

1-1-2018

A Study in Worship: Blending the African American Style of Preaching with Epic Preaching

Jamale D. Kempt
jkempt15@georgefox.edu

This research is a product of the Doctor of Ministry (DMin) program at George Fox University. [Find out more](#) about the program.

Recommended Citation

Kempt, Jamale D., "A Study in Worship: Blending the African American Style of Preaching with Epic Preaching" (2018). *Doctor of Ministry*. 266.
<http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/266>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Doctor of Ministry by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact arolfe@georgefox.edu.

GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

A STUDY IN WORSHIP:
BLENDING THE AFRICAN AMERICAN STYLE OF PREACHING
WITH EPIC PREACHING

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF PORTLAND SEMINARY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

JAMALE D. KEMPT

PORTLAND, OREGON

FEBRUARY 2018

Portland Seminary
George Fox University
Portland, Oregon

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

DMin Dissertation

This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

Jamale Kempt

has been approved by
the Dissertation Committee on February 19, 2018
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Preaching as Story.

Dissertation Committee:

Primary Advisor: Dottie Escobedo-Frank, DMin

Secondary Advisor: Kurtley Knight, DMin

Lead Mentor: Leonard I. Sweet, PhD

DEDICATION

To my extended family who cheered me on, encouraged me, and prayed for me while I was writing. To my ancestors, a great cloud of witnesses: Nathan Davis Sr., Odessa Horton Davis, James Matthews Sr., Sam Kempt and Vivian Kempt, Ella Sayles and Odessa Sayles.

Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we will call on the name of the Lord our God.

—Psalm 20:7

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: STORYTELLING FROM SHORE TO SHORE	1
Problem Statement	1
Significance of the Study	1
Introduction	1
The History of the Art of Storytelling.....	2
Storytelling for Connecting.....	9
Storytelling for Coping	10
Storytelling for Conspiring	12
Why We Love Stories	13
CHAPTER 2: JOURNEY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN PREACHING	18
The Negro Preacher.....	24
Songs in Preaching.....	29
CHAPTER 3: THEOLOGICAL WORSHIP IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN PULPIT	36
The Traditional Sermon of Europeans	37
The African American Sermon	39
Engaging the Congregation with Song	46
Engaging the Congregation with Scripture	50
The Call and Response.....	52
The Whoop.....	53
CHAPTER 4: THE IDEA OF IMAGE IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN CHURCH....	55
The History of Images.....	55
Modern Day Images.....	61
The Absence of Image in the African American Church.....	64
The African American Spiritual Art Work	66
Efforts in Bringing Images Back.....	69
CHAPTER 5: THE ART OF AFRICAN AMERICAN PREACHING	72
The Art of Black Preaching.....	72
Gleaning from Preachers from Afar.....	93
CHAPTER 6: THE NEW EPIC: A LOOK AT A NEW PARADIGM FOR PREACHING	94
.....	94
Semiotic Preaching.....	95
Narraphor.....	99

Metaphor.....	102
EPIC Preaching.....	104
Participatory	106
Image Rich.....	107
Connective.....	108
CHAPTER 7: THE NEW EPIC – A BLENDING OF THE TWO PARADIAGMS.....	112
Randomness	112
The Books of the Cohort.....	114
Sound Track	115
EPIC Preaching as Developed by Dr. Len Sweet	117
Experiential.....	118
Participatory	119
Image Rich.....	121
Connective.....	122
CHAPTER 8: THE WRAP UP.....	125
Impact on the Calvary Christian Church Congregation.....	125
Reflections of EPIC Sermons by Calvary Christian Church Members	132
Why This Is Important	141
Personal Reflection	143
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	144

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank the following for the support in completing this dissertation. Dr. Dottie Escobedo-Frank, who has moved from advisor to friend. Your caring words, expertise, and prayers kept me on the path to completion, and for that I am grateful.

To my second reader, Dr. Kurtley Knight, I thank you for your diligence in technique and professionalism which brought about a product of which I am proud.

To Trenton Covington, who called me and asked if I applied; and encouraged me to complete the application for the doctoral program. Your pleasant demeanor and kind words were a breath of fresh air and will never be forgotten.

To Dr. Loren Kern and Clifford Berger your administration leading a distance learning program are to be replicated all over the world. The consistency in your work brought about a thoroughness that yielded a product that is to be commended. To Heather Rainey thank you for your professionalism and quick responses which allowed me not to fall behind.

To Dr. David McDonald, your creativity and openness to the preachers of the gospel in every tribe are priceless. Thank you for the opportunity to have a collection of sermons, sermon vignettes on video, and The Story Lectionary as a precursor to this dissertation and thank you for your team who worked tirelessly to produce the entries in the Lectionary.

To Dr. Leonard Sweet, thank you for welcoming me into your home, welcoming me to your table, your heart, your knowledge, and understanding of the Scriptures. Your sharing forever changes me and my table as well.

To my cohort, thank you all for being who you are. Let us continue to *preach the story*, reaching all who will join us at the table inspiring all to love “*Not other... but One Another*”.

To Portland Seminary at George Fox University thank you for being an outstanding program for the training of ministers of the gospel through a local and distance learning program.

To my pastor, Dr. Marcus D. Cosby, senior pastor of the Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church, thank you for shepherding my family and me, for praying for me, and mentoring me and finally for writing a great letter of recommendation.

To my former seminary professor Dr. Chuck Pitts, Houston Graduate School of Theology, thank you also for writing a letter of recommendation.

To Calvary Christian Church, thank you for your prayers. As your pastor, I am grateful for your spiritual growth and you all allowing me to share my understanding of the Scriptures with you each week. May your love for God, your understanding, and application of the Word continue to grow, and we will continue to meet “at the table.”

To my mother, Thelma D. Matthews, my siblings (the J's), my nieces, and nephews thank you for encouraging me to finish once you heard I was beginning this quest. Your prayers, jokes, laughter, tears, and understanding of times when I had to miss out on family celebrations will not be forgotten. You all have known me all my life and most of yours, and I am proud to be a member of this singing, praying, and laughing family!

To my daughter, Elaena, thank you for showing me how to work through all the obstacles one may face, as you led by example completing your master's degree at

Sacred Heart University through their distance learning program while I worked toward this degree. Your Dad, Nanny, Tche, and I were proud family members in the stands cheering as you received your diploma. I have no doubt you will complete your next level of learning.

Finally, to my husband, William. Thank you for your unwavering support in this effort and the hundreds of others I have accomplished as you have chosen to walk beside me through it all. Thank you for praying for me. Thank you for your technical writing expertise. Thank you for loving me and making me laugh on a consistent basis.

NOW UNTO HIM WHO IS ABLE TO KEEP ME FROM FALLING AND PRESENT ME FAULTLESS BEFORE MY GOD, THANK YOU! LORD JESUS.

ABSTRACT

The stories in Scripture are rich in meaning, mood and mystery with messages often concealed from those who would just glide over them with a glancing eye. The art of preaching exhibited in the African American pulpit is complete with theology, struggle, issues, passion, and excitement. This style of sermon presentation is uniquely tied to the many cultures of the West African diaspora into the Americas. This unique style was used in the storytelling of the ancestors and through the struggles of the African in America evolving into the art of black preaching. The purpose of this dissertation is to look at the craft of African American Preaching and pair it with the EPIC preaching model of Dr. Len Sweet.

Chapter One begins with the rich history of the African the voyage on the “*middle passage*,” and the stories told from the shores of West Africa to the shores of North America. Chapter Two provides history into the evolution of African American preaching and the emphasis on story. Chapter Three centers on the building of worship in the African American Church. Chapter Four gives the history of Image in the African American pulpit and where Image is found today. Chapter Five focuses on the components black preaching and how preachers have used the elements of EPIC worship in sermonic presentations and this student’s reflections of the preaching styles of contemporary scholars who are master preachers in the art of African American preaching. Chapter Six includes an overview of the new EPIC preaching model as presented by Dr. Len Sweet. Chapter Seven focuses on the idea of combining the elements of the new EPIC worship style of preaching with the traditions of the African American style of worship further discovering the implication that the two styles may

have on modern congregants. Concluding, the idea of blending the two worship styles, Chapter 8 includes expression of this student and members of Calvary Christian Church as we reflect on the EPIC worship Services attended during this dissertation program.

CHAPTER 1: STORYTELLING FROM SHORE TO SHORE

Problem Statement

The general problem is that the church does not speak the native tongue of the culture and preachers have lost the mother tongue of preaching, storytelling. The specific problem is that there has not been enough study to provide African American preachers with the tools needed to present sermons in alternative ways, such as an EPIC preaching model.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in scope of the question of whether EPIC preaching through its elements of story, image and connectivity blended with the elements of call and response of the African American style of preaching can enhance the experience of worshipers, thus providing all preachers with viable alternatives for sermon presentation creating EPIC worship.

Introduction

“May God move so that griots never perish in war, on the battle field, but every battle field needs a griot, for without his presence the history of what happened would be forever lost.”¹

—Mandingue Proverb

Here they come! It is late afternoon; service has begun. They arrive with fros, tight fades, weaves and fat braids, jeans and tight skirts, with arms and chest littered with

¹ “Oral Literature & Storytelling,” *Goethe-Institut*, accessed July 19, 2017, <http://www.goethe.de/ins/za/prj/wom/osm/en9606618.htm>.

tattoos; Bibles in hand. They can't wait for the choir to finish jamming the latest worship... song and then hear the preached word of God.

Preaching begins. An exceptional introduction gets their attention and then the points begin. Immediately they take out their phones and read text messages. They whisper to each other for a moment periodically tuning back in. Point number two is given, and then right before delivering the third point the preacher says:

“There's a story about a young man who....” They stop texting. They are all in. Perched on the edge of the pew, leaning in they put the phones down craving to hear the story; longing to meet the characters, anticipating the setting and mood. They long to feel a part of the scenario; needing to see how the story connects to their lives. This is the time they tune in without distractions.

The stories of Scripture are rich in meaning, mood and mystery with messages woven deeply inside and hidden from those who would just glide over them with a glancing eye. I submit that if the story is preached those who hear will become “storytellers.”. And ultimately do the work of the ministry and tell the story they heard to someone else, thus making disciples.

The History of the Art of Storytelling

The telling of stories is as old as the beginning of time. Each of us is a storyteller from the moment we are born and cry out our first sounds: “Here I am! Where am I?”. It is part of the legacy of being human.² No one culture has domination over the art of storytelling. Since there have been humans on the earth, stories have been told to each

² Amy E. Spaulding, *The Art of Storytelling: Telling Truths Through Telling Stories* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2011).

generation. The ancient Greeks told stories of great heroism and defeat. Stories were told to individuals and multitudes with great dramatics and details that rendered a reaction of fear or devotion. The great leaders of the past in politics and religion told stories that would garner obedience without hesitation that would sometimes lead to the galvanizing the masses or the destruction of lives.

Walter C. Wright helps us understand the power of “storytelling”, recording that teaching values or inspiring values in others can be achieved by the storytelling. We can demonstrate what is important and teach what is important through the power of storytelling. Stories capture the imagination of people, reveal values at work and create a context in which people can picture themselves. Stories are not just stories. They are narratives that make sense of listeners lives as they perceive them; narratives weaving together the listeners experiences and the new story envisioned by the leader.³

The gift of telling stories is innate for many people in all cultures. The storyteller tells what has happened, what they have seen or heard. This can be achieved through a dramatic presentation, humor, or a stoic demeanor. The storyteller just tells the story. The audience is responsible for what they make of it.⁴ Understanding the art of storytelling and the power of narratives and applying that understanding to the presentation of proclamation will continuously enhance the efforts of those who desire to share the message of hope through the stories of Scripture. Echoing the thought of author Amy

³ Walter C. Wright, *Relational Leadership: A Biblical Model for Leadership Service* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster, 2000).

⁴ Spaulding.

Spaulding, we have only been reading for a few centuries, but we have talking and telling stories for a millennium. This experience motivates one to be a teller of stories.⁵

Edward Kolter argues that since ancient times, stories have been a source of fascination to countless numbers of people. Stories can conjure up mysterious and exciting worlds. Reading or listening to a story brings pleasure and helps us forget the daily grind for a while. Stories can also work a kind of magic: they can transport us to other places, influence our thoughts, shape our behavior, and even cause us to lose touch with reality.⁶

Kolter writes that stories are not passive copies of reality but are the results of the creative imagination of the author. Authors construct a world by applying narrative skills such as playing with time and space in representing the events and circumstances, creating specific character traits, introducing several perspectives of which the point of view of the narrator is the most common one, the operation of constructing the plot as synthesis of all these different ingredients and creating special atmosphere that most typically felt in watching a movie (as a kind of narrative).⁷

The narrative or story has always been a topic in religion, if only because of the narrative material involved in biblical studies. The narrative turn in the study of religion reflects an important observation: human beings tell (indeed) live stories that invite and serve them to see the world in a certain way and act accordingly. And they do so in close

⁵ Ibid., 26.

⁶ R. Ruud Ganzevoort, Maaïke De Haardt, and Michael Scherer-Rath, *Religious Stories We Live By: Narrative Approaches in Theology and Religious Studies* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2014), 19, accessed December 2, 2017, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁷ Ibid., 23.

interaction with the stories of a religious tradition which offers moral guidelines for the world. In one way or another, the human story relates to stories of and about a God or gods.⁸

In the last three to four decades narrative has become a central theme in all fields within theology and religious studies. Many pastoral theologians have contributed to the awareness that narrative must be a central concept if one wants to understand human existence and religious traditions.⁹

Biblical narratives can move the mind. They can refigure the world in which we live. By imagining a world in which a story in the Old Testament or one of the Gospels describes a possible state of affairs, readers fashion the world and may receive a new understanding of themselves. The effect bible stories can have on readers is strengthened by the specific religious characters of these stories and by the context in which they are read.¹⁰ James M. Day communicates that the study of narrative, and related advocacy of methods according importance of the place, function, and significance of storytelling in human behavior, increasingly shapes our understanding of human behavior.¹¹

In all that has been researched, studied and revealed about the topic of storytelling, this research student finds that the uniqueness of the African American

⁸ Ibid., 24.

⁹ Ibid., Philosophers like Paul Ricoouer (1995) and Richard Kearny (2001), biblical scholars like Hans Frei (1974) and Walter Bruggerman (1997), literary theorist like Mieke Bal (1985), systematic theologians Edward Schillebeeckx, David Tracy (1981)and Sallie McFague (1982) ethicists like Stanley Hauerwas (1983), and Alasdair McIntyer, (1981), cognitive scientists like George Lakecoff and Mark Johnson (1980) and Jerome Bruner (1986), psychologists like Theodore Sarbin, (1986) and Kenneth Gergen (1994), pastoral theologians like Charles Gerkin (1984) and many others have contributed to the awareness that narrative may in fact be a central concept if we want to understand human existence and religious traditions.

¹⁰ Ibid., 27.

¹¹ Ibid., 33.

experience has developed and thrived from its long history of the concept of storytelling. It is through this art form of communication that hundreds of people have struggled, survived, thrived and some have died to bring their story to this country through the painful task set before them. Amazingly, the will of these people and their ancestors has lived on through the stories of their ancestors.

In researching the art of storytelling, especially as it relates to the African American pulpit, I look to those who have studied the stories of the African Diaspora. The telling of stories is a rich component in the history of the African American culture and is a credible method of passing down ideologies and faith. For centuries, people of African descent have mastered and used this art to share thoughts and dreams, outline a context to explore history, and impart knowledge to the listener. The art of storytelling is described as the hunger we all have to be a part of the story. A noted theologian writes that the search of our age is a habitable text, therefore we should look into the impact that storytelling has on the lives of those who hear the stories. It is clear that people in our society are in pursuit of a story capacious enough to sponsor a meaningful life.¹²

The art or method of storytelling is not unique to the culture of African Americans, but it is relatively more recent to its culture due to the ending of slavery being a recent phenomenon in the states of America. The black people of Africa were captured and shipped in disgusting, subhuman conditions and sold as property to work the land owned by white slave owners. In an effort to communicate, after their own tribal languages were distinguished, the blacks of Africa began to tell the stories of their home land to each other in order to continue some semblance of memories of the land from

¹² Spaulding.

which they were snatched. To console each other the African slaves resorted to communication of elemental levels to mankind: dancing and singing and speaking.¹³

The stories that were passed down and translated were similar to the stories the Hebrews told their children about the Exodus. The revelation of God in the history of the black community was akin to that of the Hebrews in Egyptian bondage, where God said to Moses, “I have seen the affliction...And have heard their cry” (Exodus 3:7).¹⁴ Their stories were told to their children, and they were instructed to teach them as they walked along the road, and to tie them about their necks. These stories were vital to the survival of the Hebrew people and the stories continue today. The black African people did this in similar fashion and it is still greatly valued to this day.

Enduring slavery, the blacks of Africa would gather and sing songs of deliverance, while suffering immense oppression under the might of the oppressive law of the land. They communicate to each other over distances that they would be delivered. The captured Africans would tell stories of the motherland to each other remembering the story of the griot, the storyteller of their native village. The griots were advisors to court, storytellers, musicians and praise-singers drawn from five leading griot families.

The position of the griot has spread into many parts of the African Diaspora, especially in the Caribbean and the United States, taking on extremely positive connotations for those who see the profession as a link to their ancestors.¹⁵ The author Thomas Hale, gives a more in-depth look at the origins of the griot, including its many

¹³ Dolan Hubbard, *The Sermon and the African American Literary Imagination* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994).

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Thomas A. Hale, *Griots and Griottes: Masters of Words and Music* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007).

translations and political and cultural contradictions in his book, *Griots and Griottes: Masters of Word and Music*.

Griots, known as a hereditary group of specialists, have come to symbolize all that is positive about the preservation of the past in African American oral tradition. The remarks of Griots had unique power to communicate, distort, unify, control, entertain, enlighten, inspire, educate and deceive. The term Griot has been supplanted in numerous other cultures and grafted into many other sources.¹⁶ For the purposes of this dissertation we will suffice to use the definition of griots as a wordsmith and storyteller.

Storytelling brings one face to face with the listener and draws in both the listener and the teller, records Dawn F. Silvius in her article *Telling the Story*. Silvius purports that learning the text by heart for her has become one single process including learning the text and reflecting on it in the context of community and current events.¹⁷ Silvius continues the argument in favor of telling versus performing. Silvius states that telling happens from the perspective of the narrator even when the narrator quotes a character in the story. She continues to state that telling is an oral version of pointing at third persons in order to show what those third persons see and do and in order to hear what they say.¹⁸

The society for biblical storytellers helps ministers and lay persons develop the art of storytelling. The impact that it has on the storyteller as well as the listener is undeniable. Dennis Dewey, the founder of the network of biblical storytellers in the early

¹⁶ Stephen Belcher, "Studying Griots: Recent Work in Mande Studies," *African Studies Review* 47, no. 3 (2004): 172–186, <https://georgefox.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.georgefox.idm.oclc.org/docview/211676044?accountid=11085>.

¹⁷ Dawn F. Silvius, "Telling the Story," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 38, no. 6 (2011): 436, [http://go.galegroup.com.georgefox.idm.oclc.org/ps/i.do?p=AONE&sw=w&u=newb64238&v=2.1&it=r&iid=GALE%7CA275577985&asid=f70f03281e746e7baf16ce687102a2b1](http://go.galegroup.com/georgefox.idm.oclc.org/ps/i.do?p=AONE&sw=w&u=newb64238&v=2.1&it=r&iid=GALE%7CA275577985&asid=f70f03281e746e7baf16ce687102a2b1).

¹⁸ Ibid.

church, the experience of hearing and telling stories of Jesus as sacramental. The shared reality of the narrative, teller and audience came together as community to meet the risen Christ. The interactivity of storytelling was the basis of this experience. He goes on further to record that biblical storytelling is a spiritual discipline that entails the lively expression, interpretation and animation of a narrative text of scripture that has first been deeply internalized and then is remembered, embodied, breathed, and voiced by a teller/performer as a sacred event in community with an audience/congregation.¹⁹

Storytelling for Connecting

Storytelling is a proven method for connecting with people. Parents lead and train generations with the stories of days long gone. The Israelites told the stories of their history which was connected to the stones collected to serve as a memorial. The book of the Exodus of the Israelites, even if told outside of the bible narrative, continues to be one of the most sought-after stories of a people, their God and their miraculous deliverance.

The story of a protagonist who is compelled by a Spirit speaking to him through a bush that catches on fire but is not consumed draws the attention of most listeners. As the people of Israel hold their history in high self-esteem they pass the story of Moses, their God, and the activities of their exit to a standard that has yet to have been matched. For thousands of years the story has been told and retold with a faith igniting it to level unsurpassed.

The element of captivity, and awe of the Exodus story has been adopted to that of the African who was enslaved by Europeans in North America. Though the Africans

¹⁹ Dennis Dewey, "Great in the Empire of Heaven: A Faithful Performance of Matthew's Sermon on the Mount," in *Preaching the Sermon on the Mount: The World It Imagines* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2007), 71.

made a connection to the Exodus story due to their plight, they arrived on the soil of the new land, America, with stories of their homeland Africa.

Stories of how the Africans were captured, chained, then separated and sold to the highest bidder as property, show they were placed on plantations to work in whatever capacity the slave owner saw fit. The slaves would learn to speak each other's language, for many were from varying tribes, and the griots would emerge as they shared their stories. And in the tradition of their ancestors and families of west coast of Africa they would also incorporate music with their stories.

The sounds of harmonious hums, muffled with mournful cries longing for home would fill the atmosphere. The native words of Wolof and other native languages of the west coast of Africa would echo across the plains of this new land connecting one tribe to another. The words of the story were identified by those who understood the language of the speakers and those who were burdened with the same horrible life situation. The griot who was once sought after by nobility for a positive word of hope and life, the naming of a child, the kind words of a loved one laid to rest, was now the voice of connectivity for a people savagely stripped, stored, shipped, beaten and denied the respect of human dignity in a land far away from the mother continent.

Storytelling for Coping

America's system of chattel slavery has been sanitized and historically envisioned as little more than an unfortunate albeit profoundly profitable, economic system rooted in exploitative labor of people of African descent. However, that sanitized history masks centuries of rape, lynching, burnings, beating, deliberate mutilation, physical branding,

medical experimentation, psychological torture, family separation, humiliation, and routine dehumanization.

Some of the stories of coping were lies. In his book, *Slavery in Africa and Egypt*, the author notes that slave masters coupled their accusations of laziness with charges that slaves routinely lied. He wrote that there was truth to their claim of slaves used lying, feigning, and deception to cope with the brutality of slavery and rebel against their owners or taskmasters.²⁰

Another coping mechanism was the naming of children. The African slaves who arrived on the North American continent were in no position to stem the process of cultural erosion. One of the slave owners' first act was to strip away the slave's cultural identity by giving them new names. First-generation African slaves attempted to keep their African roots by using African words and traditions in naming their children. One African tradition employed the weekday name for a child. Quaco, a name for a male born on a Wednesday, would over time evolve into a name such as Jacco, Jacky, or Jack. Cudjo, Monday's boy, could simply become Joe and Philba, a female born on Friday might transform into Phoebe. Even new arriving slaves who were unsuccessful in maintaining their own African name bequeathed homeland names to their children in an effort to honor traditions and family ties.²¹

The naming of their own children and the telling of stories that kept the memory of their homeland was vital to the life of the newly sold slaves and their descendants. The personal nature of chattel slavery in the colonies limited an Africans arrivals' ability to

²⁰ Kenneth Chelst, *Exodus and Emancipation: Biblical and African-American Slavery* (Brooklyn, NY: Urim Publications, 2009), 84, accessed December 2, 2017, ProQuest Ebook Central.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 95.

maintain his or her cultural identity and mitigated against its long-term survival. By the time of Emancipation, there were few direct links to the language, religion, or music of the newly freed slaves in the United States and their African Ancestors. The fundamental core values and beliefs that African's brought with them affected many aspects of the variegated American scene they most readily adopted. Modified in-light of their own values William Dillion Pierson goes even further and articulates that there is a strong link between southern values and African culture. He argues that several behaviors often described as uniquely southern, such as southern hospitality, drawl, etiquette, and the code of honor, were influenced heavily by African values.²²

Storytelling for Conspiring

The bible is replete with story in which an individual tells a story to conspire. To conspire means to join a secret agreement to do an unlawful or wrongful act, which becomes unlawful as a result of the secret agreement.²³ In the Old Testament there is the story of the servant who tells a certain woman who births a child by the word of the prophet Elisha, that the prophet wanted payment for the blessing he gave. This story ends with the servant's demise. Another story portrays brothers telling Jacob about his son Joseph being caught and killed by thieves in the desert did not bring about the outcome they were expecting. Harriet Tubman's religious songs embellished her storytelling performances and were frequently central plot elements in her most popular Underground Railroad stories. An example is the story of the story of teasing the thick-witted master

²² Ibid., 99.

²³ "Conspire," *Merriam-Webster.com*, accessed August 14 2017, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/conspire.

the night before her escape using an old Methodist song, I'm Bound for the Promised Land, to communicate to her family her intentions to run away. Singing was also integral to her much-told story about coded communication with fugitives she had hidden in the woods. The song lyrics, Go Down Moses, meant stay hidden, while a Methodist, Air Hail or Hail Ye Happy Spirits, meant all clear.

Why We Love Stories

Story preaching is to be distinguished from narrative preaching.²⁴ Story preaching can be a very valuable tool in the preacher's tool kit. Narrative is defined as story, and story is defined as the telling of an event or series of events.²⁵ We love stories because they engage us at every level. Whether it is told at the level of intrigue or the level of sheer delight, stories have a way of rendering a moral lesson or a memory moment that becomes an adhesive to our minds for years to come. Jesus communicates wisdom, mystery, intrigue and morals in his parables, stories that are short and usually illustrate a moral attitude or religious principle.²⁶ Ultimately, we love stories because they yield multiple meanings by their very nature, according to John C. Holbert.²⁷

From generation to generation we have communicated our hopes, joys, fears, sorrows, hurts and pain through the telling of stories. Seeing a parent share a story that was told to them as a child, with enthusiasm and accuracy is evident of the power and

²⁴ John C. Holbert, *Telling the Whole Story: Reading and Preaching Old Testament Stories*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2013), accessed August 14, 2017, EBSCOhost.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ "Parable," *Merriam-Webster.com*, accessed August 14, 2017, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/parable>.

²⁷ Holbert.

longevity of stories. Storytelling is a method of communication that will outweigh every medium used to tell stories. The power of stories cannot be limited to, compared, or enshrined in the technological clouds of the future. As long as people and societies have experiences, stories will be shared through the art of storytelling.

Understanding the emotional needs of people and caring for them is the ultimate aim of the pastor and the ability to relate to them through storytelling. The Lord Jesus, when asked a difficult question, relayed the answer to the inquiry by telling a story. People remember stories before they remember bullet points and features. Leaders from all areas of employment have gained great success by communicating expectations tempered with great stories.

Through the ancient stories of the “middle passage” and stories of the motherland the African American pulpit has evolved into a platform that springboards the thoughts around the concepts and issues of the traditional congregant. And yet it is the life of the congregant that finds faith and hope in the power of those stories.

The power of storytelling can bring down the mightiest warrior and even a king. The power of the mind to think in pictures and understand the context of meaning and analyzing a story can move someone into action.

The story as recorded in (2 Samuel 1):

12 So the LORD sent Nathan to David. Nathan came to him and said, “There were two men in a certain city. One was rich, and the other was poor. ² The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cows, ³ but the poor man had only one little female lamb that he had bought. He raised her, and she grew up in his home with his children. She would eat his food and drink from his cup. She rested in his arms and was like a daughter.

⁴ “Now, a visitor came to the rich man. The rich man thought it would be a pity to take one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler. So he took the poor man’s lamb and prepared her for the traveler.”

⁵David burned with anger against the man. “I solemnly swear, as the LORD lives,” he said to Nathan, “the man who did this certainly deserves to die! ⁶And he must pay back four times the price of the lamb because he did this and had no pity.”

⁷“You are the man!” Nathan told David. “This is what the LORD God of Israel says: I anointed you king over Israel and rescued you from Saul. ⁸I gave you your master Saul’s house and his wives. I gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if this weren’t enough, I would have given you even more. Why did you despise my word by doing what I considered evil? You had Uriah the Hittite killed in battle. You took his wife as your wife. You used the Ammonites to kill him. ¹⁰So warfare will never leave your house because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.

¹¹“This is what the LORD says: I will stir up trouble against you within your own household, and before your own eyes I will take your wives and give them to someone close to you. He will go to bed with your wives in broad daylight. ¹²You did this secretly, but I will make this happen in broad daylight in front of all Israel.”

¹³Then David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the LORD.”

Nathan replied, “The LORD has taken away your sin; you will not die. ¹⁴But since you have shown total contempt for the LORD by this affair, the son that is born to you must die.” ¹⁵Then Nathan went home.

The LORD struck the child that Uriah’s wife had given birth to for David so that the child became sick. ¹⁶David pleaded with God for the child; he fasted and lay on the ground all night. ¹⁷The older leaders in his palace stood beside him to raise him up from the ground, but he was unwilling. And he wouldn’t eat with them.

¹⁸On the seventh day the child died. But David’s officials were afraid to tell him that the child was dead. They thought, “While the child was alive, we talked to him, and he wouldn’t listen to us. How can we tell him the child is dead? He may harm himself.”

¹⁹But when David saw that his officials were whispering to one another, he realized that the child was dead. “Is the child dead?” David asked them.

“Yes, he is dead,” they answered. ²⁰So David got up from the ground, bathed, anointed himself, and changed his clothes. He went into the LORD’s house and worshiped. Then he went home and asked for food. They placed food in front of him, and he ate.²⁸

²¹His officials asked him, “Why are you acting this way? You fasted and cried over the child when he was alive. But as soon as the child died, you got up and ate.”

²⁸ 2 Samuel 1:12–25

²²David answered, “As long as the child was alive, I fasted and cried. I thought, ‘Who knows? The LORD may be gracious to me and let the child live.’ ²³But why should I fast now that he’s dead? Can I bring him back? Someday I’ll go to him, but he won’t come back to me.”

²⁴Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba. He went to bed with her, and she later gave birth to a son. David named him Solomon. The LORD loved the child ²⁵and sent a message through the prophet Nathan to name the baby Jedidiah [The LORD’s Beloved].²⁸

What a powerful and convicting story. The person who listens to this is drawn in by the cruelty of one man and then the drama of the turn that the man to whom the story is told that he is the guilty one. The timing of the story, the pacing of the details, and the intensity of the character’s unwillingness to be merciful are all carefully packaged together to raise the emotions of the listener who in fact is the guilty one. As preachers, we have the tools and the text that allows us to use the same storytelling technique to reach the many parishioners. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to preach the story of the Scriptures, embracing its power into the lives of individuals.

The pastor takes on the position of the griot and shares the truth of the Scriptures. This sharing is done in the oral tradition of sermon presentation. Richardson and Jackson provide a broad definition of the oral tradition. They report the term ‘oral tradition’ means, “that tradition whose origins stretch back to precolonial Africa and the beliefs associated with it”. The oral tradition also termed oral literature or orature refers to a comprehensive body of oral discourse on every subject and in every genre of expression produced by a people. Orature is an art form that can be analyzed in accordance with an approved and recognized set of traditional standards. In addition, the nature of African oral tradition is drawn from African belief systems and traditions. Oral tradition is the complex corpus of verbal or spoken art created for remembering the past based on a

people's ideas beliefs, symbols, assumptions attitudes and sentiments. Records that the oral tradition has two categories literary and historical. The literary includes: poetic genres, divination poems, proverbs, parables, inclinations and songs.²⁹ Studying the Scriptures and utilizing the hereditary gift of storytelling, helps the preacher present the message of the bible in such a way that any listener can see his or herself in the grace giving word. The stories of Scripture have the power to transform any listener.

Though there are some who count the stories of the Bible as fiction, this dissertation student sees the stories being utilized to communicated from generation to generation. And it my aim to embrace the storytelling craft of the African American culture and couple it with the new paradigm shift in preaching the story to reach a greater audience.

²⁹ Elaine B. Richardson and Ronald L. Jackson, *Understanding African American Rhetoric: Classical Origins to Contemporary Innovations* (New York: Routledge, 2003), accessed December 5, 2017, EBSCOhost.

CHAPTER 2: JOURNEY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN PREACHING

*In Everlasting memory
Of the anguish of our ancestors
May those who died rest in peace
May those who return find their roots
May humanity never again perpetrate
Such injustice against humanity
We, the living vow to uphold this.¹*

—Inscription on: The plaque that stands on the walls of both Cape Coast and Elmina Castles on the continent of Africa.

In the book titled *African American Religious History: A Documentary Witness*, edited by Milton C. Sennett, there is a segment about the Traditional Ibo Religion and Culture. It is in the memoirs of this great, African Olaudah Equiano, that we can canon the origins of African Religion. Sennett writes that Africans were religious people long before encountering European slavers and Christian missionaries. He writes of first hand experiences, as he passed through several hands from being captured at age eleven, before being sold to the Captain of an English trading vessel in Virginia. After many maritime adventures and experiences as a slave in Barbados, Philadelphia and England. He purchased his freedom in 1766.²

One can see the type of worship services slaves were privy to in the book *American Religious History*. One such story is of slaves not being allowed to hold

¹ Meghan Connor, “Cape Coast & Elmina Castles: Reminder of Past and Guide for the Future,” accessed July 19, 2017, <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Cape-Coast-Elmina-Castles-Reminder-of-past-and-guide-for-the-future-315585>.

² Milton C. Sennett, *African American Religious History: A Documentary Witness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).

meetings on the plantation. The slaves assemble in the swamps, out of reach of the patrols. They have an understanding among themselves as to the time and place of getting together. This is often done by the first one arriving breaking boughs from trees, and bending them in the direction of the selected spot. Arrangements are then made for conducting the exercises. They first ask each other how they feel, the state of their minds, etc. The male members then select a certain space, in separate groups, for their division of the meeting. Preaching in order, by the brethren, then praying and singing all around, until they generally feel quite happy. The speaker usually commences by calling himself unworthy, and talks very slowly, until feeling the spirit, he grows excited, and in a short time, they fall to the ground, twenty or thirty men and women under his influence. The slave forgets all his sufferings, except to remind others of the trials during the past week, exclaiming: Thank God, I shall not live here always! Then they pass from one to another, shaking hands, and bidding each other farewell, promising, should they meet no more on earth, to strive for and meet in heaven, where all is joy happiness and liberty. As they separate they sing a parting hymn of praise.³

Sernett further reports on the insurrection of slaves through the religion they practiced. The fact that many slaves became atheist is easily understood as they stood in the face of the hypocrisy of the religion practice and preached before them on Sunday, and the brutal cruelty subjected on them on Monday.

South Carolina passed a law aimed at preventing blacks from gathering “for the purpose mental instruction or religious worship between sunset and sunrise.”⁴ This cruel

³ Ibid., 13–18.

⁴ Ibid., 89.

and unusual law was discussed in Stacey Floyd Thomas, Juan Floyd Thomas, Carol b. Duncan, Stephen G. Ray, Jr, and Nancy Lynne Westfield's book, *Black Church Studies an Introduction*. From their reporting we understand that after being denied presence and rendered invisible in the broad scope of Church history due to enslavement, segregation, and the persistence of racism, Black Christians have been believers much longer than they have had access to institutional modes of religion and worship. This history reflects that Black Christians' faith in God's love and liberating power led to the establishment of the institution and tradition known as the Black Church.⁵ Floyd-Thomas writes about the origins of the Black Church that from the moment Africans were imported to British North America and enslaved in 1619 until the end of American chattel slavery because of the Civil war, they and their descendants sought to create communal and kinship networks within the contexts of slave traders and slaveholders among enslaved populations.⁶

What began because of being denied fellowship with instructional Christianity in America, the idea of slave religion was created. Slave religion has been explained through a process called syncretism by historian Albert Raoteau.⁷ The combining of practices of the enslaved black people of West Africa such as river baptism, spirit possession, the ring shout, call and response, conjuring practices and cross-cultural

⁵ Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, *Black Church Studies: An Introduction* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007).

⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

identification of African divine spirits with Roman catholic saints in African derived religious traditions from Cuba and Haiti.⁸

When looking at the elements of the current African American worship and how it influences some the main stream congregations of today, a similar phenomenon is seen that occurred in the early existence of British North American with the Great Awakening. Floyd-Thomas reports that many of the revivalist of the Great Awakening emphasized singing, emotionalism, physical movement and personal rebirth, also noting the practice of total body immersion during baptism in lakes, rivers, and ponds, which was the norm in African water rituals.⁹

The idea of worship in the African American community is summed up by Floyd-Thomas as she states that worship in the Black Church is a vital, relational and event-filled nurturing experience. The worshipping community can engage in activities that enable them to envision the changes needed in their individual, family, and community life, Floyd-Thomas states.¹⁰

Floyd-Thomas rightly lists components of the nurturing nature of black worship and how it connects with the people through story. Personal stories are the things worshippers bring to God daily, and it is fitting that worship is designed to reach people through story.

Floyd-Thomas lists several components that reflect this idea of the stories or issues people bring to God during worship. They include: Self-Identity Issues; Social

⁸ Ibid., 6.

⁹ Ibid., 186.

¹⁰ Ibid., 187.

Contextual issues, Interpersonal Relationship Issues, Life Event Issues, Life meaning Issues, and Story Plot Issues. She boldly states that the Christian nurture in the African American church means the humans story is necessarily linked to the story of God. This is shown in exemplars of Christian faith stories, such as God's story as a Resource; God's story as Central to theology of worship and nurture, the impact of God's story and post biblical Christian faith heritage stories as a resource and the impact of the Christian faith heritage story.¹¹

In thinking of the African American way of worship and presentation of story, one must consider the harsh condition in which the African was brought to this country and the need to develop their own new way of expressing a love for God or a way to worship. Unbeknownst to damning slave catchers and eventually the plantation owners, the African people arrived with a sense of love for the deity, God, who they worshipped prior to hearing of the Europeans way of worship. Hubbard records the findings of Alan Locke who states that the African retained some memory of beauty, since by way of compensation some obviously artistic urges flowed even with the peasant Negro toward the only channels of expression left open, those of song, graceful movement and poetic speech. Stripped of all else the African American's own body became his prime artistic instrument, this new oppressive environment forced the African Americans away from their craft arts and their old ancestral skills and towards the emotional arts of song and dance.¹²

¹¹ Ibid., 185.

¹² Dolan Hubbard, *The Sermon and the African American Literary Imagination* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994).

As Africans were forced to live in this new society as underlings in an oppressive system, they found ways to adapt to the environment that was placed upon them. One of the ways was through the act of speech, which keyed in on the speech or sermon of the black preacher. Hubbard confirms in *Sermon and the African American Literary Imagination* that as a direct result of their exclusion from American society, African Americans attempted to redefine themselves and their history through acts of speech. Grounded in the church and based to a large extent on improvisation, these speech acts, keyed to the preacher's speech act, provided the aesthetic underpinnings for black oral expression. Due to their physical freedom being negated, black people developed a view of history that emphasized liberation. Thus, the black sermon in its emphasis on liberation and true Christianity is offered as a corrective to an inadequate history in which black people need not exist, except as beast of burden. And taking their cue from the black preacher, black people use their critical and creative powers to bring into being a new worldview in which they could readily participate in freedom.¹³

From the coast of West Africa, through the middle passage, the African American sermon sought to preach liberation of the people who were systematically oppressed then and now into this new land. The preaching of African American preacher was emotional and heartfelt to the point that the masters of these enslaved person were convinced that the God of Christianity would also be for the "heathen".¹⁴

¹³ Ibid., 4.

¹⁴ Ibid., 5.

The Negro Preacher

Several Negro preachers are highlighted in the history books of African American preaching. Their stories of trials and triumph serve as inspiration today to the African American pulpit. It is from observing their plight, trials and triumphs that a true understanding of what it meant to be a Negro and called of God to preach in America's past that the lessons of true faith can be learned.

In Carter G. Woodson's, *The History of the Negro Church*, he writes of the Negro preacher of worth, the likes of George Liele, Andrew Bryan, William Lemon, Thomas Armistead, Frost and Josiah Bishop, to name a few.

George Liele, born in Virginia, attended services with his master and soon became converted and baptized. Soon after that the church permitted him to preach upon the plantation along the Savannah River and sometimes to the congregation of the white church to which he belonged. He also preached by permission of his liberal master to the slaves along the Savannah River to slaves. Liele was preaching without hindrance due to his master, but upon his master's death was imprisoned with the intent to re-enslave him. He was bailed out and landed in Kingston, Jamaica. He worked to repay the gentleman who paid his fare and bought his own freedom and that of his family. He thus began his work as a preacher, preaching in small homes and watching his following grow to nearly five hundred communicants, extending to the far rural areas of Jamaica. George Liele would not preach to any slaves who did not have permission of their owners, and instead of directing attention to their wrongs, conveyed to them the mere message of Christ.¹⁵ In Black Church studies, Floyd reports that during the first Great Awakening

¹⁵ Carter Godwin Woodson, *History of The Negro Church* (Batimore, MD: 12th Media Services, 2017).

George Liele, preached at the Silver Bluff Baptist church in Silver Bluff, South Carolina, the first black Baptist church organized in North America, which included free and enslaved Blacks.¹⁶

Woodson also discusses Liele successor in Georgia, Andrew Bryan, who was also born a slave in Goose Creek, South Carolina. He too preaches to congregations of blacks and whites, and though he was successful, persecution soon followed. Woodson writes that the greater Bryans influence was among slaves, the more the masters were inclined to believe that his work could result only in servile insurrection. Bryan built a small building on the land of Mr. Edward Davis where he and his congregants would meet. Soon after they were persecuted and forced to hold meeting in the swamps, reportedly running the risk of discipline. The church gained in number and was organized to become the first Baptist church and ordained Andrew Bryan as minister with full authority to preach the gospel and administer the ordinances of the Baptist Church.¹⁷

This caused things to become more and more difficult for the slaves to attend services. They were subject to whippings, arrest, and severe beating for attending these worship services, with Andrew and his Brother both being whipped severely. They suffered to the point that their backs were lacerated to the extent that blood ran down to the earth as they lifted hands and cried to the Lord declaring that he rejoiced in being whipped and would suffer death for the cause of Christ.¹⁸

¹⁶ Floyd-Thomas.

¹⁷ Woodson.

¹⁸ Ibid., 49.

Bryan's church continued to get larger and he would divide the church each time it experienced growth. The first growth spurt led to the organization of the Second African Baptist Church of Savannah and was led by a slave named Henry Francis. The church grew and divided again into the Third African Baptist Church and from this the workers spread into all the state of Georgia.¹⁹

From Josiah Bishop to Uncle Jack, Negro preachers were listened to by black and white congregants. In most cases their success was immediate but eventually met with opposition for fear of a slave revolt after their congregants heard the message of the gospel. One preacher whose presentation of the sermon would draw blacks, whites, Baptist and Methodist, was Henry Evans, a free Negro of Virginia. Evans was licensed as a Methodist preacher who preached in Fayetteville North Carolina. He traveled, worked and preached on Sunday in which the town council ordered him to refrain from preaching. Due to his effective preaching with whites and blacks attending his secret meeting, the Methodist church organized and placed a white minister in charge of the church.²⁰

Black Harry, as he was called, learned from Mr. Asbury himself, and learned to preach more forcefully than he and received this quote from one occasion,²¹ "Rev.

¹⁹ Ibid., 52.

²⁰ Ibid., 56.

²¹ Ibid., 57. On one occasion in Wilmington, Delaware, where the cause of the Methodist was unpopular, a large number of persons came out of curiosity to hear Bishop Asbury. But, as the auditorium was already taxed to its fullest capacity, they could only hear from the outside. At the conclusion of the exercises, they said, without having seen the speaker: "If all Methodist preachers can preach like the Bishop, we should like to be constant hearers." Someone present replied: "That was not the Bishop, but the Bishop's servant that you heard." This, to be sure, had the desired effect, for these inquirers concluded: "If such be the servant, what must the master be?"

Lemuel Haynes was said to have been one of the noblest of the New England Congregational ministers of his time and became one of the choicest instruments of Christ". His face betrayed his race and blood, and his life revealed his Lord.²² These pioneers in the black church along with the creation of the largest congregation of the time under Richard Allen, the bishop elected in the Philadelphia meeting as the bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, faced adversity on several levels from whippings, imprisonment and even death.

The progress of the African American pulpit continues to develop as the country of Americas goes forth. The church moves into a conundrum of what should the African American pulpit embrace: the roots of its heritage or the acceptance of its oppressors.

The ex-slaves had remained conservative. They held onto the old-time religion and rejoiced to be able to sing the songs of freedom of their fathers and thought it a privilege to testify in Sunday meeting services. Woodson concludes, "That the negroes should thank God for their freedom, and the only way to express that gratitude was through jubilant praise and thanksgiving within the courts of the Lord. God had brought the Negro up-out of Egypt through Sodom and Gomorrah, and to show his gratitude the chief concern of the Negro should then be to be ready to walk into Jerusalem just like John."²³

Viewing the progression of the African American pulpit in my tenure I have seen the fight between the conservative thought of African American worship versus the progressive thought. It was deemed, even in the 70s, that if a person were to experience

²² Ibid., 58.

²³ Ibid., 249.

and act out in the ways of the historical slaves by shouting, dancing, and praising God with a loud voice it was uneducated or backwards. I have witnessed personally a pastor explaining to another pastor that all the people he had just witness worship God in this way were bankers, educators, accountants, all holding various college degrees. This expression was thought of as backwards even in the early years of the Americas. The young Negroes who were privy to education began to be influenced by conservative religious teachers, having the educational process working changes in the young Negro's point of view. Woodson argues that the difference in age was not the dividing line, but the difference in ideas.

Therefore, African American worship began to differ from that of their fathers. Woodson argues that several issues were a factor: difference in ideas, interpretation of religion, importance of the church in community, relation of the church to the individual and the standard of public conduct. Along with the issues mentioned, this progressive element was dubbed as the “educated Negroes” and they no longer accepted the visions and interpretation of an illiterate minister. They wanted an experience with the God of their salvation rather than a hope of the notions of the old by and by.

The educated Negroes no longer thought of religion as the cure all for all the problems of the race. They sought to incorporate education as equal solution to the ills of the times. They viewed it as weak to totally rely on the emotions as understanding of the Scriptures.²⁴

It was this movement that led to the church becoming the center of the community. Negroes were not allowed to join white public social clubs and thus the

²⁴ Ibid., 255.

church became that place for the free and now educated African Americans. The church became and is still today a place where African Americans can see neighbors they have not seen in a while, meet and hear of social issues, politics and other elements that affect the black community. And this movement carried on into the 1950s and 60s.

The African American church continued to develop in this manner. In time it grew from being a place to see friends during the end of slavery to a place where congregants could assemble with the intent of hearing of social and political issues. With emancipation, Jim Crow, and the civil rights movement being evidence that the black church was a needed entity, many African Americans, though progressing in every other area a of educational and economic growth, continued to return the black community for spiritual empowerment through the African American pulpit.

Songs in Preaching

*We've come this far by faith, leaning on the Lord;
Trusting in His Holy Word, He's never failed me yet.
Oh, oh - -, oh - - can't turn around - -
We've come this far by faith.*

—Albert A. Goodman

The preaching of African Americans evolves, and so does the worship experience. Though some may think that the evolution must drift toward a more European flare of worship, many still see the value of holding on to the traditional components of the Slave field house and field worship. The element of worship that most encompasses the idea of authenticity is that of singing.

Sitting in the pews early on in life one can hear words sung by the saints of old as they were passed down to them, and not understand that the sounds being made had a

history beyond the lives seated before you. One would hear the triumph of struggle and the presence of pain encompassed all at once. One could hear the hurt of the past and the hope of the future. Even when the actual words were unidentifiable the moans and sounds that bled through the air and hearts of those rendering the message was clear. The message was that the people present in the room were there for no other reason than to call on the God of their salvation to be present in the room with them.

It began with a designated individual at times and at other times it would begin with the person who arrived first. It mimicked the idea of whoever gets to the building first on a cold winter day is the one to light the fire. And so, it began. The deacon or designee would sing out the opening line and the congregant would join in the singing at the end of the measure carrying the song on and, at most times, in two-part harmony. The song would continue as each first sound would peal through the air like chapters in a great story. The chorus would conclude each verse and move on in a repetition manner. Sometimes the singing would be accompanied with shouting and crying but it would continue until a deacon would begin to pray.

There is nothing is more central to the preaching of the gospel than that of singing the good news. The African slaves would render songs that would communicate their feeling, their plans, and their hopes and many times this would be done without the slave owner being aware.

Songs like:

Bound to go

Jordan River, I'm bound to go

Bound to go, bound to go

Jordan River, I'm bound to go

*Bound to go, bound to go
And bid'em fare ye well*²⁵

This distinctive form of congregational signing originated among enslaved Africans who were converted to Christianity before emancipation and it is reached its height in late nineteenth and twentieth century Black Baptist and Methodist churches. Slaves hid themselves in the woods to worship or went to plantation praise house, and after Emancipation the sound of the group leader, the call and response singing accompanied by only hand and foot rhythms resonated across the plains from the uplifted windows from buildings that dominated African American communities.²⁶

Congregational hymn singing stimulates the idea of placing the human worshiper before his or her God, applies to both the tradition of African origin stressing communication between the seen and unseen worlds, and to the Christian doctrine of God's immanence throughout the domain of created being and things. The movement-centered and reflexive character of African American worship blends with the African experience of ancestral and divine spirits as a felt presence in the worship event. At the same time, American revivalists stressed the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in the believers.²⁷

Singing, from the perspective of the congregant, and at times from the preacher, would take a different form than the lining out of a hymn with the congregant continuing. A unique characteristic of preaching and singing is called moaning. One might be

²⁵ Sernett.

²⁶ William T. Dargan and Isaac Watts, *Lining Out the Word: Dr. Watts Hymn Singing in the Music of Black Americans (Music of the African Diaspora)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

listening to the leader call out the words in a metered measured melody and then the next verse would be silenced of words but filled with melody only. This dynamic is often celebrated as moment in which the words of the leader has captured his or her mind to the extent that words cannot express the joy, pain, agony, or excitement that is being experienced.

Dargan writes that “moaning” refers either to the humming chorus of a hymn performance or to more variegated and ambient sounds that can be heard during intoned prayers, moans, and hymns. Performed with the mouth open or closed, these sounds nuance the entire continuum of vocal colors between speech and song, including melisma’s, ghosted notes, slides, and blue-note inflections. Moaning is not synonymous with a moan, which is a text-based form that uses some or all the above-mentioned variants of moaning for expression and coloration.²⁸

He enlists the definition of a moan or moaning in the sense of African American worship by Willie Collins to further explain the significance in worship as sacred chant.²⁹

The origins of African American music, or as music made by people in the United States who trace their ancestry to Africa through slavery, is the focal point of what we see and hear in the African American pulpit. The concept of this style of music is denoted as

²⁸ Ibid., 35.

²⁹ Ibid., 36. [The moan is] a sacred chant of one sentence repeated two or three times of approximately thirty seconds duration whose text is generally based on personal experience and is of individual creation but may occasionally be based on a hymn title or psalm and is disseminated by oral tradition. Moans are initiated and expressed a cappella during prayer in prayer service, devotion, and occasionally during the preacher’s sermon. A number of these moans may be led successively by one of several individuals during the course of a prayer. The moan is generally uttered in the following manner: a leader moans most of the sentence and near the end the congregation joins in, in degrees sometimes initially humming then uttering the words with the leader. Moans are of relatively low amplitude as compared with song, are melodically embellished with melismas, having a unison and heterophonic texture usually done in a slow manner.

speechlike song. This singing commonly features speechlike inflections making the same modulations in instrumentals and ultimately evolving from speech into song. Speechlike inflections may be used along with melisma to express heightened emotion. Bending of pitch may be divorced from speechlike inflections and used both as an expression of heightened emotion and as a syntactic principal for organizing melody, (with the bent pitch having a cadential function). A blurred distinction between music and speech may also be achieved by using a dirty timbre in the voice such as growling or straining.³⁰ This speechlike song depicts the cadence in which several African American preachers utilize when preaching. The most likely candidates to use this type of cadence in speaking are those who are gifted in the area of music. Those who have an ear for hearing pitch and tone are able to move regularly from one key to another vocally.

Thomas Brothers discusses in his article, “Ideology and Auralty”³¹ in the vernacular traditions of African American Music (1890-1950), African American music has been made in the context of a severely asymmetrical power structure. He writes that there have been three different reasons for this. One, the African has made music for themselves that deliberately resembles European-American music. Two, African Americans have made music not for themselves but for Europeans and in doing so they have designed the music according to European taste. And finally, the African American

³⁰ Thomas Brothers, “Ideology and Auralty in the Vernacular Traditions of African-American Music,” *Black Music Research Journal* 17, no. 2 (1997): 169, accessed December 18, 2017, <http://link.galegroup.com.georgefox.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/A53478950/AONE?u=newb64238&sid=AONE&xid=413972b7>.

³¹ Ibid.

set out independently, with an interest in highlighting differences between the two traditions.³²

It is in capturing that difference that the African American preacher has the ability to engage the audience through the musical talents in his or her preaching. The evidence of the spirit moving in services where the music precedes the sermon and the sermon seems to take flight from the onset is what this musical difference brings to the pulpit. A preacher who is able to use this gift to enhance the exegesis of text and or metaphor in the text will find the ease of preaching in every situation.

There are several options for the music to enhance the sermon. The sermon may be introduced with a hymn or a metered hymn, or it may be introduced by a contemporary gospel song presented by a choir. If the choir is on point in its presentation many African American preachers are not reluctant to express their appreciation of the song openly. The preacher who is gifted in song will sometime continue the song presented by singing the chorus of the song or singing his or her favorite verse. This dissertation will reflect on examples of contemporary preacher who are able to use this gift in a future chapter of this dissertation. Examples of the songs and the reason why they are chosen are also given in that section of the dissertation.

It is important to not underestimate the power that singing plays in the presentation of the sermon. I have found that preachers who utilize this gift will do so when asked to preach to an unfamiliar congregation. Singing prior to the sermonic presentation allows the preacher to check the pulse of the waiting congregation. There are a couple of important things to remember if one is to use singing as a method of

³² Ibid., 169.

engagement in preaching: (1) meet the gift with an understanding that you are not being asked to “sing” but to preach, (2) remember to keep a balanced approach to using one’s singing gift, and (3) understand that the singing is not a substitution for rightly dividing the Word of truth. The preacher who fails to adhere to these few things in preaching runs the risk of losing credibility of one who has misunderstood the invitation to preach. The gift of singing prior to, and at the closing of a sermon, continues to be an important tool in the arsenal of African American preaching to this day.

CHAPTER 3: THEOLOGICAL WORSHIP IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN PULPIT

“A poet without... a sense of the music in speech is like a snowstorm without snow.”¹

—Clarence Major

A long history is found in noting the development of African American preaching and the development of the sermon in the Black Church. Preachers have long since found ways to preach sermons that were relevant, and spirit filled. The task for many from the early Protestant break to the Church of England, to now, has been that preachers have had to choose what information they felt was inspired and what was important issues of the day. This was certainly true of the purist who believes the scripture 2 Timothy 3:16: *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.*²

Robert Ellison identifies these men, and those like them, with a term he calls “Tractarians. These were Victorian clergymen from small rural parishes in the southern and southwestern parts of England who published speeches for the Tracts for the Times newspaper.³ These orators were also considered sophisticated genre theorists whose writings often contained prescriptive statements about what sermons should and should not be about.⁴ Ellison continues to highlight in his book how Tractarians would discuss

¹ Gordon E. Thompson, *Black Music, Black Poetry: Genre, Performance and Authenticity* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2013).

² 2 Timothy 3:16.

³ Robert H. Ellison, *A New History of the Sermon: The Nineteenth Century* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2010), accessed October 2, 2017, EBSCOhost.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

what should and should not be in taught in the pulpit. He reports that some believe the pulpit was not the place for the “exciting topics of the day and their congregants should not get caught up in the earthly activity and worldly schemes, but submit to the government authorities and obey Moses’ command to stand still and see the salvation of the Lord.”⁵ He reports further that the Tractarian writers would minimize and discussion of potentially controversial issues for fear of it detracting from the preacher’s appeal for his people live more fully Christians lives. It was his belief that Tractarians believed that the preacher must always strive to warn the people that it is quite idle to pretend to faith and holiness unless they show forth their inward principles by a pure, disinterested upright line of conduct.⁶

The Traditional Sermon of Europeans

In *New History of the Sermon, Volume 4: Preaching, Sermon and Cultural Change in the Long Eighteenth Century* the author reasons that the history of sermon penning is one of great variety. Each faith community had its basic approach to preaching at the Sunday assembly for worship. During this time the Calvinist, both England and American Puritans, preached an exegetical homily on consecutive passages of a book of the bible. Lutherans based the sermon on one of the readings appointed in the lectionary for that day while, European Catholics, English Anglicans, and Protestant Dissenters used

⁵ Ibid., 18.

⁶ Ibid., 19.

a sermon form derived from the revival of the classical rhetoric of the Renaissance, with the Roman Catholics doing the same but only in a separate service after morning mass.⁷

Clergy of each faith had their way of preaching and varied within the tradition because of the geographical change. A few of the styles included the European concetto, the Spanish gerundianismo, and the Catholic and Lutheran emblematic sermons. Eijnatten maintains that though Catholic and Protestant sermons are different, each tradition influenced the other.⁸

The sermon writing style of the Baroque period, which was derived from the Portuguese noun meaning “a pearl of irregular shape,” indicated a classism that had gone awry. A few other sermon structures of the time were the homily and the paradoxon. In the homily, the preacher gives a verse-by-verse interpretation and application of a passage of scripture, whereas in the paradoxon, the sermon serves together with a Gospel text, or contrasts it with an autoridad.⁹

Though the skills of the European preacher captured the attention and hearts of many followers, there was still a need to address the African who struggled to embrace the gospel message while trying to interpret the mixed messages of the society that justified his captivity by this same gospel.¹⁰

⁷ Joris van Eijnatten, *Preaching, Sermon and Cultural Change in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2009).

⁸ Ibid., 5.

⁹ Ibid., 6.

¹⁰ Ibid.

The African American Sermon

Some believe that there is a difference in the sermon presented by an African American preacher and one delivered by an Anglo-American preacher. Dolan Hubbard suggests that unlike the traditional Euro-American, which is descended from a learned literary tradition, the African American sermon is part of an experiential and oral tradition.

Noting that a study of African American sermons can reveal many things, such as sermonic formula and mode, Hubbard highlights an observation made by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. that a sermon is not an essay to be read but a discourse to be heard. It should be a listening appeal to a listening congregation. Therefore, a sermon is directed toward a listening ear rather than reading eye. The sermon comes alive in the life of the hearer as the author and proclaimer preaches the text. As the listeners become part of the sermon presentation through audible responses, the preacher continues to move the listener to a place of understanding and ultimately rejoicing.¹¹ It could be argued in support of Hubbard's findings that the black sermon has the ability to bring theory into reality. The black sermon as the cultural signature of the children of the African diaspora, is entrenched with drama and presented as a literary exchange between preacher and a people displaying their moral view of the world. And finally, the sermon must be biblical. In his book titled, *The Talking Book: African Americans and the Bible*, Callahan writes that preaching is a venerable art form with all the virtuosity and inventiveness of jazz and for it not to be based on a biblical text is unthinkable. One will find that no matter the preparation technique or presentation style, the preachers in the African American pulpit

¹¹ Dolan Hubbard, *The Sermon and the African American Literary Imagination* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994).

hold the Scriptures in the highest esteem and the ultimate line of the authenticity of a gospel message.¹²

The African American sermon has evolved in many ways throughout decades of political and social events in this country. The accessibility and availability of seminary training has helped preachers of all ethnicities enhance their knowledge of the word of God. And this knowledge is needed to counterbalance the increased number of college-educated congregants who are still flocking to hear a “word” from the Lord.

There are many ways the black preacher has chosen to prepare to preach. Some chose to listen or sit at the feet of the master preachers attending services, conferences, and revivals, or streaming into a worship service via the internet, and others attend bible college and, or accredited seminaries. The beauty is that the preacher recognizes that learning must continue as one develops as a proclaimer of the gospel.¹³

According to Dr. Martha J. Simmons, in her book *Doing the Deed: The Mechanics of 21st Century Preaching*, the art of preaching or preparing the sermon is lacking due to the fact that there is little information on the mechanics of preaching for the African American context. She compares preaching today to the preaching of the past and reports that today’s preaching is filled with fewer of the “BIG” themes: love, grace, justice, faith, forgiveness, discipleship, evil, creation, hospitality, hope, providence, sanctification, stewardship, suffering, and sin, etc. She proposes that when the big themes are watered down; it leads to a watering down of preaching. Simmons

¹² Allen Dwight Callahan, *The Talking Book: African Americans and the Bible* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006).

¹³ Cleophus J. LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 1999).

considers it to be watered-down whether it is the topical preaching done at Easter, Christmas or Thanksgiving. When the focus is on personal concerns such as grief, illness loneliness, marriage, divorce, mental illness, when one is addressing behaviors such as shame, jealousy depression or fear, or when one is preaching on pastoral themes.¹⁴

Simmons offers the mechanics of sermon preparation for the preachers whose context is predominantly African American, though her ideas and suggestions apply to any setting. The important thing is for the preacher to prepare to preach. Simmons argues that preachers should be well read, and sermons should be portable and fitting.¹⁵

Reading is beneficial, and Simmons purports that understanding genres is vital to preaching and creating effective sermons. There are many different genres, poems, drama, simile, narrative, and metaphor, to name a few. Simmons contends that the power of all genres lies in the combination of simplified, parallel meaning and personal identification with, or entry into, the action and meaning of the genre. When the preacher avails his or herself to the vast array of thoughts in varying genres, he or she is doing the necessary work for presenting an effective sermon.

The portability of sermons is the understanding that the sermon is distributable. Simmons states that a portable sermon is able to operate effectively in most venues where the word of God is proclaimed. She also states that a portable sermon must be fitting. A fitting sermon, as defined by the author, is a sermon, is a sermon where the

¹⁴ Martha J. Simmons and Frank A. Thomas, *Preaching with Sacred Fire: An Anthology of African American Sermons, 1750 to The Present* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010).

¹⁵ Ibid.

Word of the Lord is the right word in the right form and style, for a people at a point in history.¹⁶

Simmons shares that there is no shortcut to focused preaching. She lays out several elements that will help a sermon to have a focus, such as developing good writing skills, developing a clear behavioral focus, identifying the claim of a text, having a communal factor (call and response) and incorporating technology.

Another element of African American preaching which is discussed in detail by Simmons, is the art of “whooping.” Whooping is unique to the African American sermon presentation. Simmons shares Charles Adams definition of whooping to be, “That very thin line between singing and preaching which boldly illustrates the Black American slave preacher’s practice of a form of proclamation that transformed declarative and didactic speech into dramatic celebratory song. That is what the Black preacher’s whoop is all about.” Though whooping is a reputable element of African American sermon presentation, Simmons points out that it has a transition of a cadence that shows the movements of sermons and less of a ‘whoop’ which was mostly used in the past to bring the crowd to a frenzy or shout.¹⁷

Finally, an element of African American preaching that is widely accepted to be the crux of all sermons presentations, is the celebratory period. Every sermon presented must have a word, an idea, or a thought which allows the participant to be joyful. It is the part of the sermon in which the listener can take with them as a gift, an expression of joy for the days ahead. It is the descending of the Spirit and connecting with the spirit of the

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

listener. It is a reason to continue in the faith journey. In *They Like to Never Quit Praising God*, Frank A. Thomas defines celebration as the culmination of the sermonic design, where a moment is created in which the remembrance of a redemptive past and/or the conviction of a liberated future transforms the events immediately experienced.¹⁸

Author William Dargan explains the unique components that generally depict worship in the African worship experience. He describes them in his book *Lining out the Word: Dr. Watts Hymn Singing in the music of African Americans*, as (1) An emphasis on charisma, or gifts of the spirit, and believes that dancing in the spirit or speaking out, along with other signs, can give evidence of God's presence during worshipers. In a more general sense, (2) there is an openness to subjective or intuitive perceptions and a corresponding lack of insistence upon deductive reasoning or objective conclusions. Nevertheless, (3) such inductive learning must prove itself beneficial in the practical world of personal and social experience. And (4) because the direction of communication in such worship settings is circular rather than linear, and its meaning process-oriented rather than static, clock time is deemphasized if participants believe that God is working or manifesting himself in the worship service.¹⁹

In creating authentic worship, the African American pulpit must subscribe to the ideas mentioned in *Black Church Studies: An Introduction*, when nurture takes place through the repetitive or ritualized honor that is the given content of human stories. Christian nurture in the Black Church means that the human story is necessarily linked to

¹⁸ Frank A. Thomas, *They Like to Never Quit Praising God: The Role of Celebration in Preaching* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2013).

¹⁹ William T. Dargan and Isaac Watts, *Lining out the Word: Dr. Watts Hymn Singing in the Music of Black Americans* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

the Story of God shown in Jesus Christ, contained in Scripture, as well as the story of post-biblical exemplars of the Christian faith.²⁰

Floyd-Thomas continues the nurturing idea of the Black Church by discussing God's story as a resource and highlights that the sermon presents God revealed as the God of history and as the God who is concerned about and involved in history.²¹

Additionally, she states God's story as central to a Theology of Worship and nurture. Here she points out that there is an acknowledgment of a relationship between humans and the divine. And the nature of that relationship centers on the storied understanding that God cares for people and that God's story is a story of presence in the wilderness of life including action to defeat the powers of evil, oppression, and suffering.²²

The impact of God's story is explained as the drawing of individuals into the unfolding story of God in order for transformation to take place. The purpose is to shape people's attitudes, behaviors, intention and dispositions in order that they have an increased ability to act on God's desire for their well-being and the well-being of others.²³

Another aspect of story in the nurturing of black worship is addressed by Floyd-Thomas in *Post-Biblical Christian Faith Heritage Stories*. It is in these stories that the worshippers are exposed to the difficult journeys of their forbearers, and are filled with

²⁰ Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, *Black Church Studies: An Introduction* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007).

²¹ *Ibid.*, 187.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

the tenacity of faith and hope. Use of these stories in worship conveys that it is possible to continue with faith and to lead others in the direction of hope.²⁴

Lastly, Floyd-Thomas records that the black church serves as nurturer due to the impact of the Christian faith heritage story with hopes that the worshipper can glean an ethical stance from the stories. Floyd-Thomas writes that worshippers receive from these stories wise ways of thinking and acting that are used in the past, as well as being useful in the present and the future.²⁵

The concept of the church utilizing story to nurture worshippers can be supported by widely accepted personal experiences. Countless children learned the stories of the bible in Sunday School lessons over the years. Stories were told of David and Goliath, The Three Hebrew Boys in the Fiery Furnace, The Shunamite Woman and the Prophet, and The Prophet Elisha versus The Prophets of Baal. Personal stories also conveyed the power of God. In addition, stories of a neighbor who was sick, and the church prayed, and they got well, or a son or a daughter on drugs, and they came back to the Lord and lived clean and sober for the rest of their days. These stories were absolutely a source of nurturing and building of faith.

Stories of the Motherland were not always told. Sometimes there were the lyrics to songs. In her book *African American Folk Healing*, Stephanie Mitchem writes that through music black people created songs that used African rhythms to communicate their ideas. These songs translated into original American music styles, from blues to

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 191.

Jazz.²⁶ And from the fields into the factories in the north as America progressed, these songs became work songs.²⁷ Words to the hymns of the church served as nurturing to the lives of many worshipers.

Engaging the Congregation with Song

The nurturing sounds of singing created a place of solace and hope for generations of African American worshipers. The combination of those elements of sacred singing, paired with the heartfelt expression of preaching, created a dynamic in the African worship experience that continues to this day.

Author Emmet Price III, author of *The Yale Journal of Music and Homelitics* article, reports findings are supported by scholars and researchers of African American worship. Though the parting of ways may occur on a few dynamics, it is a consensus that preaching and singing go together like preaching and praying. Whether the preacher leads forth in singing or is precluded by a praise team, soloist or the congregational hymn, the singing or praise of the Lord in the song is a staple in the making of an African American worship service.

The focal point of this segment of the dissertation is how the preaching in the African American pulpit is supported or enhanced by the singing of the preacher alone and or with the congregation. Price writes that singing, and preaching has inspired life-changing transformation. These mediums are used to draw nearer to God as well as to correct, convict, and cajole. Pointing out that singing and preaching are God facing

²⁶ Stephanie Mitchem, *African American Folk Healing* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), accessed December 5, 2017, ProQuest Ebook Central.

²⁷ Ibid.

communicative agents for a person-to-person or person-to-people connection. Both singing, and preaching are interactive, participatory activities that are only as functional as the engagement of the initiator and participants. Price argues that in ministry everyone is fully engaged in some manner to feel or to receive the transformative power of the gospel in their lives. He concludes that this renders the recipients and the participants the singing and the preaching agents of their own transformation.²⁸ Price captures brilliantly the essence of what singing does for preaching and vice versa. He conveys the message that songs and sermons are created by people who are concerned enough about other people, and society in general, to share a message based on their own values, morals, and knowledge and beliefs through divine inspiration. These songs often have an implied narrative or the main idea using both sound and text. The song or sermon planned or improvised, Price states, is the work of the homileticians or musicologist, and comes through as he or she develops and constructs the work while analyzing its effectiveness and understanding how closely related are the mediums of singing and preaching.²⁹

And it is in the Black pulpit that we see these practiced and perfection of these two mediums in singing and preaching. Price argues that song and sermon are both based in the oral tradition of telling a story with a beginning, middle, and end. He states that within the black experience, singing has always served as the bloodline while preaching has served the heartbeat.³⁰

²⁸ Emmett G. Price, "Singing the Sermon: Where Musicology Meets Homiletics," *Yale Journal of Music & Religion* 1, no. 2 (2015): 49–66.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 58.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 60. During the seventeenth century, displaced children of God, robbed from their ancestral homeland, sang spiritual moans, sanctified groans, charismatic shouts, and jubilant hollers. From the African Continent through South America, Central America and the Caribbean, the sounds of trauma, oppression, and heartache were met with a temporal hope that, although not immediate, was eternal. The

He reports the research of in detail explaining how the combination came together to begin what is continually known as a staple in the black church. The combination of great biblically based singing and theologically sound preaching out of a struggle is referred to as the “invisible institution.” From the “invisible institution” came forth the very visible congregations of Black Baptist, Methodists, Catholics, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Pentecostals and numerous other denominational expressions of the Black Christian Experience.³¹

In the African American Church, the limitations of this dissertation student’s experience has been mainly in the Protestant tradition, there is an expectation that singing is to be a major element of the worship service. The hearts and minds of the worshippers gather with one purpose, and that is to sing praises to God. The tradition is based on the biblical examples of the children of Israel as they traveled up Mt. Zion, singing on their upward journey. Another reference is when Jesus and his disciples completed the Passover meal the Scripture writer, Luke records that after they finished the meal, they sang a hymn and went out into the Mount of Olives.

African American Church is where singing precedes or is conducted after preaching. The expectation of the tradition in the worship service as well as a bible study lesson, that a song would be sung before the preacher presents the word. These songs were called spirituals. Author Laurie Ramey writes a recollection of the poet Paul Louis Dunbar and his refusal to call them spirituals but by their true name “slave songs”. It was the poetry of the slaves and the tones they sang as they spoke to each other, and the God

singing and preaching of these enslaved Black folks not only saved their lives but activated and invisible institution that would save the lives of many generation to come.

³¹ Ibid., 60.

speaking of their plight in this oppressive land of America. The artful musicality of the slave songs language and structures justify their classification as lyric poetry, rather than folk ditties or versified bible lessons, as they have generally been called.

She also writes that Fredrick Douglas concerning the “slave song or spiritual, was one of the first and most articulate voices to address the misapprehensions of slave songs by the dominant culture. He stated in his autobiography that singing did not denote the slave’s universal happiness, and it was a grievous error to make that assumption. Their “wild songs” showed “at once” the highest joy and the deepest sadness...Slave songs were critically received with perplexity and contradictions: they were called American but not American, authentic black songs but poor imitations of white culture, naïve yet cunning, hauntingly sad, but also cheerfully uplifting.³²

These songs traversed with the freed slaves right into the church. The preacher at any given service would sing one of these spirituals and the congregation would somehow, no matter what church you were in, would know the lines to sing. Thomas Dorsey is famous for recording how a leader in the church would throw out a line, and the church would catch it in a call and response fashion (this is explained in detail in chapter two of this dissertation).

From generation to generation, like the children of Israel, the black church would teach these songs to their children by keeping them close as they sang in the field, or later as freed individuals when they kept them near while they worked for their meager fare. These songs would help ease the pain of their suffering, and as time progressed and the

³² Thompson.

civil rights movement achieved the monumental success of equality that was never seen before, the songs became the song of jubilee.

The jubilee was not geared toward the country that had changed laws to end Jim Crow and or segregation but the God who delivered them from the past offensives of the country. Preaching and singing continue to be an intricate part of worship in the African American church to this day. Singing will always be a part of the worship experience in the black church.

Engaging the Congregation with Scripture

Psalm 100 is a familiar Psalm that is read or recited and engages the congregation at the onset.

*Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands.
 Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing.
 Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we
 ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.
 Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful
 unto him, and bless his name.
 For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all
 generations.³³*

The church was filled, and the choir had finished the morning hymn. The preacher, a short man in stature, approaches the pulpit with the bible in his hand. He is holding the bible open and is looking in it. He holds it with one hand, for he chooses to keep his other hand free to wipe tears from his eyes.

The people are seated. With their eye on him, they wait for the first word. The preacher begins. "Make... a joyful... noise to the Lord... it is at that point that the people begin to shout. The reading of the Scripture imbues a response of jubilation just upon

³³ Psalm 100

hearing that the command to make a joyful noise has been given. The reason for doing so has not yet be spoken.

The entirety of the scripture is read. As the preacher reads each verse the people shout, clap and moan. The words from the Holy Bible are connecting with the hearts of the people in a way that can only be explained by people who need a reminder.

A reminder to know that whatever you have been going through this week, and whatever you are about to face, you need to hear this word from the Holy Book. Hearing and believing that the Lord has made us, and we are his is enough to bring excitement to the mind of any congregant. The difference in hearing this read in the African American church is the people are free to respond outwardly to what they are hearing.

The preacher is only reading the Scripture. There has been no exegesis, no introduction, only the word of God being read. And the response of those who know this word and have some idea of who God is and what he can do respond in kind.

The African American pulpit has continued the tradition of responding in the way of their ancestors when hearing and understanding that the word of God was written for all who would believe it. And to this day the people of the African diaspora continue to respond in righteous celebration upon hearing the word of God.

In training newly licensed and ordained ministers, Dr. Marcus D. Cosby emphasizes tith the correct reading of the Scriptures being vital to the sermon presentation. The Scriptures are to be read with clarity. The Scriptures are to be read with emphasis. The Scriptures are to be read with authority. The main point is the Scriptures are full of power in and of themselves.

In the African American worship service, the preacher understands that the congregation is gathering to hear a “word” from the Lord. It is the word of God that the listeners gathered believe can address their needs. The preacher understands that the audience can be engaged in the sermon from the reading of the first word of Scripture.

This tradition of engaging the congregation with the Scriptures begins not only at the beginning of the sermon but is also the procedure many African American preachers use to give initial greetings to a waiting congregation. Upon dawning the pulpit and or taking the stand, the preacher contextualizes the fact that the people are not only there to hear him or her preach, but they are there to ultimately hear from the Lord.

The Call and Response

It is tradition for a visiting preacher to begin his sermon with polite words to the pastor thanking him or her for the invitation to preach and ending this introductory period with a reading of the text from which he or she will preach. At the beginning of the Scripture reading the people stand, for the tradition is to stand when the Scriptures are read. This tradition is a biblical model taken from the Old Testament when the psalmist would read and direct the children of Israel to respond. It is notably found in Psalm 124 and Psalm 118.

The African American pulpit draws its strength not only from the God that is preached, but also from the heritage from which the preacher has come. The call and response dynamic are a powerful element in the presentation of the gospel. The preacher has the benefit of the listener responding in “real time” to the message that is being preached. An example is the preacher may say the words “Praise the Lord, Saints” and the people in the church will respond with the same words “Praise the Lord!”

This call and response element can bring excitement to the worship experience, and it can provide immediate feedback to the preacher preaching the message. If the message is clear, consistent with the Scriptures and appropriate for the occasion, one might hear responses that include: “Amen”, “That’s right!”, or “Preach Preacher!”. On the other hand, if the preacher is struggling to be clear and is not keeping his or her words in line with the Scriptures the call and response continues, and one might hear responses such as: “Alright”, “Help Him Lord”, “Come Holy Spirit”. In the call-and-response tradition the preacher will receive feedback letting him or her know if the people are engaged in the message that is being preached. The last response that a preacher who is off topic and out of line with the Scripture might hear is a response including the hollow sound of shoes connecting with the floor as the people begin to leave during the sermon.

The Whoop

“Ohhh Looord”, “Aint He Alright?”, “Good God a’Mighty”, “Won’t He open doors for you?”, “Won’t He make a way for you?”, “Won’t He?”, “He Will! He Will!”, “Say Yeah!”

A way that is unique to African Americans and some preachers in the Appalachian Mountains of engaging the audience is by whooping. Whooping is a sing-song way of talking that keeps a rhythm and tone that is usually in a specific musical range. If a preacher is a singer he or she has probably had an opportunity to use this technique to engage an audience.

It rises from the call and response of the audience. It is usually evident in the celebratory segment of the message. It occurs when the preacher presents the words he or she is saying in a tonal pattern and follows a cadence. The preaching goes forward like a dance. The preacher will say a phrase and the audience respond in kind. The element of

the ‘whoop’ that is so successful, to say the least an incredible feat, is that as the preacher uses this sing-songy way of speaking and delivering the message and the audience hears every word and can follow and understand. In addition to the people being engaged through this method of preaching the musicians in the church find a way to accompany the speaker playing musical chords intermittently during the preaching, enhancing the ‘whoop’ further. This phenomenon was brought over with the Africans of West Africa from the sounds of tribal chants and dances. It is an element that arises out of pure instinct and is a unique way of connecting with the listener achieving the goal of the message. (This dissertation provides more detail of this component of the African American style of worship in Chapter 2.)

CHAPTER 4: THE IDEA OF IMAGE IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN CHURCH

Sitting in the pews, one can feel the silence. As you sit there in the sacred space alone observing the walls, the windows, the lights, the pulpit, the Communion table, and choir loft, where does your mind go? What are your thoughts? How do you get in touch with the divine in this divine space? What components need to be added for the connection to be real? Authentic?

In the Protestant Church, there is a void of image. Many churches have gone the way of the iconoclasts (those who oppose image in the church) for it borders too closely on breaking the law of the Ten Commandments. Some have found a way to keep the tradition by mimicking the Catholic Church. These congregations have sought to reintroduce the idea of image into the church by way of stained glass windows, a picture of Christ suspended over the baptism pool, a painting, or wood sculpting of the cross.

Does the presence of image aid in a sincere, more reverent worship of God? Or does the absence of image diminish worship to a self-centered, less sincere worship experience? In this section of the dissertation, the focus is the idea of image. The aim is to explore a brief history of image, then take an in-depth look at what image looks like in the African American worship experience. The ideas of image have changed along with the places one might find image that inspire individuals to worship.

The History of Images

The use of image in worship is exciting and new to many congregations. Using image via technology or frescos aids in the comprehensive experience of worship for many individuals. Whether a worship center used the frescoes of the ancient cathedrals

and churches of the past or the pixel perfect displays on high definition projector screens of today, image plays an important role in providing visual stimuli for the attendees to experience worship on a deeper level.

However, the Protestant African American church seems to be void of the frescos, and many see the media (computer, projector, and screen) as an unnecessary element for enhancing the messages of the sermon presentation outside of listing the three exegetical points of the pastor's sermon.

The EPIC (Experiential, Participatory, Image Rich and Connective) sermon presentation focuses on the careful exegesis of narraphors along with an image-rich presentation of the text and a possible soundtrack. The goal is to position the listener to experience the story, the text. It is hoped they will remember the story by seeing themselves in the story. The narraphors and the soundtrack support the preaching of the story. Reaching the next generation of worshippers will require preachers who will embrace the idea of an EPIC worship experience will no doubt see tremendous growth in their churches. At this point of the research, there is a focus on how images painted, or projected, aide in the meaningful experience of the African American worship service.

Image in the church dates back to the early Christians. In the early days of the church the goal was on a mission to educate Gentile believers and by the third-century images made of both mosaic and frescoes were the instructional tools chosen by the Catholic Church. Pope Gregory made two claims for the value of painting for the church: Pictures are a form of text recording the experience of those who witnessed the biblical

event and those of the saints; Like written texts, pictures can be read and studied didactic images are an important means for teaching Christian doctrine and for conversion.¹

The prominent picture of a white man donned the walls of most religious adult's homes. It was this picture that presented a likeness of the savior of the world that was nailed to the wall of every home, almost as secure as Jesus was nailed to the cross. No one ever asked who was this man or why his picture was prominent in the homes of people everywhere. This picture was mass produced and given to soldiers in WWII and made its way around the world. Everyone was venerating this idea of a savior who looks peaceful and accepting. The picture was the oil canvas painting titled "The Head of Christ," by Warner Sallman, 1940.²

In his book, *Visual Piety*, David Morgan points out that images produce the social constructs of our society. He studies how the religious images that people have in their homes serve as forms of religious piety to support and even supplant their religious beliefs. Morgan presents the notion that the images people take home with them that represent their faith have more influence than those which they behold on the walls and screens of sanctuaries. This, he deems as visual piety.³

But what about the beginnings of the image in the worship place? When and why did the images we reverence become a part of the landscape of religious thought? How effective was the idea of using image in encouraging the faith of the worshipper?

¹ Jules Lubbock, *Storytelling in Christian art from Giotto to Donatello* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006).

² David Morgan, *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images* (Berkeley: University California Press, 1998).

³ Ibid.

Images in the church cannot be mentioned without discussing the subject of iconophiles versus iconoclast. It was the iconoclasts who felt that the worship of the image of the saints, the apostles, and deity took the form of idolatry thus ridding the church of many if not all her images. This controversy dates back to the times of the Patristics around the years of the Seventh Ecumenical Council. Ambrosios Giakalis records the beginning of the veneration of iconoclasm is associated with the life and death of a *geron*, a holy man. It was around the fourth century that this lone ascetic was known to go around healing and forgiving the sins of the people. He was said to be a living icon of God's, and after his death, his image was put up to perpetuate his presence. The controversy grew due to the argument of which things were deemed to have housed the holy. The political powers were drawn into the debate as clergy often had the ear of those in power, and some politicians were against a member of the church. What was deemed holy? Was it the person or the items deemed sacred by the clergy? Arguing, fighting, and death ensued for years as the iconoclast versus the iconophiles debated over the veneration of icons and their place in the sacred act of worship.⁴

The Catholic Church, as well as the Orthodox Church, continue to have images of the saints prominently displayed in their sanctuaries as a substantial part of their worship experience. Protestant churches conformed to a practice of not having any iconic images present, save the savior on the cross or a picture near or above the baptism pool.

Joseph Leo Koerner, captures the essence of how art (image) was viewed as a result of the Reformation. He begins his focus on the impact of image in the church after Luther nails his ninety-five theses to the door of the Catholic church by focusing on

⁴ Ambrosios Giakalis, *Images of the Divine: The Theology of Icons at the Seventh Ecumenical Council* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1994).

Luther's altar table executed by Schweinfurt in the 1590's. The painting was completed as a remembrance of Christ's memorial meal and it appears bristling with quotations and thronged by saints, ministers and believers.⁵ Memorialized, the altar becomes an apotheosis of explanation that eclipses what is explained.⁶

Koerner highlights this canvas as well as others that were completed well before the Schweinfurt, such as painter Lucas Cranach's alter piece. He declares that the Cranach piece, by placing on the altar pictures of the acts and objects that make the church visible offers an exemplary, manifest routine for invisible personal conviction, though the Schweinfurt carries this process forward.⁷

As time progressed these and other iconic paintings served as educational tools to educate the laity in the newly reformed church. The images were used in the church and used by the government. In 1630 Johann Dürer produced a much-copied engraving of the Schweinfurt scheme to influence artists. He continues that publication like Dürer's instructed Lutherans on their Scriptural and historical foundations.

⁵ Joseph Leo Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image* (London: Reaktion Books, 2010), accessed December 17, 2017, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 19. Luther's Altar: Communion is taken by the laity in both elements, the bread and the wine. The images and texts located behind the altar table in the space usually held by a retable altar piece, affirm that these elements are, in Luther's terms real signs: not mere signals for something else but the designated things itself. A curved trace of red paint, labeled the blood of Jesus Christ, connects the side wound of the crucified Christ to the chalice on the table. As schematic as a diagram, but insistent that Christ is corporeally present in the Mass this line disrupts an otherwise factual scene of an everyday Lutheran church service in 1590 as does the doctrinally motivated 'water' forking off from Christ's wound and reaching around to baptizes an infant farther back. Likewise, St. Paul and the synoptics, Matthew, Mark and Luke, personify the basis of the altar Sacrament in Scripture. Displaying a placard with Bible verses of Christ's institution of the Mass, they too appear in flesh and blood within the contemporary service. Like figments of a sculptured table come alive, these gesturing pedagogues deaden the facts before them, the real individuals frozen in attendance, their different faces regularly spaced.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

Though the church began to use icons more and more through the paintings of the confession, Koerner spends a great deal of time speaking about how Reformation art began to deteriorate. He writes that the great flowering of the visual arts in northern Europe around 1500 ended in oblivion leaving more works ruined than survived. Also in the church, due to some radical reformers, he stated that they felt faith's renovation required the destruction of images. Church pictures were accused of inciting idolatry and breaking the biblical law against graven images and ignoring the early Christian martyr's repudiation of pagan effigies. The very presence of paintings and statues in spaces of worship constituted for iconoclast's positive proof of the need for reform.⁸

During the colonial period, William Taylor shares in his book, that religious images carried meaning in official and unofficial ways, and the notion was held that they could come alive was prominent.⁹ This argument further supports that image was more than an idea to have parishioners to relish the thought of a saints or deity, but these images serve to receive from or send to a messenger. Taylor further writes that presence is imminence and that presence was God's will, and further signifies that some images were seen as a bridge to the sacred creating feelings of contrition so great that believers would briefly be admitted in the presence of God.¹⁰

Leonard Sweet, the distinguished professor at George Fox Seminary, has instilled into the "Preach the Story" cohort the need to have the "experience" of worship and bring that to our parishioners through multiple avenues utilizing all the senses. Taylor

⁸ Ibid., 27.

⁹ William B. Taylor, *Shrines and Miraculous Images: Religious Life in Mexico Before the Reforma* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2010).

¹⁰ Ibid.

highlights that the South Asian practice of *darsan* carried the identical idea; that Christian doctrine and ecclesiastical practices like that “seeing” the god means more than visibility but beholding and taking the image in...being held by that presence with sight, sound, smell, touch, and gesture all in play.¹¹ Where do we go from here? How do we continue the holy reference of images in our churches today?

Modern Day Images

Where do we go to see images that invoke emotions in us? The lure of the silver screen has captured a younger generation that has grown up in the age of television and film, but there is still a handful of individuals who see the beauty of and find inspiration in the visual arts.

Many individuals who consider themselves to be spiritual will find that mystic connection of early church paintings of saints while others will be inspired and moved by the work of contemporary art.

Researching image included visiting the Dallas Museum of Art and witnessing the contemporary works of Lucy Stahl. Intrigued by her subject matter, she captured the likeness of everyday objects and conflated the images using a scanner. It was important to observe her art and the response of individuals to her work. Stahl states of her work, though she works in advertisement she perceives the branding process as flattening space. She goes on to say, “Desires and needs are conflated. Deeply personal stories of

¹¹ Ibid.

overcoming obstacles are mixed with the smell and feel of a chip crunch, and twisted into an image.”¹²

Continuing to research the additional value of images in worship, the focus this dissertation turned to image’s inclusion in the African American pulpit. Though the history of the first churches beginning in the deserts of Africa, to the European Protestant sector, the mainstream the African American pulpit did not hold the icons or images of the church in high esteem. There is little to no reference to any icons of saints for this dissertation student. However, in a brief study in a class on the study of the Patristics, there was exposure to the worship or veneration of the saints of the church. This practice was widely held by the Orthodox, Coptic, and Catholic Church of the Christian faith.

In 2006, the New York Times reported the story of a partnership of a Greek Orthodox Monk and his group working together to bring the icons of St. Peter from Mt. Carmel in the desert of Cairo, Egypt to the J. Paul Getty’s Museum in Los Angeles, California in an exhibit titled, “Holy Image Hallowed Ground: Icons from Sinai”. The lengths at which the monks were willing to go, the level of clearance that was needed to secure their safe passage, and the preparation of the museum including building plexiglass boxes to house the icons, show the value of these sacred pieces of history. In his article, Jori Finkel claims that as they were preparing to bring the icons to the States, two workers helping in Cairo, who looked only on the proofs of pictures of the icon, would lift them and kiss them. The Orthodox monks and the curator expressed an expectation of the exhibitors to begin to engage in prayer and display extremely spiritual

¹² “Dallas Museum of Art,” *Concentrations 60: Lucie Stahl*, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://www.e-flux.com/announcements/57919/concentrations-60-lucie-stahl>.

emotions. This trip to the museum would be St. Peter's first time out of the Holy Monastery of St. Catherine's in Cairo, Egypt."¹³

The Presence of Images in Church

The research on Image led to a field experience observing a Catholic Church. In this tradition of faith, one finds a denomination presently practicing the idea of iconoclasm.

At Holy Family Catholic Church in Missouri City, Texas you will find small plaques with three-dimensional figures depicting Jesus walking up to Golgotha. The chapel is behind the pulpit area, divided by a glass window, and at the back of the chapel is a huge stained-glass window that shines throughout the sanctuary reflecting the light of the sun. The images depicted on the stained glass are the chalice, the Bible, the cross and the Fleur De' Lis. Thousands of mosaic tiles of rich hues of painted glass are joined together to bring forth an array of beauty that sets the tone for worship in the wooden sanctuary. The parishioners participate in a devout and reverent worship hour led by a Catholic priest of Hispanic descent. The priest mentions the blessed mother Mary, the mother of Jesus, a saint in the Catholic Church, during the prayer time. Worshipers also have an opportunity to bless themselves with holy water and light a candle stand holding multiple candles in the chapel.

The icons are present in the sanctuary, on the wall, and on the stained glass, but it seems that they are merely decorations and not used as a focus of worship or prayer in this present state. The church today may still hold the idea of icons in high esteem, and

¹³ Jori Finkel, "After 15 Centuries, St. Peter Finally Leaves Home," *The New York Times*, November 12, 2006.

some Protestant churches tend to have stained glass in the sanctuary. The focus of this field research was to observe to what extent the inclusion of images via icon or stained glass influences the worship experience.

One could also argue the presence of image in the church is no longer the savior but the messengers. When in a mega church, you see the pastor and the praise team and then their image is also on the 200ft screen. Does this bespeak of an icon in the person of the pastor and the leaders? Are the people who are coming to worship satisfied if they worship God and the screens aren't working that Sunday? Does it say that people are worshipping wrongly, when they are more concerned about seeing the pastor than with seeing Jesus or even our neighbor?

The Absence of Image in the African American Church

This field research for this dissertation provided insight on the issue of the absence of icons in the Protestant African American Church. The *Ashe to Amen Exhibit* provided me with the substantial examples of imagery. The artist, creating images from their own inspiration, and thus became the icons of the religious experience. The pieces allow the artist to tell the story of their African roots. Dr. King-Hammond mentioned that the Bible is what gave the Africans meaning to survive the most horrendous situations.¹⁴

The exhibit featured many African artists expresses the deep work of their experience. The artist were such names such as Romare Bearden, Sister Gertrude Morgan, Henry Ossawa Tanner and more. The exhibit was heralded as a great tribute to the black church's call and response tradition.¹⁵

¹⁴ "Dallas Museum of Art."

¹⁵ Ibid.

The exhibit included William H. Johnson's work, *Jesus and the three Mary's*, which tells the story of Jesus, but also depicts the era in American History where lynching is practiced, bringing the black liberation experience front and center, writes reviewer Chris Herlinger.¹⁶

The task of finding icons in the Protestant African American Church at times seemed daunting. In finding and reading about Dr. King-Hammonds exhibit one might be able to see how people connect to the icons that speak in a spiritual dynamic that is connected to God, though it is outside the walls of the church. It is through the work of these artists that one might find icons in the protestant African American experience.

The images that are found in the African American Churches today were included in the worship service during special occasions. A congregation may display African art during the celebration of black history. If the church is a historical church with roots reaching back to slavery, their display of artifacts and icons might be present at all times.

In the Protestant, African American church there is an interesting phenomenon. Because of our recent history of being brought to the states on slave ships one might have the pleasure to meet the direct blood relative of a slave who was a charter member of a congregation. This person can serve as a curator as they tell the stories that have been passed down from generation to generation, explaining about particular artifacts and icons in the church.

¹⁶ Joy R. Bostic, "Review of *Ashe to Amen: African Americans and Biblical Imagery*," *Souls* 16, no. 1-2 (2014).

The African American Spiritual Art Work

Beyond the work of Dr. King-Hammond the idea of icons turns into the trendy popular art. Many African Americans have replaced the head of Christ portrait of WWII with more culturally relevant art. You may even find the head of Christ portrait darkened to a brown skinned individual representing the African American race.

Additionally, African Americans begin collecting items and trinkets that represent their faith. One may find an angel or a doll that is dark skinned and position it strategically in the home. These new icons are sold in stores that sell African Art and native dress. The angels, pictures of dancers, ladies with fans, choirs singing, and preachers with praying hands and clutched bibles have become the representation of what is sacred to them. Each item symbolizes a facet of the African American worship service. The artists who paint these portraits and produces them as prints include well-known artists such as Tony Marshall, the late Jonathan Biggers, and up and coming performance artist Ange Hall. These items never reach the level of veneration as in the Catholic or Orthodox church. They serve in the space of souvenirs one might bring back from a vacation.

The question that can be asked of owners of these new icons is how do you interact with them? It is known that a devout Catholic would not merely have rosary bead or a crucifix, but the items would be used in prayer or as a focus of prayer. Many believers have personal items blessed by the Pope or a bishop and then use the new item as an object or image of worship.

The African American art is not just religious, but culturally relevant. The pictures of black families and church members are designed to inspire. The theme of

many of these pictures and paintings are meant to show the struggle of the past, and serve as an inspiration as well as the overcoming of difficulties.

The appreciation for this cultural artwork has also been embraced by the Holiday Card Company taking these items mainstream and giving the artist an opportunity to increase their income, and the consumer more and cultural options to purchase. Hallmark Company released its “Mahogany” Card line giving African American artist and consumers an additional outlet for displaying image in the community.¹⁷

Though African American secular and spiritual artwork may not be venerated by some, the community has an out for expressing themselves and paying homage to its heritage by supporting young artists who see this as a way to connect with the creator.

Sacred Space

*There's a sweet, sweet Spirit in this place,
And I know that it's the Spirit of the Lord;
There are sweet expressions on each face,
And I know they feel the presence of the Lord.*

Chorus

*Sweet Holy Spirit, Sweet heavenly Dove,
Stay right here with us, filling us with Your love.
And for these blessings we lift our hearts in praise;
Without a doubt, we'll know that we have been revived,
When we shall leave this place.¹⁸*

¹⁷ “Hallmark Mahogany,” Hallmark Corporate, accessed December 10, 2017, <https://corporate.hallmark.com/hallmark-news/greetings/mahogany/>. Mahogany is a personal expression brand that provides an authentic and engaging experience for African Americans and those inspired by African American culture. The card line exists to enhance emotional connections between family, friends and the community by capturing what’s most beloved and valued about African American culture. Hallmark has been creating cards that speak to African American culture since the 1960s. The company first introduced the Mahogany name in 1987 as a 16-card promotion. Mahogany became a year-round brand offering both every day and seasonal cards in 1991. Through the years, Mahogany has collaborated with well-known African Americans such as Jill Scott, Maya Angelou, T.D. Jakes and Iyanla Vanzant. The brand also partnered with the U.S. Postal Service in 1999 to celebrate the accomplishments of African Americans in history through the Legacy of Greatness cards that coordinated with the collectible postage stamps of the same name.

¹⁸ Doris Akers, “Sweet, Sweet Spirit Lyrics,” Doris Akers - Sweet, Sweet Spirit lyrics, <https://www.lyriczz.com/lyrics/doris-akers/167388-sweet,-sweet-spirit>.

Another aspect imagery in worship could be sacred space. The designs of the new worship centers are trending on the side of magnificent. With every new mega-church building being erected some would argue that the space is becoming less sacred.

There are those who remember the church grounds and the church building itself to be a space that was held in great reverence. The grounds were always manicured, and the yard was kept by a deacon at the church, exemplifying the ministry of service. Kids were not allowed to run and play near the church for that was God's house. Towards my college years, the megachurch introduced children's church and space where young kids could learn about God on their own level. The training fell by the wayside for parents who once kept their children with them in worship were now relieved from their duty (so to speak) of teaching their children about the sacredness of the space.

In his book, *Sacred Spaces*, Graham Howes American specialist in Islamic Art and architecture, suggests that religious architect functions on three levels, the communitarian, the didactic, and the experiential, suggesting that taken together the levels encompass the meaning and message communicated by the sum of the buildings formal qualities. He goes on to share Renard's thoughts on the idea that religious building communicates five aspects of a religious community's fundamentals: ritual practice, cosmology, sense of liturgical time, view of community history and, the notion of correspondence between microcosm and macrocosm. Finally supporting the idea of sacred space being an avenue to worship and interact with the sacredness of images. Graham discusses Renard's argument that elements of the built environment can evoke tense emotions, and a wide range of these experiential intangibles can be invoked through

the manipulation of formal characteristics such as line, space, mass, surface, color, proportion, movement rhythm, and light.¹⁹

The argument for the sacred space and the megachurch building may be at odds today. The quest to create a sacred space that will allow the believer to have an emotion connected to a place of worship is one that should be well thought out. The challenge becomes, how does one build a place so worship that is sacred and architecturally sound to evoke emotion, and at the same time functional to house the technology that keeps that place of worship operating at peak performance to reach its global audience. What is the argument for the church who finds solace and sacred space in an abandoned feed house?

Efforts in Bringing Images Back

As church leaders and senior pastors make efforts to design authentic worship services, the challenge is presenting the best sermon in the best atmosphere. The African American pulpit has a history of being successful in the evolution of developing church bodies from garages, living rooms, storefronts, and street corners. The individual coming to hear the gospel forgives the lack of lighting, seating, air condition and space. It is the spirit that they continue to be drawn to.

In the effort to bring image and icons into the worship setting, the Protestant African American church may only bring in the icons from the history of its people. The sacredness of the characters in the bible remains, though the need to venerate them and display them in the worship center is not accepted in many places.

¹⁹ Graham Howes, *The Art of the Sacred: An Introduction to the Aesthetics of Art and Belief* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007).

The new edifices being erected today are places that are million-dollar designs with all the elements that would rival any other cultures architectural design. The sacred space will always be the very best one could give God.

With the increase in technology, and the cloud technology churches are now using screens and video to bring images into the worship service. The electronics, the slides, which utilize scene scrolling throughout and set to music and stage lighting are the mechanisms used to bring in images and, though they are manufactured, they seem to do the trick to gain the focus of the congregation. The question that comes to mind is how are people seeing Jesus in all the lights and smoke that comes from a Hollywood style of worship? It is yet to be seen if the African American Church will follow the lead of the predominant society into this realm digital imaging sustaining worship.

With the church erecting, what Renard would call museums, the secular still draws a religious aspect to its museums and halls because of the connection people with the icons and artifacts displayed. Each week pastors try to create a sacred space and bring the listeners into a reverent experience with the creator of the Universe and the art world seems to be enhancing and contributing to the worship experience.

To what extent is the pastor responsible for helping each member connect with the Creator? If we are all priest, and have the spirit of the living God within us, should not the beauty of his holiness shine through? Is it necessary to have images, icons, and other items to encounter the living God?

The church has her work cut out for her. The unchurched are finding God in the beauty of his creation, and the skilled are finding him in the beauty of their own artistic creations. It is up to the church to help individuals finds ways to see the beauty of the

savior in the sacred spaces of the church with or without the elements of the past and the technological traps of the future. Spending time designing architectural masterpieces may bring visitors in to view the building. However, it will not keep them coming back. The living Word will live and attract followers if we would preach it. Ultimately the presentation of the Word of God must be presented in loving relationships with one another.

CHAPTER 5: THE ART OF AFRICAN AMERICAN PREACHING

And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word.¹

The Art of Black Preaching

The preaching prowess of black preaching can be duplicated by none. Taking a scripture and exegeting it to the extent where the congregation is whipped into a frenzy could describe most black preaching. However, the preaching abilities of prolific proclaimers can run the gamut of smooth, one-word, calm, demeanor, well educated, presenters who can present the love of Jesus in such a way that everyone leaves the building knowing they are special to God.

Noted author Charles B. Copher provides foundational research for understanding Blacks in the Bible and the art of black preaching. He discusses in his book *Black Biblical Studies: Biblical and Theological Issues on the Black Presence in the Bible*, in a chapter on biblical hermeneutics. Copher records the words of Biblical Scholar Bishop Joseph A. Johnson, Jr. on the topic of the Black Preacher and His Bible. Bishop Johnson shares the answer to an inquiry of his father, a minister with only seventh grade education, what his methods of wrestling with text are. Bishop recounts his father's reply in twelve steps: "(1) Prepare yourself with devotion and prayer prior to your encounter with the Scriptures; (2) Read the entire Book in which the text is located; (3) Become acquainted with all of the stories which lead up to the text and those that follow; (4) What are the problems, the situation of the participants in the story; (5) Read the biblical

¹ Luke 10:39.

passage aloud, so as to hear the Scriptures and permit them to speak to you; (6) Discover the human element and the Devine Element in the situation; (7) You must see what the writer saw, feel what the participants in the story felt and hear what they heard. (8) Use your imagination and put yourself in the place of the writer and the participants of the story; (9) Assume the different roles of the principal characters in the story and act as if you were present when the story was first told; (10) Ask yourself this question: ‘What special message does this passage of scripture bring to your people for their healing and renewal?’; (11) Then wait for God to speak; (12) When you preach, go slow, rise high, strike fire and sit down.”²

This dissertation student has had the privilege of sitting at the feet of proclaimers, each having a unique gift of sermonic presentation, as well as the ideas expressed by the father of Bishop Joseph A. Johnson. Paying close attention to the style and lyrical dynamics of preachers proved to be a fitting training ground for mimicking competent exegesis. Preacher and pastors observed consistently proved to handle the exegesis of the Scriptures at a level of expertise on a weekly, and some an annually basis. One such preacher was that of Dr. Cleophus LaRue. Dr. LaRue was the Spring revivalist for multiple years at New Faith Church in Houston, Texas. As a student at Houston Graduate School of Theology his writings were the focus of this dissertation students research. Reading his books, *Power in the Pulpit* and *More Power in the Pulpit* developed a greater interest in the topic of African American Preaching.

Dr. LaRue states in his introduction of the book that a majority of contemporary ministers learn to peach through preaching manuals and informed reflection of homiletic

² Charles B. Copher, *Black Biblical Studies: Biblical and Theological Issues on the Black Presence in the Bible* (Chicago: Black Light Fellowship, 1993), 70–71.

texts, while many black preachers continue to learn primarily through imitation of the masters. He explains that this means black preachers learn to preach by observation, participation and eventually mastery of the “how-to’s” of preaching from accomplished artisans of the preaching craft whom they have come to admire and respect.³

LaRue communicates that black preaching pedagogy is deeply embedded in the black religious psyche and becomes part of the black sacred story. He submits that the making of an effective black preacher begins not with formal studies but rather in the formative stages of the preacher’s life. He articulates that black preaching is a way of being in the world that one develops over time by immersing oneself in the culture and norms of black religious life, therefore one does not learn how to become a black preacher, but a preacher in the black religious experience.⁴

LaRue continues his argument for the perfection of preaching through observing and mastering the dynamics of black preaching by denoting that blacks who learn to preach by emulating those who are representatives of the best of the tradition focus intently on nine fundamental characteristics that come about time and time again in the style of proclamation.⁵

This chapter consists of personal reflections of this dissertation student. Highlighted will be the preachers who have shared the “sacred story” for many years. Recalling the experiences will be the aim of this section of the dissertation. The focus

³ Cleophus J. LaRue, *More Power in the Pulpit: How Americas Most Effective Black Preachers Prepare Their Sermons* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009).

⁴ Ibid., 13.

⁵ Ibid. These fundamentals include (1) the hermeneutic of an all-powerful God, (2) wrestling with Scripture, (3) a sense of divine encounter, (4) a waiting congregation, (5) cultural awareness, (6) a well-prepared manuscript, (7) a fitting sermon close, (8) an openness to unplanned additions, and (9) a powerful living voice.

will be identifying the elements of EPIC worship by these master presenters of the Word, highlighting one or more components of EPIC in which they each excelled.

The sermons witnessed were either a part of Sunday morning worship, a summer youth revival, or a Spring or Fall revival at the local church led by a guest preacher. In each setting there was always something to treasure such as straightforwardness, authenticity, or connectivity all being ideals on which to build a strong preaching style.

Dr. Cleophus LaRue

Dr. Cleophus Larue is Princeton Theological Seminary's Francis Landy Patton Professor of Homiletics.

Dr. LaRue is the author of several books on the topic of African American preaching. His style is that of college professor. He includes historical information tempered with a mild-mannered demeanor drawing in the listener. The excitement of the sermon builds and is heard in his voice as the tone and tenor rises. The clarity in which this professor spoke allowed for a clear following of the stories of Scripture. His articulate speech and vibrant presentation of happiness is seen through facial expressions reflecting what he was preaching, drawing every listener into the sermon. The culmination of his sermonic presentation witnessed by this dissertation student would always be a hymn of the church. The impressive item he brings to his closing is the ability to identify for the waiting musician the title and the key in which he sings a song.

The element of EPIC preaching used by this preacher was soundtrack. At the most opportune moment in his sermon he would “wrap up” his oral presentation with a song. The song would be introduced with the announcement that he would like to sing a song, and he would announce to the waiting musician the “key” he would like the song to be played. This announcement was always impressive and amusing to those who knew music and understood the anxiety of singing a song in a guest church with unfamiliar musicians. It was always to the musician's advantage to be a professional who played chords and read music to accompany this dynamic, preacher, teacher, author and vocalist.

Dr. S.J. Gilbert, Sr.

Dr. S.J. Gilbert, Sr. is the Pastor Emeritus of the Mt. Sinai Baptist Church in Houston, TX.

This dissertation student's family home church was the basis of Spiritual Formation, and it was formed by Dr. S.J. Gilbert, Sr. The family, returning to the states from two years of living overseas as a family serving in US Air Force, Mt. Sinai Baptist Church became home and the place of worship for the family.

The pastor was a young pastor, and his style of preaching was that of a traditional black preacher. He would present the scripture and then exegete it with clarity. The presentation of the gospel would be one that would excite the congregation and give the listener something to think about as they navigate thoughts of their lives through the week past and plan for the week ahead. The plain talk, excitement, and promises of the gospel motivated the congregation on many occasions. Listeners were compelled to make a decision of surrendering their lives to Christ. (a phrase which was often used in the Baptist church rhetoric).

Remembering the excitement felt when Dr. Gilbert would expound on how God would come through for you in a time of sorrow was very inspirational, even to this dissertation student as a youth growing up in the church. At times, his excitement would bubble over into leading the congregation in a great hymn of the church. The culmination of the sermon would garner praise of a God who was celebrated for the good things he had done, was doing or will do in the lives of those who worship him.

The element of EPIC preaching that was most prevalent in his style of preaching was the soundtrack. Scripture presentation and clear exegesis accompanied by a traditional hymn of the church would provide spiritual formation for many and provide

the beginning of a journey into the appreciation of sermons and preaching styles for this dissertation student for years to come.

In the tradition of the African American pulpit where singing was often incorporated Dr. Gilbert would often end his sermon with a hymn. Below is an example of that soundtrack, which is a favorite hymn of this dissertation student.

In times like These!

*In times like these you need a Savior
 In times like these you need an anchor;
 Be very sure, be very sure
 Your anchor holds and grips the Solid Rock!
 Chorus
 This Rock is Jesus, Yes, He's the One;
 This Rock is Jesus, the only One!
 Be very sure, be very sure
 Your anchor holds and grips the Solid Rock!
 In times like these you need the Bible,
 In times like these O be not idle;
 Be very sure, be very sure
 Your anchor holds and grips the Solid Rock!
 Chorus
 This Rock is Jesus, Yes, He's the One;
 This Rock is Jesus, the only One!
 Be very sure, be very sure
 Your anchor holds and grips the Solid Rock!
 In times like these I have a Savior,
 In times like these I have an anchor;
 I'm very sure, I'm very sure
 My anchor holds and grips the Solid Rock!
 Chorus
 This Rock is Jesus, Yes, He's the One;
 This Rock is Jesus, the only One!
 Be very sure, be very sure
 Your anchor holds and grips the Solid Rock!*

Dr. T. R. Williams, Sr.

Dr. T.R. Williams Sr., Founding Pastor Emeritus of the New Faith Church in Houston, TX.

The reflections of this dissertation student are of this dynamic preacher's expounding in the manner of a college professor, which served as spiritual formation of my young adult years. T.R. Williams planted, and pastored a congregation of fifty-two people which grew to more than twenty-five hundred. It was his prolific, passionate proclamation of delivering what he would often call the uncompromised gospel of Jesus Christ, which led his ministry to harvest multitudes. The sermons presented would always begin with the reading of the scripture. On many an occasion his reading of the scripture alone in such a profound way would procure a praise to the Lord from the congregation to the level of excitement where occasionally deliverance, evidence by shouting and praising, was found just in the reading and the hearing of the word of God.

His special ability was carefully exegeting and preaching the Scriptures to the level that uneducated to the most highly educated person could appreciate and understand. Whether it was expounding on how God promised never to leave us or forsake us, or exclaiming that there is no one like our God, T.R. Williams, Sr. preached with power and authority each time he stood behind the sacred desk.

The element of EPIC preaching that was most captivating from the preaching of T.R. Williams was the element of personal stories. Incorporating personal stories allowed the listener to experience the lesson of the Scripture in a different way. Ending the proclamation with a personal story allowed the listener to relate to the story of the Ancient of Days in a way that was relevant and evident that the God as presented in the Scripture, was alive and present today. Whether it was a personal story of his childhood

that would create a sense of awe and wonder of the saving power of God, or the testimony of how God delivered him numerous times from the brink of death with the commission to preach the word of God, Williams was able to capture the hearts of hearers. Below is a rendition of a story often told at the end of one of his sermons.

Mr. Lavalade's Store

The story would begin with painstaking details of how his mother would send him out at night to the store for a simple ingredient she needed for the family meal. Giving details of the long walk, it would take to go to the store, and the events that would transpire, helped the audience see the power of God through the story. He would paint the picture of how the dark of night would be a compounding menace filled with the knowledge of the neighborhood dog on one street and the neighborhood bully on the other as he traversed the dark streets to Mr. Lavalade's store. Engaging the audience with every detail as he would walk through what felt like the valley of the shadow of death, he would walk boldly knowing that though his mother had sent him on the mission, his father would go with him walking all the way. All along the way his father was walking with him. This story would confirm for the believer that though there would be dark times and the enemy may rise against us, we can complete our task because the father is always with us!

Dr. Marcus D. Cosby

Dr. Marcus D. Cosby Senior Pastor of Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church in Houston, TX.

Reflections of this dissertation student of Dr. Marcus D. Cosby are held with the utmost respect. Having had the opportunity to serve as an intern under this dynamic pastor and mentor was one of the highest honors.

Dr. Cosby is best described as a preaching pastor. He is gifted in the art of proclamation. He has mastered the art of poetic form and uses figurative language, especially repetition and alliteration, to a meticulousness method of rightly dividing the word of truth. His sermons render the human heart helpless in surrendering to the call of salvation. Once a listener hears the clear, careful and concise exegesis of the Scriptures coupled with the celebratory exaltation of the Most High God, a praise breaks out. Jubilation is regularly the response by all.

The element of EPIC preaching that Dr. Cosby presents is the element of participation. He masters the technique of call and response and then interjects statements that inform individuals that if they haven't joined in the celebration yet, there is an opportunity forthcoming. This is done by way of a statement that is quite unique. Instead of using the traditional "Can, I get a witness?", he uses this statement: "You just missed your shout cue!"

This statement alone signals to the listener that something was said about God and his goodness that should have rendered a response, and if you didn't catch it, he is telling you that what you heard was something to celebrate. It was something which should have rendered some sort of emotional response from one who knows of the goodness of God or even one who just heard about how good God is.

The ability to exegete the crowd is also a technique used by the profound speaker. Dr. Cosby serves as pastor to more than sixteen thousand members and the church mission is to be intentionally intergenerational. Therefore, he has mastered tempering his sermons to be applicable to the senior citizens, adults, and millennials. This is often evidenced by terms used throughout the sermon. Terms that relate to a popular song would be used for the millennials, while the lyrics to an old hymn of the church would be fitting for the senior citizens. Dr. Cosby strategically walks through the sermon with each demographic leading them all to the mercy seat of the savior each time he preaches. The preaching of Dr. Cosby is inviting, and everyone is included.

Rev. William A. Lawson

Rev. William A Lawson is the Pastor Emeritus of the Wheeler Avenue Baptist Houston, TX.

Rev. William A. Lawson is the founding Pastor Emeritus, of the Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church in Houston Texas. He is also a civil rights leader who marched with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. His footprint is seen all over the city of Houston and is most widely seen in the Historic Third Ward community. He is a mild-mannered individual who is always seen in the light of humility and service. He and his late bride of more than sixty plus years impacted the Houston community in enormous ways. There are multiple buildings and schools named after each of them on the campus of Wheeler Avenue Baptist and throughout the city of Houston.

Rev. Lawson began as the student pastor of the Baptist Student Movement on the campus of Texas Southern University. It was his preaching and teaching that led the students of that organization to move him to be the pastor of Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church. Planting the church in the living room of his home with thirteen charter members evolved into Rev. Lawson serving as its senior pastor for more than 40 years.

The preaching style of Rev. Lawson is that of a college professor who provides information that makes you think so deeply that your participation is seen in how far you lean in to hear this soft-spoken giant expound on the word of God.

Reflecting on a sermon he once preached on John 11:35, Jesus Wept, and his exegesis of the scripture, explaining the story behind these two words drew you in so far that you could not only understand why Jesus was crying, but you could feel the sadness of his countenance and feel the wetness of the tears that fell down his face. The listener is

so intently listening to every quiet word spoken that the tongue is arrested for fear of missing the next even more profound statement this quiet giant is about to make.

The element of EPIC preaching Rev. Lawson presents in his preaching is experiential. Rev. Lawson's command of words draws one into the scripture so closely that you feel that you are in the garden with the savior. His wisdom is shared throughout, and one can't help but feel included the saving grace of God after hearing him preach.

Rev. Delbert A. Mack, Sr.

Rev. Delbert A. Mack Sr. is the pastor of the Cathedral of Faith Baptist Church in Beaumont, TX.

Reflections of this dissertation of Rev. Delbert Mack is that he is a dynamic preacher. His proclamation style is one of no nonsense. He begins each sermon by reading the scripture and then giving his title. It is evident that once you have read the scripture and this preacher has given the title one should figuratively, ‘strap on their seat belt because this plane is about to take off’.

Rev. Mack’s presentation style is that of clearly communicating the elements of the scripture and explaining in detail what that looks like for the individual. His clear communication is spoken effortlessly with precision of highly skilled marksman, all the while listeners are cheering in celebratory praise of the God of whom he is preaching.

The EPIC element of preaching he presents will be the experiential. It is by his quick speaking exegesis presentation that the listener must lean in to make certain to hear every word spoken. His use of analogy and application is appreciated by the most rudimentary listener as well as the highly educated. There is no doubt that this preacher is filled with the Holy Spirit and is well able to rightly divide the word of truth. Within in a fifteen-minute whirlwind presentation Rev. Mack guides the jet through the lives and emotions of the congregant all the while the listener is educated, excited and compelled to make Jesus his choice. Then precisely, carefully and without a bump, Rev. Mack simply lands the plane allowing the listeners to celebrate in exuberance what they have seen and heard about the God of whom he has preached.

Rev. Valerie Crumpton

Rev. Valerie Crumpton, Associate Pastor at the Potter House of Dallas, TX.

The reflections of this dissertation student regarding Rev. Valerie Crumpton is that she is a dynamic preacher. Her knowledge and capacity of scripture and history of the church is unparalleled.

A prolific preacher who preaches from a text in a superior manner, Pastor. Crumpton lines her words with grace and clarity. As parishioners listen to her rightly divide the word of truth one cannot help but to receive the clarity of the Word coming forth.

The sermon presentation of this preacher is filled with examples from the great stories of the Bible. Once hearing how the Lord worked in the lives of the characters of the bible one can't help but feel included in the plan of salvation. Listening to this preacher is easy and inviting. From the moment she begins, she captures your attention with the evidence of an in-depth study of the subject.

The element of EPIC presentation that Rev. Crumpton demonstrates is connectivity through "Altering" (providing the congregant an opportunity to participate in an alter call). She does this through the culmination of the sermon, which is the most compelling part of her presentation. In a matter of moments pastor Crumpton uses her gift of invitation to draw the most reluctant listener to the altar for a decision for salvation, rededication or prayer.

Dr. Ralph Douglas West, Sr.

Dr. Ralph D. West is the Founding Pastor of the Church Without Walls, Houston, TX.

The dynamic preaching of Dr. Ralph West has informed this dissertation student's preaching for many years as teenager and through adulthood. His understanding of the Scriptures and his ability to exegete is astounding. The ultimate experience has been having an opportunity to interview Dr. West for this dissertation program.

I am grateful for his gracious consent to be interviewed. To best understand Dr. West's preaching type and how he incorporates EPIC in his sermon presentation a portion of the interview submitted previously as an assignment for this dissertation program is below:

*A portion of the Interview transcript with Dr. Ralph Douglas West, Sr.(RW)
(interviewed by Rev. Jamale Kempt(JK))*

Jamale Kempt- *This is an interview of one of my favorite preachers Dr. Ralph West and I'm gonna just jump in with the questions. First of all I just wanna say thank you for allowing me this opportunity. Uhm...we have been charged with interviewing a dynamic preacher and talking about your theology and your idea around homiletics, but I've also incorporated questions about semiotics and how you incorporate preaching metaphors in your preaching.*

Dr. Ralph West- *ok*

JK- *ok. So if we could get started with your name.*

RW- *My name is Ralph Douglas West. I'm the senior pastor at Brook Hollow Church, The Church Without Walls in Houston, Texas. I'm in my 28th year as a founding pastor of*

Brook Hollow Church, uhm... more affectionately known as The Church Without Walls. And I'm in an interview about homiletics.

***JK**-Ok. So could you begin just by giving me an idea of what is your theology of homiletics?*

***RW**- Preaching is born for me of out what the scriptures have created of these callings. That God called Moses from the burning bush; Samuel hearing the voice of God calling him by name; or Jeremiah in his prenatal ordination; or Isaiah in the year that Uzziah dies he has this beautiful vision of God's glory; or Hosea who sees God's love on display in the most awkward way through prostitution; and so my theology is born out of those and many other biblical text whether it be John the Baptist in the water or of Paul's dramatic conversion on Damascus...uh it is those scriptural text and stories that shape my understanding and theology of preaching.*

Theologically though you know it's Trinitarian. It is God and Jesus and the Holy Spirit, but it's God at work in history and Jesus Christ at work in humanity and the Holy Spirit at work in community...and they're not separate they are all working together in creation, in community, in church transforming and bringing about through the proclamation of the gospel men and women into identification, recognition of who Christ is, but also with the larger community of what God looks like on planet earth. That's some of, in short of what has shaped my theology as a preacher. It is I guess summed up in how Mark begins his gospel that Jesus came preaching, and teaching and baptizing, and proclaiming, that the kingdom of God is at reach, is visible, and at hand.

***JK**- Could you discuss your method of exegesis?*

***RW-** When I come to a biblical text, and after 40 years of preaching, I bring a lot of presupposition to that pre-understanding. At 40 years of preaching the tendency or the great fear for me is that I would begin to lean completely on what I think I know about that biblical text. And so, I deliberately force myself, that when I come to a text to preach is to pull down what I call heavy weight, middle weight and lightweight commentaries.*

***JK-** Hmm*

***RW-** Heavy Weight is what I call one inch above what the Hebrew in the text maybe ... and that is ... and I'm looking for almost a word for word ... uh interpretation of that biblical text. This is when I'm leaning on a commentary like Herman Neil. When I come to the middleweight, I'm looking more now at reading pericopes, paragraphs and blocks of biblical interpretations. This is now not inch high but maybe it's summarizing. And then the light weight is when I come to or when I say ... it depends on, or it could be... it maybe American bible exegesis, commentary or exegetical theological open commentary, or maybe a word at that point that that particular author may, that may be more of a middle range, but then when I come to light weight, it's not to be understood in the same way, let's say major and minor prophets. Minor just because their writings are more condensed than the majors. Light weight for me is about the same way. It's respectful, reverent, it's theological, it's historical, it's grammatical, but it gives me more of a homiletical look at how the divisions of that book may work. For instance, that might be look ...reading... through uh... interpretation, uh it's still in print commentary made for homiletics. When you look at these passages you see the preaching –possibility is in them. So that's how I get started. In addition, I should say and probably before that, uh my primary text is always the Bible, and I try to read that passage until it becomes a part of*

me, almost to where I can memorize it. And I read it out loud. And I walk around, but read it out loud when I'm by myself. Which by the way, as a side note, I study out loud. I usually close the door so that people don't think I'm having a homiletical breakdown.

RW- *I love preaching. I love talking about preaching. That's what exegetical exegesis does for me. It clarifies the, so in short, I start with the primary text, the bible, and then I try to go to my companions. Gello Davis calls her library, around her, the voices that sit around. So, I go to my theological and homiletical companions, and I listen to their voices to hear what church tradition has to say, listen to what biblical exegetes have to say. And then after that I'm with my own outline I'm trying to fill in the gaps with rich biblical resources, and then of course I try to furnish the sermon with some type of illustrative material without it becoming over bearing.*

JK- *Thank you. My next question deals with preaching style and delivery and so application.*

RW- *I would say I fit into the classical, I would view mine as the classical traditional preacher.*

JK - OK

RW – *I have no bells and whistles, I have no clichés. I try to stay very far away from clichés. I try to work very hard at crafting sentences and paragraphs and that's awkward sometimes... but I try not to be cliché-ish and in preaching I work very hard at being just a traditional preacher.*

My sermon moves, I open up with an illustration, uh and then I have movements, some time they call them points, planks, and I don't give too much attention that after about 15

years you just kind of move through the passages. Now I'm working in my mind, uh with an outline.

JK- Right.

RW- Cause I preach 95% of the time extemporaneously, but I'm thinking through of what these movements are.

JK-Muhum

RW- And I try to nail down my opening statement. I try to nail down the movements of that sermon, quotes, illustrations and but you said delivery. So, in delivery mine is rather would be ... if you heard me preach, or people would hear me, they would just say West it's nothing grand about his delivery he just stands there, and primarily behind the pulpit, and the pulpit is not ostentatious, so they can see me move about from side to side. I'm not short so.

JK- Laughing

RW- So, the podium doesn't restrict my gestures

JK- OK

RW- And so uh...my pulpit serves more as my preaching desk. I've tried preaching by moving around primarily because of the size of our building.

JK- Muhum

RW- But, I found out that that didn't work well for me. I didn't like the way it looked, I didn't like the way it sounded because it changed my delivery.

JK- OK

***RW-** I've fit into what most people probably have grown up with and many people probably have walked away from to say, uh but that's how I preach...it just....and it works for my church and that's the only place that I can be really concerned about.*

***JK-** Laughing*

***RW-** They seem to hear it and to understand it. But it's my personality. And that would be one of the other things, to quote Phillip Brooks about preaching through your truth and personality. He says you have to be true to your personality.*

***JK-** Right.*

***RW-** Yeah you have to be true to your personality. And that's my personality. I'm not very humorous, and yet I can make statements where in every sermon that...there is something humorous about it. But I'm not reaching for levity.*

***JK-** OK*

***RW-** I'm not trying to be Jimmy Fallon, you know, I'm not trying to be a standup comic. I'm not trying to be Cedric the Entertainer. You know I'm not trying to do that. You know there are moments like where comedy...uh it just comes out of truth recognition.*

***JK-**Right*

***RW-** You know, know you just tell something that happen to you growing up and people register with it. My delivery is like that. I fit into the classical African American preaching tradition. I could have said that earlier, but I like to talk.*

***JK-** That's ok! (Laughing)⁶*

⁶ Ralph Douglas West, Sr., interview by the author, Houston, October 2017.

The interview continued, and the confidence of this dissertation student was certified after talking with this pastor, that he was presenting the gospel in a way that people of all walks of life could hear the gospel and make a decision for Christ after hearing him preach.

I would have to make that statement for all of the preachers I have listed in this chapter. It is at the feet of these ministers that I have observed the presentation of the gospel have been made simple and plain. All but one of them I have observed for ten years or more. Though they all embrace a different component of the EPIC preaching method, they all utilize the strength of the Art of African American preaching that is within each of them.

Gleaning from Preachers from Afar

The list of preachers whom I have gleaned from afar consist of men and women of the Word. Some pastor's, college professor's, seminary trained, and non- seminary trained. Some have been invited guest of area churches while others where in locations a far off but accessible by travel. Each of these listed have provided an element of EPIC preaching that has informed an understanding of preaching that is based on the tradition of African American preaching as well as utilizing an element of EPIC worship. The list includes: Dr. Carol Ann Knight, Dr. Cynthia Hale, Dr. Susan Johnson, Dr. Patricia Williams, Dr. Howard John Wesley, Bishop James Dixon, Bishop Rudolph McKissick, Jr., Bishop T.D. Jakes, Bishop Vashti McKenzie, Rev. Troy Johnson, Rev. Cornelius Carroll, Rev. Willie D. François.

CHAPTER 6: THE NEW EPIC: A LOOK AT A NEW PARADIGM FOR PREACHING

In preaching, each speech act must be a baring and bearing of the story of the gospel.

—Dr. Len Sweet

Think of the ten lepers who were in a place outside of the city, outcast and marginalized, but when they heard that Jesus was passing by, they collectively got together to cry out to the master, “Jesus, savior have mercy on us”. The question the postmodern millennial may ask – how did they know that Jesus would be passing by? Someone preached to them and said the savior is near. We must preach so that those near and far, those embraced by society and those marginalized by society can hear the gospel.

Everything is changing! But there is one in Dr. Len Sweet who dares to address the need of the preaching moment that needs to change. The ears of today are listening for a sound that will cause them to know that the savior is near.

Dr. Len Sweet has found a path to the hearts and minds of the postmodernist who are ready to hear what he has to say through his megaphone. He speaks to those who are outcast and marginalized so that they can hear that the savior is near. He uses his megaphone to shout to preachers of the gospel that there is a need to change the way we preach. This change is not necessary a new way but a return to the way of the Savior.

When Jesus walked the streets of Galilee, Judea, Jerusalem and places the Spirit led him, he had crowds following him. These crowds came to hear that the kingdom was near and whenever there was a question of his power or his authority, or whenever he

wanted to share with his disciples a detail of the divine which they could grasp and hold on to, he would tell them a story.

Dr. Sweet is regarded as a futurist, one who listens to the Spirit with a discernment that cannot be denied. He purports that the sharing of the gospel today must be through the mechanism of story. In his book, *“Preach the Story”*, and on his website of the same name, he provides preachers with the opportunity to learn how to see the Scriptures with a deeper understanding by seeing the back story of every verse.

In a meeting with a cohort of pastors studying under Dr. Sweet he once asked, “What is the story of John 3:16?” Attempts were made using the theological best effort to explain what the scripture revealed. Dr. Sweet listened patiently as efforts were made to discover what he was trying to convey. The thing he was looking for was the metaphor, the narrative, or what he fittingly named the “narraphor”!

Dr. Sweet shared with the pastors in the room that before we get to the theology of the text we must see the simplicity of the narrative. Narrative is defined as a series of events and each encounter of people and power of the savior is full of events. In the analyzing the narrative. Dr. Sweet taught us to then focus on the metaphor that stood out in the text. If done well, one can tell the backstory and see the what the scripture is saying to the those who heard it first hand as well as those who yearn to hear it today!

Semiotic Preaching

On another occasion Dr. Sweet asked the cohort what is intercessory prayer? As we wondered what he might be looking for in answer, a vibrant silence filled the room. His eye piercing toward us as he leans in to see which member of our cohort would dare

to answer. But not just answer, but answer in a way that showed we had grasped the concept of semiotics and the power of story.

We struggled. We begin to give definitions, and explanations. We began to exegete the words of Scripture. We began to repeat words of preachers we had heard in prior settings. Some even began to simply reply on the words of Webster. Time quickly passed as attempts continued to fall short over what was a checking for understanding moment. In the middle of a quick pause of the barrage of failed answers, one member of our cohort began to tell this story:

Jesus was preaching in a town and the crowd began to follow him. He was in his house and continued to preach, and the great mass of people gathered outside. Then four men tried to get their friend who was lying on a mat because he could not walk, into the house to see Jesus.

Unable to break through the crowd to get inside, the men took to the outside stone staircase and climbed to the roof of the house. While Jesus was still preaching the men began to tear the roof apart and created a hole large enough to lower the man on the mat down to the place where Jesus was. When Jesus saw their faith, he looked at the man and said to him, “Son your sins are forgiven, take up your bed and walk.” At that moment Dr. Sweet says, “BINGO!”

What an awesome experience to witness a model of the power of semiotics and the power of story. It was with this quick introductory lesson that we entered the mind of Dr. Len Sweet, the one who would teach us to think in this new way. Heretofore, exegesis praxis had been to think in points. Now there is this introduction to this new way

of thinking about Scriptures. We must no longer think points... but think about metaphors and the back story.

Able to see for ourselves how our preaching was about to change¹ we were bound for a journey of opportunity into the world of semiotics, focusing on metaphors and the power of story. We were moving beyond word defining, explaining words, and the tried and true practice of word association and exegesis, and being taught how to identify, understand and discover the backstories of those words. This new paradigm will help us as preachers to, as Sweet states, convey an individual as well as a communal experience in our preaching.²

And just as the impact of that story being the answer to that question, “What is intercessory prayer?”; we could see the impact that it was going to make on each of us in addition to the congregants we preach to each week.

People remember stories. They may not remember all the things you share on every given Sunday, but they will remember the stories because stories, our stories, and the stories of scripture have a way of embedding themselves into our nature as reminders.

In his book *Giving Blood*, Dr. Len Sweet pushes preachers to look closely at the idea of preaching semiotic sermons. He states that preaching today takes place without audiences, and only with participants and partners. He goes on to state that true participation is not just meeting another Christ follower but becoming Christ for the other.

¹ Leonard I. Sweet, *Giving Blood: A Fresh Paradigm for Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014).

² Ibid., 175.

He continues to teach that through semiotics, preachers can truly have participation in the sermon. Sermons that point to Christ through stories and images make use of “semiotics”. Semiotics is best defined as the ability to read and convey “signs,” where a “sign” (be it an image, gesture, sound, object, or a word) is something that stands for something else. He further states that semiotics is about pointers, not points. He argues that semiotics is important because it is the language of the human body. A semiotic sermon reads the signs of what God is up to in the world, connects those signs in people’s lives with the Jesus story, and then communicates the gospel by connecting people in relationship to Jesus through stories, images, and gestures.

The semiotic method connects biblical narratives to indigenous cultural landscapes and their native languages of sign and symbols. Semiotic preaching differs from the traditional sermon building in its insistence on seeing the sermon itself as an incarnational medium. Traditional textual exegesis is based on mining the ore of words to excavate the gems of “biblical principles,” a biblical panning for nuggets of wisdom in one massive stream of words. Biblical semiotics by contrast, is a form of spelunking the Scriptures while surfing the Spirit of resonant images and stories by which to live and for which to die in Christ. Semiotic preaching is as much liturgical as it is exegetical. Semitic preaching, a new form of expository preaching, seeks to reconnect us with the stories, images, relationships, and resonance of the Scriptures as they were told, written, and intended to be received. Dr. Sweet purposes that in semiotic preaching, we return to the roots of our faith and to a method of conveying truth favored by Jesus himself.³

³ Ibid.

Dr. Sweet deciphers and distinguished the elements of semiotic exegesis and labels it as EPIC delivery. He argues that through this transincarnational preaching the sermon mediates the revelatory power of the Holy Spirit. This preaching points the congregant to God during worship, so the congregant points to God during their lives. He believes that semiotic exegesis, EPIC delivery, and a transincarnational theology of relational “knowing” create a kind of preaching that engages and changes lives.

Preaching is both discipline and craft. Part of creating an EPIC sermon is dynamically and relationally to introduce metaphors, images and stories that “make the familiar strange; that catapult the participant into a realm of the unexpected, unusual, and mysterious.”⁴

Narraphor

Narraphor is the talk of the soul, the music of the heart, the stuff of memory, dream and faith.

—Dr. Len Sweet

The simple definition of a story is a narrative. A narrative is a series of events which occur in a logical manner creating meaning for the reader. The narratives of the scripture give light to the plan of salvation for those who believe. It is through a series of events that the savior of the world sheds light on the Eternal’s eternal plan of salvation for all mankind.

The narrative is where one finds the plot that takes the reader through the path of understanding. In the exposition one sees the setting and seeing its relevance to the primary audience. But it is also transformative in the life of the current readers no matter where their setting may be upon their reading of the narrative. The characters are also

⁴ Ibid.

introduced in the exposition and their relationship to one another. Finding a text connection to the main character in the plot is imminent in the life of the real-life characters in the narrative as well as the living characters who read the scriptures daily.

When Jesus meets the woman at the well, he not only is the main character of the narrative, but he is the savior of the woman who meets him and shares his message to the minor characters who show up to hear what she has to say.

The setting gives light to the savior's desire to go into the places where he is unexpected to go. He finds a way to position himself in order to meet those who would not necessarily come looking for him. For it is at the well that we see the two characters meet and have a conversation that introduces the plot or problem of the narrative. The woman who is alone and comes forth with a receptacle to receive the life-giving water from the well meets the giver of life. He uses a prop, the well, as his entry point into the life of a woman. It would make sense that the primary listeners would make a big deal about the customary practice of a woman, a Samaritan, talking to a member of the house of Israel and her being alone as she talks. One must assume that the listeners continued to hear the rest of the story as it leads to the climax.

A discussion ensues, and inquiries lead to insults and more questioning. The woman says to the savior, "How can I give you a drink, for you have nothing to pitch the well with?" The primary listeners may side with her at this point thinking that the plot has changed, and the focus has been placed on what she is able to do for the savior.

But the climax of the story, the turning point is when the savior announces to her that if she knew who it was who has asked her for a drink she would have asked him for a drink.

The turning point of the narrative shows that the savior's intent all along was to create a way to present the life-giving water to one who needed it. This main character changes the trajectory of the story for the listeners. But those who listen well can observe that the savior used this stop, and the prop of a well, in order to show that he is always willing to go beyond, and draw close to those who would not go close to him.

This main character sees the woman and sees her for who she really is and helps her see that she is a life worth saving. The falling action of the plot demonstrates further the desire of the savior, which is to share what has been found. The woman now receives life from the savior and takes this message to those whom she lives among. In response to the message of a true prophet the minor characters go and see this savior for themselves and after hearing his message they too share a report. They don't just believe what she, the woman, has said, but they believe what they have heard for themselves.

This series of events gives us a narrative. It is logically presented and is developed in a way that novice readers could follow. One would be remiss to not notice the metaphors of water and the well presented in this narrative. What does the well represent? Can a reader make a textual, personal or world connection of the metaphor presented?

Dr. Len Sweet would say yes. It is his combining of the definition of the narrative (a series of events which occur in a logical manner creating meaning for the reader) with the definition of a metaphor.

In this story the woman is in need of the water that she feels will give her life. The well is a metaphor for the item that the human body cannot do without. The well is a metaphor for the keeper of the life-giving substance. It is at the well that one who is

seeking the answers to life by being with many men, meets a man who replaces the cistern that she has depended on to give her life.

Metaphor

A metaphor by its very nature lifts language.⁵ According to James Geary, metaphor is familiar as the literary device through which we describe one thing in terms of another. He goes on to state metaphorical thinking, our instinct not just for describing, but for comprehending one thing in terms of another, for equating “I” with another changes our view of what the word, and is essential to how we communicate, learn, discover and invent.⁶

And it is in understanding the power of the metaphor and its implications on the narrative that Dr. Len Sweet has unveiled the essence of semiotic preaching as understanding the “narraphors” of the Scriptures as a means of exegesis.

Dr. Sweet would argue that Semiotic preaching is a new form of biblical preaching. What is being exegeted are age-old stories and images, or what might be called narraphors. And to preach with narraphor is to practice discernment, looking for meaning in everything you see. Narraphors according to Dr. Sweet, get us thinking about something we may not want to think about. They force us to look at life in new ways and they outwit our reasoned defenses. In *Giving Blood*, Sweet cites how Paul Ricoeur sees metaphor and presses the point stating that a good metaphor or a good narrative can't have rapture without rupture. He continues to argue that metaphors produce new

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ James Geary, *I Is an Other: The Secret Life of Metaphor and How it Shapes the Way We See the World* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2012).

possibilities of imagination and vision. It is when the reader is captured by this reconfigured world that Dr. Sweet contends the narrative effects become revelatory and transformative. The goal of the narraphor is the same: the breaking down that allows that turn or twist, moving from metaphor into metamorphosis.⁷

In the story of the woman at the well the metaphor is the well. The Hebrews and the Samaritans believed that the well was the life-giving source. Living in the desert of the Middle East a well was crucial to the lives of those in the area. Though this story is told in the New Testament we are introduced to the importance of a well early in the book of Genesis.

The wells that were dug Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were strategically placed wells that provided for the people of Israel. Jacob's encounter with Abimelech and his men proved to be a confrontation in which every time he or his men would dig a well the king's men would stop up the well with dirt, denying it to be a life-giving source.

Finally, after moving around Jacob builds a well in a place where they do not stop up the well and he and his people thrived there. The well is a source of life and here in the New Testament we see the one who is life leaning on what Israel has gone to for years as a source of life. The metaphor of the well is powerful because of the connection that is made from the Old Testament to the New and the meaning is the same.

In preaching semiotics Dr. Sweet has directed the cohort to see the metaphor and investigate other places in scripture where the metaphor can be found and what message or back story helps in understanding the message at hand. It is important in semiotic preaching as well as in any form of homiletics to not commit eisegesis, but to carefully

⁷ Sweet.

exegete the word. Dr. Sweet emphasizes that if one looks closely enough and knows the story and understands the metaphor, through the leading and guiding of the Holy Spirit, one can carefully exegete the stories of Scripture.

This EPIC method of preaching that leads us to understand what makes preaching come alive when presenting of the stories of the bible. It is the intent of this dissertation to define and explain EPIC preaching and present the impact that it can have when blended with the traditions of the African American pulpit, highlighting the impact it can have on traditional church goers and non-churched individuals.

EPIC Preaching

The things we value most are our experiences and the people in which we share those experiences. Research and real-time viewing have conveyed that the advertising industry has tapped into the idea that people want to experience their product not just see it. A recent example would be in the chewing gum commercial where a young man leaves note on gum wrapper paper for a young lady unveiling his crush on her. The viewer gleans in and remembers the story of the crush and possibly thinks about the gum as they remember the story.

Or the fact that a vocal icon like Beyoncé, who has reached the iconic status allowing her to be known by her first name only, purposely connects with her fans base by giving them a name (the Beehive) and special seating where she has been known to, sing to them, touch them and even share her microphone with them giving the experience of their dreams.

Dr. Len Sweet has captured the essence of what that means in the art of preaching. He argues that core of preaching is getting something experiential that can

transform your life for God and the gospel.⁸ Dr. Sweet compares the Gutenberg world to Google world and states that what is rational is relevant to the times of each. He focuses attention to not just the belief in Jesus but the authenticity of that belief.⁹ In EPIC preaching, Dr. Sweet explains that faith is being in a grace relationship with Jesus. He states that experiencing Christ does not make us irrational, but it allows for truth that goes beyond knowledge. He boldly states that God cannot be found in the realm of the rational but dwells in the mysterious realm of grace.¹⁰ Dr. Sweet continues with the concept of experience in EPIC preaching stating that experience is allowing ourselves to be “called out and revealed, to bare our hearts to Jesus for him to see our lives, motives, sorrows, pains, issues and joys. He writes that preaching is the art and craft of getting listeners to want what they don’t know they need but can’t truly live without: a daily experience with Christ. He states that experiential preaching calls to and calls out the flock to see and be seen.¹¹

An important component of experiential preaching is that it is developed in communion with others. The days the preacher develops the sermon for his or herself are long gone. It is not foreign today to have a preaching committee (a group of people which a preacher asks for their views) to prepare the sermon experience. Dr. Sweet reports that what makes experience so rich is that we do it in common with others in shared spaces, whether in cyberspaces (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Google) or around the corner at

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

Starbucks. He believes that every sermon should give people something to see, something to hear, something to touch, something to taste and something to smell. EPIC preaching makes you think and feel at the same time.¹²

Participatory

Members of the African American pulpit community have long been a participant in the experience of preaching. Their tradition of call and response and allowing the audience to “talk back to me,” is a long-standing tradition dating back to the shores of west Africa from which the African brought this style of worship to the Americas even as victims of chattel slavery.

Dr. Len Sweet mentions in his discussion of the participatory element of EPIC preaching that that the African American tradition is light years ahead of the Anglo tradition incorporating greater quality of interaction, both verbal and physical, and having greater quality of preaching.¹³ Dr. Sweet argues that preaching is a collaborative process between pulpit and pew. The preacher who would want to preach EPIC sermons must recognize that preaching is not just a one-way communication, but a two-way street. In traditional pulpit-centric preaching, great labor is spent on writing better opening sentences, but in participatory preaching, time is spent on creating better opening (and closing) interactions.¹⁴

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Image Rich

You can remember what you see much longer than what you hear. The advertisers and the news media are aware of this fact. During the local evening news, one might hear the news anchor give a warning to viewers if they are reporting a story in which there is a gruesome death or violence. The warning may prelude and say the images you are about to see are violent and may not be suitable for young viewers. They understand the power of an image. Dr. Sweet proposes that preachers would take advantage of that power, the power of images. He states that images are the thoughts of the heart. He goes on to say that in EPIC preaching, exegeting the image and animation is the dynamic that should be aimed for. He argues that preachers need to make the shift from traditional preaching to semiotic preaching by realizing that the power of the Word isn't in the words but in the images, and the stories, and the music of the text. Exegeting words is now replaced with exegeting images. It is taking what he deems the poet's tool – image and imagination, rhyme and rhythm, simile, metaphor, and story and using the tools to bring forth the stories and narraphors.¹⁵

EPIC preaching focuses on what Dr. Sweet refers to as the “master metaphor,” the leading or controlling image that reframes the conversation or concept. It can be a character, a key moment in the story, an artifact or artifice, even a word that functions as an image.¹⁶ He also writes that every metaphor is EPIC. Even body expressions (gestures, movements) and nonverbal sounds (grunts, coughs) can be metaphors. When preaching, those assembled hear the hoof beats of the four horsemen, and see and smell the lilies in

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

the field. Preaching metaphors allow listeners to experience those things not just in ordinary ways but in new ways. Metaphors engender curiosity, humor, suspense, surprise, laughter, shock and relief. They have power to compel and to heal.¹⁷

Connective

People are desperate to connect with God, with each other, with creation, with their culture with their community.

—Dr. Len Sweet¹⁸

The modern church attender tends to keep their membership at their local church because of two reasons. One is the connection they make with the creator through the Word and the second is the connection or inclusiveness he or she has with the people of God.

Dr. Len Sweet has included this important component to his EPIC preaching and worship idea. He has understood and communicates the critical aspect of relationship and connectivity. If one feels included and connected and the feeling is a positive one the individual will not only return to the place and power of connectivity but will also tend to share the good news of what they have experienced with others in their circle of influence.

One thing that helps in the connectivity or communal aspect of the EPIC is the preacher is not the “Rockstar” that everyone is coming to see each week. In EPIC preaching there are no rock stars. Preachers must be lovers of people for the sake of the gospel, Dr. Sweet reports.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

He purports that preachers move away from preaching only to a certain group of individuals (the educated, the wealthy aristocrats), but preach a word that can connect with all who are listening. He advocates for the table being the place where everyone is connected.¹⁹

The metaphor of a family meal is the image that comes to mind of a huge family reunion meal where everyone is invited. Family and friends come from miles away and nearby cities. Each is asked to bring not only their favorite dish, but also bring their friends and loved ones. The food is only a catalyst to the conversations that will be encountered. The connections made with relatives and friends seldom seen is enjoyed, old issues spring up and are hashed out or forgotten. Memories of loved ones gone on are celebrated and the future of the little ones are pronounced and prayed for. In the end everyone leaves with feeling of appreciation and celebration that they are included in the celebration.

Each preacher must be cognizant of the fact that every person who he or she meets is a candidate for connection. How the preacher goes about connecting with the individual is vital to their buying into the concept. There must an effort to build community and bring them into the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Thinking back on the experience of the Advances for the Preach the Story Cohort, Dr. Sweet conducted a “bird in the bush” experience, which provided a firsthand look at connectivity. The idea of having individuals who met weekly via a virtual video and chat now come together to eat, stay, study, and study together afforded all an opportunity to be connected.

¹⁹ Ibid.

The experience yielded an accepting of views by individuals who in other circumstances would probably not venture to even speak to each other because of political views. But, there is something to be said about a person who can continue to eat next to you and never share in conversation. A conversation quickly moves from the mundane, “Please pass the bread”, to ministry, “Tell me how your congregation deals with the topic intergenerational issues.”

The message of the Advance module was culminated with sharing time at a meal or a recreational event. The bonding and sharing of personal stories and finding common ground was often found in a walk-through town, or a trip to the store or a friendly game of ping-pong. While Dr. Sweet and the team professors at Portland seminary conducted a practical demonstration of what it means to be connective in a worship space, participants enjoyed the images of new landscapes, the community streets and local fare, as well as the need to balance work and recreation to fulfill the requirements set before them.

EPIC semiotic preaching was the experience. Dr. Sweet moved beyond the lecture to allow the authority of the Spirit to teach as participants shared a meal and reflect on his message. And often that message was presented with soundtrack and images. In the Advance the cohort was able to see the vibrant differentiation of a sermon that is representative of a bird in the pan and a bird in the bush (relative to a story Len shared with us about two teenagers on a field trip and completing a science experiment).

Dr. Sweet would tell the cohort of the situation where one his students shared about the experience of dissecting a bird in a science course and the other student would share about her experience of visiting the zoo to see the same type of bird in its natural habitat. He emphasized how much richer the lesson of the live bird in the bush was for

the learner versus the lesson learned from the dead bird in the pan. At that point he challenged the preachers of the cohort to bring the narraphors of Scripture to life for the listener. He admonished us to see the story of scripture in light of the cultural, every day, timely nuances in order to truly bring the story to life for congregants today.

In Epic preaching the bird in the pan only allows you to see what is left, the lifeless bones, the dried feathers, the organs that used to be active now in decay. In comparison to the bird in the bush where one can not only see the bird, adorning it full colored, textured garment, but also hear its squawk or singing, and smelling its fragrance. In addition, one sees how it responds to its natural habitat and how it solves, and resolves the situation. And finally observe how the bird in the bush interacts and reacts with the elements and other living things around it.

This is the essence of semiotic preaching and the EPIC method of worship. It is allowing individuals to experience the essence of the scriptures so that they have an experience with the sights, sounds, and smells of the story.

CHAPTER 7: THE NEW EPIC – A BLENDING OF THE TWO PARADIAGMS

The aim of this dissertation has been to discover the possibility of blending the world of African American preaching with the world of the EPIC preaching style as presented by Dr. Len Sweet.

Before I can talk about how to blend the two worlds of preaching which I have now had the privileged of being a part. I would like to share some of the experiences from the cohort that have influenced and changed my preaching. As I reflect I think of the words of one of my church members. After preaching for approximately one year into the program she commented: Pastor JK, you preach differently now...you preach like a college professor. I smiled and replied, "Could it be that you are also thinking differently about worship, the table and how one can do church?" She replied, "Yeah that has really happened." She walked away smiling.

Being a member of this cohort has developed this dissertation student's preaching more than anything else that has been studied. Experiencing the Scriptures as complete stories and understanding metaphors and background stories of human lives and relationships has changed the way this dissertation student preaches.

Randomness

Dr. Len Sweet once told us that the preacher is to be prepared before the sermon is prepared. He also introduced us to the experience of randomness and to see the semiotics in things that are randomly chosen.

He shared with us that he would go to the movie theater and participate in a game of random selection. Whatever movie was coming up next is the one he would go and

see. Whether it was the movie “My Little Pony” or “Die Hard”, two vastly different genres written for totally different audiences, Sweet would watch that movie. But Sweet would challenge us to participate in that game and look for the semiotics in the random selection. The idea of randomness sounds easy, but it is quite difficult.

As creatures of habit and people who fear not having control, it is difficult to release oneself to the idea of random selection. The month after the advance my husband and I thought we would do a little research into this idea of randomness with a movie selection. We arrived at the theater and approached the kiosk. I had shared with him that Dr. Len Sweet explained to us the benefit of randomness was to totally go with the flow. We did not need to always have an agenda, but we could trust that God would be able use whatever we were about to see and provide something meaningful from the film which we could apply to our lives. We arrived at the movie kiosk. We closed our eyes and pointed at the screen. We chose a movie, I vaguely remember the title. We looked at each other and shrugged our shoulders and said to each other “Let’s Do It!” Off we went and proceeded to pay, and the kiosk would not take our funds. It was extremely frustrating to the point that we chose another movie. That instant, we gave up on randomness. With the next choice it became more and more difficult to allow the element of random selection to take over. We were in control, and we chose a film to watch. As we entered the controlled movie choice we both wondered what the random selection would have been.

The research activity of randomness comes into play when preparing a sermon for the new EPIC model. One can trust and be led by God by allowing His spirit to lead you into the choice he wants to make. Utilizing the Holy Spirit and knowing that He is in control is a humbling experience. The fact that the scripture teaches us that we are made

in his image; we are fearfully and wonderfully made; we are the sheep of his pasture and we can trust him to lead.

The Books of the Cohort

When thinking about the stories shared in our cohort and the vast number of new authors and books we were exposed to, and the simple way that Dr. Sweet asked us to view things as we prepare sermons the books helped us to grow.

The books the cohort were exposed to are invaluable and a section of them have been used in preaching opportunities by this dissertation student throughout this program. Assigning the following book titles such as: Steven Pressfield's *The War of Art* for our first read was to help us get through the abundance of books to come such as Brene Browns' *Rising Strong*, James Geary's *I Is an Other*, Ian McGilchrest' *The Master and His Emissary*, Richard B. Hays' *Reading Backwards*, Edit. Michael Newtons' *Victorian Fairytales*, Lauren F. Winners' *Wearing God, Jesus Speaks, Mother Tongue, A History of Pictures* to name few. These books will forever be a part of my preaching library.

One of the constructs of the African American pulpit is to incorporate excitement and feeling into the sermonic presentation. It is the delivering of one's passion of a loving savior with the love of the mountains overcome through years of struggle, which continue today to some degree, that can impact change for the modern church goer and reach non-church goers today.

Where an African American preacher may master the call and response of a sermon he or she can also include an element from the EPIC worship model. For example, a preacher can take the option of including an element of smell by using incense to have congregants savor the sweetness of the Lord. The goals are to help the congregant

experience all the essence of the scripture and walk away knowing that have truly been in the presence of the Lord.

The use of incense and elements of fragrance have been a part of the worship experience in many culture for a long time. In the Old Testament the job of the Levites was to prepare the place of worship and light the incense for the fragrance of the Lord to be enjoyed by the people. In the New Testament we know that during the time when Mary was told she would have a child, her cousin Elizabeth was pregnant already with John. In the time where Zachariah was to serve in the temple it was his job to light the incense in the temple. However, in today's' society one has to be careful not to risk a lawsuit due to parishioners' allergies and other physical ailments being ignited by the incense used in the worship.

Sound Track

Music is the lifeblood of African American worship. The African slaves would sing and pound out rhythms on the floor and with the clapping of hands as they sang the songs of the mother land while living as captives in a strange land. The words of the psalmist:

*By the rivers of Babylon, we sat and wept
when we remembered Zion.
² There on the poplars
we hung our harps,
³ for there our captors asked us for songs,
our tormentors demanded songs of joy;
they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"
⁴ How can we sing the songs of the LORD
while in a foreign land?*

This reminds us how we can use the song of our innermost being to be a praise to the Lord. It is with the sermon presentation that the preacher can include a song that the

congregant can join in and sing remembering the elements of the sermon that bring forth the message that one is to walk away with for the week.

“Dr. Len Sweet in his book, “Giving Blood”, states semiotic sermons give soundtracks, rhythm to word and narraphor.” He goes on to say that the black church, more than any other tradition, has mastered the magic musical mix of energy, coupled with rhythm and gesture.¹

The sermon presentation in the African American pulpit has been incorporating song or a sound track in many ways. One way is the singing of a congregational hymn immediately before the sermon. The song choice would be an old meter or a traditional hymn from the hymnal.

Call: “I love the Lord He heard my cry.

Response: I-I love the Lord He heard my cry.

Call: And pitied every groan.

Response: A-n-d pitied e-v-e-r-y groan.

Call: Long as I live while trouble rise.

Response: L-o-n-g as I-I live while trouble rise.

Call: I'll hasten to His throne.

Response: I'll ha-asten to-o-o His throne.

Call: I-I love the Lord He bowed His head.

Response: I-I love the Lord He bowed His head.

Call: And chased my grief away.

Response: A-n-d chased my grief away.”

The sounds of the African Ancestors can be heard in the old metered hymns down through the latest gospel song of today it is a tradition steep in the history of the black that translate in to modern EPIC worship without difficulty.

¹ Sweet. The essence of African preaching is “nommo and kuntu” (word and rhythm). For the black church, preaching is “oral and gestural” activity, an animated conversation in the guise of a celebration that rapper Q-Tip calls a “Vivrant Thing.” Henry Mitchell labels black preaching an embodied hermeneutic.

EPIC Preaching as Developed by Dr. Len Sweet

The essence of this cohort “Preach the Story” was to help preachers by creating a Doctor of Ministry program that would train pastors, church planters, and missional leaders in an innovative preaching paradigm that focuses on doing image-exegesis, building a sermon using metaphor and story, and delivering a sermon in an EPIC (Experiential, Participatory, Image-rich, and Connective) style. The cohort culminated with Dr. Sweet working with the cohort on a team doctoral project producing a new story lectionary that tells the entire story of the bible rather than isolated pericopes. Excerpts from the story lectionary contributed by this dissertation student will be in the Appendices of this paper.

What is EPIC preaching style? EPIC preaching is what Dr. Sweet labels as “blood work” He writes in *Giving Blood a Fresh, Paradigm for Preaching*. Preachers need to know their culture and their congregation’s peculiar storyboard and find ways to connect those storylines with the story of Jesus in ways that allow them to participate in and connect with Christ’s powerful and life-changing presence.² He continues that EPIC preaching is a new form of field “preaching”. The African American pulpit has had plenty of experience in field preaching from literal to figurative fields of people coming to hear the word of God preached. Sweet further states that preaching in EPIC style is the mix of craft and craftiness, practice and creativity, tradition and innovation required to create an atmosphere of receptivity and play. It requires the power of narraphoric message with hands-on participation and story sharing.³

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 44.

Experiential

The 'E' in EPIC preaching stands for "Experiential". It is in this area that Sweet discusses the value of presenting something that is the core of preaching, an experience. He writes that it is getting something experienced that can transform your life for God and the gospel. He points out that this paradigm shift is what rational was to the Guttenberg era, and experiential is to the Google world.⁴

What people want today is an experience, and that is true Sunday in and Sunday out. People are no longer looking to be talked to or talked at. They rather experience the thing or concept you are trying to teach. The popularity of reality shows has proven that the average individual wants in on the game. They want the experience.

Dr. Len Sweet has picked up on this fact and shares in his description of the 'E' of EPIC preaching. He describes that the experience is allowing ourselves to "called out" and "revealed" to bare our hearts to Jesus for him to see our lives, our motives, our sorrows, our pain, our issues, our joys. He goes on to say that Experiential preaching does the same thing: it calls to and calls out the flock to see and be seen.⁵ Sweet has done for the church pastor what the producers of American Idol, the Voice, Family Feud, Iron Chef and many other shows have done for the viewing public. They have allowed the observer to become a part of the experience. He further explains that EPIC preaching does not throw reason out the window but secures it in worship in Scripture. He believes every sermon should give people something to see, something to hear, something to

⁴ Ibid., 46.

⁵ Ibid., 47.

touch, something to taste and something to smell.⁶ He has shown the local pastor how to take what they know to be true and allow the listener to move from a sedentary, passive receiver to becoming a member of the cast, a character in the story, person who walks away knowing they have experienced the God of their salvation by experiencing the sermon which was preached.

Participatory

Watching a group of third graders view a Science experiment a few years ago, I remember the guest scientist as she conducted the experiment. She poured a liquid in a cylinder and waited a few seconds and then poured another liquid in to the same cylinder. The students sat watching with amazement as the cylinder filled with steam and then evaporated. What once was liquid had transformed to gas and then disappeared. The excitement in the eyes, and voices of the students was heightened. But, just when I thought they could not be more excited she asked the question, “Would anyone like to try it?” The bodies of the students became erect, and the hands of every child propelled into the air. Their experience of viewing had not reached its highest level and crossed over into a different element. They were now going to be able to participate in what they were learning about.

Dr. Sweet captures this same idea as he writes to help pastors in presenting EPIC sermons. The ‘P’ stands for Participatory. According to Dr. Sweet, participation is the mediator of experience and the animator of narraphor. Participation turns people into active agents of initiation and response. And semiotic preaching moves from a listening paradigm to a participation paradigm. It is his understanding that participation is the

⁶ Ibid., 48–49.

essence of what we will call the “transductive (transincarnational) method” focusing less on taking apart passages and more on finding ways for the congregation to take part in the message dynamically. Dr. Sweet interjects his thought about the black church in this category stating that in the African American tradition, the greater the quality of the interaction, both verbal and physical, the greater the quality of preaching.⁷

Dr. Sweet’s ideas are supported by the needs of society wanting more of an experience. More is discussed on the topic in an earlier chapter in this paper. There are also expressions from members of Calvary Christian Church in a later chapter of this dissertation describing how they too enjoy the participatory element of EPIC preaching.

Dr. Sweet sums up his thoughts on the participatory element of Epic preaching by disclosing that we must recognize that preaching is not just a one-way communication: it is a two-way street. And that the ‘P’ in EPIC is not just being responsive to content but also a constructor of the sermon. Finally, Dr. Sweet expresses that in the traditional pulpit centric preaching, real labor is spent on writing better opening sentences. But in participatory preaching time is spent on creating better opening (and closing interactions).⁸

In the African American pulpit, the participatory element is expressed when congregants are free to shout, wave, walk, and dance during the sermon. In some traditions it is normal for the other preachers of the gospel to walk near (up to the edge of the stage) the preaching pastor as he or she is making her case for the gospel. The beauty of this scene is that nothing is lost in the presentation. The preacher continues to preach,

⁷ Ibid., 50.

⁸ Ibid., 52.

and the people continue to rejoice at the word of God that is going forth. The ‘P’ in EPIC is clearly seen in the African American Church today.

Image Rich

In EPIC preaching the ‘I’ stands for “Image Rich”. Sweet writes that Semiotic preaching exegetes images. He states that the one of the shifts we need to make from traditional preaching to semiotic preaching is to realize that the power of the Word isn’t in the words it’s in the images, the stories, the music of the text.⁹ It is here that he talks about the “master metaphor” the leading and controlling image that reframes the conversation or concept of Scripture. This metaphor can be a character, a key moment in the story, an artifact or artifices, even a word that functions as an image.¹⁰ Dr. Sweet helps pastors by presenting the fact that we live in an image rich society and we should learn from the advertising agencies as they are no longer presenting their product to us in their advertisements as much as they are presenting us with a story in which their product can be found.

Picture an image in your mind: two cute snow white, bouncy, fluffy-haired puppies capering on a beautifully green freshly cut lawn on a warm seventy-four degrees blue sky Spring afternoon chasing after you with only one purpose in mind: To play with you, to love on you, to make you smile, to lick your face and chirp and bark as to say, “Hey, we like you and want to be around you all the time!” This was the image shown to Calvary Christian Church members to describe the last verse of Psalm 23:

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

⁹ Ibid., 53.

¹⁰ Ibid., 54.

He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul.

He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.¹¹

The verse states that to share the message of God's love, his goodness and his mercy are chasing after his beloved children to love on them, play with them and be with them all the days of their life! The image did it all! The members got the message of God's goodness and his mercy. Then Sweet states that image rich preaching sears the image and living presence of Christ into the hearts of his followers.¹²

Connective

In EPIC preaching the 'C' is for "Connective". Dr. Sweet pens that people are desperate to connect with God, with each other, with creation, with their culture and with their community. He states that in EPIC preaching there are no "Rock Stars!" Connective preachers are not just in the business of building communities or even forging personal relationships with Christ. Preachers are in the bodybuilding business of forming the body of Christ. People are lovers of community for the sake of community but lovers of people for the sake of embodying the gospel. Connectional preachers invite people to connect

¹¹ Psalm 23

¹² Sweet, 54.

with each other, so they can better connect with Christ's healing power and life-giving presence.¹³

Douglas Anderson and Michael J Conyers in the book, *The Race to Reach Out: Connecting Newcomers to Christ in a New Century*, writes that the focal point of their assimilation process is helping newcomers belong or connect with the church in a meaningful way. The authors argue that the issue of belonging and connecting is so important that seventy-five percent of the newcomers decide within ninety days if the church they have visited will become the church they will become a part of. They believe the answer is to create awareness, welcome newcomers with hospitality, responding well after the first visit, listening carefully to newcomers, and following up with a consistent network of invitations connecting newcomers with ministry opportunities.¹⁴

Dr. Sweet summarizes by stating that connectional preachers invite people to connect with each other, so they can better connect with Christ's healing power and life-giving presence.¹⁵ Preachers who are in the business of business of "doing our Father's' business" are constantly looking for ways to connect followers with Jesus Christ.

The African American churches mentioned in this dissertation, have made a concerted effort to connect with individuals through ministries and family groups outlined by zip codes. The family groups are led by a member of the diaconate and their spouse. The members connect weekly and share issues and concerns. They also spend time in social and recreational events throughout the year.

¹³ Ibid., 56.

¹⁴ Douglas T. Anderson and Michael J. Coyner, *The Race to Reach Out: Connecting Newcomers to Christ in a New Century* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004).

¹⁵ Ibid., 56.

Incorporating connectivity in the fellowship of the church has been one of the main focuses of Calvary Christian as the pastor leads in sharing faults and being vulnerable to ask for prayer in areas in which help is needed, allows all to be comfortable and share. The ability to connect immediately via social media and text messaging also aids in building a community. The congregation regularly meets for weekly study and a meal. Starting with checking the pulse of everyone, making sure that any pertinent issues are addressed, we move right into song and prayer then the study of the lesson. The connectivity is seen throughout and after as the members stay well after the meal to continue talking and sharing with each other.

In addition to connecting through weekly study, Calvary Christian Church also connects via the table at the end of each Sunday worship service. The meal is prepared by the pastor, the members contribute via an offering. We share in the lives of one another through fellowship, prayer and praise reports and genuine care for one another.

In the history of the African American church one would see this same type of fellowship out on the lawn of the church grounds. The picnic tables and rows of food and chairs would have been seen from a distant. It would serve as a beacon light in the community and all would be welcome. It was a special time where all who were in the vicinity would smell the aroma and know that they would be welcomed to share at the table.

CHAPTER 8: THE WRAP UP

Impact on the Calvary Christian Church Congregation

“People today aren’t hungry for new information or brilliant messages; people are hungry for fresh experiences of faith and for experiences of a God who loves them”

—Dr. Len Sweet

Worship should be participatory not passive.¹ In his book, *Giving Blood, A Fresh Paradigm for Preaching*, Dr. Sweet writes that the semiotic sermon seeks to design a participatory experience, a conversion conversation, an immersion into an alternate reality, and Christ consciousness where there is fullness of joy. This type of sermon appeals to the whole brain and is much more sensory based than logic driven, more emotionally charged than it is intellectually chiseled.²

Eager to embrace the ideas presented by Sweet with Calvary Christian Church, I employed the theory of this new paradigm shift. The focus of the sermon as Dr. Sweet argues requires a new theory of the congregation. The preacher must now wrestle with not how he or she becomes a better preacher, but how the congregation becomes better participants and a better congregation. He emphatically states that the new era of preaching must acknowledge, “WE are all participant-observers.”³

One exciting thing that has happened in the life of my church is the growth that occurred as a pastor learning this idea of EPIC preaching from Dr. Len Sweet. Having the

¹ Leonard I. Sweet, *Giving Blood: A Fresh Paradigm for Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 257.

² Ibid., 187.

³ Ibid., 92–93.

opportunity to engage the congregation in different aspects of EPIC preaching and seeing the results in real-time has been very rewarding. While many of the congregants were raised in the tradition of African American preaching, they were also open to the leading of the Spirit to experience this new method of delivering the gospel to achieve transformation and there has been an outpouring of support for the new shift by the Calvary Christian Church.

It is in this chapter that stories and examples will be shared from the view of the pastor and members who have been informed and transformed by the new EPIC preaching at Calvary Christian Church.

To begin, let's understand the importance of gestures. Dr. Len Sweet presented to the cohort that gestures were a way to help the congregant remember significant elements of the sermon. He shared with the members that the sign of the cross was a gesture used by the early church as a means to signify that you were a part of the "way". The gesture was bending the middle finger on top of the index finger. It was a peaceful sign of faith.

After preaching on the need for forgiveness and the importance of believers forgiving each other as Christ has forgiven us, a gesture was born. The theme of forgiveness was highlighted during the sermon and referenced as a deed as easy as letting a fish "off the hook" Though it is a figure of speech it has great impact in the idea of forgiveness.

When a fish is on the hook it cannot get away. No matter which way it turns, it endures more pain because of the hook. Every which way that it turns it causes more pain because of the hook. If it pulls upward the hook the digs deeper into its mouth. If it tries to swim away the fisherman pulls it back in, creating a greater sense of pain. The sermon

asks for individuals to think of someone they had not forgiven, for whatever reason. They were to get the name of that individual in their mind and take their name to God. First, they were to ask God to forgive them for not forgiving, then they were to complete the gesture.

The hands were to be clasped together cupped by the fingertips pulling in opposite directions in order to feel the fingernails digging in. After praying for the individual and then releasing the hands by broadly opening the fingers and arms signifying that they have been forgiven, this person now “let them off the hook.” The impact of this gesture was one that will never be forgotten. A few of the Calvary members shared the gesture with coworkers the next week at work.

Another aspect of the EPIC preaching model that has impacted our church has been the image. The presentation of “image” allowed for what Dr. Len Sweet referenced as “whole brain homiletics”⁴ The listener was engaged through pictures and visuals, that did not have to be brought to mind but were processed by the mind as they observed them.

A sermon was preached on the 23rd Psalm. The familiarity of this Psalm for each member, and most Christians, causes some to take the words for granted. Reciting the words verbatim can sometimes have low impact on the audience. Therefore, instead of preaching, a video slideshow of items was presented. There was no comment or words from the preacher and no text added to the picture explaining what the scene was. Members were able to self-reflect on the Lord’s shepherding and worship in their own space. The congregant was able to listen and view the slide while reflecting on how the

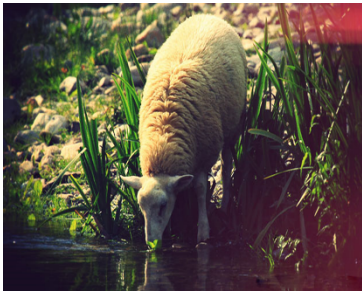
⁴ Ibid., 105.

Lord's shepherding of their life has been a blessing. The pictures represented the theme of each verse. Below are samples of the images that were viewed:



Psalm 23: The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

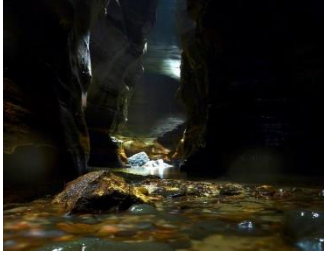
² He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.



³ He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.



⁴ Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.



⁵Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.



⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.



It is in the simple images of the theme of the Scripture that the members found comfort. For those who were in the middle of a valley experience they shared that they were encouraged by the new car and the two puppies that will be chasing after them all the days of their lives as they dwell in the presence of the Lord forever.

The slide presentation was matched with a sound track featuring a song titled, *He Restoreth my soul*, by Minister Jeffrey LaValley adding to the experience.

Planning a worship service using the EPIC method is not just adding music and video, Sweet argues that preachers must also make sure that the metaphors they preach serve the contexts of the lives with which they have been entrusted.⁵ In preaching the message of the Passover that Jesus shared with his disciples prior to his being arrested and crucified there was enough in the table scene to communicate to any congregant that it was a message of love, giving, and glory. It was on the last day of the concluding Advance that the Semiotic Preaching Cohort had the blessed opportunity to share with Dr. Sweet in the Lord's Supper.

With the beautiful ocean in the backdrop, we sat around the table listening to a message of love, inclusion, faith and healing. Dr. Sweet tells the following story:

Now when he had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum.

And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die.³ And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant.

And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, that he was worthy for whom he should do this:

For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue.

Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof:

Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed.

For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him, and

⁵ Ibid., 172.

turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.

And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole that had been sick.⁶

The metaphor of a centurion is one who has authority over many. This centurion was the leader of an army. He was not a Jew but had been kind to them and built a synagogue for them. Though he may not have been part of them he treated them with kindness and therefore they went to Jesus on his behalf. And they shared with Jesus that he should do this request because of this man's treatment of them. Jesus agrees and goes with them to fulfill the request.

The centurion speaks to his friends and sends word to Jesus with the message that he is unworthy to be in the presence of Jesus, but realizes the power of Jesus. As Jesus was getting close to the house he sends this word. He puts a distance between him and the savior by sending out his friends with the message that he is unworthy, but believes that Jesus can speak a word and his servant will be healed. Jesus does not focus on the man's associations, occupation, or assimilation, but focuses on his faith. And he rewards the centurion's faith and heals his servant.

The sermon ends with Dr. Sweet sharing with us this message of inclusion and all who believed in the message of faith were included to share at the table. The table was prepared, and Dr. Sweet had each of us present the elements to one another. The presenter was to say to the receiver that this is the body and blood that was broken and shed for you on Calvary and the receiver was to respond with "I know". The movement was powerful and we all felt included and accepted. It was at that moment that we ate the

⁶ Luke 7:1-10 (KJV).

bread and drank the cup being reminded that we were accepted by Christ because of our faith in him, and this is the message we were to take back to our congregations.

Reflections of EPIC Sermons by Calvary Christian Church Members

The Calvary Christian Church membership shared in multiple EPIC sermons throughout this dissertation journey. The members were asked to complete a brief questionnaire detailing the nature of a sermon that impacted them and if they shared the sermon with anyone.

The first member to submit their information was a medical student and preacher in her late twenties. She is an ordained preacher, wife of an ordained preacher and mother of a preschooler. Her name is Minniel and her words are as follows:

Sermon Topic or Theme: Wisdom

“I remember the first thing that stood out to me in this sermon was that Pastor started with controversy. She started with a bold statement and thought, and she presented it with confidence, as if no question was to be had. She stated wisdom is a woman: period, nothing extra, nothing more, that’s it. Growing up Baptist, anytime something of that nature is declared there is always need for discussion. After all, a woman in leadership is big deal. Nonetheless, you are claiming that wisdom is the most valuable possession we can have, and she is a woman. Of course, the sermon was not solely about wisdom being a woman but to open with such a controversial statement was an attention getter, to say the least.” The next thing that was totally thought provoking, but so obvious we missed it, is the thought that wisdom was there in the beginning with God. Of course, God is sovereign, and He knows all. I had just never really considered

that idea before; therefore I took note for further study later. Now, the sermon continued to flow with various ideas and concepts, but the part that really struck home for me was that we look like God; therefore we should act like God. The bible tells us that we are wise when we follow God. Every day we are to look for the good in others regardless. We are to hate evil as God does and give love as He is. Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. God asked me that day to make His stuff more important in my life than my stuff, to be wise and be obedient to Him.”

“I remember leaving and deciding to give all He was asking of me a try and things began to change. I was able to grow in Him. He was able to prepare me for what was to come. Before Pastor ended that day, she said, “Love can drive out hate.”. Then she asked, “Do you want wisdom?” To this day, I have to remember everyday yes, I want wisdom, and I will be wise and listen to the Lord. Life is a journey and it is so wonderful when your Pastor’s sermons follow that journey with relevance, insight, and imagery.”

The next member to share her experience is a female daycare employee and mother of six adult children, eight grandchildren and one great grandchild. She is active in church ministry as usher for more than fifty years. Her name is Thelma and her words are as follows:

Sermon Topic or Theme: The Lord’s Supper at the Table

“The way you did the Lord’s Supper. I guess the part I liked was we were having the Lord’s supper. It was about ten of us, almost like the twelve disciples, and we were seated around the table. Which reminded you of Jesus and his disciples at the table.”

It just gave you the feeling that you were with Jesus and his disciples getting ready to take the body and the blood. And it was surreal because everybody was quiet,

and you passed the cup around along with the bread and we waited till everyone had theirs and you said this is my body and what I could see was Jesus telling everyone this is my body. And after we took the bread and ate them, you said, “This is my blood do this in remembrance of me.” And it was just so real, really, real. It was like we were at the table with Jesus and I’ve never had that experience. I know we take communion every first Sunday but sitting around the table was a big difference. I enjoyed that. I think that’s it. “I think I told my oldest “daughter”, and she said, “that she would like to experience that”, because she has never done it that way.”

Another member of the church who gave input on the semiotic sermon that influenced him. He is a deacon in the church and a men’s ministry leader. He is the husband of a preacher and the father of a millennial. His name is William and his words are documented as:

Sermon Topic or Theme: The Love of the Lord 1 John 3

“The Lotion Demonstration. The impact of the sermon was both spiritual and emotional. From a spiritual aspect it was a clear illustration of how God’s love for us is always more than we can handle. In the demonstration the lotion was poured in abundance on the hands of a participant, such that it was overflowing over the hands and on to the lap of that persons. Trying to wring their hands together to absorb the lotion was not enough and they had to share it with someone else. That became the emotional part of the demonstration because it signified to me that God’s love is so overwhelming that you can’t keep it to yourself. “

Another member's account of an EPIC sermon is Belva. She is a widow and a grandmother whose ministry is sitting with and helping the elderly. Her words are as follows:

Sermon Topic or Theme: Encouraging Ourselves in the Lord

“I can't elaborate, but the sermon was about encouraging ourselves in the Lord. That he hears our cry and we can always call on Him, it helped me to remember that God is always here for me too. It's so much easier to pray for others, but sometimes it's hard for me to pray for myself, when I don't want to deal with my stuff. It helped me to remember that God can handle my stuff and help me through it especially when I feel like I'm dealing it alone. Thank you, pastor, Kempt your preaching and teaching touches my soul. I shared with my sister.”

Another member's account of an Epic sermon is Jan. She is a single female who works in criminal justice system. She is active in several ministries and volunteers through social organizations across the city. Her words are as follows:

Sermon Topic: At the Table

“I have a lot of brothers and sisters and even more family members. We mostly gather around the table during holidays. I know I am welcome at the table most of the time because they are family, but when it comes to outsiders (people not in the family), not so much. I do know that at my family's table I can get mostly all I need or want at the table.

Jesus had a feast, welcoming all, who would choose to come to His table. At Jesus' table, when He invites you, He will have all you need at the table. If you're looking

for love, joy, peace, healing, acceptance, deliverance, comfort, whatever you need, it is at the table.

I talked to a coworker about this sermon because, she was having a hard time understanding why she didn't have the friends she thought she had. Why she couldn't enjoy their company. I tried to tie this sermon into her situation, telling her that we are not always invited to everyone's table. At times if we are invited, they may not have what we want or need. However, at the table of the Lord Jesus Christ, we are always, always, always welcomed and accepted. I thank God that He gave His body, and shed His blood so that we may sit and feast at the table. Amen.”

In the fall of 2016 we conducted a study of the book of Psalms. Our major focus was on the poetic form of the entries and the experiences of the Israelites, and their God. Then we encouraged the members to read a psalm and study it and try their hand at writing their own Psalms.

The enthusiasm of the CCC members ranged from intrigue, to excitement, to fear, but each one of them tried their hand and wrote beautiful prayers and songs to the Lord.

EPIC Psalm Writing:
A Book of Psalms
Fashioned after the True Book of Psalms
 by
Calvary Christian Church Members

Thelma M.

11/04/2016

*Oh Lord don't turn from me
 Stay with me Daily
 Things have changed so around me
 Lift me in your bosom
 Stay with me daily⁷*

William K.

11/04/2016

*I will bless the Lord, for he is good
 He changed my life and made me whole
 He forgives me of my sins and forgets them
 I will bless the Lord for he is good
 He keeps me safe in this world
 He promises me a new home with him
 I will bless the Lord for he is good⁸*

Jamale K.

11/04/2016

*God lead me, God help me
 Give me a desire to know you more
 Come close, come close
 God speak to me, God oh most high speak to me
 Give me a want for your word
 That is what I need
 Come close come close⁹*

⁷ Thelma Matthews, commentary to the author, Missouri City, October 4, 2016.

⁸ William Kempt, commentary to the author, Missouri City, October 4, 2016.

⁹ Jamale Kempt, commentary to the author, Missouri City, October 4, 2016.

Thelma M.**11/10/2016**

*The Lord is my protection my strength
 The lord is my keeper and my guide
 When the enemy sent harm to me
 God shielded me. held me up and kept me safe
 The Lord blesses me daily with my abilities, and the lord continuously shows me love and
 strength
 This is now my love for the Lord!¹⁰*

Elaena K.**11/10/2016**

*Elohim, O enduring perfect one
 We even as those servants who acknowledge your greatness are not worthy of your
 mercy.
 Forgive us all God in our short comings to be more like you
 Please, never remove your love from our lives, even when we stray
 We are forever grateful for your sacrifice, strength and sacred word to us
 May this limited adoration of you be pleasing to your heart
 O YHWH our savior¹¹*

William K.**01/05/2017**

*Worshipping God (nature)
 God is all around us. Everything we see that you have made reminds us of who you are.
 The birds fly, the bugs crawl the beast walk, and the people worship.¹²*

Jamale K.**01/05/2017**

*The flowers bloom in spring multiple colors showing your greatness
 The stars flicker above the speckles of dirt showing your care
 the waters wave constantly waiting for your command
 The sun warms us all reminding us of your power.
 Thou art Elohim¹³*

¹⁰ Thelma Matthews, commentary to the author, Missouri City, November 10, 2016.

¹¹ Elaena Kempt, commentary to the author, Missouri City, October 10, 2016.

¹² William Kempt, commentary to the author, Missouri City, January 5, 2017.

¹³ Jamale Kempt, commentary to the author, Missouri City, January 5, 2017.

Minniel D.**01/05/2017**

*Oh God, Oh God,
 How great and majestic you are. How amazing you give and bless and decipher.
 How well you know every part of me.
 How awesome your patience and understanding?
 every day with you is greater because I grow in you.
 I learn how truly awe worthy you are.
 Oh God oh God how amazing you are.
 How much I love you.¹⁴*

Elaena K.**01/05/2017**

*God alone is eternal
 and for that we praise and call on his eternal goodness
 to us who are unworthy
 Be gracious and full of compassion;
 God shows us patience by forgiving us countless times
 and within all those chances
 remaining slow to anger with us
 as we live flawed in your presence day to day.
 How great of him to show us mercy we have not earned
 and continue to love us unconditionally.¹⁵*

Belva R.**1/05/2017**

*Thou art faithful oh father in all things.
 Thou raise me up when I am down and when I fall
 You feed me in always, spiritually, mentally and physically
 You give me the desires of my heart according to your will and riches and your glory.
 Therefore, I will worship and praise you forevermore.¹⁶*

William K**1/19/2017**

*God whenever we call on you, you hear us
 You are never too busy
 You are never out of touch
 When we cry out, you, stand strong
 You cover and protect us daily*

¹⁴ Minniel Douglas, commentary to the author, Missouri City, January 5, 2017.

¹⁵ Elaena Kempt, commentary to the author, Missouri City, January 5, 2017.

¹⁶ Belva Robinson, commentary to the author, Missouri City, January 5, 2017.

*You give us a portion of your strength
For this we say than you
Amen¹⁷*

Minniel D.

1/26/2017

*Lord Oh Lord how majestic you are
You are my secret place, my hiding place, my safe place.
The fortress of my heart, of my life, of my soul.
You are the place I find refuge; the place I find strength; The place I find me.
You are my God the only one and true dwelling of my inner most being
I rest in you
Live and grow in you
I find strength and protection in you
Lord, Oh Lord how majestic you are.¹⁸*

Belva R.

1/26/2017

*Father God you are my refuge and my strength and an ever-present help in my times of
trouble.
I will not fear because you are with me,
Even when the world gives way and the mountains fall into the heart of the seas,
Though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.
Thank you, father God,
for calming the waves of worry in the midst of this troubled world¹⁹*

Jamale K.

1/26/2017

*I love you Lord my strength
You are my strong source
I run to you for safety
You are my shelter, canopy, seawall
I call you. You are worthy of praise
I am shielded from my enemies²⁰
I don't have to be ashamed
I am dependent on your name*

¹⁷ William Kempt, commentary to the author, Missouri City, January 19, 2017.

¹⁸ Minniel Douglas, commentary to the author, Missouri City, January 26, 2017.

¹⁹ Belva Robinson, commentary to the author, Missouri City, January 26, 2017.

²⁰ Jamale Kempt, commentary to the author, Missouri City, January 26, 2017.

Why This Is Important

The demographics of congregations are changing. There are two reasons that this blend of African American and EPIC worship is important to the seminary student who aims to “Preach the story”. People are living in blended communities and experiencing each other cultures. The preacher or pastor today is to be ready to reach the masses from all walks of life. Seminary trained professionals are what the church is looking for to fill the pulpits across the country. The cultures from which they hail may or may not be represented in the teaching arena of their school.

However, it is important for the seminary student to be able to preach from their own tradition albeit one of mainstream Christianity or one that is sparsely documented in the halls of most seminaries and embrace a new hermeneutical presentation. Seminary students answer the call to ministry not knowing where the call will lead them. With that wide-open space of opportunity, one would be wise to study multiple aspects of preaching and the history behind the method.

The African American millennials are seeking the truth just as their white counterparts. Both groups are products of the environment in which they have been raised, an environment inundated with image and quick access to information, visuals and story. For the preacher to reach the hearts and minds of both dynamics he or she must prepare to be a great “griot” and participant in the blessed story of the savior.

Including the newcomer and allowing the worshiper to truly participate in the sermon is vital. The preacher must search for roads that these groups are traveling on to compel them to the narrow road of the faith and at the same time make certain that they are welcome and can bring friends. It is in the telling of stories that people find

themselves. Jesus proves it when he shares the story of the Good Samaritan. In the story he not only introduces the setting of a road that is traveled but also, there are many characters who travel the road. Everyone listening to the story could be one of the characters at any point in their life, he traveler, the thieves, the rabbi, the leader, the inn keeper or the Samaritan.

In “preaching the story” the audience sees with new eyes, hears with clear hearing, smells the aroma of the setting and can ultimately feel the mercy of God.

When stories are told and the metaphors or “narraphors” are placed before the congregation, the listener has the chance to decide for him or herself and yield to the message that is presented. In this manner you have a story to be remembered and shared.

Conclusion

The African American preaching style and the EPIC preaching model together are proposed to yield a more dynamic preaching experience, produce an expressive engagement with the context of Scripture, and create greater reminiscence of sermon summary.

It is important in ministry to provide an avenue in which worshipers can apply the promise of the gospel found in the stories of the Holy Bible. Such stories provide individuals with the faith to make their beliefs come to life. Utilizing the major components of the two preaching styles listed as the focus of this study, preachers will have a new method for inspiring individuals. Therefore, preachers will and must continue to Preach the Story!

Personal Reflection

It is impossible for me to delete my African American roots. I think about the passion that is within and the long history of my ancestry along with the calling that has given the ability to preach. In this dissertation I have tried to highlight the best of both paradigms to show the power that is harnessed when they are combined. The story of my personal history, and the story of my people tell the story of a God who loves the oppressed. The passion of words translated by the narraphors found in Scripture are the new mechanisms to which so many will be saved and encouraged in their faith. The sermons personify the story of salvation. In blending these two methods of preaching one will become aware that at times the preacher tells the story and other times the story tells the preacher. It is at this point that the window that one looks through shifts and becomes a mirror; the preacher becomes the story. As the stories of the bible are conveyed each time a preacher stands to proclaim the Word they become the fire tenders and story keepers keeping God alive in community. Preach the Story, cohort has provided me with a new avenue to teach, build, inform and inspire a new generation of listeners, and for this I am forever grateful!

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adogame, Afe, Roswith Gerloff, and Klaus Hock. *Christianity in Africa and the African Diaspora: The Appropriation of a Scattered Heritage*. London: Continuum, 2008. Accessed December 4, 2017. EBSCOhost.
- Anderson, Douglas T. and Michael J. Coyner. *The Race to Reach Out: Connecting Newcomers to Christ in a New Century*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004.
- Belcher, Stephen. "Studying Griots: Recent Work in Mande Studies." *African Studies Review* 47, no. 3 (2004): 172–186. Accessed December 12, 2017. <https://georgefox.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.georgefox.idm.oclc.org/docview/211676044?accountid=11085>.
- Bostic, Joy R. "Review of Ashe to Amen: African Americans and Biblical Imagery." *Souls* 16, no. 1-2 (2014).
- Brothers, Thomas. "Ideology and Aurality in the Vernacular: Traditions of African-American Music (CA. 1890–1950)." *Black Music Research Journal* 17, no. 2 (1997): 169. Accessed December 18, 2017. <http://link.galegroup.com.georgefox.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/A53478950/AONE?u=newb64238&sid=AONE&xid=413972b7>.
- Burgh, Theodore W. "Black Biblical Interpretation and Near Eastern Archaeology." *Black Theology* 4, no. 2 (2006): 138–150. Accessed December 15, 2017. EBSCOhost.
- Callahan, Allen Dwight. *The Talking Book: African Americans and the Bible*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006.
- Chelst, Kenneth. *Exodus and Emancipation: Biblical and African-American Slavery*. Brooklyn, NY: Urim Publications, 2009. Accessed December 2, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central.
- Colombo, H. "A Faithful Journey." *Indianapolis Business Journal* 37, no. 13 (2016): 13–19. Accessed December 2, 2017. <https://georgefox.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.georgefox.idm.oclc.org/docview/1792591444?accountid=11085>.
- Copher, Charles B. *Black Biblical Studies: An Anthology of Charles B. Copher: Biblical and Theological Issues on the Black Presence in the Bible*. Chicago: Black Light Fellowship, 1993.
- Dargan, William T., and Isaac Watts. *Lining Out the Word: Dr. Watts Hymn Singing in the Music of Black Americans (Music of the African Diaspora)*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.

- Deaderick, L.B. "Capturing Spiritual Moments: A Photography Exhibit at the Chrysler Museum Explores Black Churches." *McClatchy Tribune Business News* (2007). <https://georgefox.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.georgefox.idm.oclc.org/docview/462799168?accountid=11085>.
- Dewey, Dennis. "Great in the Empire of Heaven: A Faithful Performance of Matthew's Sermon on the Mount." In *Preaching the Sermon on the Mount: The World It Imagines*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2007.
- Eijnatten, Joris van. *Preaching, Sermon and Cultural Change in the Long Eighteenth Century*. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2009.
- Ellison, Robert H. *A New History of the Sermon: The Nineteenth Century*. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2010. Accessed October 2, 2017. EBSCOhost.
- Eshun, Sussie and Esther Mortimer Packer. "Positive Psychology Practice with African Americans: Mental Health Challenges and Treatment." In *Positive Psychology in Racial and Ethnic Groups: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 259–279. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2016. Accessed July 21, 2017. PsycBOOKS.
- Finkel, Jori. "After 15 Centuries, St. Peter Finally Leaves Home." *The New York Times*. November 12, 2006.
- Floyd-Thomas, Stacey M. *Black Church Studies: An Introduction*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007.
- Fry-Brown, Teresa. *Delivering the Sermon: Voice, Body, and Animation in Proclamation (Elements of Preaching)*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008.
- Ganzevoort, R. Ruard, Maaïke de Haardt, and Michael Scherer-Rath, eds. *Religious Stories We Live By: Narrative Approaches in Theology and Religious Studies*. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2014. Accessed December 2, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central.
- Geary, James. *I Is An Other: The Secret Life of Metaphor and How it Shapes the Way We See the World*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2012.
- Giakalis, Ambrosios. *Images of the Divine: The Theology of Icons at the Seventh Ecumenical Council*. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1994.
- Greenberg, A. "The Church and the Revitalization of Politics and Community." *Political Science Quarterly* 115, no. 3 (2000): 377–394. Accessed December 10, 2017. [com.georgefox.idm.oclc.org/docview/208269197?accountid=11085](https://georgefox.idm.oclc.org/docview/208269197?accountid=11085).

- Hale, Thomas A., *Griots and Griottes: Masters of Words and Music*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007.
- Hawks, Annie S. "I Need Thee Every Hour." Accessed December 10, 2017. http://library.timelesstruths.org/music/I_Need_Thee_Every_Hour/.
- Henrich, Daniel J. "The Griot Storyteller and Modern Media." *Communicatio* 27, no. 1 (2001): 24–27. doi:10.1080/02500160108537921.
- Holbert, John C. *Telling the Whole Story: Reading and Preaching Old Testament Stories*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2013. Accessed August 14, 2017. EBSCOhost.
- Howes, Graham. *The Art of the Sacred: An Introduction to the Aesthetics of Art and Belief*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2007.
- Hubbard, Dolan. *The Sermon and the African American Literary Imagination*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994.
- Kling, David W. *The Bible in History: How the Texts Have Shaped the Times*. Cary, NC: Oxford University Press, 2004. Accessed December 15, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central.
- Koerner, Joseph Leo. *The Reformation of the Image*. London: Reaktion Books, 2011. Accessed December 17, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central.
- LaRue, Cleophus J. *The Heart of Black Preaching*. Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 1999.
- LaRue, Cleophus J. *More Power in the Pulpit: How Americas' Most Effective Black Preachers Prepare Their Sermons*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.
- Lubbock, Jules. *Storytelling in Christian Art from Giotto to Donatello*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006.
- Mattis, Jacqueline S., Nyasha Grayman Simpson, Wizdom Powell, Riana Elyse Anderson, Lawanna R. Kimbro, and Jacob H. Mattis. "Positive Psychology in African Americans." In *Positive Psychology in Racial and Ethnic Groups: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 83–107. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2016. Accessed July 21, 2017. PsycBOOKS, EBSCOhost.
- Mitchell, Henry H. "African-American Preaching: The Future of a Rich Tradition." *Interpretation* 51, no. 4 (1997): 371–383.

- Mitchem, Stephanie. *African American Folk Healing*. New York: NYU Press, 2007. Accessed December 5, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central.
- Morgan, David. *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images*. Berkeley: University California Press, 1998.
- Odozor, Paulinus Ikechukwu. *Morality Truly Christian, Truly African: Foundational, Methodological, and Theological Considerations*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014.
- Pipes, William H. *Say Amen, Brother! Old-time Negro Preaching: A Study in American Frustration*. Westport, CN: Negro Universities Press, 1970.
- Price, Emmett G. "Singing the Sermon: Where Musicology Meets Homiletics," *Yale Journal of Music & Religion* 1, no. 2 (2015): 49–66.
- Richardson, Elaine B. and Ronald L. Jackson. *Understanding African American Rhetoric: Classical Origins to Contemporary Innovations*. New York: Routledge, 2003. Accessed December 5, 2017. EBSCOhost.
- Sadler, Rodney S. *Can a Cushite Change His Skin?: An Examination of Race, Ethnicity, and Othering in the Hebrew Bible*. New York: T&T Clark, 2005. Accessed December 14, 2017. EBSCOhost.
- Sagal, Douglas B. "Imaginative Insight: Midrash and African-American Preaching." *Judaism: A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought* 50, no. 1 (2001): 3–16, Accessed December 12, 2017. <https://www.questia.com/library/p439149/judaism-a-quarterly-journal-of-jewish-life-and-thought> .
- Sernett, Milton C. *African American Religious History: A Documentary Witness*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999.
- Silvius, Dawn F. "Telling the Story." *Currents in Theology and Mission* 38, no. 6 (2011): 436. Accessed December 9, 2017. <http://go.galegroup.com.georgefox.idm.oclc.org/ps/i.do?p=AONE&sw=w&u=newb64238&v=2.1&it=r&id=GALE%7CA275577985&asid=f70f03281e746e7baf16ce687102a2b1>.
- Simmons, Martha J. and Frank A. Thomas. *Preaching with Sacred Fire: An Anthology of African American Sermons, 1750 to the Present*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2010.
- Spaulding, Amy E. *The Art of Storytelling: Telling Truths Through Telling Stories*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2011.
- Sweet, Leonard I. *Giving Blood: A Fresh Paradigm for Preaching*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014.

Taylor, William B. *Shrines and Miraculous Images: Religious Life in Mexico Before the Reforma*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2010.

Thomas, Frank A. *They Like to Never Quit Praisin' God: The Role of Celebration in Preaching*. Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2013.

Thompson, Gordon E. *Black Music, Black Poetry: Genre, Performance and Authenticity*. Farnham, United Kingdom: Ashgate, 2013.

Woodson, Carter Godwin. *History of The Negro Church*. Baltimore, MD: 12th Media Services, 2017.

Wright, Walter C. *Relational Leadership: A Biblical Model for Leadership Service*. Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster, 2000.