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Preaching in Multicultural Contexts

Edited by
Eunjoo Mary Kim and Namjoong Kim

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Guest Editors

Eunjoo Mary Kim
Namjoong Kim

Guest Editors

Eunjoo Mary Kim
Divinity School
Vanderbilt University
Nashville, TN
USA

Namjoong Kim
Practical Theology
Claremont School of
Theology
Los Angeles, CA
USA

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About the Editors

Eunjoo Mary Kim

Eunjoo Mary Kim is the Charles G. Finney Chair and Professor of Homiletics and Liturgics at Vanderbilt University Divinity School. In addition to many articles, she wrote *Preaching the Presence of God: A Homiletic from an Asian American Perspective* (Judson Press, 1999) and *Women Preaching: Theology and Practice through the Ages* (Pilgrim Press, 2004). She is also the author of *Preaching in an Age of Globalization* (Westminster Knox Press, 2010), *Christian Preaching and Worship in Multicultural Contexts* (Liturgical Press, 2017), and *Preaching Jesus: Postcolonial Approaches* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2024). Dr. Kim edited the 2023 Special Issue "Multicultural Worship: Theory and Practice" of the journal *Religions* and co-edited *Women, Church, and Leadership: New Paradigms* (Wipf and Stock, 2012). Her scholarly work focuses on developing theology and methods of preaching and worship that are relevant to contemporary cultural contexts. Her research interests include postcolonial and multicultural approaches to preaching and worship, Asian American theology and preaching, and practical theology. Her current research project focuses on developing Meta Homiletics that is effective in the culture of post-Christendom. Dr. Kim served as president of the Academy of Homiletics in 2018. An ordained Presbyterian minister, she has served local congregations and has worked on various Presbytery committees.

Namjoong Kim

Namjoong Kim is Associate Dean of Doctoral Programs & International Relations for Korea, Associate Professor of Practical Theology, Ministry, Liturgy, and Homiletics, and Director of the Intensive Doctoral Program in Korean Contexts at Claremont School of Theology. He earned his Ph.D. in Liturgical Studies from Drew Theological School in 2016. Dr. Kim's scholarship bridges theoretical, pastoral, and practical dimensions of Worship and Preaching, with particular expertise in Social Justice, Multiculturalism, Creative Preaching and Worship, Sacraments, Reconciliation, Conflict Healing, and Intergenerational Ministry. He has contributed significantly to contemporary discussions on the intersection of culture, theology, and liturgical practice, particularly in multicultural and digital ministry contexts. His notable publications include co-authoring *Digital Ministry Paradigm Shift* in *Future Report for Worship and Preaching in the Context of COVID-19: Religious, Practical, and Pastoral Perspectives* (Seoul: Worshipleader, 2021), and book chapters such as *Exploring Intergenerational Worship of Interdependence in a Korean American Context* in *Multicultural Worship: Theory and Practice* (Religions, 2023), *Preaching from the Perspective of Asian American Theology in Preaching the Manifold Grace of God* (2022), and *Worship after the COVID-19 Pandemic Crisis in the Korean Context in Imagine Church after COVID-19* (2020). His work also includes scholarship on worship leadership and communication, exemplified in *Worship as Question and Discourse: A Reset Toward Worship Focused on Communication and Fellowship* (2025). Dr. Kim's academic and practical contributions aim to equip students, clergy, and congregations for transformative ministry in diverse cultural contexts, fostering inclusive, justice-oriented, and spiritually formative communities both within Korea and globally.

Preface

Since the reprint of the Special Issue "Multicultural Worship: Theory and Practice" by the journal *Religions* in 2023, the Editorial Board has expressed interest in publishing a follow-up collection on preaching in multicultural contexts. This volume is the fruit of their timely concern and steadfast support, featuring insightful essays from nine contributors.

The context for preaching is not static but continually shaped by internal and external cultural dynamics. Culture is often understood as the attribute of a particular social group, representing a mode of life historically transmitted within a community. Today, however, we live in a multicultural world in which the rhythms of globalization, migration, and technological connectivity have made cultural diversity inseparable from the fabric of everyday life. In this environment, people engage in cultural negotiation on a daily basis rather than remaining firmly rooted in a single racial or ethnic identity.

Christian preaching is no exception. Although preaching has long been conceived as a primarily didactic and unidirectional act, preachers now face an imperative to engage cultural complexities with theological depth, ethical sensitivity, and rhetorical creativity. The pulpit is no longer merely a site for repeating conventional practices of proclamation; it has become a space of encounter, negotiation, and transformation, where diverse cultural identities intersect, historical injustices are confronted, and communal imagination is expanded. Moreover, the complexity of multicultural contexts requires preachers to rethink the very nature and purpose of homiletics—its theological grounding, hermeneutical strategies, practical execution, and communal impact.

"Preaching in Multicultural Contexts" arises from this challenge. Building on the insights of *"Multicultural Worship: Theory and Practice"*, this volume shifts the focus from worship to preaching, offering an array of theoretical frameworks, methodological innovations, and practical examples that illuminate the complexity and the promise of preaching in diverse cultural settings. Its essays foreground preaching as both a dialogical and performative act—dialogical because it requires mutual interpretation and relational engagement between preacher and congregation, and performative because it enacts transformation, fosters communal imagination, and embodies ethical commitment. The essays collected here converge around the profound insight that culture and preaching are mutually constitutive. Yet, the authors approach this insight from complementary yet distinct vantage points—intercultural, intergenerational, historical, and postcolonial—and produce a constellation of paradigms that illuminate the theological, ethical, rhetorical, and practical dimensions of preaching in multicultural contexts.

Timothy Levi Adkins-Jones, in "Hoodies and Holy Disruption," exemplifies preaching as embodied prophetic protest within a culture marked by racial diversity and injustice. Drawing on Ezekiel's performative acts and contemporary rituals like "Hoodie Sunday," Adkins-Jones demonstrates how preaching can challenge systemic injustice, engage diverse audiences, and make moral and divine truths unavoidable. This approach integrates social critique with ritualized, embodied performance to offer a model of preaching both ethically urgent and culturally resonant.

The essays by Jeremy Kangsan Kim and Namjoong Kim highlight the relational and communal dimensions of preaching in multicultural contexts. In "Deconstructing the Marginalized Self," Kangsan Kim weaves together the Korean concepts of *uri* (we) and *ren* (compassion and resistance) with biblical lament, proposing this intercultural framework as a theological foundation for reconstructing the identity of Korean American congregations. He further emphasizes the importance of solidarity, hope, and prophetic agency in shaping congregational identity. Namjoong Kim,

in "Playful Pulpits," explores the transformative power of play and regards it as a theological and homiletical medium. Moreover, he demonstrates how imaginative, participatory, and playful preaching can bridge cultural divides by deepening intercultural engagement. Both essays illustrate that preaching is not merely a transfer of knowledge but a communal act that shapes identity, builds empathy, and catalyzes ethical reflection.

Jaewoong Jung's essay, "Multicultural Preaching Across Generations: A Proposal for Effective Preaching to Young Generations in the Great Dechurching," also builds on relational and communal approaches. He addresses the widespread dechurching of younger generations—especially Millennials and Generation Z—and proposes a model of conversational preaching that emphasizes mutual listening, reciprocal relationships, and attentiveness to cultural differences across generations. His essay demonstrates the vital relevance of dialogical preaching for engaging the cultural experiences and spiritual needs of young adults.

Eliana Ah-Rum Ku and Scott Donahue-Martens attend to the structural, historical, and ethical dimensions of preaching. In "The Agency of Preaching," Ku reconceptualizes preaching as an act of hospitality, emphasizing co-agency and shared participation while addressing asymmetrical power dynamics, marginalization, and the limitations of monocultural approaches to preaching. Donahue-Martens, in his essay "A Postcolonial Conversational Approach," interrogates lingering colonial influences on preaching and advocates for a conversational, interstitial model that cultivates the preacher's intercultural competence and deepens relational understanding among congregants. Together, these essays remind us that ethically grounded, socially attentive preaching requires critical awareness of historical legacies and ongoing structures of privilege.

Michael E. Connors and Timothy Leitzke explore the theological and historical frameworks that enable intercultural preaching. In his essay, "Toward Inculturated Preaching," Connors emphasizes inculturation as dialogical, adaptive, and liberative and encourages preachers to construct authentic local theologies in conversation with their congregations. In "How Can Preachers Use Luther in a Decolonial Multicultural Context?," Leitzke examines how Martin Luther's theology can be ethically and contextually reinterpreted and provides a model of hybridized engagement that resists oppressive legacies associated with Luther while retaining his constructive theological insight. Both essays offer homiletical implications for developing historically and theologically grounded preaching that speaks effectively to multicultural contexts.

Finally, Jared E. Alcántara, in his essay "A Framework for Preaching About Racial–Ethnic Identity," offers a model that bridges the relational, ethical, and theological dimensions of preaching. Drawing on social psychology, intercultural communication, and homiletical methodology, Alcántara presents a framework that attends to the construction of racial and ethnic identity in multicultural congregations, providing a valuable resource for both scholarship and praxis.

Collectively, these essays illuminate the multidimensional character of preaching in multicultural contexts. The volume's originality lies in its synthesis of relational, structural, historical, theological, and performative perspectives through rigorous interdisciplinary study, drawing not only on theology but also on philosophy, sociology, history, communication studies, and cultural studies. Rather than prescribing a singular method, it presents a constellation of paradigms for preaching in multicultural settings—paradigms that intersect, challenge, and complement one another. This approach captures the profound complexity of preaching as a cultural, ethical, and theological practice capable of fostering dialogue, nurturing solidarity, and inspiring prophetic imagination in our multicultural world.

Furthermore, this volume provides preachers, worship leaders, and faith communities with concrete strategies for engaging their congregations meaningfully. The essays in this volume

highlight how preaching can cultivate empathy, ethical awareness, intercultural competency, and communal formation, inviting both preachers and congregations into processes of transformation. It is also noteworthy that the authors demonstrate that preaching in multicultural contexts is not merely a pastoral concern but also an avenue for collaborative and reciprocal engagement in sustained scholarly inquiry, enabling us to learn from one another and to co-construct knowledge about issues arising from multiculturalism.

Therefore, *Special Issue: Preaching in Multicultural Contexts* challenges Christian churches and scholars to participate actively in constructing inclusive, justice-oriented, and theologically grounded communal spaces that respond meaningfully to the complex, layered, and multifaceted realities of multicultural contexts. By fostering critical reflection, creative innovation, and intercultural understanding, it contributes to the broader project of homiletical scholarship and praxis, offering a vision for preaching that engages the realities of daily life and holds the potential to transform both faith communities and our multicultural world.

Eunjoo Mary Kim and Namjoong Kim
Guest Editors

Article

Hoodies and Holy Disruption: Black Protest Preaching and Multicultural Congregations

Timothy Levi Adkins-Jones

School of Theology, Boston University, Boston, MA 02215, USA; tljones@bu.edu

Abstract: Black prophetic preaching offers a moral critique of individuals and oppressive powers rooted in Scripture and divine promises. However, in an ever-diversifying contemporary landscape shaped by persistent racial injustice, social upheaval, and compounded oppression, Black protest preaching is emerging as a sub-genre of this tradition that serves as a source of resistance and renewal for all. This article explores the theology and practice of Black protest preaching, using Ezekiel's embodied homiletic acts in Ezekiel 4–5 and the contemporary observance of "Hoodie Sunday" as interpretive anchors, and how this type of preaching can be used in multicultural contexts. While prophetic preaching typically draws on moral exhortation to call a community toward change and speak truth to power, protest preaching functions through symbolic action, embodied resistance, and spatial disruption to make that truth unavoidable.

Keywords: black preaching; prophetic preaching; protest; community; Trayvon Martin; Ezekiel; performance

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"You know, if I had a son, he'd look like Trayvon." (Tau 2012)

President Obama offered these words in response to a question screamed from a reporter at the end of a press conference that was called to announce a new World Bank leader. For someone who was measured in his responses, I suspect both because of nature and circumstance, this line and the rest of his statement were an emotional plea, an attempt to offer something more than political jargon and well-manicured statements. For a moment, it seems, President Obama let his guard down and he allowed himself to speak to the hearts of so many who were traumatized by the murder of Trayvon Martin, humanizing Trayvon for multicultural America that was divided on the issue: "If I had a son, he'd look like Trayvon." This public mourning from the President arrested my sermon writing process. I was moved to tears as we heard not just from the Chief Executive of this country, or the careful political operative, but from a Black father trying to make sense of a senseless killing.

On 26 February, the day I celebrated my 30th birthday, Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old boy on his way back to his father's fiancée's house from the convenience store, was killed. Trayvon was followed by a self-appointed neighborhood watch captain named George Zimmerman. Mr. Zimmerman saw this young man, who happened to be wearing a hoodie and carrying a can of iced tea, and proceeded to call the police to report his "suspicious" behavior. Not satisfied with simply calling the police and alerting them about this seemingly "suspicious character," Zimmerman pursued Martin against the explicit instructions of the 911 dispatcher. Seventeen-year-old Trayvon Martin weighed 140 pounds. Zimmerman weighed 250 pounds. After a brief scuffle, Zimmerman shot and killed Trayvon, committing a tragic act that reverberated throughout the world.

As the father of a son who also looks like Trayvon, and as a man who himself could have been Trayvon, I was enraged to my very core, and like President Obama, I fought to find words to humanize this beautiful black boy that had been demonized by his killer. I wrestled with how to express my own pain and what a congregation needed to hear as they dealt with the news. I was not alone; this tragedy galvanized preachers from across the country (Jones 2012). Pastors and proclaimers organized and, in a collective act of homiletic protest, led "Hoodie Sunday" services to capture the emotions of the moment in a way that would provide pastoral care and prophetic witness. Congregations across racial and ethnic difference participated in this homiletic act as Black, white, Asian-America, Latino and Native American churches joined members of other faith traditions in the protest (Harper 2012). Skittles bags and hoodies became symbols of dissent as preachers collectively spoke of the injustice of Trayvon's murder. "This tragedy was a community-shaking event that signaled what may be understood as the emergence of a new sub-genre of Black prophetic preaching that I identify as 'Protest Preaching.'"

While prophetic preaching typically draws on moral exhortation to call a community toward change and speak truth to power, protest preaching functions through symbolic action, embodied resistance, and liturgical disruption to make that truth unavoidable. Black Protest Preaching dramatically confronts systemic injustice while rousing the congregation's emotions to invite action across difference. Black protest preaching inspires through dramatic actions that can unify congregations in action. And though it is in a particular preaching tradition, that of the Black Church, I believe that preaching inspired by Black protest preaching can serve as a unifying force for multicultural congregations and for Christian churches that differ racially and culturally within our diverse society. Because of its use of symbolism and embodied action, Black protest preaching offers a homiletic that can allow members of multicultural congregations to imagine themselves collectively in the ritual act. Similarly to how the particularity of President Obama's invitation to imagine a presidential child that looked like the slain Trayvon touched the hearts of people across different cultural backgrounds, Black protest preaching can ignite shared righteous indignation for congregants of different backgrounds.

This article offers a preliminary examination of Black protest preaching and its utility in multicultural congregations. After providing a working definition for Black protest preaching, the article will use Ezekiel's embodied homiletic acts in chapters 4 and 5 as examples of "proto-protest" preaching and "Hoodie Sunday" as a modern interpretive anchor for Black protest preaching. By examining the practice of Black protest preaching and the Biblical foundations for this practice, I argue that this homiletic holds transformative potential across multicultural contexts, defined here as congregations shaped by racial, socioeconomic, or cultural diversity.

1. Black Prophetic Preaching

Black preaching has historically included prophetic impulses. From the hush harbors of enslaved Africans to the pulpits of Civil Rights era leaders to the streamed services of 2025, Black prophetic preaching is a critical aspect of the Black preaching tradition. In *A Pursued Justice*, Kenyatta Gilbert suggests that "from one generation to the next, prophetic preaching in African American church contexts has been the mediating apparatus for translating the message of God's abiding love and hope for humankind."(Gilbert 2016, p. 105) He further defines Black prophetic preaching as "God-summoned discourse about God's good will toward community with respect to divine intentionality, which draws on resources internal to Black life in the North American context."(Gilbert 2016, p. 6) Black prophetic preaching offers a moral critique of individuals, systems, and powers while also helping the community imagine a more just society. It calls the community to faithfulness,

righteousness, and transformation, pointing beyond an immediate crisis to God's ultimate intentions. Gilbert goes on to name the following as the four foundational elements of Black prophetic preaching: "(1) unmasks systemic evils and deceptive human practices by means of moral suasion and subversive rhetoric; (2) remains interminably hopeful when confronted with human tragedy and communal despair; (3) connects the speech- act with just actions as concrete praxis to help people freely participate in naming their reality; and (4) carries an impulse for beauty in its use of language and culture."(Gilbert 2016). What I describe as Black protest preaching holds many of the markers of prophetic preaching, but with some significant differences.

2. Towards Black Protest Preaching

Using Gilbert's description of Black prophetic preaching, I am suggesting that Black protest preaching, as exemplified by Hoodie Sunday sermons, is a subset of the genre that intensifies the delivery method. I posit that Black protest preaching is prophetic preaching animated by a particular injustice that wades into the urgency of a specific moment and that calls for a certain form of action. While both Black prophetic preaching and Black protest preaching offer hope, protest preaching insists that hope must interrupt. As a preliminary hypothesis, Black protest preaching utilizes embodied, symbolic, and disruptive forms of proclamation to interrupt normalized injustice and catalyze urgent response. It is deeply contextual, dramatic, and immediate. I imagine Black protest preaching to be the kind of preaching arises in moments of acute crisis and mobilizes communities through preaching as a symbolic act and liturgical disruption.

While all preaching is performance, Black protest preaching would be the preaching that is especially dramatic and embodied, as it plays with attire, affect, and physical presence to produce an immersive preaching experience. If I were to offer four potential foundational elements of Black protest preaching, they would be that it (1) uses symbolic and embodied action to dramatize the sermon; (2) exists as a disruption of liturgical time and space; (3) is marked by urgency and a sense of direct confrontation; and (4) uses the worship service itself as a site of protest and solidarity. To further distinguish the particularity of Black protest preaching, I will offer descriptions of hypothetical sermons preached from the same text: one as Black prophetic preaching and the second as Black protest preaching.

Using Ezekiel 37:1-14, and the vision of the dry bones as the sermonic text, one might preach a prophetic sermon entitled "Can these Bones Live?" whose theological focus is on the idea that God speaks life over what looks lifeless. God would be described as one who brings breath back to the broken. A central theme might be that though the bones are dry, they are not forgotten, and God is still speaking, so there can be life. The sermon could be situated in any context and speak to any injustice that besets a community. This is a popular text within the Black preaching tradition, and one might imagine using a sermon that poetically describes the process of the bones coming back together, delivering the hope for the future. The sermon would focus on envisioning a future where dry bones did not have to exist, and even celebrating God's ability to blow breath back into the community.

A protest sermon from this same text might be titled, "We are the Bones that won't Stay Dry!" To begin, the preacher might kneel with chains on their wrists, wait in a moment of silence before describing what it is like to be a bone, a chained, chalk-outlined, underfunded, overpoliced bone. They would make the direct connection between the valley of the dry bones and an event that had just occurred in the community. The focus would be on igniting the church to see how, like the bones in the text, they are sitting in the valley. The preacher would then be calling on them to act in response to a recent event. As part of the preaching act, congregants might be invited to write names of "dry bones" on index cards;

names of victims, neighborhoods, and injustices; and lay them on the altar while music plays in the background. The closing of the sermon would be hopeful, but decidedly more action oriented, calling everyone to *be* the breath that brings life back to the community, by participating in some upcoming action. While these two imagined scenarios are similar, I believe protest preaching distinguishes itself by moving from hopeful exhortation to urgent confrontation, traditional pulpit rhetoric to embodied, participatory delivery, comfort and challenge to a direct call for action, and from preaching and worship to protest and symbolic action. To further understand protest preaching, I turn to the prophet Ezekiel as a proto-protest preaching example.

3. Ezekiel's Proto-Protest Preaching

Ezekiel performs his prophetic actions during the Babylonian Exile, a time of significant national trauma and theological dislocation. His audience is a displaced people struggling to reconcile their suffering with God's promises. This audience had known the pain and devastation of Babylonian oppression and needed to relearn what hope and justice could look like, considering their tragic circumstances. They needed a word that could snap them out of the malaise of disappointment. Ezekiel's prophetic oracles are not unique in their apocalyptic visions. Other prophets had visions of creatures and figures that would be foreign to modern readers. But Ezekiel's oracles are exceptional in their dramatic action. God ignites Ezekiel's prophetic work by having him eat a scroll in Chapter Three. This leads to a series of homiletic performances that invoke a spirit of protest. I believe them to be a biblical precursor to the type of protest preaching described in this article. These actions, particularly those found between Ezekiel 4:1 and 5:4, invoke drama to make a larger point and call the people to action. In this sense, Ezekiel is a protest preacher, as his homiletic actions disrupt comfort, expose injustice, and embody divine critique through bold, symbolic, and often confrontational means. Ezekiel's prophetic acts provide a foundational model for protest preaching by merging symbolism, spectacle, and public witness.

His first homiletic protest performance is found in 4:1-3, when God asks him to draw the city of Jerusalem on a clay tablet and lay siege to it. He is instructed to set up what amounts to a display model of the city, replete with an iron pan and an iron wall. This diagram was a stand in for the actual city. The clay brick served as a symbol to shock the listeners into action. The next homiletic act is found in Ezekiel 4:4-8 through the prolonged bodily performance of lying on his side. Ezekiel lies on his left side for 390 days and on his right side for 40 days. These days symbolize the years of Israel's and Judah's sin. Again, he embodies the weight of the community's transgression, physically representing the wrong. While this kind of spectacle, the endurance of over 400 days of action, is beyond the types of preaching I am imagining, it offers an example of the invested embodiment of protest preaching.[1] The next act comes in Ezekiel 4:9-17, where he eats defiled bread. By consuming bread that had been baked over cow dung, Ezekiel demonstrates the dire conditions that would exist during the siege. This shocking and plainly gross homiletic act was intended to awaken the audience to their actions. Here again, the urgency and severity of the problem were foregrounded. Lastly, in Ezekiel 5:1-4, Ezekiel shaves and divides his hair into thirds, showing the signs of judgment, death, and division on the way. These homiletic acts use striking metaphors to communicate God's desire for the people. Each of them is an individual drama that exhibits similarities to the protest preaching that has been previously described.

Each act was the result of a fully embodied preaching performance. Ezekiel did not simply share or speak a message; his entire body became the message. Additionally, symbols were used in these acts to communicate meaning to the people. They also were all

disruptive; the audacity of the actions paired with their performance in the public square served as a disturbance to the people's actions, which provoked urgency and stimulated their moral imagination. Additionally, Ezekiel's homiletic acts demonstrated a solidarity between the preacher and the people. By embodying the message, he becomes one with the people, showing solidarity in the struggle, and sharing in the pain of the people. As outlandish as these acts seem today, I believe that they offer a radical template for protest preaching. Protest preaching must *do* as much as it *says*. The preacher, like Ezekiel, is called to make the Word dramatically enfleshed to encourage the people into action. We turn now back to a more robust description and analysis of "Hoodie Sunday," a modern example of Black protest preaching.

4. Hoodie Sunday

On a solemn Sunday in 2012, just weeks after the killing of Trayvon Martin, churches across the country witnessed a visual and theological rupture as preachers went to the pulpit in hoodies, carrying a can of iced tea and a bag of Skittles, mimicking that appearance of Trayvon when he was killed.[2] Many congregations joined their pastors in this attire, as the hoodie became a sanctified symbol of solidarity, grief, and anger. These "Hoodie Sunday" services marked a profound moment in African American preaching where attire, liturgy, and proclamation merged to bear witness against racialized violence. These homiletic acts were a modern example of Black protest preaching as they built off the urgency of the moment, the particularity of an event, and called the congregation into immediate action.

In the weeks following Trayvon's murder, protestors flooded the streets wearing hoodies, demanding justice for the slain teen (The CNN Wire Staff 2012). There was something about this tragedy that stoked the righteous indignation of the country, and that ultimately grabbed the attention of many Black pastors. The idea for coordinated Hoodie Sunday services was born through an online conversation between 30 and 40 Black pastors and church leaders who gathered in response to the protests that were happening across the country (Jones 2012). The call led to different communities figuring out their own version of a "Hoodie Sunday" liturgy, with varied responses catered to the needs of specific congregations (Jones 2012). As churches across denominations and regions took part, sermons were shared widely on social media, and images of Black pastors in hoodies went viral. In a real sense, sanctuaries became protest sites, and pulpits were engulfed in Black protest preaching.[3]

Using the four foundational aspects of Black protest preaching that were proposed earlier, (1) uses symbolic and embodied action to dramatize the sermon; (2) exists as a disruption of liturgical time and space; (3) is marked by urgency and a sense of direct confrontation; and (4) uses the worship service itself as a site of protest and solidarity, "Hoodie Sunday" services were a prime example of this practice. These sermons used hoodies, iced tea, and Skittles as symbolic markers to dramatize the moment and the message. Wearing a hoodie in the pulpit challenged many perceived norms of reverence and respectability in many Black church traditions. Wearing a hoodie was not countercultural so much as it was "counterliturgical" in that it offered an alternative kind of worship service. The hoodie became a homiletical device. It spoke before the preacher opened their mouth. It declared solidarity with the slain and served as a visible critique of a society that renders Black bodies suspicious based on appearance alone. In this way, the hoodie functioned like sackcloth in the Old Testament as a garment of mourning and protest. Secondly, these sermons superseded any previous liturgical planning and took precedence in the moment. Thirdly, these sermons were directly confronting the moment and served as a catalyst for congregations joining an already growing protest movement. Finally, the planning of these

Hoodie Sunday sermons and the inclusion of the congregation furthered the solidarity between preacher and people, as in many instances, congregation members showed up in hoodies as well.

Sermonic Themes and Examples

Preliminary study suggests that Hoodie Sunday sermons followed certain thematic trajectories. Most began with lament, naming the pain and loss of Trayvon Martin's life and often then shifting more broadly to lamenting similar kinds of losses in the community.[4] They would also include theological affirmation around the sacredness of Black lives, asserting that Black lives are made in the image of God and are worthy of love, justice, and protection. These sermons also often called for protest action, encouraging the congregation to engage in advocacy and direct action in their communities. Congregations were also collaborators in these services. These sermons often included reading the names of Black people killed by police, moments of silence, and community prayers.[5] By transforming the sanctuary into a space of protest, Hoodie Sunday services reclaimed the church as a site of social action. Furthermore, the integration of social media allowed these sermons to resonate far beyond the preaching moment. These sermons made their way around the internet and had an afterlife of effect in the public sphere. Preachers and their congregations, and more specifically those that managed the social media accounts, became curators of symbols, creators of public theology, and digital proclaimers. Hoodie Sunday sermons showed how hashtags and homilies could converge to spur protest and challenge the powers.

One of the more viral Hoodie Sunday sermons was preached by Howard-John Wesley at Alfred St. Baptist Church in Alexandria, VA.[6] Entitled "A Rizpah Response," Wesley uses the story of Rizpah and her grief found in 2 Samuel 21:1-14 to preach a masterful protest sermon about the tragic killing of Trayvon Martin. This sermon also fits all the markers of Black protest preaching that were mentioned earlier. Even the context speaks to the urgency. During the sermon, it is revealed that Wesley was not scheduled to preach that Sunday, but that the urgency of the moment called him back from what would have been a day off. Rhetorically, this demonstrates the importance of the moment and communicates to the congregation the full significance of this homiletic act. As the sermon begins, he enters the pulpit to a standing ovation, marking what feels like a transformation of the worship space. The applause is not to celebrate the preacher so much as to mark the moment; to demonstrate a solidarity with what is about to happen. His sermon begins well before he starts speaking, as he strategically pauses when he first gets to the pulpit. This allows the congregation's response to swell, further solidifying the connection between the preacher and the people and allowing room for the emotion of the moment to grow. Wesley captures lament, righteous indignation, fear, and even hope in this sermon. It was a fully embodied performance, as he wore a Howard University hoodie, an HBCU located near this congregation, and throughout he danced on the line between preacher and person. At one point early in the sermon, he uses a version of the phrase, "the pastor in me wants to say this but the Howard-John in me says. . ." further placing himself and his emotions as a father into the moment. Similarly to what I have named earlier about my own experience preaching for a Hoodie Sunday service and what President Obama did in a few moments at a press conference, Wesley personalized and humanized the grief of the moment. It was clear from the audience's response that this personalization brought about even further identification with the issue. It was not important whether you were Black, a father, or even a parent; that kind of sermonic personalization breeds connection across difference. And it is this kind of personalization and identification that I believe makes Black protest preaching a fruitful model for multiethnic congregations.

5. Black Protest Preaching for a Multicultural Environment

Black protest preaching can translate powerfully and provocatively to multicultural environments. This type of preaching is not simply "preaching while Black," it is a homiletical stance of resistance, disruption, and embodied truth telling that emerges from the Black freedom struggle. The way that it uses symbolic acts, lament, direct confrontation, and communal memory to interrupt systems of injustice can work in a multicultural environment. Black protest preaching cultivates a homiletic of community and solidarity, hoping to bring everyone into the preaching ritual through drama and imagination. The more that the communal aspects of the preaching practice are emphasized, the more influential it can be in multicultural congregations. By humanizing issues of injustice, Black protest preaching becomes an otherwise preaching practice that connects people across differences.

In *Other-Wise Preaching*, John McClure proposes an ethic for preaching in postmodernity that emphasizes the connection between the entire congregation. For McClure, otherwise homiletics "strives to become wise about other human beings—to gain wisdom about and from others for preaching" (McClure 2001). He is arguing for preaching that makes the preacher and the members of the congregation feel obligated toward one another. McClure calls otherwise preaching a "deeply passive 'act' of proxemics—of 'exposure' to the other, of extraditing oneself to the neighbor (McClure 2001, p. 10). Utilizing French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, McClure notes that "the falseness of totality is exposed in face-to-face encounter with other human beings. In this encounter, the glory of otherness interrupts our attempts to cling to sameness" (McClure 2001, p. 8). In other words, our lived reality forces us to realize that our individual proclamations do not stand up to interaction with others. Black protest preaching does not allow members of the congregation to "cling to sameness" in that it forces a confrontation with the humanness of others. By personalizing the pain of tragedy, Black protest preaching creates space for any and everyone to identify with the horror of the moment. This becomes more important in multicultural contexts, as one cannot assume the same kind of cultural solidarity and identification that can be found in monocultural congregations. Black protest preaching attempts to build solidarity and even fellowship through its dramatic confrontation of injustice. The idea is that the entire congregation is discerning God's will together through the sermon; the sermon itself becomes a place of koinonia.

In *Preaching in an Age of Globalization*, Eunjoo Mary Kim asks the following question, "if the ultimate concern for preaching is to help listeners search for the wholeness of truth, and if the context of preaching—the locus of God's revelation—is interwoven into the wider human and natural world, where should the preacher go to discern the revelation of God?"(Kim 2010). One of Kim's answers to this question is "the koinonia"(Kim 2010, p. 21). The koinonia is the result of God's people fellowshipping in maturity, love, and togetherness. Despite differences in race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, age, and theological orientation, the koinonia is the community of true disciples of Christ (Kim 2010, p. 22). It is in this context that Kim suggests that the preacher can experience the real presence of Christ and that it is here that God reveals God's divine will. Black protest preaching is a place for "the koinonia"; its emphasis on communal engagement allows the very act of preaching to be a place of communal discernment. I believe that the very experience of preaching together this way creates space for solidarity in multicultural congregations. Kim goes on to say that "we cannot live authentically without welcoming the other who vary in race, gender, ethnicity, culture, nationality, and sexuality, for we are created to reflect the personality of the triune God. . .humanization is a communal effort toward the transformation of the human community to become a new society like the perfect community of the Trinity" (Kim 2010, p. 48). Black protest preaching is a work of humanization that motivates the

community to just actions in the world. Through its drama and sense of the moment, Black protest preaching is also a work of imagination that humanizes and builds connection.

Howard Thurman, noted preacher, mystic and theologian, had beliefs about the power of the imagination that are uniquely suited to this conversation about Black protest preaching in multicultural congregations. He was the pastor of one of the first intentionally multicultural congregations in the country, The Church for the Fellowship of all People, is from the Black church tradition, and while his preaching may not fit the parameters of Black protest preaching as named in this article, he was deeply concerned about building community through imagination. One of Thurman's most explicit discourses on the power of imagination comes in his chapter on "Reconciliation in Disciplines of the Spirit". In a conversation about how to get people to love, Thurman says that he needs to "find the opening or openings through which my love can flow into the life of the other...most often this involves an increased understanding of the other person. This is arrived at by a disciplined use of the imagination"(Fluker and Tumber 1998). Here, Thurman wants the reader to begin to see the imagination as a tool. He mentions that when one typically thinks of imagination as a "tool," we do so when we view it in the hands of an artist (Fluker and Tumber 1998). Thurman then makes the claim for the place where he feels that imagination has its greatest import:

> "But the imagination shows its greatest powers as the angelos of God in the miracle it creates when one man, standing on his own ground, is able while there to put himself in another man's place. To send his imagination forth to establish a point of focus in another man's spirit and from that vantage point so to blend with the other's landscape that what he sees and feels is authentic, this is the great adventure in human relations". (Fluker and Tumber 1998, pp. 182–83)

Angelos is a Greek term for messenger. Thurman is suggesting that the imagination is a messenger, a carrier of a message that allows for connection. For Thurman, the imagination is a tool that could be wielded to get to the heart of another person. And this is where the emphasis on the imaginative use of drama in Black protest preaching creates space for connection between members in the congregation. The more that imagination is considered in the creation of these sermons, the more people can join to fight for justice. Black protest preaching creates solidarity through a collective call to action that imaginative, dramatic, otherwise, and based in fellowship.

6. Conclusions: Cultivating Black Protest Preaching in Multicultural Congregations

Black protest preaching is a practice rooted in the Black prophetic tradition that I believe can serve as an example to the wider church, specifically multicultural congregations that are committed to justice. The shared homiletic act of dramatic truth-telling, lament, and hope calls a diverse congregation to the world of building the beloved community in the world. Black protest preaching disrupts complacency and summons the whole congregation to become participants in God's liberating work. For multicultural congregations, cultivating this kind of preaching requires both deep pastoral attentiveness and bold prophetic imagination as the context creates some barriers to solidarity absent from Black congregations. What follows are practical considerations for nurturing this homiletic in ways that build solidarity across difference.

1. Ground the Practice in Shared Theological Commitments

Preaching in multicultural congregations that is influenced by Black protest preaching must be understood as a faithful expression of the gospel. This is a practice that must be worked into the ongoing liturgy of the congregation and not merely something that

occurs on a special occasion. By rooting protest preaching in Biblical witness, like Ezekiel's proto-protest homiletic acts, preachers in multicultural contexts can help congregations see protest as central to the Gospel's call for justice. One might even make the move towards naming Jesus' flipping of the tables as another prime example of preaching protest in the Bible to further the theological grounding of the practice.

2. Listen Deeply to the Congregational Context

In multicultural environments, protest preaching must grow from an authentic reading of the congregation's lived realities. This means listening, in formal and informal settings, to the stories that members share about experiencing injustice, what symbols resonate with their spirits, and where solidarity is already emerging. This kind of active listening builds trust amongst the congregation and ensures that protest preaching is an expression of the congregation's shared life rather than a performance imported from outside. I would advise that sermon talk-backs be a regular part of multicultural congregations trying to build a protest homiletic. This would allow members of the congregation more space to share their stories.

3. Use Symbols that Invite Empathy Across Difference

The visual language of protest, hoodies, iced tea, Skittles, chains, etc., helps set the stage for developing the immersion into the moment that is necessary for protest preaching. In multicultural congregations, symbols should connect directly to the injustice being named while offering points of identification for people of varied backgrounds. Everyone has or at least is familiar with hoodies, for example. Also, acts such as writing the names of victims and placing them on the altar can invite broad participation while maintaining the dramatic and embodied character of Black protest preaching. Inviting members of the congregation to participate in this preaching is paramount, as the more the congregation embodies the sermon, the more that they bring their own symbols to bear in the preaching moment, the greater import that the message has for the community.

4. Disrupt Liturgical Space with Clear Framing

Disruption is essential to protest preaching, but in contexts where traditions differ, framing matters. When changing attire, reordering the service, or introducing a symbolic act, explain its theological grounding so that all can interpret it as worship. This framing helps prevent misunderstanding and deepens the congregation's engagement in the act as a moment of shared witness. Furthermore, because of the differences in background, framing is necessary to even make sure that everyone is aware of any tragic event. While I would like to imagine that a tragedy like the murder of Trayvon would resonate with the entire community, there are many who might simply be unaware of the issue, especially those from different cultural backgrounds.

5. Make the Congregation Co-Proclaimers

Black protest preaching is most powerful when it transforms the congregation from an audience into collaborators. In a multicultural setting, this might include multilingual readings. Can you imagine, for example, people from many different backgrounds all in hoodies, line up across the altar saying in their own language, "I am Trayvon." The harmony of voices would create a modern Pentecost protest that would surely resonate throughout the congregation. The aim is to embody the koinonia Eunjoo Mary Kim describes, where the sermon becomes a communal act of discernment and solidarity, not merely a solo performance from the pulpit.

6. Hold Lament and Hope Together

While protest preaching often begins in grief, it cannot remain there. In multicultural congregations, where members may have varied histories with protest, preachers should guide the movement from lament to the kind of hope that fuels action. This hope is built on the shared belief that God's justice is still breaking in, and that the congregation is called to embody that justice together.

7. Extend the Witness Beyond the Sanctuary

The afterlife of a protest sermon can be as important as its delivery. Encouraging congregants to share images, clips, or testimonies on social media expands the reach of the message and invites others into the work. In diverse congregations, where members are connected to multiple networks, this digital witness can ripple far beyond the immediate community.

Black protest preaching in multicultural contexts is not about diluting its prophetic edge for broader appeal. Rather, it is about amplifying its witness so that it can be heard, felt, and acted upon by people across differences. When done well, it becomes a site of communal imagination and solidarity where we learn to see through one another's eyes and act together for the sake of God's justice. The goal is to preach so that diverse congregations find themselves as the *angelos* of God in the world, a unified body bearing witness to the gospel's power to disrupt, reconcile, and bring life to dry bones. Hopefully, then, everyone would feel the sting of a loss of someone who looked like Trayvon, regardless of what they looked like themselves.

Notes

[1] There are also resonances here to the popular protest method of "die-ins."
[2] See this article from Sojourners that offers a description of the kinds of Churches participating in Hoodie Sunday services, https://sojo.net/articles/pastors-and-congregants-wear-hoodies-church (accessed on 22 July 2025).
[3] This is also an example of the kind of networked protests that Tufecki writes about in *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest.*
[4] In the Witchger article mentioned earlier, he offers three example Hoodie Sunday sermons that demonstrate these tenets. Future work will offer a fuller analysis of Hoodie Sunday sermons for a more precise rhetorical analysis of these themes.
[5] Jones, 3.
[6] At the time this article was written the first part of the sermon found at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vkg2_pVfjMU (accessed on 22 July 2025) had over thirty two thousand views.

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Deconstructing the Marginalized Self: A Homiletical Theology of *Uri* for the Korean American Protestant Church in the Multicultural American Context

Jeremy Kangsan Kim

Praise Presbyterian Church, Somerset, NJ 08873, USA; jeremy.ks.kim@gmail.com

Abstract: This study explores the transformative potential of the traditional Korean concept of *uri* (we) and the Confucian principle of *ren* (compassion and resistance), integrated with the biblical tradition of lament, as a theological framework for addressing the marginalization of contemporary Korean American Protestant churches and their members. Critiquing the limitations of current theological models focused on marginality, the article reimagines the Korean American self through the lens of *uri* and *ren*. This perspective enables compassion and resistance to deconstruct the notion of the marginalized self and reconstruct an authentic identity. The article proposes a pastoral–prophetic homiletical praxis that fosters solidarity among Korean American churches and empowers these churches to claim their prophetic voice within the multicultural American context. This approach has the potential to transform Korean American churches into a space for hope, communal restoration, and resistance amid socioecclesial challenges.

Keywords: homiletical theology; *Uri* (we); lament; Korean American Protestant church; compassion and resistance

Korean immigration to the United States began with workers who arrived at Hawaiian sugar plantations in 1903. Since then, the Korean American Protestant church has played a central role in the Korean immigrant experience. Initially, these churches served as hubs for overseas support of the Korean independence movement, which persisted until Korea's liberation from Japanese occupation in 1945. Following the 1965 Immigration Act that abolished national origin quotas and the resulting growth in immigration from Korea, Korean American churches evolved into vital spiritual and cultural centers, preserving Korean norms and values among the newcomers in the multicultural environment of America (W. Y. Kim 2004, p. 43; Hurh and Kim 1984, p. 236). Despite this rich legacy, Korean American churches now face challenges in a post-pandemic, multicultural, and pluralistic society. Their focus on maintaining ethnic and cultural boundaries and on institutional survival has hindered their broader societal engagement (H. A. Choi 2024, p. 16). This insularity and "ghettoization" not only limits their vitality but also alienates members of the younger generations (H. Lee 1996). To address these existential challenges, this study aims to deconstruct the notion of the marginalized Korean American self-entrenched in these churches and offer a framework for proclaiming God's Word to both congregants and the broader community.

This study focuses on the theological and practical contexts of first- and 1.5-generation Korean Americans, who represent the majority of the members of Korean American churches. The article first explores the sociopolitical contexts shaping Korean American marginalization and critiques the current homiletical theology in these churches, which often reinforces exclusionary practices. Next, it draws on theological concepts of marginality

and liminality developed by Korean theologians and reimagines the authentic self through the concept of *uri* (we) grounded in *ren* (仁), a principle that embodies compassion and resistance. This identity is then explored through a homiletical theology rooted in biblical lamentation, which shares transformative characteristics with *ren*. The article, thus, provides a focused analysis of these churches' homiletical theology and explores its potential for transformative engagement in addressing internal and external challenges.[1]

1. The Emergence of the Marginalized Self: The Otherization of Asian Americans

Large-scale migration of Koreans to the United States began after the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. While many of these immigrants were skilled urban professionals with an advanced education, they struggled to secure positions that matched their qualifications (I. Kim 1981, p. 24). This disparity was part of a broad process of the "otherization" enforced by the alienation and exclusion directed at Asian Americans. This otherization occurs when dominant groups construct others as intrinsically "different", in contrast to American values of individual rights, autonomy, and equality (Weis 1995). Historically, White Americans, viewing themselves as embodying "civic belonging", have engaged in the racial otherization of groups they deemed distinct (Perry 2001; Sundstrom and Kim 2014). Consequently, Koreans and other Asians have been labeled as perpetual outsiders since they began migrating to the United States and have faced systemic racial discrimination and hate crimes.

After 1965, Korean and other Asian immigrants to the United States experienced a unique form of racial discrimination. Positioned as neither foreign nor fully assimilable, they did not experience the kind of racial discrimination enacted by Whites against Blacks but were relegated to a liminal status. Their "invisible third other" status placed them outside conventional racial hierarchies, creating a form of marginalization characterized by "double in-betweenness". This status denied them full inclusion or exclusion, leaving them socially and politically obscure. The model minority myth exemplifies this dynamic by portraying Asian Americans as "honorary Whites" who are able to assimilate into mainstream society. This reductive portrayal positions Asians as "successful immigrants" who achieve the American dream; however, it ignores their struggles (D. D. Lee 2024, pp. 148–49). The construct also fails to recognize the distinct racial and cultural identities of Asians from different countries and regions of the world, enforcing both exclusion and invisibility and relegating Asian Americans to a marginalized position. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic revived the "yellow peril" narrative, scapegoating Asians as the cause of the virus's spread and inciting anti-Asian sentiment and hate crimes. This sociopolitical context has heightened collective self-awareness among Korean American and other Asian American communities. However, instead of actively addressing their exclusion, many have internalized their marginalization, passively accepted a peripheral status in American society. This internalized otherization—which is what creates the marginalized self—further entrenches their exclusion from mainstream society.

2. Reinforcing the Marginalized Self: Homiletical Theology in the Korean American Church

Prior to 1965, Korean American churches primarily functioned as hubs for sociopolitical activism, notably supporting Korea's independence movement until the nation's liberation from Japanese colonization in 1945. They also played a crucial role in supporting the reconstruction of their homeland following the colonization and the devastation of the Korean War (1950–1953). After the passage of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, the churches shifted to providing spiritual care for marginalized immigrants, preserving

the cultural heritage of their members, and fostering solidarity within ethnic Korean communities (Min 1992, pp. 1384–85). This cohesion created a sense of belonging but also reinforced insular boundaries, contributing to the "ghettoization" of Korean Americans (Wan 2024, p. 116; Min 1991). While fostering a distinct cultural identity, these dynamics limited broader societal integration and deepened the separation of Korean immigrants from mainstream society.

The sermons preached in Korean American churches reflected the lived struggles of their congregants but often emphasized a privatized faith. The messages focused on individual salvation, spiritual satisfaction, and economic success framed as evidence of divine favor.[2] Prosperity theology, which also gained momentum in South Korea following the major wave of immigration to the United States that began in 1965, was intertwined with shamanistic beliefs and the notion of the "American dream" and paradoxically critiqued materialism while reinforcing its values (A. E. Kim 2000, p. 116; Park 2013, pp. 132–33). This inward focus constrained homiletical discourse, perpetuating the marginalization of Korean Americans by reducing churches' engagement with societal issues and reinforcing ethnic boundaries. This inward orientation led to a form of social regression. Prosperity-centered preaching diminished the collective responsibility of congregations, sidelining the prophetic dimensions of the Christian faith that address systemic injustices (Lin 2020, p. 165). The focus on individual success undermined efforts to promote the biblical concept of shalom—a peace that actively confronts societal inequities and fosters justice. As a result, Korean American churches generally were not able to transcend their marginalization and engage meaningfully with the broader public sphere.

Conservative evangelical theology, which has been critiqued for being ahistorical and acontextual, further shaped Korean American preaching after 1965. This tradition often aligned with White cultural norms and racial biases that failed to address structural injustices (Yong 2014, p. 114; Rah 2009). Pastors trained in evangelical institutions lacked the educational background to tackle race-related challenges, leaving their homiletics constrained by the evangelical theology they had inherited (Liu 2022).[3] This theological orientation reinforced insularity and inhibited the churches' ability to become agents of societal transformation. Preachers' privatized and prosperity-centered messages resonated with immigrant communities seeking stability and success. However, their narrow focus limited the churches' evolution into socially transformative institutions. Initially critical of secular American values, many Korean American churches ended up reinforcing the same cultural dynamics they had once opposed. This inward focus also hindered their development into more inclusive, outwardly engaged communities.

3. Re-Interpreting the Marginalized Self: Marginality and Liminality

In response to the prevailing state of homiletical theology in the Korean American church, theologians such as Jung Young Lee and Sang Hyun Lee, have sought to reinterpret the identity of Korean Americans through the concepts of marginality and liminality.

Jung Young Lee employs Stonequist's concept of liminality to explore the immigrant experience of being "in-between" dominant societal structures. Marginalized individuals, he argues, belong fully to neither world; they navigate "two antagonistic worlds without belonging to either" (J. Y. Lee 1995, p. 49). Lee's notion of the "in-beyond" transcends this duality, offering a broader perspective that moves beyond structural limitations. Grounding his theology in Christ as the ultimate marginal figure—"a man in-between two different worlds" (p. 71)—Lee calls on Korean Americans to embrace a transformed marginality by emphasizing their solidarity with other marginalized groups and resisting assimilation into dominant systems. He urges Korean American churches to actively identify with others on the margins rather than seek assimilation or centrality.

However, Y. S. Kim (2008) critiques Lee's view, arguing that while embracing liminality as a Christian responsibility may have merit when it addresses the marginality of Jesus Christ, certain externally imposed forms of marginality—such as those rooted in race, culture, religion, gender, or poverty—must be resisted and overcome rather than passively embraced. Kim argues that systemic discrimination imposed by dominant structures requires active opposition rather than accommodation. Similarly, Peter Phan (1997) critiques Lee's conceptualization of marginality as a dual space that must be neither escaped nor entirely embraced. He contends that marginality must be understood as an oppressive construct that requires both resistance and deliverance, but he emphasizes that redemption lies solely with God (Phan 1997, pp. 146–49).

Building on Jung Young Lee's work, Sang Hyun Lee reinterprets marginalization as a "liminal space"—a site of creative and transformative potential. Drawing on Victor Turner's model of "separation-liminality-reintegration", Lee emphasizes that the *liminal* phase is a space for new possibilities (S. H. Lee 2010, p. 6). He identifies Christ as the paradigmatic liminal figure, rejected by Jerusalem's religious leaders but embraced in Galilee's marginal spaces. Lee views the marginalization of Galileans under elite structures as parallel to the systemic exclusion faced by Asian immigrants in the United States, asserting that God's transformative work among marginalized communities offers hope for societal renewal. He argues that liminality creates opportunities for marginalized individuals to engage in transformative acts of faith that challenge systemic injustice. However, his framework does not adequately address the complexities of modern multicultural realities whose boundaries are increasingly fluid and dynamic (H. J. Lee 2012).

Despite these limitations, Jung Young Lee and Sang Hyun Lee have significantly reinterpreted the marginalized self as it relates to Korean Americans. By presenting Jesus Christ as the quintessential liminal figure, they challenge the church to align with marginalized groups and transcend insularity. Their work critiques tendencies toward ghettoization and passive marginalization, emphasizing the church's responsibility to embody Christ's transformative message by working toward racial reconciliation, political equity, and socioeconomic justice. Such efforts are essential for addressing the evolving complexities of American society and fostering a more inclusive future (Matsuoka 2009, p. 61). Through these reinterpretations, the marginalized self is repositioned not as a condition to be passively endured but as a space of potential, one that calls for active engagement in societal transformation and faith-based advocacy. Jung Young Lee and Sang Hyun Lee's reinterpretation of *marginality* and *liminality* provided hope to Christian Korean Americans navigating immigrant challenges. Based on a Christological framework, their theology reinforced a distinct cultural identity aligned with ecclesiological goals. However, from a hermeneutical perspective, this approach largely recognizes marginalization without addressing its structural causes.

4. Deconstructing the Marginalized Self: Revitalizing the Authentic Self Through Uri (We)

4.1. Challenges and Limitations in Re-Interpreting the Marginalized Self

Despite considerable theological effort, the transformation of the marginalized self of Korean Americans has remained limited due to persistent social and hermeneutical challenges. From a social perspective, the failure to achieve generational transition and the shifting patterns of immigration continue to be critical obstacles. In the aftermath of the 1992 Los Angeles riots that erupted after White police officers killed Black motorist Rodney King, there were growing calls from within the Korean American community for Korean American churches to transcend homeland-centered perspectives and engage more deeply with American sociopolitical realities. Second- and third-generation Korean Americans,

more attuned to American cultural contexts, were seen as potential agents of generational change (Seo 2019, pp. 133–36). However, shifts in immigration patterns disrupted this transition of leadership. Korean immigration declined in the 1990s, although it resurged in the 2000s due to a financial crisis in South Korea in the late 1990s. The resulting influx of first-generation immigrants allowed the older generations to continue dominating church leadership. Consequently, many second- and third-generation Korean Americans distanced themselves from these churches in what became known as the "silent exodus". Rather than fostering inclusivity, these churches reinforced ethnic and cultural boundaries, strengthening the marginalized self-identity of their congregants. Since the 2010s, a further shift in immigration patterns—and an accompanying decrease in reliance on religious institutions as spiritual refuges and cultural centers—has weakened Korean American churches' capacity for self-reflection on the marginalized self and societal engagement.[4]

The marginalized self is shaped by systemic exclusion and racial discrimination, injustices that require active dismantling rather than passive acceptance. Using marginalization as an epistemological tool for defining identity risks perpetuating systemic oppression. A self constructed through externally imposed realities cannot fully actualize an authentic identity. Prophetic acts require claiming one's capacity for self-definition. Without this, theological discourse risks accommodating unjust systems, thus, reinforcing oppression instead of subverting it.

4.2. Deconstructing the Marginalized Self Through the Revitalization of Uri

The authentic self for Korean immigrants or Korean Americans today—a self that is not imposed by sociopolitical structures but is inherent to their identity—is defined by the concept of *uri* (우리, we), a notion that rejects divisive notions of otherness and the marginalized self. In Korean culture, *uri* signifies "identity, oneness, mutual dependence, mutual protection, and mutual acceptance" (S.-C. Choi 1998, p. 246). This concept integrates the individual "I" with the collective "we", forming a unified existence rooted in relationality, love, and mutual care. *Uri* (우리, we) is intrinsically linked to *ren* (仁, humanity), a principle central to Korean identity that predates Confucianism's introduction to Korea in the fourth century CE during the Three Kingdoms period (Lew 2008). The literal translation of *ren* is humanity; however, the term incorporates the concepts of compassion and resistance. Koreans have long considered *ren* a foundational cultural value that prioritizes unity and relational harmony. Over time, this principle became a central tenet of Confucian ethics. Symbolizing the integration of "man" (人) and "two" (二), *ren* (人 + 二 = 仁) embodies the primordial essence of human relatedness, emphasizing relational unity and mutual care (Wei-ming Tu 1999). Furthermore, *ren* represents a relational force that transcends dualism and promotes harmony (Fingarette 1983; Gier 2001).

For Confucius, *ren* epitomizes the universal ethical nature of compassion and resistance or "humaneness", as noted in the *Analects*: "Humaneness [仁, ren] is more vital to the people than water or fire. … I have never seen the person who died from treading the path of humaneness [仁, ren]" (15:35). *Ren* fosters reciprocal openness, dissolving the dichotomy between self ("I") and other and providing the philosophical basis for *uri*. It is deeply embedded in the Korean identity and stands in stark contrast to the otherness imposed by hierarchical American social structures. Rather than reconstructing selfhood in reaction to external forces of marginalization, Korean Americans, through *ren*, perceive all others—all humans—as equals. Embracing not only Korean Americans but all marginalized and othered individuals within American society in love restores the collective identity expressed by *uri*. This process dismantles the externally imposed marginalized self and reclaims the authentic self, a self that is rooted in relational wholeness and mutual care.

By revitalizing the concept of *uri*, Korean Americans can transcend imposed boundaries and reject isolation or separation. This reclaiming of an identity shaped by *uri* is characterized by mutual respect and relational harmony, which empowers individuals and communities to resist societal forces that perpetuate marginalization. The philosophy of *ren* reorients Korean American identity toward inclusivity and solidarity with all those burdened by an imposed marginalized self in American society. This broadened identity extends beyond the Korean American community to foster collective empowerment and revitalization.

4.3. The Dynamics of Compassion and Resistance in Ren

Chinese philosopher Mencius described *ren* (仁) as operating through the heart of compassion (惻隱之心, *ceyin zhi xin*). Mencius argues that humanity's moral potential is demonstrated by the innate inability of humans to remain indifferent to others' suffering. He illustrates this with the example of a person who instinctively acts to save a child about to fall into a well. This response, he emphasizes, is neither self-serving nor reputation-driven but arises from intrinsic human nature. Mencius asserts that without the capacity for compassion, a person cannot be truly human (Mencius 2009, 2A6, 1A7). This heart of compassion constitutes the sprout or the tip of *ren*, encapsulating the essence of human nature and serving as the basis for moral cultivation. Bryan Van Norden (2007) describes *ren* as being pained by others' suffering and taking joy in their happiness, emphasizing the emotional response that unites self and other. In Neo-Confucianism, practicing *ren* dissolves the boundaries between subject and object, creating a unified perception of others as extensions of oneself (Cheng 1981). In this context, the otherization imposed by dominant groups on marginalized individuals, such as Korean Americans, through exclusion and disempowerment is unacceptable. In a community grounded in *uri* and the shared virtue of *ren*, marginalization must be deconstructed to uphold relational mutuality and inclusivity.

Ren (仁) is further realized through moral anger directed against that which is *bu ren* (不仁, not *ren*). Confucius describes moral anger as a judgment that refines instinctual likes and dislikes into ethical discernment (Confucius 2007, 4:3). This anger becomes a transformative force that cultivates compassion and fosters collective resistance against injustice. Mencius expands on this by connecting *ren* to *yi* (義, righteousness). In one of his dialogues, Mencius justifies the removal of tyrants by sage-kings, emphasizing the ethical imperative of confronting oppression (Mencius 2009, 1B8). He argues that violating *ren* forfeits the Mandate of Heaven (天命, *tianming*; this legitimized the rule of virtuous emperors or kings), making such rulers destroyers of *ren* (賊仁者, *zeirenzhe*). Removal of these rulers becomes a moral obligation rooted in *ren* and *yi*. Resistance through *ren* is accomplished not by opposition or separation but by dismantling the hermeneutics of otherness and redefining the other as integral to the self. This understanding, the philosophical foundation of Korean identity, is centered on the concept of *uri* (we) and, therefore, transcends binary divisions.

The concept of *uri* and the revitalization of the principle of *ren* offer Korean Americans a framework for deconstructing the marginalized self. This approach affirms that individuals are not objects defined by race or ethnicity but are dignified beings inherently resistant to separation and domination. Humanity's essence calls for compassion, which makes exclusion and discrimination morally unacceptable. Acts of marginalization are manifestations of *bu ren* (not *ren*) and must be dismantled through resistance rooted in compassion. Within the principle of *ren*, where compassion and resistance coexist, the self transcends marginal or liminal identities. *Ren* calls for restoring *uri*—the collective self that

dismantles unjustly imposed identities and claims dignity and justice. This vision not only redefines identity but embodies a value that is essential in today's multicultural society.

5. A Hermeneutic Dynamic of Compassion and Resistance for the Korean American Church

5.1. The Significance of Uri in Contrast to Levinasian Otherness

The rejection of the subject-object dichotomy, central to theories of otherness, is explored in East Asian thought centered on *ren* and in Emmanuel Levinas's philosophy. The principle of *ren* (humanity, including compassion and resistance) dissolves the subject-object dichotomy, emphasizing relational reciprocity and the necessity of the Other to actualize the self (Mencius 2009, 7A4). Similarly, Levinas interprets human suffering through an interhuman lens, positioning the I as hostage to the Other in a relationship he calls "substitution" (Levinas 1985, p. 100; 1998, p. 146). This inherently asymmetrical relationship defines the self through its ethical responsibility to the Other. By critiquing the primacy of subjectivity, Levinas defines relationships as grounded in unconditional responsibility and revealed through the epiphany of the face.[5] Both frameworks highlight intersubjectivity and relational responsibility.

Levinas's notion of the Other has significantly shaped homiletics, as seen in works by John S. McClure (2001) and Ronald J. Allen (2009). McClure employs Levinas's critique of totality to deconstruct the church's habitus—the dominant framework of Scripture, tradition, and reason—that suppresses marginalized voices. This deconstruction exposes oppressive binaries and, thus, fosters preaching oriented toward radical responsibility to the Other. Termed "other-wise" preaching, McClure's approach amplifies marginalized voices in both sacred and secular spaces. This emphasis resonates with the proposal of a homiletical theology aimed at deconstructing the marginalized self through the lens of otherness in *ren*, the core value of *uri*.

Levinas's concept of otherness, while profound, lacks a critical dimension: the integration of diverse communal narratives. His emphasis on the singularity of the Other limits its applicability. Postcolonial critiques argue that his framework, rooted in European historical and cultural tensions, privileges sameness over true otherness. Drabinski (2011, pp. 2–3) highlights these Eurocentric constraints, asserting that Levinas's ethics, shaped by the Hellenic-Hebraic dichotomy, positions the Jewish Other against the Greek Same. He critiques Levinas's universalism as fundamentally colonial, measuring every Other through a European lens (p. 7). In contemporary multicultural societies, however, the Other extends beyond this framework, encompassing a broader spectrum of identities that Levinas's ethics fail to address. In contrast, *ren* offers a more inclusive paradigm, transcending the dichotomy between self and other. Unlike Levinas's asymmetrical model, where the Other holds ethical responsibility for the self, *ren* emphasizes mutuality and relational interconnectedness. Within Confucian thought, human relationships are shaped by *ren*, fostering harmony rather than division. The Confucian model replaces Levinas's notion of ethical obligation—structured around substitution and heteronomy—with an emphasis on the self-cultivation of each individual. In the philosophy of *ren*, the singularity or plurality of the other is inconsequential because the relationality between self and other is neither oppositional nor separative. Instead, it is characterized by mutuality, driven by the inherent force of humanity. This perspective enables individuals to thrive within a community centered on reciprocal ethical engagement. Unlike Levinas's framework, which assigns moral authority to the Other, *ren* situates ethical responsibility within communal harmony, providing a more balanced and integrative approach to engaging with the Other in pluralistic societies.

5.2. Uri as a Homiletical Value for the Korean American Church

The principle of *ren* (compassion and resistance) embedded in *uri* (we) offers Korean Americans a transformative paradigm for deconstructing their marginalized self shaped by sociopolitical realities. By revitalizing values deeply rooted in Korean American historical and philosophical traditions, *ren* facilitates the reconstruction of an authentic self capable of meaningful engagement with a transcultural and pluralistic environment. The hermeneutic dynamic of compassion and resistance inherent in *ren* provides a robust pastoral and prophetic framework for homiletical theology.

Compassion reflects the divine nature of God, as exemplified by Jesus Christ's confrontation with human alienation and suffering. Andrew Purves (1989, pp. 16–18) highlights that "God's compassion requires us to understand God now in terms of God's vulnerability and willingness to suffer with us." This notion aligns with Mencius's concept of *ceyin zhi xin*, the innate heart of compassion, which underscores human interconnectedness. Similarly, within the church, compassion is a key characteristic of discipleship. Practicing compassion fosters believers' collective identity as Christians and, thus, as members of the body of Christ. Furthermore, it embodies the essence of *uri* (we) when it includes those who suffer beyond the church's boundaries. For the preacher, compassion provides a framework for deconstructing congregants' alienated identities formed by otherization. A new self emerges within the sacred community of *uri*, one that creates solidarity among believers. This solidarity aligns with Johann Metz's (1980, p. 95) vision of overcoming injustice through shared experiences of systemic oppression. Compassion, therefore, not only affirms individual dignity but also supports a community rooted in mutual care and unity.

The prophetic dimension of *uri*, as a transformative force, cultivates compassion and fosters collective resistance against injustice, empowering communities to confront systemic injustice in contemporary society.

Christ's crucifixion epitomizes this dual dynamic; it represents both an act of divine solidarity and a critique of sociopolitical oppression (Katongole 2017, p. 120). Similarly, *ren* inspires resistance to structural evil, empowering communities to address their marginalization while reclaiming their human dignity. For Korean American churches, this prophetic framework positions *uri* as a theological response to the challenges of racial, ethnic, and cultural exclusion. By addressing systemic inequalities, the prophetic aspect of *uri* becomes a tool for justice and reconciliation, guiding congregants to resist marginalization through their faith and in broad societal contexts.

Adopting *uri* as a homiletical framework within Korean American Protestantism presents significant theological and cultural challenges. Conservative evangelical church leaders, dominant in many Korean American churches, often resist incorporating indigenous Korean traditional concepts or Confucian concepts like *ren*, perceiving them as compromising doctrinal integrity. Matthew Kim, for example, argues that integrating East Asian philosophies risks syncretism and shifts the focus away from biblical authority (M. Kim 2007, pp. 63–66). Today, Confucianism—central to the concept of *uri*—faces criticism as authoritarian, patriarchal, and exclusive. This critique is based on the high value Confucianism places on filial piety (孝, *hyo*), primarily expressed through ancestor worship, which resulted in an overemphasis on the family-oriented practice of *ren*. This led to the ritual hierarchy of agnates (persons descended from the same male ancestor) in both the domestic and public arenas, such as in the paternalistic concept of the king of Korea as the national father and the father of the family and, thus, as the elder who has the authority and power to control other family members (Koh 1996, p. 188). This encouraged authoritarian, factional, gerontocratic, patriarchal, and male-oriented ideas and practices in Korean society that were in direct contrast with the genuine meaning of otherness in *ren.* Furthermore, these characteristics of *ren* were strengthened in response to consecutive

traumatic events of the twentieth century, such as colonization, war, and industrialization, which distorted *uri* into a survivalist construct rooted in binary in-group/out-group distinctions (H. A. Choi 2024, pp. 3–8). These distortions, reinforced by modern patriarchy and economic hierarchies, have eroded the inclusive and relational essence of *ren*. Instead of fostering solidarity, *uri* has evolved into an exclusionary framework marked by animosity toward those outside immediate networks, such as kinship or regional ties (Kwon 2014, 2015). Confucianism, therefore, has come to be regarded today as a feudalistic heritage that needs to be eliminated in contemporary society.

Preaching that is more than rhetorical exposition constructs a gospel-centered reality by engaging Scripture, congregants' experiences, and shared traditions (Jacobsen 2015, p. 42). By rediscovering *ren*—with its dynamic interplay of compassion and resistance—preachers in Korean American churches can reinterpret *uri* within an inclusive theological framework.

6. Preaching as Lament: A Homiletical Theology for the Korean American Church That Embodies Compassion and Resistance

Biblical lament complements the concept of *uri* by addressing systemic injustices while fostering solidarity. Rooted in Christianity's scriptural and ecclesial heritage, lament enables congregations to express shared struggles, transforming individual suffering into collective healing. Incorporating lament into preaching allows churches to confront marginalization and empowers congregants to seek justice.

6.1. Lament Within the Biblical Tradition

Lament is a significant literary genre within the ancient Near Eastern and Hebrew Bible traditions that arose from contexts of suffering, such as war, poverty, famine, oppression, and systemic violence. In the biblical tradition, lament reflects the profound trust of the people of God in God's faithfulness to them, even amid their suffering. Rather than expressing doubt, laments affirm hope in God's presence and deliverance (Day 1990, pp. 29–30; Ellington 2008, pp. 12–13). Walter Brueggemann (1991, p. 52) emphasizes that lament demonstrates deep covenantal trust and provides a theologically grounded language to articulate anguish. Central to this tradition are the lament psalms, which embody the tension between faith in God's promises and the reality of suffering. Billman and Migliore (1999, p. 107) describe these psalms as "the language of the painful incongruity between lived experience and the promises of God."

Lament psalms are characterized by the distinct elements of pleas (addressing, complaint, petition) and praise (affirmation, doxology), thus, offering a structured framework for expressing grief and faith (Brown 2005, pp. 28–29). This genre is not confined to the Psalms but extends to other biblical texts, such as Job, Ezra, and Jeremiah. Jeremiah's laments exemplify this tradition by representing collective suffering while resisting the systemic injustices of idolatry and political oppression (Rah 2015, p. 122; Katongole 2017, p. 155). His prophetic voice transforms mourning into a critique of societal structures that have violated God's covenant, making lament both an expression of trust and a praxis of resistance. In the New Testament, laments are most powerfully expressed in the Gospels.[6] For example, Jesus's lament on the cross (Matt. 27:46) and over Jerusalem (Matt. 23:37–39; Luke 13:34–35) serves as a prophetic act resisting oppressive political and religious systems (Duff 2005, p. 10). Like the laments in the Hebrew Bible, these New Testament examples call for divine intervention but also challenge the sociopolitical structures that perpetuate injustice.

6.2. Lament as a Homiletical-Theological Message of Compassion and Resistance

Lament provides a vital framework for articulating anguish amid suffering, offering what Mays (1994, p. 22) calls "a vocabulary of need [and] rhetoric of affliction". Far from merely emotional catharsis, lament enables individuals to discover profound theological and existential meaning in the silence of trauma. This transformative encounter with a God who suffers alongside humanity moves lament from despair to hope, fostering a relationship with the divine marked by both compassion and resistance.

Lament as a homiletical tool offers a pastoral response to systemic injustice, marginalization, and hatred. For those forced into a marginalized identity by sociopolitical realities, lament offers a theological framework that validates their suffering and resists systemic dehumanization. Homiletical theology, as Farley (2003, p. 41) argues, must interpret theology through the lens of lived experiences rather than impose rigid doctrinal constructs. This situational hermeneutics integrates lament as a crucial pastoral praxis and is particularly helpful for Korean Americans. By creating a sacred space where congregants can express their pain and confront injustice before God, lament fosters both individual healing and collective resilience. Compassion is central to this dynamic. It signifies the recognition of people's shared humanity, even in structurally oppressive environments (Farley 2003, p. 38). This compassion transcends unrefined anger, avoiding deepening divisions between marginalized groups and systemic oppressors. Instead, lament fosters solidarity within the faith community by connecting the suffering of individuals to the broader struggles of *uri* (we)—those experiencing shared pain. This communal solidarity transforms lament from an expression of anguish into a prophetic call for justice, marking a critical shift from pastoral to prophetic dimensions.

Lament is a means of voicing affliction, but it is also an act of resistance against the systemic realities perpetuating suffering. Though often perceived as an individual expression of pain, lament reflects collective realities. Rah (2015, p. 23) observes that lament cries out for justice against prevailing injustices, bringing personal and communal pain into the public sphere. In ancient Israel, lament was both a communal practice and a protected right, serving as a foundation for social justice (Crüsemann, as cited in Lakkis 2009, pp. 169–73). The public nature of lament allowed communities to reimagine history and society in light of God's justice, fostering hope for transformation amid inequity and oppression. Hauerwas (1994, p. 53) contends that while definitive solutions to societal evil may remain elusive, communal solidarity can absorb the destructive terror of systemic injustice, preserving human relationships. This solidarity is founded in the compassionate God who laments from the cross. Jesus's cry of abandonment is not rhetorical but a profound revelation of divine identification with human suffering. In this moment, God's solidarity becomes the theological basis for resisting the alienation and oppression endured by marginalized groups. Through divine solidarity, the *uri* community, in this case the Korean American church, can find the strength to resist sociopolitical oppression and to envision God's justice. Lament offers a homiletical-theological foundation for hope and transformation, empowering faith communities to confront systemic injustice while anticipating the realization of divine justice—a justice that confronts and ultimately overcomes suffering and evil.

6.3. Preaching as Lament: The Dynamic Interplay of Compassion and Resistance

Lament embodies the inseparable dynamic of compassion and resistance, reflecting the dual pastoral and prophetic roles of the pulpit. These roles—declaring God's compassion for the marginalized and confronting systemic injustice—are not isolated tasks but part of a unified ministry. This holistic approach reinforces the theological understanding that the community is not defined by its marginalization but is liberated by its authentic

identity of *uri* (we) and, thus, fully participates in the body of Christ as a cohesive and interconnected church bound in solidarity. Believers' participation in Christ's incarnation does not signify their passive submission to suffering; instead, Christians embody the transformative power of divine love as it actively resists and overcomes forces that distort and destroy human life (Ramsay 1998, p. 67). The incarnation symbolizes God's definitive opposition to evil and ultimate triumph over it.

This dynamic is evident in Christ's ministry, where acts of compassion toward the suffering were inherently acts of resistance against unjust social and religious systems. His pronouncement "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted" (Matt. 5:4) created a space where the marginalized were no longer objectified but were recognized as recipients of divine grace and participants in God's mercy. Thus, preaching as lament is inherently bibliocentric, giving voice both to the anguish directed toward a seemingly absent God—an expression of trust—and to active resistance against systemic injustice. Preaching from the lament passages in the Hebrew Bible may also be viewed as Christocentric because preaching as lament embodies Christ's dual mission of compassionate solidarity with the suffering and prophetic opposition to injustice.

This offers a theological perspective rooted in the incarnation and redemptive work of Christ that addresses the present suffering while proclaiming the transformative power of divine justice.

Preaching should constitute an act of justice, challenging the powers that oppose God's purposes (Campbell 2002, p. 69). Contemporary Korean American churches, however, often confine preaching to spiritual comfort and material prosperity, privatizing the gospel and fostering the church's ghettoization. This focus limits the church's prophetic engagement with broader systemic realities. Preaching, however, should not be an abstract collection of doctrines or personal anecdotes. It is a communal practice of the traditional Korean concept of *uri* that shapes believers' lives to be in alignment with Christ's love and justice. Grounded in lament, preaching that proclaims God's compassion and resistance culminates in hope, transforming and reorienting lives toward God's redemptive purposes. For Korean Americans who have a marginalized identity and are navigating life within a multicultural society, preaching as lament offers a pathway to restore hope in God's love. This God, present in their lives, fosters the collective identity of *uri* and empowers them to reclaim their dignity and resist systemic oppression. Such preaching deconstructs frameworks perpetuating marginalization of the self and enables congregants to claim their revitalized identity in Christ. The homiletical theology that conveys this restoration, grounded in the concept of *uri* and the principle of *ren*, provides a foundation for envisioning a hopeful future rooted in divine solidarity and presence.

7. Conclusions

This study highlights the transformative potential of a homiletical theology rooted in the Korean concept of *uri* (we) and enriched by the theological praxis of biblical lament. Within sociopolitical contexts that perpetuate marginalization, *uri*, informed by the dynamic of *ren* (compassion and resistance), provides a framework for deconstructing otherization and reconstructing a relational identity for Korean Americans. This identity rejects imposed boundaries of exclusion and instead embodies solidarity and mutual care. Grounded in *ren*, *uri* fosters a communal ethos that counters isolation, otherization, and exclusion. Lament deepens this framework by creating a theological and rhetorical space that engages both the divine presence and sociopolitical realities. Biblically, lament serves a dual purpose: voicing suffering and challenging systemic injustices that perpetuate it. Within the Korean American ecclesial context, preaching as lament embodies this duality, transforming the pulpit into a site where pastoral care intersects with prophetic resistance.

This integration mobilizes congregations toward collective action while offering comfort and hope. The synthesis of *uri* and lament addresses critical challenges in contemporary Korean American preaching, including the privatization of the gospel and the ghettoization of the church as an institution. By reframing homiletical theology to engage with lived experiences of marginalization of Korean Americans and the broader multicultural societal context of the United States, this approach reclaims the church's vocation as both a pastoral and prophetic community.

Today, discrimination against marginalized groups extends beyond the historical categories of race and ethnicity to encompass those excluded based on religious beliefs, sexual orientation, or economic vulnerability. In this context, preaching serves as both an act of solidarity with those who are enduring diverse forms of suffering and a prophetic call to justice and reconciliation. By adopting the concept of *uri* and the practice of lament in the Korean American church, homiletics has the potential to become transformative, addressing immediate communal needs while inspiring hope and restoration aligned with God's redemptive purposes.

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Notes

1. The silent exodus of second- and third-generation Korean Americans poses a critical challenge for Korean American churches. This study focuses on identifying the root causes of the marginalized self, emphasizing the sociocultural and ecclesial dynamics shaping first- and 1.5-generation churches. It does not address the distinct theological and church contexts of later generations.

2. The literature suggests that, after the 1965 Immigration Act, Korean American church pulpits shifted toward prosperity theology, with a focus on fortune-seeking, individualistic, and this-worldly messages (E. M. Kim 1998, 2002; Yang 2016, pp. 102–5; Jeong 2022, pp. 47–107).

3. Liu critiques M. Kim's (2007) homiletical theology for inadvertently conforming to Whiteness despite addressing second-generation Asian American realities and proposing alternatives to evangelical preaching. Liu contrasts this with E. M. Kim's (1999) approach, which, while engaging with European and White theological traditions, critically examines Whiteness in Asian American preaching. Liu articulates her own vision for a transformative and self-critical Asian American homiletic, offering a model that repositions its relationship with White-dominant paradigms.

4. John Oh (2021, p. 1) highlights three significant transformations within the Korean diaspora in the United States: (1) the growing number of lawful permanent residents, (2) the increasing presence of short-term residents (nonimmigrants), and (3) the rapid transition from offline to online forms of community engagement.

5. In Levinas's view, the epiphany of the face summons the self to respond to the other because the face of the Other discloses otherness as Infinity. The epiphany does not reveal power or glorification; instead, it reveals the weakness and powerlessness of others, such as orphans, widows, the bereaved, and the destitute. Thus, Levinas asserts the epiphany of the face as an ethical appeal to responsibility.

6. See Matt. 2:18; 23:37–39; 26:36–46; 27:46; Mark 14:32–42; Luke 13:34–3; 18:1–8; 22:39–46; John 11:34–44.

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Article

Playful Pulpits: Exploring Multicultural Preaching Practices Through the Lens of Theology of Play

Namjoong Kim

Claremont School of Theology, 10497 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90024, USA; njkim@cst.edu

Abstract: This article explores the symbiotic relationship between the theology of play and preaching in diverse cultural contexts. Through a comprehensive examination of the nature of play from various scholarly perspectives, it serves as a bridge connecting individuals across varied cultural backgrounds. Delving into the theological foundations of play and its integration into preaching practices, this article articulates its transformative potential in multicultural congregations. The article also examines practical strategies to infuse a playful dimension into sermons, encompassing both their outward structure and internal content. Through exemplifying instances of playful preaching in multicultural contexts, this paper illustrates how incorporating play can significantly enhance the effectiveness of sermons. Addressing challenges linked to this approach, the discussion underscores the paramount importance of multicultural sensitivity. The article advocates for an inclusive preaching style that not only acknowledges but also celebrates the diversity present within congregations during the event of preaching. By framing preaching as a manifestation of play and incorporating the defining characteristics of play into sermons, the article prompts thoughtful reflection on the evolving role and function of preaching in multicultural contexts. Consequently, this will prompt preachers to reassess their roles and purposes within culturally diverse congregational settings. Furthermore, this article presents the collaborative nature of preaching, where both preacher and congregation actively engage in shaping meaning together, as creating a playful pulpit that fosters an interactive and transformative preaching experience.

Keywords: theology of play; multicultural contexts/congregations; transformative potential; multicultural sensitivity/inclusive preaching; collaborative preaching

1. Introduction

This paper focuses on preaching in multicultural contexts and explores its new possibilities through the concept of play. It first examines the characteristics of play from a humanistic perspective, viewing it as a phenomenon that goes beyond mere amusement to reveal humanity's creative nature. Then, it reflects on the theological significance of play as discussed by theologians and a liturgist, considering its relevance to preaching in multicultural contexts. Traditional preaching tends to prioritize doctrinal delivery based on reason, often neglecting the various emotional and experiential aspects of the audience. In a multicultural society, these limitations become more pronounced, as one-way communication is ineffective when addressing audiences with diverse cultural backgrounds and communication styles.

Therefore, this paper emphasizes that integrating play into preaching signifies a fundamental shift not only in the form of preaching but also in its purpose and methodology. Play-based preaching transforms into an experiential process that fosters interaction with

the audience, delivering the message in a multisensory way through playful elements such as storytelling, humor, and metaphor, while evoking emotional resonance. In particular, in a multicultural context, play functions as a bridge for communication that transcends cultural differences, providing a space where audiences from diverse backgrounds can share and empathize in their faith experience. Imagining preaching as play, rather than mere dialog or persuasion, shifts the understanding and approach to preaching for both the preacher and the audience. Preaching becomes a shared process of play between the preacher and the congregation, and where preaching is experienced as play, the space can be regarded as a playground.

Building on this imagination and theoretical background, this paper presents practical examples of play-based preaching in multicultural contexts and examines how integrating play enhances the effectiveness of preaching. It also addresses the challenges of playful preaching, particularly the risks of cultural misunderstanding, superficial entertainment, and culturally centered interpretations, and underscores the importance of multicultural sensitivity in overcoming these issues. Furthermore, the paper discusses how play-based preaching alters the role and purpose of the preacher, exploring the new functions preaching can fulfill within multicultural communities. Ultimately, the paper aims to reframe preaching as an expression of play, offering an inclusive space that actively celebrates diversity within multicultural communities and calls for a deep reflection on the evolving role and function of preaching in such contexts. This broader context highlights the shared responsibility between preacher and congregation. Their collaboration forms the foundation for playful preaching, fostering healing, reconciliation, and growth in multicultural communities.

In summary, after briefly presenting the theological and anthropological meanings of play, the limitations of traditional preaching, and the importance of play in multicultural contexts, the paper concludes by proposing specific methods of application, challenges, the transformation of the preacher's role, the redefinition of preaching's purpose, and directions for the evolution of preaching, emphasizing the shared responsibility of both the preacher and the congregation in fostering a collaborative, transformative environment.

2. A Study on the Application of the Concept of Play to Enhance the Effectiveness of Preaching in Multicultural Contexts

2.1. The Significance of Play in Revealing Human Existence and Culture: A Theoretical Exploration

Play is a significant phenomenon that reveals the deeper dimensions of human existence, transcending the realms of mere recreation or amusement. It has profoundly influenced human culture, civilization, and the very modes of being. A deep exploration of the essence of play plays a crucial role in overcoming the limitations of the modern, instrumental view of humanity (Homo Faber), and in re-illuminating the creative and free nature of human beings. Notably, Johan Huizinga argued that play is not merely an element of culture but the origin of culture itself, with all areas of human culture—such as language, mythology, ritual, art, and philosophy—emerging from play (Huizinga 1955, pp. 1–28).[1] Building on Huizinga's work, Roger Caillois further developed the discourse on play by classifying it into four types (competition, chance, simulation, and vertigo), while emphasizing its political significance (Caillois 1979, pp. 162–66). Phil Porter expands the concept of play beyond a mere activity, framing it as an attitude, an ethic, and a way of life. He asserts that work and play are not opposing concepts but are mutually complementary, highlighting the spiritual values derived from play, such as grace, energy, and joy (Porter 1995, pp. 84–85). In sum, play is a critical phenomenon that unveils the essence

of human existence and culture, reaffirms the creative and free nature of humanity, and demonstrates the complementary relationship between life and play.

2.2. The Theology of Play: Embracing Joy, Freedom, and Community in Multicultural Preaching

Theologically, play can be interpreted as a significant act reflecting the joy, freedom, grace, and relationship with God inherent in creation. Jürgen Moltmann regarded play as "a way of experiencing the fullness of the created world (Moltmann 1972, pp. 5–40)".[2] Moltmann's *Theology of Play* breaks away from traditional theological frameworks, enriching the interpretation of key theological themes through the lens of play (Moltmann 1972, pp. 15–18). For him, play is not merely entertainment or amusement; it is deeply connected with the nature of God, human creativity, Christ's salvation, and the hope of the eschaton. Moltmann's theology of play critiques the performance-driven modern society, restores human dignity and freedom, and helps facilitate a new experience of the relationship with God.

This theology of play offers significant insights for preaching in multicultural contexts. By critiquing performance-centered modern civilization and reinterpreting the nature of God, creation, Christ's mission, and eschatology, Moltmann's framework provides essential resources for addressing the challenges of preaching in multicultural settings, where the gospel must be effectively communicated to diverse audiences with varied cultural backgrounds. In a multicultural society, preaching must resonate with an audience that holds diverse languages, cultures, and value systems. This includes overcoming language barriers and misunderstandings caused by cultural differences, while maintaining a balance between embracing various faith backgrounds and clearly communicating the core message of the gospel.

Moltmann's theology of play offers theological resources for addressing these challenges. The concept of the God who plays (Deus Ludens) reveals that God's whole creation is an expression of universal love, encompassing all cultures and races, and preaching must communicate this truth in the various cultural languages of the audience. Furthermore, the understanding that creation is not an accomplishment, but an expression of joy suggests that preaching should celebrate and respect the unique values of each culture, rather than imposing particular cultural norms. Moltmann's view of human and nature creativity as participation in God's creativity encourages the active use of the unique expressions and artistic forms of each culture in multicultural preaching. By integrating the stories, music, dance, and visual arts of various cultures into sermons, preaching can become a richer, more diverse medium for communication (Smith 2009, pp. 131–58). This indicates that preaching can extend beyond verbal transmission, conveying the gospel through various sensory and experiential means. Moltmann's interpretation of the incarnation of Christ as God's gracious play and the resurrection as the victorious play of new creation provides comfort and hope to people experiencing pain and conflict in multicultural contexts (Moltmann 1972, p. 26). By reinterpreting the pain and conflicts of diverse cultural contexts within the history of God's salvation and presenting the hope of new life through the resurrection, play-based preaching can deliver a message of hope.

Moreover, Moltmann's portrayal of eschatology as eternal communion with God and the joyful play of the divine suggests a vision of community in which diverse people in a multicultural society can participate and rejoice together (Moltmann 1972, p. 113). His linking of the Trinity to the dynamics of play shows that a multicultural church can become a unified community of people from different cultural backgrounds. The church must be a playground that reflects the communion of the Triune God, and preaching functions as play in the process of helping people from various cultural backgrounds respect one another, learn, and grow together.

Thus, based on Moltmann's theology of play, multicultural preaching can employ various methods such as narrative sermons, the use of art, multilingual communication, intercultural dialog, and participatory activities. In this way, Moltmann's theology of play provides a crucial theological foundation for multicultural preaching, aiding in the effective communication of the gospel to diverse cultural audiences and assisting in the formation of new communities through the meeting of different cultures.

Harvey Cox, in his book *The Secular City* and subsequent works, presents play (festivals, feasts) as a key mode of human existence (Cox 1965). He emphasizes that play, far from being a mere leisure activity, carries a liberating meaning, enabling the experience of freedom and joy and the formation of community. Play's characteristics include transcendence of the ordinary, community-building, creative expression, and hope for the future. In modern secular cities, play plays a crucial role in restoring human relationships and finding hope amidst the anonymity and bureaucratic control of technology.

Multicultural preaching faces challenges such as cultural differences, language barriers, the coexistence of diverse worldviews, and conflict. Cox's concept of play provides important insights for addressing these issues. Through play, preaching can transcend cultural differences, promote a sense of community, and deliver creative and hopeful messages. For example, by incorporating stories, music, and dance from various cultures or through communal events, preachers can foster a sense of belonging and encourage active participation. Additionally, preaching that utilizes play must consider cultural respect, the exclusion of commercialism, and the preservation of authenticity, ensuring that the unique values of each culture are honored. By applying the concept of play in this manner, effective communication in multicultural preaching becomes possible.

Although Hans-Georg Gadamer is a philosopher rather than a theologian, his insights into play provide valuable contributions to theological imagination. He argued that play is inherently embedded in the way human beings exist (Gadamer 1989, pp. 101–34). This perspective suggests that play is an essential expression of humanity created in the image of God. Moreover, play serves as a space for humans to exercise the freedom and creativity bestowed upon them, allowing for a renewed experience of their relationship with God and the re-establishment of their relationship with the world. This holistic viewpoint holds significant implications for preaching in multicultural contexts.

In multicultural communities, where people from different cultural backgrounds and value systems gather to worship, preaching must respect and embrace these cultural traits while effectively conveying the core message of the gospel. The concept of play plays a crucial role in such multicultural environments. Based on Gadamer's assertion that play is an intrinsic part of human existence, preaching can promote free and creative communication between people from different cultural backgrounds. For instance, by integrating various cultural traditions or arts into worship and preaching, individuals can experience play as they respect each other's cultures and feel a sense of belonging to the community. Additionally, play can facilitate interaction and understanding across differences, enriching the faith experience within multicultural communities.

2.3. Worship as Play: Romano Guardini's Vision of Liturgical Experience in Multicultural Contexts

The concept of worship as a form of play is a central theme in Romano Guardini's work *Vom Geist der Liturgie* (The Spirit of the Liturgy). He draws a parallel between worship and play, emphasizing the essential nature and purpose of worship through this analogy, which elevates the playful nature of humanity to a spiritual dimension. According to him, the key characteristics of worship as a play are as follows (Guardini 2018, pp. 68–78): First, he views worship not as something imposed, but as a voluntary and free act, akin to play. Worship is not a mere means to achieve a goal but a meaningful act in itself, an expression of

humanity's pure devotion before God. Second, he explains that, like play, worship involves certain rules and forms. These forms are not mere constraints but provide the structure necessary for worship to be communal and harmonious. Through form and order, worship maintains its sacred dimension. Third, he believes that the various symbolic elements used in worship (such as bread, wine, water, oil) facilitate a mystical communication between God and humanity. These symbols deepen the worship experience, making it richer and more profound. Fourth, he points out that just as play connects individuals to the group, worship binds the faith community together. Worship is a communal experience where believers gather in unison to approach God, strengthening the bonds within the community. Finally, he asserts that much like how play provides an escape from the ordinary and offers a special world, worship allows the believer to experience a transcendent encounter with God. Worship transcends the constraints of everyday life and becomes a space where the presence and grace of God are encountered. Through his understanding of worship as a playful and creative encounter between humanity and God, he expands the theological comprehension of liturgy and worship.

In a multicultural society, preaching plays a crucial role in creating a space where all can experience God's grace, transcending cultural differences. His liturgical perspective inspires a reconceptualization of preaching as a playful, creative, and communal act, making it a powerful tool for deeper communication and unity in a multicultural context.

Moltmann, Harvey Cox, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Romano Guardini all interpret play as a significant act with profound theological and human meaning, presenting it as a useful concept for preaching in multicultural contexts. They emphasize that play serves as a space for humans to express their freedom and creativity, playing a crucial role in forming community and facilitating a renewed experience of the relationship with God. Moltmann sees play as the joy and freedom of creation, Gadamer views it as an intrinsic mode of human existence, and Guardini frames worship as a voluntary and free act, highlighting the creative encounter between God and humanity. Cox, on the other hand, argues that play possesses the power to form community and unite diverse cultures.

In this sense, multicultural preaching can harness the playful nature of worship to transcend cultural differences and communicate in a way that respects the unique values of each culture. Furthermore, these thinkers regard play as a pathway for experiencing a renewed relationship with God, suggesting that worship and preaching go beyond mere message transmission, integrating the traditions and arts of various cultures to foster creative and free communication that enhances interaction and understanding. In this way, multicultural preaching plays a vital role in uniting people from different cultural backgrounds and re-establishing their relationship with God.

3. Reimagining Preaching: From Rational Instruction to Playful Engagement in Multicultural Contexts

Traditionally, preaching has focused on logical explanation, doctrinal instruction, and moral exhortation, relying predominantly on rational thought. This approach aims to deliver doctrinal accuracy and theological systematization but often overlooks the emotional, imaginative, and bodily experiences of the audience. For instance, traditional preaching often concentrates on the rational analysis of the biblical text to clarify its meaning, while presenting the practical application of faith as moral norms or lessons. While effective at the cognitive and intellectual levels, this method has limitations in encompassing the holistic experience of the hearers.[3]

In multicultural contexts, the limitations of traditional preaching become even more pronounced. Audiences from various cultural backgrounds bring different forms of expression, communication styles, and worldviews that influence how they understand and relate

to the sermon. For example, in some cultures, symbolic or non-verbal communication may hold greater significance than verbal articulation, while others may place higher value on logical argumentation. Preaching that is exclusively focused on doctrinal accuracy or moral exhortation, without accounting for these diverse communicative styles, may fail to resonate deeply with listeners, limiting the sermon's potential for transformation.[4]

In light of these challenges, integrating play into preaching offers a fundamental shift in both the methodology and purpose of sermon delivery. Far from merely altering the format of the sermon, the concept of play invites a reimagining of preaching as an interactive, experiential process that fosters active participation. Play, by nature, is dynamic, relational, and creative—it engages not only the mind but also the heart and body. When incorporated into preaching, elements of play such as storytelling, humor, metaphor, and imaginative imagery make the sermon more sensory and emotionally resonant. These elements invite the congregation into a shared experience, encouraging them to participate actively rather than remain passive recipients of doctrinal knowledge (McClure 1995, pp. 29, 53–54).[5]

Preaching rooted in play also introduces an important balance between structure and freedom. While play involves certain rules and order, it simultaneously encourages creativity and spontaneous interaction. By integrating these elements into preaching, the sermon becomes more flexible, allowing individuals to express their cultural identities and personal experiences while still engaging with the doctrinal and theological message being conveyed. This approach invites the preacher to move beyond mere intellectual instruction, utilizing artistic expressions, bodily movement, music, and even dance, to create a multi-sensory encounter with the gospel that transcends abstract concepts and reaches the full spectrum of human experience.

Moreover, a playful approach to preaching is particularly effective in engaging the emotions and imagination of the congregation. It taps into the deeper layers of human experience, fostering emotional empathy and encouraging physical involvement in the worship process. This emotional and physical engagement transforms faith from a mere intellectual concept into an organic, lived experience. The playful elements of preaching offer an opportunity for emotional connection and reflection, helping the audience internalize the message on a deeper level.

In the context of multicultural preaching, the playful aspects of sermon delivery also serve as bridges of communication that transcend cultural differences. Preaching that incorporates play allows individuals from diverse backgrounds to connect with each other, empathize with one another's experiences of faith, and share in a common worship experience. This interactive, playful approach fosters a communal space where the distinct cultural expressions of the congregation can coexist, providing an opportunity for mutual understanding and unity in diversity (Kim 2017, pp. 118–20).[6]

Thus, preaching that integrates play is no longer just a means of transmitting doctrinal knowledge or moral teachings. It becomes a transformative tool that shapes the faith community and nurtures the spiritual growth of individuals. Through the incorporation of play, preaching becomes an engaging, participatory experience that reaches beyond intellectual understanding to foster a deeper, more holistic encounter with the gospel. It is in this dynamic interplay of structure and creativity, logic and imagination, that preaching becomes a powerful, life-changing force, capable of impacting the lives of its listeners in profound and lasting ways.

4. Practical Applications of Playful Preaching: Methods, Challenges, and Multicultural Sensitivity

The application of play to preaching is multifaceted, allowing preachers to adapt approaches that align with their cultural contexts and audience characteristics. Far beyond simply adding elements of entertainment, this approach aims to integrate the essential qualities of play—such as transcending the ordinary, fostering community, creative expression, and inspiring hope for the future—into the fabric of sermons. This integration broadens the scope for communication within multicultural communities and enhances the depth and efficacy of gospel proclamation.

4.1. Strategies for Infusing Play into the External Structure of Preaching

The external structure of a sermon encompasses its mode of delivery, format, and environment. Infusing playfulness into these aspects can significantly increase audience engagement and participation. Firstly, preachers can break free from conventional expository preaching by employing storytelling, dramatic presentations, visual aids, and a synergy of music and art to inject dynamism into their messages. For example, introducing various depictions of the Last Supper from different cultural and historical contexts can vividly illustrate how Scripture has been interpreted through diverse lenses. Storytelling that draws on myths, legends, and folktales can establish emotional resonance and effectively convey theological truths. Dramatic preaching, such as first-person monologs or epistolary sermons from the perspective of biblical figures, captivates listeners and fosters deep emotional connection. Incorporating artistic elements like visual media, music, dance, and fine arts creates a multisensory experience that enhances the impact of the sermon.

Secondly, participatory sermon formats invite the congregation to actively engage with the message. Techniques such as quizzes, games, role-playing, and facilitated discussions encourage audiences to co-create meaning and deepen their understanding. Bible-themed quizzes and role-play exercises, for instance, can spark interest and encourage exploration of various perspectives. These methods foster an environment of mutual learning and strengthen the communal bonds among participants.

Lastly, cultivating a festive atmosphere transforms the preaching environment into a space of joy and unity. The thoughtful use of lighting, music, and décor can evoke vibrancy, while pre- or post-sermon communal meals, cultural performances, and festivals nurture a sense of belonging. This mirrors Johan Huizinga's emphasis on play as a space for communal bonding and transcending every day, allowing members of multicultural congregations to laugh, learn, and grow together.

4.2. Strategies for Infusing Play into the Internal Content of Preaching

The internal content of preaching—its themes, structure, and core message—offers fertile ground for integrating the profound dimensions of play to enrich the delivery of the gospel.

Firstly, narrative-centered sermons resonate deeply with listeners by moving away from abstract doctrinal frameworks. Incorporating stories from Scripture, personal experiences, historical events, and literature, interwoven with symbols, metaphors, and humor, makes the message relatable and memorable. Adopting unique perspectives—such as recounting biblical events through the eyes of nature (e.g., trees, water, heaven, or animals)—adds layers of creativity and intrigue.[7] In multicultural settings, leveraging narratives from diverse traditions reduces the risk of miscommunication and fosters inclusivity. For instance, presenting the Bible from the perspective of migrants, as seen in the stories of displaced peoples in Scripture, or employing postcolonial approaches to preach about Jesus, can provide a fresh and compelling interpretation that deeply engages the audience.[8]

Such perspectives not only challenge conventional readings but also offer a more inclusive and culturally sensitive way of connecting with diverse listeners.

Secondly, a judicious use of humor can dissolve the rigidity of a solemn sermon atmosphere, easing tension and inviting connection. Humor serves as a tool to convey truth in a disarming manner, creating a positive and approachable tone. However, preachers must exercise caution to ensure that humor supports rather than undermines the message's authenticity and avoids alienating or offending any individual or group. Thirdly, sermons that underscore hope and positivity can uplift congregations, especially those navigating challenges such as migration, cultural dislocation, or discrimination. By presenting a vision of resilience and renewal, preachers offer both comfort and empowerment to diverse audiences. Lastly, preachers can open avenues for diverse interpretations of the message, encouraging creative and reflective engagement (Clader 2003, p. 162). This approach aligns with the imaginative and exploratory nature of play, enabling congregants to contextualize the sermon within their own cultural frameworks and lived experiences, thereby enhancing receptivity and resonance.

This dynamic diverse and playful approach to preaching aligns with a deeper engagement with Scripture, as seen in the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32). While the story can be interpreted from the perspectives of the elder son, the younger son, and the father—each rooted in human experience—the passage also includes the tale of the calf sacrificed for the human celebration. By incorporating the perspective of the calf, sacrificed for human revelry, preaching can be expanded to address ecological concerns with the theme of sacrifice for human satisfaction and the voices of the oppressed, marginalized, and silenced in society. In this way, the preacher and congregation can engage in a transformative dialog, using the calf as a symbolic lens to explore issues of oppression, discrimination, and silence, thus connecting the gospel's message to the struggles of today's world.

In a multicultural context, this broader, inclusive interpretation deepens the theological understanding while also inviting the congregation to actively engage in the sermon as a playful, transformative space. Just as the calf's sacrifice broadens the narrative to include the oppressed, this model of preaching encourages reflection on social injustices and creates an opportunity for the congregation to connect with shared struggles across cultures. By incorporating symbolic elements such as this, preaching transcends traditional boundaries, fostering an inclusive dialog that challenges individual and collective perspectives. This approach not only enriches the message but also nurtures empathy, cultural sensitivity, and a deeper engagement with the diverse realities of the congregation. Through such engagement, preaching becomes a powerful vehicle for transformation—encouraging reflection, action, and healing within the context of a multicultural community.

Another example of playful preaching can be found in the scene from Matthew 26:17–25, where Jesus and his disciples share the Last Supper. A creative exploration of this moment might ask who prepared the meal and who did the dishes—questions that the biblical text does not address. In a patriarchal society, it is unlikely that men would have been tasked with these domestic responsibilities, yet the narrative leaves these details unmentioned. This playful approach invites reflection on the roles of those who may not be explicitly mentioned in the narrative, encouraging a deeper, more inclusive interpretation of the text within a multicultural context.

In a multicultural and inclusive preaching context, this opens a path for the preacher and congregation to engage with the unsung contributors of history—those who are often overlooked or excluded in dominant cultural narratives. By reflecting on the unseen labor that sustains both society and the church, this imaginative approach to preaching invites deeper reflection on the importance of marginalized individuals and ecosystems. It serves as a powerful tool for addressing not only human injustices but also the environmental

issues that often go unrecognized. This perspective not only broadens the theological understanding of the passage but also fosters empathy and solidarity across diverse cultural contexts, encouraging the congregation to see and honor the roles of those who are often relegated to the margins of society.

In sum, integrating play into preaching, through creative perspectives and inclusive interpretations, not only enriches the theological message but also fosters a deeper connection between the gospel and the lived experiences of diverse communities. By acknowledging the often-overlooked voices of both people and the natural world, preaching becomes a transformative act that encourages deep reflection, promotes healing, and advocates for social justice in diverse cultural settings.

4.3. Challenges and the Necessity of Multicultural Sensitivity

While playful preaching has transformative potential, it is not without its challenges, particularly in multicultural contexts. Misrepresenting or distorting cultural elements can exacerbate tensions or unintentionally demean certain groups. Preachers must approach cultural themes with sensitivity, backed by diligent research and genuine respect. An overemphasis on entertainment risks reducing play to a mere novelty, detracting from the sermon's theological depth. Play must remain a means of illuminating the gospel rather than an end in itself. Additionally, preachers who project their own cultural perspective onto the interpretation of Scripture may alienate members from different backgrounds. Maintaining a posture of openness to diverse interpretations is essential. To address these challenges, cultivating multicultural sensitivity is paramount. This includes fostering openness, empathy, and intercultural communication skills, alongside continual self-reflection and learning.

By thoughtfully integrating playful elements into preaching, sermons can transcend mere informational delivery to become dynamic spaces of shared joy, learning, and spiritual growth. Such an approach not only facilitates vibrant communication within multicultural communities but also amplifies the transformative power of the gospel.

5. Advocacy for Inclusive Preaching Methods and the Evolving Role of Sermons

This study advocates an inclusive preaching methodology that transcends merely recognizing diversity within multicultural communities to actively celebrating it by integrating the essential characteristics of play into sermons. Such an approach reimagines preaching not as a unidirectional tool of message delivery but as a dynamic space where individuals from varied cultural backgrounds can come together to laugh, learn, communicate, and cultivate a profound sense of community of faith.

By engaging in these discussions, this paper calls for a deeper reflection on the evolving role and function of preaching in multicultural contexts. Preaching must no longer be confined to a singular cultural framework but must transform into a living process of communication co-created by individuals of diverse cultural heritages. Through the spirit of play, sermons can evolve into more creative and dynamic expressions, serving as vital instruments for fostering harmony and growth within multicultural communities.

In synthesizing the earlier discussions on examples of playful preaching, its challenges, and the critical importance of multicultural sensitivity, this study urges preachers to reassess their roles and objectives within culturally pluralistic communal settings. This call extends beyond a mere shift in preaching methods, demanding a fundamental reconsideration of the ontological significance and pastoral function of preaching itself.

5.1. Redefining the Role of the Preacher

Traditionally, preachers have been regarded primarily as authoritative conveyors of religious messages, entrusted with the role of delivering divine truths to their congregations (Csinos 2022, p. 66).[9] However, in the increasingly multicultural contexts of today, preachers adopting a playful homiletic approach must transcend this traditional framework and assume roles that address the diverse needs and expectations of their communities of faith. First, the preacher must act as a cultural mediator, fostering communication among audiences from varied cultural backgrounds and addressing misunderstandings that arise from cultural differences. This requires a deep understanding of and respect for the unique traditions, values, and perspectives represented within the congregation. By crafting messages that resonate across cultural divides and offering interpretations inclusive of multiple viewpoints, the preacher serves as a bridge that unites rather than divides. Second, the preacher becomes a community builder, utilizing playful elements within sermons to facilitate interaction and cultivate a sense of connection among listeners. Through shared experiences of laughter, learning, and dialog, the congregation develops stronger bonds and a deeper sense of mutual understanding. This role highlights the potential of sermons to foster not only spiritual growth but also communal solidarity and belonging.

Third, the preacher takes on the role of a creative communication designer, moving beyond conventional methods of message delivery to create immersive and participatory experiences. By employing diverse modes of communication, engaging multiple senses, and encouraging active audience participation, the preacher transforms sermons into dynamic events that resonate more deeply and inclusively with the audience. Finally, the preacher must embody the role of a humble companion, abandoning the authoritative posture traditionally associated with their position. Instead, the preacher engages with the congregation as a fellow seeker of truth, learning and growing alongside them. This humility fosters an environment of shared exploration, where the preacher listens actively to the insights and experiences of others and remains open to diverse interpretations. In embracing these roles, the preacher redefines their vocation to meet the demands of a pluralistic society, creating a space where cultural diversity is celebrated, communal bonds are strengthened, and the pursuit of truth becomes a collective journey.

5.2. Reimagining the Purpose of Preaching

In multicultural contexts, the purpose of preaching must extend beyond doctrinal instruction and the mere transmission of religious knowledge. It should embrace a broader and more transformative set of objectives that resonate with the diverse realities of its audience. One essential aim of preaching in such contexts is fostering cross-cultural understanding. Preaching should serve as a platform for promoting mutual respect and deeper appreciation among individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. By illuminating the unique values, traditions, and meanings embedded within each culture, sermons can encourage the congregation to view differences not as obstacles but as opportunities for growth and enrichment. This approach nurtures an ethos of mutual respect, fostering a spirit of cooperation and harmony.

Another critical objective is strengthening communal bonds. Preaching has the potential to cultivate a profound sense of unity and belonging among community members. Through shared experiences of joy, music, and collective learning, individuals build trust and deepen their understanding of one another. These interactions contribute to a robust sense of communal solidarity, transforming the congregation into a space of genuine connection and shared purpose.

Preaching should also play a significant role in promoting personal and communal growth and healing. It must deliver messages of hope and comfort that address the

emotional and spiritual struggles of its audiences (Black 1996, pp. 41, 83–90, 146–51). By inspiring resilience and offering encouragement to overcome life's challenges, sermons help individuals discover meaning and purpose, fostering their personal development and emotional well-being. Finally, preaching must embrace the task of inspiring commitment to social justice. In a world rife with inequality and discrimination, sermons must challenge systemic injustices and motivate the congregation to act. By addressing societal issues through a multicultural lens, preaching can articulate actionable strategies to combat prejudice and inequality, empowering individuals to become agents of change in their communities (Kim 2017, pp. 32–35). In embracing these expanded purposes, preaching evolves into a powerful instrument of transformation—one that unites, heals, and mobilizes diverse communities toward collective flourishing and justice.[10]

5.3. Preaching as a Collaborative Act: Cultivating Interdependence in Multicultural Communities

Lucy Rose and John McClure critique traditional and New Homiletics for maintaining a hierarchical preacher–congregation dynamic. Despite efforts to emphasize listener participation, preaching remains largely one-directional, limiting true collaboration. To address this, preaching must shift from authoritative proclamation to an interactive, communal process where both preacher and congregation actively shape meaning together (Rose 1997, pp. 4–112; McClure 1995, pp. 20–61).

In this collaborative nature of the preaching model, preaching becomes a shared space, akin to a playground, where engagement fosters theological discovery, healing, and growth. The preacher no longer dictates meaning but facilitates a conversation in which the congregation plays an active role. Just as play thrives on openness and challenge, preaching flourishes when congregants bring their diverse experiences and perspectives, transforming the sermon into a living dialog rather than a preordained message.

This collaborative vision also requires empathy and cultural sensitivity. Traditional homiletics often silences marginalized voices, whereas a participatory and interdependent model embraces diversity as a source of theological insight. The sermon becomes a dynamic encounter, where tensions are not avoided but engaged constructively. Beyond the preaching moment, this participatory nature of playful preaching approach fosters a community that embodies the sermon's transformative power through reflection, dialog, and action. Like a playground that nurtures both creativity and resilience, preaching becomes a space where theological exploration leads to justice, reconciliation, and renewal.

5.4. The Evolving Trajectory of Preaching

This paper emphasizes the need for preaching to evolve into a dynamic and responsive medium that embraces cultural diversity, strengthens communal ties, and fosters both individual and collective growth, all while advancing social justice. By incorporating the concept of play, sermons can become more creative and participatory, effectively addressing the shifting demands of multicultural societies and opening new pathways for engagement.

This vision of preaching transcends merely creating enjoyable experiences; it embraces the playful dynamic of a shared space where both preacher and congregation engage in confronting conflicts and fostering healing and reconciliation. Like a playground, preaching becomes a collaborative act that not only celebrates diversity and its beauty but also addresses injustices, reconciles differences, and advocates transformative change. In this interdependent relationship, preaching fulfills its holistic purpose, becoming a space where growth, joy, and social transformation coexist.

Future research should delve into the changing roles and purposes of preaching within various cultural contexts. Empirical studies exploring the impact of playful homiletics and the development of practical strategies for preaching in multicultural communities

are crucial. Such research will equip preachers with the necessary tools to navigate the challenges and opportunities posed by a pluralistic society.

In conclusion, this paper presents an innovative approach by integrating the concept of play into preaching, providing valuable insights into how the practice can adapt to meet the challenges and opportunities of multicultural contexts. It encourages preachers to transcend cultural differences, enhancing communication and redefining the purpose and methodology of preaching. Additionally, it envisions preaching as an inclusively, collaboratively and interdependently mutual process that plays a central role in building community within diverse congregations.

By framing preaching as a transformative and unifying force, this work highlights its potential to serve not only as a communicative act but also as a powerful tool for fostering community in multicultural settings. This perspective offers a forward-looking approach to the future of preaching, emphasizing its role in shaping inclusive and resilient faith communities.

It is hoped that this approach will inspire future theological and homiletical scholarship, motivating the development of preaching practices that are adaptable to the evolving realities of multicultural societies. By embracing the creative potential of play, preachers can craft more engaging and emotionally resonant messages, ultimately strengthening communal bonds and promoting deeper intercultural understanding. The expectation is that such an approach can contribute to the flourishing of diverse faith communities that celebrate diversity, cultivate mutual respect, and advocate for social justice, paving the way for a more compassionate, collaborative, and transformative future in the multicultural context of faith.

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Notes

1   It is relevant for discussions on the humanistic perspective of play and its significance in human creativity.
2   His book discusses the theological significance of play and its implications for Christian faith and practice.
3   Craddock (1985): This book examines how traditional logical approaches to preaching can overlook the bodily and emotional experiences of the listeners. Lischer (2005): This book discusses the traditional approach to preaching and how it often neglects the emotional and imaginative experiences of the audience.
4   Over the past five decades, a transformative approach known as the New Homiletic has emerged, aimed at developing a preaching methodology that speaks to the challenges and complexities of postmodern culture. While this approach has brought about significant theoretical and methodological advancements in homiletics, the practical impact on churches has remained limited, with little evidence of substantial change in preaching practices or deeper engagement within congregational settings.
5   Homileticians like John McClure, Lucy Rose, Wesley Allen, and Shauna Hannan champion a model of preaching that is both conversational and collaborative, emphasizing the active engagement of diverse community members in the processes of biblical interpretation and sermon development. Their approach underscores the importance of including marginalized groups and disadvantaged individuals, fostering a more inclusive and participatory dialog between preachers and congregations (McClure 1995; Rose 1997, pp. 99–111; Allen 2005, pp. 68–70; Hannan 2021, pp. 8–80).
6   This approach aligns with the practice of what Dr. Eunjoo Mary Kim refers to as *The Kaleidoscope Model* in her book, *Christian Preaching and Worship in Multicultural Contexts*. Dr. Eunjoo Mary Kim is a scholar and author who has written extensively on topics related to homiletics and theology, particularly focusing on the intersection of preaching and postcolonial theory. She has contributed significantly to the field of preaching through her work on how different cultural and historical contexts influence

the interpretation and delivery of sermons. She has also emphasized the importance of inclusive and diverse perspectives in Christian preaching.

7 The following two papers provide valuable resources for facilitating eco-centered preaching: Dr. HyeRan Kim-Cragg (2022, 2024).

8 For ideas on postcolonial preaching of Jesus, please refer to the following two books: Kim-Cragg (2021), Kim (2024).

9 "Too often the preaching moment is perceived as similar to a banking model for learning: preachers have a nugget of information they want everyone in the congregation to know, and the sermon is the medium through which those pieces of knowledge are passed on directly from speaker to hearer".

10 The following books provide valuable analyses of contemporary challenges related to social justice and the experience of suffering: Kim (2021), Travis (2021), Kim (2023).

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Multicultural Preaching Across Generations: A Proposal for Effective Preaching to Young Generations in the Great Dechurching

Jaewoong Jung

School of Preaching, Seoul Theological University, Bucheon 14755, Republic of Korea; john1996@stu.ac.kr

Abstract: This study proposes multicultural preaching across generations as a means of effective preaching in the time of the Great Dechurching. Young generations, represented by Millennials and Generation Z, are the least religious of all age groups, showing the strongest intention to leave the church. The author argues that the failure to form a Christian identity, rather than the church's failure to adapt culturally, is the main cause of the Great Dechurching among young generations and that preaching to a generation-segregated congregation, tailored to a target generation, contributes to the failure of forming a Christian identity, as it obstructs the sharing of faith experiences intergenerationally. Based on empirical evidence from multiple surveys, I demonstrate that preaching is influential in the dechurching of young generations, and that the faith gap across generations, rather than the cultural gap, contributes to the dechurching of young generations. Then, by analyzing preaching models in relation to generation, the author points out the problems in generation-blind and -separated preaching and suggests multicultural preaching across generations as a desirable homiletical model for overcoming the dechurching of young generations by formulating a Christian identity through intergenerational conversations around faith. I describe this as conversational preaching that seeks mutual listening and learning based on equal and reciprocal relationships across generations, as well as the recognition of cultural differences across generations.

Keywords: preaching; generation; Millennials; Generation Z; dechurching; religious unaffiliated; intergenerational preaching; multiculturalism

1. Introduction

As Peter Forsyth said, "with its preaching Christianity stands or falls"; preaching has been a core ministry of the church throughout its history (Forsyth [1907] 1993, p. 1). Where the true gospel is preached, the church rises; where preaching withers, the church declines. Thus, whenever the church has faced a crisis, a renewal of preaching has been called for in response. This was the case with the Reformation, the Puritan movement, and the New Homiletics movement. It is, therefore, natural to look to preaching for solutions to the unprecedented phenomenon of dechurching that churches across the globe are experiencing today.

This study attempts to investigate how preaching affects the dechurching of young generations by focusing on the relationships between generational differences, dechurching, and preaching. It has been assumed that the cultural irrelevance of Christianity is the main cause of dechurching. However, I argue that the failure to form a Christian identity among young generations due to prevailing generational separation is a more important factor than the issue of cultural adaptation.

Following the assumption of cultural adaptation, some preachers regard cultural relevance as the most important factor in effective preaching for young generations and seek to preach sermons that fit generational characteristics in communication styles and culture. For instance, Ron Allen proposed tailoring preaching to each generation, designing preaching to appeal to different generations' cultures, and delivering it in a way that reflects their communication styles because he believed that people of different generations listen to sermons in different ways and have different life issues, tastes, modes of expression, and worldviews (Jeter and Allen 2002, pp. 22–47). His model of tailoring preaching for each generation's characteristics is valuable since it is a homiletical response to the emergence of new generations and is well informed about cultural differences across generations. It is an attempt to preach the gospel with consideration of generational differences so that each generation can hear the gospel effectively. However, it is doubtful that his model is still effective considering the rapid dechurching of young generations over the last few decades. In addition, it is problematic because it enlarges the generational gap rather than bridging it and hampers the sharing of faith across generations.

Then, what is the problem? Scholars of dechurching point out that the lack of transmission of faith from older generations to younger generations is the real problem in the ecclesial crisis. They argue that it is essential for young generations to hear the good news and formulate their Christian identity through the intergenerational communication of faith. Thus, I suggest multicultural preaching across generations, in which all generations share the gospel and experience faith through mutual listening and learning based on equal and reciprocal relationships. To substantiate the validity of this argument, I will take empirical evidence from a survey on preaching for young generations, particularly Millennials and Generation Z, that I recently conducted in South Korea, along with scholarly conversations about dechurching and intergenerational preaching.

2. Dechurching Young Generations

2.1. Dechurching Young Generations Across the Globe

In general, churches around the world, except for churches in the southern hemisphere, have been declining for the last several decades in tandem with increasing religious disaffiliation. This is especially serious in some regions, such as Western Europe, North America, and South Korea. As church attendance and church membership in those regions have been sharply declining over the last several decades, the number of "the nones", a group of people who are not affiliated with any religion and do not attend religious services, has increased unprecedentedly.

The decline in Christianity in Western Europe is not new. However, it is notable that the share of Christians is rapidly declining, while that of the nones is increasing. This contrasts with the earlier religious landscape in Western Europe because, in the past, most Western Europeans identified as Christians, even though they were inactive in religious participation and practices. However, recently, many of those inactive Christians have become wholly unaffiliated, verifying the dechurching in Western Europe. For example, while 79% of Norwegians replied that they were raised Christian, only 51% of Norwegian respondents currently identify as Christian. Thus, it can be interpreted that 28% of Norwegians left the church, which matches the gap between those who were raised unaffiliated (15%) and the current unaffiliated share (43%) (Pew Research Center 2018, pp. 84–86).

The same applies in the United States. According to the General Social Survey (GSS), the nones have increased from 5% of Americans in 1972 to 29% in 2021, while the share of U.S. adults who identify as Christian has fallen from 90% in 1972 to 63% in 2021 (Pew Research Center 2022, pp. 19–21). Jim Davis and Michael Graham say that about forty million adults in America have left the church in the last twenty-five years, with most of

them seeming to have become nones. They call this new religious trend in the United States the "Great Dechurching" (Jim Davis and Michael Graham, pp. xxii, 3).

The Great Dechurching is happening in a similar way in South Korea. According to the 2023 Survey on the Religious Life and Consciousness of Koreans, which was conducted by Gallup Korea with 9,182 adults over the age of 19 nationwide from February to November 2022, the share of religiously unaffiliated Koreans increased from 45% in 2012 to 63% in 2022, while the share of religiously affiliated Koreans fell from 55% in 2012 to 37% in 2022. In the meantime, the share of Protestant Christians decreased from 22.5% in 2012 to 15% in 2022 (Korea Christian Pastors Association 2023, p. 43). This is similar to the results of a survey in *Koreans and Religion 1984–2021* published by Gallup Korea in 2021, which reported that the share of Protestant Christians in South Korea decreased from 21% in 2004 to 17% in 2021, while that of nones increased from 47% to 60% in the same period (Gallup Korea 2022). In short, the Great Dechurching occurs in tandem with religious disaffiliation in South Korea.

Meanwhile, one should note that the level of religious disaffiliation varies depending on the generation. The number of dechurched people is growing larger in younger generations than in the generations that precede them. According to the American National Family Life Survey, every younger generation is less religiously affiliated than the older generations. While the share of the religiously unaffiliated population in the Silent Generation is 9%, it increases to 18% among Baby Boomers, 25% in Generation X, 29% among Millennials, and 34% in Generation Z (Cox 2022). Ryan Burge demonstrated that, while the share of nones among Baby Boomers increased from 10% in the 1980s to 20% in 2021, the nones in Generation X doubled to 23% in 2021 in comparison with the statistics in 1998. While the share of religiously unaffiliated Millennials increased to 38% in 2021, the share of nones in Generation Z skyrocketed to 49% in 2021 (Davis et al. 2023, p. 35).

This generational dechurching is observed in Europe as well. According to the European Social Survey (ESS), which was conducted in 22 countries from 2014 to 2016, 64% of French young adults (16–29 years old in 2014–2016) and 70% of British young adults were identified as nones (Bullivant 2018). This result can be compared with a report by the Pew Research Center in which 23% of British adults, including those abovementioned generations, were identified as religiously unaffiliated (Sahgal 2018). This confirms that the decline in religious affiliation in successive European generations is observed in the same way as in the United States.

The same applies to South Korea. According to *The 2023 Survey on the Religious Life and Consciousness of Koreans*, the rate of the decrease in church affiliation is sharper among younger generations than among older generations. In 2022, the population of Protestant Christians in their 20s dropped by 9.8% in comparison with 2017, and the population of those in their 30s dropped by 5.5%, while the population of Protestant Christians over 50 years old decreased by 4.4%. Considering that the Buddhist population in their 20s decreased by 1.6% and the Catholic population in their 20s decreased by 0.1% in the same period, the dechurching among young Koreans is striking. It is also notable that the population of unchurched Christians, who identify as Christians while they are not affiliated with a church, has increased. It was reported that the number of unchurched Christians increased from 10.5% in 2012 to 29.3% in 2022 (Korea Christian Pastors Association 2023, pp. 43, 50, 105).

2.2. The Cause of Younger Generations' Dechurching

These studies showing the amount of dechurching among younger generations lead to the assumption that generational differences affect the dechurching of younger generations. Scholars have taken sociocultural reasons or theological reasons, such as secularization,

the spread of individualism, and moral scandals of religious leaders, into account when addressing the causes of dechurching. For instance, David Kinnemann and Gabe Lyons presented the following six themes among the reasons why young generations leave the church: being hypocritical, too focused on obtaining converts, anti-homosexual, sheltered, too political, and judgmental (Kinnemann and Lyons 2007, pp. 27–28). These reasons also seem to be involved in dechurching in recent years. Among the reasons for cultural Christians' dechurching, Jim Davis and Michael Graham listed the following answers: "My friends were not attending" (18%); "Attending was inconvenient" (18%); "Suffering changed my view of God" (17%); "I wanted to express my gender identity" (17%); "I moved to another community" (17%); "Too restrictive of my sexual freedom" (16%); "Scandal involving clergy" (16%); "I chose to worship completely online" (16%) (Davis et al. 2023, p. 49).

Some of these answers seem to verify the idea that the church's cultural delay or cultural irrelevance is the cause of dechurching among young generations. Thus, the solution seems to be to foster a culturally adapted Christianity. However, contrary to this assumption, the statistics of dechurching show that it is worse in the mainline denominations that have a positive outlook on cultural adaptation than in the conservative denominations that are generally negative toward it. According to a report on the American religious landscape by the Pew Research Center, while the share of mainline Protestants in the United States dropped by 3.4% from 18.1% in 2007 to 14.7% in 2014, the share of Evangelicals decreased by 0.9% from 26.3% in 2007 to 25.4% in 2014, and the share of religiously unaffiliated persons increased by 6.7% from 16.1% in 2007 to 22.8 in 2014 (Pew Research Center 2015). Thus, it turns out that cultural adaptation has not been very effective in stopping dechurching, thus contradicting this assumption.

This also applies to Korean dechurching. The main causes of dechurching in South Korea are Koreans' secularization and loss of trust in the church rather than the church's cultural irrelevance. In response to the question of "why did you leave church?", Koreans gave answers in the following order: "lack of interest in religion" (34.5%), "mistrust and disappointment in religion" (29.1%), "lack of faith" (19.5%), and "not wanting to be bound" (10.6%) (Korea Christian Pastors Association 2023, p. 50). Among these answers, the second reflects the loss of trust in the church, while the others reflect secularization. Although one might say that cultural irrelevance contributes to the loss of trust in the church or secularization, I believe that the correlation between them is not considerable. Rather, it seems that the church's over-embracing of culture is seen as secularizing the church and creating an anti-Christian sentiment, which, in turn, contributes to dechurching.

This does not mean that culture does not matter. Culture matters. However, it is necessary to focus more on the way in which one understands culture and how to respond to it rather than on the forced adaptation of culture. If one understands culture through thin descriptions, describing what culture looks like on a surface level without any interpretation or context, one would overlook the deeper dynamics of culture that work beneath cultural phenomena and fail to explain why something happened and what it means, which can be achieved through thick description. Those who understand culture only through thin descriptions seek to show Christianity's compatibility with contemporary cultures to young generations and concentrate on developing Christian practices, including preaching, songs, styles of worship services, and others, and adapting them to the contemporary cultural trends with which they would feel comfortable. Meanwhile, they fail to recognize the cultural incompatibility of Christianity, thus creating a dissonance with the worldview, values, and cultural norms on which secular society is based and an inability to form a Christian cultural identity. However, since Christianity has both cultural compatibility and incompatibility, and Christian practices are not only influenced by cultures by adapting to

them but also influence, formulate, and transform cultures, one should seek to transmit the distinctive cultural identity embedded in Christian culture from older generations to younger generations through various Christian practices, in addition to developing more culturally relevant Christian practices for young generations.

I believe that the main cause of the Great Dechurching among younger generations comes not from the failure of cultural adaptation but from the failure to form a Christian identity. As shown in emerging Christian practices that are adapted to contemporary cultures, including contemporary Christian music, storytelling/narrative preaching, the use of various cultural works, and the employment of various digital media for Christian ministry, churches have not been far behind cultural trends. Rather, some churches have been proactive in promptly adapting to cultural trends, as some have adopted contemporary music, such as rock-and-roll or hip-hop music, for their worship music, and some have adopted new media, such as audiovisual systems, online streaming services, social networking services (SNSs), and VR (virtual reality) technology, to develop highly culturally adapted churches and ministries; this even includes the use of wide broadcasting screens, online worship services, and metaverse churches. For a while, the strategy of churches' prompt cultural adaptation worked well in slowing the pace of dechurching, as shown in the success of the churches that adopted contemporary cultural trends promptly, such as the Willow Creek Church in the U.S. and Onnuri Church in South Korea. However, the current situation of the Great Dechurching among younger generations casts doubts about the effectiveness of cultural adaptation, and it requires us to reflect more deeply and more keenly on whether we were right or wrong.

In reflection, I believe that prompt cultural adaptation can contribute to the loss of Christian identity and the enlargement of the generational gap in dechurching, despite its positive contributions. As cultural changes become more rapid, the generational gap becomes larger. So, even as churches have adopted cultural changes in step with societal cultural changes, the generational gap in churches has become larger, building barriers across generations that hamper the intergenerational transmission of faith or sharing of faith experiences. In addition, as methods of communication are different among generations, with rapid cultural changes and technical progress, intercommunication across generations becomes awkward and uncomfortable, resulting in a lack of intercommunication, which accelerates the loss of sharing of Christian faith across generations.

As a result, as churches have increasingly adapted to contemporary culture, they have become generation-segregated congregations where multiple generations are present but the transmission of faith among them rarely happens (Allen et al. 2023, pp. 29–41). Age segregation is often considered an important factor of a highly advanced church education system since younger generations are taught in a way that fits their cultures and intellectual abilities, in accordance with their developmental stages. However, this only makes generational segregation worse. Parents drop their children off in the Sunday school room, go to attend the adult worship service, and have no conversations about what they experienced there nor what they believe in because they believe that the pastor and teachers will teach their children better than them in a way that fits children's culture. However, in reality, young people do not have enough opportunities to form their Christian identity through ongoing conversations with peers or older generations of the faith community simply because they do not spend enough time sharing faith with each other. As this continues for over a decade in young Christians' developmental years, younger generations rarely have the chance to hear about faith from older generations. Younger generations who have not experienced faith through existential events and have not heard about faith from the reliable older generations become skeptical of the Christian faith without having an opportunity to develop their own faith through intergenerational conversations about it;

then, when they are grown up, it is easy for them to choose to leave the church since they feel that attending is meaningless.

Similarly, a group of scholars argue that the dechurching of young generations is related to the loss of intergenerational transmission of faith. They argue that disbelief or nonbelief of parents is a cause of their children's dechurching. During their research on the family backgrounds of nones, Vern L. Bengston and his colleagues argued that intergenerational transmission of religious non-affiliation is one of the factors of dechurching, which differs from the assumption that nones' rejection of their parents' religious faith is the cause of the rise in their number (Bengston et al. 2013, pp. 149–64). They explain that the increase in the number of nones among younger generations is due to the increase in the number thereof in the generation of their parents. As a result, religious disaffiliation is transmitted intergenerationally. Along the same lines, Ryan Burge also says that "half of the religious disaffiliation is caused by young people raised in nonreligious households, while the other half is teens and college-age students leaving religion behind as they move into their late twenties" (Davis et al. 2023, p. 151).

The lack of intergenerational faith transmission is also the cause of the younger generation's dechurching. The authors of *The Great Dechurching* take the missed generational handoff into account as the cause of the rise in religious disaffiliation. They say that the generational handoff is most often missed during the three transitional periods of life that are most important for maintaining faith: the high school years, the four years after high school, and the early years of a new career. Many young people struggle to fit in or belong to the church during this time, and on top of this, their parents leave them with less support and interaction because they believe that it would be good for their children to seek social and psychological independence. However, contrary to these assumptions, young people still need support from their parents and older generations in developing their identity and faith. The authors claim that young people need the church as a faith community where older generations can help them follow Jesus together and walk with them to find the answers to hard questions about faith and life (Davis et al. 2023, pp. 148–63). In other words, young people need an intergenerational faith community where multiple generations interact with each other by sharing their faith experiences and confessions, not a multigenerational congregation where multiple generations simply get along without any significant interactions or mutual listening in relation to their faith experiences.

Then, what shall we do abour this problem? Simply put, it is necessary to restore and promote intergenerational interactions to formulate the Christian faith in congregations. This can be achieved through a variety of intergenerational Christian practices, such as intergenerational worship services, intergenerational Bible study groups, intergenerational Vacation Bible School (VBS), and intergenerational preaching. All generations can benefit from growing into more mature disciples of Christ through intergenerational worship, service, learning, and fellowship. Preaching is one of the most significant Christian practices that contributes to forming Christian identity through intergenerational communication of faith; it is not merely a means of church growth that attracts people by showing how Christianity is culturally relevant and attractive, nor is it a unilateral cohesion of Christian doctrines without any consideration of generational differences. Preaching is the key to resolving the problem of younger generations' dechurching. In particular, intergenerational preaching is needed as a bridge for the generational gap in dechurching as it builds a co-foundation of faith through mutual listening and mutual learning.

3. Preaching for Dechurched Generations

3.1. Preaching's Influence on the Dechurching of Young Generations

Before unfolding the discussion of intergenerational preaching for dechurched generations, it is necessary to delve into how preaching affects dechurching among young generations. To discuss this, I would like to look at the data from a survey of Effective Preaching for the MZ generations in South Korea that I conducted in 2024.

3.1.1. The Survey of Preaching and Dechurching Among Young Generations in South Korea

The survey was designed to examine how the Korean Millennial generation and Generation Z (those born between 1981 and 2012, hereafter MZ generation) experience preaching and how their experiences influence their motives for leaving the church. Therefore, the survey researched two groups of respondents: current church attendees who have been listening to sermons and those who attended churches before but have left the church. In addition, to study the preacher's perspectives on the issue, preachers from the MZ generation were also included in the survey. This survey of church-attending audiences was conducted online by using Google Forms from 24 January to 19 April 2024, targeting those in the MZ generation aged between 12 and 42 (born between 1981 and 2012) nationwide. The valid sample size was 600, of which 239 (39.8%) were male and 361 (60.2%) were female.

Based on age, there were the following:

- 144 respondents (17.5%) aged 12–20, belonging to Generation Z;
- 342 respondents (57%) aged 20–29, belonging to the Young Millennials;
- 114 respondents (19%) aged 30–42, belonging to the Old Millennials.

Based on church attendance duration, there were the following:

- 11 respondents (1.8%) who attended for less than a year;
- 20 respondents (3.3%) who attended for 1–3 years;
- 14 respondents (2.3%) who attended for 3–5 years;
- 41 respondents (6.8%) who attended for 5–10 years;
- 514 respondents (85.7%) who attended for more than 11 years.

In terms of denomination, there were the following:

- 32 respondents (5.3%) who attended Presbyterian churches (the Presbyterian Church in Korea—Tonghap and Hapdong);
- 30 respondents (5%) who attended the Korean Methodist Church;
- 253 respondents (42.2%) who attended the Korean Evangelical Holiness Church;
- 277 respondents (34.6%) who attended the Korean Baptist Church;
- 8 respondents (1.3%) who attended churches of other denominations.

The survey of individuals in the MZ generation who left the church was carried out by the Pastoral Data Center/Ji&Com Research due to the difficulty of accessing this group. The Pastoral Data Center/Ji&Com Research conducted the survey from 19 March to 24 March 2024, targeting dechurched individuals in the MZ generation with ages between 12 and 42 years (those born between 1981 and 2012) nationwide. The valid sample size was 300, with 150 males (50%) and 150 females (50%). Based on age, there were 160 respondents (20%) aged 15–18 years, belonging to Generation Z, 120 respondents (40%) aged 19–29 years, belonging to the Young Millennials, and 120 respondents (40%) aged 30–43 years, belonging to the Old Millennials. Based on church attendance duration before leaving, there were 86 respondents (28.7%) who attended for less than a year, 69 respondents (23%) who attended for 1–3 years, 34 respondents (11.3%) who attended for 3–5 years, 48 respondents (16%) who attended for 5–10 years, and 63 respondents (21%) who attended for more than 11 years. The denomination before leaving the church was surveyed using general terms

such as the Presbyterian Church, Methodist Church, and Holiness Church because many respondents who left the church did not know the official names of the denominations. The results showed 121 respondents (40.3%) who previously attended Presbyterian churches, 20 respondents (6.6%) who attended Methodist churches, 38 respondents (12.7%) who attended Full Gospel churches, 12 respondents (4%) who attended Holiness churches, 6 respondents (2%) who attended Baptist churches, and 103 respondents (34.3%) who attended other denominations or did not know the denomination.

3.1.2. Correlation Between Preaching and Dechurching

Looking at the results of the survey on how preaching affects dechurching, 68.0% of the dechurched respondents in the MZ generation answered that preaching had significant influences on their decision to leave (13.7% answered "very much so" and 54.3% answered "somewhat"). In response to the same question, 80.3% of the church-attending respondents in the MZ generation answered that preaching affects dechurching (19.0% "very much so", 46.5% "somehow", and 14.8% "yes"). This indicates that while both groups recognize that preaching plays a significant role in dechurching, church attendees are more concerned about this issue than dechurched respondents.

To analyze the specific relationship between preaching and dechurching, the researcher asked "What kind of preaching negatively affects dechurching?", with the following examples: ① boring sermons, ② sermons that do not fit the contemporary world, ③ theologically/ethically inappropriate sermons, ④ sermons that are irrelevant to real life, and ⑤ authoritarian sermons. In response, church-attending respondents answered in the following order: theologically/ethically inappropriate sermons (36.7%), authoritarian sermons (26.2%), and sermons that do not fit the contemporary world (15.0%). Meanwhile, dechurched respondents answered in the following order: theologically/ethically inappropriate sermons (29.0%), boring sermons (25.3%), and sermons that do not fit the contemporary world (22.3%).

These results show that the content of the sermon (③) is the most important factor of dechurching, whereas the sermon's cultural relevance (②) is the third most important factor. What should be noted is the difference in focus between church-attending respondents and dechurched respondents. While church-attending respondents consider the relationship between the preacher and the audience (⑤) and the content of the sermon (③) more important than cultural relevance (②) and effectiveness in delivery (④), for dechurched respondents, effectiveness in delivery (④) and cultural relevance (②) are more important. If one investigates this in more detail, one can find that dechurched individuals and church attendees who have been attending for less than 3 years commonly consider boring sermons the most important cause of dechurching.

The reasons why some listeners feel that a sermon is boring are several. It might be simply because the preacher's delivery is limited. If the preacher speaks in monotone without any vocal variations, facial expressions, or gestures, such as reading a book, the listeners will feel bored. However, there could be other reasons, such as indifference, irrelevance, or unfamiliarity with biblical contents and Christian doctrines. Even if the preacher delivers a sermon very actively in an engaging and memorable manner, if the sermon is hardly connected to the lives of the listeners, and if the listeners are indifferent to the preaching itself and/or are unfamiliar with biblical language and contents, theological thoughts and logics, and church culture, the sermon could be boring for them.

The survey shows that the shorter a listener's church attendance is, the more bored with preaching they feel. This can be interpreted as follows: at least for the dechurched or those who are in danger of dechurching, a listener's lack of experience and knowledge of Christianity affects the effectiveness of preaching, as does the problem of the preacher's

ability to deliver sermons effectively. Thus, it is necessary to help listeners gain more and deeper knowledge of biblical teachings and faith experiences through preaching, while the preacher must make efforts to deliver sermons more effectively.

3.1.3. Effective Preaching for the Dechurched Younger Generations

Then, what characteristics does effective preaching for the dechurched younger generations have? This can be answered through the responses to the questions of "What preaching is the best?" and "What preaching is the most memorable?". First, regarding the best preaching, church attendees answered in the following order: sermons offering solutions to life's concerns (27.8%), sermons interpreting the Bible faithfully (26.8%), and sermons teaching the principles of Christian life in detail (22.8%). Meanwhile, the dechurched answered in the following order: sermons offering solutions to life's concerns (43.3%), sermons telling biblical stories in an interesting way (30.3%), and sermons interpreting the Bible faithfully (15.0%).

Regarding the question about the most memorable sermons, church-attending respondents answered in the following order: sermons offering solutions to life's concerns (44.2%), sermons interpreting the Bible faithfully (33.3%), and sermons mediating spiritual experiences (9.5%). Meanwhile, dechurched respondents answered in the following order: sermons offering solutions to life's concerns (50.7%), sermons telling biblical stories (21.3%), and sermons interpreting the Bible faithfully (17.3%). This shows that both the church attendees and the dechurched commonly favor sermons that are relevant to their lives, and church attendees seek a deeper understanding of the Bible and a spiritual experience from preaching, while dechurched individuals prefer to hear interesting stories.

In addition, the use of audiovisual media in preaching seems to be a key factor. Regardless of whether they are church attendees or the dechurched, listeners are positive about the use of audiovisual media and pursue more active experiences of preaching involving the presentation of video clips, the performance of dramas, and the use of static images. Listeners stated that audiovisual media are helpful for hearing sermons (church attendees: "somewhat helpful" 53.2% + "very helpful" 28.0%; the dechurched: "somewhat helpful" 69.7% + "very helpful" 16.3%) and stated that audiovisual media help with understanding and prevent boredom (church attendees: "help with understanding" 56.2% + "prevent boredom" 35.0%; the dechurched: "helps with understanding" 50.0% + "prevent boredom" 39.3%). In addition, as for the audiovisual media that they hope will be used in preaching, church attendees answered in the following order: images (51.0%) and videos (40.2%). Meanwhile, the dechurched answered in the following order: videos (66.7%) and images (23.0%).

In response to the question of "What is the most necessary in preaching to prevent the MZ generation's dechurching?", church attendees answered in the following order: developing sermons that are relevant to real life (35.8%), using sermonic language that listeners can understand (21.3%), and resolving the preacher's authoritarian attitude (16.0%). The dechurched answered in the following order: developing sermons that are relevant to real life (32.3%), resolving the preacher's authoritarian attitude (22.0%), and developing various preaching methods (18.0%). In sum, both church attendees and the dechurched answered with "developing sermons that are relevant to real life" as the most necessary factor in preventing younger generations' dechurching. This result echoes the answers to the previous questions about effective preaching, in which both church attendees and the dechurched expected sermons to be relevant to their lives. In other words, the most important characteristic of effective preaching for younger generations is the relevance of a sermon to real life.

It is clear that a sermon that is irrelevant to life, that only discusses the religious meaning of a couple of words from biblical verses, is far from the audience's existential concerns brought about by societal absurdity and irony in human life, or forces listeners to follow religious decrees based on a narrow interpretation of a biblical text or Christian doctrine would not be welcomed by young generations. However, one should not understand a sermon that is relevant to real life as a culturally relevant sermon in a narrow sense, involving adapting to contemporary cultural trends on a surface level, dealing with cultural issues without deep theological reflections, or using advanced communication methods for the purpose of effective delivery only. Instead, it would be better to describe this as the sermon that answers the questions and concerns raised in and through theological conversations amid the existential struggles of life. The sermons that young generations favor would include answers to existential and/or theological questions, situational issues, relational conflicts, moral conflicts, and others. Younger generations expect to hear good news to help them resolve such troubles in their lives.

Then, how should we preach with this knowledge? I propose a solution through multicultural preaching across generations in which all generations in the congregation listen to each other and learn from each other. This is because multicultural preaching across generations is a culturally conditioned form of preaching that facilitates the sharing of faith experiences gained through struggles in life which each generation has gone through.

3.2. Multicultural Preaching Across Generations for Dechurched Generations

3.2.1. Multigenerational Congregations in a Multicultural Context

To develop multicultural preaching across generations, preachers should understand the relationship between preaching and culture. As stated by David M. Csinos in his book on intergenerational preaching, "preaching is culturally conditioned"; cultural norms affect how we preach, while cultural views affect how we interpret the Bible and what we preach (Csinos 2022, p. 63). Similarly, Andrew Carl Wisdom claims that "preachers must have a fundamental understanding of the significant effect culture, language and communication have in the construction of generation". Claiming that the generation is the locus of culture, he argues that preaching in a multigenerational congregation should proclaim the gospel in a culturally relevant manner (Wisdom 2004, pp. xvii, 20). As shown in the survey, cultural relevance is a crucial element of effective preaching for dechurched younger generations. Thus, it is necessary for preachers to understand culture. The issue is that of understanding a culture, particularly generational culture, in relation to preaching and defining the cultural relevance of preaching. The following homiletical discussion will help understand culture in relation to preaching through an in-depth description.

Leonora Tisdale is a leading homiletician who approaches congregations in a cultural context. She posits that a congregation is a cultural community that possesses unique worldviews, values, and lifestyles and communicates through a distinct idiom, encompassing both verbal and nonverbal symbols. Sermons, undoubtedly, function as one of these distinctive idioms, contributing to the communication of a congregation's subcultural identity alongside other symbolic languages (Tisdale 1997, pp. 15–16). While Tisdale's contribution in viewing congregations as cultural communities rather than purely religious communities is valuable, and her proposal for culturally adapted preaching is insightful, it is important to acknowledge a limitation in her analysis. As Eunjoo Mary Kim rightly points out, although she acknowledges that diverse subcultures exist within a congregation, she concentrates on the congregation as a monolithic and homogenous group rather than a multicultural community (Kim 2010, pp. 7–8).

Unlike her sketch of a culturally homogenous congregation, congregations comprise culturally diverse subgroups, differentiated by age, gender, race, ethnicity, social status, ed-

ucation, and other factors, creating a multicultural context. Cultural diversity is observed not only in culturally heterogeneous congregations, such as multiethnic or multiracial congregations, but also within seemingly homogenous congregations. Therefore, a congregation is not only a distinctive subculture within broader society but also a multicultural microcosm where multiple subgroups interact. Generation should be noted as a factor in the construction of the multicultural context within a congregation. Generational differences contribute significantly to the multicultural context, as each generation carries distinct cultural identities and preferences, potentially leading to cultural differences. Consequently, recognizing the cultural diversity within a congregation, particularly across generations, is crucial for effective preaching.

In this sense, it is necessary to acknowledge how cultural diversity across generations is constructed. As a group of culture research experts says, "cross-temporal differences can be thought of as akin to crosscultural differences with the defining element being time rather than region"; generational differences are constructed through cultural changes over time (Gentile et al. 2014, p. 32). A generation refers to a cohort of people who are born within a similar timeframe and share common historical and cultural experiences during their formative years. The shared experiences of a generation facilitate building a common consciousness and common behavioral patterns, and finally, the creation of a generational identity that distinguishes them from other generations and a generational culture, which is a distinctive way of living.

While classic theorists of generation studies, including Karl Manheim, Neil Howes, and William Strauss, attribute the cause of generational differences mainly to major historical events, Jean Twenge takes cultural change into account as a cause of generational differences, with technological progress contributing to cultural changes over time (Twenge 2023, pp. 5–9). In particular, she argues that technological changes influence how humans think, feel, and behave—in other words, how we live. Technological progress, including progress in medical technology, communication technology, transportation, and other fields, has lengthened our lifespan, has expanded the realm of life from regions to the globe, and has changed our ways of communication, as well as facilitating other ways of living. These changes in how people live have changed our values, worldviews, and beliefs; they have changed cultures. In the course of these changes, generational differences are spawned as each generation interacts with technology in unique ways, and it shapes their worldview, communication styles, social interactions, and priorities.

Although it is undeniable that technological changes are a driving force behind generational differences in values and beliefs, contributing to cultural changes at least on the level of the external shapes of life, historical events still should be considered causes of generational differences. Technological changes occur in history, not in a void. Technological changes are intertwined with historical events and result in the construction of cultural shifts. Each generation gains cultural experiences through the interactions between historical events and technological changes. Therefore, it is necessary to consider what historical changes, including sociopolitical events, cultural shifts, and technological progress, make up generational experiences.

This can be exemplified by the difference in generational categorization between the United States and South Korea. US scholars of generation theory take World War II, the cultural revolution in the 1960s, the end of the Cold War, and the IT revolution in the 1990s into account as the causes of cultural changes that resulted in American generational differences, categorizing generations in the United States as Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964), Generation X (born between 1965 and 1976), Generation Y or Millennials, (born between 1977 and 1997), and Generation Z (born after 1998). However, while Korean scholars follow the Western generational categorization, the birth span of

each generation is different from that of the American generational categorization, as the Korean historical experience is different from the American experience. The Korean War (1950–1953), industrialization under the military dictatorship in the following period, democratization, globalization, and the IT revolution in the 1990s are the major historical events that impacted the formation of generations in South Korea. Since the historical experiences gained by each generation in the two countries are different, the characteristics of each generation are also different, even if they are labeled as the same generation.

After the Korean War, the government promoted industrialization to rebuild the country. To secure a high-quality workforce capable of adopting and handling new technologies, they implemented national education, which became the driving force behind cultivating middle-class intellectuals. Eventually, these individuals became the main agents of the democratization movement in the 1980s and created a new social order. Globalization after the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s was inevitable, as interaction with foreign countries was essential to foster new industries and export goods produced through them. This globalization further accelerated technological innovation and vitalized human exchange with foreign countries, achieving not only institutional democratization but also the democratization of consciousness or, in other words, lifestyle democratization.

As these processes occurred very rapidly, Koreans gained vastly different values, worldviews, and communication styles depending on their generation. The pre-industrialization generation, which is now elderly, holds values and worldviews based on traditional Confucian culture and communicates unilaterally in authoritarian ways. The industrialization generation (Korean Baby Boomers) grew up in a military culture that promoted modern education and applied a modern authoritarian system to Confucian culture to achieve the goal of efficient production. Therefore, they are accustomed to rational communication based on valid grounds and direct communication that clearly conveys arguments and delivers them clearly and effectively. Generation X is the bridge generation. They challenge the cultural norms that the older generations continue to uphold, despite their paradoxical embodiment thereof, and have created a new cultural space for the following generations. The younger generations, who are now in their 20s and 30s (Millennials and Gen Zers), were born and raised in a democratized and globalized world after industrialization and have grown up in an educational environment that respects individual opinions and encourages the expression of creative perspectives. Therefore, while they inherit and embody the culture of the previous generation, they also resist it and explore the thoughts and cultures of diverse people from around the world encountered through the internet. They freely express their own thoughts and pursue interactive communication based on an egalitarian mindset.

It is essential for preachers to recognize these generational differences that create different subcultures within a congregation. The more and deeper the preacher understands these cultural differences across generations, the more cultural intelligence they gain and the deeper it will be; they will develop "the capability to deal effectively with other people with whom the person does not share a common cultural background and understanding" (Kim 2017, p. 5). Instead of judging other generational cultures from one's perspective, one is required to respect the cultures of other generations as equally valuable and be prepared to listen to the voices of other generations. This will be the foundation of their ability to bridge the generational gap and deliver good news across generations. This multicultural intelligence is required for multicultural preaching across generations.

3.2.2. Multicultural Preaching Across Generations

This study assumes a multigenerational preaching context in which multiple generations gather to hear a sermon. I refer to the following three models of preaching

for multigenerational congregations: generation-blind preaching, generation-segregated preaching, and intergenerational preaching. First, generation-blind preaching is an act of preaching that lacks awareness or recognition of cultural differences across generations, regardless of the presence of multiple generations in the preaching context. The preacher focuses on providing instruction on Christian doctrines or expounding upon biblical texts without considering the generational gap in biblical literacy or theological thoughts, even if multiple generations hear the sermon together. The application of the preaching message is general and abstract, as the preacher does not pay close attention to connecting it with a concrete context. The listeners are informed about the contents of the Bible and Christian doctrines, but it will be hard to expect their existential transformation from hearing this since it is hard to make connections between knowledge and life.

Second, generation-segregated preaching involves proclaiming the gospel to a targeted generation within a congregation. Usually, it is performed in a generation-segregated congregation, such as with preaching in Sunday school. Generational segregation is preferred because it reduces parents' responsibility for taking care of their children during worship, and it seems to be effective in responding to cultural trends by adjusting to children's developmental stages. This model segregates the congregation according to age and seeks to preach a message to a targeted generation in a language that they can understand and in a manner that grabs their attention and echoes with their culture. There are certainly merits in communicating the gospel in a way that fits a certain generation, as cultural barriers can be removed and the effectiveness of preaching can be promoted. However, this model also has a weakness, as this can be a barrier against the intergenerational communication of faith.

For this reason, a group of scholars proposed intergenerational preaching as an effective preaching method for multigenerational congregations. Andrew Carl Wisdom defines intergenerational preaching as "preaching the Gospel message to the five to six generations comprising most weekend assemblies, through targeted generational images, metaphors and linguistic references" (Wisdom 2004, p. xvii). His model of intergenerational preaching balances cultural adaptation to targeted generations and the sharing of a common belief across generations. On the one hand, his homiletical model seems to be one of generation-targeted preaching since he underscores multicultural awareness and linguistic sensitivity in consideration of the truth that each generation in the congregation has different generational mindsets, feelings, and distinct values and characteristics. On the other hand, as a Roman Catholic priest, Wisdom finds common ground for intergenerational preaching in the Catholic sacramental imagination, which enables congregants to interpret reality through their common experience of partaking in the sacraments, and he takes this as a symbolic hub that bridges the generational gap (Wisdom 2004, pp. 8, 64–80). In short, Wisdom proposes intergenerational preaching that is aware of generational differences but seeks to overcome them by taking the sacramental imagination as a co-foundation of faith across generations.

David Csinos proposes another model of intergenerational preaching. Similar to Wisdom, Csinos admits the necessity of recognizing the diversity of generations within a congregation. Thus, he encourages preachers to pay close attention to the preaching language in consideration of different levels of linguistic knowledge, ability, and vocabulary depending on their ages. While older generations would not be informed about the younger generation's idioms that are used for social networking service (SNS) communication or cell phone communication, younger generations would not understand theological jargon, such as pneumatology, justification, or ordinance, nor would they understand the deep theological meaning of Christian words, such as crucifixion, atonement, and redemption, due to the rise in illiteracy in Christian language (Csinos 2022, p. 77). Along the same

lines, Darrell Hall argues that the preacher must become a generational polylingual or a generational polyglot (Hall 2022, p. 28).

Although the above discussion is valuable, Csinos's more significant contribution is his emphasis on mutual formation in and through intergenerational preaching. He argues that people of all ages can teach one another and learn from one another, saying "[w]e learn from each other, and we teach each other. No one generation has all the answers and insights". He believes that generational differences are potent, with much insight into growing one's faith in God (Csinos 2022, pp. 78–79). In other words, he does not assume traditional preacher-oriented preaching in which the preacher gives a message unilaterally by fitting it to a targeted generation among the multiple generations in a congregation; rather, he assumes conversational preaching in which all generations, including the preacher and listeners of all ages, participate in mutual listening and learning. Instead of the preacher's solo proclamation and the listener's passive listening, he suggests preaching in which all of the participants—preacher and listeners—across generations listen to each other and learn from each other. Therefore, he underscores mutuality, equality, and reciprocity as the characteristics of an intergenerational church. He believes that intergenerational communities with such characteristics foster increasing openness to being changed through relationships with the other. Therefore, he seeks to form "a shared primary identity as Christians" in the congregants through the sharing of their experiences of God and the gospel across all generations in a preaching event.

I agree with Csinos in that mutual listening and learning are essential for the formation of Christian identity through intergenerational preaching. Mutual learning, regardless of age, is indeed one of the most prominent characteristics of the Christian community, as Jesus told disciples to learn from children about heaven (Matthew 18:1–10). Since God reveals Godself to all generations (Joel 2:28), we can learn about God and faith from all generations. Christian teaching not only includes teaching down but also teaching up on the basis of the honesty and humility that Christ has shown. One might describe this as "reverse mentoring" since one can learn from a younger person as well as an older person. In other words, the cultural distinctiveness of Christian communication lies in its conversational feature, which is communal, nonhierarchical, personal, inclusive, and scriptural, as Lucy Rose stated before (Rose 1997, p. 121). It is ideal for a Christian community that all generations engage in sharing the gospel by bringing their experience of God into their lives, even if they express it in the language and culture of their generation. In this sense, I believe that preaching across generations should be conversational and multicultural.

If one defines multiculturalism as a position that acknowledges cultural differences and cultural diversity as a valuable source for developing identity further through mutual interactions on the basis of equal and reciprocal relationships between different members, the true model of intergenerational preaching or preaching across generations is multicultural. This is because multicultural preaching across generations is based on mutual listening between generations to enhance cultural intelligence and mutual learning and find the grace shown by all generations. By listening to other generations, one can understand the cultural differences between them. By learning from other generations through the mutual sharing of their faith stories, one can identify and name the grace found in their experience of God in their lives. Through these ongoing intergenerational conversations, each generation can learn from one another and form a distinctive Christian identity whose paradigmatic model is found in the narrative of Christ in the Bible.

Intergenerational conversation is the key to multicultural preaching across generations since conversation is the way through which young generations formulate a Christian identity, as all generations share the gospel while recognizing cultural differences between

generations. The loss of intergenerational conversation obstructs mutual understanding across generations through intergenerational sharing of their experience of God, as this hinders the intergenerational transmission of faith, in addition to enlarging the cultural gap across generations. Fortunately, some preachers have attempted intergenerational conversation in preaching. In 2020, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, Rev. Anna Kendig, a young female pastor, had a dialogue while preaching with Jean Emmons, an old female elder, delivering a message to empower the congregants amid the global crisis of public health by juxtaposing the exposition of a text by Rev. Kendig and sharing Emmon's experience of life (Anna Kendig 2020). I believe that this is a good example of intergenerational conversational preaching, as two preachers had a conversation about faith built on mutual respect, and they listened to each other throughout the conversation. Inspired by this or other sermons, preachers can develop various forms of intergenerational preaching. However, it seems to me that the most important aspect is intergenerational conversation, in which all generations listen to each other with no bias due to a hierarchical mindset but, rather, with mutual respect.

4. Conclusions

In this study, I propose multicultural preaching across generations as a way of effective preaching in the time of the Great Dechurching. Churches across the globe have been experiencing the unprecedented phenomenon of the Great Dechurching among younger generations. Although some consider the cultural irrelevance of Christianity to be the main cause of dechurching, I argue that missing the intergenerational handoff of faith is a more important factor in the dechurching of younger generations based on a survey that I recently conducted in South Korea. Thus, in response, I propose multicultural intergenerational preaching as a way of effectively preaching to bridge the generational gap and stop dechurching. As discussed above, multicultural preaching across generations seeks to facilitate intergenerational conversation about faith through mutual listening and mutual learning based on equal and reciprocal relationships between each generation in the congregation. I expect that this would be an alternative solution for the dechurching of younger generations by fostering the formation of a Christian identity through the sharing of faith stories across generations and finding the grace that God manifests for all generations.

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Article

The Agency of Preaching: Practicing Hospitality in Multicultural Contexts

Eliana Ah-Rum Ku

Homiletics, Graduate School of Practical Theology, Icheon-si 17304, Republic of Korea; elianasoriyuni@gmail.com

Abstract: Preaching in a multicultural context calls for hospitality to ensure that diverse cultures and experiences are acknowledged and valued. Embodying hospitality in preaching means that participants engage as co-hosts and co-guests, contributing to a shared vision of hospitality within the community. This opposes the asymmetrical, one-directional power dynamics that perpetuate the host–guest dichotomy in the gospel. This research argues that when Christian preaching in a multicultural context pursues "power-with" rather than "power-over" to address the power imbalances inherent in singular understandings and experiences, it can reframe preaching as an act of mutual hospitality rather than a unilateral act of defining or instructing the gospel. To pursue this, this study conceptualizes preaching as an ongoing act of hospitality among preaching participants, examines the possibility of preaching agency for co-preachers through the case of Korean Bible Women, and explores effective ways to practice preaching agency.

Keywords: hospitality; multicultural subjects; preaching agency; Korean Bible Women

1. Introduction: The Matter of Hospitality in Multicultural Contexts

Multiple cultures are deeply embedded in our lives. This extends beyond the coexistence of individuals shaped by different languages, cultures, races, traditions, and customs to encompass epistemic, empirical, and metaphorical dimensions (Kang 2014, p. 3). This context compels us to reflect on "the interaction and juxtaposition, as well as tension and resistance when two or more cultures are brought together sometimes organically and sometimes through violent means" (Kwok 2015, p. 10). Thus, while worldviews, linguistic understandings, and perceptions of reality have never been entirely homogeneous (Jeter 2008, p. 291), the contemporary multicultural context calls for preaching that is attuned to cultural constructs and lived experiences (Cutié 2019, p. 89), underscoring the importance of valuing diverse perspectives and fostering meaningful engagement. If one agrees that this acknowledgment represents one of the most significant theological and pastoral challenges in a multicultural context, then hospitality emerges as one of the most urgent and essential discourses for multicultural pulpits.

In the ancient Near East, hospitality was not only a personal and social virtue but also a means of eliminating hostility toward those who were unfamiliar or different (Matthews 1991, p. 13). In ancient Greece and Rome, hospitality was based on the concept of "brotherhood," though it was characterized by an emphasis on "reciprocal obligations" (Ahn 2010, p. 245). Within this customary tradition, early Christian hospitality distinguished itself by identifying Jesus with "one of the least" and welcoming others regardless of any expected benefit (Pohl 1999, pp. 16, 22). In other words, Christian hospitality was not based on contractual reciprocity; it was driven by a heightened sensitivity and empathy for the marginalized. However, the dichotomous understanding of host and guest has diminished

Christian hospitality, reducing it to an act dependent solely on the goodwill of the "giver." It legitimizes "assimilationism," which reinforces the dominant culture's superior power (Ahn 2010, p. 257). As Derrida's term "hostipitality" (hostility+hospitality) presents the uneasy, bitter aspect of hospitality, which reveals the contradictory double movement of the host's sovereignty, that is, power and conformity to the rules set by power (Derrida 2000, pp. 53–55). While more complex socio-cultural dynamics undoubtedly exist, one critical observation in multicultural contexts is that perceiving others as guests inherently distinguishes them from the host, thereby constructing a passive and dependent identity within a certain power dynamic. Thus, encountering one another as partners is a crucial aspect of this framework, viewing guests as co-actors collaborating together rather than merely as recipients of hospitality (Ahmed 2000, p. 7).

In this sense, hospitality, which entails mutually relinquishing control to others (Ahmed 2000, p. 8), provides valuable insights into preaching in a multicultural context, particularly in addressing the marginalization caused by dominant biblical interpretations and culturally insensitive sermons that overlook diverse cultures and experiences. Ignoring the Christian gospel as presented through the lenses of unfamiliar people, experiences, and disparate interpretations—those that differ from traditional understandings—limits our understanding of our relationship with God, including the Bible, as well as our connections with the diverse individuals around us. Such limitations often stem from envisioning a dichotomous power relationship, with the preacher as the host and the preaching participants[1] as guests. If Christian preaching in a multicultural context pursues "power-with" rather than "power-over" to address the power imbalances inherent in singular understandings and experiences of socio-cultural contexts and biblical interpretations, it can reframe preaching as an act of mutual hospitality rather than a unilateral act of defining or instructing in the gospel (Nothwehr 2004, p. 250). This is because hospitality is not merely about accepting the stranger but about creating a space that affirms difference, freedom, choice, and dignity (Park 2019).

This study understands preaching as an ongoing encounter among preaching participants, examining their active participation as co-preachers and exploring ways to effectively practice preaching agency.

2. The Agency of Hospitality in Preaching

Hospitality is intrinsically tied to the concept of relationships that recognize the dignity of all beings. This commitment to relationship is not about communication, understanding, or experience flowing in only one direction—a pattern rooted in the pulpit (preacher)–audience dichotomy—but rather an effort to creatively and spontaneously establish a shared ground among preaching participants. For a multicultural community committed to cultivating relationships of mutual dignity, preaching is an ongoing process of interaction in which multifaceted cultural narratives from the past, present, and future intersect and dynamically engage with one another. In other words, preaching reveals how all lives and stories share vulnerability and interdependence in various ways. Preaching thus serves as a space for imagining and embodying concrete alternatives to dominant cultural patterns and values (Katongole 2011, p. 78).

Since the 1960s, homileticians have aimed to bridge the pulpit (preacher)–audience dichotomy through various efforts. In *The Servant of the Word* (1964), Herbert H. Farmer emphasized preaching as an interactive and relational act. Notably, the inductive and narrative preaching movements of the 1970s marked a departure from the traditional "delivery" model, which framed the preacher as a messenger to a passive audience. These movements encouraged preachers to align themselves with the congregation, aiming for a shared journey of experiencing the gospel (McClure 2010, p. 126). However, these

approaches often assumed that the preacher's imagination and empathy should closely align with those of the preaching participants and that the preacher's experiences were largely similar to those of the participants (McClure 2010, p. 126).

To address these assumptions, since the late 1990s, homiletic scholarship has developed more theologically open and dialogic preaching models, emphasizing respect for diverse experiences and perspectives. The collaborative/dialogical preaching model seeks to embody the ethics of hospitality by cultivating a mutually critical and relational approach between the preacher and the preaching participants, particularly in addressing the diverse experiential and perspectival differences within the faith community (Rose 1997; McClure 1995). This approach encourages preachers and participants to ask and listen to one another (McClure 2021, p. 91). In this context, preachers as hosts seek to ensure the pulpit's accessibility to individuals with diverse interpretations and experiences, particularly those on the margins and those with vested interests. The aim is to facilitate collaborative learning without privileging any group (McClure 1995, pp. 51–52). This "subject-centered" preaching practice as opposed to being "listener-centered" (McClure 2010, p. 136) does not aim to dominate cultural contexts but instead seeks to reorganize their dynamics through "co-optative action" (Brown 2020, p. 49). Collaboration means recognizing that others may have valuable insights that can teach and potentially transform the preacher's interpretation of the gospel, rather than merely using those insights to reinforce the preacher's homiletical messages (McClure 1995, p. 23).

This recognition entails acting as an agent of preaching in a relational and interdependent manner, despite the inherent complexity of its practice and the practical limitations of fully representing every voice (Cannon 1988, p. 105). Becoming an agent does not involve striving for a specific position or status but is about recognizing the potential for subjectivity within all social realities (Townes 1995, p. 121). Amid the complexities of multicultural contexts, this involves creatively utilizing one's contextual resources—discernment, imagination, wit, courage, and ingenuity—to engage with conflicting values and participate in equitable and innovative judgment that meets diverse needs (Westfield 2001, p. 104). By embracing mutual vulnerability and reconfiguring oneself in an interdependent state— where experience, tradition, and culture are not absolute—one becomes a subject of value practice that transcends race, language, and culture (Kim-Cragg 2018, p. 176).

However, questions remain: Who will invite individuals exercising agency? Who will determine the topic of dialogue? Whose perspective will guide the construction of the ethical framework? And can the preacher truly share their role as host?

3. Korean Bible Women: Agents of Hospitality in Multicultural Context

The agency in preaching demonstrated by Korean Bible Women provides partial insight into these questions. Emerging spontaneously during the early days of Korean missions, these women were often newly converted individuals who felt compelled to share the good news with their neighbors and friends. Far from being passive recipients of the gospel, however, these women demonstrated theological and moral agency. They actively formed relationships with women missionaries based on their own thoughts and decisions, taking initiative in preaching the gospel wherever they went as partners, rather than understanding themselves within a benefactor-beneficiary dichotomy (Park 2023, p. 200). For instance, Bible women even traveled to remote mountain villages where missionaries could not go, preaching, leading Bible schools, and organizing Bible study gatherings (Ko 2019, pp. 104–5). They were not preachers confined to prearranged settings but those who actively created spaces for preaching.

From the perspective of hospitality, space is not something pre-owned or controlled by any one party; it emerges in the process of being with others and mutually receiving

one another (Reynolds 2023, p. 60). In this respect, the space of preaching is not confined to liturgical or physical boundaries but can be understood as a relational concept that extends to all places and experiences. All spaces, including private conversations, can serve as sites for preaching, as preaching is not confined to the pulpit or regular worship times but can emerge in real-life situations (E. M. Kim 2024, p. 115).

3.1. Agents in a Multicultural Relationship

Women missionaries from Western countries in the history of Korean missions, despite cultural differences, shared experiences in 'women's work'—commonly regarded in Korea at the time as women's responsibilities, such as caregiving, child-rearing, and household management—which provided common ground for meaningful exchanges with Korean women. The women missionaries preached the gospel more effectively when they shared it collaboratively, engaging with those who had different experiences in language and culture (E. Kim 2024, p. 41). Annie H. Gale recalls the partnership between Korean Bible Women and women missionaries as follows:

> My mother held Bible classes in our sitting room for the women. With their babies tied on their backs and leading older children by the hand, they would come and ask to be shown around our house... None of these women could read. This made it difficult to teach them, but with the aid of a Korean Bible woman, my mother would tell them the great story. It was astonishing to see how they would listen, fascinated, and ask innumerable questions showing their interest and understanding (Gale 1945, p. 154).

By the 1910s, the role of Bible Women had expanded significantly, with some even teaching the New Testament independently (Park 2023, p. 195). Unlike the proposition-centered gospel commonly proclaimed by male leaders of the time, Bible Women focused on delivering the Bible in a narrative style—vividly depicting biblical characters and explaining parables in realistic ways—making it more accessible and easier to internalize for illiterate women and children accustomed to an oral culture (Park 2023, p. 195; E. Kim 2020, p. 207). This method was also similar to the way female missionaries preached in the early days of the mission. For example, they primarily relied on picture books, picture cards, and hymns to convey their sermons (E. Kim 2020, p. 168). While a separate Bible study was designated for children, women, children, and villagers of diverse ages and social classes participated in preaching together during worship services, revival meetings, or open-air preaching conducted during visits to various villages (E. Kim 2020, p. 208). In this regard, interdependent hospitality between the Bible women and the missionaries was an essential factor in facilitating preaching across cultural differences.

3.2. Agents as Multicultural Subjects of Preaching

Bible Women exercised their agency as multicultural subjects. Due to the deep-seated dichotomous thinking that views Christianity as mutually exclusive from Confucianism or shamanism—both of which were key cultural features of Korea at the time—many scholars have interpreted the identity of Bible Women primarily through transformative frameworks such as freedom and liberation (Yang 1997, p. 167; Ha 1999, p. 16; Chang 2023, p. 267; Chung 2015, p. 233; Park 2023, p. 199). However, these women actively embraced the Christian gospel, and by drawing from their roots in Confucianism and shamanism—distinct characteristics of Korean culture—they developed a hybridized identity as Bible Women. Positioned as "in-both" individuals, on the periphery rather than at the center of society, they were creative agents who navigated and utilized resources from both worlds. Their dual belonging enabled them to engage both cultural systems with innovation and adaptability, approaching them as insiders while simultaneously maintaining a critical

perspective as outsiders (Lee 1995, p. 152). For instance, Korean Bible Women discovered innovative ways to proclaim the gospel, going beyond the forms in which it was initially introduced to them and skillfully utilizing their cultural resources and circumstances. Lee-Ellen Strawn notes that Bible Women borrowed the authority of *mudang* (female shaman) to access *anbang* (women's inner quarters), a space largely shaped by Confucian cultural norms (Strawn 2012, pp. 130–37). This was possible because Bible Women were perceived as having abilities related to the spiritual realm. They were invited to teach in the *anbang* and to pray for healing from illnesses or to drive out evil spirits. In this capacity, they also provided psychological healing for Korean women, a role that closely resembled the work of shamans in traditional Korean culture (Strawn 2012, p. 129). Through this collaboration of traditional Korean culture with Christian practices, Bible Women developed a distinctive and subjective approach to their ministry.

Though Bible Women's preaching was excluded from institutional theological discussions—dismissed by elite theologians as "superstitious" or a "faith for blessing" form of belief—they offered a unique gospel message. They often integrated spiritual and moral teachings, including the parables of Jesus, with practical knowledge relevant to their time, such as contemporary scientific insights into astronomy, geography, hygiene, and physiology (E. Kim 2020, p. 244). This unique approach to preaching—combining spiritual truths with practical knowledge—enabled Bible Women to engage deeply with the everyday lives of Korean women, making the gospel relatable and actionable. One missionary account captures this dynamic vividly:

> It was not strange that they could not understand, for "comfort," "happiness," "holiness," "goodness," are words without any real meaning in their vocabulary, foreign to all their ideas of life. Somehow it seemed as if it would be more to the purpose to give them a bit of soap, and after seeing the miracle it could work upon their clothes and bodies, tell them that, far more wonderful than that, the Lord Almighty could clean up their hearts and lives if they would only give themselves over to Him (Gale 1893, p. 217).

The women missionaries were amazed that the Bible Women communicated the gospel in a way that was easy for Korean women to relate to and remember, and to put into practice, by relating it to various everyday topics (Sharrocks 1905, p. 9). Bible Women exercised agency in preaching by deeply valuing their everyday context and building upon it as a foundation for their message. This was not achieved by abandoning their identity rooted in a hierarchical patriarchal system, nor by uncritically adopting the Western concept of the autonomous self. Instead, they cultivated a communal identity that honored their existence and experiences as individuals, fostering an environment where their unique perspectives were mutually respected and empowered (Lee 2007, p. 299).

3.3. Agents as a Multicultural Space for Preaching

The Bible Women often visited the anbang, a significant social sphere for women at the time (Strawn 2012, p. 122). These visits expanded their preaching agency beyond traditional religious settings, fostering the development of a broader community network. This space allowed the Bible Women to engage a diverse group of village women, including non-Christians, in a form of communal ministry (Strawn 2012, pp. 123–24). Their preaching also permeated everyday life, whether in the home, in church, by the creek, or even at a wash place (Avison 1906, p. 213). Their approach to preaching was conversational rather than a formal mode of delivery. In this context, preaching was not solely about transmitting and interpreting the Bible; it also involved creating space for fostering communication and cultural exchange (Strawn 2012, p. 126).

This practice differs from outdoor preaching events, such as the widely known sermons of the First and Second Great Awakening movements in the United States during the early 18th and early-to-mid 19th centuries. Instead, Bible Women's preaching aligns with Stanley Saunders and Charles Campbell's assertion that a significant portion of preaching occurs on streets and in public spaces, reflecting the church's biblical foundations (Saunders and Campbell 2000, p. 97). Kierkegaard similarly argued that Christianity is not suited to quiet places and times, insisting that preaching should take place "in the street, in the midst of life, of the reality of daily life, weekday life" (Kierkegaard 1968, p. 2). It is not merely about moving multicultural preaching away from pulpit-centered authority but about embodying a broader preaching agency that includes more voices and contexts.

3.4. Agents as Multicultural Weavers of Everyday Life

The practice of preaching was deeply intertwined with the practice of hospitality in daily life. Bible Women often took in abandoned children or elderly grandmothers as companions during their itinerant preaching journeys. They would collaborate to determine who would care for these individuals during revival meetings, even taking turns to provide for those in need (E. Kim 2020, p. 225). In this way, the value of Christian hospitality—a radical and risky form of welcoming "one of the least" (Mt 25:45)—was an integral part of their preaching life.

The Bible Women's prayers and testimonies embodied a unique cultural image of God through their practice of hospitality toward their everyday experiences and cultural contexts. God is portrayed as a liberating force, saving from sin, while also vividly depicted through images of women engaged in everyday tasks: doing laundry, stoking a fire in the furnace, or squatting to tie up the fields (Ha 1999, p. 15).

It is difficult to find clear and comprehensive data on how Bible Women understood and accepted the Bible, as well as the origins of their theological foundations (Ha 1999, p. 17). Even during the period when the Korean church became institutionalized (since the mid-1930s), Bible Women were relegated to temporary positions, without being guaranteed the right to preach or govern (Yang 1997, p. 179), which may help explain the lack of official records of their sermons. However, based on the theological understanding and records of female missionaries such as A. B. Chaffin and J. D. Van Burskirk, who worked closely with them in their devotion to the gospel, we can infer the foundational theological perspectives of the Bible Women (Yang 1997, p. 170). The missionaries focused on interpreting Jesus' attitude toward women in the Scriptures to provide theological support for resisting the restrictions Korean women faced in the church, such as opposition to their participation in ordination, governance, and preaching. For example, they (1) critiqued societal views on chastity, which often excused men while condemning women, arguing that the unilateral imposition of chastity on women contradicts Jesus' teachings (Jn 7:53–8:11); (2) reinterpreted the story of Mary and Martha to create theological space for women, asserting that tasks like food preparation, traditionally relegated to women, are of secondary importance (Lk 10:38–42); and (3) interpreted the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:1–42) as evidence of Jesus' recognition of women's intellectual and spiritual capacities (Ha 1999, pp. 18–19).

Korean Bible Women had experienced exclusion within their socio-cultural context, as well as within the church. Nevertheless, they continued to preach the gospel in any situation they encountered. In particular, they taught the unlettered to read the Bible to ensure that no one would be excluded from the gospel, and they cared for the poor and the sick, embodying hospitality in both their preaching and daily lives (E. Kim 2020, p. 209).

4. The Co-Preacher

Eunjoo Mary Kim highlights that the ministry testified to in the New Testament is not an institutionalized, hierarchical concept of traditional pastoral leadership, where pastors are leaders and laypeople are followers. Instead, it is a shared ministry, which is possible only through leadership rooted in the community's personality (E. M. Kim 2010, p. 250). In other words, all preaching participants, including preachers, must recognize themselves as co-hosts and co-guests, fostering an inclusive space for active participation in various ministries driven by their own initiative. The ways in which Korean Bible Women embodied agency in preaching largely align with the vision of ministry grounded in this understanding. They were co-preachers.

Drawing insights from how Bible Women embodied agency in preaching, we can consider four aspects with careful attention to the issue of agency in preaching within a multicultural context: (1) Agency in preaching is only possible when individuals actively choose to exercise their own agency. There are inherent limitations in the way a preacher can choose to share authority with others. (2) A shared vision of agency enables the community to collectively embrace one another's agency in preaching. This entails the community actively accepting and supporting the participation of all preaching participants, including moments when individuals step forward to share their thoughts or perspectives within the preaching event. (3) Preaching participants, as co-authors of the preaching dialogue, engage in an interplay of listening and reflective thinking, often addressing challenges or questions within their own minds (Gaarden and Lorensen 2013, p. 34). Implicit dialogues frequently take place in associative, critical, and contemplative ways, broadening and enriching the preaching event (Gaarden and Lorensen 2013, p. 28). Thus, preaching extends into spaces beyond the pulpit, the preacher, and spoken language. (4) If preaching is not confined to a vertical relationship, then hospitality in preaching can extend into our everyday lives. This involves a way of life that acknowledges the inherent vulnerability of human relationships—that is, the impossibility of fully understanding or representing others—while striving to relinquish self-centered positions. Christ's command to treat others as we wish to be treated becomes an epistemological practice; we are called to exhibit the same depth of empathy and understanding for others as we do for our own culture, experiences, and way of life (Clark and Holquist 1984).

In a multicultural context, therefore, understanding preaching participants as co-preachers involves a shift in focus from viewing otherness as something to be understood through the empathic comprehension of other cultures to recognizing the other as an active subject engaged in mutual dialogue. It involves privileging the perspectives of those traditionally regarded as passive listeners, reconfiguring reality from new vantage points, and creating spaces for dynamic change by occasionally challenging established taboos (Campbell and Cilliers 2012, pp. 155–56).

5. Practicing Hospitality in Preaching as Co-Preachers

If participants in preaching commit to embodying the agency of hospitality toward one another as co-guests and co-hosts, transcending the constraints of place, time, and social location, practicing hospitality in multicultural preaching can be expressed on at least four levels: individual, communal, hermeneutical, and spiritual.

5.1. Hospitality with All Names: Individuals

Differences in communication, language, beliefs, and lived experiences can be constrained by language, creating challenges for the overall preaching performance within a community that reads, interprets, and performs Scripture (Kim-Cragg 2019, p. 10). Therefore, it is essential to consider the ways in which certain voices or perspectives may be

excluded or overlooked within a community. It is not enough to merely observe existing forms; rather, it is necessary to empathize with, observe, and, when needed, learn from and creatively engage with the stories, customs, and traditions of others in a sensitive and responsive manner (Alcántara 2015, p. 197). Since hospitality resists the tendency to minimize cultural ambiguity, challenging established systems of perception does not aim to simply transform individuals to fit comfortably within the community. Instead, it compels them to cross rigid boundaries, even at the risk of altering or transforming aspects of the community itself (Caputo 2013, p. 174). This may cause stress, but it serves as a call to change, enduring and learning from it to enhance intercultural communication skills (Alcántara 2015, p. 204).

The performance of hospitality in preaching is not reserved for an authoritative figure but is enacted by all subjects across all areas of life, especially by individuals and groups often deemed weak, in need of help, or socially marginalized. These individuals assert their roles and power, embodying subjectivity (Snarr 2007, p. 97). Striking up a conversation or questioning can effectively facilitate the realization of subjectivity. For instance, the Syrophoenician Gentile woman in Mark 7:24–30 becomes an agent of interdependent communication by questioning, responding, and persuading within a situation where she experiences the authoritative and offensive rejection of Jesus. The dialogue took place at the intersection of various boundaries—geographical, ethnic, and gender—that posed significant challenges for a Gentile woman in the first-century context (Witherington III 2001, p. 231). Rather than denying or abandoning her identity, this woman engages in creative argumentative dialogue, working within and accepting the socio-cultural limitations. While recognizing the priority of the Jews, she simultaneously asserts her right to seek healing for her daughter (Witherington III 2001, p. 232). In this dialogue, Jesus acknowledges her as an autonomous subject, and the woman, acting agentively within the socio-cultural and religious constraints that gave rise to exclusion and oppression, brings about mutual transformation (Park 2008, p. 127). Her self-determined words subvert deeply entrenched values of ethnocentrism and racism (Broadhead 2001, p. 72).

Testifying is a meaningful practice for realizing subjectivity. In the pericope of demonic possession in Mark 5:1–20, Jesus sends the healed man, who wishes to stay with Him, back to his community, entrusting him to represent what happened in his own words. This man, once considered possessed and marginalized, was given the opportunity to "represent" his experience, which may have included the violence he endured while being arrested, bound, oppressed, silenced, feared, and regarded as polluted (Mainwaring 2014, p. 184). Through this testimony, the man likely experienced his suffering becoming integrated into the narrative of the gospel (Ku 2024, p. 7). His testimony might have served as an existential call to the village community, who still feared him even after the exorcism (v. 15), challenging them to reimagine their relationships and perceptions. It might have urged them to move beyond their previous understanding and biases, even those shaped by fear and hatred, and to reframe their views (Ku 2024, p. 7).

Questions in various settings are crucial for embodying hospitality in preaching, as they foster a deeper understanding of how participants' unique contexts and perspectives shape their engagement with preaching. In one-on-one settings, questions can explore an individual's lived experiences, cultural background, and life trajectory, fostering deeper and more mutual dialogue about the personal perspectives that influence their thoughts and behaviors. In group settings, questions encourage participants to collaboratively engage with scriptural texts, integrating personal perspectives with communal and ethical considerations. These discussions address diverse interpretations and issues arising from varying readings of the Bible. By fostering conversations "before, during, and/or after the

actual event of preaching" (McClure 2021, p. 91), this process transforms preaching into a communal practice, rather than one shaped solely by an individual perspective.

5.2. Hospitality with Mutual Encouragement: Community

Fostering mutual encouragement in faith communities requires openness to diversity, self-reflection, and a willingness to learn from others. Rather than imposing certain perspectives, individuals and communities are invited to engage critically and collaboratively in shared practices. This entails embracing ambiguity and continuous mutual examination in light of diverse cultures, which often challenge familiar norms and patterns (Choi 2015, p. 43). Conflict, though often perceived negatively, can be an inherent part of community life, particularly in multicultural contexts. Embracing conflict is essential for fostering creative and transformative relationships, even with those with whom we disagree. This approach involves safeguarding spaces of hospitality, ensuring the agency of marginalized voices whose ability to respond is constrained by inequitable cultural and structural dynamics. It treats one another as partners in interpretive and practical dialogue (Marshall 2018, p. 127), while encouraging communities to reflect on dominant tendencies and cultivate cultural sensitivity. Hospitality in preaching fosters mutually deeper awareness and transformation (McClure 2010, p. 134), moving beyond the mere celebration of multicultural experiences.

The performance of mutual encouragement can be influenced by physical location, as elements of social position carry different priorities and meanings depending on the environment (Saunders and Campbell 2000, p. 88). Saunders and Campbell notes that even when the same methodological tools are employed, reading the Bible with students on the streets of Atlanta differs from classroom readings because visual, auditory, olfactory, social relationships, and lived experiences shape distinct contents and methods for interpretation (Saunders and Campbell 2000, p. 89). Similarly, ethical conversations about refugees will yield markedly different experiences in the preacher's office compared to the FCJ Refugee Centre in Toronto. This conversation will no longer be between a pastor and a congregation but will instead occur between individuals reflecting together on the situation of refugees. It can also be a conversation between someone seeking to understand the realities of refugees and another who has long been engaged in refugee-related work. This dynamic asymmetry of power fosters a space of mutual encouragement, allowing the community to participate in interpretation as a polyphonic voice. This stands in contrast to a linear approach, where the preacher holds the final authority on interpretation.

This practice involves intentionally seeking and recognizing those unfamiliar to us, breaking free from the comfort and familiarity of church boundaries, and initiating meaningful conversations. It is about embarking on a faith adventure with strangers, discovering God's presence in unexpected places, and encountering the Word in new and transformative ways.

5.3. Hospitality with the Image and Language of the Disenfranchised: Hermeneutic

A function of hospitality in preaching is connected to the ability to link interpretations of symbols and stories from other cultures to one's own culture and experiences (Byram 2021, p. 52) As Kim-Cragg notes, because preaching as a communicative event inevitably reflects reality in a particular way, it can be shaped by our own limited and biased perspectives on the Bible and the communities in which we live (Kim-Cragg 2019, p. 6). This inherent imbalance in language can lead to the categorization, representation, and misrepresentation of images from an external viewpoint (Kim-Cragg 2019, p. 7).

Brian Blount argues that, in order to avoid the charge of interpreting texts merely ideologically, we must consider texts sociolinguistically. This involves recognizing that the

language of a text can legitimately convey different meanings to individuals from various sociological and linguistic backgrounds (Blount 2005, p. 5). Moreover, Blount emphasizes the importance of a comprehensive approach to language, one that encompasses not only the grammatical–textual and conceptual–ideational functions but also the social–interpersonal functions of language, transcending the boundaries of formal linguistic standards, which are often shaped by sociological concepts (Blount 2005, pp. 6, 8). Sejong Chun, reflecting on this perspective, highlights the value of reading the Bible through "intercontextual dialogue"—interpreting current events in light of biblical insights and vice versa. Chun argues that the "meaning potentials" of biblical texts can be realized through a "genuine dialogue" between the reader's context and the context of the biblical text (Chun 2011, p. 18). While not all meanings will necessarily harmonize, texts rooted in various traditions must be applied and tested in real-life situations, engaging in dialogue with the diverse members and groups of faith communities who are seeking to live out their beliefs (Bullock 2008, p. 169)

Our use of language often perpetuates a process of "othering," in which certain perspectives are privileged as constituting the "we," while simultaneously creating a "them" through the language we use to objectify others (Reynolds 2023, p. 52). Preaching in a multicultural context therefore requires that the preacher intentionally reflect on their own cultural perceptions and commit to communicating the gospel in culturally meaningful forms that resonate with those who are culturally different from themselves (Choi 2012, p. 274). While mindful of the commands in the biblical text (Matt 5:38–48), which include directives calling for non-resistance to abuse and love of enemies, preachers must consider how these commands might be interpreted in an immigrant context. Such teachings may unintentionally encourage undocumented immigrants to passively submit to political threats of deportation and the construction of higher border walls (Howell 2020, p. 81). Adopting this attitude not only requires being an exposed and self-consciously engaged observer of other cultures but also entails learning both to refrain from cultural dominance and to accept a position of vulnerability in areas of inexperience (Hawn 2003, pp. 274–76). In this context, a "multiperspectival approach" is necessary (Choi 2012, p. 276). This is an approach that remains centered on the Bible while remaining sensitive to the ways in which Christian culture is defined and interpreted within specific contexts. This approach acknowledges that no culture's understanding of the Bible is perfect and recognizes the limitations imposed by cultural biases and perspectives (Choi 2012, p. 277).

A multiperspectival approach to preaching does not imply that only practices perceived as exotic or unfamiliar are culturally sensitive forms of hospitality in preaching. Rather, it highlights the emancipatory potential that can arise from a sermon's multiple dimensions, including liturgy, hermeneutics, language, and performance (Hartshorn 2007, p. 40). In other words, it is a matter not merely of translating the language of the text but of continuing to use the text's language in new ways that align with the new context (Campbell 2006, p. 169). In exploring the various ways text and experience interact, we can resist the tendency to subordinate one to the other.

5.4. Hospitality with Divine Action: Spirituality

In addition to addressing ethical issues in sermons and respecting the voices of sermon participants, another essential aspect of preaching is engaging with the voice of God—the eternal Other. Lorensen refers to this as "the double otherness" (Lorensen 2014, p. 161). The ongoing task of preaching is to continuously recognize and practice the interaction of the positive and analogical relationship between the qualitative difference between God and the world and the practical differences found within the finite world (Lowe 1993, p. 43).

In the instability of this dynamic, imagining hospitality for a double otherness allows preaching to function as a communication of God's word oriented toward others.

Hospitality with Divine Action affirms that it is God, not us, who initiates the story of grace, love, and forgiveness, proclaiming that we and all creation are the beneficiaries of this new dispensation (Katongole 2011, p. 79). Hospitality draws us into a rich relationship, filled with the self-giving that has existed among the three Persons since the beginning of creation. The Holy Spirit does not replace our subjectivity but enables us to put it into practice (O'Donovan 1986, p. 106). It serves as the source of moral action and freedom, empowering Christians to act confidently in the world God has declared redeemed, as multicultural subjects (Northcott 2011, p. 476). The possibility of the other's intrusion, based on mutual subjectivity, encourages the practice of hospitality in preaching, aimed at discovering fragments of various testimonies that bear witness to God and God's work.

In this respect, practicing hospitality in the multicultural pulpit involves engaging with the understanding of divine revelation as the Word of God, not only within the confines of a traditional theological space but within a "threshold space" where unpredictable intrusions occur through transformative encounters between the infinite Other and diverse others (Lorensen 2014, p. 178).

6. Conclusions

In a multicultural context, the beginning of a sermon is marked not by its first words but by the actual encounter with the diverse participants of the sermon. Imagining hospitality in a multicultural pulpit involves the agents of preaching collectively embracing the instability and vulnerability that otherness brings in terms of time, space, and existence. The embodiment of such interdependent hospitality within a community goes beyond merely acknowledging differences. It entails forming a community that mutually affirms and preserves the unique needs and identities of its members (Yong 2015, p. 125).

To this end, the agency of sermon participants is one of the most critical factors. This is because the agency of participants from diverse cultural backgrounds is closely tied to the embodiment of hospitality, which requires heightened sensitivity to mutual experiences and voices. In other words, embodying agency involves fulfilling the responsibility of becoming co-preachers as co-guests and co-hosts in preaching. This ensures that the voices of specific dominant groups in the church are not the only ones represented in the gospel, but that the stories and perspectives of marginalized groups are visibly included and audibly heard within God's narrative of redemption (Snarr 2007, p. 91). No response is ever final; rather, each is part of an ongoing conversation. Nonetheless, the space of preaching must continually provide clear pathways for participants to exercise their agency, offering steps toward radical transformation that move beyond mere discourse.

Such practices can disrupt established cultural norms and can require immediate responses to unexpected changes. These moments may call for significant changes in preaching patterns, a greater emphasis on listening to one another for the good of the community, and a relinquishing of power (Crosby 2020, pp. 155–56). This is because there is no entirely practical, creative, or functional way to fully include and engage everyone, making them feel completely connected: "There are always moments when one "loses something" and that seems to be the sacrifice most multilingual and multicultural congregations are willing to make in order to gather together, even if it is only occasionally" (Cutié 2019, p. 96). Responses to the call of the Other are not prescriptive solutions but must be "invented each time, in each moment, in singular situations" (Derrida 1999, p. 72).

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Notes

1. This term encompasses various elements of preaching, including the preacher, God, and, more broadly, the Bible, culture, history, and social structures integral to the preaching process. However, in this article, to avoid confusion, the term 'preaching participant' is used as a replacement for 'congregation' or 'listener,' aiming to move beyond the notion of passive recipients and to encompass broader, more active engagement.

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A Postcolonial Conversational Approach to Preaching in Multicultural Contexts

Scott Donahue-Martens

Kingswood Extended, Kingswood University, Sussex, NB E4E 1E6, Canada; donahuemartenss@kingswood.edu

Abstract: Preachers cannot assume the mere presence of different cultures or diversity means a congregational context is multicultural. Fostering an environment conducive to multiculturalism can be difficult, partly due to the persisting colonial structures. The colonial systems created spaces where different cultures and diverse groups interacted, yet these interactions were destructive. The goal of integrating, especially understood through assimilation, cultures into the existing system limits multiculturalism. This article outlines three inter-related foci for preaching, especially preaching where both the preacher and the congregation have social privilege, to foster healthy multiculturalism. Drawing from the works of Jared Alcántara and Matthew Kim, I recognize the need for preachers and congregations to increase their intercultural competence and hermeneutical tools for recognizing, interpreting, and ethically navigating biblical and modern cultures. Because some preachers and congregations have taken their cultural formation for granted, inter-cultural development is a critical step toward preaching in multicultural contexts. The article discusses Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* as the second major movement. His notions of hybridity and the distinction between diversity and difference are particularly helpful for pushing against colonial limits. Preaching in multicultural contexts needs to be approached as more than the sum of diverse cultures present and absent. Through the work of Bhabha, I conceive of preaching in multicultural contexts as fostering interstitial spaces which embrace difference, while resisting the objectification of culture. Turning more directly to the homiletical theory in the final section, I argue that O. Wesley Allen's conversational model, guided by the concepts of interstitiality and hybridity, can develop preaching in multicultural spaces by emphasizing open-ended relational discovery rather than singular objective understanding. This conversational approach actively seeks relational participation where individuals are committed to mutual growth through critical interactions which account for culture as a general concept and particular cultures. This conversational reframing invites growth through multicultural understanding.

Keywords: preaching; homiletics; multiculturalism; homiletical theory; hermeneutics; postcolonial theology; postcolonial preaching; conversational preaching; intercultural competency

1. Introduction

Equitable multicultural preaching rarely occurs by accident, nor does an awareness of multiculturalism on the part of the preacher automatically lead to equitable multi-cultural preaching. While awareness of the importance of multiculturalism is the first step, those who occupy privileged social locations may also benefit from critically ex-amining their frameworks, actions, and settings. This critical examination is necessary because colonialism confines many attempts at equitable multiculturalism by offering

alternative—inequitable—versions of multiculturalism. These inequitable approaches to multiculturalism might appear productive to those with social privilege. The development of intercultural competency[1] assists in revealing the contours of settings which claim to value multiculturalism, but whose structures are largely inconsistent with equitable multiculturalism. Without developing intercultural competency, preachers and congregations are at higher risks of reinforcing harmful colonial dynamics than productively engaging with those who are different. This article discusses intercultural competency, postcolonial theory, and conversational preaching as a way of moving toward equitable multicultural preaching. The combination of these three topics does not provide definitive answers, but a potential path forward for congregations.

The challenge of working toward equitable multiculturalism is understanding the roles of subjectivity in differences between intention, perception, and the reception of how events or situations are experienced. The subjective element of experience shapes how groups and individuals interpret situations, particularly in limiting or life-giving manners. Still, the guiding images of multiculturalism offer paradigms which people and societies draw from. Some of the most popular images of multiculturalism are rooted in ethnocentric ways of navigating culture, which underscores that multicultural paradigms are not socially or ethically neutral. Therefore, this article begins by offering a working understanding of ethnocentric multiculturalism before recounting a personal experience of a church whose multicultural approach was confined by ethnocentrism. It moves on to discuss multiculturalism and intercultural competency in more equitable ways. The article then turns to complexify identity and difference utilizing insights from Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*. These interdisciplinary ideas are discussed with O. Wesley Allen's conversational preaching model. I suggest that conversational homiletics can guide congregations seeking equitable multiculturalism when it is expanded through critical attention to the postcolonial theory and intercultural competency. Using insights from Homi Bhabha and O. Wesley Allen, I invite preachers to think of multicultural preaching as an ongoing relational process that is constantly open and in need of nurturing revision, while navigating differences, rather than approaching multiculturalism as an attainable achievable object that is finalized through numerical diversity. Central to this for preachers who occupy places of social privilege is the shift from approaching multicultural preaching as an act of representing the other to the critical examination of the self and settings.

2. Ethnocentric Approach to Multiculturalism

The privilege of taking culture for granted can prevent obtaining and enacting the necessary knowledge and skills for equitable multiculturalism and may make it more difficult to recognize the limitations of ethnocentric multicultural models. Preachers whose social locations have largely precluded critical reflection on the place of culture in their lives, the wider context, and interpretive methods may benefit from more complex approaches to identity and experience. Thus, it is necessary for preachers to critically examine the assumptions of what constitutes multiculturalism and to account for cultural privilege as an important step toward moving beyond the confines of colonial Christianity and colonialism (Powery 2022, pp. 15–29). One way of understanding these limits is to consider how certain approaches to congregational multiculturalism can end up reinforcing dominant ethnocentric Christianity.

Recognizing the forms of multiculturalism which are imbued with ethnocentrism requires working understandings of both the terms. Here, I draw from the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) to discuss ethnocentrism. Generally, "The DMIS constitutes a progression of worldview 'orientations toward cultural difference' that comprise the potential for increasingly more sophisticated intercultural experiences" (Hammer

et al. 2003, p. 421). The DMIS identifies the approaches to difference and the self as either ethnocentric or ethnorelative. The ethnocentric approaches "refer to the experience[s] of one's own culture as 'central to reality'" (Bennett 2004, p. 62). This can appear as universalizing particular cultural understandings, approaches, and experiences. The constructed nature of the cultural paradigm is often taken for granted rather than contextually and hermeneutically accounted for. In other words, the ethnocentric approaches are experienced as more objective, normative, and universal as opposed to subjective, constructed, and relative. Ethnocentrism is defensive about the validity and superiority of one culture over others, which often leads to an us-versus-them mentality (Hammer et al. 2003, pp. 424–25). Ethnocentrism might also take the form of minimizing cultural differences, while consciously or unconsciously universalizing a particular culture. Many people who utilize ethnocentric minimization are not aware of its ethnocentric orientation because it can seem like a competent intercultural approach (Hammer et al. 2003, pp. 424–25). This lack of awareness, especially related to wider contextual factors, can make it hard for some people with social privilege to see how certain multicultural approaches are inequitable.

Multiculturalism is a dynamic concept that changes over time. Multiculturalism is particularly open to change because of its interwoven nature with complex concepts like culture, diversity, and the political theory. Eunjoo Mary Kim provides a working understanding of multiculturalism as "a socio-cultural and political movement that aims to change the multicultural society into a better world where people who differ in race, ethnicity, culture, and religion can live peacefully with equally respected recognition of their diverse cultural identities" (E. M. Kim 2017, p. 5). Her notion of "equally respected recognition" is critical to equitable multiculturalism. I view the equitable multiculturalism approach as more dialogical than ethnocentric versions of multiculturalism, which is more unilateral and laden with colonial hierarchies. Equitable multiculturalism does not happen through mere proximity to diversity though, as proximity itself can be harmful.

3. Multicultural Images

At the societal level, multiculturalism is often guided by schematic images like the melting pot or the salad bowl. These images perform important societal functions and impact how events and experiences are interpreted by individuals and groups. These images are guiding paradigms which pre-figure interpretation and shape multicultural expectations. It is important to recognize that these images are subjective and were largely formed by those with social privilege. They might be experienced as liberating for some people under certain conditions and suffocating for others. However, too often these images are uncritically accepted, and their limitations are left unaccounted. In *Preaching in an Age of Globalization*, Eunjoo Mary Kim explores some of these major societal images. The first main image is that of the melting pot. Kim notes how the image was used to envision a society where cultural and ethnic differences melted into a common identity; however, this vision was rarely actualized outside of whiteness (E. M. Kim 2010, p. 104). Thus, the intention of the melting pot to move beyond a particularizing colonial hierarchy ended up obscuring the influence and force of the dominant ideology. Regarding preaching under this model, Kim writes, "Rather than helping the congregants open themselves up to other cultures and engage in learning about one another to form a shared identity, melting-pot preaching maintains the congregational identity of the dominant congregational culture" (E. M. Kim 2010, pp. 104–5). The melting pot approach, supported by assimilationist values, is largely unidirectional and conformist. The melting pot does not require those from dominant social location to critically examine themselves or the setting.

The second image that Kim explores is the salad bowl. The salad bowl allows for a greater degree of distinctiveness for the various parts of the salad. However, Kim notes

how the salad bowl is also confined because salad dressing covers the unique flavor of the parts. The melting pot and salad bowl approaches to navigating differences is bolstered by a national integrationist value (E. M. Kim 2010, pp. 104–5). In the post-Civil Rights Era, integration became a virtue and litmus test for assessing openness to multiculturalism. However, integration does not de-center the existing ethnocentric setting in which people are integrated. This underscores the limitations of the melting pot and the salad bowl. Neither image affords an equitable way of changing the ethnocentric contexts, situations, and systems. Each image can be individually employed in manners which appear theologically and socially multicultural to socially privileged adherents, while actually systematically reinforcing ethnocentrism.

Kim offers the alternative image of a kaleidoscope which brings together many distinct pieces to form beautiful and shifting patterns. "Like the kaleidoscope that never repeats exactly the same pattern but constantly shifts to form a new pattern, kaleidoscopic preaching is open to inclusiveness and creativity" (E. M. Kim 2010, p. 107). Kim underscores the necessity of the "preacher's multicultural competence and aesthetic sensitivity" for kaleidoscopic preaching (E. M. Kim 2010, p. 108). She notes how the kaleidoscope "creates a multiplicity of symmetrical patterns from fragments of various materials, through the use of mirror and lenses set at different angles" (E. M. Kim 2010, p. 107). Thus, different perspectives and possibilities are expected. She sees this image as reflecting the multitude of diversity and "the dynamic interaction of different experiences among them toward their new shared identity" (E. Kim 2010, p. 106). Kim's proposal seeks to balance the relationships between individuals and the whole, as well as different perspectives and cultures. It resists domination and the sedimentation of identity, even as the importance of parts contribute to the whole. A more fluid approach to identity and openness to various perspectives are the critical components of an equitable approach to multicultural preaching.

4. Ethnocentric Multicultural Church: A Case Study

A brief case study will exemplify some limits of ethnocentric multiculturalism and how it can confine the perceptions of the self, others, and settings. This case study shows how a community can performatively desire multiculturalism, while fostering an environment antithetical to multiculturalism. My first experience in a "multicultural" church context was during my final year of seminary when I completed my contextual education requirements. The Senior Pastor regularly referred to the congregation as multicultural, which he largely based on how many people from various countries attended the church. However, an underdeveloped understanding of multiculturalism limited the church's theology, vision, and approach to multiculturalism. The pastor and church board largely took an assimilationist approach to multiculturalism, which welcomed people of different ethnicities, but demanded conformity to a gospel steeped in whiteness. While people from all over the world attended the congregation, the leadership of the congregation was largely white and regularly made decisions that closely aligned with conservative American politics.

The congregation was comprised two main bodies. The first held worship services in English, even while it contained many individuals for whom English was a second language. The second body had its own pastor and held worship services in Spanish. The two bodies had limited contact with each other. The predominately English-speaking body saw itself as valuing hospitality and started serving lunches during the fellowship time after service. The pastor for the Spanish-speaking congregation and I were brainstorming ways of allowing the two bodies to interact more and see themselves as one church. We wondered what it would look like to hold a joint meal once a month during the time in between services. He offered to have his congregation bring the food for a monthly

joint meal. After a few months, his congregation not only brought delicious food, many people from the Spanish-speaking congregation also attended the English worship service on the days they brought food. In response, the worship team, who had a few bilingual members, started singing a single song in Spanish during the worship service. This caught the attention of some board members who raised an "issue" at a board meeting. The board members complained about the Spanish song and any other efforts of utilizing Spanish in the service, such as doing the Scripture reading in Spanish. They expressed that this was "unfair" and that it "excluded English speakers". They defended their position by reminding the board that the Spanish speakers had their own worship service which they were free to attend. Despite some protests, the general sentiment of excluding Spanish in the worship service prevailed; however, the board still wanted the Spanish-speaking body to bring food once a month. This decision was imbued with segregationist leanings regarding separate services and demanding conformity to whiteness when together.

This experience shows how an integrationist approach to multiculturalism can reinforce harmful colonial dynamics when people of diverse ethnic, cultural, and racial backgrounds interact. Multiculturalism needs to be approached as more than the presence of a diverse number of people, and equitable multiculturalism does not automatically occur through proximity. Creating and maintaining multicultural spaces requires careful attention, vulnerability, and the willingness to adapt. The largely white church board and many church members lacked the necessary dispositions, frameworks, perspectives, and theology for recognizing the disconnect between their multicultural intentions and their ethnocentric modes of being. The gaps between the desire, knowledge, and skills for intercultural competency can exacerbate harm in church settings partly because of the authority bestowed to the theology of the pulpit, which is often at risk of espousing monocultural theology.

5. Intercultural Competency and the Self in Settings

Even with a new guiding image for multiculturalism, preachers and congregations seeking equitable multiculturalism may need additional skills and knowledge for navigating settings and the self. Preaching which breaks from the confines of ethnocentrism can learn from intercultural competency in general, and particularly on recognizing how culture shapes settings and identities. In *Crossover Preaching: Intercultural-Improvisational Homiletics in Conversation with Gardner C. Taylor*, the homilitician Jared Alcántara understands "intercultural competence (IC)" as "the cultivation of knowledge, skills, and habits for effectively negotiating cultural, racial, and ecclesial difference" (Alcántara 2015, p. 30). For many monocultural congregations, intercultural competency requires understanding their own cultural formation before being able to maturely engage others and navigate multicultural settings well. In *Preaching to Every Pew: Cross-Cultural Strategies*, James Nieman and Thomas Rogers write, "Preaching that recognizes multicultural realities is, in some important respects, less a matter of the *others* we may hope to reach than of whether *we* make a serious engagement with our particular setting" (Nieman and Rogers 2001, p. 14). This is contrary to a lot of ethnocentric multiculturalism which focuses on "others" and often fails to account for the potency of settings which limit equitable multiculturalism. The critical examination of the self and identity can enable deeper engagement with settings because the individual has greater potential for alternative perceptions.

By learning to recognize the social construction of the self and one's own culture, more complex engagements with others and other cultures are possible. Alcántara says the following: "Put simply, those who critically study their own culture are more effective at adapting to and learning from people from other cultures. They become interculturally proficient with respect to other cultures and with respect to their own culture" (Alcántara

2015, p. 201). Alcántara underscores the importance of improvisation in this endeavor. He proposes the idea of a crossover homiletic. "By crossover homiletic I mean a homiletic that effectively deploys performative and metaphorical improvisation-as-intercultural-negotiation" (Alcántara 2015, p. 28). He continues, "This approach constitutes an alternative way of thinking about preaching practice and homiletical strategy with a specific aim in mind: to foster dispositional commitment to improvisational-intercultural proficiency as a way of being and acting" (Alcántara 2015, p. 28). Improvisation necessitates the openness to listen and change in conversation with others. Improvisation embraces the "unfinished" sense of homiletical theology (Jacobsen 2015, p. 3). In this mode of preaching, intercultural proficiency is a consistent element, rather than an occasional topic. The preacher is intentionally committed to developing intercultural competency in the self and the congregation. Multicultural preaching requires epistemic humility, relational openness, and complex notions of identity, which make it well suited to a conversational preaching method.

Intercultural competency can also inform exegesis and scriptural interpretation for preaching. Ethnocentric preaching often approaches the biblical text without critical consideration of the hermeneutical impact of culture. Matthew Kim's *Preaching with Cultural Intelligence: Understanding the People Who Hear Our Sermons* can help preachers understand the Bible and congregation as culturally complex. Kim maintains that "preaching with cultural intelligence requires biblical exegesis *and* cultural exegesis" (M. Kim 2017, p. xv). Kim writes, "Preachers have a tendency to deliver sermons that are monolithic and thereby monocultural. . . . What I am proposing is a new hermeneutical paradigm, which I call the *authorial-cultural* model of biblical interpretation" (M. Kim 2017, p. 37). This model seeks greater clarity of the biblical author's intended meaning of a passage of Scripture as the homiletical crux of preaching. Kim argues that cultural interpretation is a necessary part of the exegetical process. Like Kim, I think it is important to consider a biblical author's and the wider, cultural contexts. "As preachers, we want to be highly familiar with the authorial intention, which presumes historical, grammatical, and literary study, yet also highlight the author's cultural context—the biblical culture(s) in which the writer lived" (M. Kim 2017, p. 37). Kim's movement for cultural understanding focuses on the biblical text and its context more than the congregational context. This seeks to recognize the importance of the otherness of the text. It can also be an important moment where preachers understand the limits of their cultural frames for biblical interpretation.

While Kim focuses on the cultural intelligence regarding sermonic application, preachers also need to consider culture, theology, and the congregational context. As preachers consider the importance of culture to biblical exegesis, moving away from ethnocentric preaching can also entail embracing the contextualization of all theologies, including homiletical theology. In *Models of Contextual Theology*, Stephen Bevans writes, "There is no such thing as 'theology,' there is only *contextual* theology" (Bevans 2002, p. 3). By viewing all theologies as contextual theology, preaching can better account for the influence of human experience and culture on theology. Bevans especially pushes back against the so-called objective approaches to theology which were often presumed to be universal and decontextualized, but often rooted in dominant culture (Bevans 2002, pp. 3–5). The goal of contextualizing preaching is not to become exclusive, but to hermeneutically account for the situatedness of all knowledge and paradigms, including the gospel. While the gospel is in some senses universal, it is experienced in particular cultures. Recognizing the experiential limits and possibilities is critical in a postcolonial environment where ethnocentric theology is often seen as normative and de-contextualized. The postcolonial theory is an apt conversation partner here because it is acutely focused on the complex intersections of identity and culture. Few disciplines have thought about identity and culture in as complex

manners as the postcolonial theory. The work of Homi Bhabha can help identify some key areas for more complex approaches to identity and multiculturalism.

6. Homi Bhabha: The Location of Culture

Postcolonial theorists like Homi Bhabha describe the enduring legacies of colonialism which continue to shape culture and how people interpret settings and experiences. The work of Homi Bhabha can complexify identity and setting in helpful manners for equitable multiculturalism. Here, I identify three conceptual shifts from Bhabha which can help foster equitable multiculturalism. With the first, Bhabha invites us to shift from thinking about the framework of diversity to recognizing the need for an approach to difference. The second, interstitially, and the third, hybridity, complexify static understandings of identity and settings. In other words, settings and the self are complex and fluid. Bhabha helps us recognize that preaching which seeks equitable multiculturalism must resist the objectification of culture, especially the cultures of others, even as it cannot ignore the location of culture for the self, the community, and the setting. Through the work of Bhabha, preaching in multicultural contexts can be viewed as fostering interstitial spaces which arise through dynamic intersecting differences, while resisting the objectification of culture. Interstitial spaces, which occur in the area between spaces, recognize that multiculturalism is not about choosing a single culture for all to embrace, or about leaving all individual cultures in separate enclaves.

Bhabha is an astute conversation partner here because of his critical reflections on multiculturalism. Bhabha challenges the concept of multiculturalism, partly because of its openness to co-option by colonialism. Because of Bhabha's awareness of power, conceptual systems, and identification with "others", he underscores that discourses, settings, and interactions are imbued with hierarchies of power and knowledge (Bhabha 2004, pp. 46–50). In other words, a self-proclaimed multicultural setting is not a neutral field for socially equal actors to engage one another apart from histories of oppression and domination. This is especially true when those in places of power and privilege like pulpits represent others.[2] He writes the following:

> "However impeccably the content of an 'other' culture may be known, however anti-ethnocentrically it is represented, it is its location as the closure of grand theories, the demand that, in analytic terms, it be always the good object of knowledge, the docile body of difference that reproduced a relation of domination and is the most serious indictment of the institutional powers of critical theory". (Bhabha 2004, p. 46)

Bhabha underscores that multicultural interactions are rife with colonial inequality and misrepresentation. This means that even well-intentioned acts of representing the other sermonically can situationally and contextually be counter-productive to equitable multiculturalism.[3] Bhabha warns against an approach to multiculturalism which attempts to separate present interactions from the history of colonialisms, which continues to shape present identities and social interactions.

Bhabha argues for an approach to culture rooted in "difference" rather than "cultural diversity" (Bhabha 2004, p. 49).[4] This movement challenges the identification of productively engaging difference through proximity and treating diversity in objective frames. He writes, "Cultural diversity is an epistemological object—culture as an object of empirical knowledge—whereas cultural difference is the process of the *enunciation* of culture as '*knowledgeable*', authoritative, adequate to the construction of systems of cultural identification" (Bhabha 2004, pp. 49–50). One issue with cultural diversity is that it can essentialize differences and overdetermine culture by remaining closed to recognizing individuality, uniqueness, and fluidity. Bhabha seeks to resist objectifying diversity and

otherness with more fluid, open, and temporal approaches to difference. He offers the idea of hybridity, the combining of different cultures in particular expressions, as moving toward cultural difference. Bhabha sees hybridity as a threat to colonial discourse, which can push us beyond "cultural relativism" (Bhabha 2004, p. 162). Hybridity is novel in that the intersection of cultures produces new ways of thinking and being. This is different from cultural relativism, which is an embodiment of a "to each their own" type of thinking. Hybridity also embraces the location of culture being rooted in the lived experience; rather than the location of culture being rooted in privileged definitions. "What is irremediably estranging in the presence of the hybrid . . . is that the difference of cultures can no longer be identified or evaluated as objects of epistemological or moral contemplation: cultural differences are not simply *there* to be seen or appropriated" (Bhabha 2004, p. 163). Bhabha raises issues of epistemology, authority, and representation here. Culture is always more complex than the systems of differentiation make them out to be, even when the systems of differentiation are often necessary for the recognition of culture and cultural differences. Bhabha outlines the necessity of a third space which moves beyond the fixity of cultures and the representative systems, which are used to seek understanding of cultures (Bhabha 2004, pp. 53–55).

Bhabha recognizes that certain "theoretical strategies" "are necessary to combat 'ethnocentrism' but they cannot, of themselves, unreconstructed, represent that otherness" (Bhabha 2004, p. 100). In other words, the recognition of ethnocentrism by seeking to recognize the role of culture may be better suited for descriptive engagement rather than prescriptive interventions. My use of descriptive here refers to describing what is actually happening, whereas perspective refers to what should be happening. Bhabha argues that certain concepts help describe actual problems, but those same concepts are limited in their capacity to imagine solutions to those problems. This might describe why some preachers struggle to move from raising awareness about the importance of multiculturalism to actualizing equitable multicultural congregations. Bhabha writes, "The challenge lies in conceiving of the time of political action and understanding as opening up a space that can accept and regulate the differential structure of the moment of intervention without rushing to produce a unity of the social antagonism or contradiction" (Bhabha 2004, p. 37). The concepts of time, action, and space thrive with "*negotiation* rather than *negation*" and must be understood as an ongoing process (Bhabha 2004, p. 37). The emphasis on negotiation in Bhabha's work can be a helpful framework which resists reductionistic binaries, some of which can be helpful conceptually, but are always in need of nuance and complexification in actualization. Culture, setting, and identity are not static objects, but are always in flux and inter-relate. A conversational homiletic focused on negotiation rather than as a convincing argument is suited to this approach to culture. The sermon arises from the intersections of the pulpit and the pew, the text and the context, ancient and modern cultures, and individuals and the congregation in unfolding conversation.

Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and interstitiality can assist preaching in multicultural contexts as more than a sum of the diverse cultures present and absent. A challenge for multicultural preaching is navigating differences without objectifying others or reinscribing colonial paternalism. While this is an issue of representation, representation cannot be completely disconnected from identity. Bhaba writes, "In the postcolonial text the problem of identity returns as a persistent questioning of the frame, the space of representation, where the image—missing person, invisible eye, Oriental stereotype—is confronted with its difference, its Other" (Bhabha 2004, p. 66). Bhabha critiques the colonial approach to identity which claims objectivity in its totalizing mutually inhering dynamic of the relation between the "Self (or Other)" (Bhabha 2004, p. 66). Bhabha embraces interstices as a way of pushing against the ossified essentialism of colonial identity. "The interstitial

passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (Bhabha 2004, p. 5). Bhabha recognizes that interstitial spaces are necessary to push the "epistemological 'limits' of those ethnocentric ideas" at the "enunciative boundaries of a range of other dissonant, even dissident histories and voices—women, the colonialized, minority groups, the bearers of policed sexualities" (Bhabha 2004, p. 5). Intercultural competency, skills, and knowledge are critical to this multicultural interstitial space, particularly when seeking "understanding of human action and the social world as a moment when *something is beyond control but it is not beyond accommodation*" (Bhabha 2004, p. 18). Equitable multiculturalism requires a commitment to openness on the part of the preacher to learn from other people and cultures. Equitable multicultural preaching is a divestment of pulpit power and an investment in people's lives as a potential source of proclamation. This divestment can coincide with an invitation for the congregation to join the unfolding proclamatory event. In this mode, sermons might shift from proving points to seeking mutual understanding.

7. A Model of Conversational Preaching

Conversational preaching can help move preaching toward third spaces as it seeks to de-center the preacher as the central source of congregational authority and knowledge. In *The Homiletic of All Believers*, O. Wesley Allen Jr. Allen offers the image of a conversation as a homiletical model for navigating preaching in the post-modern context. Allen proposes "shifting the locus of the conversation from the preacher and the sermon to that of the congregation itself" (Allen 2005, pp. 14–15). This does not mean that there will not a monological sermon. Allen's conversational model still imagines one person offering a sermon in a worship service. However, Allen's conversational model reconceptualized the function of the sermon in congregational life. The sermon is not the exclusive event of proclamation, the declaration of the gospel, and its impact. Conversational preaching means "the sermon is in service to the proclamatory conversation instead of vice versa" (Allen 2005, p. 15). Preachers offer sermons rooted in the existing congregational conversations, which prompt further conversations, especially proclamatory conversations which are centered around naming the gospel and its significance to the present. Allen outlines ecclesiological shifts for preaching which alter the sermon from being seen as a finished product to being part of an unfolding process. Involved in this shift is engaging people in theological conversations which connect the various aspects of their lives in purposeful and enriching manners. Allen notes that this work needs to "reclaim a sense of communal vocation for the church in a world where meaning making is viewed in more and more individualistic terms" (Allen 2005, p. 20).

Allen is not proposing that congregations and members engage in conversation for the sake of arriving at a single point, which then would end the conversation. Instead, the conversation remains open and ongoing, with explicit attention to collaboration and the possibility of transformation (Allen 2005, pp. 22–23). Conversational preaching does not mean that everyone has an equal time sharing or that all perspectives are equal. "Asymmetry—difference in beliefs, commitments, and experience—is essential to conversation and should be highly valued" (Allen 2005, p. 26). There is no formula for who should talk more or less on any given topic. It is situationally dependent, especially because some people might be more knowledgeable about certain topics and less about others. Allen's point with asymmetry is not about calculating it. In Allen's conversational preaching, asymmetry helps maintain a common commitment to hear other perspectives and contribute to the conversation with openness to change. Beliefs and experiences should be shared with clarity and specificity even as the dialogue involves holding these in a "tentative" manner which is open to revision and nuance (Allen 2005, p. 27). Crucial to equitable

multicultural preaching is the recognition of the limits of all views, and particularly the limits of frameworks themselves. Allen writes "Indeed, for conversations to advance and conversions to be possible, the ethic of reciprocity must include both an egalitarian view of our conversation partners and a valuing of difference among our proclamation partners" (Allen 2005, p. 27). Reciprocity, like asymmetry, does not mean everyone has equal time talking; it means everyone remains open to hearing the perspectives of others and remains open to changing perspectives. Therefore, preachers might need to be more invitational and open-ended if they hope to participate in ongoing conversations rather than offer definitive answers.

Allen proposes that the sermon in conversational preaching is not the finished product or the definitive word on the topic. He writes, "A true conversational homiletic should begin with the recognition that the proclamation of the gospel is a shared responsibility of the church offered through a matrix of theological, religious, political, and personal conversations, not solely the duty of the preacher standing alone in the pulpit" (Allen 2005, p. 15). The notion of a shared responsibility is important for multicultural preaching, which depends on expansive openness to different insights, perspectives, and approaches. Allen's vision for conversational preaching seeks to "not only empower individuals to engage and struggle with the Christian traditions in their own meaning-making process but will shape the way the community (as a group of believers in but not of the world) understands its broad institutional mission as the body of Christ, struggling to transform the world instead of being conformed to it" (Allen 2005, p. 35). Thus, people must be willing to converse with each other with honesty and openness. The conversational approach allows, in theory, for various perspectives, lenses, and experiences to become central to proclamation. Conversational preaching expands preaching from the moment of proclamation on a single Sunday to the work of the church and wants to consider the cumulative impact of preaching over time (Allen 2005, p. 59). Creating and maintaining equitable multicultural spaces requires careful attention, vulnerability, and the willingness to embrace a broad understanding of proclamation. While many spaces are experienced as neutral or even welcoming to certain people, the same space may be experienced as hostile to other people. This is why new frameworks for multiculturalism, intercultural competency, and the postcolonial identity theory can contribute to the shift toward equitable multiculturalism.

Allen recognizes that preaching is only one part of the congregation's ongoing conversations and that effective leaders recognize sermonic limitations. The congregation I served in 2020 recognized the limitation of the pulpit alone for addressing racialized violence and started offering conversational settings to learn, process, and collectively mourn racialized violence. After a few weeks, we realized that there was an ongoing need to establish this space on a more permanent basis and to expand the topic, so the group "Project ARC" was founded. ARC stands for Awareness of Race and Culture. The group met weekly initially and bi-weekly after some time to discuss identity, current events, and to hold each other accountable to growing in awareness and action. The group sought to explore various perspectives and insights in equitable and non-judgmental manners. Often, the group spent time reflecting on experience and God's presence in proclamatory manners, but without the labels of preaching or teaching.

The Project ARC space thrived through the groups' mutual commitment to listen and hear the perspectives of others before responding. Rather than being afraid of making mistakes, the focus on honesty and vulnerability allowed sensitive topics to rise to the surface with less fear of rejection. There was no pulpit preaching during Project ARC, but the gospel was experienced through mutual exchange. A key part of this exchange was the co-facilitators, one of whom was not clergy. Project ARC recognized that the proclamation of the gospel should not be confined to worship services, pulpits, or even

the Scripture texts. ARC's engagement with individual's and the community's experiences as disclosive of the gospel was a critical complement to pulpit preaching and an example of conversational preaching. Experiential theology, more than exegesis, provided generative insights and faith-seeking understanding. Experiential theology does not guarantee equitable multiculturalism, but it can be a critical component of equitable multiculturalism.

8. Conclusions

Effective conversational preaching thrives through the open involvement of the congregation. However, congregations seeking to implement a conversational homiletic might benefit from new equitable images of multiculturalism, intercultural competency, and more complex notions of identity. The history of Christianity contains diverse understandings and approaches to multiculturalism. Eunjoo Mary Kim notes that, "Thinking about Christian preaching and worship in a multicultural context is not a new approach. The Christian church has always been situated in multicultural circumstance and worshiped God in diverse ways by incorporating cultural elements" (E. M. Kim 2017, p. xiii). However, Kim also carefully discusses how multiculturalism is experienced as threatening to some and constructive to others (E. M. Kim 2017, p. 4). Thus, the relationships between Christianity and multiculturalism and the practice of Christian preaching and multiculturalism are not straightforward. This article maintained that the ongoing legacy of colonial Christianity continues to negatively confine multiculturalism. One way this occurs is through ethnocentric multiculturalism. Multicultural preaching needs to account for harmful colonial structures which persist in seeking uniformity masking as unity. At the same time, multicultural preaching should resist the privatization of culture as purely individualistic subjectivism. The individualistic subjectivism paradigm typically involves a "to each their own" kind of thinking, which recognizes cultural differences as real, but is constricted when navigating difference or promoting systemic change. This navigation is further limited by an understanding of multiculturalism as merely proximity to different cultures or the tolerance of different cultures.

Embracing this vision homiletically requires self-reflexivity at the intersection of identity and culture. Multiculturalism does not baptize all the aspects of culture but calls forth the critical consideration of the hermeneutical and contextual impacts of cultures. Like Eunjoo Mary Kim, I am inclined to see multiculturalism as a positive ideal and as an extension of the Gospel which cannot be confined to any particular culture. Kim recognizes that monocultural congregations and monocultural preaching persists in both majority and non-majority settings, which means that multiculturalism is not just important for some congregations (E. M. Kim 2017, pp. xiv–xv). She writes, "I maintain that even when the congregants have the same racial and cultural backgrounds, their worship should not be limited to themselves, but their theological concerns and liturgical experiences should be extended beyond their limited worldview and culturally embedded spiritual practices" (E. M. Kim 2017, p. xiv). Multiculturalism, especially recognizing the limits of any particular cultural framework, should be inherent to the work of the gospel because the gospel should not be bound by any particular culture. Multiculturalism can invite the critical examination of the cultural conditions of all interpretations, and it can help congregations recognize the negative impact of colonialism. While multiculturalism is informed by ideals, it is enacted largely relationally. While conversational homiletics may not guarantee equitable multiculturalism, along with the postcolonial theory and intercultural competency, it can help us move in that direction.

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Notes

1. While there are different models of intercultural competency, I find the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) particularly helpful (Hammer et al. 2003).
2. Representation is an especially important topic to preaching. Some preachers seeking to promote multiculturalism by representing the other.
3. Conversational preachings commitment to being an unfolding process can be instructive here.
4. It is important to recognize that Bhabha is not engaging theories of intercultural competency at this point but noting ways in which colonialism can objectify the concept of diversity much in the same way that capitalism can commodify diversity for economic purposes. Bhabha even has statements which are critical of multiculturalism. To me, these comments seem more directed at multiculturalism as an objectified product rather than a lived reality. In other words, there are approaches or forms of multiculturalism which reinforce colonialism. The concept of multiculturalism can invite people to conceive of cultures as object rather than interstitial spaces which resist easy and definitive definitions. Thus, I do not think that Bhabha work is against all multicultural spaces or frameworks. He invites us to reflect on the epistemological limits of approaching cultures.

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Article

Toward Inculturated Preaching

Michael E. Connors

John S. Marten Program in Homiletics and Liturgics, Department of Theology, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN 46556, USA; mconnors@nd.edu

Abstract: How do we understand the relationship between preaching and culture? This question is as old as Christianity, even though "culture" in its anthropological sense is a relatively recent development. As every preacher knows, both preacher and listener are shaped by certain pre-understandings and values as they approach the interactive moment of proclamation. Culture shapes the imagination and thought patterns of the preacher, no less than the listener. If preaching is to be considered dialogically—a bidirectional conversation between the preacher and the listeners, in service of a conversation between God and God's people—then it behooves both human conversation partners to become ever more aware of the cultural milieu(x) in which they are immersed. Every preaching event is the work of constructing an authentic local theology, a theological understanding suited to the particular people, historical moment, and cultural context in which it takes place. This essay seeks to shed light on that question through an engagement with a contemporary approach to the theology of inculturation (or contextualization). The starting point is a theology of preaching and its purpose as a Christian practice. We then turn to a theology of inculturation as it has been developing in recent decades, a theology that frames the interaction of the Christian message with culture in terms of both adaptation and liberation. Drawing upon the work of Robert Schreiter and others in understanding the formation of local theologies, the essay advances some methodological considerations in order for the church to move toward the possibility of authentically inculturated preaching. It concludes with some concrete suggestions for preachers, and an examination of one attempt to think through what it means to preach in a postmodern cultural context.

Keywords: preaching; inculturation; contextualization; preaching and culture; multicultural preaching

The great homiletician Fred Craddock remarked,

> The work of interpretation, which is the heart of arriving at a message, and the work of deciding on design and movement for framing that message into a sermon are two processes with their own integrity, their own purposes, their own skills, and their own climaxes. The task of interpretation has its own "eureka!" The message for Sunday is clear; what one will seek to achieve in the pulpit has moved out of the mass of notes and the pre-dawn gray of the mind into sunshine.... And how will this be communicated? What movement of the sermon will provide the experience of this message for the hearers? That task still lies ahead, but when it is done, again there will be "eureka!" Unless the minister has two eurekas, it is not likely the listeners will have one. (Craddock 1985, p. 85)

This article proceeds from the assumption that both interpretation/message/substance—the *what* of preaching—and design/form/movement/delivery—the *how* of preaching—are coequally important in good preaching. That is to say, Christian preachers

need not only to be right, truthful, theologically sound, and faithful to the tradition, but they also need to be received and understood by their hearers and to preach a message which is positively impactful upon the hearers' lives. Surface impressions may suggest that in preaching there is only one actor delivering a one-directional message—a view which, regrettably, some preachers do seem to hold. Yet most preachers understand that preaching is truly dialogical, that homiletic construction and performance are vital ingredients for effectiveness. Many understand that the homiletic dialogue is in service of something even larger, namely, the dialogue between God and God's People (Pope Francis 2013, para. 140f.). Preaching is a selfless act in a double sense: first, the preacher seeks a true word beyond her/himself; and second, the preacher unselfishly seeks to discover and explore that word with his/her hearers in a way maximally suited to facilitate their understanding and interiorization. Good preachers believe preaching matters, and matters enough to do it with care both for the Word of God and the People of God. Preaching conveys a message which is important, and important enough to enlist our best communicative efforts.

A dialogical understanding of preaching, which strives for effectiveness, thus prompts the preacher to want to understand both the sacred text more thoroughly, but also to examine him/herself critically as a dialogue partner, and to know her/his listeners as deeply as possible, their concerns, assumptions, biases, socio-economic locations, languages, values, fears, and hopes—in short, the *cultures* of his/her interlocutors. As many preachers know, both preacher and listener are shaped by certain pre-understandings and values as they approach the interactive moment of proclamation. Culture shapes the imagination and thought patterns of the preacher, no less than the listener. If preaching is to be considered dialogically—a bidirectional conversation between the preacher and the listeners, in service of a conversation between God and God's people—then it behooves both human conversation partners to become ever more critically aware of the cultural milieu(x) by which they have been formed and in which they are rooted. "Preachers", claims Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, "need to become amateur ethnographers—skilled in observing and in thickly describing the subcultural signs and symbols of the congregations they serve"[1] (Tisdale 1997, p. 60).

There is wide agreement today that cultural sensitivity is a virtue to be sought and cultivated, in preaching as in other individual and ecclesial activities. Our collective consciousness of cultural diversity continues to expand. Yet more work needs to be done on how to understand the relationship between preaching and culture, and in what sense preaching *can* or *ought* to be suited to particular cultural circumstances. Cultural context should shape preaching—on this point, there is wide agreement. But how?

This article will seek to shed light on the question of culture's impact upon the shape of preaching through an engagement with contemporary approaches to the theology of *inculturation*.[2] The starting point is a theology of preaching and its purpose as a Christian practice. We will then turn to a theology of inculturation as it has been developing in recent decades, a theology which frames the interaction of the Christian message with culture in terms of both adaptation and liberation. Then, drawing upon the work of Robert Schreiter, Hervé Carrier SJ, and others in understanding the formation of local theologies, the essay proposes a brief sketch of a method by which the church and its preachers might move toward the possibility of authentically inculturated preaching. With those tools in hand, we will then briefly examine one attempt to think through what it means to preach as a faithful Christian in a "postmodern" cultural context.

Before proceeding, I want to offer some brief comments on two key terms in this chapter. Both terms have been understood in various ways, and while space does not permit a full recapitulation of those discussions here, it is appropriate to provide the reader with the author's working understandings of those terms.

Gospel. This is a summary term for the goal of Jesus' own ministry. The central theme of Jesus' preaching and teaching was the Kingdom or Reign of God (or of Heaven, in Matthew's Gospel), a spatial–temporal master metaphor for God's sovereign, creative, salvific action in the world. After his death and resurrection, the church preached Jesus himself as the Christ and the instantiation of the Kingdom which he preached.

Culture. I remain provisionally satisfied with Clifford Geertz's "semiotic" concept of culture as a set of "socially established structures of meaning", a "context. . . within which social events, behaviors, institutions, or processes can be intelligently—that is, thickly—described" (Geertz 1973, pp. 5, 12, 14). Geertz's fuller definition of the concept is:

> [Culture] denotes an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which [humans] communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life. (Geertz 1973, p. 89)

1. A Theology of Preaching

The foregoing comes into sharper relief if we frame this discussion with some summary reflections on the purpose, goal, or *telos* of preaching. What is it, and why do we do it? Despite the tradition's plurality, the Christian churches have almost consistently maintained preaching as a valued practice. Yet the understandings of preaching and its contexts and purposes have varied considerably over the centuries and across denominational boundaries. It is neither possible nor desirable to trace that history here, but its diversity does demand that the present author be transparent about the theological commitments that shape and govern his development of this article's argument.

Elsewhere, I have developed a fuller account of my own Roman Catholic understanding of preaching, as that has developed over the last forty-odd years.[3] An "executive summary" of sorts will suffice here.

Why do we preach? Above all, we preach to help our hearers find God. We preach for encounter; we preach to bring people closer to God, to guide, to facilitate or make more possible the encounter of our hearers with a living God.

Meeting the living God changes us. We call this *metanoia* (conversion or transformation), and on the basis of that transformation—which is an ongoing, lifelong process—we are moved to gratitude, wonder, and love, which grounds the desire to live differently, to respond and serve in a life of missionary or intentional discipleship, devoted to service and mission.

Encounter → *conversion/transformation* → *gratitude/wonder/love* → *response/action/ commitment/missionary or intentional discipleship*[4]

To put it differently, preaching's immediate or proximate goal is the experience of meeting the Divine Other. Empowered by that experience, the ultimate end of preaching is cultivation of a stable, committed relationship with God, which includes a life reflecting the charity and mercy we find in Jesus Christ. The Christian life is always oriented toward union with God. Thus, Christian ministry, and especially the ministry of preaching, is oriented toward assisting people toward that end.

2. Theology of Inculturation

Even though the term "culture" in its anthropological sense (the sense deployed here) is a relatively recent development, the Christian community has struggled with questions of the relationship between its gospel *kerygma* and the diversity of cultures as far back as New Testament times. A couple of brief examples from the career of the apostle Paul should suffice here to illustrate the point.

Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians was penned in response to a pastoral situation in the church of Corinth that Paul judged to be disorderly, polarized, and theologically astray. The letter opens with Paul making a strong appeal to the core proclamation of the gospel as the source of unity and order. In 1 Cor 1:22–24 Paul says, "For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (NRSV). Prompted by his own radical conversion experience that moved him from being an observant Jewish Pharisee to a Christian apostle, Paul brought a concern for the Christian movement's relation to Judaism to all of the pastoral situations he faced. Yet he also understood that tensions and misunderstandings between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians were part of the reason for the Corinthian community's interior conflicts and disorder. So he engaged in a bit of what we might call soft, armchair cultural analysis. Both Jews and Hellenists brought some cultural baggage to their reception of the gospel and their life with those of different backgrounds. Accordingly, Paul understood that the gospel might have a different resonance within each of the two camps. The cultural predispositions of the Jewish faithful indicated an emphasis on the gospel's power, while those of the Greeks suggested framing the gospel as wisdom. Paul's overarching point here, of course, is to facilitate understanding between the two camps, i.e., to help both groups understand that the distinct language in which the gospel has come to each must not obscure the fundamental unity of the proclamation nor, therefore, can it be the grounds for compromising the fundamental unity between them.

Paul's visit to Athens in Acts 17:16-34 is also an instructive case. Here Paul is clearly attempting to read his audience, and he attempts to adapt his preaching for the unique cultural contours of his Athenian hearers. On the one hand, Paul praises the general religiosity he witnesses in the city, and he includes lines which are directly or indirectly drawn from well-known Greek philosophers. He points to an altar "to an unknown god" as a point of entry for making known to his hearers the message he is bearing witness to. At the same time, his preaching, as always, features the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ as central, even though Paul probably knew that these teachings would be the most difficult for the sophisticated Athenians to swallow. Luke's inclusion of this scene seems to imply that, even though Paul's success at Athens was numerically slight, this was a glimpse into his typical pastoral method: affirm and tap into what you can, and then stretch the hearers' minds toward those aspects of the message which are most foreign to the hearers' thinking and way of life.

A full examination of the history of the Christian movement with respect to diverse cultural contexts is, of course, beyond the scope of the present project. If such an examination were undertaken, we would find some instances when the interaction went smoothly and fruitfully, others when it did not, and many which were mixed. It would also highlight occasions on which, from our 21st-century perspective, questions about culture practically begged to be asked but were not. Some of the most contentious doctrinal or ecclesiological issues of that history can be better seen today as the result of cultural misunderstandings, at least in part. Cultural context shapes, makes possible, and delimits all of these interactions. Catholic theologians Stephen Bevans and Ricky Manalo go so far as to say,

> There never has been just "theology" or "theologizing", but only "contextual theology" and "contextual theologizing". . . . Just as there is no such thing as "theology" but only "contextual theology", so there is no such thing as "preaching." There is only "contextual preaching." Only preaching that makes an effort to communicate to real people in real situations is preaching that is worthy of the name. (Bevans and Manalo 2016, p. 233f.)

A modern critical appreciation of culture has prompted more intentional reflection about the prerequisites for a healthy and respectful dialogue between the church and its message on the one hand, and cultural contexts on the other. Bevans and Manalo summarize the contemporary situation:

> Theologians have concluded that theologizing today needs to honor the centrality of experience in human religious existence. Thus what has always been an implicit inclusion of experience now has become conscious and intentional. Theology, therefore, needs to be reflection-in-faith that is a mutually illuminating and critical dialogue between the experience of the past in Scripture and tradition and the experience of the present in daily life—in other words, a dialogue between "text" and context". (Bevans and Manalo 2016, p. 233)

Or, one might say, a dialogue between church/tradition/faith on the one hand, and cultures on the other. With respect to preaching, Bevans and Manalo continue:

> It is never a matter of *not* preaching in context. Rather it is always a matter of what context one preaches out of and/or preaches to.... What is important is the discernment of what the context *is* by a conscious, intentional recognition of it as one prepares, delivers, or assesses a homily. (Bevans and Manalo 2016, p. 234)

Reflection under the topical headings of "contextualization" and "inculturation" has grown up in recent decades precisely to aid the church in that process of discernment vis-à-vis all branches of theology and pastoral praxis. Bringing that reflection to bear specifically upon homiletics has only rarely been broached. The development of the mostly Catholic theological trajectory of inculturation has been traced elsewhere.[5] In the current discussion, we have only space to mark some milestones in that development and to identify some of its key insights.

The origins of the term "inculturation" are themselves somewhat uncertain.[6] It began to circulate more widely when used several times by the 32nd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus in 1974–75. But it was the Jesuit Superior General, Father Pedro Arrupe SJ, who popularized it and stimulated reflection upon it in a 1978 letter to the order. Arrupe offered a description of inculturation which has often been quoted in the years since then:

> Inculturation is the incarnation of Christian life and of the Christian message in a particular cultural context, in such a way that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question (this alone would be no more than a superficial adaptation), but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming it so as to bring about "a new creation". (Arrupe 1978b, p. 2)

Arrupe described the process of inculturation as lengthy, complex, and requiring "lucid discernment" of a culture by the church, with the goal always being that of "creating genuine communion" (Arrupe 1978b, p. 3).

Arrupe's letter was accompanied by a lengthier text, "A Working Paper on Inculturation", which contained this definition of inculturation:

> [Inculturation is] that effort which the church makes to present the message and values of the gospel by embodying them in expressions that are proper to each culture, in such a way that the faith and Christian experience of each local church is embedded, as intimately and deeply as possible, in its own cultural context. (Arrupe 1978a, p. 11)

In envisioning a process of deep encounter between the Church and a given culture, both Fr. Arrupe's letter and the accompanying document broke new ground for Catholic theologians, and the development of the concept of inculturation proceeded quickly in the subsequent years. Of particular note, further refinement of the concept was forthcoming

from the Dutch theologian Arij A. Roest Crollius SJ. Crollius described inculturation this way:

> The inculturation of the Church is the integration of the Christian experience of a local Church into the culture of its people, in such a way that this experience not only expresses itself in elements of this culture, but becomes a force that animates, orients and innovates this culture so as to create a new unity and communion, not only within the culture in question, but also as an enrichment of the Church universal. (Crollius 1978, p. 15f.)

Crollius's description closely parallels that of Arrupe, but it adds two important elements. The first is that it moves decisively beyond missiological reflection of the early and mid-20th century, which emphasized the need for "translation" of the gospel, along with "adaptation" and "assimilation" to the local culture. Crollius's description seems more fully to reflect the influence of the Second Vatican Council and postconciliar Latin American and other "liberation" theologies; he saw more clearly that at times the process must also seek to change culture, purging it of disvalues and cultivating gospel values.

The second contribution of Crollius here is the addition of a note of reciprocity, making the inculturation process an exchange of mutual enrichment; both the church and the culture receive something through it. Not only does the church adapt and assimilate to the local culture, a process which changes the culture and liberates it from toxic elements, but the church itself is changed and enriched, becoming more fully "catholic", a unity embracing ever greater diversity. In a subsequent article, Crollius concluded beautifully:

> The purpose of inculturation is not to salvage a traditional culture, but rather to render present in the galloping process of change which affects all cultures the light and life of the Gospel, so that each culture may become a worthy "habitat" of God's pilgrim people—a tent rather than a fortress—and an irradiating light that adds to the splendor of the entire cosmos. (Crollius 1980, p. 54)

With remarkable speed, the theology of inculturation took hold at the highest levels of the Catholic Church. The first mention of the term in a papal document was in Pope John Paul II's (1979) apostolic exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae: Catechesis in Our Time*. There, John Paul II adopted the term:

> The term *inculturation* may be a neologism, but it expresses very well one factor of the great mystery of the Incarnation. We can say of catechesis, as well as of evangelization in general, that it is called to bring the power of the Gospel into the very heart of culture and cultures. For this purpose, catechesis will seek to know these cultures and their essential components; it will learn their most significant expressions; it will respect their particular values and riches. In this manner it will be able to offer these cultures the knowledge of the hidden mystery and help them to bring forth from their own living tradition original expressions of Christian life, celebration and thought. (John Paul II 1979, para. 53)

Grounding the process of inculturation as an extension of the logic of the Incarnation helped to provide a firm theological footing.

In subsequent writings, Pope John Paul II's reflection advanced even further. In his 1982 founding of the Pontifical Council for Culture, he spoke of an "organic and constitutive link" between Christian faith and culture and the desirability of a "synthesis between culture and faith [which] is not just a demand of culture, but also of faith." He continued, "A faith which does not become culture is a faith which has not been fully received, not thoroughly thought through, not fully lived out" (As quoted by Shorter 1988, p. 231). A more extended treatment of inculturation was included in John Paul II's (1990)

encyclical *Redemptoris Missio: On the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate*. He cited favorably the 1985 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops, which had said:

> Since the Church is a communion, which joins diversity and unity, being present throughout the world, it takes up whatever it finds positive in all cultures. Inculturation, however, is different from mere external adaptation, as it signifies an interior transformation of authentic cultural values through integration into Christianity and the rooting of Christianity in various human cultures. (As quoted by Shorter 1988, p. 236)

The pope then constructed a description of inculturation which is fully reciprocal:

> Through inculturation the Church makes the Gospel incarnate in different cultures and at the same time introduces peoples, together with their cultures, into her own community. She transmits to them her own values, at the same time taking the good elements that already exist in them and renewing them from within. Through inculturation the Church, for her part, becomes a more intelligible sign of what she is, and a more effective instrument of mission. (John Paul II 1990, para. 52)

Inculturation, the pope emphasized, is a slow and deliberate process, one which "must be guided by two principles: 'compatibility with the Gospel and communion with the universal Church'" (John Paul II 1990, para. 54).

The foregoing altogether brief sketch of the development of the theology of inculturation in the Catholic context affirms and encourages—indeed, demands—the development of pastoral praxis, including preaching, which is authentically inculturated. Such preaching will be attuned to both the local culture of the hearers and to the gospel. Inculturated preaching will seek to honor the universality of the Christian message, while simultaneously embracing the diversity of cultural expressions. It will affirm cultural values and practices which are positive, as judged from the perspective of Christian revelation, and challenge and seek to transform those which are not. It will welcome cultural diversity as an enrichment of its patrimony, not uncritically, but with careful discernment. It foresees a dynamic dialogical process which reaches deeply into both the culture and the gospel, bearing fruit in a new instance of the God–human interaction. Inculturated preaching presumes deep listening to cultural experience, values, and narratives. It will seek to express the gospel and draw the listener into the encounter with God in ways that are well suited to the cultural context, offering the culture both affirmation and critique. Intrinsically, the gospel seeks to wed itself to culture through a painstaking, creative process of dialogue and reflection.

3. Methodological Considerations for Constructing Inculturated Preaching

Within the goal of preaching for encounter, how might we develop authentically inculturated preaching? A basic picture of inculturated pastoral praxis has begun to emerge, although our sources do not directly address the "how to" of inculturation. It remains to provide preachers with some general guidance as they face the preparation of preaching and some means of evaluating their efforts. How does one go about this process? And how does one know if s/he is being faithful to both gospel and culture? There is no recipe for this creative task, but we should be able to suggest some steps in the process and some evaluative guardrails.

As we saw in the first section, preaching seeks to facilitate a dialogue between God and God's People. Facing the latter dialogue partner, the inculturating preacher will first want to do some cultural analysis. The preacher asks, "What do I know about my people's

culture? That is, what are the factors which shape their receptivity to and/or resistance to the gospel message?" Assembling this kind of cultural data is crucial and can be approached through diligently asking the following and similar questions.

What are my hearers' *shared values and disvalues*? What are their *cultural practices, rituals, expectations, myths, and national stories*? What can I learn from the *history* of this congregation city, region, and nation? *What are these hearers' religious affiliations, commitments, rituals, expressions, devotions*. What *value is placed upon the individual and upon human dignity and agency*? How is this reconciled with any value placed upon the *common life* and *common good*? What are the *dominant institutions and cultural systems*? What are the typical *artistic expressions* (music, the graphic arts, etc.) in this culture, and what do these tell us? What is the educational level prevailing in my congregation? How do *social location* and *economic status* shape my people's perceptions of life and the ways they respond to those perceptions? What sorts of *work* do these hearers do? How are special populations—e.g., children, the aging, the sick, the mentally ill, minorities, the vulnerable – included/excluded in this cultural context? hat sorts of *change* are occurring in this social context? What is developing? What are the pressures for change, the resistances, and the resulting conflicts? What *news and current events are* on the minds of the hearers? What have I been hearing from them recently? What can be learned about the local culture through available *culture critiques*?

Once the above sorts of cultural information are assembled, largely from personal observation and study, the preacher can then begin to ask deeper theological questions.

Where does the gospel seem to meet this cultural context? What gospel messages or values are likely to be received as "good news" in this culture? What parts are more likely not to be understood, or to meet resistance? From a gospel perspective, what are the insights, values, and practices of the culture which can be affirmed, emphasized, drawn forth, built upon, or developed? What are the cultural resources I can utilize in proclaiming the gospel and making it understood, and how will I use them? What are the insights, values, and practices that need to be named, confronted, challenged? How will I do that in preaching? Where/how can I make the gospel more understandable/accessible by "translating" or "adapting" religious language? Where is the gospel seeking to set my people free, illuminate their lives, ennoble them? How can my preaching liberate them? What are the ecclesial resources at my disposal as I preach in this cultural context? What aspects of my church's language, praxis, or cultural baggage are likely to be problematic for my hearers? How might I overcome those barriers to understanding and reception of the gospel?

In addition, it is extremely important that the preacher be culturally self-critical:

What are my own cultural biases? Which of those biases coincide with the biases of my hearers, and which are those that conflict? Which parts of my own cultural baggage need to be held in check, insofar as possible, as I approach the construction of this homily to these people? How am I being asked to grow in appreciation of cultural differences or in my love for these people?

Needless to say, many of these are not easy questions. But they are questions which can be taken up and answered, in part or in full, with greater or lesser degrees of sophistication, by intelligent preachers who are willing to put in the effort to help ensure their preaching "lands" well with their audience.

4. Evaluating Preaching as Local Theology

One way to approach the challenge of inculturating or fully contextualizing preaching is to see it as one concrete instance of what theologian Robert Schreiter refers to as "local theology" (Schreiter 1985). As a ministry of discernment, every preaching event is the work of constructing an authentic local theology, a theological understanding suited to the

particular people, historical moment, and cultural context in which it takes place. If the goal of preaching is to lead people to God, then the question I must ponder each time I preach is this: What does God want to say and do among these people, at this time and place in history, through this/these scriptural text(s)?

There could be many ways of arriving at preaching which speaks to that question, and each Sunday's homily will be a product of a unique preacher's unique prayerful and thoughtful discernment. But how might we evaluate such efforts? Where might we find some assurance that we have, however modestly, "succeeded" in meeting the contextual challenge of preaching?

We noted above that John Paul II laid down two criteria for authentic inculturation: "compatibility with the Gospel and communion with the universal Church." These are surely correct, at least judged from the point of view of a Catholic ecclesiology, but they are not specific enough to be practically useful. Schreiter proposes five tests for local theology (Schreiter 1985, pp. 117–21):

1. *The Cohesiveness of Christian Performance*. Does it manifest and uphold the fundamental coherence of Christian belief?
2. *The Worshiping Context and Christian Performance*. This is the ancient principle of *lex credendi, lex orandi*: the rule of belief and the rule of prayer are yoked together.
3. *The Praxis of the Community and Christian Performance*. What is the fruit born of a local theology? What practices does it generate? *Lex credendi, lex orandi, lex facendi*.
4. *The Judgment of Other Churches and Christian Performance*. The church is a catholic unity. What happens when a local theology submits to the judgment of other local churches?
5. *The Challenge to Other Churches and Christian Performance*. Does the local theology generate mission, an impulse to move outward from itself?

Schreiter proposes that these five criteria interlock and must be used together "to give a reasonable guarantee of Christian identity" (Schreiter 1985, p. 121).

Hervé Carrier, meanwhile, has advanced a similar set of four "guidelines for inculturation":

1. *Distinguish faith's proper role*. "We must maintain the radical distinction between the Gospel message and any culture" (Carrier 1993, p. 73).
2. *Build the church according to its identity*. "Fidelity to the essential identity of Christianity as lived in the Church" (Carrier 1993, p. 75). This includes doctrine, liturgy, and pastoral practice.
3. *Reconcile unity and pluralism*. "Safeguarding the identity of Christianity is in no way opposed to a healthy pluralism" (Carrier 1993, p. 77). "Unity is not uniformity.... [but] 'a pluralism of expression in the unity of substance'[7].... True pluralism is that which creates *communion*" (Carrier 1993, p. 78).
4. *Promote discernment and investigation*. Inculturation requires careful discernment and invites ongoing investigation in an attitude of respect and receptivity (Carrier 1993, pp. 79–81).

All three of the above authors, however, are facing in the same direction, namely, toward the faith and the faith tradition. They are all speaking to the question, "How do we know if a local theology is true to that faith and tradition?" This is, needless to say, a vitally important question. However, the agent of inculturation, especially the preacher, must also face in the other direction, toward the culture(s) in which she or he is lodged. How does one know if one is being true to that cultural context? How might we attain a reasonable confidence of fidelity to the culture? Provisionally, I would suggest four rough criteria.

The fruits of *cultural discernment*. Does the local theology deploy an accurate and sufficiently comprehensive cultural analysis? Does the local theology speak to identifiable values and disvalues, practices, and lifestyles of the culture?

Effectiveness. Does the local theology "work?" Is there evidence that this local theology brings people closer to God in a way which bears fruit in deeper relationship with God and deeper praxis of charity within the culture?

Reception, or the *sensus fidelium*. Is the local theology "received" by those it is intended to serve? Is it perceived to speak to the real lives of these people, as those lives are shaped by cultural forces?

Openness and authentic communion. Does the local theology generate cultural defensiveness, or does it open outward in mutual friendship, receptivity, and service to other cultures and to the world?

If space and time allowed here, it would be most instructive for us to examine a few of the many instances of inculturations in the church's history, to see what we might learn about their successes and failures. For now, we can point to a few examples worth further consideration on another occasion. One is John Paul II's (1985) encyclical *Slavorum Apostoli*[8] ("Apostles of the Slavs"), in which the pope holds up Saints Cyril and Methodius as examplars of the inculturation process among the Slavic peoples. Another would be a deep examination of the devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe, so instrumental in the conversion of native peoples in Mexico and such a central feature of Mexican culture to our own day.[9] We could also critically examine some of the contemporary theological attempts to inculturate or contextualize preaching.[10]

5. How Homileticians Can Help Practitioners Toward Inculturated Preaching

By now the basic process governing the inculturation of preaching should be clear. It includes:

- *Cultural analysis*. The preacher assembles information on the cultural situation of the sermon context, utilizing both personal "participant-observer" data and knowledge acquired from scholarly ethnography, social critique, history, theology and religious studies, the media, and others.
- *Discernment*. The preacher assesses the cultural data from the point of view of the Christian faith, identifying aspects of culture which are consonant with the gospel, resistant to it, or some mixture of both.
- *Creativity*. The process of sermon creation, approached in a prayerful way seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit, might proceed in either of two directions: (a) the preacher chooses one dimension of culture to speak to, and then identifies resources within the Christian tradition which speak to that part of the context; or (b) especially if the preacher is working within a lectionary system of Scripture selections, s/he chooses one aspect of the text(s) which speak to one aspect of culture in a way which illuminates, affirms, adapts to, and/or confronts the culture. Either of these directions yields the focus and function statements which then guide the preacher's process of homiletic construction.

The preacher, and only the preacher, can be the final constructor of the local theology which is preaching. However, the larger homiletics community can assist with cultural analysis and discernment. I close this essay with a very brief examination of one such resource which I believe can be helpful to preachers, and which offers a model of such efforts.

The late Timothy J. Keller was a popular preacher, pastor, and founder of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, as well as the author of some two dozen books. For our purposes here, it is Keller's reflection on homiletics, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism*, which concerns us, and in particular, chapters Four and Five. In the fourth chapter, Keller lays out a contextual understanding of preaching, which includes both adaptation to and confrontation with the culture. "Contextualization", he says, means

"to resonate with yet defy the culture around you" (Keller 2015, p. 99). He draws support from an examination of Paul's preaching ministry. He sums up his method in six pieces of general advice for preachers.

Use accessible or well-explained vocabulary. Avoid theological or ecclesial jargon, and use words which are readily understood by these listeners (Keller 2015, pp. 103–6).

Employ respected authorities to strengthen your theses. Especially when speaking to people for whom the Bible has little or no authority, draw upon sources they trust (Keller 2015, pp. 106–10). Make culturally contextualized choices to illustrate and reinforce your point.

Demonstrate an understanding of doubts and objections. This demonstrates a willingness to listen and to be transparent about one's own convictions (Keller 2015, pp. 110–14).

Affirm in order to challenge baseline cultural narratives. Bring to light the cultural assumptions and narratives which generally are not reflected upon and help the hearer see the implications (Keller 2015, pp. 115–16).

Make Gospel offers that push on the culture's pressure points. Show how the Christian message offers more powerful resources for meeting needs and fulfilling aspirations (Keller 2015, pp. 117–18).

Call for Gospel motivation. Help the hearers to understand how the gospel can more deeply address human problems, provide healing, and resolve impasses (Keller 2015, pp. 118–20).

In the subsequent chapter, "Preaching and the (Late) Modern Mind", Keller then gives the reader a sample of his method in action vis-à-vis the cultural forces which prevail in much of the world today. That situation is often described as "postmodern", although Keller prefers the term "late modern" to emphasize that there are more continuities than discontinuities with the "modern" era. He believes this "late modern" situation represents not a break with modernity but rather "an intensification of [modernity]'s deepest patterns" (Keller 2015, p. 123). Building upon the work of Charles Taylor,[11] Keller identifies secularity not as a system of total unbelief but as a system of hidden, unexamined beliefs. He says, "Secularism is its own web of beliefs that should be open to examination" (Keller 2015, p. 126). Keller identifies five great narratives which shape the late modern mind and counsels strategies for responding to them (Keller 2015, pp. 127–55).

To illustrate Keller's method, let us briefly take up the fifth and last of these narratives, the *identity narrative*, the one which the author identifies as most fundamental to late modernity.The identity narrative locates personal identity in self-definition, an interior, subjective process (Keller 2015, p. 132). This is closely related to the third narrative, the *society narrative*, or the narrative of radical individualism (Keller 2015, pp. 131, 140–46). "Our society's main heroic narrative," says the author, "is that of the individual standing up and being true to him- or herself over society's opposition" (Keller 2015, p. 132). Keller calls this the myth of the "sovereign self"(Keller 2015, p. 133). Here again, however, he affirms that the modern emphasis on the individual has brought much good, and that it has originating Christian sources, for example, Augustine's *Confessions*. Yet modernity and late modernity have gone beyond valuing and seeking to understand interior movements and given them absolute, superior value. Keller counters that self-definition based upon self-expression "is actually an illusion" (Keller 2015, p. 135). "The modern process of identity formation. . . tells you to go out and create a self from scratch" (Keller 2015, p. 137). But dignity and identity cannot be self-bestowed. The Christian antidote to the late modern illusion is the *imago dei*, the belief that we are made in the divine image. "This means," says the author, "our value is both *inherent* (it comes simply from being human) and *contingent* (it reminds us how dependent we are upon God)" (Keller 2015, p. 137). Christian preachers, therefore, can tap into sources of identity found in the doctrines of Creation and Redemption. Ultimately, Keller says, Christians see that "The question of identity is not

'who am I?' but 'whose am I?'" (Keller 2015, p. 138), and that life's goal is to grow into, not some constructed and whimsical self, but into the likeness of Christ.

I mean here to endorse neither the details of Keller's cultural analysis nor all of his conclusions for preaching. Rather, my hope here has been to raise up one example of the sort of thing that homiletic thinkers could provide to practitioners to guide their local efforts to speak in an inculturated or truly contextual voice from the pulpit. Keller wrestled with this question: what can we understand about our cultural milieu, and what sort of response does that invite of us when we preach? That response will sometimes require adaptation or translation, sometimes affirmation, sometimes reminder or illumination, sometimes rebuke, often some combination of two or more of these. Keller brings the preacher into contact with a stream of incisive cultural analysis. He assesses the "late modern" milieu sympathetically yet critically, affirming its advances while identifying its less salutary aspects. He then deftly constructs a framework for a Christian response in preaching to late modernity's challenges, searching for ways in which the Christian kerygma might be more likely to meet with a receptive response. While Keller's advice is necessarily general, it is accessible enough to the typical preacher to helpfully guide a preacher's undertaking of the ministry of the pulpit. A preacher guided by Keller's advice might well be able to articulate truths of the Christian faith, like the doctrines of Creation and Redemption, in a way better suited to a late modern congregation whose experience of the burden of identity construction will make them receptive to an alternative approach. The gospel preached in this manner sheds light on late modernity's problems, offers healing, suggests ways forward in resolving its problems and, most importantly, draws the hearer into intimate union with our God.

Much work remains to be done for the churches to move toward authentically inculturated preaching, and the need is pressing. What we preachers can learn from the developing theology of inculturation is that wherever the gospel lands amid culture's lights and shadows, it celebrates, lifts up, ennobles, cleanses, and offers hope.

Notes

[1]   Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, Tisdale 1997), 60. N.B.: The reader of Tisdale's work will soon notice considerable affinity of thought between that excellent work and the present article. I readily acknowledge my debt to Tisdale. In particular, Tisdale's defense of preaching as "contextual theology", mainly from Protestant sources, and her semiotic understanding of culture, are strengths of her book, and for that reason I largely omit those important discussions here. The present article seeks to build upon Tisdale's work in four ways: (1) by setting the discussion within an explicit framework of the goal or *telos* of preaching; (2) by drawing upon specifically Roman Catholic sources on the theology of inculturation, which Tisdale does not include; (3) by speaking to at least one issue which Tisdale does not, namely, the question of evaluating the soundness or authenticity of preaching as local theology; (4) by briefly examining one work as an example of a resource which might offer preachers some general guidance in the quest for inculturated preaching.

[2]   Although *inculturation* is the term which mostly prevails in Roman Catholic discourse, and *contextualization* is more common in the Protestant world, I take these two terms to be practically interchangeable as far as the theological and pastoral problematic which they denote. Both of them point to the question of how to appropriately suit theological reflection and pastoral praxis to a concrete human situation at a given time and place. This is not to ignore that behind these preferences lie some diverging theological emphases, nor to suggest that these divergences and terminological choices might not have some diverging practical

implications. Those implications, which I judge not to be major, are worthy of deeper exploration at another time. But because I myself am lodged in the Catholic community, and for additional reasons, I prefer *inculturation* and use it here.

3   See, especially, Michael E. Connors, "To What Effect? Qualities of Effective Catholic Preaching," chap. 2 of Michael E. Connors, ed., *Effective Preaching: Bringing People into an Encounter with God* (Liturgy Training Publications, 2019), 13–28.

4   I refer the reader to the book chapter in the preceding footnote for a full accounting of the sources behind this understanding. However, it may be helpful to mention a few of the chief sources here:U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops, Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry, *Fulfilled in Your Hearing: The Homily in the Sunday Assembly* (Washington, DC: USCCB Publishing, 1982).Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (Boston, MA: St. Paul Books and Media, 1994).Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, op. cit.Stephen Vincent DeLeers, *Written Text Becomes Living Word: The Vision and Practice of Sunday Preaching* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004).

5   The most comprehensive treatment remains that of Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988). For a synopsis of some of the major documents, see Michael E. Connors, *Inculturated Pastoral Planning: The U.S. Hispanic Experience* (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2001), pp. 7–16.

6   Shorter attributes it to Joseph Masson SJ, professor at the Gregorian University in Rome. See J. Masson, "Fonction missionaire, fonction d'Eglise", two parts, *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 80 (1958) 1042–1061 and 81 (1959) 41–59. But Masson drew upon the work of Pierre Charles SJ; see P. Charles, "Missiologie et Acculturation", *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 75 (1953) 15–32; also P. Charles, *Etudes Missiologiques* (Desclée de Brouwer, 1956), 137, where Charles still seems to use the word in the more anthropological sense which today is usually termed *enculturation*. Hervé Carrier SJ, meanwhile, citing Charles, claims the term had been "in current use among Catholics" since at least the 1930s; see H. Carrier, *Evangelizing the Culture of Modernity* (Orbis, 1993), 26. Clearer is Masson's more theological deployment of the term in a 1962 article ("L'Eglise ouverte sur le monde", Nouvelle Revue Théologique 84:10, Dec. 1962, 1038), where he says: "Aujourd'hui, alors que, tout justement, l'exigence se fait plus urgente d'un catholicisme inculturé d'une façon polymorphe."

7   This interior quote is from a 1975 address of Pope Paul VI to the bishops of Africa and Madagascar.

8   See John Paul II (1985).

9   There is a large and still expanding literature surrounding this devotion. See, *inter alia*, Virgilio P. Elizondo, *Guadalupe: Mother of the New Creation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997).

10 A few of many possible examples:Justo L. González and Pablo A. Jiménez. 2005. *Púlpito: An Introduction to Hispanic Preaching*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.Kenneth G. Davis and Jorge L. Presmanes. 2000. *Preaching and Culture in Latino Congregations*. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications.Maurice J. Nutt, C.Ss.R. 2022. *Down Deep in My Soul: An African American Catholic Theology of Preaching*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.Frank A. Thomas. 2016. *Introduction to the Practice of African American Preaching*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.Matthew D. Kim and Daniel L. Wong. 2020. *Finding Our Voice: A Vision for Asian North American Preaching*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.Eunjoo Mary Kim. 1999. *Preaching the Presence of God: A Homiletic from an Asian American Perspective*. King of Prussia, PA: Judson Press.

11 See, especially, Charles Taylor (2007), *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press). Keller acknowledges his deep debt to Taylor for much of the cultural analysis in this chapter. See, e.g., Keller, n. 9, p. 281.

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Article

How Can Preachers Use Luther in a Decolonial Multicultural Context?

Timothy Leitzke [1,2]

1   Trinity Lutheran Church, Valparaiso, IN 46383, USA; taleitzke@gmail.com
2   Department of Theology, Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, IN 46383, USA

Abstract: This article seeks a way for preachers to use Martin Luther's theology today without succumbing to Luther's anti-Semitism. Its place in the discipline of homiletics is of hermeneutics and general sermon direction. I argue that Luther's anti-Semitism is theological, and that in order to avoid anti-Semitism, Luther's theology must be changed. I also argue that the concept of decoloniality offers a way forward, specifically in hybridizing Luther's theology in today's world.

Keywords: Luther; Lutheranism; anti-Semitism; coloniality; decolonial

1. Introduction

How can preachers use Martin Luther today? He stands as a towering figure over theology, and his name is lent to denominations descended from him, including my own Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). But how does a preacher today use Martin Luther, a notorious anti-Semite, in preaching? It is a question even more pointed since the war in Gaza broke out in October 2023 and Lutherans have called for peace. It is not a simple matter of ignoring the anti-Semitic bits of Luther's theology, or following the popular and inaccurate explanation that Luther turned anti-Semitic later in life as he grew frustrated with the pace of reform. Luther's theological method produces Jews and Judaism as stubborn, offensive, wicked, false, etc. Nonetheless, it is simplistic to suggest, as some have in the era since WWII, that Luther leads directly to Hitler. Meanwhile, it is rash to try to use Luther's theology as it is and hope to avoid anti-Semitic results. As one who claims Luther's legacy as part of their own, I face this conundrum with every sermon. Do I cite Luther, and, if so, what do I do about his anti-Semitism? I suggest that the concept of decoloniality offers a solution.

A fair question at this point is how a member of a mainline Christian denomination in the United States has any place using an epistemological framework developed by and for subaltern people. I will argue that Lutheranism in the United States exists within a reality of coloniality. Decolonial methods expose this reality, and reveal it to those of us living it. Of those who claim Luther's legacy, more is required than an apology; if we wish to continue in the faith, we must do so in new ways. Decoloniality offers a way forward. It is a way that must be undertaken with the understanding that what we bring from our Eurocentric culture is going to be redefined in ways over which we have little control.

In this essay, I will provide an overview of how Luther's theology and exegesis are anti-Jewish. Next, I will engage the concept of colonialism and explore three options for a decolonizing approach to Luther, favoring the approach of hybridity or what Grosfoguel calls "border thinking". Then, I will argue how these options do or could appear in contemporary Lutheran approaches. Finally, I will press the decolonial, hybrid Christ into service in exegeting a text for proclamation.

2. From Luther Then to Luther Now

2.1. Martin Luther on the Jews

Martin Luther was an anti-Semite. He was not unique for his era, though he was harsh even for that era. His attacks on Jews should not be read apart from the commissions he earned for writing some of them, or from the burgeoning alliance between German Jews and the Habsburg Emperor. Steven Rowan suggests that in some cases, Luther's attacks on Jews might have been surrogate attacks on the Emperor (Rowan 1985, p. 90). At the same time, Luther's attacks embarrassed his own princes (Rowan 1985, p. 81).

Of paramount importance for this essay is the fact that Luther's attacks on Jews were not afterthoughts. Robert Kolb observes that Luther's anti-Semitic arguments "were to a significant extent exegetical" (Kolb 2009, p. 164). That is, Luther's method of interpretation produced anti-Semitic outcomes.

Christians have read the Old Testament as Christian Scripture since the New Testament era. Kolb notes that Luther severed the traditional distinction of law and gospel from the sweep of salvation history. For Luther, the law did not reign until Christ to be replaced with the gospel. Rather, both law and gospel were found in both testaments, and "the proper distinction of law and gospel became God's way of addressing the existential situation of fallen human beings" (Kolb 2009, p. 52). So, Luther can contend in "How Christians Should Regard Moses" that the Torah is useful to Christians once they dismiss the commandments given solely to Israel because the Torah contains gospel promises and examples of faith and love (Luther 1960b, pp. 168–70). And in "Against the Sabbatarians", Luther can sever the Ten Commandments from Scripture!

> "[T]he Ten Commandments had spread over the whole world not only before Moses but even before Abraham and all the patriarchs. For even if a Moses had never appeared and Abraham had never been born, the Ten Commandments would have had to rule in all men from the very beginning, as they indeed did and still do". (Luther 1971, p. 89)

The "Ten Commandments" for Luther are Natural Law, or what Lutherans call the "Second Use" of the law, which exposes existential shortcomings and drives us to Christ.

The law did not reign until Christ; Moses did. Luther's issue with Jews is that they fail to see Christ as their messiah and the Church as the true Israel. In his "Prefaces to the Old Testament", Luther argues that "Moses himself has told us that his office and teaching should endure until Christ, then cease. . .", a reference to Deuteronomy 18 read Christologically (Luther 1960c, p. 246). That office and teaching are not Law, but leadership of Israel. Thus, in "That Christ Jesus Was Born a Jew", Luther contends that his reforms to the church are intended "to bring some of them [Jews] back to their own true faith, the one which their fathers held" (Luther 1962, p. 213). In other words, Luther contends that what he recognizes as the Christian faith is what Jews before Christ believed.

For Luther, Jewish failure to follow Christ combines with the incontrovertibility of Scripture to prove that Jews have no logical place in sixteenth-century Germany or anywhere else. Jesus was clearly the "prophet like Moses" in Deuteronomy 18 (Luther 1960c, p. 246). Jacob's prophecy in Genesis 49—"the scepter shall not depart from Judah"—had been fulfilled because Jesus took that scepter before Jerusalem fell (Luther 1962, pp. 213ff.). Furthermore, the lack of any Jewish state in the sixteenth century was proof God and the true Israel had moved on. So, in the "New Prefaces to the Old Testament", "The physical, earthly government they have not, for they have neither king nor lord, neither kingdom nor princedom; the spiritual too they have not, for they will not accept the new covenant and must thus remain without a priesthood" (Luther 1960a, p. 288).

Luther's exegesis contends that since natural law is separate from salvation history, and since Jews cling to an outdated covenant, Jews exist in a kind of limbo. "[T]hey miss both covenants and hang between heaven and earth", Luther says in his "New Prefaces to the Old Testament" (Luther 1960a, p. 288). And in "How Christians Should Regard Moses", Luther contends that there are two kingdoms—the temporal and the spiritual—and "[b]etween the two kingdoms still another has been placed in the middle, half-spiritual and

half-temporal. It is constituted by the Jews, with commandments and outward ceremonies which prescribe their conduct toward God and men" (Luther 1960b, p. 164). Most of these laws cannot be kept since the destruction of the Temple. This renders any attempt at observing Judaism futile. Luther says contemporary Jews "are no longer Jews, since they do not observe their law" (Luther 1971, p. 79). And again, "the Jews are no longer Israel" (Luther 1960a, p. 287).

Brooks Schramm summarizes the situation: "When Luther writes that Moses is dead, what he really means is that *Judaism is dead*" (Schramm 2014, p. 36). Luther's reasoning is hermeneutical, exegetical, and doctrinal. Perhaps one may forgive Luther for such reasoning in the 1500s, but such reasoning today erases an entire religious tradition. Combine that with the baggage of subsequent anti-Semitism including the Third Reich's embrace of Luther, and Luther's hermeneutic cannot be accepted without some modification.

2.2. Coloniality and Decoloniality

The United States is a culture with "coloniality". Douglas John Hall has long contended that North America is its own culture, with states originally founded as European colonies and receiving theologies from Europe (Hall 2003, p. 46). The end of the "colonial" period did not end colonialism. The US became (more of) a colonizer. Even as its own colonial administrations folded, e.g., in the Philippines, the US remained a colonial power. Ramon Grosfoguel contends, "One of the most powerful myths of the Twentieth Century was the notion that the elimination of colonial administrations amounted to the decolonization of the world. This led to the myth of a 'postcolonial' world" (Grosfoguel 2008, p. 7). Grosfoguel offers in place of the descriptor "postcolonial" the concept of "coloniality", a reality that persists beyond the close of formal, official colonial status. "Coloniality allows us to understand the continuity of colonial forms of domination after the end of colonial administrations..." (Grosfoguel 2008, p. 7). Grosfoguel distinguishes his "decoloniality" from "postcoloniality", believing the former term to be more accurate. Not everyone agrees. For my purposes, Grosfoguel's category of "colonially" is what matters. Lutheranism in the United States exists within coloniality. The colonial administration of England and the regular importing of Lutheran theology in the form of pastors recruited in Europe is long over, but the coloniality of Lutheranism persists.

Decoloniality offers a response to coloniality. Walter Mignolo has argued that "decolonial thinking emerged at the very foundation of modernity/coloniality, as its counterpoint" (Mignolo 2011, p. 46). In order to be Lutheran and combat Luther's anti-Semitism, I require more than a technical-sounding name for that endeavor. Grosfoguel notes two routes of decolonial thinking that he (and I) would rather avoid. The first approach Grosfoguel names "Third World Nationalism", the creation of a European model nation-state on the site of the former colony (Grosfoguel 2008, p. 15). The ecclesiastical analog of this would be the persistence of Eurocentric denominations with Eurocentric power structures, and unmitigated theology from European sources. The second approach Grosfoguel names "Third World Fundamentalism", the assertion of a pure space outside of modernity and coloniality. Such wholesale rejections of Europe are, Grosfoguel contends, further binary oppositions (Grosfoguel 2008, p. 15). By embracing only what is not Europe, "fundamentalism" still lets Europe define terms. The ecclesiastical analog of this would be rejections of denominations or even Christianity since they are colonizer religions, or even the embrace of any religious practice so long as it is not Christian.

Grosfoguel offers a third approach, which he calls "critical border thinking". He writes, "border epistemologies subsume/redefine the emancipatory rhetoric of modernity from the cosmologies and epistemologies of the subaltern..." (Grosfoguel 2008, p. 16). The result is what Grosfoguel calls a "redefinition/subsumption of citizenship, democracy, human rights, humanity, economic relations beyond the narrow definitions imposed by European modernity" (Grosfoguel 2008, p. 16). It is not simply a matter of blending colonizer and colonized, or of taking the things we like from each to create a new thing. It is a changing of what terms mean.

Another way to describe what Grosfoguel calls "border thinking" is "hybridity" or "hybridization".

Mona West says hybridization:

reflects a postcolonial reality that emerged from the relationship between and within the colonized and the colonizers' cultures. The aspects of the dominant European culture are implanted in or grafted onto the colonized culture, submerging its beliefs and values within its own to create a hybrid culture that is neither one nor the other...hybridity is an identity that refuses a homogenous purity. (West 2016, p. 51)

West applies the concept to LGBTQ faith communities. I believe it can be applicable within the ELCA as a way of reading Luther. Luther is grafted onto culture. What grows is something new.

HyeRan Kim-Cragg has described hybridity in terms of *arkhe* and *repario*. The colonizer kept the *arkhe* or official archive, having destroyed any other records. When it came time to do anything, the *repario* or repertoire never matched the archive. In worship, this manifested as official rites brought from Europe (*arkhe*) being enacted in new ways. Kim-Cragg even argues that every eucharistic act today is both archive and repertoire, a hybridization of the official order of things and what actually happens (Kim-Cragg 2016, pp. 79, 80). In this sense, I seek a non-anti-Semitic hybridization of Luther.

2.3. Decolonial Readings of Luther

What might a decolonial approach to Luther look like? If we take up Grosfoguel's three approaches, we can first note what Grosfoguel calls fundamentalism, what I describe ecclesiologically as a rejection of Luther and Lutheranism. Naming everyone who has left the church and citing their reasons would take forever. What I describe here is a rejection of institutions, denominations, and theological legacies that nonetheless allows itself to be defined by what is being rejected. A potential example in contemporary Lutheranism is Lenny Duncan.

Duncan was part of the Decolonize Lutheranism social media project in the 2010s, as of 2024 a defunct web domain and a long untended Facebook page. Duncan was an ELCA pastor and wrote *Dear Church* as a "love letter" to the ELCA. In it he defines the ELCA as a radically loving and accepting community infected with racism. Duncan calls this racism a theological problem rooted in the way Lutherans are "trained to search for reconciliation" by circumventing repentance (Duncan 2019, pp. 6, 39). Duncan does not mention Luther or his theology in the book. Duncan quit the ELCA in 2022, stating publicly, "This is not the end of my story with the Divine. . .. It's just the end of my story with the ELCA" (Duncan 2022). Ministers resign often for complex reasons, and Duncan names racism and frustration with institutions among his. My reason for mentioning Duncan is to offer him as an example of what Grosfoguel describes as assertion of a pure space outside of European modernity and coloniality. One could read Duncan's exit from the ELCA—but not from faith in God—as an assertion of a religious space outside of religion. In Grosfoguel's terms, the religion is still setting the agenda as that over against which the new space is defined. For those of us who wish to stay within Lutheranism, such departure is not an option.

Timothy Wengert's work on Luther could represent an ecclesiastical analog to what Grosfoguel calls "Third World Nationalism", the adoption of the European model as our own. In *Reading the Bible with Martin Luther*, Wengert presents Luther's biblical hermeneutic as sound and perpetually efficacious. Wengert sums up Luther's hermeneutic with Luther's phrase *Was Christum treibet*, which Wengert translates, "What pushes Christ". The key to any biblical passage is what pushes Christ (Wengert 2013, p. 6). The 21st-century preacher can employ Luther's method without modification. They must deploy the proper distinction between law and gospel, revealing our sin and God's promise of Christ (Wengert 2013, pp. 22–46). They must read from the proper center of Scripture: "the very weakness of the crucified and resurrected one", also called the "theology of the cross" (Wengert 2013,

pp. 67, 126). And they must read Scripture from "the experience of the God who justifies the ungodly" (Wengert 2013, p. 126). Such an approach takes Luther as he is. It trusts that his method will eschew problems like claiming Jews do not really exist. I have already argued that this does not work.

An example of a hybrid approach can be found in the work of Deanna Thompson. Thompson critiques Luther from the position of feminism. She expresses the challenge in personal terms. "Some days I encounter Luther basking in his and others' sufferings in ways my feminist self rejects as masochistic. Other days I encounter feminist theologians who avoid women's own chronic predisposition to sin, which my Lutheran self cannot affirm" (Thompson 2004, p. xi). Thompson's project seeks not simply to blend Luther and feminism, or to take aspects she likes from each. It is a changing of what terms mean.

Thompson interrogates Luther and Feminism on matters of Sin, a Male Savior, and Atonement. She inverts the usual law–gospel order in discussing Sin, arguing that a better approach is starting with the gospel of hope without losing sight of the reality of Sin (Thompson 2004, p. 115). She suggests overcoming idolatry of Jesus's maleness "by reasserting the image of the crucified woman as the *location* of Christ today" (Thompson 2004, p. 125). She advocates for the replacement of Luther's classic "joyous exchange—in Luther presented as the marriage of Jesus to us the "wicked harlot"—with the model of Jesus befriending humanity (Thompson 2004, p. 136). These approaches exhibit what Grosfoguel describes as the redefinition of terms beyond the received European (Luther-an) thinking, and what West described as hybridity. It is a theology that is not Luther's but also not feminism as Thompson receives it. It is a new thing.

2.4. Decolonizing Luther's Anti-Semitism

Thompson's interrogation of patriarchy provides some clues as to how one might approach Luther's anti-Semitism. It bears mentioning that she also addresses Luther's anti-Semitism directly, observing rightly that "because Luther viewed all Old Testament passages in light of how they preached the promises of Christ, he continuously found Jewish exegesis offensive to Christ" (Thompson 2004, p. 91). She argues that those who wish to use Luther must draw attention to his inconsistency in claiming all people put Jesus on the cross, but Jews alone bear responsibility for it. And, most tantalizingly, she suggests we push Luther's "vision of the Old Testament as theologically significant in its own right to include Jewish interpretations of the text, as well as demanding a more nuanced dialectical approach to Israel and the Jews as integral to the Christian story" (Thompson 2004, p. 91).

How, then, may the preacher today subsume and redefine the theology received from Luther? It will, I believe, involve a redefinition of no less than Christ himself. The sticking point for Luther is not simply that the Old Testament pushes Christ or that Jewish exegesis is offensive to Christ. The sticking point for Luther is that Christ is everything. Luther personally depended upon Christ as he preached him. Before his "breakthrough" and (to him) new vision of a loving and gracious God, Luther would confess his sins for hours, despising the God who demanded so much (Thompson 2004, p. 8). Then, Luther realized God clothed the sinner in God's own righteousness. "The magnitude of this realization for Luther cannot be underestimated…" (Thompson 2004, p. 9). Luther knows all depends on Christ because he experiences it personally. There is salvation in Christ alone.

A decolonial reading of Luther cannot hold this position. We imported Luther and his sixteenth-century Christ from Europe when we emigrated. This Christ does not tolerate difference. He is offended by Jews. For contemporary Lutherans (and for Christians who want to draw on Luther) who will not worship a Christ offended by Jews, there are choices such as those suggested by Grosfoguel: depart the tradition (but allow it to set the agenda), embrace the tradition (and reencode its problems), or hybridize. That is going to mean hybridizing the Christ we get from Luther.

Some prominent Lutherans already embrace the idea of Christ "among others" rather than Christ alone. Notably, Nadia Bolz-Weber has stated in her book *Pastrix* that she is open to other forms of revelation and spirituality besides Christianity (Bolz-Weber [2013] 2021,

p. 15). For others, this is a dangerous direction to travel in as it challenges the bases of Christian doctrine.

The ELCA has already moved in this direction of Christ "among others". The Good Friday liturgy in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* embodies such a shift in its Bidding Prayers (traditionally offered after the sermon and hymn of the day). They include petitions "for our sisters and brothers who share our faith in Jesus Christ", "for the Jewish people, the first to hear the word of God", "for those who do not share our faith in Jesus Christ", and "for those who do not believe in God". Each prayer concludes, "We ask this through Christ our Lord" (ELCA 2006, pp. 636, 637). The decolonial emphasis in that conclusion rests on the first word: *we* ask this... It is the recognition that we who are praying are Christian, and that Christ is our Lord, but there are other possibilities. The language of the prayers has evolved from the 1978 *Lutheran Book of Worship* in which participants prayed that the Jewish people "may arrive with us at the fullness of redemption" (LBW 1978, p. 140). This clause has been struck. By the early 21st century, ELCA Lutherans recognized that prayers for the Jewish people should not impose Christian ideas upon them. Similar changes have been made to the other petitions referenced.

But that is not a complete changing of terms. It is still Luther's sixteenth-century Christ "if you want him", and if you do not want him, we will not make a big deal out of it. Hybridizing Christ might mean that when a preacher seeks to interpret Scripture by asking "what pushes Christ", by "Christ" they mean someone who is Jewish, someone who loves and does not abandon his own people. By "Christ" they might mean someone who as a human did not know everything and therefore cannot be expected to know it now. By "Christ", they might mean someone who as divine is beyond our comprehension and whose thoughts we cannot know exhaustively. Decolonizing Luther will mean hybridizing Christ.

2.5. An Exegetical Example

Saint Mark's story of Jesus and the Syro-phoenician woman offers us a test case for pushing a hybrid Christ. The reading is paired in the Revised Common Lectionary with the healing of a man who is deaf and has impeded speech (Mark 7: 24–37). It follows a text in which Mark has inaccurately stated that all Jews of his day ritually wash their hands, their food, and their cookware and utensils. Jesus rejects the practice, and in the process, declares all foods clean (Mark 7: 1–23). Jesus' wholesale rejection of Jewish identity markers contrasts sharply with his refusal to heal the Syro-phoenician woman's daughter because she is a "dog". The text is ripe for pushing Christ as one who creates a new reality in which Jewish identity markers mean nothing, and instead this gentile woman and her daughter belong. Interpreted this way, the text becomes Christ versus Judaism. Perhaps the preacher tries to draw a contemporary analogy—e.g., Judaism in Mark is like rule-based Christianity today, Jesus' welcome of the woman and her daughter is like welcoming Christianity today. But such an analogy depends upon a certain presentation of Judaism, one that is dead compared to Christianity. Could hybridizing Christ help avoid this?

The hybrid Christ is Jewish. To the best of our knowledge, Jesus never left Judaism. When the New Testament Jesus attacks or insults Judaism, the first order of interpretation is to recognize that he does so from within. Paula Fredriksen observes that New Testament arguments over practice sound like typical intra-Jewish arguments. "Within a first-century intra-Jewish context, such arguments would and did sound like conflicting ideas about the right way to be Jewish" (Fredriksen 2010, p. 81). It is possible that Mark is simply wrong about Jewish practice, but even then his text must be understood as one about the right way to worship the God of Israel. Moreover, Mark specified that Jesus had been in an argument with "Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem". The target is *Pharisaism*, and possibly more precisely that from Judea. (The phrase "all the Jews" could mean "all the Judeans".) If this is typical intra-Jewish argument, then the whole scene preceding the encounter with the Syro-phoenician woman can and probably should be read as an argument over the right way to be Jewish. Jesus' trip to Tyre in Mark

7: 24 is not the start of a gentile mission rejecting dead and legalistic Judaism; it is a trip to Tyre. Period.

What, then, is Jesus doing in the argument? Warren Carter notes that Mark identifies the Syro-phoenician woman as a *Hellene*, an elite Greek (Carter 2019, p. 192). Tyre itself is an economically powerful city, and her location in it could mark her as simultaneously elite (unlike Jesus) and under Roman rule (like Jesus). Sharon Ringe contends that the woman is "portrayed as part of the group in the region whose policies and lifestyle would have been a source of suffering for her mostly poorer, Jewish neighbors" (Ringe 2001, p. 86). Jesus, "not wanting anyone to know he was there", is met by an elite woman who asks for an exorcism. Jesus reacts to her wealth and power the way we might expect from the brother of St. James (James 2: 6–7, "Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you?"). Here, in St. Mark's Tyre, Jesus tells the elite woman, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs" (Mark 7: 27). What is Jesus doing in the argument? Insulting a rich woman. He is also going to lose. Her response—"Lord, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs"—is perhaps rephrased: if I was your dog, you would feed me. She wins with that. A hybrid Christ can lose arguments! There is more.

This scene and the one following it are connected by the Greek word "to throw". The woman asks Jesus to throw out the demon. Jesus says it is not right to throw children's food to dogs. After Jesus concedes defeat, the woman goes home and "finds the child having been thrown on the bed". The NRSV's choice of "lying" misses the divine passive, and the sense that there has been an altercation—a struggle—inside the daughter between Jesus and the demon. Jesus won.

The demonic is not mere superstition. It is not a pre-scientific explanation for illness in general or mental illness in particular. Recent studies in trauma have shown "demons and spirits" to be among known symptoms of dissociation in response to trauma (Van der Hart et al. 2006, p. 79). Before Franz Fanon became known for his anti-racism and anti-colonialism, he studied psychology and worked with psychiatric patients (both colonizers and colonized) with disorders that arose from the reality of French colonial violence. Patients with delusions, horrifying impulses, committing acts of violence of which they were unaware, could with therapy trace their difficulty to a brutal encounter between colonizer and colonized (Fanon 2021, pp. 181–233). Richard Horsley observes a correlation between an increase in episodes of spirit possession and exorcism cults and foreign invasions in Africa. The case for colonization and its demons is a subject for another study. Suffice it to say, with Horsley, that the "appearance of destructive heavenly or other spiritual forces ('fallen angels', 'demons') in Judean scribal texts coincides with the increase in military invasions by Hellenistic and then Roman imperial armies" (Horsley 2021, p. 69). When Jesus throws the demon out of the Syro-phoenician girl, perhaps he throws out damage done by imperial Rome. Mark does not tell us specifics, but imperial armies use the same playbook from place to place. The mother's sight of her daughter's "having been thrown" is evidence of Jesus having fought colonial violence.

In the following scene, Jesus meets a man who is deaf and has impeded speech. He "throws" his fingers into the man's ears, connecting this encounter to the previous one. Then, Mark says, Jesus looks up to heaven and says, "to him": "be opened". To whom was Christ speaking? A hybrid Christ does not know everything and cannot be expected to. He has just seen what colonialism did to a girl—a girl from a wealthy and powerful family—and has thrown it out. Now, he looks up to heaven and says *to God*, "be opened". He is not leaving Judaism or declaring it dead. He is thoroughly Jewish and has argued with fellow Jews about how to be Jewish. Thoroughly Jewish, he now places himself in solidarity with the world before God. He is crying to his God to be open, open to this man, open to a Syro-phoenician girl and her mother, and yes, to Jesus' own people. He is crying to a God whose thoughts he does not know, not exhaustively. And he is crying to us—the readers, the listeners, the preachers—to be opened to those around us affected by violence

or trauma. Perhaps such a hybrid Christ opens up a new space. He is not Luther's Christ, nor is he simply the opposite of Luther's Christ. He is a new thing. Perhaps.

3. Conclusions

This is but a beginning. It is a beginning in the sense that proposing a hybrid Christ opens up many possibilities (and perhaps a large can of worms). It is also a beginning in the sense that the encounter with Christ who justifies the ungodly creates new beginnings. With every justification, with every human loved, Christ challenges what we think we know of him. Preachers can allow the imported European sixteenth-century Christ with his anti-Semitism to set the agenda, either by defining what we are or what we are not. Or preachers can let Christ do what he does: become incarnate in the preachers' world, be subsumed and redefined, be "grafted" onto the world and allowed to hybridize. The resulting theology is neither Luther nor anti-Luther. It is a new thing.

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Article

A Framework for Preaching About Racial–Ethnic Identity in Christian Congregations

Jared E. Alcántara

George W. Truett Theological Seminary, Baylor University, 1100 South 3rd Street, Waco, TX 76706, USA; jared_alcantara@baylor.edu

Abstract: The central question of this article is, how can preachers in multicultural congregations develop an interculturally competent homiletical framework for explications of racial–ethnic identity? This question will be answered in two parts with a special interest in how identity is shaped in minoritized communities: first, through the recognition of intercultural identity construction in dialog with social psychology of race and intercultural communication theory, and, second, through the redistribution of knowledge and wisdom in these fields to build an interculturally competent homiletical framework. In the conclusion, we will consider the implications of this study and discuss opportunities for further research.

1. Introduction

In a racialized society, the explication of racial–ethnic identity by Christian preachers requires practical wisdom, theological reflection, and intercultural competence. Proceed with caution. Discussions of racial–ethnic identity remain fraught on account of the pervasiveness of racism, ethnocentrism, and xenophobia. Unfortunately, some Christian theologies of identity contribute to prejudice rather than eradicating it.[1] Consider the long-term destructive effects of theologies that validate or authorize colonialism, ethnic domination, or white Christian nationalism. To be part of the solution rather than the problem, preachers in multicultural contexts should proceed with wisdom. Now more than ever, they need good frameworks for reflection and action.

To aid preachers in this important work, this article asks, how can preachers in multicultural congregations develop an interculturally competent homiletical framework to explications of racial–ethnic identity? The answer comes in two parts: recognition and redistribution.

First, preachers can engage in recognition through engaging in interdisciplinary dialog with social psychology and intercultural communication theory.[2] In this article, we will consider the "racial position model" proposed by social psychologists Linda X. Zou and Sapna Cheryan (Zou and Cheryan 2017), and identity avowal and ascription in intercultural communication scholar M. J. (Mary Jane) Collier's theory of cultural identity (Collier 1998a, 1998b, 2005a, 2005b, 2009; Meyers and Collier 2005; Thompson and Collier 2006).[3]

Second, preachers can engage in the redistribution of the knowledge and wisdom from these fields to develop an interculturally competent homiletical framework that equips them with the practical wisdom they need to explicate racial–ethnic identity in preaching.

2. Recognition: Racial–Ethnic Identity in Social Science and Intercultural Communication

The first task for developing an interculturally competent homiletical framework is to *recognize* how racial–ethnic identity construction informs seeing and knowing.

2.1. Problematizing Cultural Identity

Racial–ethnic identity discussions take place within the wider context of discussions about cultural identity, a veritable circle within a wider circle. Discussions of cultural identity remain fraught not just on account of racism, ethnocentrism, and xenophobia but also due to other factors. Words such as "culture" and "identity" have been challenged in recent years. Regarding the former, theologian Kathryn Tanner (1997) writes

> It seems less and less plausible to presume that cultures are self-contained and clearly bounded units, internally consistent and unified wholes of beliefs and values simply transmitted to every member of their respective groups as principles of social order. What we might call a postmodern stress on interactive process and negotiation, indeterminacy, fragmentation, confl (Me, and porosity replaces these aspects of the modern, post-1920s understanding of culture, or, more properly... forms a new basis for their reinterpretation). (p. 38)

Regarding the latter, scholars have also interrogated identity markers beyond the bounds of race–ethnicity in areas such as gender, sexuality, class, and disability, with the recognition by many that these and other markers intersect with racial–ethnic identity as opposed to existing apart from it. For instance, in her book *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response*, Jacquelyn Grant observes the ways that race, class, and gender intersect for black Christian women; in so doing, she pushes back against white feminist accounts of women's experience and black male accounts of the black experience (Grant 1989).

In one sense, the "postmodern stress" on culture as porous and intersectional assists preachers; it helps them understand how cultural identity informs seeing and knowing especially on account of its willingness to challenge reductive binaries. In another sense, however, it falls short of the task of engagement, at least on its own. Preachers also need to know how to address the psychological, social, and cognitive dimensions of racial–ethnic identity formation. To assist in this task, we turn now to social science and intercultural communication.

2.2. Racial–Ethnic Identity and Social Science

Through the lens of social science, *the racial position model* proposed by Zou and Cheryan (2017) helps preachers better understand how racial–ethnic identity shapes seeing and knowing, more specifically, how stereotypes impact their parishioners.

In 2017, Zou and Cheryan published what would later be considered field-shaping research on the way that perception and intergroup positioning work among the four largest racial–ethnic groups in the United States: Asian Americans, Latinx Americans, White Americans, and African Americans (Zou and Cheryan 2017). They saw their model as a necessary revision given that the older model presented racial–ethnic identity as a "hierarchy along which Whites are positioned as the dominant and most advantaged group in society while African Americans are disadvantaged and devalued" (Zou and Cheryan 2017, p. 696). Although the hierarchical model helped redress ongoing problems with racism in a racialized society, it did not sufficiently account for how race and ethnicity impact two of the other major ethnic groups: Latinx Americans and Asian Americans. Where do *these groups* fit into the traditional hierarchical model if at all? Both have experienced exponential numerical growth.

In their model, Zou and Cheryan sought to push race studies beyond a reductive black–white binary and to confront implicit bias across all four groups. Regarding the latter, they took special interest in how each of the four groups described experiences of racism and ethnic prejudice, how they perceived or stereotyped other groups, and how they positioned their groups and other groups along "two axes of subordination": superior/inferior and American/foreign (Zou and Cheryan 2017, p. 696).

To conduct their research, Zou and Cheryan engaged national survey data, more than 1000 coded surveys, and the latest social psychological research. In the coded surveys,

they asked participants to recount their experiences of ethnic prejudice and racism. After surveying the data, their research findings revealed stereotype patterns that occurred across two axes: inferior–superior (y-axis) and foreign–American (x-axis). They called their model the racial position model.[4] Each of the four groups landed in one of four quadrants or positions across the y-axis and the x-axis. The following graph, Figure 1, demonstrates where each of the four groups landed based on larger societal perceptions or stereotypes (Zou and Cheryan 2017, p. 698):
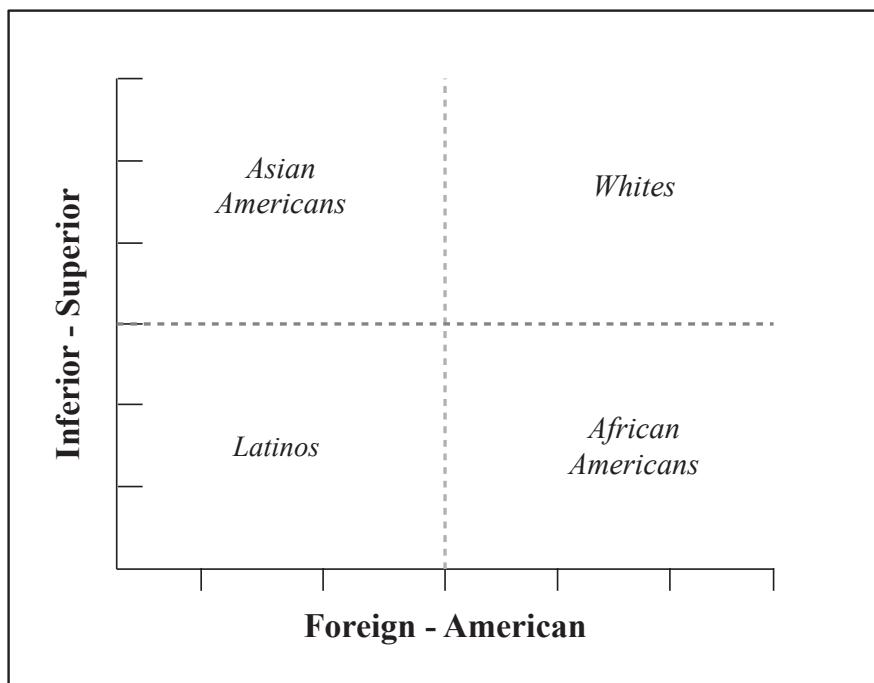
Figure 1. Zou and Cheryan, "Two Axes of Subordination".

According to the model, Asian Americans are perceived or stereotyped as Superior–Foreign, Latinx Americans as Inferior–Foreign, White Americans as Superior–American, and African Americans as Inferior–American.

When Zou and Cheryan conducted a follow-up study with Native Americans and Arab Americans, they used the model to determine where both groups landed within the four quadrants. Native Americans were in the same quadrant as African Americans: Inferior–American. Ironically, they were perceived as less American than White Americans, a trend that was "consistent with previous research" (Zou and Cheryan 2017, p. 710). Arab Americans landed in the same quadrant as Latinx Americans: Inferior–Foreign. However, they were positioned as more foreign and more inferior than Latinx Americans; in fact, they were perceived as more foreign and inferior to any other group. Regarding the positioning of Arab Americans, Zou and Cheryan proposed that their "findings may be capturing a specific cultural and historic moment in which Arab and Muslim Americans are perceived to hold a particularly low position in American society" (Zou and Cheryan 2017, p. 710).

The racial position model gives preachers a multidimensional way to understand how ethnic prejudice and racism impact different groups within their congregations. In general, Asian Americans in churches are perceived or stereotyped by others as superior and foreign, Latinx Americans as inferior and foreign, White Americans as superior and American, and African Americans as inferior and American. Although each group is impacted by racial position differently, consider the homiletical impact of words of affirmation for groups that are perceived as inferior or the power of reminders that a group's members are in a family, knit together into a community, when they are perceived as foreign in their own country.

2.3. Racial–Ethnic Identity and Intercultural Communication

Through the lens of intercultural communication, one aspect of M. J. Collier's *theory of cultural identity, identity avowal, and identity ascription* helps preachers better understand how racial–ethnic identity shapes seeing and knowing among parishioners and in society at large (Collier 2009). Avowed identities pertain to the identities that individuals or groups perceive about themselves or claim for themselves on their own and with others, whereas ascribed identities pertain to the identities conferred upon individuals or groups by others and perceived as such by individuals and group members. Collier (1998b) describes the differences between avowal and ascription this way:

> In-group cultural identities and relationships with out-group members are constructed contextually through avowal and ascription. Avowal consists of the perceived identity enacted by the self or group members in a given communication situation. In other words, avowal is, This is who I am (we are) as a member(s) of my (our) cultural group... Ascription of identity consists of perceptions of others' identities and self's perception of identities attributed to self by other: This is how I see you seeing me as a member of my cultural group here and now. (pp. 132–33)

Individuals and group members exercise little to no agency over *identity ascriptions* as these pertain to the perceptions or stereotypes that others put upon them at first glance. Although identity ascription is part of being human and is not always bad, it also has the power to cause hurt and harm to others. For instance, Collier and co-researcher Monique A. Meyers (Meyers and Collier 2005) discovered that, in interviews, judges, attorneys, and advocates ascribed value-based cultural identity judgments toward female abuse survivors seeking restraining orders, having a tendency to see them as deficient, weak, emotional, submissive, and, in some cases, deserving of their abuse.[5]

In contrast to identity ascription, individuals and group members exercise agency when they engage in *identity avowal*. They enact or claim the identity markers that are most important to them with whomever they please and sometimes despite how others perceive them.

Although identity avowal can be liberative, e.g., "Latino Strong" or "Black and Proud", it does not have to be liberative. Sometimes, it further instantiates prejudice. For instance, when Collier and co-researcher Jennifer Thompson (Thompson and Collier 2006) conducted interviews with interracial couples in the mid-2000s, some couples evaded discussions of race altogether in their relationship, and in the interviews sometimes, appealing to how far society had come since these discussions were relevant; some professed to be colorblind. Although this proclivity came from a heartfelt place in that there was a desire to preserve and protect the relationship at all costs even if it meant avoiding difficult conversations, the couples had also evaded discussing complex racial issues and claimed to be colorblind in a society that was anything but colorblind or post-racial.[6] Their agency prevented them from going deeper together in honest and open dialog.

Individuals and group members tend to make two decisions when it comes to their avowed identities when they are with out-group members. First, they decide on the *salience of their avowal*; that is, they determine the relative importance of one or two identity markers in a given context. The level of salience differs depending on various factors such as situation, time, interaction, and interlocutor (Collier 2005b, p. 239; Collier 2009). According to Collier, "different cultural identities may become salient depending on who is present, the history of the group, topic and type of encounter or episode, language game in use... particular cultural identities are enacted and become salient and contested in particular historical, political, economic, and social contexts" (Collier 1998b, p. 132).

Second, they decide on the *intensity of avowal*; that is, they determine how strongly they want to defend their avowed identities if or when these identity markers are called into question, interrogated, or tested. Collier would be the first to point out that, just like the salience of avowal, the intensity of avowal depends on a host of factors in the intercul-

tural exchange such as "situation, context, topic, and relationship" (Collier 2005b, p. 240; Collier 2009).

Perhaps an example of identity avowal and identity ascription will make Collier's theory of cultural identity less abstract and more concrete. In 2005, Collier published her findings on how racial identity and cultural identifications were discussed and negotiated in interviews with South Africans from 1992 and 1999. The interviewees included white Afrikaner South Africans, white South Africans of British descent, and black South Africans.

In one interview, a young woman named Nomsa, who was a black South African, described a conversation she had with her friend who was a white South African. In the interview, Nomsa described the racial identity that her friend tried to assign her because of how she spoke and the vocabulary she used, what Collier refers to as identity ascription, and the racial identity she chose for herself in response to her friend, what Collier (2005b, October) calls identity avowal:

> I think with my friend I think the biggest argument we ever had it was [she asked me] 'How, why do you speak differently from them?' This whole 'them' and 'me'. I mean I'm, I AM a 'black girl, like everyone else, and I happen to speak a bit differently so she has this whole 'them' and 'you'. 'I'm different I'm not 'black' I'm special, you know'. But the way I handled it; I just told her I am too 'black' [meaning: "I am black also"], get over it, and she did understand. Cause we are the same, a 'black' person is a 'black' person, here's not a different or special 'black' person. (p. 307)

In this intercultural encounter, Nomsa navigated the identity ascribed to her by her white friend, that of someone who was special or different or not like the others because of her vocabulary, and she rightfully turned her friend's identity ascription on its head. Through identity avowal, she claimed that she was black just like other black South Africans. Her way of speaking and vocabulary did not somehow make her less black. "I am too black", or "I am black also", she responded. A black South African is a black South African regardless of how they speak.

The language of identity avowal and identity ascription (in Collier's cultural theory of identity) provides preachers with much needed frameworks for determining how racial–ethnic agency functions in the lives of their parishioners and in their own lives as well. When they discuss racial–ethnic identity, whether inside or outside the pulpit, they have tools for meaningful discussions. They can describe the identity markers that society *ascribes* to listeners in terms of their racial–ethnic identities (knowing that the ascriptions will be different based on the social location of the person or persons listening), and they can point listeners to the power of *avowing* the racial–ethnic identities that are most important to them with whomever they please and despite how others perceive them.

3. Redistribution: Toward an Interculturally Competent Homiletic

Now that a survey has been conducted of Zou and Cheryan's racial position model and Collier's cultural identity theory (identity avowal and identity ascription), we can turn our attention to the second task: the *redistribution* of the knowledge gained from these fields for the sake of developing an interculturally competent homiletical framework. This framework can equip preachers with the practical wisdom they need to explicate racial–ethnic identity in sermons. I will propose two building blocks for this framework: first, embrace pluralism and, second, become an intercultural ethnographer.

3.1. Building Block # 1: Embrace Pluralism—It Is Here to Stay

Preachers in multicultural congregations already know intuitively that shifts in demographics will become more important to congregational life in the future. Demographic shifts have already changed the landscape of churches and communities and will continue to do so with increasing force in the years ahead. The same shifts that have taken place in the global church are also taking place in the church in the United States. As early as the early 2000s, sociologist R. Stephen Warner (2006) predicted the "de-Europeanization

of American Christianity". In a 2023 op-ed in the *New York Times*, pastor and author Tish Harrison Warren (2023) writes

> We often hear that the most significant trend in religion in America is the rise of the "nones", those who profess no religious affiliation. That demographic group is indeed important for the future of religion, culture and politics in America, and as of 2021, Pew reported that 29 percent of all adults identified as atheists, agnostics or "nothing in particular". But alongside that trend, the changing demographics of Christianity promise to transform faith and religious discourse. We cannot assume that America will become more secular so long as the future of America is less white. (online)

Although the demographic shift in the church is still in process, it remains an inherent inevitability rather than a logical possibility. The preachers of today and tomorrow will be preachers in an intercultural church with an intercultural future.

I experienced the power of demographic change firsthand when I served as a teaching pastor at a church in New Jersey in the 2010s. I served at my church for four years. The first year I served there, non-white new memberships (i.e., people joining the church) accounted for 30 percent of new memberships and white memberships accounted for the other 70 percent. By the fourth year, the percentages had flipped with non-white new memberships accounting for 70 percent of new memberships and white memberships accounting for the other 30 percent.

Embrace pluralism (Berger 2014). It is here to stay.[7] Although the demographic shifts may not happen in the same way that they did at my church, they will happen. Hopefully, most if not all preachers in multicultural congregations have embraced pluralism already in their journey. If they ignore it, they do so at their peril.

The models that have been proposed in this article can help preachers in multicultural congregations navigate the realities of pluralism with greater efficiency and impact, in particular, as it pertains to explicating racial–ethnic identity. In Zou and Cheryan's racial position model, preachers have access to a model that explains how perception or stereotypes work across the four major racial–ethnic groups in the United States during a time in which the church is faced with a decision: will it embrace pluralism as an opportunity for missions or reject pluralism as a threat to the status quo? Granted, the racial position model does not offer preachers prescriptions, but it is also not designed to do so. It is descriptive. Rather, it offers preachers the language and knowledge they need to achieve deeper contextualization in their congregation. Deeper knowledge of how racial–ethnic stereotypes work means deeper contextualization, and deeper contextualization means greater intercultural competence in pastoring and preaching to laypeople.

Collier's work in cultural identity theory provides preachers with both descriptive and prescriptive possibilities for homiletical reflection and action[8] (Collier 1998a). Identity ascription typically arises from trusting perceptive hunches that are stereotypical. People bring preconceived notions or perceptions to encounters with others in intercultural communication, the descriptive dimension of cultural identity negotiation. However, identity avowal does not follow the same pattern. Collier describes what happens when communicators decide on their most important identity markers through salience of avowal and intensity of avowal, another mark of descriptive action. But identity avowal also gives people agency to prescribe identities that counter false perceptions, stereotypes, a veritable counternarrative. Although identity avowal does not always beget liberative praxis, it often does. Consider again the testimony of Nomsa, a young black South African woman, and her interaction with her young white South African friend, who was also a woman. Nomsa "exerts individual agency in this interaction to claim her own identifications" (Collier 2005a, p. 307).

In my judgment, identity avowal opens up creative possibilities for theologically imaginative work among pastors in multicultural congregations. When used rightly, it leads to liberative praxis. Dominant voices in society may ascribe identities to people of color as foreign and inferior or American and inferior (as Zou and Cheryan observe), but

preachers can declare that God sees them as family, knows they belong, and honors their racial–ethnic identity markers rather than seeing them as a deficit. No one is inferior who is a bearer of the Imago Dei. When preachers explicate racial–ethnic identity in a manner that activates avowal for individuals and group members, and they explicate Christian identity in a manner that does the same, a word of life (cf. Phil 2:16) may be found on their lips when they preach. They cannot control or commander God's Spirit in such a way that they can guarantee that it will be a word of life, but they can curate conditions and proclaim gospel realities in such a way that they become bearers of good news for all people.

3.2. Building Block # 2: Become an Intercultural Ethnographer

In Leonora Tubbs Tisdale's influential book, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, she urges pastors to become "congregational ethnographer(s)" in service to faithful and fitting contextualization (Tisdale 1997, pp. 18, 35, 59–61, 64–76, 91). Drawing on language from cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) and his notion of a "thick description" of culture, she writes the following (Tisdale 1997):

> Preachers need to become amateur ethnographers–skilled in observing and in thickly describing the subcultural signs and symbols of the congregations they serve. The task of congregational exegesis is a 'microscopic' one, involving attention to the very local actions and idioms of congregational life. The task is an imaginative and interpretive one, requiring pastors to guess at meanings and constantly to reassess those guesses. And the task is an open-ended one, as the quest for meaning carries pastors into the ever-deepening waters of congregational life with its shifting tides and currents. (p. 60)

Tisdale's proposal is not without its limitations.[9] She offers a general analysis for how to perform ecclesial ethnography, but only in white monocultural congregations. Her proposal does not account for the nuances of a multicultural congregation. Even so, her interest in people and demographics can be a helpful starting point for multicultural preaching.

In her chapter "Exegeting the Congregation", Tisdale commends seven symbols of congregational exegesis that preachers can engage in to achieve the "thick description" that is needed: stories and interviews, archival material, demographics, architecture and visual arts, rituals, events and activities, and people[10] (Brown and Powery 2016). For the purposes of this article, we will focus only on the symbols that are most relevant to the explication of racial–ethnic identity: people and demographics. We focused on demographics in the last section for Strategy # 1. In this section, we will focus on people as crucial sources of multicultural learning.

She invites pastors to ask the following: Who are the key stakeholders in the church? Who is vocal? Who is silent? Who is considered wise? Who sits on the margins? Who fits? Who doesn't fit? (Tisdale 1997, pp. 76–77).

Although these questions are important and need to be asked by pastors, they do not seem to get at the racial–ethnic dynamics that shape seeing and knowing in a racialized society. Granted, some racial–ethnic dynamics will come up when a pastor engages in another one of the seven symbols of exegesis: stories and interviews.

Consider how Zou and Cheryan's racial position model and Collier's work on identity avowal and ascription might create space for fresh, culturally responsive questions:

- In a multicultural congregation, where do different segments of the community land in Zou and Cheryan's racial position model with a y-axis of inferior–superior and an x-axis of foreign–American? How might this position make them more or less silent, more or less marginalized, and more or less able to fit in or not fit in within the congregation?
- How does one's position in the racial position model impact their self-understanding and understanding of others? What are the benefits and drawbacks of this self-understanding and understanding of others? How might preachers address both?

- Drawing from Collier's work, how might racial–ethnic identity ascriptions (which are more commonly known as stereotypes) adversely impact segments within the congregation, and how might these ascriptions pose a threat to the spiritual, emotional, and psychological wellbeing of congregants?
- What creative possibilities are there for various markers of Christian identity to redress the wounds caused by identity ascriptions or racial positioning? For instance, the Christian metaphor of family could potentially redress the wound of being stereotyped by others as poor or fatherless or being deemed by others as foreign and inferior.
- What overlap or fusion is there if at all between the racial–ethnic identities that parishioners avow and the Christian identities that people avow? For instance, when a person avows their racial or ethnic identity as beautiful as a counternarrative to stereotypes that may tell them otherwise, that same person can find similar affirmations in Scripture; they are "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14).

The answers to these and other questions will not only help preachers become better intercultural ethnographers. More importantly, they will help them know how best to challenge stereotypes, confront falsehoods, redress wounds, and engage in the work of theological imagination when they preach.

4. Conclusions

The central question of this article was, *how can preachers in multicultural congregations develop an interculturally competent homiletical framework for explications of racial–ethnic identity?* The answer came in two parts: recognition and redistribution. First, we proposed that preachers engage in recognition in dialog with social psychology and intercultural communication theory, more specifically, the racial position model proposed by Zou and Cheryan and the language of identity avowal and identity ascription as it was laid out in Collier's cultural identity theory. Second, we proposed that preachers engage in redistribution by developing an interculturally competent homiletical framework that equips them with the practical wisdom they need to explicate racial–ethnic identity in sermons.

Although insights from social science and intercultural communication give preachers the language they need to build a homiletical framework that is more interculturally competent than it would be otherwise, the insights gained from these two fields only take them part of the way.

At least two opportunities for further research arise as a result of this study. First, further research can be conducted on how to move from an interculturally competent framework for preaching toward practical strategies that can be deployed. A question that has *not* been answered in-depth in this study is, which concrete practices and practical strategies can be pursued as a result of the insights gained from interdisciplinary dialog? Second, further research can be conducted to bring racial–ethnic identity into dialog with Christian identity. This possibility was hinted at in the sections on embracing pluralism and becoming intercultural ethnographers, but it remains as underdeveloped. To be sure, significant research is still to be performed on the fusion between racial–ethnic identity and Christian identity. It represents fertile soil in homiletics. At present, most of this soil remains untilled.

Notes

1. For examples of Christian theologies of identity that catalyze racism, nationalism, or a combination, see Gorski et al. (2022), Abanes (1996), and Zeskind (1986).

2. In hermeneutics and phenomenology, another helpful conversation partner is Paul Ricoeur and his work on "the course of recognition". Ricoeur argues that one is called to the work of recognizing oneself and one's identity, and also called to the work of mutual recognition, or the self in relationship to those who are different and in relation to the world. For more on the course of recognition, see Ricoeur (2007).

3. I also draw from Zou and Cheryan's work in my discussion of how stereotypes, racism, and racialization adversely impact seminarians of color (Alcántara 2020).

4. Zou and Cheryan acknowledge and appreciate that their model is not devoid of being influenced by other models. They show how their model interacts with three other models of racial–ethnic perception: the ABC Model of stereotype content that prioritizes "agency/socioeconomic success and progressive-conservative beliefs", the SCM Model's axes of warmth–coldness and competence–incompetence, and the Image Theory Model's trifold of "relative power, relative status, and goal compatibility" (Zou and Cheryan 2017, p. 698).

5. Meyers and Collier (2005) discovered in their survey of interviews that court officials (judges, lawyers, and advocates) perpetuated "dominant and oppressive discourses" that had a direct and negative impact on how women (especially minorities) were perceived in the courtroom (p. 267). The interviewees often cast women as weak, submissive, and sometimes deserving of abuse (pp. 268–70).

6. Thompson and Collier (2006) drew six conclusions on cultural identity from surveying the interviews with interracial couples. For conclusion five, they write "Emphasis on similarity and their relationship is manifest through race evasive and power evasive discourse by some couples who for example, circumvent any debate about racial issues and institutional forces outside the relationship by talking about how progressive things are now, and not needing to 'think' about issues like racial difference" (p. 503).

7. In the final book he published before he died, sociologist Peter L. Berger (2014) continued to reject the basic tenets of secularization theory, arguing that the most significant challenge facing North American society and the church was not secularization but pluralism. He writes "Secularization theory, based on the idea that modernity necessarily brings about a decline of religion, has for a time served as a paradigm for the study of religion. It can no longer be maintained in the face of the empirical evidence. A new paradigm is needed. I think that it must be based on the many implications of the phenomenon of pluralism. I propose that a new paradigm should be able to deal with two pluralisms—the co-existence of different religions and the co-existence of religious and secular discourses" (p. ix).

8. For instance, Collier (1998a) uses her work on identity avowal and ascription to promote intercultural friendships. In these friendships, interlocutors aim at the same goal, an ideal: avowed and ascribed identities match in the intercultural encounter (pp. 370–78).

9. For a critique of Tisdale's approach as being too monocultural and local, see Kim (2010).

10. In her co-authored book *Ways of the Word*, Sally Brown (Brown and Powery 2016) critiques and builds on Tisdale's seven sources of context. She contends that preachers must consider three vantage points in congregational life in the work of contextualization: the close-up view of a congregation's symbols and stories a la Tisdale, the wide view that looks at the cultural dynamics that operate in a local congregation, and the hidden view that examines the power dynamics in the church. Regarding the third vantage point, Brown writes, "Preachers need to know who exerts control over decision-making processes and who is marginalized... Tracking the flow of power in a congregation is crucial to wise pastoral leadership" (p. 117). For the purposes of this article, the two vantage points that would be most relevant to racial–ethnic identity would be the wide view and the hidden view.

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