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## The Homiletical Mediation of Liberation

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**Abstract:** *The trauma experienced by marginalized communities often results from violence operating on many levels, not the least of which is economic. Victims of economic oppression and exploitation cry out to the church for a balm. That homiletical balm must call the church back to its rightful pursuit of liberation and render its complicity in economic oppression visible. Such a homiletical effort can be anchored in a theology emerging from the Lazarus narrative in John. A re-reading of that text offers a liberative homiletic that speaks to this moment in American culture.*

### Need for a New Theological Framework

The ideology of neoliberalism, and its accompanying economism, continues to challenge the Christian church's proclamation. While the concept of neoliberalism is notoriously difficult to define, within this project it refers to a late form of capitalism that first rose to prominence during the 1970s. Its foundational premise is that of the classical liberal idea of the free market as the best instrument for realizing and sustaining individual freedoms.<sup>1</sup> As such, neoliberalism is far more than simply a method of organizing economic existence. Instead, neoliberalism offers alternative constructions of essential concepts such as freedom, choice, community, individualism, and power. The process whereby these neoliberal ideas supplant or mutate similar truth claims existing outside the sphere of economic activity, and in this case within the Christian tradition, is what I refer to as economism.<sup>2</sup> The church's encounter with economism mutates the church's identity and transforms its homiletical practices such that those practices promulgate economic ideology as the lens through which to interrogate and understand the world. The results are proclamations and praxes of the church which exhibit a diminished focus on resistance to the impact and influence of neoliberalism.<sup>3</sup> This is in contrast to homiletical praxes that take seriously the communal trauma inflicted on communities of the poor and seek to overcome the influence and incessant individualism of neoliberalism. Homiletical approaches that resist economism's grasp are all the more difficult to realize because of neoliberalism's instantiation in the very modes of thinking that govern and guide many homiletical frameworks. However, the growing perversity of economic trauma and disparity provides the occasion for preachers to engage a theological framework that can operate within the cultural context of neoliberalism without succumbing to its worst influences. Such a homiletical framework re-imagines life (inclusive of economic existence) in a manner that calls for a revolutionary stance

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<sup>1</sup> David. Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 2.

<sup>2</sup> The term 'economism' has been used by political scientists to describe the undue influence of economic considerations in the "determination of social and political relations." This term is utilized within this paper to reference the same phenomenon of the undue influence of economic ideology (in this case that of neoliberalism) on religious institutions and their constituents. See Ashley, Richard K. Ashley, "Three Modes of Economism," *International Studies Quarterly* 27, no. 4 (1983): 463-96. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2600557>.

<sup>3</sup> This decreased focus on responding to the trauma of economic exploitation is not the result of diminishing experiences of poverty that serve as one of the many instantiations of neoliberalism's deleterious impact. See Alan Mallach, *The Divided City: Poverty and Prosperity in Urban America* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.5822/978-1-61091-782-7>.

relative to neoliberalism. In response to the persistent presence of economic and social trauma and exploitation, I offer a liberative homiletical theology grounded in the narrative of Lazarus.

### Why the Lazarus Text?

This liberative homiletic utilizes the Johannine depiction of the resurrection of Lazarus to shape its proclamation of a Christ-centered liberty offered to those held captive by exploitative economic and communal forces. John's biblical narrative may appear an odd choice given the rich history of liberation theologians' and preachers' reliance on passages such as the fourth chapter of Luke.<sup>4</sup> However, John's depiction of Jesus's encounter at the tomb of Lazarus provides an efficacious context within which to offer a balm for the trauma experienced by those shut out of political and economic discourse. John's narrative provides a visceral reminder that a liberative homiletic lives within the particular experiences of humanity who are the objects of God's liberating grace. A liberative homiletic requires a theological framework that establishes the boundaries, rules, and expectations of the church and its homiletical and theological praxes. It seeks to render visible those who have been made invisible through the trauma of neoliberalism and to acknowledge their voices as meaningful in understanding and executing the church's mission. More importantly, a liberative homiletic examines the church for possible complicity in the maintenance of economic exploitative practices and calls the church (both white and black) to redirect its indispensable resources toward the eradication of cultural and economic sources of trauma. The theological and homiletical reflections and possibilities immanent within the Lazarus narrative interrupt systems of traumatic exploitation and make visible patterns of non-recognition that have become normalized in American culture, propagated by the church, and even internalized by segments of poor communities and their religious institutions.

The practicality of the liberative homiletical framework is found in its ability to speak to the lived experiences of the poor and oppressed including the trauma they routinely experience. Christian churches who welcome these often serve in communities unimpressed by the frequency or formality of rituals and liturgy. Each week, many such churches gather together the economically exploited who live within the shadows of both ornate cathedrals and humble storefronts. These men and women in the community, who walk daily in the trauma of their impoverishment and live sequestered in fields of deprivation, look upon the practices of the church and listen to its preachers with concern and consternation if not outright contempt. Why? Because they wonder,

...If the God boldly professed by the church is so present when these Christians lift up their voices...why is this God's blessings so absent from our community? Every Sunday, churches congregate in the midst of the residual fragments of broken communities. As ornate and overflowing churches stand in worship and celebration, communities of the poor continue to lift their voices in lament and dismay. And the church fiddles while cities burn.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Prior, *Jesus the Liberator: Nazareth Liberation Theology (Luke 4. 16-30)* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995); Luise Schottroff and Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *Let the Oppressed Go Free: Feminist Perspectives on the New Testament* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993); Thomas D. Hanks, *The Subversive Gospel: A New Testament Commentary on Liberation* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2000); James H Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, Rev. ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> Excerpt from a sermon by the author (titled, "Worship at the Cross") offered at a community worship service at the Mt. Zion Baptist Church of Joliet, IL on September 7, 2014.

A liberative homiletic responds to these concerns by directing the church to identify and struggle with the oppressed and recognizes that the Christ who is proclaimed is to be found in the midst of the oppressed. Pastors and the congregations they serve should be “in solidarity with the interests and aspirations of the oppressed and the repressed of the world today.”<sup>6</sup> This stands in opposition to neoliberalism’s intent to deny the persistent presence of the poor or its role in sustaining systemic poverty. When the principles of neoliberalism become ingrained in the preaching and homiletics of the church, the church embraces an individualistic view of poverty that locates the causes and trauma of poverty “in poor persons themselves (e.g., lack of ability, lack of effort).”<sup>7</sup> When poverty is understood through this lens, theological and homiletical efforts affirm an understanding of poverty as a problem of people and their practices and emphasizes methods for improving the behavior of poor people so that those individuals might, in turn, improve their lot in life. Preaching that is infused with this kind of awareness focuses on the personal behavior of the poor, reflecting and reinforcing the economism at the root of the very problem to which the church believes itself to be responding. Instead, the theology of a liberative homiletic is distinguished by its embrace of a structuralist perspective of poverty that understands the causes of economic trauma, such as experiences of poverty, as systemic and immediately related to the economic and societal conditions in which the poor are trapped.<sup>8</sup> A liberative homiletic responds to these systemic issues by directing the church to work toward change in the systems responsible for the perversity of poverty.

### **The Necessity of Liberation**

The theology of a liberative homiletic makes a distinct claim regarding the necessity of liberation, given the conditions of those in need and the historical and theological traditions of the Christian church. A liberative homiletic understands the church’s identity as concretized in the pursuit and well-being of life for the most vulnerable.<sup>9</sup> In this regard, a liberative homiletic refuses to submit to the enticement of neoliberalism to prioritize institutional existence as what constitutes the church’s success. Rather, it anchors individual and institutional identity in solidarity with those who have been rendered invisible and mute and refuses to accept their invisibility and muteness as “givens” of human existence. This homiletical framework repudiates surrender to the intransigence of poverty and the unrelenting and ever-expanding presence of economic disparity. Additionally, a liberative homiletic refuses to render the poor as simply objects of the church’s charitable activity but calls on the church to challenge the very systems that work to ensure the permanence of the poor and their continued exploitation by market forces that are dependent on their existence and submission.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez and Robert R. Barr, *The Power of the Poor in History* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992) 21.

<sup>7</sup> Matthew O Hunt, “Religion, Race/Ethnicity, and Beliefs about Poverty,” *Social Science Quarterly* 83, no. 3 (2002): 812, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1540-6237.00116>.

<sup>8</sup> Hunt, “Religion, Race/Ethnicity, and Beliefs about Poverty,” 812; Lawrence Bobo, “Social Responsibility, Individualism, and Redistributive Policies,” *Sociological Forum*, no. 6 (1991): 71–92, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01112728>.

<sup>9</sup> Jeremiah A. Wright, “Protestant Ecclesiology” in *The Cambridge Companion to Black Theology*, ed. Dwight N. Hopkins and Edward P. Antonio (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2012), 185-197.

<sup>10</sup> Chuck Collins, Juliet B. Schor, Felice Yeskel, United for a Fair Economy, and Class Action (Organization), *Economic Apartheid in America: A Primer On Economic Inequality & Insecurity* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005), 65-99; Néstor Oscar Míguez, Joerg Rieger, and Jung Mo Sung, *Beyond the Spirit of Empire: Theology and Politics in a New Key* (London: SCM, 2009), 13.

A liberative homiletic acknowledges the conscious choice required by the church to respond to the systemic and entrenched trauma of economic exploitation, in all of its social, political, and economic manifestations within the communities the church serves. This choice acknowledges that the call of liberation, for a church already in the grasp of economism, often results in the failure of that church to engage in a genuine and authentic pursuit of liberation on behalf of those most in need. Instead, an economistic homiletic (which is formed in the image of the neoliberal principles at the root of economism) serves to re-enforce the very conditions that oppress and traumatize those who might otherwise disrupt systems of exploitation. This leaves these churches with the belief that they are on the side of the poor while their praxes remain passive, their voices silent, and their hands unengaged in actions that might ultimately overturn or threaten the market's continued exploitation.<sup>11</sup> The theological impetus for a liberative homiletic lies in a particular reading of the narratives of the Gospels of the New Testament, where the liberation of the poor and oppressed is posited as the central message and mission of Jesus and by extension, of the church.<sup>12</sup>

### Resources for a Liberative Homiletic

A liberative homiletic that anchors itself in the particularity of the Lazarus narrative recounted in John's Gospel provides a frame for understanding the conditions it confronts and the role and work of the preacher and the church. Lazarus's entombment can be understood as symbolic of the exploitive conditions in which the poor exist. These conditions, like Lazarus's death and burial, appear inescapable and because of his condition, Lazarus has been rendered invisible and removed from the community. He has been left unseen and unheard while in the grip of the tomb. This is one of the objects of Jesus's concern: to speak to and for the one who is now voiceless.<sup>13</sup> The preacher recognizes the poor in their community since many have been traumatized and left voiceless - except when their frustration boils over in riots and protests. Even in those moments, their voices may be heard but dismissed as the irrational outbursts of those simply in need of the care of a paternalistic system that knows what is best for them.<sup>14</sup> Or, more tragically, the economically exploited are left in the hands of preachers who revive the error of other-worldliness and insist that the trauma of the exploited needs no immediate or temporal resolution when heaven is right around the corner. Yet, understanding the ministry of Jesus, and by extension, the identity of the church, within the theology of the Lazarus text reminds us that it is indeed the voiceless and unseen for whom Jesus (and preachers) are called to labor. Upon Jesus's arrival, Lazarus's spiritual and material liberation is proclaimed. This, along with the many other glimpses into the ministry of Jesus, provides the opportunity to conjoin Jesus with the plight of the economically exploited. This homiletical framework also renders visible the church's complicity in the maintenance of systems of economic exploitation and the reality that this complicity carries social, economic, and political repercussions for the

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<sup>11</sup> Míguez, Rieger, and Sung, *Beyond the Spirit of Empire*, 64.

<sup>12</sup> Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 35.

<sup>13</sup> Stanley E. Porter, *John, His Gospel, and Jesus: In Pursuit of the Johannine Voice* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015); Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel and Epistles of John: A Concise Commentary* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1988).

<sup>14</sup> Joe Soss, Richard C. Fording, and Sanford Schram, *Disciplining the Poor: Neoliberal Paternalism and the Persistent Power of Race* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2011), 41, <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226768786.001.0001>. The paternalism is even evident within religious institutions dealing with the poor. Jason Hackworth, "Compassionate Neoliberalism?" in *Faith Based: Religious Neoliberalism and the Politics of Welfare in the United States*, 48-62 (University of Georgia, 2012), 58.

formulation of genuine Christian theology and praxes. Jesus's radical confrontation with the conditions of the silenced in this text expresses the essence of divine identity and liberative homiletics.<sup>15</sup>

The challenge for the liberative homiletic is to operate within the all-too-familiar reality of trauma and pain within which the poor live. In confronting this challenge, the theology expressed within the Lazarus text is prescient. As mentioned above, Lazarus has been separated from the community, and his condition is understood as beyond temporal remedy. John presents Jesus's arrival at the tomb of Lazarus as confronting a temporally hopeless circumstance.<sup>16</sup> The hopelessness of this moment speaks to an analogous circumstance that the preacher confronts. The sheer magnitude of repeated acts of ideological and physical violence experienced by the poor, relentless in their sheer frequency, create a hopelessness similar to that of Lazarus's condition. Nevertheless, this is the very circumstance into which Jesus has stepped. The hopelessness and the finality of Lazarus's invisibility also results from the ritualistic practices of the community. Yet, their rational practice of surrender to his condition has inadvertently made them complicit in Lazarus's separation from the community. Just as the audience pictured in this text might object to the accusation of complicity, one can hear the objections of the church to similar accusations. The economism operative within the church leaves its actions seemingly as rational as that of the community burying Lazarus, but a liberative homiletic has arrived to confront the (ir)rationality of neoliberalism that smothers the decaying smells of the church's abdication to a community's impoverishment. Before there is any action recorded by the writer of this Gospel, one hears from the text the powerful but practically foolish declaration of Jesus's call to Lazarus. In this moment, the liberative homiletic extends an invitation to the church to believe that, even in the presence of seeming hopelessness, liberation remains possible. It calls the church to confront the communal exploitation of others and death present within communities of the poor, not to accommodate these, but to respond and overturn their presence. A liberative homiletic calls the church to speak, fight, and work toward overturning neoliberalism's illusion of infallibility, and to speak life into the particularity of the impoverished.

Overly-spiritualized interpretations of this biblical text adopt a meta-narrative that asserts that the ministry of Jesus represents an overturning of only the spiritual forces impacting the life of Lazarus and, by extension, all of those in need of Jesus's salvific action, robbing this narrative of any material consequence. An earlier exchange in this text between Jesus and Lazarus's sister, Martha, represents an understanding of the claim of Jesus on the life of Lazarus to be within the context of a future resurrection.<sup>17</sup> (John 11:27) However, Jesus's actions within this passage

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<sup>15</sup> James H Cone, *God of the Oppressed* Rev. ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997), 69; Dwight N. Hopkins, *Introducing Black Theology of Liberation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1999), 57; Raphael G. Warnock, *The Divided Mind of the Black Church: Theology, Piety, and Public Witness* (New York: NYU, 2014), 113-114.

<sup>16</sup> It is understood that the Johannine presentation of the miracle stories operates within the meta-narrative of signs within the earthly ministry of Jesus. As such, even the miracle at Lazarus' tomb can be interpreted within John's larger apologetic effort. Francis J. Moloney, *Signs and Shadows: Reading John 5-12* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996); Stephen S. Kim, "The Significance of Jesus Raising Lazarus from the Dead in John 11," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 168, no. 669 (January 2011), 59; Sandra Marie Schneiders, "The Resurrection (of the Body) in the Fourth Gospel: A Key to Johannine Spirituality," in *Life in Abundance: Studies of John's Gospel in Tribute to Raymond E Brown, SS*. (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2005), 168-98.

<sup>17</sup> J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015); Delbert Burkett, "Two Accounts of Lazarus' Resurrection in John 11," *Novum Testamentum* 36, no. 3 (1994): 219, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156853694X00094>.

provide for a homiletical approach that focuses on Jesus offering a direct rebuke of both spiritual and physical forces that rain death upon the most vulnerable. Most importantly, the theology of this text serves as a call to “creative non-violence [which] confronts the powers of death itself and calls humanity to live in the new life of resurrection, here and now.”<sup>18</sup> Both the call to confront death (understood as economic exploitation) and the hope of victory against deathly powers, speak against a spiritualizing of this encounter and open new possibilities for the church’s preaching.

What is at stake in this encounter at the tomb is an understanding of Jesus’s ministry as concerned with the physical and material existence of those whom community has written off as beyond their help. The Jesus presented in this text is interested in the particularity of Lazarus’s condition, and this does not exclude but embraces his material well-being. This narrative posits the theological possibility that a liberative homiletic cannot pursue liberation theoretically or abstractly alone. It must be concerned with the particular and material needs of the vulnerable. It is this emphasis on understanding God’s presence in the material context in which one is situated that is the catalyst for a liberative homiletic. This homiletical approach also challenges congregants immersed in economism’s meta-narrative. It is what Walter Brueggemann describes as the phenomenon of congregations embracing the dominant (and exploitative) narrative (i.e., economism) and having little desire to receive the counter-narrative embodied in a liberative homiletic.<sup>19</sup> Individuals sharing a commitment to living out their faith in difficult places understand that a liberative homiletic asserts that the ministry of Jesus calls followers to a mode of thinking that appears, in contrast to the thinking promulgated by neoliberalism, as irrational. This irrationality is most visible in the exchange captured in the Johannine text between Jesus and Martha (John 11:39).

Having arrived at the tomb where Lazarus lies imprisoned, Jesus makes the simple request of Martha to have the stone removed.<sup>20</sup> The stone is not there for the benefit of Lazarus but rather to protect the community from enduring the disease, smell, and unpleasantness of Lazarus’s decaying body and entombment. In like manner, neoliberalism erects barriers that inoculate its operations from the reality and presence of the poor. Challenges to the removal of these barriers can appear as senseless to congregations as Jesus’s request appears to Martha. Given Lazarus’s condition and the length of time he has been deceased, it seems foolish for any action to be taken that ignores his condition or envisions a different possibility for him. Martha’s response in the text is quite understandable and seemingly rational in light of the facts presented. Yet, Jesus’s response to her declaration offers insight for the preacher engulfed in the rationality of neoliberalism. Jesus’s action suggests that the response of the liberative church to the presence of poverty must not align with economism’s rationality. The fight on behalf of the economically exploited or in solidarity with the traumatized and impoverished, as advocated by a liberative homiletic, will be seen as irrational in a world governed by the rationality of the marketplace. Any call for individuals or the church to forgo self-interest and the pursuit of personal aggrandizement will be at odds with a church captive to economism.<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, this is the possibility the liberative homiletic asks the church to consider. This encounter between Jesus and

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<sup>18</sup> John Dear, *Lazarus, Come Forth!: How Jesus Confronts the Culture of Death and Invites Us into the New Life of Peace* (New York: Orbis Books, 2011), 2-3.

<sup>19</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *The Practice of Prophetic Imagination: Preaching an Emancipatory Word* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012) 6, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt22h6srr>.

<sup>20</sup> Byron McCane, *Roll Back the Stone: Death and Burial in the World of Jesus* (Harrisburg: Trinity, 2003)

<sup>21</sup> Gérard Duménil and Dominique Lévy, “The Neoliberal (Counter-)Revolution” in *Neoliberalism: A Critical Reader*, ed. Alfredo Saad-Filho and Deborah Johnston (Ann Arbor: Pluto, 2005), 10-15.

Martha offers the church a glimpse into the reality of a liberative theology and homiletic that offers the possibility of envisioning life for the poor that defies conventional thinking. The liberative homiletic invites the church into pursuing a balm for the traumas inflicted on those who are economically exploited. It suggests standards of living for all men and women not determined by their economic utility and rejects economism's declaration that such thinking is irrational. A liberative homiletic suggests that diminishing the disparity between the wealthy and the poor is not irrational. A liberative homiletic suggests that the church and its congregants reject the rampant individualism that drives consumption and insists that this is not irrational.<sup>22</sup> The pursuit of equality for the poor and vulnerable, in spite of the continued persistence of economic exploitation, is not irrational. This acceptance of alternative possibilities for human existence made visible through a liberative homiletic is unfathomable within neoliberalism but is what the example of the ministry of Jesus invites the church to consider. A liberative homiletic seems foolish given the magnitude of what confronts so many churches and communities. However, this is precisely what is so visibly posited by Jesus when he stands before Lazarus's tomb. If we envision ourselves standing there among the grieving spectators, we immediately see the apparent foolishness of Jesus's call for the dead man to come forth. In like manner, the church is homiletically challenged to stand with the poor and foolishly trumpet life in the midst of those who are forgotten or believed to be dead.<sup>23</sup>

A liberative homiletic calls the church to do more than simply retire to the security of suburban sanctuaries, rest in religious rhetoric, or retreat to the safety of non-threatening rituals that refuse to challenge the powers of the status quo. Instead, the church is called to stand before the sepulchers of poor communities and to cry out (in its preaching and other praxes) in pursuit of an eschatologically defined but materially experienced liberation that gives life and hope to the vulnerable. Like the Johannine Jesus, the church informed by a liberative homiletic musters the strength to stand even amid tears and broken hearts, to lift their heads to heaven, lay their hands to the work of the earth, and to proclaim and pursue life and victory for those in need.

### **The Homiletical Call to the work of Liberation**

A liberative homiletic can accomplish even more than this, as evidenced by the troubling conclusion of the Lazarus narrative. In the narrative, Jesus first mentions the crowd in his prayer, indicating to the reader that he has not lost sight of them in this miraculous moment. Jesus then speaks to Lazarus, calling him by name from the tomb but also speaking in the presence of the crowd, forming an *inclusio*. The individual and the community are joined as Lazarus emerges from the tomb. However, the connection made is somewhat unexpected. Within the framework of the text, Lazarus has been liberated from the tomb by Jesus's action but Lazarus is not yet fully free. He has been restored by divine intervention, but that which renders Lazarus genuinely human, his identity as symbolized by his face, remains covered by the trauma of his entombment.<sup>24</sup> Emphasizing the importance of Lazarus's complete liberation, and the critical role of the community, Jesus invites the community surrounding Lazarus to participate in his liberation by helping to remove his grave clothes. A liberative homiletic recognizes that, while the church may hold to the spiritual implications of its service to the community, it is also called

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<sup>22</sup> Rebecca M. Blank and William McGurn, *Is the Market Moral? A Dialogue on Religion, Economics and Justice* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2004).

<sup>23</sup> Charles L. Campbell and Johan Cilliers, *Preaching Fools: The Gospel As a Rhetoric of Folly* (Waco: Baylor University, 2012), 18.

<sup>24</sup> Rick Moody, "Notes on Lazarus," *Conjunctions*, no. 69 (2016): 94.

to pursue the material liberation of those entrapped. Even if one understands the impact of neoliberalism on the church's mission within a spiritualized framework, the church must also account for the material consequences of its proclamation in word and deed. This realization offers the church an avenue for attending to the material and spiritual consequences of the evils and trauma that neoliberalism presents to the church and its community.

The efficacy of this biblical narrative as a liberative homiletical framework is rooted in the idea that the church is directly called to the ministry of liberation. A liberative homiletic links each congregant's experiences of liberation to the community's need for liberation and calls the congregation into active pursuit of liberation, both spiritual and material, for the entire community. Jesus, as described in this text, surrenders the completion of this miraculous moment to the hands of the very community that participated in the ritual of declaring the end of Lazarus's life. In like manner, the church, complicit in having thrown its hands up in surrender to the conditions which trapped the vulnerable, has been called to serve as agents of liberation. Why does this text present Jesus leaving incomplete the work of liberation if not to affirm that the church is itself instrumental to God's liberating intentions? Without the crowd's actions, Lazarus would be alive but remain tragically trapped in the residuals of his trauma. Without the involvement of the church, the vulnerable remain trapped even though the power of the gospel declares them free. Without the involvement of the church, the most vulnerable never fully experience the freedom that is theirs as persons created by a loving God.

### **Summary**

There is great power in a liberative homiletic informed by the story of Lazarus as it provides vital theological and homiletical grounding for God's liberative purposes among us. It rightly discloses that God in Jesus Christ has chosen the poor and the exploited to be recipients of God's gracious liberation and declares that responding to the traumatization of the poor (symbolized by Lazarus) is the proper pursuit and mission of the church. This text encourages preachers to avoid the temptation of allowing liberation to be myopically warped by the lens of individualism. The preaching of the church must continue to proclaim the importance of congregations responding to the systemic causes of communal trauma. Most importantly, the Lazarus text offers the preacher an opportunity to declare the church an agent of change for its community and a beneficiary of that activity. In the church's service to the traumatized in its midst, it also experiences deeper levels of liberation. While the congregation may be constituted by some who have been freed from the death and bondage of neoliberalism, the congregation only fully experiences its liberation when it is actively engaged in the liberation of its community. This homiletical declaration of mutual dependence ensures that the church and the community are viewed as partners in one another's liberation from the economic bondage so evident around us.

## Vulnerable Good News: Distance & Patience In Gospel Performance

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**Abstract:** *The performative implications of the gospel have been the focus of intense homiletical reflection. These reflections explore avenues through which the “what” of the gospel shapes the “how” of its proclamation. Yet one feature of the gospel that has received little attention is the connection between the gospel’s inherent vulnerability and how that vulnerability should shape sermonic performance. This paper considers what possible impact the vulnerability intrinsic to the gospel, as good news, should have on one’s preaching performance and the potential implications of this connection. Drawing on speech-act theory and a theological understanding of the gospel as “good news,” this paper argues sermonic performance that mirrors the gospel’s nonviolent epistemology is a necessary condition for gospel speech. It suggests performative distance as one strategy for meeting this condition and that such a strategy reveals the potential significance of patience as a homiletically significant virtue.*

### Introduction

The performative implications of the gospel have long been the focus of intense homiletical reflection.<sup>1</sup> These reflections, each in their own way, have explored avenues through which the “*what*” of the Gospel shapes the “*how*” of its proclamation.<sup>2</sup> Yet one feature of the gospel that has received little attention is the connection between its inherent vulnerability and how that vulnerability should shape sermonic performance. In this article I consider what possible impact the vulnerability intrinsic to the gospel’s function as *good news* should have on one’s preaching performance and the potential implications of this connection. In part one I consider J.L. Austin’s concept of performative utterance, emphasizing the “primary condition” of a speech act in which the speaker must adopt a stance consistent with their utterance. In part two I take up an analysis of the gospel as “good news” to identify a particular “gospel epistemology” in which vulnerability is a central feature since the gospel’s function as *good news* requires the possibility of the hearer’s rejection. In part three I identify the concept of distance as a way of meeting the performative criteria for gospel proclamation. In the final section I propose that the reality of the gospel’s inherent vulnerability, the distance it requires, and the potential results of that performance reveals the significance of patience as a homiletical virtue.

### J.L. Austin and Speech-Acts

In *How to Do Things With Words*, J.L. Austin provides a general theory of speech acts.<sup>3</sup> Austin begins with a simple observation: there are statements that do more than refer or describe and so do not fit within the “constative” category of speech used by the philosophers of his day.

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<sup>1</sup> For examples, see Evans Crawford, *The Hum: Call and Response in African American Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995); Charles Bartow, *God’s Human Speech: A Practical Theology of Proclamation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997); Jana Childers and Clayton Schmit, ed., *Performance in Preaching: Bringing the Sermon to Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008); Clayton Schmit, *Too Deep for Words: A Theology of Liturgical Expression* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002); Richard Ward, *Speaking from the Heart: Preaching with Passion* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992).

<sup>2</sup> I borrow the language of the “what” and “how” of the gospel from Fred Craddock, *Overhearing the Gospel: Revised and Expanded Edition* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> John Searle, “Austin on Locutionary and Illocutionary Acts,” *The Philosophical Review* 77.4 (1968): 405.

These statements participate in the action they were previously thought only to describe.<sup>4</sup> This leads Austin to critique the assumption that language's only function is to make declaratory statements regarding the facticity of a thing and points instead to the ways language possesses a non-literal and non-declarative function. Thus, Austin argued we should speak of two categories of utterances: those that describe something (*constantives*) and those that participate in the doing of an action (*performatives*). Where constantives can be either true or false, Austin notes performatives can be either "happy" or "unhappy." In attempting to distinguish between these two categories of speech, Austin suggested the "hereby" test for identifying performative utterances: if we can place an utterance in a form that begins with "hereby" ("I hereby decree...), it is a sign that our speaking the utterance performs the action contained within it.

### *Collapsing the Constantive-Performative Distinction*

Yet as Austin differentiated between performative and constantive utterances, he realized the distinction was not as clear as a simple "hereby" test. For example, performative utterances can also deal in qualities of "true" and "false" since in most cases performatives entail, imply, or presuppose something that is true or false.<sup>5</sup> Thus, we are unable to separate performatives and constantives because they depend on one another for their force.<sup>6</sup> In every test Austin proposed for distinguishing the performative from the constantive, both classes would end as an "unhappy" utterance if the facts did not support them.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, Austin found that both classes were dependent upon circumstances, the speaker, the speaker's intentions, and could occur in the same grammatical form. In short, the performative distinction "neither separated the class of utterance to which 'true/false' applied from all other classes; nor did it separate utterances that could be felicitously or infelicitously uttered from all others; nor did it divide utterances into two mutually exclusive classes of any sort."<sup>8</sup>

Austin's inability to distinguish the two categories of utterances led him to conclude there may, in fact, be no distinction between them at all. Rather, Austin demonstrated "what was supposed to be a special case of utterances (performatives) swallows the general case (constantives), which now turn out to be only certain kinds of speech acts among others."<sup>9</sup> Even when the type of speech was a descriptive statement (a supposed constantive) whose primary job is to refer, it only does so effectively when the force of the utterance is made clear.<sup>10</sup> Simply put,

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<sup>4</sup> J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), 5. This kind of utterance "is, or is a part of, the doing of an action." For example, when a minister conducts a wedding and utters the statement, "I know pronounce you man and wife..." the minister is not merely describing an already-existing reality; she is performing an action through the utterance that has changed the state of affairs. A couple that had not previously been married now find themselves to be such. It was the utterance itself that performed the action. It was an utterance that *did* something.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 45-52.

<sup>6</sup> Searle, "Austin on Locutionary and Illocutionary Acts," 406.

<sup>7</sup> "Now we failed to find a grammatical criterion for performatives, but we thought that perhaps we could insist that every performative *could* be in principle put into the form of an explicit performative, and then we could make a list of performative verbs. Since then we have found, however, that it is often not easy to be sure that, even when it is apparently in explicit form, an utterance is performative or that it is not; and typically anyway, we still have utterances beginning 'I state that...' which seems to satisfy the requirements of being performative, yet which sure are the making of statements, and surely are essentially true or false." Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 91.

<sup>8</sup> James McClendon and James Smith, *Convictions: Defusing Religious Relativism* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1994), 49.

<sup>9</sup> Searle, "Austin on Locutionary and Illocutionary Acts," 406.

<sup>10</sup> For example, when an utterance is truly descriptive and not ironic. See, Hugh White, "Introduction: Speech-Act Theory And Literary Criticism," *Semeia* 41 (1988): 3.

*all* speaking is both a saying and a doing. It is only a question of the *kind* of performative speech-act that is taking place. Rather than grouping utterances into constatives or performatives, Austin classified them according to the utterance's *doing*: saying something (Locutionary act) and performing something (Illocutionary act).<sup>11</sup> Yet Austin took a further step and claimed all Locutionary acts are also necessarily Illocutionary acts, since a Locutionary act (uttering a certain sentence with a certain sense and reference) often implies a "doing" (the Illocutionary act) of its own.<sup>12</sup> As with the constative-performative distinction, Austin collapsed the locutionary-illocutionary divide.

### *Speech-Acts and the Primary Condition*

Having shown the priority of illocutionary acts, the question becomes one of assessment: If illocutionary speech acts no longer depend upon their correspondence to non-verbal objects (the "true/false" dichotomy), how do we determine their validity?<sup>13</sup> What becomes the standard for distinguishing between utterances that accomplish their action (happy) and those that do not (unhappy)? To assess a speech act's success, Austin argues that speech acts have necessary preconditions.<sup>14</sup> Even the simple act of pronouncing a man and woman husband and wife, for example, has preconditions. The minister must speak in both a common language and with proper convention. The minister must be qualified and involve the appropriate parties. Finally, the minister must maintain a position consistent with the utterance. This last condition has, since Austin, been recognized as the *primary condition* for the happy performance of a speech act. One does not perform a happy speech act if one is insincere in their utterance, does not have the requisite thoughts, or has no intention of acting as if the utterance were true.<sup>15</sup> By including a speaker's feelings, thoughts, and intentions, Austin reveals the necessity of a speaker's total stance for performing a speech act.<sup>16</sup> This stance requires "the entertaining (as true and important) of certain alleged facts, the embracing of certain pervasive theories about what matters in life, the hoping of certain hopes, the adoption of certain roles in certain communities, and the undertaking of certain patterns of behavior with regard to those facts, theories, hopes, and roles."<sup>17</sup> One's performance of a happy speech act requires one's total engagement in that speech-act; taking a stance with one's life that is consistent with the utterance.

### *Speech Acts, Primary Conditions, and Preaching*

Austin's theory of speech acts holds several implications for the practice of preaching. First, Austin shows that our preaching is not simply an act of "saying something about something," but is a speaking that is also a doing.<sup>18</sup> To proclaim and perform the gospel within

<sup>11</sup> Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 98-130.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 98: "To perform a locutionary act is in general, we may say, also and *eo ipso* to perform an *illocutionary act*, as I propose to call it."

<sup>13</sup> Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 151 calls this overcoming the "true/false fetish" and the "value/fact fetish."

<sup>14</sup> White, "Introduction: Speech-Act Theory And Literary Criticism," 3.

<sup>15</sup> "Where, as often, the procedure is designed for use by persons having certain thoughts, feelings, or intentions, or for the inauguration of certain consequential conduct on the part of any participant, then a person participating in and so invoking the procedure must in fact have those thoughts, feelings, or intentions, and the participants must intend so to conduct themselves." Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 39.

<sup>16</sup> James McClendon and James Smith, "Religious Language After J.L. Austin," *Religious Studies* 8.1 (1972): 61-62.

<sup>17</sup> McClendon and Smith, *Convictions*, 63.

<sup>18</sup> Markus Thane, "Speech-Act Theory to Enhance Karl Barth's Homiletical Postulation of a Sermon's 'Revelatory Compliance'," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 68.2 (2015): 198.

the context of the sermon is not only to say something referentially about the gospel, but also to engage in speech acts through which we (and God) accomplish certain actions.<sup>19</sup> In short, Austin helps us see that our sermons are not just things that say, but *do*. Furthermore, Austin points to the significance of our “stance” in that saying for the doing.<sup>20</sup> By demonstrating a speech act’s dependence on the speaker’s thoughts, feelings, and intentions – their stance – for its completion, Austin also shows us that we must shape our sermonic performance in ways that align with the speech act we perform. Thus, Austin’s establishment of the “primary condition” for performative speech acts is simultaneously a demand that the preacher’s character as a preacher and their stance in the performance of the sermon is consistent with the speech of the sermon.<sup>21</sup> As preachers of the gospel, we must perform our speech acts in ways that are congruous with the gospel we seek to perform; otherwise our speech will be unintelligible and untrue. Our stance in preaching is a vital part of our preaching; the “how” must match the “what.” Yet having identified the importance between one’s speech and one’s taking a stance that is consistent with that speech, the question remains as to the conditions for a faithful gospel speech-act. The task before us is to discern what demands the gospel places on preaching that seeks to be gospel preaching. What “stance” does the gospel require of the preacher?

Perhaps a place to begin in our discernment of the “how” of gospel proclamation is with a consideration of what the gospel *is*. In some ways, beginning here seems an impossible task, since there are any number of ways preachers and homileticians can and do define the “gospel” for the purpose of their preaching.<sup>22</sup> Yet we gain traction if we think of the term “gospel” itself. Gospel, at its most simple, means the “good news.” Homileticians may differ on what this good news consists of – its specific content, its intended audience, and its implication – but across their definitions, homileticians and preachers are united in their affirmation that the gospel is fundamentally *good news*. And if we consider what it means to think of the gospel as most basically good news that someone speaks, announces, or witnesses to, then we quickly see that such a vision of the gospel carries with it an internal logic that implies a particular epistemology; a particular way of understanding and perceiving the world.

### **“Good News” and the Logic of a Gospel Epistemology**

For much of the Church’s history, Christians have held a commitment to non-violence and sought to articulate the implications of that commitment as a central component of Christian discipleship.<sup>23</sup> Rather than serving as an ethical addition to an already established system of beliefs, this commitment involves the total way in which one lives and understands one’s place

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<sup>19</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>20</sup> Richard Briggs, *Words in Action: Speech Act Theory and Biblical Interpretation* (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 36.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Ward, *Speaking from the Heart: Preaching with Passion* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 65-72. Ward speaks of this unity as the *ethos* of the preacher; the congruity between their character and speech.

<sup>22</sup> André Resner, “Do You See This Woman? A Little Exercise in Homiletical Theology,” in *Theologies of the Gospel I Context: The Crux of Homiletical Theology*, ed. David Schnasa Jacobsen (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2017), 15-41.

<sup>23</sup> George Kalantzis, *Caesar and the Lamb: Early Christian Attitudes on War and Military Service* (Eugene: Cascade, 2012). See also the volume by David Cramer and Myles Werntz, *A Field Guide to Christian Nonviolence: Key Thinkers, Activists, and Movements for the Gospel of Peace* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022). Cramer and Werntz are helpful in that they point out “Christian Pacifism” is hardly a monolithic entity but has existed in many different forms.

in the world, and is not merely a rejection of violence.<sup>24</sup> Pacifism is “the basic language of our human vocation, our way of understanding creation and our place in it.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, Christian pacifism contains an epistemic quality; it shapes how a person knows so that they “see the world in a certain way, understands in a certain way.”<sup>26</sup> For those operating with a commitment to theological non-violence, this quality of pacifism results in a unique “gospel epistemology.”

### *Against Imperialism and Foundationalism*

Christian pacifists commonly develop this “gospel epistemology” in contrast to coercive ways of knowing that are present in imperialist and modernist/foundationalist epistemologies.<sup>27</sup> Imperialist epistemologies are epistemologies of the establishment order – whether it be political, gender, sexual orientation, economic, or otherwise – in which what counts as truth and right is the property of those in positions of power.<sup>28</sup> This imperial epistemology is inherently coercive because it leaves no room for disagreement since disagreement is nothing less than an attack on those who set the terms for what counts as true. This epistemology is coercive because it attempts to secure agreement through force. One either agrees with the “truth” as designated by those in power or one must face the (often violent) consequences of dissent. Absent from imperial epistemologies is the ability to say “no.” This form of epistemology asserts power rather than entertain disagreement.

Closely related to imperialist epistemologies are modernist epistemologies that in their quest for a solid ground upon which to build different and more complex forms of knowledge are thoroughly “foundationalist.” This foundationalism attempts to work its way “down” to a solid, universal ground that transcends cultures and particularity. This may at first strike us as a good thing, seeing as it recognizes a need for a “locus of validation beyond those in positions of power such that truth does not become the property of the mighty making it vulnerable to a nihilistic critique.”<sup>29</sup> It seems good that claims to knowledge and truth rest on something beyond a powerful person’s might to make it so. We reach “beyond” because we recognize the need for validation that relies on more than our own sense of the self-evident, that we want to hold views of the world that are not liable to the accusation of fideism or relativism.<sup>30</sup> Yet this quest for foundations is also a political and social move that seeks to avoid dependency on the assent of another. Ultimately, the quest for foundations is the quest for a “trump card” in our conversations

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<sup>24</sup> “Christian pacifism is thus not to be understood merely as a conclusion to some ethical theory that legitimizes and prohibits various activities and justifies particular political structures. It is also – at the same time, in the same place – a particular style of thinking or mode of discourse. In addition to the way of life it calls for, Christian pacifism involves a corresponding epistemology, a different way of thinking about knowledge.” Chris Huebner, *A Precarious Peace: Yoderian Explorations on Theology, Knowledge, and Identity* (Scottsdale: Paulist, 2006), 97.

<sup>25</sup> Ted Grimsrud and Christian Early, “Christian Pacifism in Brief,” in *A Pacifist Way of Knowing: John Howard Yoder’s Nonviolent Epistemology*, ed. Ted Grimsrud and Christian Early (Eugene: Cascade, 2010), 17.

<sup>26</sup> Ted Grimsrud, “Pacifism and Knowing: ‘Truth’ in the Theological Ethics of John Howard Yoder,” *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 77.3 (2003): 404.

<sup>27</sup> Stated simply, “coercion” refers to strategies of knowledge or dialogue that seek, through any number of avenues, to force agreement or impose assent on another.

<sup>28</sup> For a detailed discussion of this epistemology and the ways it uses force to dictate and control understandings of right and truth, see Michel Foucault, “Two Lectures,” in *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate*, ed. Michael Kelly (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), 31-46.

<sup>29</sup> Christian Early and Ted Grimsrud, “John Howard Yoder on Diversity as Gift: Epistemology and Eschatology,” in *A Pacifist Way of Knowing: John Howard Yoder’s Nonviolent Epistemology*, ed. Ted Grimsrud and Christian Early (Eugene: Cascade, 2010), 138.

<sup>30</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *In Good Company: The Church as Polis* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 33.

with another to overcome our vulnerabilities.<sup>31</sup> Thus, foundationalism “quickly becomes another form of imperialism in which agreement is secured through socio-political coercion and persistent disagreement is marginalized (and therefore eliminated) as ‘unreasonable,’ ‘idealistic,’ or ‘sectarian’.”<sup>32</sup> Simply put, the search for a final and ultimate foundation is a search for the power to *require* or *force* the other to agree; whether through the strength of a particular argument or through the social pressure of a community. There is no space within this epistemology to say “no” once one reaches the “foundation” without the threat of violence.

Most important for our purposes in this exploration of imperialist and foundational epistemologies is the observation of how they resort to coercion to secure what counts as truth within conversations. Whether it is the threat of force committed by those in power, threat of dismissal from the conversation on grounds of unreasonableness, or the pressure a community applies to quash dissent, both of these epistemic frameworks attempt to overcome vulnerability through coercive tactics that force agreement under threat. Because of this, both epistemologies seek to overcome another’s ability to say “no,” forcing them to agree with our claims.<sup>33</sup>

### *Toward A Gospel Epistemology*

In contrast to both imperialist and foundationalist epistemologies, theological non-violence develops a conception of the gospel’s own epistemology; a way of knowing implicit in the gospel itself. The moral power of the gospel arises from the reality that one does not have to believe. Thus, there is a vulnerability inherent to the gospel that serves as one of its defining features and any epistemology that would bear the name “gospel.” To establish such a claim, Christian non-violence relies on the internal logic of the gospel itself. It is *news* because those who do not already know it will not know it unless a message-bearer tells them. But it is *news* that is *good* because hearing this news comes to the person as something that frees and liberates, redeems and saves. Yet this means that what makes the gospel *good news* is that it does not come with a demand for acceptance, but only an invitation.<sup>34</sup> In fact, if such a demand did follow, that news would cease to be *good* because it would then assert itself through oppression, compulsion, or brainwashing. The gospel, according to its own internal logic, carries with it the possibility for rejection; and as such is inherently vulnerable.

Yet for those who maintain a commitment to Christian non-violence, this is where the persuasive power of the gospel lies. For one to use the gospel as any kind of move that “seeks to assure assent” would be to undercut the gospel because “such assurance only comes through coercion.”<sup>35</sup> The message-bearer’s rejection of coercive strategies in their announcement and speech is precisely that which allows the persuasive power of the gospel to shine through. Indeed, the very truth of our message depends on such a rejection. The vulnerability of the gospel means that its proclamation repudiates strategies that seek to determine the results of our

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<sup>31</sup> On this point, see Sharon D. Welch, *A Feminist Ethic of Risk* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 23-48 and Hannah Arednt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

<sup>32</sup> Early and Grimsrud, “John Howard Yoder on Diversity as Gift: Epistemology and Eschatology,” 138.

<sup>33</sup> I once attended a church service in which the preacher was beginning an apologetic sermon series. And as he introduced the sermon series, he noted that “by the time this series is done, you’ll see that it’s actually stupid to NOT be a Christian.” One sees here the imperialist and foundationalist epistemologies at work, seeking to secure a base from which the hearer could do nothing but agree. There is simply no room for disagreement without being “stupid” or “irrational” and therefore worthy of punishment.

<sup>34</sup> Richard R. Osmer, *The Invitation: A Theology of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021), 12-13.

<sup>35</sup> In many ways, this is an affirmation and commitment to Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5. Early and Grimsrud, “John Howard Yoder on Diversity as Gift: Epistemology and Eschatology,” 139.

conversation *in advance of having the conversation*. Such attempts to secure the outcome prior to our engagement with the other are often the sources of our acts of epistemic violence to the extent that such moves reflect our desire for invulnerability against the dissent of those with whom we engage. Yet gospel speech, *as gospel speech*, can never know in advance what shape the conversation with the other will take or the response of those to whom we bear witness. Rejection by the other as unpersuasive is always one possible outcome. True gospel speech, therefore, refuses those strategies that strive to side step that vulnerability and secure assent prematurely.

### *Gospel Epistemology and Preaching*

A non-violent emphasis on vulnerability as a fundamental component of a gospel-shaped epistemology results in a collapse of the distinction between *what* one says and *how* one says it.<sup>36</sup> The medium or form of the good news is an essential part of what makes it good news.<sup>37</sup> If vulnerability is a core aspect of what makes the gospel “good news,” then one must seek out non-coercive means of sharing such news that reflect this vulnerability. Where Austin’s speech-act theory shows the necessary connection between one’s stance and one’s speech, a nonviolent gospel epistemology shows the “stance” we must assume in gospel proclamation. By emphasizing the gospel as fundamentally vulnerable speech that *necessarily* includes within it the possibility of rejection, theological nonviolence helps us see that our stance must seek, as best as we are able, to reflect and maintain this vulnerability as a feature of our performance.<sup>38</sup>

This condition of vulnerability poses a direct challenge to much contemporary homiletical theory to the extent that much homiletical theory developed within a social imaginary of imperialist and foundationalist epistemologies and shares their assumptions.<sup>39</sup> Whether it be homiletic approaches that seek to “absorb” the world or that may compel one to celebration,<sup>40</sup> many of our current homiletical frames can easily fall into coercive performative strategies that actually seek to overcome the gospel’s intrinsic vulnerability. Thus, a commitment to gospel speech and performance requires that we leave open the possibility of the hearer’s rejection. This requires we reject preaching that seeks to obtain assent from the hearer through coercive means. It requires respect for the agency of the hearers *as hearers* at an intellectual, emotional, and communal level. The question now becomes, how might we embody this vulnerability in sermonic performance?

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<sup>36</sup> While not an explicitly theological resource, Marshall Rosenberg has also explored the way in which a commitment to non-violence should inform even our use of language. See, Marshall Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life* (Encinitas, CA: Puddledancer Press, 2015).

<sup>37</sup> Charles Bartow, *God’s Human Speech: A Practical Theology of Proclamation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 3.

<sup>38</sup> “It is not to be assumed that the gospel provides religious and moral constraints on what we say but leaves how we say it to be governed solely by practical considerations of effectiveness... There is such a thing as Christian style, a method of communicating congenial to the nature of the Christian faith.” Craddock, *Overhearing the Gospel*, 12.

<sup>39</sup> Jacob Myers, *Preaching Must Die: Troubling Homiletical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 4. For an important analysis of this point as it relates to African American preaching and the experience of African American women preachers, see Lisa Thompson, *Ingenuity: Preaching as an Outsider* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2018), 16-19. On the notion of “social imaginaries,” see Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

<sup>40</sup> On approaches to preaching that view “absorbing” as their aim, see Michael Brothers, *Distance in Preaching: Room to Speak, Space to Listen* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 88-132. On the potentially coercive aspect of celebration, see Cleophus LaRue, *Rethinking Celebration: From Rhetoric to Praise in African American Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016), 1-6.

## Distance in Preaching

Within the fields of speech, interpretation, and performance studies, the concept of distance denotes a complex dynamic between the performer, “text,” and audience.<sup>41</sup> Speaking of the concept generally, Wallace Bacon defines “esthetic distance” as pointing “to the relationship between work and audience in terms of the work’s degree of ‘objectivity’ and hence the audience’s degree of ‘detachment’.”<sup>42</sup> For Bacon, the concept of distance speaks to the listener or reader’s involvement in the work. Yet he also notes that while distance may at first appear to have negative connotations such as withdrawal or detachment, the opposite is actually the case. For Bacon and others, “distance does not refer to the strength of impact of a literary work on the audience; it refers to the nature and quality of it. Esthetic distance affects the audience’s perspective.”<sup>43</sup> While distance speaks to many “relationships” within the performative act (reader-text, text-audience, character-character, etc.), I focus my discussion on the relationship between performer and audience (preacher and congregation), and specifically the possibilities it opens for listener participation. Thus, by “distance” I speak of the creation of space between performance and listener that allows the listener room to hear, discern, and respond.<sup>44</sup> As an aspect of performance, distance helps listeners maintain integrity and makes possible their free response.

### *Distance, Space, and Integrity*

A core function of performative distance is the creation of space and in many ways this function is a practical one.<sup>45</sup> For instance, physical distance in the form of a raised stage or pulpit makes possible the audience’s unobstructed view of the performer. While the creation of literal, physical space between performer and audience may seem a simple thing, it significantly impacts the audience’s reception of a work, facilitating a particular kind of relationship between the performer or preacher and the audience.<sup>46</sup> Consider, for example, the effect it would have on an audience if the speaker, rather than standing behind a lectern or at a distance on a raised platform, stood directly next to a person in the audience, spoke directly to that person, or at various points touched or “singled out” others in the audience. The resulting awkwardness and discomfort of the audience would be the outcome of the speaker’s violation of space. The audience came with expectations about what they would see and hear, implying also an expectation of appropriate distance. When the speaker violates that expectation, it has a direct impact on the audience’s ability to receive and respond to the performance. Thus, physical distance also creates “psychological or spiritual space.”<sup>47</sup> This spiritual or psychological space affords the listener the critical distance to evaluate whether and how to participate and respond. Distance and the space it creates is a means of protecting the integrity of everyone involved in the “aesthetic transaction.”<sup>48</sup> In terms of the speaker and work, aesthetic distance maintains an

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<sup>41</sup> For a survey and history of this concept, see Brothers, *Distance in Preaching*, 11-46.

<sup>42</sup> Wallace Bacon, *The Art of Interpretation* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1972), 474.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 474.

<sup>44</sup> For my use of “distance,” “space,” and “room,” I am indebted to Brothers, *Distance in Preaching*.

<sup>45</sup> Jana Childers, *Performing the Word: Preaching as Theatre* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 45.

<sup>46</sup> Bacon, *The Art of Interpretation*, 62-68.

<sup>47</sup> “The line of demarcation that separates the preacher and the congregation makes it possible for the person in the pew to have her own experience. Literal space makes figurative space possible.” Childers, *Performing the Word*, 46.

<sup>48</sup> Ronald Pelias, *Performance Studies: The Interpretation of Aesthetic Texts* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992), 107.

“otherness” that prevents both speaker and text from being dominated and absorbed by the audience. The speaker, while possibly coming from the audience, in their role as speaker is “other” than the audience and addresses them. Likewise, the “text” of the performance is other than the audience and not reducible to the audience’s reception or impression.<sup>49</sup> Distance also maintains the integrity of the audience. By respecting the audience’s otherness, the performer does not assimilate them into the performance. Rather, aesthetic distance maintains freedom in the performance for each participant to freely react.

### *Distance and Response*

The creation of space and protection of integrity that distance makes possible also provides the audience with the freedom to respond as they see fit. In short, it is this aesthetic distance in performance that makes audience response possible. Where a lack of distance or a violation of appropriate distance can lead to a domination of the listener that attempts to force a particular response upon them, an appropriate distance actually *increases* the participation of listeners and allows them to respond in their own, unique way.<sup>50</sup> Without distance, it becomes impossible for the audience to respond to the performance to the extent that the loss of distance means the listener’s loss of agency and results in their simply becoming part of the performance.<sup>51</sup> Respecting their integrity and agency, distance makes possible the freedom of genuine reaction in which listeners evaluate and respond for themselves. Furthermore, a performance, *as performance*, depends on such a response for actualization in the present. “Texts” may exist independently of their readers and hearers, but they are equally dependent on the reader and hearer to bring them into the present day.<sup>52</sup> The listener’s ability to respond in freedom to the performance becomes a vital aspect of the performance’s existence. Thus, questions concerning the integrity and freedom of the listener are important not only for their impact on how we think about the place and agency of the audience, but also for the very nature of performance.

### *Distance and Gospel Epistemology*

By connecting performative distance with our previous discussions of a gospel epistemology, we see that distance provides us with a resource for respecting the listener’s freedom and agency and embodying the vulnerability of the gospel within sermon performance. As a means of preserving and protecting the integrity of the listener and providing them the freedom to respond, distance leaves the sermon open to the hearer’s rejection. Sermons that incorporate distance will not attempt to overcome the will of the listener through strategies of “absorption,” but reflect the vulnerability of “good news” by leaving open the possibility of critique and rejection by the hearer. Sermons that employ distancing devices and techniques give the hearer “room or space, to consider a message without being lured, pressured, manipulated, or coerced by means of direct confrontation. The result of maintaining distance is free participation

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<sup>49</sup> Bacon, *The Art of Interpretation*, 172-173.

<sup>50</sup> Pelias, *Performance Studies*, 107-109.

<sup>51</sup> “Distance encourages and protects the responses of the hearer (emotions, criticism, passions, thoughts, judgments, rejections, and acceptances) as integral to the performance. As the reader is not passively absorbed into the text, neither is the hearer passively absorbed into the text (or a sermon). A transactional approach to performance transcends the text/reader-performer/hearer dichotomy whereby distance fosters not absorption but engagement.” Brothers, *Distance in Preaching*, 44.

<sup>52</sup> Bacon, *The Art of Interpretation*, 173-174.

in the Christian message.”<sup>53</sup> In contrast to the foundationalist epistemologies Yoder critiques, distance rejects the need for such closure, giving the other space to respond. Through its use of performative distance, the sermon proclaims the gospel in ways that maintain its integrity as good news. It is a technique or approach to the performance of the sermon that does not force agreement or assent but accepts vulnerability as fundamental to gospel speech and ensures the listener the freedom to respond.<sup>54</sup> As such, performative distance has a vital role in sermons that claim to be gospel speech.

### **Gospel Vulnerability, Distance, and Homiletical Patience**

To this point I have explored the connection between gospel vulnerability and the place of distance in sermonic performance as a matter of “proper fit,” arguing that performative distance “fits” gospel proclamation’s requirement of vulnerability. Yet it may also be the case that this connection between the gospel’s vulnerability and performative distance speaks to a deeper reality with larger implications for the practice of preaching. Mainly, this connection and its manifestation in sermonic performance seem to reveal the place of the virtue of patience in our homiletical practice and may signal the possible significance of thinking of patience as a particularly important homiletical virtue for the practice of preaching in general. In the sermon’s performance, distance’s embodiment of the vulnerability of the gospel is fundamentally one concrete manifestation of homiletical patience.

#### *Vulnerability and Patience*

The vulnerability intrinsic to the gospel is not an end in itself – vulnerability for vulnerability’s sake – but reflects a larger theological reality both about the God who is the source and aim of this gospel and what it means to inhabit the divine reality as creatures in the world. The vulnerability that is central to an understanding of the gospel as good news is a manifestation of a larger theological reality: the reality of God as one who is patient.<sup>55</sup> To speak of divine patience is to speak of God’s action toward humanity as God’s giving us the space and time to live out our own freedom and existence.<sup>56</sup> In God’s patience, God chooses not to act toward us in a manner that imposes or removes from us the independent existence God has given God’s creation. Instead, God’s patience accords God’s creatures their own integrity and capacity for free action.<sup>57</sup> God’s patience helps us to dispatch vulgar construals of divine governance that depict God as a control freak, ultimate micromanager, or master puppeteer under which creation does nothing other than follow God’s irresistible will.<sup>58</sup> Instead, God’s patience reveals that one of God’s primary purposes for the world is to grant humanity the time and space needed to live into the diverse futures that God graciously offers.<sup>59</sup> It is this aspect of God’s nature that is, at

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<sup>53</sup> Brothers, *Distance in Preaching*, 74.

<sup>54</sup> Charles Bartow, *The Preaching Moment: A Guide to Sermon Delivery* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980), 64: “But the conversational preacher will lead the listening with sensitivity to the fact that what is said may not immediately ‘ring true’ among those who hear it, and as H.H. Farmer has put it so well, the preacher will leave the listeners free to respond on the basis of their own ‘insight and sense of the truth’.”

<sup>55</sup> For a fuller treatment of patience, see Matthew Pianta, *On Patience: Reclaiming a Foundational Virtue* (New York: Lexington Books, 2016).

<sup>56</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 4 vols, II/1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956-1975), 409-410.

<sup>57</sup> Paul Dafydd Jones, “On Patience: Thinking With and Beyond Karl Barth,” *Scottish Journal Of Theology* 68, no. 3 (2015): 278.

<sup>58</sup> Paul Dafydd Jones, “Patience: A theological experiment,” *Theology Today* 72, no. 1 (2015): 17.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

least in part, the reason behind the gospel's intrinsic vulnerability. In leaving open the possibility for the hearer to reject the message, the gospel respects the independent existence of the hearer, manifesting God's divine patience toward God's creation. This is not to say the gospel does not call for a decision (and hope for a positive response), but it does mean that just as God is patient with humanity, so the gospel proclaimed will not seek to dominate the hearer by forcing or coercing them into a pre-determined response.

### *Distance and Performative Patience*

This understanding of patience extends itself to the level of the creature. Human, or more particularly Christian, patience is that virtue which enables persons to rightly endure the sorrows of this life. It is simply the case that much in this life either happens to us, is beyond our ability to solve, or cannot be solved quickly enough to alleviate all suffering. In such instances, the virtue of patience rightly orders our sorrowing, enabling us to continue in our pursuit of justice and shalom. It is because patience empowers this "right responding" that we can take another step toward justice and reconciliation.<sup>60</sup>

Embodying and sustaining the vulnerability that is at the heart of gospel proclamation calls for the preacher's own exercise of patience. In any sermon, the preacher, to greater or lesser degree, experiences the temptation to force the hearer into a particular response. In those moments, the preacher's proper exercise of performative patience serves a double function. First, it ensures both that the vulnerability of the gospel is manifested in their proclamation, providing time and space for hearers to respond with their own initiative and independence. Second, it also sustains the preacher in the face of any subsequent rejection that may occur. Sustained and empowered to sorrowing without despair, patience empowers responses that enable us to both embrace the message of the gospel and endure the rejection of those whom we desire to persuade or convert.<sup>61</sup>

Within this theological conception of the sermon, performative distance becomes a means through which the preacher exercises patience in the performance of the Word. Performative patience guards the preacher both against the temptation to force the hearer into any particular response and to endure rejection that may follow. But there is also a positive dimension to the preacher's exercise of performative patience. In refusing to "box in" or coerce the hearer into any particular response, the preacher leaves open the possibility of responses from the listener that were beyond the preacher's own imagination. Furthermore, it could also be the case that patience in performance deepens that preacher's engagement in the sermon, making their performance more faithful to the gospel they proclaim. Thus, patience exercises a double function, both

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<sup>60</sup> This is an important point because it reveals that patience, as a virtue, is concerned with our passionate responses rather than actions themselves. Or stated differently, because patience relates to our passions, emotions, and desires, it would be incorrect to think of specific actions as "acts of patience." Rather, what patience does is to help our passionate responses be rightly ordered so that those virtues who do take acts as their aims can function well. On this important distinction, see John Bowlin, *Tolerance Among the Virtues* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 106-159.

<sup>61</sup> This double function of patience is perhaps more necessary now than ever, in a season of turmoil over the systemic racism that saturates every aspect of our society and cultures and the threats faced by those in the LGBTQ community. In such a time, we intensely desire the confrontation and conversion of those who hold up these systems of oppression and violence. And because of this desire we might be tempted to "shortcut" conversation, seeking other ways to force those to whom we speak to agree. Or, perhaps despair is ever close at hand, as those to whom we proclaim the message of a liberating Gospel dismiss that message as "social justice" or "left wing." In either case, the virtue of patience is that virtue which can help sustain those called to preach in tumultuous times.

preventing forms of rhetorical, physical, and epistemic violence and deepening gospel engagement.

*Patience as a Homiletical Virtue*

The connection between gospel vulnerability, faithful sermon performance, and performative patience serves as one specific manifestation within the practice of preaching that may point to the homiletical significance of patience more generally. As noted above, performative distance is one of the ways that patience is exercised in the sermon's performance, giving the hearer time and space to respond. This act of patience has an impact not only in securing the hearer's independence but also in potentially deepening the preacher's homiletical engagement, leading to more faithful practice. In short, preaching that seeks to be gospel proclamation calls for performative patience on the part of the preacher. The degree to which the preacher exercises this patience opens possibilities for response from the hearer and engagement in the preacher that enriches every aspect of the performance. If this is the case in one aspect of homiletical practice, it may be fruitful to consider the implications of patience on the practice of preaching more broadly, and patience's potential standing as a homiletical virtue, the possession of which deepens and strengthens one's preaching practice.

## The Fair Use Sermon: When Verbal And Visual Borrowing Cross The Line<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** *This paper hopes to add to the conversation regarding plagiarism by approaching this issue from a different angle, primarily in regards to how we should properly use (and cite) sources that fall more into the realm of fair copyright usage. We live in a what has been called a wired world, meaning that we who speak for God must practice integrity in all aspects of our teaching ministry—including our creative aspects, such as audio, video and visual imagery. This paper, then, will discuss this concern, looking first at the problem of both verbal and visual borrowing, then provide an explanation of fair use codes, and then conclude with a discussion of existing and creative solutions especially as they relate to visual borrowing.*

In April 2021, *Religion News Service* ran a series of articles related to the topic of plagiarism. The most notable of the articles, authored by editor Bob Smietana, was also the most ironic. The article opens by focusing on a woman attending virtual services with her congregation in Franklin, Tennessee. It chronicles her growing frustration with her minister's preaching, culminating in a "really not Jesus-like" tirade when she discovered the minister's sermon had been preached by another minister in Kentucky *three years earlier*.<sup>2</sup> To add to her minister's pastoral and homiletic misconduct, this deeply troubled woman discovered that the minister's next sermon was a near word-for-word lifting—including a visual demonstration—of a sermon preached by none other than Mark Driscoll when Driscoll was still with his Mars Hill Church in Seattle. The 2013 sermon was titled, "Do Not Steal." Knowing Driscoll's own history with plagiarism,<sup>3</sup> irony abounds. The woman's minister resigned in 2017, only to be caught committing the same pastoral crime in April 2021 at his new congregation in Woodhaven, Michigan, again preaching old sermons from Driscoll. When asked by *RNS* about his use of sermons from other preachers, the minister simply said that he had studied hard for his sermons and had been run out of the congregation in Franklin due to a coup, leaving Smietana to conclude that "the truth of the Bible can still come through, even with a pastor who plagiarized. But that does not make it right."<sup>4</sup>

But what about the use of images in sermons? One of the issues that drew *RNS* attention was that the minister in question, Zach Stewart, had not only used Driscoll's sermons word-for-word, but had also plagiarized visual imagery such as gesturing how to shoot a bow and arrow and the use of Driscoll's graphics. Preachers may search through sermons on Paul's letters to the Romans and come across an intriguing series by another preacher who has prepared excellent graphics. Then a preacher's next sermon collection on YouTube includes the exact same graphics, without credit given online to the originator of the material or in the accompanying

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Tiffany Brooks, John S. McClure and especially Robert Stephen Reid for their helpful comments and thoughtful critique in the development of this essay.

<sup>2</sup> Bob Smietana, "'If You Have Eyes, Plagiarize': When Borrowing a Sermon Goes Too Far," *Religion News*, April 27, 2021, <https://religionnews.com/2021/04/27/plagiarism-pastors-sermon-ghostwriters-zach-stewart-driscoll/>.

<sup>3</sup> Sarah Pulliam Bailey, "Exclusive: Mark Driscoll Resigns from Mars Hill Church," *Religion News*, April 27, 2021 <https://religionnews.com/2014/10/15/exclusive-mark-driscoll-resigns-from-mars-hill-church/>.

<sup>4</sup> Smietana, "'If You Have Eyes, Plagiarize': When Borrowing a Sermon Goes Too Far."

printed or digital materials. We may chase the rabbit down the hole far enough to discover the congregational worship arts team that designed those eye-catching visuals in the first place. Or, in reviewing a student sermon, you find her selection of a visual image (one you seem to remember seeing years ago in your college art appreciation class) compelling. But when you search her notes to find any information regarding the image, you discover that there is no reference to any kind of source material. Is this simply bad research, or does it constitute plagiarism?

The issue of plagiarism, both verbal *and* visual, is not new to the preaching profession. As far back as 1952, Webb Garrison, then professor of preaching at Candler School of Theology, stated that, “Any minister can consistently produce original sermons. Yet there is a steady stream of instances in which plagiarism is detected in published works.”<sup>5</sup> The Internet has made this practice of “borrowing” immensely easy. To be honest, this author has frequently been guilty of visual borrowing in the past. The pressure to preach stimulating insights accompanied by evocative visuals has increased in the pastoral marketplace due to the increasing expectation of those who hear and see our sermons.<sup>6</sup> We have wrestled with this issue so much that “to cite or not to cite” is more than just an adaptation of Shakespeare’s immortal line from *Hamlet*.

Like it or not, preachers and worship leaders are bound by what is called “fair use” law for proprietary material. The desire to use others’ creative materials does have some limits, and when those limits are exceeded, the consequences can be serious. Ultimately, this essay is not about verbal plagiarism (i.e., the borrowing of another’s sermon), although it will touch on this concern. Instead, this essay seeks to broach a different discussion, one concerning the visual side of plagiarism—a topic of which there is a dearth of material, especially in homiletic literature. Looking first at the problem of both verbal and visual borrowing, this essay provides an explanation of fair use codes and concludes with a discussion of existing and creative solutions for crediting sources, especially as they relate to visual borrowing. The hope is to initiate a generative conversation regarding the topic of “fair use” in homiletical and liturgical discussions.

### **The Problem of Verbal and Visual Borrowing**

In a day when learning management systems arrive to campus with plagiarism detection software built into their coding, one would think that the issue of verbal and visual borrowing would be on the decline. However, it seems that the problem is getting worse rather than better.<sup>7</sup> On one end of the spectrum is Rick Warren, who is famous for quoting Adrian Rogers: “If my bullet fits your gun, then shoot it,” meaning he has no problem with other preachers using his

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<sup>5</sup> Webb B. Garrison, “Plagiarism and the Development of Originality,” *Religion and Life* 21 (Autumn 1952): 573.

<sup>6</sup> For example, see both arguments for and cautions against the use of visual imagery in preaching in Rick Blackwood, *The Power of Multi-Sensory Preaching and Teaching: Increase Attention, Comprehension, and Retention* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008); Richard A. Jensen, *Envisioning the Word: The Use of Visual Images in Preaching*, Fortress Resources for Preaching (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005); J. Ellsworth Kalas, *Preaching in an Age of Distraction* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2014); Leonard Sweet, *Giving Blood: A Fresh Paradigm for Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014); Thomas H. Troeger, *Ten Strategies for Preaching in a Multi Media Culture* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996); Joseph M. Webb, *Preaching for the Contemporary Service* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006); and Karyn L. Wiseman, *I Refuse to Preach a Boring Sermon! Engaging the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Listener* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2013).

<sup>7</sup>For example, see Scot McKnight, “Hey, Preacher, Is That Sermon Really Yours?,” *Patheos*, March 18, 2019 [www.patheos.com/blogs/jesuscreed/2019/03/18/hey-preacher-is-that-sermon-really-yours/](http://www.patheos.com/blogs/jesuscreed/2019/03/18/hey-preacher-is-that-sermon-really-yours/).

material verbatim in their own preaching, teaching, and even writing.<sup>8</sup> On the other end of the spectrum are preachers like author (and former attorney) Carey Nieuwhof of Connexus Church in Ontario, who has argued that preachers should not provide sermons to a wider audience because the temptation to steal a sermon is great when the pressure is high.<sup>9</sup> Both of these views are adventures in missing the point.

First, we need to ask what is the nature of the current problem with verbal borrowing in sermons? There was a time when, in order to borrow a homiletical insight—or an entire homily—one had to consult books; in particular, sermon collections. Sermons have been published for decades, with some modern major publishers running entire sermon series. For example, one popular preacher in my denomination from a generation or two ago published a handful of textbooks on preaching and pastoral ministry, even publishing a couple of collections of sermons. This was in the late 1970s and early 1980s. He continued to do so, even as he moved back and forth between the church and the academy. That is, until he visited a former student of his—without advanced warning—only to hear one of his own sermons preached word-for-word. Then there were sermon tapes, and later CDs. Lynn Anderson is a popular preacher within my denomination whose “tape ministry” was quite successful. That is, until the week the tape did not record. Blank tapes were sent across the United States, much to the dismay of many preachers. Anderson said that he decided to discontinue the taping of his sermons when he received a call from one flustered preacher who asked what he would preach in a couple of weeks because he *only* preached what Anderson had preached.<sup>10</sup>

It is one thing to quote an insight from a popular preacher like Barbara Brown Taylor or Andy Stanley in a sermon. Neither is it unusual to cite a passage from the preacher’s favorite biblical commentary. In doing so, the preacher develops a “discipline of invitation” which allows other voices to be heard in the sermon, deflating the preacher’s own position of power and conflating various streams of insight into one united voice.<sup>11</sup> However, it is wholly another thing to borrow these insights—or entire sermons—without attribution simply to create an *Aha!* moment for the listeners. Recent statements from William Willimon such as “Stealing really isn’t stealing if it’s done unselfishly for the good of my neighbor” and “My sermonic borrowing is an indication of how much I love my people,”<sup>12</sup> even if offered in jest, are ethically incompatible with the preaching ministry. This is what Michael Knowles has referred to as the “stealing of power” from another which perverts the sermon into a weapon of violence rather than an instrument of peace.<sup>13</sup> Reid and Hogan refer to this as a problem of in-authenticity. They note, “In reality, there is a lot of borrowing and influence that goes on in the production of anything worth reading or hearing. That is a good thing. Once the term *plagiarism* is applied to borrowing however, it suggests a large amount of uncited, verbatim usage rather than just influence. It also

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<sup>8</sup> Ed Stetzer, “Preaching, Plagiarism, and Sermon Central,” accessed 16 April 2019, [www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2008/may/preaching-plagiarism-and-sermon-central.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2008/may/preaching-plagiarism-and-sermon-central.html); see also Thomas G. Long’s critique of Warren’s statement in “Stolen Goods: Tempted to Plagiarize,” *Christian Century* 124 (2007): 18.

<sup>9</sup> Carey Nieuwhof, “5 Reasons You Shouldn’t Preach Other People’s Sermons,” accessed September 4, 2019, <https://careynieuwhof.com/5-reasons-you-shouldnt-preach-other-peoples-sermons/>.

<sup>10</sup> Jim Martin, “Connecting Preaching with the Congregation Lecture” (2015).

<sup>11</sup> My thanks to Casey Thornburgh Sigmon for this insight; personal conversation with the author, December 6, 2019; Thomas G. Long also discusses something similar when he talks about giving credit to the “great cloud of witnesses that influence our sermons; *The Witness of Preaching*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 259.

<sup>12</sup> William H. Willimon, “Kleptomania Homiletica,” *Journal for Preachers* 42 (Pentecost 2019): 43.

<sup>13</sup> Michael Knowles, personal conversation with the author, December 6, 2019.

reframes the activity as a form of cheating.”<sup>14</sup> The issue that is at play here is not ingenuity but integrity. As Tom Long has noted, “There is a difference between being a debtor and being a thief... Preachers who strive to tell the truth, who seek to honor the communion of saints, who desire to maintain the trust of the faithful community—that is to say, preachers with ethical integrity—will wrestle with these questions and make the best decision they can.”<sup>15</sup>

On one hand, “intellectual property” is a thing that should be respected. While one preacher may be okay with anyone using his or her material, this is not and cannot be seen as a blanket view of those in the pastorate. On the other hand, any sermon, just like any book, can have value to a wider audience when used appropriately. As Bradley Munroe once humorously mused,

Perhaps I am being much too negative about the possibilities for good and way too cautious about petty moral hindrances to good preaching. Imagine the possibilities: through the Internet good sermons could be universally available to every minister in the technologically advanced world. The ‘demise’ in modern preaching could be ‘cured’ overnight. My limited vocabulary and lack of theological insight would no longer hinder my congregation from growing into the likeness of Jesus Christ. Bible reading would return! Mission would explode! Maybe even evangelism would happen! Oh, it is too wondrous to think. I am giddy.<sup>16</sup>

The former view is confronting plagiarism head-on by embracing it as an option, while this latter view is preventing plagiarism at any cost.

It is hard to believe that Chris Stinnett’s article on citing our sources was written over twenty years ago.<sup>17</sup> However it is still as timely as ever. There have been back-and-forth conversations<sup>18</sup> as well as entire issues of academic journals dedicated to the topic.<sup>19</sup> Yet the present essay is not about borrowing another preacher’s sermon. In 2022, if you still think borrowing another’s sermon (or sermon illustration or other portions of a sermon) without giving that preacher some form of credit is acceptable, then you need to seriously consider the unethical example that you are displaying to your congregation. As Jeffrey Peterson argued twenty years ago, we live in a “wired world,”<sup>20</sup> meaning that we who speak for God must practice integrity in all aspects of our teaching ministry—including our use of creative sources such as audio, video, and visual imagery.

### Defining “Fair Use”

The issue that is before us is that of “fair use” which, according to the Stanford Fair Use Project, is defined as “any copying of copyright material done for a limited and ‘transformative’

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<sup>14</sup> Robert Stephen Reid and Lucy Lind Hogan, *The Six Deadly Sins of Preaching: Becoming Responsible for the Faith We Proclaim* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012), 21.

<sup>15</sup> Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 261.

<sup>16</sup> W. Bradley Munroe, “On Ethics on the Internet: The Brewing Crisis in Pulpit Ministry,” *Journal for Preachers* 21 (Advent 1997): 49.

<sup>17</sup> Chris Stinnett, “Footnotes in the Pulpit,” *Leadership* 21 (Fall 2000): 89-90.

<sup>18</sup> For example, William H. Willimon, “Borrowed Thoughts on Sermonic Borrowing,” *Christian Ministry* 28 (January-February 1997): 14-16; and Laurie Tiberi, “Borrowing is OK—Lying is Not,” *Christian Ministry* 28 (January-February 1997): 17-18.

<sup>19</sup> For example, see the Autumn 2005 issue of *Encounter*, the faculty journal for Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis.

<sup>20</sup> Jeffrey Peterson, “Preaching Technique: The Ministry of the Word in a Wired World,” *Christian Studies* 17 (1999), 47-56.

purpose, such as to comment upon, criticize, or parody a copyrighted work.”<sup>21</sup> At root is the concern for how material is being used, specifically with regard to whether permission has been sought from the original author. The issue focuses on the term “transformative,” which is an artery that feeds into the heart of the ongoing free-speech debate. The question that is central to the discussion of “transformative” is *how* the material in question is being used and for what purpose the material in question is being improved by or improving the newer material. On one hand, there is the issue of “commentary and criticism,” meaning the material being borrowed is either being commented on or being used in a commentary. For instance, if you have noticed, this essay has already pulled from a number of resources to *comment* on the issue of plagiarism. Additionally, citing lines from a book in a professional review—with page numbers noted—in order to critique the author’s point of view falls under the area of *criticism*.

On the other hand, the issue of “parody” arises when one work is mocking or imitating another work in a comical way. For example, *Saturday Night Live* has been in the business of parody for over forty years, pulling materials that are immediate, such as the famous 1976 parody of the *60 Minutes* “Point/Counterpoint” segment, starring Dan Aykroyd and Jane Curtain<sup>22</sup> or the 2019 parody of Broadway staple *Les Miserables* (which was inspired by a lobster dinner).<sup>23</sup> Parody in these instances is meant to remind the audience of the original, only in a new and humorous way. What is at stake is whether the user has “infringed” on the original author’s intellectual claim to the material: has the copyright, the original author’s right to legally disseminate his or her work in whatever manner he or she sees fit, been violated? In short, we have committed “copyright infringement” when we perform or broadcast the work without a prior arrangement, distribute copies of published materials without compensating the author, or align ourselves against the original material in a derivative manner without previously informing the original author.<sup>24</sup>

Taking the example of a work of art, it qualifies as copyright infringement when the preacher does not give the original artist credit for their work, as when a preacher displays a picture of a work of art and refers to it as directly connected to the Bible story being discussed, as if it had been painted during the moment depicted by the artist. Without giving credit to Caravaggio—even with a citation on the slide—the preacher is taking credit for the work, as if she or he painted it for the sermon. When that sermon is broadcast live on Facebook to the general public, the problem multiplies.

In the case of video clips, copyright infringement occurs when the preacher does not give credit to the original content creator of the video. Without any other reference, what else is an unsuspecting audience to think than that the preacher produced the video personally? YouTube’s filter, however (especially since it is powered by Google), knows better, pulling the plug on the worship service video before anyone gets to see it. The issue here can easily be resolved in a

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<sup>21</sup> Rick Stim, “What is Fair Use?,” Stanford Libraries, accessed 13 July 2019, <https://fairuse.stanford.edu/overview/fair-use/what-is-fair-use/>; See also, Rick Stim, *Getting Permission: Using and Licensing Copyrighted-Protected Materials Online and Off*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (Berkley, CA: Nolo, 2016); Patricia Aufderheide and Peter Jaszi, *Reclaiming Fair Use: How to Put Balance Back in Copyright* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 1-15.

<sup>22</sup> Saturday Night Live, “Weekend Update: Jane, You Ignorant Slut - SNL,” YouTube (YouTube, August 7, 2017), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c91XUyg9iWM>.

<sup>23</sup> Saturday Night Live, “Bodega Bathroom - SNL,” YouTube (YouTube, March 2, 2019), [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vgBxxEL-3TI&feature=emb\\_logo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vgBxxEL-3TI&feature=emb_logo).

<sup>24</sup> “Copyright Infringement,” Digital Media Law, September 10, 2021, [www.dmlp.org/legal-guide/copyright-infringement](http://www.dmlp.org/legal-guide/copyright-infringement).

couple of ways. First, by purchasing a broadcast license from CCLI and then culling from their robust catalogue of worship-related videos. Or second, by citing the pertinent details of the video in your verbal description of it and giving credit in a bulletin.

### The Solution for Visual Borrowing

With regard to visual borrowing and teaching prospective preachers, a challenge pertinent to this discussion is the question of being a congregation that is “resource rich” versus one that is “resource poor.” Whereas larger congregations may have dedicated staff who can put the time and effort into developing creative audio, video, and visual materials for worship and preaching, smaller congregations simply do not have the resources to do so. Larger congregations whose preachers are often given short sabbaticals or “study breaks” to plan out their preaching months in advance are then able to plan and collaborate with others in arranging for copyright permissions. However, preachers in smaller congregations are fortunate to get the song list from the liturgist before the bulletin is printed on Friday afternoon.<sup>25</sup>

Lack of staff or time does not justify the violation of fair use laws. The law is clear on what is considered fair use and what is considered copyright infringement or plagiarism.<sup>26</sup> And yet, there is a caveat: as social media continues to evolve and develop, the laws pertaining to protecting copyright and privacy and seeking to prevent copyright infringement and plagiarism will have a sense of fluidity to them in the coming years. For instance, just over two and a half years ago, the *New York Times* reported that Google and YouTube agreed to pay a \$170 million fine related to privacy and copyright violations.<sup>27</sup> Diligence must be the watchword in our emerging digital landscape.

As was mentioned above, integrity must guide all of our homiletic endeavors, including how and why we source images, audio files, and videos. But how can students and “resource poor” congregations engage creative processes and resources without resorting to plagiarism or copyright infringement? In teaching students about copyright laws as they seek helpful resources and create some of their own, several options are readily available. First, we can encourage students and preachers to develop their own videos. It is amazing what one can do with a smartphone. Shoot a “person-on-the-street-video” by asking people questions related to the content of the sermon and then uploading the video to the church’s Vimeo account. Or craft a video that can set up a sermon or serve as a form of preaching. In several of my Bible and preaching classes, I use media projects—videos primarily—to acclimate my students to the digital world.<sup>28</sup> In one particular video, Sean Snyder, who is a middle school minister for Grace

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<sup>25</sup> For more on this discussion of creative teams and the worship arts, see Jennifer Allen Craft, *Placemaking and the Art: Cultivating the Christian Life*, Studies in Theology and the Arts (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018); William A. Dyrness, *Visual Faith: Art, Theology, and Worship in Dialogue*, Engaging Culture Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001); Kevin J. Navarro, *The Complete Worship Service: Creating a Taste of Heaven on Earth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005); Len Wilson and Jason More, *Taking Flight with Creativity: Worship Design Teams that Work* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009); and especially Gerald C. Liu and Khalia J. Williams, *A Worship Workbook: A Practical Guide for Extraordinary Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2021).

<sup>26</sup> If you would like to delve deeper into the legality of copyright infringement and plagiarism in a digital world, I would encourage you to review the [Digital Millennium Copyright Act of 1998](#) (US) and/or the [Digital Economy Act of 2010](#) (UK).

<sup>27</sup> Natasha Singer and Kate Conger, “Regulators Fine Google \$170 Million for Violating Children’s Privacy on YouTube,” *New York Times*, updated: August 10, 2021, [www.nytimes.com/2019/09/04/technology/google-youtube-fine-ftc.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/04/technology/google-youtube-fine-ftc.html).

<sup>28</sup> Rob O’Lynn, “Talking Heads: Crafting Digital Media-Based Research Projects,” *Wabash Center Journal on Teaching* 2, no. 1 (2021): 224.

Church in Wooster, Ohio, submitted a project for the Narrative Preaching course in which he filmed himself performing a poem that he wrote about God’s gracious and creative presence in our lives.<sup>29</sup>

Second, we may encourage our students and preachers to use their own pictures. Again, smartphones are a wonderful tool, especially if using a tool like Evernote. Snap the picture, save it to an Evernote file, and then download it later into the sermon PowerPoint or Keynote presentation. For instance, Tim Spivey, the lead pastor of the New Vintage Church in Escondido, California, frequently requests help from his congregation. When he and his teaching team are planning a new sermon series, Tim will ask his congregation to snap pictures around town that they can use for sermon imagery. One of the images may even wind up as the main image for the series. The creative team sets up a submission site on their website, collecting the images for possible use.<sup>30</sup>

Third, we may encourage students and preachers to develop their own graphics, or what I call “anchor images.”<sup>31</sup> Using a platform like Canva or Adobe Spark, develop an image that can be used with all visual, printed, and digital worship products (i.e., the bulletin, website or Instagram account). For example, I have been preaching from the Book of Psalms during the summers at my current congregation. I developed the “anchor image” by simply taking a picture of the title page for Psalms in my Bible and uploading it to my Adobe Spark account. I developed an image entitled “Summer in the Psalms,” which allows me to use it for the foreseeable future. On more than one occasion, I have been asked for permission to use the image in another setting.<sup>32</sup>

If all else fails, we can remind our students and preachers to search for freely accessible materials in Google, Bing, or Firefox. Of course, when using another’s material, remember to cite the sources. Citing a digital image, work of art, or video is no different than citing a book, journal article, or fellow preacher. For example, the week that I wrote the first draft of this essay, I prepared a sermon from Psalm 48 about the ancient Jewish people’s dedication to Jerusalem and the dedication that modern Christians should have to their local churches. At the end of the sermon, I talked about four qualities that we should possess. On the bulletin, I listed the four qualities and also cited the sources that I had pulled them from, noting author, book title, and the year the book was published.

In guiding students, I offer three suggestions on how to practice authenticity and integrity when drawing from the work of others. First, it can be as simple as citing the work in your bulletin, sermon worksheet, or lesson notes. For instance, in a recent guest sermon at the Issaquah Christian Church in Issaquah, Washington, Robert Stephen Reid preached from the text in Mark 6 where Jesus is rejected by his home synagogue. When preaching the sermon, Reid used a significant number of public-domain images, including a couple of screen captures. The URLs were listed in the “notes” section of each slide, although that is only visible to the

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<sup>29</sup> Sean Snyder, “Media Project - Narrative Preaching,” Vimeo, April 29, 2022, <https://vimeo.com/334181816>.

<sup>30</sup> “Sermons,” New Vintage Church, April 17, 2020, <https://newvintagesd.org/sermons>.

<sup>31</sup> Rob O’Lynn, “DIY Sermon Graphics,” 2018 Preaching Roundtable, Kentucky Christian University, Grayson, Kentucky; October 9, 2018.

<sup>32</sup> For example, see such a brief conversation between myself and Rev. Dr. Justin Schwartz, the Senior Minister for the First Christian Church in Louisburg, Kansas; “First Christian Church Louisburg, Kansas,” Facebook, June 23, 2019, <http://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10211078175908859&set=pb.1789779620.-2207520000.&type=3>.

presentation's author. Documentation for each slide was offered on a single-sheet bulletin insert.<sup>33</sup>

Second, search for a strong image that would encapsulate the sermon's theme in one picture. In composing a sermon series from 1 Thessalonians around the theme of hope, I came across George Frederick Watts's classic painting entitled *Hope* (1886). I used a downloaded image in two forms throughout the series. One form was as an "anchor image" that was printed on the weekly bulletin and was used in the sermon presentation. The other was of the image flashed on the screen at the end of the sermon. The author's name, title of the painting, year the painting was completed, and where the painting currently resides were added alongside the image in a small textbox. In each message, I referred back to the image in a line such as, "As we continue to see in Watts's painting *Hope*, as long as there is one star in the sky and one string of music being played, there is hope."

Third, you can create a digital image file of your sermon notes for distribution on social media (including being uploaded to the description for your sermon video file). For example, my friend Tracy Tooley is the lead minister for reGeneration Church in Huntington, West Virginia. His social media coordinator, Lynsey Bowe, posts his sermon notes each week by posting a screenshot of the template that she developed in Pages and then converting that screenshot to a PDF. The screenshot is then uploaded to Instagram and Facebook (@regenerationwv). The images contain black-lined boxes with sermon content in each of them, such as the scriptures used, sermon ideas, and citations for all sources that are cited. Each of these approaches provide appropriate citation of the resources and also provide a way for listeners to follow up on the material.

### Concluding Remarks

Now the question comes as what to do with all of this? In the article referenced above, Ed Stetzer offers a pledge that he recommends preachers take in order to be more authentic in their preaching. The pledge focuses on using only scripture to base the sermon on, commentaries only as supporting—not supplanting—material, and to accurately communicate God's word.<sup>34</sup> In addition to that pledge, I would like to push the conversation beyond simply affirming not to plagiarize others' materials but to develop an ethical construct for digital citizenship in homiletics that covers more than borrowing another's sermon. It needs to also include appropriate use of illustrative materials, such as videos, visual images, and published resources.

Therefore, homiletic digital citizenship that is ethically appropriate in its practice of "fair use" in preaching will commit to the following: First, homiletic digital citizenship pledges not to borrow another's message without properly citing the original preacher and asking that preacher's permission to use the sermon or any of its contents. Second, homiletic digital citizenship pledges not to broadcast another's video without properly citing the video's publication information, either in print or in broadcast. Third, homiletic digital citizenship pledges not to broadcast another's song without properly citing the song's publication information, either in print or in broadcast. Fourth, homiletic digital citizenship pledges not to project an image on the screen—*especially if the sermon or service will be broadcast*—without properly citing the image, to the best of the preacher's ability, on displayed slide. Fifth, homiletic digital citizenship pledges not to borrow a piece of sermon or worship art, such as an Adobe Spark or Canva image, without asking permission from the image's creator. Sixth, homiletic

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<sup>33</sup> Robert Stephen Reid, "A Kryptonite Faith?," unpublished sermon, September 20, 2018; used with permission.

<sup>34</sup> Stetzer, "Preaching, Plagiarism, and Sermon Central."

digital citizenship pledges not to quote a print resource, such as a book, journal article or blog, without citing, at minimum, the author, resource and, if relevant, page number on the displayed slide, in the bulletin or on a lesson worksheet. This is not the end of the conversation, as the integration of preaching and technology is an ever-evolving conversation. However, it is hoped that this essay will serve as a conversation starter for formulating more ethically appropriate responses to the conversation.

## Keeping It Age-Appropriate: Preachers' Negotiation of Timespaces in Their Practice of Preaching for Children

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**Abstract:** *In this article, I study preachers' practice of preaching to children. Using Theodore Schatzki's concept of "timespace," I analyse how four timespaces – school, age-appropriation, "ordinary" preaching, and the Bible – are configured in the practice of preaching to children. I also explore what normative assumptions preachers have concerning preaching to children and how these contribute to the configuration of the practice. Finally, I discuss why the timespace of age-appropriation seems to dominate every negotiation in preachers' practice of preaching to children, and I suggest that recent homiletical research makes essential contributions that preachers engaging in preaching for children should consider.*

### 1. Introduction

The turn toward a focus on listeners in the field of homiletics shifted the perspective from preachers and their manuscripts to listeners' responses. This was a necessary change of attitude and has stimulated much valuable research.<sup>1</sup> However, in this article, I examine preachers' utterances and actions concerning their practice of preaching for children<sup>2</sup> by employing the concept of timespace. According to Theodore Schatzki, this concept can be used to explore the dimensionality of practices and how dimensionality configures practices.<sup>3</sup>

The article aims to explore which timespaces are produced in the preacher's practice of preaching for children, how they interweave, and how they configure the preachers' preaching practice. An additional aim of this article is addressing the normative assumptions in the practice.

The main research question in this article is as follows: *How do timespaces configure preachers' practice of preaching for children?* To answer this, I developed three research sub-questions:

- Which timespaces do the preachers produce in their practice of preaching for children?
- How do these timespaces interweave?
- Which normative assumptions do preachers express and enact, and how do these normative assumptions contribute to configuring their practice of preaching for children?

I employ empirical material from preaching events conducted in Christian education events in the Church of Norway. As these Christian education events and the reform preceding them are

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<sup>1</sup> Among others, see John S. McClure, *Listening to Listeners: Homiletical Case Studies* (St. Louis, Mo: Chalice Press, 2004); Theo Pleizier, *Religious Involvement in Hearing Sermons: A Grounded Theory Study in Empirical Theology and Homiletics* (Delft: Eburon Academic Publishers, 2010); David Rietveld, "A Survey of the Phenomenological Research of Listening to Preaching," *Homiletic* 38, no. 2 (2013); Marianne Gaarden, *The Third Room of Preaching* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> I use the term preaching for children to show that the emphasis of the article is on preaching in a setting where children are the primary listeners. I have chosen this over the often-used term 'preaching to children' as the use of directional prepositions, such as 'to', strongly suggest that preaching involves a transfer of meaning from the preacher to the listeners. Moreover, it is too cumbersome to refer to 'preaching in worship services where a Christian Education event is embedded' or 'preaching with children as primary listeners'; thus, I use the term preaching for children.

<sup>3</sup> Theodore R. Schatzki, *The Timespace of Human Activity: On Performance, Society, and History as Indeterminate Teleological Events*, Toposophia (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), 60.

distinctively Norwegian, I offer a short introduction to Christian education in the Church of Norway below.

## 2. Christian Education Reform in the Church of Norway

The Church of Norway is a Lutheran majority church that was the state church of Norway until 2017.<sup>4</sup> Whereas 71% of the Norwegian population are members of the Church of Norway,<sup>5</sup> only a small percentage attend church monthly. The Norwegian government launched an extensive Christian education reform in the Church of Norway approximately twenty years ago<sup>6</sup> that significantly influenced ministry to children and young people in the Church of Norway, including funding many new positions for Christian educators and considerable research on the reform itself.

The 2010 curriculum for Christian education in the Church of Norway' *Gud gir – Vi deler* [God gives – We share] is a result of this reform. Its goal is to offer every baptised child in the Church of Norway one Christian education event annually from the ages 0–18 years. Also, every congregation in the Church of Norway is required to design a local Christian education plan based on the national plan. In the national plan, it is recommended that every Christian education event end with a worship service. These worship services are often called *Gudstjeneste for store og små*, or *Familiiegudstjeneste* [Worship services for Old and Young or Family worship service]. While such worship services are aimed at being more "child friendly" than regular worship services, the main structure of the liturgy is mostly not changed. What is often changed is that the psalms can be children's songs, the prayers might have a simpler language, and not least, the preaching event is almost always shorter and usually includes dramatization of bible texts and employs objects and visual elements as part of the preaching event.<sup>7</sup> However, these worship services are still *the* worship service available, there are no additional services for youth, adults or elderly. The goal is to gather the whole congregation.

The two Christian education events that I have studied are *Tårnagent-helg* [Tower Agents] and *Lys Våken* [Wide Awake]. During a Tower Agent event the children, aged 7-9, are detectives exploring the church. They do so by performing tasks all over the church, with the highlight being a trip in the church tower to see the bells (and views).<sup>8</sup> Wide Awake is a celebration of the Church New Year, taking place on the eve before the first Sunday of Advent. The children, aged 10-12, sleep over at church, often sleeping in the Church nave.

Figure 1 shows a model event structure from one of the congregations studied, St Nicholas in the North.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup> "Tro og livssyn," (Faith and Views of Life) white paper, the Norwegian Government, accessed April 3, 2020, <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/tema/tro-og-livssyn/den-norske-kirke/innsiktsartik.ler/fra-statskirke-til-stat-og-kirke/fra-tidslinjen-historikk-om-forholdet-stat-og-kirke/id2426318/>.

<sup>5</sup> "Den norske kirke – Medlemsstatistikk," (Church of Norway – membership statistics) the Church of Norway, accessed April 3, 2020, <https://kirken.no/nb-NO/om-kirken/bakgrunn/om-kirkestatistikk/medlemsstatistikk/>.

<sup>6</sup> "Stortingsmelding – Trusoppfølging i ei ny tid," (White paper – Christian education in a new era) white paper, the Norwegian Government, accessed April 3, 2020, <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/stmeld-nr-7-2002-2003-/id196490/sec1>.

<sup>7</sup> Linn Sæbø Rystad, "Overestimated and Underestimated: A Case Study of the Practice of Preaching for Children with an Emphasis on Children's Role as Listeners" (MF Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society, 2021).

<sup>8</sup> This of course only applies to churches who have a tower.

<sup>9</sup> For research ethical reasons, all names and place names are anonymized. However, I have found it possible to indicate the geographical location of the churches without compromising the anonymity.

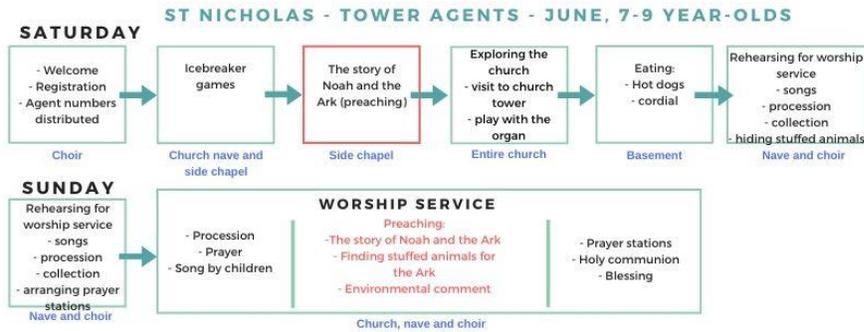


Figure 1

Although the congregations hold different Christian education events, those included in the empirical material were usually organised similarly to this model. The events typically last only a day or two.

### 3. Methods

This study was part of the larger research project *Forkynnelse for små og store* ['Preaching for Young and Old' or 'FoSS']. The empirical material consists of interviews with thirteen preachers from six congregations, participant observations of worship services, field notes and video recordings of the worship services. The study is designed as an instrumental case study where the aim is to gain an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon, in this case, preaching for children.<sup>10</sup>

I conducted participant observation, field notes, video recordings and interviews at four congregations, St Nicholas in the North, St Mary in the Middle, St Sophia in the South, and St Emmanuel in the East of Norway; colleagues from FoSS gathered the field notes, video recordings and interviews from St John and St Michael (both located in the Western part of Norway). The interviews with the preachers were conducted individually using a semi-structured approach.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, having video recordings of the worship services allowed studying the preachers' actions and utterances in detail.<sup>12</sup> The interviewed preachers were all interviewed after the events concluded. Another characteristic trait of the worship services concluding the Christian education event is that preaching is not reserved for the pastor, hence, a volunteer can preach on such Sundays.<sup>13</sup> All adults who participated in preaching events throughout the Christian education events were classified as preachers. Most interviewees served as pastors and catechists; however, the interviewees included two volunteers who were teachers by profession.

### 4. Review of literature on the topic of children and preaching

Peer-reviewed research on preaching for children is scarce; I located only three peer-reviewed articles on the subject, all on Children's sermons.<sup>14</sup> A large body of literature exists,

<sup>10</sup> Sarah Crowe et al., "The Case Study Approach," *BMC Medical Research Methodology* 11, no. 1 (2011); Robert E. Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1995).

<sup>11</sup> Svend Brinkmann and Steinar Kvale, *Interviews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2015). Except the interview from St Michael that, for pragmatic reasons, was a group interview. Included in the term preacher are pastors, catechists, church educationers and volunteers.

<sup>12</sup> Christian Heath, "Embodied Action: Video and the Analysis of Social Interaction," in *Qualitative Research - Issues of Theory, Method and Practice*, ed. David Silverman (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2011), 252.

<sup>13</sup> This is also possible in regular worship services in the Church of Norway but it is extremely seldom done.

<sup>14</sup> James A Carr, "The Children's Sermon: An Act of Worship for the Community of Faith," *Perkins Journal*, no. Spring (1983); James Nieman, "Three Thuds, Four D's, and a Rubik's Cube of Children's Sermons," *Currents in*

however, on 'how to preach (effectively) to children'. Such contributions are often written from the perspective of Christian education, not homiletics,<sup>15</sup> and almost without exception include lists of 'best practice'.<sup>16</sup>

The books and articles reviewed were published before the empirical turn in practical theology and therefore precede crucial contributions in homiletics in recent decades, such as dialogical, carnivalistic, empirical, Other-Wise and conversational approaches.<sup>17</sup> While roundtable preaching and congregational exegesis<sup>18</sup> emerged pre-2000, these theories are not present in the books and articles on preaching for children.<sup>19</sup>

It is the three peer-reviewed articles on preaching for children that mostly approach homiletics as an academic field. These articles do not argue against preaching for children; their main concern is the content of such preaching.<sup>20</sup> Their authors fear that children are not hearing 'the gospel' and that preachers are not taking Children's sermons seriously enough.<sup>21</sup> In other words, these homiletical contributions argue that preachers' approaches to preaching for children should be more *similar* to adult sermons than *different* and advocate employing homiletical and hermeneutical tools when engaging in preaching for children.

However, the non-peer-reviewed contributions argue that preaching for children needs adaptation to the target audience, meaning preachers should approach preaching for children *differently*.<sup>22</sup> Employing theories similar to the above, the authors claim that children need shorter sermons and more straightforward language, and they encourage using visual and material objects.

## 5. Theory – Practice and timespace

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*Theology and Mission* 22, no. 4 (1995); Wilbert M. Van Dyk, "Preach the Word! To Children," *Calvin Theological Journal* 32, no. 2 (1997). I am aware of the difference between children's sermons and worship services such as the ones I studied; however, I believe findings from research on preaching for children in such worship services and Children's Sermons can be mutually relevant.

<sup>15</sup> See, for instance, Sara Covin Juengst, *Sharing Faith with Children: Rethinking the Children's Sermon* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994).

<sup>16</sup> Ann M. Garrido, "Preaching among Children," *Liturgical Ministry* 15, no. Winter (2006); O. Suthern Sims Jr, *Creating and Leading Children's Sermons* (Macon: Smyth & Helwys Publishing Inc., 1999); Richard Robert Osmer, "Teaching the Catechism in the Children's Sermon: A New Possibility for Biblical and Theological Literacy," *Journal for Preachers* 4, no. 22 (1999).

<sup>17</sup> Charles L. and Cilliers Campbell, Johan H, *Preaching Fools: The Gospel as a Rhetoric of Folly* (Waco: Baylor University Press CY, 2012); Marianne Gaarden and Marlene Ringgaard Lorensen, "Listeners as Authors in Preaching - Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives," *Homiletic* 38, no. 1 (2013); Ronald J. Allen and O. Wesley Allen, *The Sermon without End: A Conversational Approach to Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015); John S. McClure, *Other-Wise Preaching : A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001); Marlene Ringgaard Lorensen, *Dialogical Preaching : Bakhtin, Otherness and Homiletics*, vol. vol. 74 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014); Sivert Angel, "Talerens Troverdighet I Prekener for Konfirmanter," in *Gudstjenester Med Konfirmanter*, ed. Elisabeth Tveito Johnsen (Oslo: IKO-forlaget, 2017).

<sup>18</sup> Lucy Atkinson Rose, *Sharing the Word : Preaching in the Roundtable Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997); Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, Fortress Resources for Preaching (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997).

<sup>19</sup>Except Nieman, who argues for understanding children as active listeners. Nieman, "Three Thuds, Four D's, and a Rubik's Cube of Children's Sermons."

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.; Van Dyk, "Preach the Word! To Children."

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., "Preach the Word! To Children," 438-39.

<sup>22</sup> Garrido, "Preaching among Children."; Anna Carter Florence, "A Prodigal Preaching Story and Bored-to-Death Youth," *Theology Today* 64, no. 2 (2007); Jr, *Creating and Leading Children's Sermons*.

In the field of homiletics, many scholars agree that preaching is a practice; however, what this entails for preaching is seldom discussed.<sup>23</sup> Practice theory, however, provides a way to discuss and research what is done and said in the practice of preaching. The theoretical foundation for the concept of 'practice' used in this article is Theodore Schatzki's definition: "a set of doings and sayings that is organized by a pool of understandings, rules, and something I call a 'teleoaffective structure'."<sup>24</sup>

In this article, I understand preaching as a practice in a Schatzkian manner, attempting to understand why preachers 'do what they do'<sup>25</sup> by analytically employing the concept of timespace and analysing the preachers' normative assumptions.

## 5.1 Timespace

Timespaces can be described as the dimensionalities of practices and, thus, can be used to analyse how practices are stretched out in time and space and how this configures practices. Schatzki defines timespace as 'acting towards ends departing from what motivates at arrays of places and paths anchored at entities'.<sup>26</sup>

However, timespace is something other than 'objective time and space'.<sup>27</sup> Whereas objective time is usually conceptualised as a succession as seen in our clocks and calendars, objective space is usually employed to refer to 'real' space, like a building.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, timespace is also not subjective time or space or time and space as experienced time and space. Fundamental to the concept of timespace is the notion that past, present and future occur at once. This simultaneousness means that the practice of preaching is not a present practice succeeding the past and followed by the future. Instead, in the practice of preaching, the past, present and future exist together at once.<sup>29</sup>

Although timespaces incorporate past, present and future, Schatzki argues that timespaces and practices are always indeterminate.<sup>30</sup> Normativity is produced in practices and upheld or not by how the practitioners act in practices. However, Schatzki points out that norms and customs can override teleology and, as a result, pre-empt the future. Thus, rather than the practitioners, norms and customs of a practice can specify what 'makes sense for people to do'.<sup>31</sup>

Moreover, interwoven timespaces can be coordinated and harmonised but can also conflict. Coordination occurs when variants of common or shared pasts, presents or futures are

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<sup>23</sup> See, for instance, Paul Scott Wilson, *The Practice of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995); Nancy Lammers Gross, *Women's Voices and the Practice of Preaching*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017). An exception is Thomas G. Long and Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Teaching Preaching as a Christian Practice: A New Approach to Homiletical Pedagogy* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008).

<sup>24</sup> Theodore R. Schatzki, "Practice Mind-Ed Orders," in *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*, ed. Karin Knorr Cetina (New York: Routledge, 2001), 50.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Schatzki, *The Timespace of Human Activity: On Performance, Society, and History as Indeterminate Teleological Events*, 60. (Quote reflects publication cited.)

<sup>27</sup> Theodore R. Schatzki, "Timespace and the Organization of Social Life," in *Time, Consumption and Everyday Life: Practice, Materiality and Culture*, ed. Elizabeth Shove, Frank Trentmann, and Richard R. Wilk (Oxford: Berg, 2009), 1.

<sup>28</sup> Schatzki, *The Timespace of Human Activity: On Performance, Society, and History as Indeterminate Teleological Events*, 1-64.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 145.

coordinated in human action.<sup>32</sup> Harmonisation occurs when actions fit smoothly and adjust to each other.<sup>33</sup> When timespaces are harmonised, their adjustment has no result except for the absence of conflict. Conflict within timespaces can arise; however, this analysis concentrates on the conflict between incompatible timespaces, when people act in spatialities that are partly shared and conflicted or follow futures that are incompatible or fuelled by contrary pasts.<sup>34</sup>

## 5.2 Operationalising timespace

While Schatzki's account of timespaces is highly theoretical, he wants his theories to be operationalised and used in empirical research.<sup>35</sup> Even though Schatzki mainly uses the concepts of coordination, harmonisation, and conflict to describe individual action, I use the same concepts to analyse the relationship among different timespaces in a practice, not necessarily tied to individual action.

Additionally, Schatzki never isolates or names specific timespaces, which this article does. To operationalise the concept of timespace in the practice of preaching for children, I first sorted the empirical material into categories of motivations/ideals (past), what the preachers do and say in the preaching events (present) and teleos/ends (future). This sorting was done for analytical purposes only, keeping in mind that in timespaces, past, present, and future occur simultaneously.

## 6. Analysis – Coordinated, conflicting, and harmonizing timespaces

From the initial analysis, four timespaces emerged as essential for the organisation of the practice of preaching for children: (1) school, (2) age-appropriateness, (3) the Bible and (4) 'ordinary preaching' (as opposed to preaching for children). To more closely analyse how these timespaces configure practice, I used the last two research sub-questions: examining whether the identified timespaces are negotiated in coordination, conflict, or harmonization with each other, which normative assumptions were upheld or produced in the preachers' practice of preaching for children, and how these configured the practice.

### 6.1 The timespace of school – Coordination and conflict

In the Christian education events, a typical material arrangement of a room is one where the children are seated in chairs and addressed by an adult standing in front of them. This adult is talking to them, preaching or teaching.<sup>36</sup> When this happens, the children need to raise their hands if they want to speak. Therefore, the material arrangement of the space is similar to that of a school. Also, just as in a school, Christian education events are designed to teach something to those who attend.

At St Nicholas, Nicole, the catechist, reflects on the relationship between school curriculum and preaching.

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<sup>32</sup> Schatzki, "Timespace" 42.

<sup>33</sup> Schatzki, "Timespace and the Organization of Social Life." 44.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 42–44.

<sup>35</sup> Schatzki, *The Timespace of Human Activity: On Performance, Society, and History as Indeterminate Teleological Events*, xvii.

<sup>36</sup> In this article, I refer to teaching in the vernacular meaning of the word and do not engage in discussions on learning and learning theories. Most of the preachers seem to use the term 'teaching' to mean conveying information about something they know to someone who does not know it. The exception is one of the volunteers from St Emmanuel who discusses Gardner's educational theories in the interview. Howard Gardner, *Multiple Intelligences: New Horizons in Theory and Practice* (USA: Basic Books, 1993).

**Nicole:** What I have experienced these last years is that this is the only Bible story I know that the children have heard before [. . .] the only story I am absolutely sure that they know is the Noah story.

**Interviewer:** Because they teach it at school? And in kindergarten?

**Nicole:** Yes, so that one. [. . .] Well, so that is the one that I know that they have heard. [. . .] So, one of the children said: 'We have just had this at school', and then I thought, 'Of course, they're in third grade, so they are the right age for this story'. [. . .] But I thought [. . .] oi, have I thought enough about this, that they already know the story? Because I like to, well, present it a little differently, so that it is the same story, but this time we can see something new in it.

In referring to the school year and the age of the children invited to Christian education events, Nicole reaches out of her place and time to organise her preaching. She uses her experience with the school and its curriculum to choose which Bible stories she employs in preaching events and does so in coordination with the curriculum at school. Nicole thus draws on the children's past experiences with the text. She hopes that, by using the same stories and telling them in different ways, adapted to the age of the children, this will promote her aim of communicating and passing on the joy she had while reading Bible stories as a child. Hence, Nicole also stretches her preaching practice into her past.

Moreover, she employs theories of child development, broadly understood. In her reasoning, the children are 'the right age' for the story. In doing so, Nicole adapts her preaching accordingly, bringing these experiences and theories into the practice of preaching. Hence, she organises the preaching event in *coordination* with the school curriculum and the timespace of age-appropriateness.

Comparatively, Eva, a volunteer from St Emmanuel, uses the timespace of school to configure her preaching and her concept of 'good' preaching.

**Interviewer:** One of the children asked you, 'What is prayer?'

**Eva:** Yes!

**Interviewer:** So, you cannot assume that they know what prayer is?

**Eva:** They know very little, and then I think: they have had almost five years of KRLE [knowledge of Christianity, religion, philosophies of life and ethics] education, but [. . .] eh [. . .] that is another business! Here, I am, going off on another subject [...] Yes, but I really question this. We are not to preach at school, that's fine, but we really need to question [. . .] have they really learned enough? Have they learned what's in the curriculum? Have they been taught it? Maybe that is the most pressing question, have they actually been taught what's in the curriculum? But, well [. . .] that is not what you're writing about.

Eva does not object to the curriculum or the ban against teachers preaching in public school; instead, she questions whether the children are taught what is in the religion curriculum at school.<sup>37</sup> Thus, Eva's past experience with and knowledge of school configures how she believes preaching should be performed.

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<sup>37</sup> "Læreplanverket – fagplaner," (Curriculum) The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, accessed April 3, 2020, <https://www.udir.no/kl06/RLE0023>.

**Eva:** And like, I feel that [. . .] Edward, the way he does it [. . .] it's not like 'sugar-coated Christianity'. Because I feel like that's often the case [. . .] in Confirmation training, and not to talk about the baptism school for the 6-year-olds. There, it's sugar-coated that we should be good people and friendly to each other and such. They come here for this baptism school and will only attend it a couple of times, and they use a lot of time to talk about how we need to be kind to each other. [...] I don't think it is the right use of time! When they are there for such a short time, we need to talk about what really matters to us! We need to [. . .]

**Interviewer:** Do you mean like talk so that they know they are at church and not kindergarten?

**Eva:** Yes! Because of that thing of being nice to each other and not bully others [. . .] maybe they've heard it enough times already?

**Interviewer:** Hehe [. . .] so you're like 'never mind that'?

**Eva:** That we use the time [. . .] to preach, to say it plainly. And Edward, he does that all the time.

However, Eva not only criticises teaching in the Norwegian public school but also argues that the church fails to preach about 'what really matters' to children. Eva praises the Wide Awake event and the leaders there for not 'sugar-coating' their preaching, something she believes is happening in other church activities. Thus, she implies that children attending other Christian education events are not subjected to 'good' teaching or preaching. Therefore, the place, or objective space, of teaching and preaching is not the defining factor for Eva; it is the quality. Hence, she creates a dichotomy between 'bad' preaching and preaching about 'what really matters'. In doing so, she combines teaching at school with some preaching in church within the timespace of school.

Eva seems to hope that if the children are exclusively exposed to preaching about 'what really matters', this preaching will also matter to them. At the same time, teaching in school should 'actually teach' the curriculum and hence provide the children with sufficient knowledge about Christian faith and practices.

Thus, both Nicole and Eva's negotiations show that the space they produce is not restricted to the Church building. Curriculums, stories and materiality shape a space that is stretched out beyond the Church itself. The same happens with time: the preacher and the children are there in the present, but activities and experiences from the past are also there. Nicole and Eva's past experiences and emotions about school are brought into the present. At the same time, the activity is also directed toward the future: toward the following educational years for the children in school, in other Christian education events and Church more generally.

## **6.2 The conflicting timespaces of 'ordinary' preaching and age-appropriateness**

A central normative assumption the preachers hold is that preaching for children is different from ordinary preaching. In their enactment and discussion of preaching for children, the preachers argue that such preaching should be targeted at the children, provide an opportunity for direct involvement (drama or answering questions), have accessible language, include something visual and concrete and be short and that the preacher should not use the pulpit.

Hence, they produce what I call the timespace of age-appropriateness. In producing this timespace, the preachers draw on past experience, different child developmental theories, the curriculum of the Christian education reform and a future goal of making church relevant for the children and produce a common way of practising preaching for children across the congregations.

Comparatively, the preachers produce ordinary preaching as a timespace which takes place in the worship service in the church nave, with the preacher standing in the pulpit and addressing an attentive adult audience sitting in the pews. In ordinary preaching, it is not as vital to preach age-appropriately or provide opportunities for the audience to be directly involved. The preachers use the timespace of ordinary preaching as a neutral point of departure, from which they adjust their practice of preaching for children. Thus, the preachers demonstrate that the timespace of ordinary preaching permeates the preachers' configuration of their practice of preaching for children.

Mark, a pastor, and Marlon, a church educator from St. Mary, address age-appropriateness in preaching for children:

**Marlon:** Well, I am mostly used to preaching to the children's choir, and they are between five and ten, and then you often have to use some concrete things.

**Interviewer:** You need to bring something concrete into it?

**Marlon:** Yes, more than words, and drama, like, so they can be involved.

**Mark:** It is obvious that the visual is an essential part [. . .] and that people are allowed to participate in what happens so that they feel like it's theirs like they also own it.

Here, Marlon brings in his past experiences from preaching to the children's choir, where he has experienced that he needs to have 'some concrete things'. The reason he gives is that using concrete things or drama in the preaching event helps the children be involved. Mark also points out that involvement is vital. Hence, they both agree that preaching for children needs to employ age-appropriate methods. Neither Marlon nor Mark said why this is so 'obvious'. Thus, although it is unlikely that the preachers have read the literature surveyed in this article, they adopt and uphold a normativity remarkably similar to the normativity described there.

In Christian education and developmental psychology, different stage theories of development have been influential in much of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.<sup>38</sup> A standard critique, especially of early stage developmental theories, is that they can be interpreted as portraying children as becoming increasingly religious as they age and move from thinking concretely about religion to thinking abstractly.<sup>39</sup> Chris Boyatzis, in his critique of such developmental theories, argues that there has been a tendency to make such theories about child development into the truth about children;<sup>40</sup> instead of using the theories as possible explanations, people believe that children *are* how the theories describe them. Such an inference

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<sup>38</sup> Chris Boyatzis, "Agency, Voice, and Maturity in Children's Religious and Spiritual Development," in *The Study of Children in Religions: A Methods Handbook*, ed. Susan B. Ridgely (New York; London: New York; London: NYU Press, 2011). 25.

<sup>39</sup> See for instance: James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981).; *ibid.* Jennifer Beste, "Children Speak: Catholic Second Graders' Agency and Experiences in the Sacrament of Reconciliation," *Sociology of Religion* 72, no. 3 (2011). Ridgely argues that although the science in the field of developmental psychology might have moved on from these early stage theories of development, they are still in use in churches and educational institutions. Susan B. Ridgely, "Introduction," in *The Study of Children in Religions*, ed. Susan B. Ridgely (New York; London: New York; London: NYU Press, 2011).

<sup>40</sup> Boyatzis, "Agency, Voice, and Maturity in Children's Religious and Spiritual Development," 27.

might lead to strong prescriptive and normative assumptions on approaching a particular age group of children. Reformulating Boyatzis, one could say that such stage theories of development inscribe a strong normativity when interpreted as ontology instead of theory. In the above, I have shown that this normativity is reproduced in the preachers' insistence on how preaching needs to be age-appropriated.

Here it is vital to note that, although the individual preachers reproduce such normativity, it is difficult to go against normativities that have long upheld traditions. Especially the obviousness which Marlon and Mark refer to demonstrate that they do not seem to entertain the possibility of questioning whether they should uphold this normativity or not. Therefore, the timespace of age-appropriateness greatly configures Marlon and Mark's preaching practice in providing normativity which decides what 'makes sense for them to do', a normativity that is expressed in their understanding and practice of how preaching for children needs to be age-appropriate, short, simple and include some visual or dramatical element.<sup>41</sup>

An essential observation is that while homileticians have long argued that form and content cannot be separated in preaching, several of the preachers observed and interviewed in this study often make this separation.<sup>42</sup> For instance, Merete at St. Michael's reflects on the role of theology in preaching for children:

**Merete:** Well [. . .] when preaching to children, I am a very creative preacher. I really like to work together with others and always come up with dramas and fun things. I love doing this together with other people! But I am occupied with the preaching containing some theology. It is not just a retelling of the texts. It is so much more. I am sure you noticed. And, I am sure you have heard those retellings many times. They make me so discouraged.

Merete claims that preaching for children needs to be more than retelling stories; it also has to contain some theology. However, she does not specify what she means by theology. The preaching event at St Michael is organised as a dramatic conversation between Merete and the church educator. This conversation presents several dogmatic statements, such as 'Jesus is our redeemer' and 'Jesus opened the way to heaven', which might be what Merete refers to as theology. If so, Merete produces a timespace where 'dramas and fun things' (form) are separate from theology (content), all the while arguing that the practice of preaching for children needs to include theology. Hence, theology becomes an entity that she can insert into or remove from preaching. In this way, Merete displays the conflict between the age-appropriateness and

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<sup>41</sup> Schatzki, *The Timespace of Human Activity : On Performance, Society, and History as Indeterminate Teleological Events*, 184.

<sup>42</sup> Fred Craddock claims that "the method is the message. So it is with all preaching: how one preaches is to a large degree what one preaches." Craddock also maintains that the method communicates theological content and hence, he argues strongly against separating form and content. Fred Brenning Craddock, *As One without Authority*, 3rd ed. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979). Other homileticians have also argued against separating form and content. Contributions like Buttrick's *Moves and Structures*, and Lowry's *The Homiletical Plot*, as well as McClure's *Other-Wise Preaching* and Rose's *Roundtable Preaching* all demonstrate that the form of preaching and the content of preaching are closely tied together. David Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (London: SCM Press, 1987); Eugene L. Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form*, Expanded ed. ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001); John S. McClure, *Other-Wise Preaching: A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001); Lucy Atkinson Rose, *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997).

ordinary preaching timespaces by wanting to involve the children and have drama while not sacrificing theological content.

All of the preaching events observed in this study differed from an ordinary preaching event in the Church of Norway. I believe the emphasis on the timespace of age-appropriateness show that the preachers, in this negotiation between age-appropriateness and ordinary preaching, end up being more occupied with *how* (form) one should preach than *what* (content) one should preach. This division between form and content perhaps reveals a view of communication close to a transfer model,<sup>43</sup> which is widely criticised by both homileticians and practice theoreticians.<sup>44</sup>

Thus, in preaching for children, the preachers negotiate between focusing on children or preaching or between the timespace of age-appropriateness and ordinary preaching. In the interviews, the preachers state that they are concerned with content, yet, enacting preaching events makes significant changes in form and small changes in content. The changes in content are frequently limited to using simple words and speaking in short sentences. Thus, the content of those same preaching events remains quite theologically sophisticated and dogmatic—e.g., the ransom theory of atonement, sin, or God's destruction of the world through a flood—or the polar opposite, namely simple "messages" repeated throughout the preaching event, like "Jesus wants you to be friends with everyone."<sup>45</sup>

Moreover, this separation of form and content demonstrates that the timespace of ordinary preaching and age-appropriateness are produced as conflicting timespaces in the practice of preaching for children.

### 6.2.1. Target audience

When asked whom they considered the target audience of preaching events in Sunday worship services, most preachers in the study stated that children were their target audience, yet some articulated intentions to include the whole congregation. One way this conflict is visible is in how preachers use manuscripts. Most preachers refer to the importance of connecting with the children and looking them in the eye, aiming to preach without manuscripts.

*Interviewer:* I noticed it [the manuscript], because yesterday you did not have one, and today you did and used it. It seems like you chose to have two different approaches. Can you reflect on that?

*Nicole:* Yes, well, I need to look the children in the eyes. Like, yesterday, when we were five children in the little side chapel, and they sat there in the first row, well then, I needed to look them in the eyes. Today there were many adults present, and I thought, 'I have to remember the name of those islands in the Pacific'. Then I needed the manuscript. I used a lot of the same sermon as yesterday, and I do not think I remembered what the islands were called then. I just said, 'some islands', and that's fine. But when the adults

<sup>43</sup> The transfer model of communication represents an understanding of communication that assumes the transfer of information from a sender to a receiver, with little or no recognition of the communication being interpreted or otherwise differently understood or appropriated by the receiver. See Marianne Gaarden and Marlene Ringgaard Lorensen, "Listeners as Authors in Preaching - Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives," *Homiletic* vol 38, 1 (2013): 31–32.

<sup>44</sup> Gaarden, *The Third Room of Preaching*.; James V. Wertsch, *Voices of the Mind: A Sociocultural Approach to Mediated Action* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 73.

<sup>45</sup> Kristin Graff-Kallevåg and Jan Olav Henriksen, "Jesus og Kaptein Sabeltann - en analyse om hvordan det forkynnes om frelse for små og store," (forthcoming).

*are there, well, then it needs to be in order. I have to know the names of those islands. So, therefore [ . . . ] the manuscript helped me remember them.*

As this statement shows, Nicole has different ideals for children and adults. In preaching for children, she needs to look them in the eye; she needs to remember her facts and be precise for adults. This reveals another version of the central assumption that preaching for children is different: ordinary preaching needs to be more intricate and precise. In enacting preaching for children, this ambivalence and negotiation results either in preaching events that target children, not adults, or that target both, yet in separate sections. As Pastor Mark says in his sermon, “You adults are not getting off this easily; there's something for you too.”

Also discussing his target audience, Sam, the pastor of St. Emmanuel, is concerned that worship services and preaching events should be for the whole congregation, yet this particular Sunday, the children “ended up” becoming his target group. He attributes this shift toward the children to the text “he got” that Sunday (from the lectionary), which concerned the Annunciation of Mary.

**Sam:** When I got that text about Mary, right? I could link them together.

**Interviewer:** Mmm.

**Sam:** So I felt like [ . . . ] that I could remain in that Tower Agent theme [designated by the event] and that the Bible story, or Bible text, became an element of the Tower Agent theme, although not a big element. But what I intended, at least, was that the theme and the text would become part of the whole, so to speak.

Linking the text of the Annunciation to the concept of Tower Agents, the Christian education event and the timespace of age-appropriateness both influence how Sam interprets the biblical text. Hence, it seems that compared with the timespace of ordinary preaching, it is not the timespace of the biblical text but rather the timespace of age-appropriateness that determines how the biblical text is interpreted. I will return to this finding in the next sub-heading, where I discuss the timespace of the Bible in greater detail.

Moreover, none of the preachers in the study uses the pulpit. In the interviews, the preachers do not reflect on this. Although I do not know whether the preachers use the pulpit typically, it does seem like an element of defining preaching for children as different from ordinary preaching. Stepping down from the pulpit allows the preacher to be closer to the children, who usually sit at the front pews at these events. As such, this stepping down might be part of the preachers' effort to have eye contact with the children and make themselves more available for them.

The pulpit is one of those places that has become what Schatzki calls 'standardised'<sup>46</sup> – preaching happens from a pulpit. Hence, this stepping down is another way to demonstrate the dominance of the timespace of age-appropriateness in preaching for children. Despite the long history and tradition of preaching taking place in the pulpit, the assumed advantage of being closer to the children encourages a break with tradition.

Furthermore, Nicole mentions that the change in space, from a side chapel with five children on Saturday to the Sunday worship service with adults and more people present, configures how she preaches. The preaching in the side chapel on Saturday produces a time and space where direct communication between Nicole and the children is possible.

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<sup>46</sup> Schatzki, *Timespace*, 75

However, not all preaching on Saturday in the different congregations takes place in a side chapel; some take place in the church nave. Therefore, the deciding factor for whether preaching events are different is not the place but the timespace. While the Christian education events produce a time and space where the children are allowed to be concretely and directly involved in the preaching events, worship services seem to add a spatiality and atmosphere that reduce flexibility and room for direct verbal involvement.

Nevertheless, the preachers still argue that preaching events in worship services should also be age-appropriate and directed at the children to further their involvement in the preaching event. At the same time, the preachers state that they wish to provide worship services for the whole congregation. Thus, the preachers, particularly the pastors, seem to believe that worship services should be 'age-less' but preaching for children should always be 'age-specific', thus producing a tension between worship services and the timespace age-appropriateness.

These negotiations show that timespaces are both interwoven and conflicting.<sup>47</sup> The normativity described in developmental theories and the tradition of considering preaching for children as different from other preaching is strong enough to determine what makes sense for the preachers to do. As such, both the ordinary preaching and age-appropriateness timespaces configure the practice of preaching for children – the former by introducing a contrasting, perhaps perceived neutral way of preaching, and the latter by providing theories and methods that maintain the difference.

### **6.3 The timespace of biblical texts – Harmonization**

Every preaching event in the empirical material also revolves around a biblical narrative, maybe because they are easy to dramatize. Hence, a fascinating aspect of the preachers' practice of preaching for children is how they approach the timespace of Bible texts. The biblical texts have many connections to the past, as historical, religious, cultural and liturgical texts. Because biblical texts are used as religious texts, they are also connected to the intentions and future hopes of those who read and interpret them.

Consequently, the biblical texts stretch out beyond the practice of preaching for children in time and space and are part of its dimensionality. In all preaching events, the dynamic of using old texts filled with intention and tradition to interpret the present situation and provide hope or purpose for the future is present. However, in the practice of preaching for children, the temporal, historical, cultural and liturgical aspects of the biblical texts are seldom explored during the preaching events.

The primary marker of the biblical texts existing in a different objective time and space is to dress up in clothes that look similar to those with which Jesus and his disciples are portrayed in Western art, often with kitchen towels as headscarves. While the preachers seem to put this dressing up in the category of being fun and conveying that this story happened in a different objective time and space, in interviews with children, they asked why one always had to dress in 'funny and ugly' clothes when doing dramas in the church. Hence, in retelling biblical stories, dressing up does not communicate the change in time and place that the preachers aim to convey.

The preachers act in ways that harmonize this timespace with the other timespaces in the practice: the biblical texts fit seamlessly into the preaching events, even if you have a kitchen towel on your head while you tell it. Where one might expect tension and conflict, no tension

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<sup>47</sup> The worship service itself could also be described as yet another timespace that needs to be negotiated in preaching events. However, for the purpose of narrowing the scope of the article, the collisions and negotiations in the worship service as a whole will not be discussed.

exists. The preachers present biblical and personal stories as well as stories from yesterday's newspaper as existing within the same timespace and, hence, produce a timespace where the past, present and future do not exist simultaneously but are conflated into one. As a result, this harmonious use of biblical texts might obscure how foreign parts of the Bible are to modern readers and presuppose a biblical literacy that transcends unchurched children or even churching adults.<sup>48</sup>

Furthermore, the preachers emphasize making the preaching concrete, short, and compatible with the event theme rather than starting with reading the text, again showing that the age-appropriateness timespace is exceptionally dominant in configuring the practice of preaching to children. Therefore, the timespace of biblical texts is conflated with a harmonized 'message' which the preachers wish to convey so that questions of historicity and critique are not being raised.

### 7. The dominant timespace of age-appropriateness

In the analysis, I show that when the preachers produce time and space in the practice of preaching for children, they give primacy to the timespace of age-appropriateness. Other timespaces are primarily coordinated and subordinated, and if conflicts arise, the age-appropriateness timespace 'wins' the conflict.

The preachers are remarkably uniform in their concerns about target audience, materiality, visibility, involvement and brevity. I believe that Boyatzis makes a compelling argument concerning how theories can be used as blueprints for practice, dissolving nuanced theory into normative assumptions.<sup>49</sup> The analysis shows that reliance on theories and tradition can create norms that determine what 'makes sense for people to do'. Therefore, the lack of scientific, homiletical research on preaching for children contributes to the dominance of the timespace of age-appropriateness. Whenever the timespaces of ordinary preaching and the timespace of age-appropriateness conflict, the preachers do not have homiletical literature and theory available for their decision-making. Alternatively, they at least do not recognize homiletical theory as a tool to use when preaching for children.

Moreover, remarkably, the ordinary preaching timespace produced does not include the same attention to psychology and pedagogy. The above raises the question of whether the New Homiletics' critique, claiming that it is impossible for the preacher and listeners to entirely identify with each other or for the preacher to access a shared experience with adult listeners,<sup>50</sup> has not been expanded to include preaching for children. The age-appropriateness timespace in preaching for children seems to provide a way around this critique and creates a timespace where it is possible to know one's audience and tailor preaching accordingly.

This article does *not* argue against considering the age of most listeners, nor for dismissing theories and insights from educational studies and developmental psychology. Children do grow in understanding as they mature. Nevertheless, children are more than simply their age. All seven-year-olds are not the same, just as all forty-five-year-olds are not the same. Just as one would advocate for an intersectional perspective on women and race, children should be approached as complex individuals with intersecting identities. Thus, the practice of preaching for children could benefit from including insights from the last decades of homiletical

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<sup>48</sup> For the purposes of anonymity in the review process, this reference is omitted.

<sup>49</sup> Boyatzis, "Agency, Voice, and Maturity in Children's Religious and Spiritual Development."

<sup>50</sup> Ringgaard Lorenzen, *Dialogical Preaching: Bakhtin, Otherness and Homiletics*, vol. 74; Gaarden, *The Third Room of Preaching*; McClure, *Other-Wise Preaching: A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics*, 51.

research: like the critique against New Homiletics, or newer empirical and theoretical contributions, such as Other-Wise preaching and dialogical approaches to preaching. Doing so might complexify preaching for children and thus give children's intersectional identities more space.

This nuancing might also contribute to questioning the separation of form and content with which preachers operate. In the separation of form and content, preachers express an operant understanding of theology and communication where theology is a static entity that can be inserted or removed, and communication is merely transferring a message from one person to another. This understanding diverges from the views of theology and communication that they express in the interviews, however, in which most preachers discuss theology and communication as more dynamic and dialogical. Consequently, I claim that becoming aware of one's normative assumptions about preaching, communication, and theology affects how one preaches, and it is beneficial for preachers to be more consciously aware of these *also* when preaching for children.

## 8. Conclusion

Timespaces configure the practice of preaching to children in several ways; the most important is through conflict, pitting the timespace of age-appropriateness and ordinary preaching against each other. When a conflict arises, the timespace of age-appropriateness almost always prevails. This conflict leads to a separation of form and content and an emphasis on *how* to preach instead of *what* to preach.

I criticise the emphasis on creating preaching that 'fits' an age group. The assumption that preachers will gain access to the children's experience, emotions, thoughts, and reflections in narrowing the target age group is flawed. Here, homiletical theory has a role to play. Adopting a dialogical and practice-oriented understanding of communication, where the aim is not to transfer a message from a sender to a receiver but to create a space for reflection and appropriation, might provide a bridge over the form-content divide.

One of the advantages of a dialogical approach is that some pressure is taken off preachers; if meaning is created in the meeting of consciousnesses, preacher and listener share responsibility and (at least some of) the power of meaning-creation. Another advantage is that such an approach weakens the temptation and opportunities to tailor preaching to the target audience because the focus of a dialogical and practice-oriented understanding of communication argues for interaction between conscious individuals, not with groups.

Hence, treating children as individuals and not according to their age group might make it easier to address their existential needs. Therefore, I claim that the preachers' practice of preaching for children can benefit from lessening the influence of the timespace of age-appropriateness on the practice and allowing preachers to employ homiletical resources in preaching for children. Finally, I propose that the above demonstrates that preaching for children is both similar to and different from ordinary preaching. Hopefully, this article can function as a spark for engaging debates in the homiletical community concerning the practice of preaching for children in the future.

William P. Brown. *Deep Calls to Deep: The Psalms in Dialogue amid Disruption*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2021. 447 pages. \$39.99.

When one approaches sacred texts, either arriving for the first time or returning to them as to familiar landmark, one is invited not only to the world of the text, but simultaneously to delve deeper into one's current world. In *Deep Calls to Deep: The Psalms in Dialogue amid Disruption*, biblical scholar and theologian William P. Brown offers a guide on how to approach the Psalter with the aforementioned nuanced balance of both belief and searching as one engages the intentional variety of the Psalms. In short, the book is a rich survey of the diversity of dialogues and interpretations present within the Psalter itself -- countering a narrative that the book has one "voice" or one clear message. And by extension, amid many cultural and societal ills, Brown demonstrates how modern-day readers, and engagers, of the Psalms are also invited to lean into diversity and into dialogues amongst each other, where differences do not have to equal divisions.

Particularly in the face of pandemic, environmental catastrophes, white supremacy, partisan polarization, and more, *Deep Calls to Deep* is an invitation into the dialogical nature of the psalter, itself a "work of theological and literary diversity" (11). Brown initiates these conversations with sound biblical scholarship – including devoted attention to the Hebrew text and its nuances – which is coupled with social and cultural commentary. Not only does Brown place The Psalms into conversation with the Divine and with humanity, but he makes the distinct move of placing The Psalms into conversation with each other. By highlighting the examples of diverse dialogue within the Psalter itself, Brown demonstrates how the Psalms are collected and "set up to talk to each other" (29), a model which he suggests readers of the Psalms can emulate.

Brown divides the book into four main sections: namely, "Torah," "Prophets," "Writings," and "Reflections." Each section, and their respective subsections, are carefully curated to follow the journey of the Hebrew Bible as it is modeled through the artistic expression of the community's hymns and songs. Tracing from "In the Beginning: A Primordial Dialogue," to the work of judges and prophets in "Establishing Justice: Prophetic and Psalmic," the reader goes on the journey alongside the community, and is able to witness the emerging conversations. Brown is careful not to represent a unitary voice, nor to call for one from readers, but through the various expressions of lament, praise, and thanksgiving, the reader is encouraged to remember "biblical wisdom covers the epistemological spectrum from confident certainty to unsettling uncertainty" (333). Through an analysis of David, certainly a prominent figure in the collection of psalmic literature, the reader is exposed to the complexities and diversities present within one individual, let alone within a community.

While *Deep Calls to Deep* offers an in-depth analysis of the scriptural text itself that biblical scholars will find refreshing, its work is not limited to biblical studies. The book – both its content and its structure – is particularly generative for preachers and other practitioners of religion who are interested in exploring and stimulating diversity within their own faith communities. As Brown articulates in the conclusion, "If the Bible can 'make room' for 'divergent perspectives,' then so can its readers" (444). The diversity of the biblical text, as Brown explicates through the Psalms, is an ongoing and open invitation to its readers that dialogue and diversity is to be cherished and embraced. In so doing, we, too, might wrestle together through our epistemological uncertainties and move together in our quest for justice.

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Amy-Jill Levine. *Witness at the Cross: A Beginner's Guide to Holy Friday*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2021. 153 Pages. \$17.

The old passion spiritual, “Were you there when they crucified my Lord,” invites us to stand as a witness at the foot of the cross. Levine goes further by inviting the reader to look at the cross through the particular eyes of those present with Christ during the event, suggesting that each person represents a different tone in a larger theological symphony. She makes this apparent by starting with the characters rather than the writers who tell their stories. In this way, Levine presents a comparative study that not only dives into the individuals and groups themselves, but approaches the theological messages of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John from a nontraditional angle.

Each chapter is divided by individual witnesses or groups of witnesses, including Simon of Cyrene, the unnamed bystanders and scoffers, the other victims hanging alongside Jesus, the beloved disciple, the women, and Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. The exegetical work around these characters extends beyond their engagement with the cross as Levine surveys how their immediate presence connects with a larger picture, possibly through previous gospel appearances, ties to prophecy, and sociohistorical realities. For example, when looking at the soldiers, Levine considers the implications of living in a Roman state. Similarly, when looking at the women, she connects the name “daughters of Jerusalem” to Hebrew texts and explores communal responsibility for lament and repentance. Each chapter varies in its type of exploration, based on the characters themselves, but consistently returns to how their unique stories contribute to the particular theological message of the gospel which includes them. Levine’s history of excellent and insightful scholarship continues with this book. From the first page on readers benefit from her ability to weave microscopic word study with meta themes, her unabashed embrace of difficult questions, and her rejection of traditional textual interpretations that result in anti-Judaism conclusions—especially important in connection to the Passion narratives. She does all of this with rightly sprinkled humor throughout the book.

The book’s subtitle, “A Beginner’s Guide to Holy Friday” may indicate the accessibility of this text, but as someone who has heard and studied these passages at length, it still offered something new, fresh, and introspective. This book is not the type of exegetical guide which parses Greek words or methodically follows a pattern of examination—that is clearly not Levine’s intent. She follows the characters and tells their story in a way that invites readers of all levels into an enjoyable exegetical process. This reflects the book’s connection to its partner materials in a leader’s guide and video teaching sessions ranging from 10-15 minutes (available as a DVD or through an online membership streaming service). Together, these resources comprise an excellent education package for ministry settings. Still, do not let the style or context mislead about this book’s potential for individual study or use in an introductory level classroom. Her expertise, experience and scholarship shine through these pages as Levine weaves ideas together around these characters, producing deep moments of perception through a single question, an idea, or modern-day illustration.

As I read these pages, I kept saying to myself, “That’ll preach!” Levine outlines the roles of these characters in such a way that anyone preparing a sermon would have a wealth of launching points for diving into their character, and as Holy Friday seems to arrive each year without fail, these different hooks into familiar texts and characters are invaluable.

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Rabbi Yonatan Neril and Rabbi Leo Dee. *Eco Bible Volume 1: An Ecological Commentary on Genesis and Exodus*. The Interfaith Center for Sustainable Development, 2020. 231 pages, \$15. *Eco Bible Volume 2: An Ecological Commentary on Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy*. The Interfaith Center for Sustainable Development, 2021. 265 pages, \$15.

“Is concern for environmental stewardship external to the Hebrew Bible (Torah to be specific), or a central message embedded within it?” (*Volume 1*, xv)

Holding this guiding question, editors Neril and Dee creatively guide a discussion on the five books of the Torah: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, with particular attention to ecology. Written with the dire context of the global pandemic and alarming environmental crises, *Eco Bible Volumes 1* and *2* show how these crises are interconnected and how the Bible is relevant to the present moment. Neril and Dee, in conversation with over 100 rabbis and Jewish thinkers, are convinced that both religion and science together can inspire people to engage ecological challenges and move people of faith to action--everywhere around the globe.

The commentaries are organized by verse, though not every verse is commented on. The use of thematic titles guides readers to think ecologically; for example, the title “sustainability and spiritual awareness” precedes commentary on Genesis 1:3 (*Volume 1*, 4). Over 100 themes are illuminated across 50 chapters of Genesis, including insights from a range of rabbis, including Jonathan Sacks’ “the stewardship paradigm,” a commentary on Genesis 2:15 (*Volume 1*, 11). *Volume 1* also includes Midrash, a major rabbinic commentary on the Hebrew Bible. Knowing that the Midrash “plays” with the Hebrew meaning of words and ventures into its unconventional areas of interpretation, powerfully expands the hermeneutical horizons of the reader (*Volume 1*, 183).

In *Volume 2*, Neril and Dee artfully engage readers as they delve into presumably uninspiring texts and show how they are relevant to contemporary life, particularly regarding the task of living sustainably. Focusing on Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, the writing contributors assert that hundreds of verses on animal sacrifices in Leviticus derive from a deep care for and desire to protect animals. Many verses in Numbers deal primarily with how to live in the wilderness, while one of the main teachings of Deuteronomy is closely related to matters regarding the “land” upon which the people of Israel will soon settle. The commentaries on these three books in the Torah powerfully demonstrate how human and animal lives are intertwined and interdependent. Passages such as Numbers 22:28 – the words of Balaam’s donkey – are reclaimed with refreshing insights, turning attention to interspecies communication, in this case (103). Topics such as soil quality, land rest, and water awareness, drawn from Scripture, offer new possibilities for teaching, preaching, and learning. Furthermore, the commentaries are ripe with sermon examples and illustrations.

Throughout both volumes, Neril and Dee offer “Suggested Action Items.” These practical suggestions invite readers into practices that support ecological awareness, care and protection. For instance, preachers who desire to engage the natural world in their biblical and homiletical exegesis might daily attend to the elements of our planet, such as the warmth of the sun; the ground beneath our feet; or the scattered stars (19). The action items are also instructive for the congregations who seek spiritual disciplines that may address ecological problems. By simply unplugging electric appliances before Shabbat, one may participate in the work of ecological responsibility (172). Other action items include looking at the clouds, appreciating their shapes, colors, and speeds, and considering cloud cover as part of the health of the planet (176).

Preachers who want to deepen their reading of Torah and find ways to speak from ecological perspectives will want these volumes. They are an excellent resource for anyone who seeks to interpret the Bible with an ecological lens, and to do so while learning with and from Jewish scholars, thinkers, and practitioners. A notable strength of this set is its engagement with a 3500-years-old Jewish tradition of interpretation, citing 160 commentaries on the Hebrew Bible, in addition to referring to the most recent scientific sources. The writings travel across time helping readers to hear the voices of the past, voices that call out to the dormant ears of today to wake up and pay attention to their world as well as to their faith. Finally, both *Eco Bible* volumes generously provide additional information. *Volume 1* lists bibliographical details of Jewish scholars and teachers throughout the ages; in a similar vein, *Volume 2* lists suggestions for further reading for Jewish scholarly work on Jewish teachings on animals, creation, trees, land, ecology, veganism and vegetarianism.

The authors of *Eco Bible* urge readers to become responsible and faithful stewards, and protectors of what many suggest is a planet on the verge of collapse. The two-volume commentary is a spring of ecological wisdom from our Jewish ancestors in faith. While God is the ultimate source of life that replenishes the drying planet, it is this God revealed in Scripture who summons us to join in the life-saving act of protecting our world.

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Thom S. Rainer. *The Post-Quarantine Church: Six Urgent Challenges + Opportunities That Will Determine the Future of Your Congregation*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 2020. 118 pages. \$12.99.

Thom S. Rainer states, “Perhaps the most basic and obvious conclusion to be drawn from the pandemic is that it gave church leaders an opportunity to rethink *everything*” (82). The pandemic was certainly unexpected, not only by individuals but also by churches. As churches reopen, Rainer gives them practical advice regarding “*how* they should open,” not “*when* they should open” (6). In this short and succinct book, he lays out six challenges that churches need to accept to move them forward in the post-quarantine era.

In chapter 1, “Gather Differently and Better,” Rainer challenges churches to turn “the purpose of our church buildings upside down” (17). Rather than using the church facility for members only and on Sundays only, he asks churches to open their doors to community members throughout the week.

In chapter 2, “Seize Your Opportunity to Reach the Digital World,” Rainer challenges the mindset of going back to a pre-pandemic normal because such a thing no longer exists. The digital world is, he argues, “a mission field—a largely untapped area for local church ministry” (28), and “the opportunities are too important to ignore” (29).

Chapter 3, “Reconnect with the Community Near Your Church,” is a wake-up call for neighborhood churches experiencing slow erosion due to their turning inward and “replacing the Great Commission with a great complacency” (48). What are the needs of the community? What are the ways a church can have a positive impact on its community?

In chapter 4, “Take Prayer to a New and Powerful Level,” Rainer brings our attention back to the heart of Christian ministry—prayer. As church buildings closed during the pandemic, prayer meetings expanded greatly in the digital world, and he argues that they should continue in the post-quarantine church: “Don’t lose the emphasis. Don’t stop praying” (65).

Chapter 5, “Rethink Your Facilities for Emerging Opportunities,” describes how churches have become “an exclusive social club” and how the Great Commission has become “a great *omission*” (72). Looking at church facilities that are used as often as college football stadiums, which he calls “poor stewardship” (79), he asks church leaders to find ways to partner with local organizations and share their physical spaces.

In chapter 6, “Make Lasting Changes That Will Make a Difference,” Rainer highlights not only why churches fail to accept change but also how they can lead for lasting change. Changes and thus membership losses are inevitable in the post-quarantine era. But, he cautions, “[T]he rules have changed,” and church leaders have to “get ready to adapt” (99).

This book is a product of Rainer’s long years of experience and struggle as a pastor, educator, CEO, and church counselor. He notes that the pandemic has brought to our attention what is obvious but many have avoided seeing: “Churches that refuse to change will inevitably decline or even die. Blunt but true” (101). This book lays a good foundation for clergy and laity on how to better adapt to changes happening in the post-quarantine era and better serve the congregation in the church and the community.

The book, however, has limitations. First, its content is redundant. For example, chapters 1 and 5 do not appear to be different from one another at their core. By the time I read chapter 6, it felt like a review of the earlier chapters. Second, the title is catchy but the content is not novel. His suggestions, such as connecting with and inviting people from the community to the church, utilizing the digital world, and focusing on prayer have been foci of church ministry for years. It

seems that Rainer is simply presenting them in a different context with a new book cover. Third, he is speaking to mid-size and large churches that have their own buildings. What about small churches that do not have their own buildings? What about congregations that are small and elderly? I wonder how much he considered their needs.

Despite these limitations, I think this book is worth reading, especially for churches wondering where and how to restart in the post-quarantine era. I recommend this book to pastors and church leaders as a sourcebook or book study material. It will motivate you to accept necessary changes, adapt the ways you have always done things in church, and serve your congregation and community better.

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Charles L. Campbell. *The Scandal of the Gospel: Preaching and the Grotesque*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2021. 98 pages. \$23.78

In *The Scandal of the Gospel: Preaching and the Grotesque*, Charles L. Campbell invites preachers and homileticians to take on the grotesque character of the gospel by drawing on a variety of artistic sources. In art, the grotesque “embodies contradictions, incongruities” (6) and engages radical hybrid forms that subvert dominant categories. Taking 1 Corinthians 1:23 and its affirmation that the message of Christ crucified is “both foolishness and a scandal (stumbling block),” Campbell asserts that, “the scandal of the gospel may simply be that it is grotesque” (5). This book offers a vision of preaching that reckons with the paradoxical and sometimes unsettling realities of life.

In Chapter 1, “Jesus in the Grotto: The Gospel as Grotesque,” Campbell uses ancient art to explore the grotesque nature of the gospel and its scandalous pairing of contradictions. For example, the ancient Roman graffiti, *Alexamenos graffito* (ca. 238-244), is a mocking depiction of a young man worshipping a crucified, donkey-headed figure believed to represent Jesus. This kind of art was “radically at odds with the norms of clarity, balance, and harmony presumed to be features of a classical aesthetic” (5). Accordingly, says Campbell, this mixing of subversive, incompatible, unacceptable, and disorienting realities is exactly the condition of the gospel. As such, the grotesque serves as an invitation to preachers to relinquish the rigid patterns and resolutions that often serve as a way of escaping the paradoxical nature of life. Instead, he contends, faithful preaching listens to different voices, even as their grotesqueness shocks us. This, he argues, is where God enters.

Chapter 2 focuses on the concept of the “weaponized grotesque” as a lens to frame and interrogate “ideologically constructed whiteness and white supremacy” (20). Drawing on poetry and novels, Campbell describes the weaponized grotesque as the rhetorical tool employed by “those in power to denigrate people who are different from them in order to reassert their power and reinforce social hierarchies” (20). Locating the weaponized grotesque in political rhetoric, this chapter argues that by turning humans into animals or things, those who benefit from ideological whiteness dehumanize marginalized groups. The result is the reification of white supremacist categories and social hierarchies that ultimately lead to death. The call of the preacher is to interrogate and interrupt the weaponized grotesque with a resounding “No!” His intention is to issue a counter-rhetoric in which the humanity of those who have been made into animals and things is affirmed.

Chapter 3, “Incarnate Word: Preaching and the Carnavalesque,” posits the “carnavalesque grotesque” as the alternative to the weaponized grotesque. It examines the concept of *carnival* to suggest how Christ's incarnation is the actualization of the grotesque. “Carnival is the embodied theology of the marginalized that brings down the powerful from their thrones and lifts up the lowly” (45). Through the lens of the festive celebration of the carnivalesque grotesque, Campbell employs Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the grotesque body to establish an eschatological vision of the Body of Christ in which boundaries and binaries are transcended and the lowly are lifted up. “Grotesque preaching calls the church to be open to the world and calls the pulpit to be open to different bodies and new voices” (56).

Chapter 4, “Apocalypse Now: Preaching and the Environmental Grotesque,” describes the present environmental crisis as an enormous catastrophe that places us in the “interval of the grotesque” (64) in which we live in an “unsettled space of unresolved contradictions” (64). He argues that the most appropriate response of preaching is “grotesque hope . . . affirming a

testimony of hopeful affirmation and a testimony of that hope's negation" (66). From here, Campbell returns to the concepts explored in the first three chapters to invite new grotesque homiletical patterns.

*The Scandal of the Gospel* is a timely book for preachers and homileticians. It challenges readers to reassess the familiar patterns of preaching that too often rush to neat resolutions while avoiding the messy, paradoxical realities of life in an unjust world – realities that are embodied in the incarnate and crucified Christ. While Campbell writes that the grotesque transgresses patterns, his resolution returns to patterns by calling forth new ones. It would have been helpful if Campbell had explored what homiletical possibilities might exist beyond patterns and categories if the discipline is to truly take on a grotesque quality. Nevertheless, this short text is a wonderful invitation to those who are committed to preaching and teaching the scandalous grotesque gospel.

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Katie Lauve-Moon. *Preacher Woman: A Critical Look at Sexism Without Sexists*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021. 240 pages. \$29.95.

Katie Lauve-Moon is Assistant Professor of Social Work at Texas Christian University. One of her interests is inequality in the workplace. In *Preacher Woman: A Critical Look at Sexism Without Sexists*, she studies the lack of female senior pastors in Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) churches. The CBF was formed thirty years ago partly in response to the Southern Baptist Convention's (SBC) refusal to recognize leadership roles for women in the church. While the CBF honors the role of women in church leadership, only 5% of its churches have female senior pastors or co-pastors. Lauve-Moon explores this trend through the study of six CBF churches: two with male senior pastors, three with female senior pastors, and one with male and female co-pastors. While her study focuses on CBF churches, other denominations can utilize her research to examine representation of female leadership within their own congregations.

One key element of the CBF is local church autonomy, meaning that each church makes decisions for its own church body and is not guided by denominational hierarchy. While the CBF and its local state affiliates can provide a church with names of those looking for a church position, it does so as a service to the candidate and the churches without making specific recommendations. The task of a ministerial search is left up to local churches, which often form ministerial search committees made up of individuals from the congregation. Lauve-Moon explores this procedure and provides an analysis of those factors that can influence a church's decision about whether or not to consider a female candidate, concluding that this is an "implicitly sexist organizational process" (x).

Since the CBF is a relatively young organization and came out of the SBC, many churches have not had the opportunity to have females in senior leadership roles. As a result, female children and teens do not have role models demonstrating that women can be ministers. In contrast, young men in CBF who feel called to ministry are mentored and guided from an early age. Nevertheless, male and female enrollment is almost equal in CBF affiliated seminaries. However, female leaders have difficulty finding placement in local churches or are hired for positions such as children's ministry or office manager that rarely lead to advancement. In contrast, male leaders are readily hired and placed in positions that can easily advance to senior leadership positions.

Since ministerial leadership in SBC and CBF churches has been male-dominated throughout their histories, masculine models of leadership and authority are viewed as normative. This puts women at a disadvantage if they aspire to senior leadership in CBF churches. Lauve-Moon notes: "...women often face social consequences when they fail to fit into this particular mode; herein lies the hegemonic significance of gender" (99). The author studies how female leaders are often judged by their looks, including weight, dress, and the ability to "act like a woman," rather than their leadership skills. Male ministers are rarely subjected to such scrutiny. Additionally, women are not only expected to conduct their ministerial functions in the church, but also to be the primary caregiver in the home. Similarly, churches frequently add a "third shift" to female ministers by seeing them as the "church's wife," responsible for overseeing the hospitality of the church, much like a pastor's wife. Lauve-Moon also notes how female ministers experience sexual harassment, and are both overworked and underpaid, following the trends found elsewhere in society. Finally, the author reports that

female ministers frequently address social issues because of the injustices they have faced in their own lives.

Katie Lauve-Moon has authored a detailed book about how gender socialization in society affects women in leadership roles in the CBF. She provides a sociological analysis of leadership trends interspersed with interviews of female pastors, their male counterparts, and members of congregations. Her book is for a wide range of audiences, including the academy and the church, and can serve as an affirmation for women who are discerning a call to church leadership by providing them with an overview of the many issues they may face in following their call. The book can also be an important study for congregations considering women for leadership roles in the church. Lauve-Moon ends each chapter with study questions about how churches view women's roles in ministry and how to become more aware of personal biases that may be obstacles to hiring female pastors.

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Sunggu A. Yang. *Arts and Preaching: An Aesthetic Homiletic for the Twenty-First Century*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2021. 210 pages. \$24.49.

Sunggu A. Yang asserts that the “what” and “how” of preaching have dominated introductory preaching courses to the exclusion of the “who” and “why.” “[W]ith few exceptions,” he claims, the result has been “disappointing sermons that are leaden and irrelevant, highly dogmatic, obsessively entertaining, or too performative to give the audience a solid message” (1). Standard preaching education, he argues, can do better in terms of fostering the “*holistic-aesthetic ground of preaching*” (“why”) and the “*spiritual formation of the preacher*” (“who”) (5).

Yang proposes a holistic-aesthetic pedagogical paradigm that dethrones technical intellectual inquiry which can objectify texts. Instead, he lifts up the multidimensional, subjective experience of the living word of God in sermon preparation. His paradigm submerges preachers in “the *mysterium tremendum* of the word, so that they may truly *experience* what the living word says and how it feels” (10). Traditional approaches would have preachers go to the text and “poke around,” Yang suggests, while his makes space for the word of God to come to preachers in a way that addresses their humanity holistically and sensorially (10). Boldly, Yang compels homileticians to foster holistic-aesthetic encounters by postponing standard exegetical work for the first month of an introductory course, using that time to study biblical-theological aesthetics and teach students “creative, artistic, and performative hermeneutical approaches to the biblical text” (12). He urges homileticians to create space for students to participate in God’s *logos as well as* God’s ethos and pathos, thus cultivating the multidimensional spiritual formation of preachers who, with Isaiah, will cry out, “Here am I; send me!” (Isa. 6:8).

The proceeding chapters provide insight into the many forms this holistic-aesthetic pedagogical paradigm shift can take by putting homiletics in conversation with particular artistic disciplines. Chapter 2 proposes a “cubistic homiletic” in which texts are deconstructed and reconstructed in ways that encourage holistic multidimensionality. Cubist sermons do not require singular theses, introductions, conclusions, literary completeness, or a linear flow through time. They affirm open-endedness and use “indirect, invitational, and allusive” language with no attempt to control the listeners’ meaning-making (38).

Chapter 3 offers an “architectural-homiletical” approach specifically for preaching texts that either speak about literal architecture or use architecture in a metaphorical, imaginative manner (45). Yang reveals the power of architecture to communicate “the ultimate values of life” (47) and attributes “salvific power” (56) to architecture. He proposes that preachers organize their sermons according to a text’s spatial units, with the introduction and conclusion functioning as the front and back door.

Chapter 4 presents “fashionista preaching” to help texts “come alive in the fashion-saturated minds of the listeners today” (88). Yang invites preachers to view texts as fashion pieces and find meanings by discerning their colors, textures, and shapes. Sermons can use fashion illustratively (fashion illustrates meaning, e.g., being wrapped in a blanket illustrates comfort), integratively (interweave fashion metaphors with the message), and intradynamically (construct sermons as fine garments).

Chapter 5 contends that preachers preach to “film-saturated” congregations; therefore, preaching should learn from film. Yang recommends a “cinemate homiletic” that employs 1) a hermeneutical lens examining topics like gender, power, money, and violence, 2) a highly visual

and sensorial sermon structure, and 3) five “narrative codes” adopted from film to keep listeners engaged.

Chapter 6 recognizes that many in our pews experience their lives in an episodic, existential way. Yang argues that Paul Tillich’s existential theology resonates well with an episodic person’s identity. He adopts it as a theological grounding for preaching the existential gospel of Christ in an episodic manner and provides a “dramaturgical episodic” sermon form.

Chapter 7 is unique in that Yang does not offer any particular homiletic or form. Instead, he reports on currents in womanist homiletics and an appreciative description of the Beyoncé Mass that he attended. He encourages his readers to make a pilgrimage to the black church to hear black woman preachers and affirms that “*womanism is for all*” (163).

I was left wondering how teachable some of Yang’s more abstract concepts would be for many homileticians, in addition to the practicality of some of these complex approaches making their way into the average overworked preacher’s preparation. More examples for each approach would have been helpful. Occasionally, Yang also appears more focused on providing ways to keep the listeners’ attention through creative preaching than on fostering the “who” and “why,” as he describes in the beginning. Still, his creativity and openness to learning from artistic disciplines will undoubtedly inspire homileticians to lead their students toward a more holistic-aesthetic encounter, which was precisely his aim.

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Ross Halbach. *Bonhoeffer and the Racialized Church*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2020. 262 pages. \$44.99.

*Bonhoeffer and the Racialized Church* explores ecclesiological and racial intersections between Bonhoeffer, Willie Jennings, Kameron Carter, and Brian Bantum. The author's main concern is theological and guided by two central questions: "How does the triune God speak into and through a Christian church embedded within the language game of whiteness, and how does God do so without giving in to the devastating speech of whiteness?" (3). Ross Halbach is clear that he does not intend to offer a solution to these questions or the problem of the church's complicity in whiteness; instead, he invites the reader into ecclesial participation through Word and sacrament. Halbach urges readers to hold firm to the notion that God speaks and works through the Church, despite complicity in racism. While whiteness provides resistances to hearing God speaking, Halbach prioritizes theological fidelity and ecclesial participation as responses to whiteness.

The first chapter discusses whiteness through Bonhoeffer's terms of penultimate and ultimate in order to move from what the author sees as a problem/solution approach to theological debates on race to a discernment/surprise frame. The discernment/surprise frame looks for where Christ is already at work so that human participation in God's work is in response to God's work. An additional benefit, for Halbach, of the ultimate penultimate frame is avoiding the racializing of God and unduly elevating human racial identity. The second chapter names whiteness as a resistance to God's speaking and promises for Creation. It includes a historical narration of whiteness and a brief survey of whiteness studies. Chapter 3 turns to Bonhoeffer and Willie Jennings to discuss ways in which God addresses humanity amid a fallen world. Halbach places into dialogue Bonhoeffer's assertion that God speaks through the church amid sin and Jennings's focus on Western theology's legacy of whiteness.

Chapter 4 takes a Christological turn through the dialogue between Bonhoeffer's prioritization of Christological humiliation and Carter's emphasis on avoiding supersessionist theology. As in other places of the book, Halbach underscores some of the limitations of Bonhoeffer's theology, especially in this chapter with regards to supersessionism. Halbach's primary concern with the works of Jennings and Carter is their lack of attention to an ecclesiology that understands God to be speaking to and through the historical church. The final chapter is more comparative than dialogical and discusses Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology and Bantum's "mulattic hybridity" in relation to Christ and the church (187). Bantum sees God working disruptively with regard to race and the church; whereas Bonhoeffer presents an ecclesiology rooted in irruption. This leads Halbach to connect the concept of the mulatto church to Bonhoeffer's presentation of Word and sacrament as God's irruption leading to a responsive disruption.

*Bonhoeffer and the Racialized Church* has much to offer its readers. It carefully develops a dialogue between a prominent theologian of the past with contemporary theologians who write on race and racialization. Halbach offers important Christological warnings concerning theology and race which preachers should consider. He wants readers to remember that "Christ is not an idea but a living person that confronts and comforts God's people again and again, within the midst of fallen creation" (155). The strong emphasis on intersections between Christology, ecclesiology, and theology is something that homileticians might find helpful for teaching and forming a theology of preaching. While the book has its guiding questions about God speaking through the church steeped in whiteness, and a constructive argument does unfold, some of the

chapters remain isolated from one another. In other words, the chapters on Jennings, Carter, and Bantum can largely stand on their own. Thus the individual chapters are accessible to readers interested in a dialogue between Bonhoeffer and each individual theologian. Lutheran theology features prominently throughout the book, especially concerning race and Christology, but readers outside of the Lutheran tradition can still glean valuable insights.

I think the greatest limitation of the book is its restricted constructive response to whiteness. Halbach's priority seems to be theological, as he assures readers that a church steeped in whiteness can still be a place where God speaks. For Halbach, there is a sense in which Christians looking to respond to whiteness within the racialized Church should do so by trusting Christ's presence in Word and sacrament. While this is a helpful theological orientation, readers might be left looking for more regarding practices or living out a faith that intentionally seeks to dismantle whiteness. Halbach names that the book does not engage womanist scholars as an additional limitation. Despite these problems, *Bonhoeffer and the Racialized Church* invites readers to see whiteness and racialization as theological concerns while holding firm to God's work and presence through the church.

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Veronice Miles. *Embodied Hope: A Homiletical Theology Reflection*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2021. 268 pages. \$32.

Veronice Miles' *Embodied Hope: A Homiletical Theology Reflection* uses an interdisciplinary approach to address questions of how debilitating despair arises for Christians in spite of the gospel proclamation of hope and how the embodiment of hope can combat despair and engender transformation. For Miles, embodying hope includes adherence to theological principles of love and justice rooted in the *imago Dei* and God's desire for *shalom* as well as their connection to individual and communal praxis.

Miles opens with a reflection on the need she and other clergy felt in July 2016, after several traumatic events in the U.S., to speak to their congregations in ways that acknowledged the warranted grief and despair while encouraging hope and ongoing action for social justice. This book in essence sets forth Miles' guide to doing so in ways that are beneficial to scholars, clergy, and anyone interested in the theological connection of hope to Christian history and proclamation.

In chapter 1, "Toward an Embodied Theology of Hope," Miles defines embodied hope as a "conceptual metaphor for Hope's presence in our lives" and "a language for describing *that which creates in each human being yearning for wholeness and well-being, the always-speaking voice of God's Spirit assuring us of God's presence, power, and fidelity and calling us toward loving, just, and restorative action.*" (19; emphasis and capitalization in original). She asserts that while humans have the capacity to act as partners with God in working toward God's *shalom*, we often do not believe we can influence the world around us or, due to deceptive messaging, fail to acknowledge the need for transformation. According to Miles, lack of imagination and individual and communal despair can limit our ability to practice an embodied theology of hope.

In the next two chapters, Miles sets forth nine channels through which society induces despair and disperses deceptive and debilitating messages. Miles begins in chapter 2, "Culturally Induced Despair Revealed," with four of the channels: colloquial expressions, idioms of exasperation, cultural assumptions or social conventions, and constituent elements of our known world. Each channel is addressed after an overview of how culture is being defined and used in the book.

In chapter 3, "Disclosing the Dangers of Culturally Induced Despair," Miles meticulously examines the ways in which imaginative capacity and engagement can be limited by five channels: negating and dehumanizing images, myths, ideologies, theologies, and ecclesial commitments. She begins by exploring the positive and negative roles played by human imagination. Looking at the works of Paul Ricoeur, Maxine Green, Paulo Freire, bell hooks, and other theologians and philosophers, Miles concludes that "imaginative dearth fueled by the deceptive language of despair [is] the primary threat to our ability to live with Hope and imagine our world anew" (63). Miles then explains the ways negating and dehumanizing images, myths, and ideologies can lead to imaginative dearth. She also avers that "[r]esisting imaginative dearth...requires us to maintain a necessary tension between critical thought and imaginative abundance by permitting critical thought to inform imaginative abundance and vice versa" (70). Miles asserts that "[w]hen critical thought, imaginative abundance, and concrete action coalesce in service to God's *shalom*, we can indeed resist imaginative dearth" (71).

In addressing theologies and ecclesial commitments that lead to the promulgation of deceptive language and the acceptance of social injustices, Miles reminds Christians of the teachings of the canonized scriptures with regard to love of God and love of neighbor. She

observes that "not unlike our predecessors, we live within the tension of our desire to live and proclaim the gospel and competing interests that call into question the gospel's efficacy for our ability to survive and thrive in our world today" (87).

Miles then gives a poignant summary of Christian history from the early church through the Crusades. This summary includes an examination of the impact on Jesus' followers of the delay of the Parousia, the persecution of Christians by Nero, and the founding of the Muslim faith and Muslim territorial expansion. She also notes the institutional church's increasing alignment with the rulers of empire, material wealth, and military power. According to Miles, this alignment perpetuates the tension for believers and the related "theological and ecclesial distortion co-opts our imaginative potential, preventing us from imagining and actualizing new possibilities for our lives together" (109).

In chapter 4, "The Anticipatory Language of Hope," Miles turns to the ways in which messages of despair may be countered and life-enriching imagination increased. She explores specific gospel passages demonstrating why Jesus' gospel proclamation is "the archetypal reservoir from which Hope's anticipatory language flows" (132).

Miles speaks most directly to the task of preaching in chapter 5, "The Disruptive and Energizing Power of Proclamation." She examines the ways in which the message of the gospel and its messengers can disrupt deceptive cultural messaging and energize forces for justice. To assist preachers in these endeavors, Miles concludes the chapter with a description of "four homiletical values and practices [including] embracing empathy proofed by compassion, eliminating distortion, amplifying Hope's assurance and call, and cultivating imaginative abundance and purposeful, Hope-filled action" (151).

In chapter 6, "The Courageously Audacious Practice of Hope," Miles discusses ways preaching impacts the development of imagination and courage. She does so through an examination of the work of preachers and other leaders in movements for social justice and civil rights in the U.S.

In an appendix, Miles includes a three-page critical analysis of preaching for use during sermon preparation. The analysis consists of questions for reflection on potential distortions that impede the congregation's ability to fully embody a hope-filled homiletic, on the perceived positive and negative ways in which those distortions impact members of the congregation, and on ways to invoke a faithful response from the congregation.

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Sarah Travis. *Unspeakable: Preaching and Trauma-Informed Theology*. Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2021. 126 pages. \$ 19.

Everyone has scars, though not all scars are visible. Some wounds run so deep that they cannot be easily perceived or healed. Traumatic experiences leave indelible scars on our body and soul. Preaching seeks to heal wounds by proclaiming the good news. However, the ongoing effects of trauma completely alter trauma survivors' ways of feeling, knowing, and perceiving reality so beautiful words from the pulpit often fail to reach them. In her homiletical theological response to trauma, Sarah Travis, who teaches preaching at Knox College, University of Toronto, proposes trauma-informed preaching by reexamining theological commonplaces and the practice of preaching through the lens of trauma.

Chapter 1 offers a sweeping review of trauma theory, a broad definition of trauma, and its effects in relation to the central elements for the practice of preaching. Travis describes traumatic experiences as "a kind of encounter with death" (16). These radical events shatter the world trauma victims know and reorganize the perception of the mind and their ways of engaging with self, others, and the world. Trauma survivors often experience the fragmentation of memory and have trouble with processing language and narrative. Due to intrusive memories of traumatic events, the past does not stay in the past but continues to intrude into the present and thus, they are unable to imagine the future. Trauma shatters their relationships with others as well as themselves, while traumatic experiences can also be opportunities for growth.

Chapter 2 uses trauma as a lens for critiquing and reexamining existing theological frameworks, including a theology of the gospel, in order to help preachers to adequately address trauma and hope for trauma survivors in preaching. Due to "the ongoingness of traumatic wounding," (39) trauma survivors often feel that they live in-between life and death. Life and death or grace and trouble intermingle in the experience of the in-betweenness of trauma (49). In the face of trauma, both death and resurrection are considered essential parts of gospel. It is necessary for preachers to remain in this in-between space and tell two stories simultaneously: "one of a resurrection that has overcome death, and one that testifies to the ongoingness of death even in the face of the resurrection" (54).

Chapter 3 considers the meaning and role of "witness" for trauma-informed preaching. A witness is the one who observes a particular event and is called upon to bear witness to what one has seen and heard on behalf of someone (57). Preachers are witnesses to stories of trauma and those of the resurrection at the same time. The good news emerges from this middle space between life and death, where the strict binaries of life and death become blurred, and multiple stories and perspectives are held together simultaneously (67). Only when preachers can hold both narratives of trauma and grace together in witnessing the reality of traumatic wounding's, then words from the pulpit may bring healing to those who are traumatized.

Chapter 4 examines the role of imagination in trauma-informed preaching. For recovery from trauma, the capacity to imagine new life is essential, while traumatic events debilitate trauma survivors' capacity for imagination and agency. The preacher as a midwife of the imagination helps the traumatized find a space in which they can imagine a new future even in the midst of trauma (80). The task of the preacher is to help people imagine a future and reestablish a directionality that moves toward hope, resilience, and recovery without denying the reality of the traumatic wounding. Preaching as healing discourse helps traumatized people integrate their fragmented memory of trauma into the larger story to create a sense of wholeness

and make meaning of their lives. The church can provide a safe environment for the traumatized person and narrative frameworks to reconnect fragments to make a meaningful whole.

Chapter 5 explores the roles of language and offers trauma-sensitive hermeneutics. By using trauma as a hermeneutical lens, Travis attends to traumatic realities such as violence and exile in sacred texts, how these traumatic events affect individuals and communities, and how the traumatized find their way to survival and resiliency (102). Travis proposes Bibliodrama and lament as useful hermeneutical methods. Bibliodrama, a form of role-playing, can be a communal practice to explore the unspoken reality of trauma in the lives of the biblical characters and uncover their feelings, emotions, or bodily senses. This bodily engagement with texts is an interpretive method for trauma survivors and can expand preachers' understanding of the text (105). Lament is a theological language that affirms God and the reality of human suffering simultaneously. Lament provides a space to remember and honor the pain and suffering of trauma survivors without ending in the abyss of despair because lament is also a language of faith.

We live in an age of trauma. We witness numerous traumatic events directly or indirectly. Trauma has been an important contextual and pastoral element for preaching. Travis invites preachers to remain and struggle in-between the space between life and death to proclaim the gospel for trauma survivors and all people of God. What I would like to know more about is how different types of trauma such as cultural trauma can be dealt and healed in preaching. For instance, the process of cultural trauma is different from that of individual trauma. While Travis acknowledges the different kinds of trauma, her homiletical proposal is a response primarily to individual trauma. This book offers timely and valuable insights for preachers who take the reality of trauma seriously but still believe that "there is a balm in Gilead" for the traumatized. Indeed, there is a balm for trauma survivors but it can be found only in the space between life and death. Travis provides an excellent map of this difficult and uncharted terrain of trauma for preachers and homileticians.

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Lisa Allen. *A Womanist Theology of Worship: Liturgy, Justice, and Communal Righteousness*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2021. 231 pages. \$19.59.

Lisa Allen's *A Womanist Theology of Worship* challenges Black churches in America to reclaim justice-making as central to their liturgical practice. With a detailed historical narration of Black worship, Allen carefully discloses how liberation and justice lie at the heart of a Black Christian faith. Allen writes to address a lack of justice-making in many contemporary Black churches. She argues for and provides a paradigm that "seeks to dismantle problematic liturgies based in white supremacist theologies that have permeated Black worship in America from its inception through the twenty-first century" (xii).

The first eight chapters model a womanist hermeneutic for liturgical historical analysis. In chapter 1, Allen identifies three vital aspects of a Black liturgical imagination: a personal view of God, a communal call of justice, and a communal identity (8). In the second and third chapters, she shows how African cosmologies and white supremacy, explicit in slavery, shape the liturgical needs and expressions of "*Africans in America*" (22). While African cosmology provided a framework to understand God(s) as both immanent and transcendent, the inhumanity of slavery challenged Africans to hold their relational and communal needs as means of survival and care. While liturgical elements such as prayer, preaching, and singing were the same as whites, the impetus behind Black worship and its aesthetic particulars affirmed justice for and liberation of Black people as essential.

In section 2, covering chapters 4 through 8, Allen examines contemporary Black liturgical theology, identifies problematic divergences, and shows how those divergences undermine the sustainability of the Black church and, subsequently, Black communities writ large. Here, Allen's womanist hermeneutic of suspicion is in full tilt. Her well-researched analysis engages a wide range of scholars across the humanities and social sciences. In chapter 4, Allen codifies various African retentions and new-world developments in Black worship to identify the foundations of a black liturgical theology. At the heart of her analysis is an embrace of four convictions guiding Black worship: survival, resistance, deliverance and liberation, and affirmation and joy. These convictions inform a Black performative aesthetic that affirms the unrestricted use of the Black body. In chapters 5 and 6, Allen shows how the development of organized Black churches and denominations elaborated aspects of historical Black worship while also succumbing to anti-black Eurocentric theologies and liturgies. Here, Allen elucidates anti-black elements of theological anthropology. Among her observations is the double self-negation that affirms black color as dark and sinful and Black bodies as purposed for slavery or more consistently less than whites. Even as Blacks and whites worshiped together in both Great Awakenings, asymmetries of power between Black and white worshipers grew as white supremacy, and anti-blackness persisted. The evangelical and Pentecostal movements of the early and mid-20th solidified asymmetries as white evangelicals asserted their political agenda and Pentecostals disengaged from worldly pursuits and concerns. Even as Black performative aesthetics grew on radio and television during this period, they did little to further justice and liberation for Black people. In chapter 7, Allen shows how Black churches maintained a connection to the concerns of Black people, which culminated in the civil rights movement. In chapter 8, she considers the biblical mandate for justice as a foundational through-line for liturgy and justice in the Black church. Her turn to the bible foregrounds a pivot to womanism as a praxis of justice-making.

In section 3, chapters nine and ten, Allen offers a womanist instructive intervention calling for Black churches to reclaim interest in and concern for justice that embraces the diversity within black communities and takes the ongoing threat of anti-blackness seriously. Her guiding womanist ethic requires a “centering of African and African-descended cosmological and theological worldviews and spirituality, an affirmation of embodiment in worship without qualification, employing womanist hermeneutics in all worship elements, as well as a womanist hermeneutic/spirituality of communal empowerment and agency” (175). The task of the Black church is to work, the very meaning of the word liturgy, on behalf of the welfare and well-being of all Black people readily denied justice in an anti-black world. In conclusion, *A Womanist Theology of Worship* provides a most comprehensive narration of justice as the Black church’s liturgical guidepost. This text is appropriate for any class focusing on Black worship, the Black church, Black preaching, and contemporary issues in theological anthropology.

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Claudio Carvalhaes. *Ritual at World's End. Essays on Eco-Liturgical Liberation Theology*. Pennsylvania: Barber's Sons Press, 2021. 401 pages. \$59.99.

The latest book by the renowned Brazilian theologian and liturgist Claudio Carvalhaes represents a work that synthesizes, grounds, and in turn further expands his theological scaffolding from several of his works and publications in recent years. In *Ritual at World's End* he offers two important approaches. He offers, on the one hand, the systematization of an elaborate eco-liturgical theology from the perspective of liberation theologies, and on the other, an exhaustive application of this framework from diverse fields of knowledge, problematics, and epistemologies that account for the contemporary challenges of theology, politics, ecology, and the religious, making the liturgical a field of epistemic revision.

As Carvalhaes himself mentions in the introduction of the book, the first two chapters are the most important since in them he develops this very uncommon intersection between liberation theologies, eco-theology, and liturgy. The singularity of this proposal is the epistemological expansion—both of the liturgical as a theme and of the theological task in a liberating key—from decolonial approaches, the matter of corporality, the queer approach, the environmental problematics, and the global economic critique, among other elements, which fulfill the double function of, on the one hand, re-signifying the epistemic/methodological proposal of liberation theology, and on the other, making liturgy a *locus theologicus* that serves to account for these elements. It is worth mentioning that the element of colonial critique is one of the most prominent in this work, again as a way of identifying the colonial legacies of liturgical practice, of its space/temporality frontiers (and restrictions), its naturalized borders of exclusion/inclusion, and its political performance.

The second chapter proposes to expand the well-known Christian *leges/lex* on the basis of a *lex naturae*, which acts not only as a field of reception but also as a decolonial device that deconstructs and questions the colonial-modern dimension that runs through both Christian theology and liturgy in its Western and modern version. In this way, the *lex naturae* is instituted as an axis of liberating and decolonial critique, especially in front of the hegemonized notions of subject, time, space, identity, and the inherited modern dichotomies between the sacred and the profane, the individual and the collective, and the religious and the political, among others.

From this theological frame, Carvalhaes inquires into an application of his proposal in the most varied themes, conjunctures and fields: the question of rituality and technology in the particular challenges of the Anthropocene and the post-COVID-19 global context (chaps. 3 and 6); a critical reading of public theology from an understanding of the liturgical as a public locus that radicalizes the commitment to socio-cultural, economic and political injustices (chap. 4); a critical understanding of the sense of multiculturalism from the concept of multinaturalism in its liturgical dimension (chap. 5); the intersectionality between inter-religious, socio-economic dynamics and political conflicts (chaps. 7 and 8); the liturgical as an instance of visibility and at the same time questioning of the processes of racialization and discrimination (chaps. 9 and 14); the challenge of queering our Christian practices (chap. 10); and the liturgy as an instance of socio-economic critique, particularly in its contemporary capitalist, neoliberal, and global logics (chaps. 11, 12 and 13).

All of Carvalhaes' works are characterized by maintaining a special balance between the theoretical-academic approach, the articulation of pastoral and political experiences, and the provision of liturgical resources for individuals and communities. *Ritual at World's End* continues with this same dynamic, offering ritual tools, narratives, and other liturgical

suggestions, which will serve to put into practice what has been elaborated in the different chapters in ecclesial, political, and civil society communitarian spaces, among others.

We can identify two major contributions of Carvalhaes work. First, the outline into a field that is still pending in the theological world (especially in Latin America), such as the revision of the liturgy from the liberation theologies perspectives. The particular approach offered by Carvalhaes allows, at the same time, to highlight the central contribution that liberation theology still has, as well as to give an account of how liturgy is a field that allows an epistemic “re-actualization” of these theologies within the framework of the contemporary dynamics of the religious and political world.

In this last sense, the second great contribution of the book is to make the distinctive elements of liturgy a field of critical review of the epistemic processes that cross the theological endeavor. Thus, the decolonial dimension, political critique, inclusive and queer practices, commitment to the environment, the impact of mobilization and activism, among other elements already highlighted, do not represent areas “attached” to the liturgical as a particular field, but constitutive elements of it, and from there to theology as an exercise. In other words, the inherent relationship of the liturgical with the ritual as community construction, with the earth as locus, and with social dynamics and complexities, are constituted as instances of theological-political revision at all levels.

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Swee Hong Lim and Lester Ruth. *A History of Contemporary Praise and Worship: Understanding the Ideas that Reshaped the Protestant Church*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021. 368 pages. \$44.99.

Publications like *Christianity Today* have declared the “Worship Wars” over. In 1999, Praise and Worship was declared the winner,<sup>51</sup> and in 2011, it was suggested that at the very least a truce had been called.<sup>52</sup> However, for denominations such as my own (Mennonite Church Canada), conversations around *traditional* compared to *contemporary* ways of worshipping are ongoing. As I have engaged doubtful practitioners on the gifts of contemporary praise and worship, I have observed that a lack of understanding of the theology and history of praise and worship music is one of the most significant drivers of their skepticism. Misunderstanding of the origins, scriptural basis, and practical goals of the movement have left “traditional” worship leaders with unanswered questions and doubts that turn quickly to fears. And, until recently, there were few resources available to remedy this gap.

Lester Ruth and Lim Swee Hong’s newest volume, *A History of Contemporary Praise and Worship: Understanding the Ideas that Reshaped the Protestant Church* offers scholars and practitioners alike a much-needed history of both contemporary worship and praise and worship music, parallel movements that redefined how communities worshiped throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Building upon the strong foundation laid out in their first volume, *Lovin On Jesus: A Concise History of Contemporary Worship*, Ruth and Lim present the ideas in this book as two distinct yet related rivers: the river of praise and worship and the river of contemporary worship. For many, these two histories have been previously understood as one, erasing the unique intent of each movement.<sup>53</sup>

The river of Praise and Worship is traced back to 1946, when Canadian Pentecostal leader Reg Layzell received the conviction that praise is the biblical way to experience the presence of God, based on Psalm 22:3: “Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.” This belief shaped the development of praise and worship as it became more liturgically and theologically defined, welcoming new musical expressions while holding to an emphasis on God as enthroned by the praise of the people. As it progressed, the movement brought with it a resurgence of resources to train musicians in the style of praise and worship, which was characterized by a lengthy period of worship that required specialized leadership. A by-product of this increasingly popular liturgical style, however, has been that as it was transmitted, the core theological conviction became blurred. Worshipers have become distanced from the original position that “God inhabits of the praises of his people. This way of worship is a gift from God to

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<sup>51</sup> Michael Hamilton, “The Triumph of the Praise Songs: How Guitars Beat out the Organ in the Worship Wars,” *Christianity Today*, July 12, 1999, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1999/july12/9t8028.html> (accessed May 2, 2022).

<sup>52</sup> Mark Galli, “The End of Worship Wars,” *Christianity Today*, March 11, 2011, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2011/march/endworshipwars.html> (accessed May 2, 2022).

<sup>53</sup> See pages 311–313 for a brief overview of these two distinct yet parallel movements. Some readers may find it helpful to read this summary before beginning the book.

renew the church” (311). Indeed, the widespread adoption of this way of worshipping has, in some cases, overshadowed the original theological intent.

The second river examined is that of Contemporary Worship, which is defined by the core theological conviction that a gap exists between worship and the contemporary church, and that it is the job of Christian leaders to find ways to bridge this gap. The text of 1 Corinthians 9:22 provided a biblical foundation for outreach through worship: “I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some.” Worship leaders and visionaries within this movement sought to be highly relevant and accessible, using relatable language, informal dress, and popular musical influences to close the distance between the church and an increasingly disengaged society. These practices garnered avid support from the Church Growth movement, as modeled by several large and influential congregations which avidly promoted contemporary worship.

Held together, Ruth and Lim suggest that the ideas of Contemporary Praise and Worship can be summarized as “presence and purpose” (xiii). Praise and worship has prioritized praise as a mechanism through which to invoke God’s *presence* in worship. Contemporary worship emphasizes using relevant and accessible ways of worshipping for the *purpose* of drawing people to church. Together, these movements have revitalized not only mainline North American worship, but also Christian congregational music around the world. Far beyond their early influence in Pentecostal, Charismatic, and Evangelical communities, they have blossomed into liturgical practices that influence nearly every Christian denomination.

Overall, this book serves as a robust liturgical history for worship planners, engaged congregants, scholars, and so many more. It helps to make known key figures who had largely been forgotten and explains theologies of worship that remain a mystery to many. Now, when confronted with questions on the heavy emphasis on praise in early contemporary worship or the decision to use popular music in worship to engage youth culture, I am grateful for a resource that explains with diligence and respect the nuances of this movement. This book is sure to give all who read it a deep appreciation for the Spirit led, scripturally based, and musically rich history of contemporary praise and worship.

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