Signature Page on File

950 North Main Street, 2nd Floor
Findlay, OH 45840
Mailing Address:
PO Box 479
Findlay, OH 45839
419-434-4200

Preaching with Power: The Role and Impact of Prophetic Preaching within the Black Church

A Project Submitted to the Faculty

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Doctor of Ministry

by

Michael A. Carr, Jr

Winebrenner Theological Seminary

Findlay, Ohio

June 30, 2025

Dedication

This study is dedicated first and foremost to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, through whom I can do all things. Next, I dedicate this research to the Black Church, the "collective," for without you, there would be no us. Even in the 21st century, we continue to fight against social marginalization, economic exploitation, and cultural dehumanization.

To my wife and children, Erica, Michael, Mackenzie, Mackyli, and Maddisyn. You all have given up so much for me to achieve another milestone in my life and ministry. I love you all dearly and appreciate you taking the time to listen to me share my research, even when I know you had other things to do.

Thank you to my parents, siblings, and a host of friends, colleagues, and fellow believers who have been blessed to accompany me on this journey. To my maternal grandmother, the late Mary Clinton, who sleeps with the ancestors in the arms of Jesus. Although you did not have much to give us in terms of material wealth, you ensured we were wealthy in knowing Jesus and found Him within the context of the Black Church. To my Temple of Praise Church family, thank you for your prayers, encouraging words, financial gifts, and for allowing me to practice weekly as a prophetic preacher speaking truth to power.

Finally, to my mentors and homiletical heroes who engage in the practice of prophetic preaching, I dedicate this work to you. Please continue to lift your voice and lend your support in our ongoing struggle. We shall overcome!

Abstract

This study is a qualitative examination of the historical and contemporary role of prophetic preaching as a transformative tool for congregational change and cultural activism within the Black Church. Rooted in the biblical tradition of the Hebrew prophets and exemplified by Jesus, prophetic preaching has served as both a spiritual guide and an instrument for social justice, particularly within the context of the Black Church in the United States. The study traces the evolution of this tradition from its origins in the era of slavery to the Civil Rights Movement and into the modern era.

Drawing on semi-structured, open-ended interviews with active and retired Black pastors who engage in prophetic preaching, this study offers insight into how sermons classified as prophetic inspire congregational change and cultural activism. Historically, the Black Church has been a beacon of hope and a leader in the struggle for liberation and justice. Yet, its prophetic voice has diminished in recent decades, contributing to a deepening divide between the Black Church and the Black Community.

The study argues for the reclamation of the Black Church's prophetic voice, stressing the need for preaching that speaks truth to power and addresses the contemporary social, political, and economic injustices affecting both the Black Church and the Black Community. Highlighting the importance of a Black hermeneutic, an interpretive lens of Scripture rooted in the lived experience of Black Americans, this study reveals how such a viewpoint informs both the content and delivery of prophetic preaching. The study concludes with practical applications for recovering prophetic preaching, enabling it to remain relevant, motivate congregational change and cultural activism, and lead in the ongoing struggle for liberation and justice.

Acknowledgments

In the spirit of the Black Church tradition, giving honor to God who is the head of my life. It’s another day’s journey, and I'm glad about it. Additionally, I would like to extend my gratitude to my project team, Dr. Bruce Coats, Dr. Donald Perryman, and Dr. Kathryn Helleman, for their support, encouragement, and guidance in helping me complete this study. I would also like to express my appreciation to Dr. Martin Johnson for his keen eye for detail. My time at Winebrenner Theological Seminary has provided me with invaluable insights from both cultural and social perspectives, equipping me for service as a doctor of the church. This journey has been memorable.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

Chapter One

Introduction

This research is born from the historical and contemporary role of prophetic preaching within the Black Church as a transformative force for congregational change and cultural activism. Prophetic preaching in the eras of Slavery, the Civil Rights Movement, and the modern era form the backdrop of this project. Since the establishment of the invisible institution, prophetic preaching has long been embedded within the Black religious experience in the United States, serving both as a spiritual guide and a vehicle for cultural activism. It is grounded in the biblical tradition of the Hebrew prophets speaking the Word of God of salvation and judgment, declaring truth to power, advocating for justice, addressing moral decay, and calling for righteousness.[1] Similarly, Jesus' stance in Luke 4 presents a challenge to the status quo, including economic disparity, social arrangements of the day, and the liberation of the captive, which emphasizes prophetic preaching. Prophetic Preaching has emerged within the Black Church as a response to societal injustices. According to Melva Wilson Costen, the invisible institution is an early reference to the Black Church and how enslaved people worshipped in secret places out of the eyesight and earshot of the enslaver. The hidden places where enslaved people worshiped were often referred to as "brush harbors" or "hush harbors." Slave worship also took place in cabins, in the woods, and sometimes in swamps and ravines. It is from the

[1] Kenyatta R. Gilbert, *A Pursued Justice: Black Preaching from the Great Migration to Civil Rights*, (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 55. Additionally, the biblical passages of Isaiah 1:17, Amos 5:24, and Micah 6:8 are just three examples which demonstrate the Hebrew prophets speaking truth to power, advocating for justice, addressing moral decay, and calling for righteousness.

invisible institution and the frequency of slave worship that the establishment of the subsequent "visible institution" or Black Church came into existence.[2]

Martha Simmons and Frank Thomas refer to the invisible institution as:

> blacks participating in social and religious practices from preaching to conjuring to rebellion-hatching, to mourning, to moaning, to calling on Jesus…. The invisible institution existed alongside the churches that blacks attended with white and alongside the gospel that was preached by white who advocated submission and docility. Later it continued to exist alongside churches formed by blacks and for blacks that began with the espousal of white social and biblical doctrines than they were to black liberation. It is the invisible institution that helped refashion the black preachers, who became the storyteller, prophet, underground railroad conductor, and hope-igniter in the Americas.[3]

Black preachers have historically embodied a prophetic witness where the prophetic voice within the Black Church used their pulpits to address the social ills of the day,[4] push the boundaries, advocate for the liberation of the oppressed, and empower congregants to stand for justice.[5] Although the Hebrew prophets did not, as Kenyatta Gilbert suggests, "preach from scripture based on his witness as the contemporary cleric does to discern and proclaim how God works in current times, the prophet served as Yahweh's human instrument, carrying out Yahweh's instruction in the social realm."[6]

Prophetic preaching, grounded in the biblical tradition of the prophets and exemplified by Jesus, speaks truth to power, courageously confronting oppressive systems and serving as a

---

[2] Melva Wilson Costen, *African American Christian Worship* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993), 36-37.

[3] Martha Simmons and Frank Thomas, *Preaching with Sacred Fire: An Anthology of African American Preaching, from 1750 to the Present* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 2010), 21-23.

[4] Kenyatta Gilbert, *Exodus Preaching: Crafting Sermons About Justice and Hope* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2018), xi.

[5] William Zachary, Jr., "Prophetic Preaching that Transforms A Congregation into A Prophetic Church" (D.Min. diss., United Theological Seminary, Dayton, OH, 2015), 33.

[6] Gilbert, *A Pursued Justice*, 56-70.

divine summons to challenge social, political, and economic injustices. It calls for transformative change that disrupts the status quo, echoing James Cone's conviction that Black theology is fundamentally a theology of liberation, emerging from, and speaking for, communities that experience oppression.[7] Based on the work of Clarence Wright, "Scripture shows us that God responds to injustice with action."[8] Black preaching, infused with prophetic proclamation rooted in Scripture, not only reveals God's response to and involvement in the social injustices affecting the Black Church and community but also announces an alternative reality, calling congregants to congregational transformation and cultural activism.[9] Gilbert posits, "Black preaching provides a clear example of African American prophetic preaching."[10] By drawing on the prophetic tradition, Black preaching uplifts those whose experiences in the United States have been marked by adversity and oppression.

This prophetic tradition of preaching faith and hope in God despite present sufferings still resonates within the Black Church. From the Exodus narrative to the Hebrew prophets and ultimately to the suffering of Jesus, the Black Church has drawn parallels between its situation and those recorded in Scripture.[11] Gilbert offers three characteristics that shape the idea that

---

[7] James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 17.

[8] Clarence E. Wright, *The Sunday After: Preaching in Moments and Movements* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2022), 18.

[9] Edward P. Wimberly, *Pastoral Care in the Black Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1979), 25. Wimberly posits the idea that "In the case of the slave a world view emerged that not only gave meaning to the slave's existence but also provided the efficacious power that sustained the salve in a hostile environment. The world view of the slave projected God as the important resource of sustaining. For the salve, God was envisaged as being immanently involved in all of life and he was the ultimate source of life. The world view provided explanations of how God had power over the universe, and held that faith in him provided the power to sustain the slave in the midst of chaos. The slave believed God was in control of the matters of the world and in his own time would make things right in the world."

[10] Gilbert, *A Pursued Justice,* 66.

[11] Gilbert, *A Pursued Justice,* 67-69.

Black prophetic preaching draws its message and agenda from the Hebrew prophets. First, "prophetic Black preaching is God-summoned speech that runs counter to the tendency to reduce the prophetic Word proclaimed to positivistic history or modern rationality. Second, prophetic Black preaching dares to speak about God's presence in places where pain, oppression, and neglect are all too apparent. Third, this distinctive form of prophetic discourse names experiences within concrete and temporal spaces as holy."[12] These parallels help us view God as a liberator and emancipator. The uniqueness of prophetic preaching is the idea of a God who intervenes on behalf of the suffering.[13] The influence of the prophets and Jesus has shaped a distinct tradition of prophetic preaching within the Black Church, which was birthed out of slavery and continued through the Civil Rights era and beyond. This tradition combines biblical authority, the Black experience, and calls for liberation and justice, employing a powerful homiletical style to address the social ills that contributed to the founding of the United States.

As observed by Donald L. Perryman, the historical development of the United States is complex, shaped by issues of racism, class, and geography. From its inception, the nation sanctioned policies that forcibly brought enslaved Africans to the "new world," removing their language, cultural identity, religion, and family ties, condemning them to a life of involuntary servitude. Over more than four centuries, these individuals and their descendants have been regarded as outsiders and inferior citizens through systemic social and cultural control, including segregation, discrimination, and humiliation.[14] Ibram X. Kendi argues that the legacy of slavery evolved into a system of racial inequity, becoming a framework that prophetic preaching must

---

[12] Gilbert, *A Pursued Justice,* 68-70.

[13] Gilbert, *A Pursued Justice,* 69.

[14] Donald L. Perryman, "The Role of the Black Church in Addressing Collateral Damage from the U.S. War on Drugs" (Ph.D. diss., Antioch University, Yellow Springs, OH, 2019), 1.

address through its critique of societal injustices.[15] In his master's thesis, F. Keith Slaughter states that "Blacks have suffered tremendously in our relationship with persons who classify themselves as white and who practice white supremacy, whether consciously or unconsciously as a part of systemic racism."[16] Racism can be defined as any program or practice of injustice legitimatized by race.[17] In her book, *What Does It Mean To Be White: Developing White Racial Literacy,* Robin DiAngelo defines race as "The false concept that superficial adaptations to geography are genetic and biological determinants that result in significant differences among groups of human beings."[18] Jemar Tisby in *The Color of Compromise: The Truth About the American Church's Complicity in Racism* suggests, "Race and racism are social constructs. There is no biological basis for the superiority or inferiority of any human being based on the amount of melanin in her or his skin."[19] Although geography and biology may not be a basis for race and racism, the fact is that race and racism are deeply embedded into American society.

Within the United States, racism is primarily "the expression of systemic power over people of color."[20] DiAngelo proposes that the term people of color "refers collectively to all of the racial groups who do not have white identity and the resources that white identity provides

---

[15] Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* (New York, NY: Nation Books, 2016), 237.

[16] F. Keith Slaughter, "The Impact Potential of Liberative Black Preaching on the 'Beingness' of African Descent Persons in the Black Church Context: The Therapeutic Dimensions of Black Preaching" (Master's thesis, Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta, GA, 2009), 14.

[17] Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (New York: NY: University Press, 2001), 154.

[18] Robin DiAngelo, *What Does It Mean to Be White? Developing White Racial Literacy* (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 2012), 82.

[19] Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019), 19, 27.

[20] Joseph Barndt, *Understanding and Dismantling Racism: The Twenty-First Century Challenge to White America* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 59.

(white privilege); people not defined or perceived as white. In the United States, whites are the dominant group and people of color are the minoritized group."[21] For this study, the term "people of color" will refer to the Black Community. Over the past decade, police brutality against Black men and women has garnered national attention. In recent years, a significant number of deaths has been observed among Black Americans at the hands of those chosen to protect and serve, which has not only garnered national attention but also prompted countless protests and other sociopolitical undertakings aimed at addressing the age-old issues of racism, injustice, and segregation faced by Black Americans. In his doctoral dissertation, Demar Felix Fearon posits, "The abuses of power by the police towards African American residents are reflective of America's racist history and institutions. Acknowledging this history is the first step towards changing these unjust systems that make black residents feel inferior to the white men with power."[22]

In *Between the World and Me*, Ta-Nehisi Coates warns his son about the harsh realities of race in America by writing, "I would like you to know; in America, it is tradition to destroy the black body – it is heritage."[23] Fearon further asserts:

> They were unarmed, but the police claimed they were fearful for their lives. Hence, it leads me to conclude that Black people are perceived as a threat in the United States of America. The reason for my conclusion stems from the consistent violent acts perpetrated against Black and Brown Bodies in America by white authoritative individuals and institutions. Black and Brown Bodies have been brutalized throughout this country's history, police brutality is a byproduct of this tragic history.[24]

---

[21] DiAngelo, *What Does It Mean to Be White?* 84, 87.

[22] Demar Felix Fearon, "Social Justice Preaching in the Seventh-Day Adventist Church" (D.Min. diss., Drew University, Madison, NJ, 2022), 23.

[23] Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (New York, NY: Random House, 2015), 132.

[24] Fearon, "Social Justice Preaching," 24-25.

The contemporary Black Church has an obligation to confront the sociopolitical, spiritual, and economic issues of inflation, unemployment, gentrification, food insecurities, healthcare disparities heightened by the emergence of a global pandemic known as COVID-19, voter suppression, educational inequities, police brutality, mass incarceration which has disproportionally impacted people of color, white supremacy and white privilege, the rise of white evangelicalism, white Christian nationalism, and the like.[25] The Black Church must defend the rights of all people as God's children created in His image.[26] This study intends to make an appeal for the Black Church to advocate for and lead in liberation and social justice, following the example set by Jesus when dealing with the imperial powers of Rome in Luke's Gospel.[27]

Arguing from a similar position, Keith Savage makes the claim that:

> There is a long tradition of the Black Church to link social justice, as an ethic of religious practice and faith, with political and social change. It is an aspect which asserts that God is the God of the politically, socially, and economically oppressed and of the marginalized within society. It is the physical manifestation of biblical salvation and truth among humanity where all experience divine love, freedom, justice, and peace. It is a theology born from scriptural themes of prophetic calls for a return to justice and the life and ministry of Jesus Christ among the marginalized and poor.[28]

The Black Church historically holds a hermeneutic of liberation and justice rooted in the Black experience within the United States.[29] Many Black Christians approach the Bible through a distinct lens, which serves as the basis for interpretation. Kenneth H. Hill proposes that there are

---

[25] For an explanation for not capitalizing "white," see the definition for "Black" in the Definitions section.

[26] Michael Battle, *The Black Church in America: African American Christian Spirituality* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), xiii.

[27] Luke 8:26-39, [KJV]. Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced in this project are from the King James Version.

[28] Keith A. Savage "Reclaiming the Black Church's Prophetic Voice for Social Justice Through the Social Critique of the Eighth-Century Hebrew Prophets" (D.Min. diss., United Theological Seminary, Dayton, OH, 2013), 2.

four sources of biblical interpretation in the Black Church. First, the Bible itself is a source of interpretation and is considered a prophetic book with authority in its liberating story. The second source is experience. Blacks experienced God through the debasing and demoralizing system of oppression known as slavery. The third source of interpretation is the Black Church itself, providing hope and liberation. Through stories and sermons that highlight God's liberating actions, oppressed people discover value. The fourth source of interpretation is culture. Blacks were able to resist the white dominance through music, art, literature, and folk tales.[30] Kenneth Hill, Cleophus LaRue, Henry H. Mitchell, and other scholars refer to this as a Black hermeneutic.[31] This hermeneutic serves as a fundamental or positional interpretation of Scripture "that practices social justice as a communal process to influence Christian values, hearts, and practice for just social transformations within the larger society."[32] These practices of social transformation serve as the lens through which Blacks understand Scripture and God's involvement in their lives, appealing "for the contemporary Black Church leadership and laity to re-hear and reclaim the prophetic appeal of the Christian Bible and link it to the prophetic call of practical application or praxis."[33]

---

[30] Kenneth H. Hill, *Religious Education in the African American Tradition: A Comprehensive Tradition* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2007), 37-38.

[31] Kenneth Hill, *Religious Education in the African American Tradition,* 38. The term Black hermeneutic refers to an interpretative approach of the Bible that grew out of the Black Church. There are many excellent works which speak to the role of the Black hermeneutic in biblical interpretation. Cleophus J. LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 13, 16, 20-29. LaRue suggests that "to get at the heart of black preaching, one has to understand the interconnectedness between scriptural texts and African American life experiences. Blacks persistently view scripture in a certain way, so persistently in fact that it becomes the template through which they view all scripture." LaRue identifies four distinct components of the Black biblical hermeneutic that include Genres of Scripture, Domains of Experience (Personal Piety, Care of the Soul, Social Justice, Corporate Concerns, Maintenance of the Institutional Church), Domains of Demonstrations of God's Power, and Extended Metaphors. Henry H. Michell, *Black Preaching; The Recovery of a Powerful Art,* (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 1990), 18, defines this as "the handiest name for the unique thoughts and interpretations of the Bible that grow out of the Black religious experience and are expressed in Black preaching."

[32] Savage, "Reclaiming the Black Church's Prophetic Voice," 3.

[33] Savage, "Reclaiming the Black Church's Prophetic Voice," 3.

The Bible offers prophetic appeal through the prophets and later through Jesus. Their words and actions provide the contemporary Black Church with a theology for praxis and application. Furthermore, the Prophets and Jesus offer the contemporary Black Church a prototype for prophetic proclamation. The objective of this proclamation is not simply to speak of the future with certainty but to be God's mouthpiece to communicate and represent His justice in the world.[34] As stated by Henry H. Mitchell, "the Black hermeneutic seeks to look into the message of the Black past and see what Black ancestors could be saying to Blacks today."[35]

Statement of the Problem

When Jesus entered the synagogue in Nazareth on the Sabbath day, He stood and began to read the words of the Old Testament prophet Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised."[36] The prophetic words spoken by Isaiah relate to the year of jubilee, a period in the law of Moses when debts were forgiven and slaves were set free.[37] These words may have held significant meaning for the hearers of Jesus' day due to the promise of the gospel being preached to the poor, deliverance for an oppressed people from their captivity, and setting at liberty those who are bruised. Moreover, this passage demonstrates the messianic nature of Jesus as He connects Himself to it by saying, "This day the scripture is fulfilled in your

---

[34] Savage, "Reclaiming the Black Church's Prophetic Voice," 3.

[35] Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1990), 19. (This researcher consulted two versions of Mitchell's text, this one published in 1990, the other published in 1970.)

[36] Luke 4:18.

[37] Leviticus 25:8-24.

ears."[38] By applying this prophecy to His ministry, Jesus identified Himself as an emancipator, liberator, and above all, the Messiah.

Similarly, throughout history, the Black Church has served as an emancipator and liberator for Black people, speaking out against social injustice issues within the Black Community in America. In *Human Services and Social Change: An African American Church Perspective*, Andrew W. Edwards discusses the critical role the Black Church has played over the years. He states that, "In the African American community, the church has historically been the key support system for those facing political, economic, social, and/or emotional crisis."[39] However, over the past several decades, the prophetic voice of the Black Church has gradually diminished.[40] In his book, *The Black Church: This is Our Story, This is Our Song,* Henry Louis Gates contends that throughout the history of America, the Black Church has two stories, "one of a people defining themselves in the presence of a higher power and the other of their journey for freedom and equality in a land where power itself, and even humanity, for so long has been denied."[41] He further argues that "since the birth of the Black Church, it has stood the foundation of Black religious, political, economic, and social life."[42] Yet, one might maintain that the

---

[38] Luke 4:21.

[39] Andrew W. Edwards, *Human Services and Social Change: An African-American Church Perspective* (Cleveland: The Inner-City Renewal Society, 1992), 1.

[40] Calvon Tijuan Jones, "Reclaiming the Tradition of Prophetic Proclamation in the Black Church: The Significance of Proclaiming Life in the Face of Death" (D.Min. diss., Duke Divinity School, 2023), 2. Kelsey Dallas, "Where Are Churches in the Black Lives Matter Movement?" *Desert News,* July 24, 2020. Dallas interviews Rev. Watson Jones, III, pastor of Compassionate Baptist Church in Chicago who argues, "The Church has lost some of its prophetic voice. It's lost some of its fervor." Consequently, "activists no longer feel like they need the power of religious institutions behind them to change the world."

[41] Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Black Church: This is Our Story, This is Our Song* (New York: Penguin Press, 2021), 1.

[42] Gates, *This is Our Story, This is Our Song,* 1.

bastion of Black religious, political, economic, and social life no longer appears to be prophetic, addressing the sociopolitical and economic concerns impacting the Black Church. This is consistent with Clayborne Carson, as cited by Dallas, who writes: "Many Black Churches have shifted their focus away from protest movements in general. They now spend more time worrying about individual souls than the soul of the nation."[43]

While it is not being suggested that prophetic voices no longer hold a presence in the pulpits of the Black Church today, the Black Church largely appears to have fallen short in its commitment to liberation and social justice.[44] This decline in prophetic engagement is evident in the shift among many Black Congregations from cultural activism to a primary focus on individual spiritual formation, resulting in a widening gap between the Black Church and the community's urgent needs, as discussed further in Chapter Two. Howard Thurman echoes this in *Jesus and the Disinherited* by positing that, "It is not a singular thing to hear a sermon that defines what should be the attitude of the Christian toward people who are less fortunate than himself."[45] Consequently, the contemporary sociopolitical challenges confronting the Black Church remain unaddressed and inadequately responded to when prophetic voices are absent from its pulpits, compared to the Civil Rights era. During this pivotal period, the Black Church's prophetic voice spoke truth to power, orchestrating significant sociopolitical changes. In contrast, the modern era has seen the emergence of leaders such as Black Lives Matter and other social organizations.

---

[43] Dallas, "Where Are the Churches?" Clayborne Carson is the director of the Martin Luther King Jr., Research and Education Institute at Stranford University.

[44] Eddie Glaude Jr., "The Black Church is Dead," *Huffington Post*, April 26, 2010. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-black-church-is-dead_b_473815.

[45] Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1976), 2.

Roderick C. Pounds Sr. discusses the role of the Black Church during the Civil Rights Movement and its continued significance in his doctoral dissertation. He remarks:

> The successful role that the Black Church played during the Civil Rights era is an example of what the church can accomplish when unified toward a common goal. Unfortunately, today's Black Church is stagnant, ineffective, and voiceless with regards to confronting social justice issues. Furthermore, many pastors who have a desire to do social justice ministry find themselves embroiled in conflict with disinterested congregants. Many black congregations no longer participate in social justice ministries even though they themselves are the victims of American social injustices. This lack of membership participation is a new phenomenon in the local Black Church and does not reflect the historical role she has played within the community.[46]

In this modern era, the Black Church not only lacks the assertive prophetic voice it once possessed but is also absent from actively engaging in the realm of liberation and social justice. Consequently, the Black Church now assumes the role of a bystander, leaving one to wonder, has the Black Church lost its relevance in the pursuit of justice? If the Black Church is to reassert itself as a prophetic voice in the twenty-first century, it must address the sociopolitical, economic, and spiritual issues affecting its community. Moreover, there is an imperative for prophetic Black preaching. The Black Church must once again embrace its prophetic role, acting as a moral agent of God that perceives and responds to social injustices.[47] According to Savage:

> Opportunities for prophetic witness as a gathered community become lost and devalued in a one-dimensional view of the local church's call to individual spiritual salvation alone. Prophetic proclamation and Christian education must motivate individuals and congregations to move beyond simply holding spirit-filled worship and evangelism that feeds the soul. It must engender an equally needed spirit-filled work that meets the political, economic, and social needs of justice in the daily lives of those in the community. The Black Church must be encouraged to once again embrace its prophetic dimension to stand as a moral agent of God that sees and reacts to injustice as God does.[48]

---

[46] Roderick C. Pounds Sr., "A Project to Discover Reasons for Pastoral and Parishioner Conflict" (D.Min. diss., Ashland Theological Seminary, Ashland, OH, 2020), 62.

[47] Savage, "Reclaiming the Black Church's Prophetic Voice," 4.

[48] Savage, "Reclaiming the Black Church's Prophetic Voice," 4.

The job of the church is not only to cultivate the spiritual lives of its congregation but also to be visible and active in the community, addressing societal ills and promoting justice beyond its walls.[49] More than ever, there is a pressing and ongoing need for prophetic preaching, which addresses social injustices and encourages the Black Church to be active within society.[50] Black Americans are still facing some of the same sociopolitical challenges as encountered during the Civil Rights Movement and before. Therefore, preaching within the Black Church must address the present-day sociopolitical and social injustices affecting the Black Community in the post-civil rights era.[51] Prophetic preaching is that kind of preaching, and in support of the foregoing thesis, the contemporary sociopolitical conditions faced by the Black Church necessitate a prophetic response. People have a sincere longing for the meat of the Word and the bread of life.[52] Prophetic preaching goes to the heart of the gospel, transforming the heart and renewing the mind of the listener through the power of Jesus Christ.[53] As hearts are transformed and minds are renewed, listeners are empowered to live out the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which enables them to engage in both cultural transformation and social activism.[54]

Historically, sermons in the Black Church that emphasize liberation and social justice are often inspired by a divine source and transcend religious doctrine or moral guidance; instead,

---

[49] Paul T. Jersild and Dale A. Johnson, "The Church's Response to Social Issues," *Moral Issues and Christian Response,* 5th ed. (Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1993), 3.

[50] Roland Q. Leavell, *Prophetic Preaching Then and Now* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1963), 12.

[51] Steve Cole, *The Black Church: The Root of the Problems of the Black Community* (Memphis, TN: M2N Publishing, 2006).

[52] Leavell, "Prophetic Preaching," 12.

[53] E. Dewey Smith, Jr., "Prophetic Preaching: A Model of Male Transformational Ministry at the Greater Travelers Rest Baptist Church of Decatur, Georgia" (D.Min. diss., United Theological Seminary, Dayton, OH, 2012), 33.

[54] Matthew 25:35-45.

they usually address contemporary social, political, and cultural concerns that challenge the status quo and advocate particularly for justice and liberation. Sermons are grounded in Black Theology, which "arises from an oppressed community and affirms the Black condition. God is not an 'abstract' revelation, independent of the human experience. God meets us in the human situation, not as an idea or concept that is self-evidently true. God encounters us in the human condition as the liberator of the poor and the weak, empowering them to fight for freedom because they were made for it."[55] As the Black Church moves forward in a contemporary world, it must be positioned to stand the test of time as God's living organism here on earth, designed to protect, serve, and liberate the oppressed.[56]

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the role of prophetic preaching within the Black Church, highlighting its historical and contemporary significance. It seeks to discover how active and retired Black pastors within the Black Church who engage in prophetic preaching describe their sermons' capacity to motivate congregational change and cultural activism. This research, with its focus on the sociopolitical issues affecting the Black Church, underscores the necessity of prophetic preaching in the modern era, just as it was before and during the Civil Rights Movement. Drawing on foundational sources, the project evolved from the researcher's interest in exploring the historical significance of prophetic preaching within the Black Church and its potential application today to motivate congregational change and cultural activism.

---

[55] James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation, 50th Anniversary Edition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2020), xxvii.

[56] Kenyetta Dotson, "A Project to Develop and Evaluate an Outreach Manual for Black Churches Located in Flint, Michigan" (D.Min. diss., Ashland Theological Seminary, Ashland, OH, 2023), 15.

Raphael G. Warnock, in *The Divided Mind of the Black Church: Theology, Piety, and Public Witness* asserts, asserts, "how a church conceives the work of salvation and consequently the nature of its vocation as salvation's instrument will determine the character of its witness and the depth of its involvement in the hard and elusive work of social transformation."[57] Hence, the Church's mission is to address the "slavery of sin and the sin of slavery."[58] While it may be difficult to arrive at a universal definition of prophetic preaching, given that many scholars define it differently within their respective contexts, this project provides an operationalized definition that has been provided in the Definition of Terms section of this chapter. It will be further expanded upon in Chapter Two.

Moreover, most scholars, including Black scholars, suggest that prophetic preaching is "Preaching that creatively speaks on behalf of others about the injustices and inadequacies of the present and the hopeful possibilities of the future."[59] This form of spiritual communication serves as an inspiration and a catalyst for positive change, calling out injustices and reminding the burdened of God's eternal presence, even in difficult times. This form of preaching not only aligns with Black preaching but has also been deeply embedded within it. Scottie Aaron suggests that Black preaching is unique and once addressed the issues within the Black Community, providing hope to the children of African descent. Aaron argues, "Black preaching has helped the African American community get through some very tough times. Dating back to slavery, black preaching helped to liberate the mind even though the body was still in bondage."[60]

---

[57] Raphael G. Warnock, *The Divided Mind of the Black Church: Theology, Piety, and Public Witness* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2014), 28.

[58] Warnock, *The Divided Mind*, 29.

[59] Leavell, *Prophetic Preaching*, 12.

[60] Scottie L. Aaron. "Purposeful Preaching with Transformative Leadership for the Black Church in the Twenty-First Century" (D.Min. diss., United Theological Seminary, Dayton, OH, 2015), 1.

However, not all Black preaching is prophetic.[61] The historical tradition of Black preaching has included prophetic substance where the Black preacher held a disposition and a hermeneutic that called for liberation and justice.

Gilbert contends, "Prophetic Black preaching connects the speech act with prophetic actions as concrete praxis to help people freely participate in naming their reality. The praxis of naming reality to transform it is what prophetic Black preaching carries out in the Great Migration and during the Civil Rights movement of the nineteen-fifties and sixties."[62] The role of prophetic preaching has been compelling in the fight for justice since the beginning of the invisible institution through the contemporary Black Lives Matter movement. More will be said about both Black preaching and prophetic preaching within Chapter Two.

While contending with the misinterpretation of Scripture from white enslavers, the enslaved Black preacher not only had to offer inspiration but also prophetic hope.[63] Cleophus LaRue, in his book, *I Believe I'll Testify: The Art of African American Preaching,* states, "There are those in the African-American pulpit who have learned the craft primarily through emulation

---

[61] Kenyatta R. Gilbert, "Making the Unseen Seen: Pedagogy and Aesthetics in African American Prophetic Preaching," *Homiletic*, vol. 34, no. 2 (2009).

[62] Gilbert, "Making the Unseen Seen," 21.

[63] Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1978) and Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2000) detail the Christianization of slaves to support the institution of slavery. White slave masters believed that by converting and baptizing their slaves, the slaves would become docile and obedient to their masters. According to Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019), 81, "Robert Lewis Dabney, a southern Presbyterian minister and professor, not only believed that slavery was morally acceptable; he viewed it as positive for the African. Additionally, Dabney saw introducing Africans to Christianity as one of the most praiseworthy benefits of slavery for black people. Because black people were condemned to perish in their pagan beliefs, Dabney saw white Christian slaveowners as loving people standing between the enslaved and eternal damnation. . . .White evangelists compromised the Bible's message of liberation to make Christianity compatible with slavery." Biblical passages such as Genesis 9:18-29 and Colossians 3:22 were preached to support slavery. This would eventually lead slaves to hold their own religious gatherings out of disapproval of a vitiated Gospel preached by their masters. Many slaves could not reconcile the hypocritical behavior of their masters with a loving and liberating God of the Bible.

of accomplished preachers whom they have come to admire."[64] Due to the historical and contemporary Black experience in the United States, individuals within the Black Church need to hear sermons that address the sociopolitical, economic, and spiritual issues impacting its community in equal proportion to sermons that offer religious doctrine and moral guidance.

Significance of the Study

There is abundant evidence that prophetic preaching within the Black Church has been and is a transformative force, although Black Americans continue to face social injustices. The Black Church cannot deny the fact that its silence and inaction contribute to the acceptance of these injustices. There is a need to reclaim the prophetic voice of the Black Church in the modern era for congregational change and cultural activism. There is also a need to reevaluate the role of prophetic preaching within the Black Church in addressing the sociopolitical issues that impact the Black Church and community. For far too long, the Black Community has suffered from the vestiges of slavery. This suffering has manifested as an acute crisis within the Black Community. Reginald F. Davis suggests the following:

> History shows us that social transformation cannot be left to chance. Black people cannot put their trust and liberation in the hand of the government. The crisis facing Black America is so critical that there is no question that in the twenty-first century, the Black Church needs new informed leaders who can strategize, communicate, and motivate the oppressed to rock the boat for justice and righteousness. The Black Church must agitate because people cannot move toward their liberation until they do so. They must say no to oppression, exploitation, and marginalization. Leaders must challenge people not to solely depend on government social programs, which are useful in giving a hand up but not a constant handout. Future leaders must be truly and deeply committed to the social, economic, and political uplift of the people. What made Jesus such an effective leader is that he stayed within the great prophetic tradition; he confronted groups with power that oppressed and exploited the weak, and he worked with the oppressed, empowering them to advance not the interest of the Roman Empire but the kingdom of God. It is then

[64] Cleophus J. LaRue, *I Believe I'll Testify: The Art of African American Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 28.

> necessary for the Black Church to demand the kind of leadership that Jesus demonstrated as relevant for the twenty-first century.[65]

This project will explore the biblical, theological, historical, and contemporary warrants that underpin the role of prophetic preaching within the Black Church. To understand the Black Church, one has to comprehend Black preaching and its prophetic tradition and significance. The Black Church has been a fundamental organization in the lives of Black people throughout the history of the United States, serving as an "escape from their oppression and dehumanization by white people."[66] It was once the epicenter of the Black Community, with many Black clergy engaging in demonstrations against injustices.[67] However, Raphael Warnock claims, "the oppositional witness of the Black Church against racism and on behalf of justice has not always been consistent, nor has the nature of its response been the same."[68]

The prophetic voice of the Black Church and its inspiring hope, which fueled the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, became a balm for Black Americans in their fight for justice.[69] In the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Church and Black preachers were like the prophets of old, whose prophetic preaching spoke truth to power, demanded justice, and called for liberation.[70] This study is significant because Black people throughout the United States are

---

[65] Reginald F. Davis, *The Black Church: Relevant or Irrelevant in the 21st Century?* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2010), 100-101, 103, 125-126.

[66] Juan Marcial Floyd-Thomas, *Liberating Black Church History: Making it Plain* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2014), 7.

[67] Myron Krys Florence, "Seek Justice: How the Prophetic Preaching of Martin Luther King, Jr. Can Speak to the African American Church Today" (master's thesis, Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, GA, 2018), 1.

[68] Warnock, *The Divided Mind*, 29.

[69] Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, 11, 222.

[70] Bernhard W. Anderson, *The Eighth Century Prophets: Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1978), 1-100. This text provides an analysis of the eighth-century prophets, revealing new insights for contemporary prophetic preaching and social justice action.

still confronted with many of the same social, political, and economic misfortunes as seen during the Civil Rights Movement, and preaching within the Black Church context has to inspire hope prophetically. Prophetic preaching is contextually and culturally rooted with a distinctive flavor of liberation and social justice. The sermons are noteworthy for their ability to empower, addressing the contemporary social, economic, and political issues facing the Black Church and community. The sinful seed of systemic and institutionalized racism continues to blossom into economic and health disparities, various forms of injustice, political divisiveness, police brutality, sequestered voting, overturning of Affirmative Action, the expunging of Black History from courses of study, and the like. The Church needs modern-day prophets to speak truth to power and call out these injustices.

In his book, *Where Have All the Prophets Gone?* Marvin McMickle asserts that the Church has lost its prophetic voice and influence. He contends that the preoccupation with ministry matters and other topics has diverted the Black Church's attention away from its communal and scriptural duty to support the disadvantaged, whether they be impoverished, widowed, orphaned, or marginalized.[71] The content of sermons in the Black Church tradition following the Civil Rights Movement shifted from a prominent focus on combating cultural and social injustices to an excessive emphasis on exuberant worship and the pursuit of prosperity.[72] The Black Church must reclaim its prophetic voice, speaking truth to power and addressing the ills that impact the Black Church and community. Before Black people became lawyers, doctors, educators, or even served as politicians, the Black Church advocated for the dignity of Black

[71] Marvin McMickle, *Where Have All the Prophets Gone? Reclaiming Prophetic Preaching in America* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2006), 6-8.

[72] Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 1.

people. Michael Cross Jr. appropriately states, “God is not only a God of the valley (low places), but He also allows His people to reach mountaintops (high places). I believe that God is present in the Black preaching tradition because He cares for the oppressed and desires His people to prosper (Psalm 146:7-9). Both Black preaching and Christian preaching in general must go forth to show today’s world why God and the Church are still needed and essential in our lives.”[73]

Research Questions

This study seeks to examine the role of prophetic preaching within the Black Church by answering the primary research question: How do pastors who engage in prophetic preaching describe their sermons’ capacity to motivate congregational change and cultural activism?

The following sub-questions will also be addressed:

(a) What is the impact of the call to action in the context of prophetic preaching?

(b) What are the responses of congregants to your prophetic preaching?

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms have been defined for clarity and are used throughout the project.

Activism is defined as “action taken challenging those in power to bring about change in society and benefit the greater good.”[74] Such actions address social ills or injustices, promoting equality and advocating for change in society. For this study, the terms 'cultural activism' and

[73] Michael Cross, Jr. “The Black Preaching Tradition: The Art of Preaching in the Black Church Tradition with Sermon Analysis” (master’s thesis, Western Illinois University, Macomb, IL, 2020), 5.

[74] Eleanor Brooks, “What Is Activism: Definition, Types, Role, Examples, and Importance” *Democracy & Justice* (2023). Accessed March 17, 2025. https://www.liberties.eu/en/stories/activism/44871.

'social activism' are used interchangeably, referring to both cultural and social activism, and may be used interchangeably with 'cultural transformation,' which is defined later in this section.

African American or Black refers to the same group or community of individuals. It denotes individuals of African descent within the United States who are part of the struggle for liberation and justice. As Kenyatta Gilbert offers, "The decision to capitalize the term Black is in recognition of the fact that recent scholarship is moving away from the term black in lowercase, which primarily suggests an ontological description of identity formation solely based on race. The capitalization of the term Black and not white is a way to signal a rhetorical disruption of domination and white supremacy, and to honor, in a broader fashion, the particular historical and cultural legacy of people of African descent in this country."[75] Black will be used as the preferred term unless quoting a source that prefers African American or Black in lowercase.

Black Church refers to a historically significant and culturally distinct religious institution within the African American community, comprised of various denominations, churches, and congregations whose membership is primarily African American. Originally referred to as the *Negro Church* by intellectuals such as W.E.B. DuBois and Carter G. Woodson, it emerged from slavery and gained prophetic prominence during the Civil Rights era as the *Black Church*.[76] According to C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya, "There are seven historical Black denominations, which comprise the Black Church: African Methodist Episcopal (AME), African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ), Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME), Church of God in Christ (COGIC), National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. (NBCUSA),

---

[75] Gilbert, "Making the Unseen Seen," 18.

[76] Robert A. Wortham, *W. E. B. DuBois and the Sociology of the Black Church and Religion, 1897-1914*, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018). Carter G. Woodson, *History of the Negro Church* (Washington, DC: Associated Publishers, 1945).

National Baptist Convention of America (NBCA), and Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC)."[77] Keyona Harper suggests, "The title 'The Black Church' is a stenography for sociological and theological use, referencing the inclusion of the diverse Black Christian church denominations in the US."[78] Within this project, the Black Church refers to "the collective, as opposed to one denomination, church, or congregation, as there is no monolithic Black Church."[79] This definition of the Black Church does not include Black Congregations in majority white denominations, nor Black Congregations led by white pastors. The researcher's decision to capitalize the term Church or Congregation after the word Black is to emphasize the collective historical definition.

Black Culture "is closely related to the black experience and black history. It consists of creative forms of expression as one reflects on history, endures pain, and experiences joy. It is the music, poetry, prose, and other art forms."[80]

Black Experience refers to "a life of humiliation and suffering; the atmosphere in which blacks live. It is the totality of black existence in a white world where babies are tortured, women are raped, and men are shot."[81]

---

[77] Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, 1.

[78] Keyona Harper, "A Study to Understand the Experiences of Black American Christian Women in Leadership Positions Who Serve within the Black Church" (Ph.D. diss., Lynchburg, VA: Liberty University, 2025), 17-18.

[79] Curtis Belle, "Preaching Matters: Reclaiming the Prophetic Voice of the Black Church," (D.Min. diss., New Brunswick Theological Seminary, New Brunswick, NJ, 2021), 17.

[80] Cone, *A Black Theology*, 28.

[81] Cone, *A Black Theology*, 24-25.

Black Hermeneutic "is a construct of slave narratives, sermons, songs, and the voices of countless faithful believers in the Lord Jesus Christ trying to make sense of Scripture and God's action in their lives amid various forms of oppression."[82]

Black Preaching is defined as "preaching that grew out of and highlights the plight of the African American experience."[83] Historically, it "contains a biblical hermeneutic of resistance using delivery variations relevant to the Black Church."[84] It is rooted in the prophetic tradition and may be prophetic, but not always.[85]

---

[82] Bruce L. Fields, "The One and the Many: What Can Be Learned from a Black Hermeneutic," *The Covenant Quarterly*, vol. 73, No. 2 (2015), 44.

[83] Cross, "The Black Preaching Tradition," 4.

[84] Charles O. Galbreath, "Preaching as Religiously Educative: Black Preaching As A Liberating Pedagogical Model for Black Millennials" (Ph.D. diss., Fordham University, New York: 2020), 33.

[85] Robert Smith, Jr., *Doctrine that Dances: Bringing Doctrinal Preaching and Teaching to Life* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2008), 148. Smith refers to the terminology of variations such as "lecture," "whoop," or "tune." These variations have been utilized cross-culturally, however, they are primarily utilized within the context of Black preaching within the Black Church. Cleophus J. LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 10-12. LaRue argues that the use of strong biblical content, creative language, appeals to emotion, and ministerial authority are all points in Black preaching. James Earl Massey, *The Responsible Pulpit* (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 1974), 101-110 saw the Black preaching tradition as "functional, festive, communal, radical, and climactic." Evans E. Crawford with Thomas H. Troeger, *The Hum: Call and Response in African American Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 16-17. Crawford and Troeger discuss the "homiletical musicality" in Black preaching, which is "the way in which a preacher uses timing, pause, inflection, pace, and other musical qualities of speech to engage all that the listener is in the act of proclamation." William B. McClain, *Come Sunday: The Liturgy of Zion* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1990), 62-71. McClain characterizes Black preaching as "rich with passionate words and vivid imagery for a disillusioned and disinherited people. It is biblical, prophetic, poetic, dialogical, didactic and inspiring, declarative, slow and deliberate build-up, dramatic pause, relate life and life situations of the congregation, hopeful and optimistic." Frank Thomas, *They Like to Never Quit Praisin' God* (Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 1997), 47-49. Thomas offers insight on the role of celebration in preaching. Thomas defines celebration as "the culmination of the sermonic design where a moment is created in which the remembrance of a redemptive past and/or a liberated future transforms the events immediately experienced. The African American preaching tradition of celebrative design has untold riches and experience in celebrative emotional process, affirmative images, and the practice of celebration."

Black Theology "is a theology of liberation because it is a theology that arises from an identification with the oppressed blacks of America, seeking to interpret the gospel of Jesus in light of the black condition. It believes that the liberation of the black community *is* God's liberation."[86] For this project, Black Theology and Black Liberation Theology are terms that may be used interchangeably, but both refer to this definition.

Congregants refer to individuals holding membership within the Black Church.

Congregational Change refers to "a change within a congregation where both the pastor and laity alter their practices and community life from internal dynamics to external pressures of the broader society."[87]

Cultural Transformation refers to "practices that advocate for social justice, civil rights, and community empowerment. Given the Black Church's role to be both a spiritual and societal agent of change, this form of activism utilizes sermons, gospel music, prayer, and community organizing to inspire and mobilize congregants for social and political action."[88]

Liberation is a theological concept referring to the pursuit of freedom for Black Americans "through social, political, and economic empowerment."[89]

Prophetic Preaching is defined as preaching that "speaks truth to power, confronting societal ills."[90] Prophetic preaching "shifts the focus of congregations from what is happening to

---

[86] Cone, *A Black Theology,* 5.

[87] McMickle, *Where Have All the Prophets Gone?* 2.

[88] Sandra L. Barnes, "Black Church Culture and Community Action," *Social Forces.* vol. 84, no. 2 (Dec 2005): 967-994. Accessed June 11, 2024. https://doi.org/10.1353/sof.2006.0003.

[89] Bruce L. Fields, *Introducing Black Theology: Three Crucial Questions for the Evangelical Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academics, 2015), 15.

[90] Wright, *The Sunday After*, 44.

them as a local church to what is happening to them as a part of society."[91] It is "current event preaching, because it is a wholly contextual enterprise that takes inventory of the current culture and aligns it with God's will."[92] In short, prophetic preaching is a call to action, utilizing sermons that focus on liberation and social justice. The definition of prophetic preaching will be expanded further in Chapters Two and Four.

Social Ills or Injustices refer to the sociopolitical issues of injustice impacting the Black Church, which include, but are not limited to, slavery, segregation, Jim Crow, economic issues of inflation, unemployment, gentrification, food insecurities, healthcare disparities heightened by the emergence of a global pandemic known as COVID-19, voter suppression, educational inequities, police brutality, mass incarceration which has disproportionally impacted people of color, the lack of home ownership in the Black Community, white supremacy and white privilege, the rise of white evangelicalism, white Christian nationalism, and the like.

Social Justice is defined as "fair treatment of all people in a society, including respect for the rights of minorities and equitable distribution of resources among members of a community."[93] For this project, the concern is for the oppressed.

Delimitations

The scope of this project has intentional limitations, delimited by topic, methodology, and sampling. This research focuses on thirteen active or retired Black pastors within the Black Church who engage in prophetic preaching. This study does not include white pastors or white

[91] McMickle, *Where Have All the Prophets Gone?* 2.

[92] Wright, *The Sunday After*, 45.

[93] Dictionary.com, "Social Justice," accessed March 17, 2025, https://www.dictionary.com/browse/social-justice.

congregations, nor does it explore ways to integrate a particular preaching methodology within the preaching moment. These are left for future research. The research question determined the research methodology, which, for this project, necessitates a qualitative approach, given that it is phenomenological in nature. This approach provides a rich narrative of individual experiences, rather than relying solely on statistical analysis and correlations.

Chapter Structure

Chapter One consists of an introduction to the project, the problem and purpose statements, research questions, definition of terms, and delimitations.

Chapter Two provides a review of the literature with attention given to the following areas: (1) defining preaching within the Black Church, (2) defining prophetic preaching, (3) an historical, biblical, and theological warrant for prophetic preaching, (4) a history of prophetic preaching from slavery through the Civil Rights Movement, and (5) modern prophetic preaching in the Black Church.

Chapter Three discusses the research methodology and design, including the population, setting, and overall execution of the research. This qualitative project employed semi-structured, open-ended interviews as a method of data collection to determine how pastors who engage in prophetic preaching describe the sermons' capacity to motivate congregational change and cultural activism.

Chapter Four yields the results of the data analysis, offering insight into: (1) theological foundations of prophetic preaching, (2) contextual responsiveness, (3) education and mobilization, (4) pastoral voices, (5) challenges and tensions, and (6) historical and cultural legacy.

Chapter Five focuses on the conclusions drawn from the research, discussing the implications of the findings and offering recommendations for further study. Moreover, this chapter explores how pastors within the Black Church can utilize this work as a practical resource, offering insights into the essential elements of prophetic preaching. It emphasizes the urgent need for prophetic proclamation to address the sociopolitical challenges impacting the Black Church and community.

Summary

Eric Mason in *Woke Church: An Urgent Call for Christians in America to Confront Racism and Injustice* declares, "The church should be the main communicator and the first-place people look to for answers about issues of race and justice within our country."[94] This is the reason behind studying the role of prophetic preaching within the Black Church to motivate congregational change and cultural activism. The Black Church must be on the front lines addressing issues that have a systemic and systematic impact on our community.[95] While Black Lives Matter and other social organizations are to be celebrated for their willingness to pick up the mantle of liberation and social justice, the Black Church must reclaim its prophetic voice and resume its place as the premier leader in the battle for liberation and social justice. Since the Black Church's roots are grounded in the Black experience within the United States, it must reclaim its prophetic voice in this modern era, both speaking truth to power and foretelling prophetic hope. The Black Church has a missional mandate not only to save souls but to engage in cultural transformation and social activism. Salvation and liberation are needed.

---

[94] Eric Mason, *Woke Church: An Urgent Call for Christians in America to Confront Racism and Injustice* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2018), 24.

[95] Mason, *Woke Church*, 26.

This researcher has chosen to conduct this study within the Black Church, not only because it is the place where he has been nurtured, developed, and currently serves, but also because there is great potential for change and transformation within the Black Church and Black Community. According to Frederick D. Haynes, III, "The African American village or community today is broken. When our village is broken, that indicates that there are broken people in our village, and when we have broken people, we have broken families, a broken economy, broken churches, and broken schools."[96] This problem may be a perceived failure of the Black Church to advocate around sociopolitical issues and to provide relevant interventions aimed at addressing such problems, resulting in a chasm between the Black Church and a disenchanted Black Community.[97]

This project is timely and relevant due to the overwhelming impact of the sociopolitical and socioeconomic issues affecting the Black Church and Black Community. The Black Church must be the voice to begin healing our communities and restore them to preeminence and prophetic prominence. This research examines the role of prophetic preaching within the Black Church by seeking responses from pastors on how those who engage in prophetic preaching identify their effectiveness in motivating congregational change and cultural activism. What is the impact of the call to action in the context of prophetic preaching? What are the responses of congregants to prophetic preaching? There is a growing need for the contemporary Black Church to reclaim its prophetic voice, addressing current social injustices as it once did in the Civil Rights era, which has the potential to inform public policy.[98] Prophetic preaching is necessary to

---

[96] Frederick D. Haynes III, *Healing Our Broken Village* (Dallas, TX: Saint Paul Press, 2008), 15.

[97] Perryman, "The Role of the Black Church in Addressing Collateral Damage," 15.

[98] Battle, *The Black Church in America,* 128.

help the Black Church heal a broken community, remain relevant within it, and maintain a connection to the community.

The prophetic silence of the contemporary Black Church ignited this researcher's passion for this project. As a Black preacher-pastor within the Black Church, he shares in the sociopolitical ills affecting the Black Church. Moreover, as a lifelong member of the Black Church, he is part of an institution whose prophetic voice has advocated for loosening the chains of the oppressed. With this in mind, this project serves as a resource calling the Black Church out of complacency and back into prophetic prominence. To fully understand the historical and contemporary significance and urgency of this call for renewed prophetic engagement, it is necessary to examine the body of scholarship that explores the historical, theological, and sociopolitical foundations of the Black Church's prophetic tradition. The literature review will contextualize this project by surveying key works that address the Black Church's role in social justice, the evolution of prophetic preaching, and the contemporary challenges facing the Black Church.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

There is growing concern over the lack of prophetic preaching within the Black Church in the modern era, particularly in comparison to the Civil Rights Movement's approach to addressing contemporary sociopolitical issues.[99] Much of the research either centers on the historical impact of prophetic preaching or critiques its decline, thereby resulting in a dearth comparatively within the body of literature that examines how this method of preaching can be revitalized and applied in the modern era to address the sociopolitical challenges confronting the contemporary Black Church effectively. This literature review examines the role of prophetic preaching within the Black Church, emphasizing its historical and modern significance. Rooted in the biblical tradition of the prophets and Jesus, and deeply intertwined with the lived experiences of Black Americans, prophetic preaching has been a transformative force within the Black Church for congregational change and cultural activism. This tradition of proclamation, forged in response to systemic oppression and existential suffering, has historically empowered Black communities to resist injustice and articulate alternative visions of liberation and justice.[100]

Despite the profound legacy and ongoing significance of prophetic preaching within the Black Church, scholarly attention on homiletics and preaching is predominantly from the white perspective. In contrast, the Black perspective is relatively absent. Although Black clergy likely preached to more whites than Blacks,[101] the study of Black preaching as a discipline was

---

[99] Anthony B. Pinn, *The Black Church in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 17. Pinn notes how the Black Church "faltered in addressing the needs of black Americans during much of the early twentieth century" compared to the Civil Rights Movement when it "emerged as a vital factor in the sociopolitical and economic life of the United States."

[100] Daryl L. Horton, "Discerning the Call to Prophetic Civic Leadership within the African American Pastoral Tradition" (D.Min. diss., Brite Divinity School, Fort Worth, TX, 2020), 2-5.

[101] Mitchell, *Black Preaching* (1990), 24.

unidentified until the 1970s.[102] In *Introduction to the Practice of African American Preaching*, Frank Thomas gives four reasons for the omission of scholarship in the Black preaching tradition:

> (1) much of the genius of African American preaching traveled in oral tradition, (2) black homiletics, for the most part, were passed on in the apprenticeship model of the Black Church, (3) based upon Western intellectual bias, few scholars paid serious attention to the complexity of African American preaching, and (4) until the 1970s African American preaching was primarily studied by nontheological and few homiletical scholars. It was not until the work of Henry H. Mitchell in the latter part of the twentieth century that the academic field of homiletics paid much attention to black preaching.[103]

There is a need to reconsider the role of the Black Church, its homiletical tradition, and the practice of prophetic preaching as instruments for congregational change and cultural activism.[104] W. E. Fluker argues that "the Black Church has provided the pool of leadership which led to the creation of social institutions and organizations that have prophetically challenged the nation to move toward a 'beloved community.'"[105] The Black Church has historically played a critical role in shaping the moral conscience of America. Therefore, by including the prophetic voices of those within the Black Church in this project, it will provide practical research, "to bridge the chasm between theological education in the academy and what African Americans believe and affirm in the context of the Black Church."[106]

---

[102] Frank Thomas, *Introduction to the Practice of African American Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016), 16.

[103] Thomas, *Practice of African American Preaching*, 16-17, 20.

[104] From this point forward, all references to prophetic preaching are to Black prophetic preaching unless otherwise noted.

[105] W. E. Fluker, ed., *The Stones That the Builders Rejected: The Development of Ethical Leadership from the Black Church Tradition* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), 7.

[106] Lewis V. Baldwin, "Black Church Studies as an Academic Interest and Initiative: A Historical Perspective," *The Black Church Studies Reader*, Alton B. Pollard and Carol B. Duncan, eds. (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 46.

Historically, from the era of slavery through the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Church prioritized social justice and liberation. However, in the era following the Civil Rights Movement, including the modern era Black Lives Matter movement, the contemporary Black Church has not responded in a large measure to issues of social justice and liberation. Following the Civil Rights Movement, the prophetic voice of the Black Church has been omitted from pulpits and the broader societal discussion regarding the sociopolitical issues impacting the Black Church and community.[107] Robert M. Franklin, in his chapter, "Beyond Preaching: Unchurched Black Men," states, "Since the Civil Rights movement, most churches have withdrawn from vigorous social activism and have turned attention to institutional expansion and physical improvements."[108] To understand the need to revive the prophetic voice of the Black Church, one must consider how it addresses issues that disproportionately affect Black Americans. It is essential to draw from the Black experience in America, the broader religious experience, and the historical significance of prophetic preaching within the Black Church. Cornel West states, "The institutional roots of the prophetic tradition in Afro-America lie in Black Churches."[109] Understanding the experiences and historical contributions of the Black Church in responding to racial oppression offers a distinctive addition to existing literature.

Definition of Preaching Within the Black Church

Preaching, in any form, is a form of religious and educational communication. The preacher is positioned as a prophetic voice at the head of the congregation, with the principal

---

[107] Pounds, "Reasons for Pastoral and Parishioner Conflict," 44, 62.

[108] Martha J. Simmons, ed., *Preaching on the Brink: The Future of Homiletics* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996), 48.

[109] Cornel West, *Prophetic Fragments* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), 42.

responsibility not only to share the Gospel but also to connect it in perilous times, especially during times of crisis. Samuel D. Proctor asserts that the preacher bears significant responsibility, and the act of preaching must engage the congregation in a thoughtful and sincere dialogue, characterized by clarity and intentionality.[110] Proctor stresses his convictions further by remarking that preaching is a vital exercise worthy of attention and study, an endless pursuit for evaluative tools, and methods for continuous improvement.[111] He regarded preaching as the most critical task the minister performs.

Within the Black Church, preaching has historically been "a form of subversive speech and liberating joy since the first Africans were enslaved in the United States."[112] Walter Brueggemann, in his work *Deep Memory, Exuberant Hope,* advances this idea by articulating what subversive preaching is: "Preaching is never the dominant version, never has been. It is always a subversion, always a version, a rendering of reality that lives under the dominant version."[113] The tradition of subversive preaching within the Black Church offers a theological understanding of God's active presence on behalf of the oppressed and marginalized, which forms the foundation for a Black hermeneutic. As stated by Cleophus LaRue, "Black preaching originated in a context of marginalization and struggle, and it is to this context that it still seeks to be relevant."[114]

---

[110] Samuel D. Proctor, *The Certain Sounds of the Trumpet: Crafting a Sermon of Authority* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1994), 2.

[111] Proctor, *Crafting a Sermon of Authority,* 2.

[112] Galbreath, "Preaching as Religiously Educative," 5.

[113] Walter Brueggemann, *Deep Memory, Exuberant Hope: Contested Truth in a Post-Christian World* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 5.

[114] Cleophus J. LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 14.

The primary responsibility of the Black preacher is to reveal how God's purposes and actions are actively present in the lived experiences of the congregants. Charlie Dates builds upon Gilbert's perspective by contending, "The black preacher is more than just a proclaimer on Sunday mornings to the community he serves. His influence is far-reaching into the lives of his parishioners and into the social structures in which his voice is heard. His responsibility, in a sense, is almost like the chief of the tribe."[115] The influence of these distinguished scholars, along with others, is profound and far-reaching. Their messages echo with the authoritative declaration, 'Thus says the Lord.' Therefore, "Prophetic preaching is not something merely thought out, or inferred, or hoped, or feared. It is directly inspired by the Spirit of GOD, an inspiration which gives power to a preacher's sermon preparation through study, meditation, and prayer."[116]

Within the Black Church, preaching is at the center of religious life and worship. According to Henry H. Mitchell, "Black preaching was developed after a long and often quite disconnected series of contacts between the Christian gospel variously interpreted and men caught up in the Black experience of slavery and oppression."[117] To understand the nature of Black preaching, it is essential to examine the correlation between scriptural texts and the lived experiences of Black people.[118] In his master's thesis, Michael Cross suggests, "The development of preaching, especially in the African American context, has been a journey to say

---

[115] Charlie Dates, "Donald Parsons and the Understudied Burden of Biblical Black Preaching" (Ph.D. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, IL, 2016), 12.

[116] Leavell, *Prophetic Preaching,* 15.

[117] Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching* (Philadelphia, PA: J. B. Lippincott, 1970), 65. (This researcher consulted two versions of Mitchell's text, this one published in 1970, the other published in 1990.)

[118] LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching,* 13.

the least. This journey has come through slavery, reconstruction, the civil rights movement, and to our present-day world. Its brilliance has existed for centuries, but I am thankful that it is being revealed to us now more than ever through the hard work of so many scholars and theologians."[119] Cleophus LaRue defines Black preaching as "a rich and varied tradition, covering a broad configuration of motivations, theological points of view, art forms, structures, and styles of delivery."[120] Black preaching has been a longstanding educational practice within the Black Church. It is the culminating event of the worship experience within the Black Church. According to Kenneth Hill, "The sermon continues to be the leading mode of learning of Christian education for the Black Church."[121]

While a working definition for Black preaching has been presented, it is challenging to define Black preaching simply because it is so contextually rich and its meaning continues to evolve in response to the needs of the people, especially those who are oppressed and marginalized.[122] Charles O. Galbreath states, "Black preaching is a prophetic and subversive lens—from the genesis of Black preaching, there has been an emphasis on truth-telling and liberation. As Black preaching was birthed in oppression, it has consistently offered a critique of the cultural norms and sought to transform the mores of the royal consciousness."[123] Shaped by

---

[119] Cross, "The Black Preaching Tradition," 2. Some of the scholars who have contributed to the growth of Black preaching include Henry H. Mitchell, Kenyatta Gilbert, and Frank Thomas. Some key referenced works include Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1990); Kenyatta Gilbert, *The Journey and Promise of African American Preaching* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011); Frank Thomas, *They Like to Never Quit Praisin' God: The Role of Celebration in Preaching* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1997); Frank Thomas, *Introduction to the Practice of African American Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2016); and Frank Thomas, *How to Preach a Dangerous Sermon* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2018).

[120] LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching*, 9.

[121] Kenneth Hill, *Religious Education*, 123.

[122] Galbreath, "Preaching as Religiously Educative," 6.

[123] Galbreath, "Preaching as Religiously Educative," 8.

the social, political, economic, and cultural fabric of Black life, Black preaching has offered hearers the Word of God and liberation, enabling Blacks to endure massive brutalities and injustices.[124] The prophetic preaching tradition within the Black Church has been a voice of hope in difficult times. Its prophetic practices have allowed the Black Church to persevere amid adversity, addressing the needs of Black Americans. West makes the claim that:

> The inescapable opportunism—or unprincipled scrambling for crumbs—of black prophetic practices is largely a function of both the unmet needs of black Americans and, more importantly, the design and operation of the American social system. The needs of black Americans are similar to those of most Americans: more control over their lives and destinies, better living conditions, health care, education, and the extension of liberties for the effective exercise of their unique capacities and potentialities.[125]

Therefore, serious deliberation should be given to the prophetic tradition of the Black Church, not merely for its critical role in the Black liberation movement, but also because it can highlight the social issues that impact the lived experience of Black people in America.[126] Mervyn A. Warren posits the following idea regarding Black preaching and the lived experiences of Blacks:

> Black preaching embodies at once an anomaly and a reality, the former because in the absolute sense the genre of biblical preaching possesses a Christian universality without regard to ethnicity and the latter because historical forces in Western civilization warrant acknowledgement of an emphasis in preaching born legitimately within the church and demanding recognition as a valid reality.[127]

---

[124] Mitchell, *Black Preaching* (1990), 123-124.

[125] West, *Prophetic Fragments,* 41.

[126] West, *Prophetic Fragments,* 67.

[127] Mervyn A. Warren, *King Came Preaching: The Pulpit Power of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 46.

Gilbert denotes the following on prophetic preaching: "There is a pedagogical dimension of the prophetic voice of Black preaching that accents the importance of enabling the congregation to understand its situation in light of God's justice and what God intends."[128] However, despite the sociopolitical activism evident in protests and movements within the Black Community, the prophetic voice often seems muted within the confines of the Black Church. This observation highlights the significance of the Black Church in amplifying and sustaining a prophetic voice, promoting sociopolitical activism, and aligning its teachings with the urgent calls for social justice. Kenyetta Dotson suggests:

> The Black Church was called upon to fight the evils of the world, leverage relationships, and rise in times of adversity and injustice. The Black Church should be rooted in scriptures and grounded in the word of God to stand for the weak against the strong, the disinherited, and the oppressed. This effort of strength shows the power of the Black Church, black people, and liberation theology to affect societal change. As with Dr. King, church members, activists, and ministers must preach God's word in a way that is truthful, equitable, liberating, and just.[129]

It is essential for Black preachers and their preaching to convey God's word with integrity, fairness, and a sense of liberation. This approach instills optimism and hope among the congregants within the Black Church. Charlie Dates states:

> Scholarly descriptions of black preaching are plentiful and varied. In spite of the damages of slavery, the injustices of North American segregation, and the pain of cultural lag, the question of black preaching's longevity, vitality, and potency remains unanswered. What has kept this preaching tradition alive? How has it managed to weather the storm and navigate the church in America through its toughest seasons? I argue that the vitality and potency of black preaching is inextricably tied to its commitment to the right handling of scripture.[130]

---

[128] Kenyatta Gilbert, *The Journey and Promise of African American Preaching* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 12.

[129] Dotson, "Develop and Evaluate an Outreach Manual for Black Churches," 10-11.

[130] Dates, "Understudied Burden," 1-2.

The connection between the Scriptures and Black preaching lies in their esteemed significance within the Black religious experience. Both preachers and congregants hold them in high regard, perceiving Scriptures as the divine Word of God. Therefore, the preacher's occupation is to proclaim God's Word to His people in all circumstances, as the prophets of old.[131]

Willem A. VanGemeren proposes, "The prophets spoke God's word to people in crisis. During war, siege, famine, or other adverse times, they addressed living people and applied God's message to the issues at hand."[132] Cleophus LaRue suggests that "to get at the heart of Black preaching, one has to understand the interconnectedness between the scriptural texts and the African American life experiences. Since Scripture is never interpreted in a vacuum, Scripture and the life experiences of blacks always stand in a figure/ground relationship to one another."[133] Black congregants usually attend church with the expectation that the preacher will expound upon the Scriptures, and their engagement with the sermon is contingent upon perceiving a connection between the Scriptures and the preacher's message.[134] Consequently, the Bible is fundamentally intertwined with the practice of Black preaching. The connection between Black preaching and Scripture is long recognized, with many scholars noting its profound regard for the biblical text.[135] Mitchell moves the conversation on Black preaching forward through his

---

[131] James Ward and Christine Ward, *Preaching from the Prophets* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 12.

[132] Willem A. VanGemeren, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word: An Introduction to the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 68.

[133] LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching*, 13-14.

[134] LaRue, *I Believe I'll Testify*, 57.

[135] Dates, "Understudied Burden," 2. Dates mentions several scholars who have authored works on Black preaching with reference to the role of Scripture in Black preaching.

discussion of the Black hermeneutic. Mitchell posits that the "Black hermeneutic" offers an understanding of the Scriptures derived from the Black religious experience and expressed in Black preaching.[136]

The Black hermeneutic is based on two fundamental principles. The first is the declaration of the gospel in the language and culture of the people. The second is tailoring the gospel to address the current needs of the people.[137] As Black preachers proclaim the gospel in a language and culture that resonates with the people, meeting their needs, the message must be grounded in the authority and insights of the biblical text. Mitchell states, "The vast majority of Black preaching, and probably the best of Black preaching, is based on biblical authority and biblical insights."[138] Cone, in his book *A Black Theology of Liberation,* states, "Blacks have heard enough about God. What they want to know is what God has to say about the black condition. Or, more importantly, what is God doing about it? What is the relevance of God in the struggle against the forces of evil which seek to destroy black being?"[139]

Black preaching becomes liberating when it speaks to the relevance of God in Scripture for the world and the struggles of the oppressed. For the oppressed, whenever God communicates, His message carries a profound sense of liberation. Cross proposes that "Black preaching uses the Word and the unwavering character of God to convey a message to the marginalized and oppressed throughout the world. A large number of these persons identify as people of color (non-white), and are socially or genetically connected to the plight of the African

---

[136] Mitchell, *Black Preaching* (1990), 17.

[137] Mitchell, *Black Preaching* (1990), 20.

[138] Mitchell, *Black Preaching* (1990), 57.

[139] James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation: 50th Anniversary Edition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2020), 38.

American experience."[140] Laurie P. Feille posits, "When preachers do not allow or consider the voices of people of color to enter our understanding of Scripture or the world, we are participating in *inferential racism* by perpetuating a white lens view and understanding of both Scripture and the world. Thus, it is imperative that our eyes are opened to the power of the words that we speak in our sermons."[141]

Accordingly, Wright suggests, "The distinctiveness of Black preaching comes from the intersection of experience and scriptural interpretation."[142] He further claims, "After the election of Donald Trump as the forty-fifth president of the United States, the question of how to present God's good news in light of a president who personified bigotry and unchecked narcissism was constant."[143] When addressing the social crises affecting the Black Church in the current sociopolitical landscape, the preaching moment demands an image of hope.[144] Gilbert offers his perspective on Black preaching as Dates details: "Black preaching, for Gilbert, is three-dimensional. The tri-vocal or three voices of the black preacher are: prophet, priest, and sage. . . . Gilbert sees these elements functioning in a Trinitarian way. Neither can be had without the other. If black preaching divorces itself from these, it fails its charge and its church."[145] As a result, the Black preacher must assume all three voices in the preaching moment, but particularly the prophet when addressing the specific challenges faced by the Black Church to instill

---

[140] Cross, "The Black Preaching Tradition," 4.

[141] Laurie P. Feille, "Confessional Biblical Preaching in the Face of Whiteness: Challenging the Preacher's Understanding of White Supremacy" (D.Min. diss., Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN, 2018), 4.

[142] Wright, *The Sunday After,* 49.

[143] Wright, *The Sunday After,* 49.

[144] Wright, *The Sunday After,* 26.

[145] Dates, "Understudied Burden," 12.

practices of congregational change and cultural activism within the congregation. This approach enables congregants to gain a deeper understanding of their reality and empowers them to navigate the world around them. Mitchell made the following comment in 1970: "Black people are always preoccupied with problems, and the Black preacher has had to give strength for the current day's journey, and guidance and vision for extended survival in a brutally oppressed absurd existence."[146]

Consistent with the aforementioned idea, the role of the Black preacher extends beyond the walls of the church building and Sunday sermons; they are called to be a prophetic voice in both the pulpit and public square, influencing the lives of congregants and motivating congregational change and social activism.[147] Gilbert implores preachers to take their role seriously, knowing that their influence extends far beyond the congregation into the community in which the preacher and congregants reside. By doing so, he summons the preacher back to operate in their sacerdotal function. As a sage, the preacher has to address social justice as an essential component in the plan of Black preaching, and it is the lost voice of the Black preacher's modern occupation.[148]

Definition of Prophetic Preaching

What is prophetic preaching? Numerous scholars have proposed various definitions of prophetic preaching. For this project, it is crucial to note that the term' prophetic preaching' refers to preaching that speaks truth to power, addressing the social injustices and issues that impact the Black Church. It is grounded in the biblical tradition of the prophets and Jesus, who were the

---

[146] Mitchell, *Black Preaching* (1970), 101.

[147] Dates, "Understudied Burden," 12.

[148] Dates, "Understudied Burden," 13.

earliest exemplars of prophetic preaching.[149] Black preaching lends itself to prophetic preaching because it is rooted in a Black hermeneutic of social justice and a cultural context of the Black experience. It draws upon the biblical inspiration of the Old Testament prophets, who challenged injustices and advocated for the oppressed, as well as Jesus, who challenged the social constructs of the day, as seen in Luke 4.[150] Ronald Q. Leavell suggests, "The Lord Jesus Christ, the prophet of Galilee, is the divine pattern for all preachers. Prophetic preaching is preaching that emulates the style of the prophets. It is a well-prepared message with food for thought, which is organized in proper homiletical form, but much more."[151] Black preachers carry a mantle of speaking truth to power, serving as modern-day prophets who challenge systems of sociopolitical injustice impacting the Black Church today. Prophetic preaching inspires hope, which extends beyond the church service by "purposefully reimagining a better reality for those who are marginalized within society."[152] Leavell further contends that "One preaches prophetically when they are under the authority like Amos."[153]

Historically, within the Black Church, prophetic preaching not only addresses issues of social injustices but also offers hope and inspiration to marginalized individuals while influencing a call to action for transformative change. Prophetic preaching pronounces God's

---

[149] Gilbert, *Exodus Preaching*, XI, 45.

[150] Filip Grujic, "Towards Contextual Prophetic Preaching," *Kairos: Evangelical Journal of Theology*, vol. 14, No. 1 (2020): 73-84. https://doi.org/10.32862/k.14.1.4. The emphasis of the Old Testament prophets was the spiritual decay of the time and idolatrous practices of the people of Israel. However, many prophets addressed the social injustices of the time and spoke on behalf of the poor and marginalized. Among the prophets who advocated social justice were Amos, Micah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Isaiah.

[151] Leavell, *Prophetic Preaching*, 11, 13, 14.

[152] Belle, "Reclaiming the Prophetic Voice," 22.

[153] Leavell, *Prophetic Preaching,* 14, quotes Amos 3:7.

message in a particular time and place in the community's historic journey.[154] Hence, the prophetic preacher bears witness to the existence of an active God at work in the lives of humanity. Prophetic preaching then becomes radically theocentric, representing God as one who was concerned about human affairs.[155] The representation of God in human affairs is evident in the Exodus story, which demonstrates God's activity in the liberation of His people from oppression, slavery, and bondage. Thomas Hoyt Jr., in the chapter, "Interpreting Biblical Scholarship for the Black Church Tradition" in *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation,* asserts, "The story of the Exodus speaks especially to blacks. Just as Israel, as a community, became liberated from bondage and oppression, God's work in the world is to liberate all people from oppression for them to form a community of political and social partnership."[156] The retelling of God's activity in the Exodus story becomes the prophetic radicalism from which prophetic preaching within the Black Church flows.[157] In this project, it can be argued that prophetic preaching reaches a radical appeal when it addresses the origin of social crisis.

Anthony Tyshawn Gardner claims, "Prophetic radicalism is a consistent description of the homiletical activity in the Black Church, as described by James Earl Massey and exhibited in Kelly Miller Smith, and thus is the characterological content in the African American preaching

---

[154] Ward and Ward. *Preaching from the Prophets,* 11.

[155] Ward and Ward, *Preaching from the Prophets,* 12.

[156] Thomas Hoyt Jr., "Interpreting Biblical Scholarship for the Black Church Tradition," *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation*, Cain Hope Felder, ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 30-31.

[157] Anthony Tyshawn Gardner, "An Analysis of Prophetic Radicalism in the Social Crisis Preaching of Kelly Miller Smith, Sr." (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY, 2019), 16. The term "radicalism" is not a term defined within this project, but rather a term used by Gardner to describe the homiletical activity and content within the Black preaching tradition.

tradition."[158] James Earl Massey shares some insight into the Black preaching tradition by stating that, among other things, preaching within the Black Church calls for the sermon to be radical. The sermon encourages listeners to examine the origins of their personal lives and offer an active response.[159] Through energetic speech, animated storytelling, and a sacred hermeneutic, congregants are endowed with resilience and faith to meet such challenges by affirming God's presence and the promise of justice, even in the face of adversity and oppression. Kelly Miller Smith argues, "Social crisis preaching is the proclamation of that which is crucially relevant within the context of the Christian gospel in times of social upheaval and stress."[160]

The radical nature of prophetic preaching, rooted in the biblical tradition of the prophets and Jesus, not only shapes the homiletical style within the Black Church but also serves as a conduit for confronting social crises and injustices. This prophetic imperative compels preachers to address the pressing sociopolitical realities facing their congregations, particularly the enduring challenge of white supremacy, and to call the community to active engagement and justice-seeking in the world. Cone underscores the depth of this challenge, arguing:

> This country was founded for whites and everything that has happened in it has emerged from the white perspective. The Constitution is white, the Emancipation Proclamation is white, the government is white, business is white, the unions are white. What we need is the destruction of whiteness which is the source of human misery around the world. . . . Sin, therefore, is whiteness.[161]

---

[158] Gardner, "An Analysis of Prophetic Radicalism," 13.

[159] James Earl Massey, *The Responsible Pulpit* (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 1974), 105.

[160] Kelly Miller Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching: The Lyman Beecher Lectures 1983* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984), 33.

[161] Cone, Black Theology of Liberation, 104.

Feille points out that at the heart of sociopolitical issues distressing the Black Church today is white supremacy.[162] According to Feille, "If, as preachers, we believe that white supremacy is a sin, then we are called not only as pastors/preachers, but also as present-day prophets."[163] As modern-day prophets, Black clergy must "seek justice" as a burden of concern for the powerless and disenfranchised, speaking out against the sins of racism, white supremacy, and the sociopolitical issues affecting the Black Church, and do so from a position that reveals God in the liberation of these individuals.[164] Gardner further insists, "Prophetic preaching confronts and ultimately rejects the vision, mores, theologies, and narratives constructed in hierarchic and homogeneous silos often responsible for the discrimination and oppression of disenfranchised minority groups."[165] Black prophetic preaching delivers a prophetic voice to the pulpit within the Black Church, equipped to confront the systemic and institutionalized issues affecting minority groups.

This divine message of justice and liberation from oppression reverberates throughout the biblical narrative. Gilbert contends, "Prophets were raised to speak truth to power, often in scolding ways. In light of the prophets' task of coupling criticism and hope, by analogy, the preacher might discover creative ways of linking the New Testament witness of the saving significance of Jesus' death as a liberative and redemptive vision with the prophets' priestly role in the speech-act."[166] Both the prophets and Jesus proclaimed God's word and will in human life,

---

[162] Feille, "Confessional Biblical Preaching in the Face of Whiteness," 6.

[163] Feille, "Confessional Biblical Preaching in the Face of Whiteness," 13.

[164] Lewis J. Dixon, "Black Churches and Their Communities: An Exploration of the Impact of a Declining Prophetic Voice and Space" (D.Min. diss., Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School, 2021), 19.

[165] Gardner, "An Analysis of Prophetic Radicalism," 14.

[166] Gilbert, *Exodus Preaching*, 63.

calling for social action and liberation from oppression, while confronting the status quo. Within many mainline churches, the term "prophetic" typically refers to sermons that draw from the teachings of the prophets or Jesus, inspiring people to follow God's vision for justice, peace, and equality.[167] It can also refer to sermons that directly address social issues. Prophetic preaching ignites a sense of urgency, stirring congregations toward collective change and cultural activism beyond Sunday mornings, to envision a more just reality for those who are marginalized within our society.[168] Prophetic activism conveys the church's community involvement beyond the walls of the building to benefit members of Black communities.[169] J. Philip Wogaman defines prophetic preaching as "bringing the light of the gospel to bear upon all aspects of human existence."[170] Wogaman affirms the call is rooted in the biblical tradition of the prophets who called people to repentance, confronted power structures, and spoke on behalf of God. For Wogaman, "To be prophetic is not necessarily to be adversarial, or even controversial. Although it will inevitably lead to some conflict and some controversy."[171]

Dawn Ottoni-Wilhelm posits, "Prophetic preaching proclaims God's Word from within the Christian tradition against all that threatens God's reconciling intention for humanity."[172]

---

[167] Tisdale, *Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach,* 3.

[168] Belle, "Reclaiming the Prophetic Voice," 22.

[169] O. M. McRoberts, *Streets of Glory: Church and Community in a Black Urban Neighborhood* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago, 2003), 123-150. "Prophetic activism" is not a term defined within the project, but rather a term used by McRoberts to describe how prophetic preaching embodies activism for community involvement.

[170] J. Philip Wogaman, *Speaking Truth in Love: Prophetic Preaching to a Broken World* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 7.

[171] Wogaman, *Prophetic Preaching to a Broken World,* 3, 7.

[172] Dawn Ottoni-Wilhelm, "God's Word in the World: Prophetic Preaching and the Gospel of Jesus Christ," *Anabaptist Preaching: A Conversation Between Pulpit, Pew and Bible,* David B. Greiser and Michael A. King, eds. (Telford, UK: Cascadia Publishing, 2003), 77.

Walter Brueggemann uses the following definition as his thesis and definition for prophetic proclamation: "Prophetic proclamation is an attempt to imagine the world as though YHWH—the creator of the world, the deliverer of Israel, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ whom we Christians come to name as Father, Son, and Spirit—were a real character and an effective agent in the world."[173] In an earlier and similar work, Brueggemann views prophetic preaching as a disruption of the status quo and a call to imagine and enact an alternative to the dominant culture. He states, "The central task of the prophetic ministry is to evoke and nurture a faithful consciousness which is alternative to the dominant culture which surrounds us."[174] Marvin McMickle insists, "Prophetic preaching points out a lack of concern and acquiescence in the face of evil that can so easily replace the true God of Scripture who calls true believers to the active pursuit of justice and righteousness for every member of society."[175] Gardner further proposes, "Prophetic preaching confronts and ultimately rejects the vision, mores, theologies, and narratives constructed in hierarchic and homogeneous silos often responsible for the discrimination and oppression of disenfranchised minority groups."[176]

Gilbert defines African American prophetic preaching as "interpretation" that brings clarity to the sacred (the realities of God, revealed truth, highest moral values, and so on) and articulates what should be an appropriate human response to the sacred."[177] For Gilbert, "African American prophetic preaching is meditational speech. It bears no fundamental distinction from

---

[173] Walter Brueggemann, *The Practice of Prophetic Imagination: Preaching an Emancipatory Word* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), 2.

[174] Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 3.

[175] McMickle, *Where Have All the Prophets Gone?* 2.

[176] Gardner, "An Analysis of Prophetic Radicalism," 14.

[177] Gilbert, *Exodus Preaching*, ix.

prophetic preaching in general, except to the extent that it is seen as God-summoned speech clothed in cultural particularity."[178] Fearon offers the following definition: "Prophetic preaching should constantly challenge the status quo, and God's authority in the preacher's life should lead him/her to preach with power. The older preachers preached prophetically without the fear of what would happen or tried to be politically correct in using passive rhetoric to try and gain favors with the Whites."[179] He further maintains:

> Prophetic preaching should transform lives and should be preached by every pastor in a community where injustices are prevalent; sexism, racism, classism, militarism, police brutality, I would assert in allowing someone to understand my meaning of prophetic preaching. Preachers should ensure we use the Bible and be constantly praying while standing in the pulpit, preaching prophetically, and challenging the status quo. A preacher should continuously pursue justice. Prophetic preaching is justice-oriented and should never focus on self-glory; it is standing with the authority and power of God preaching with boldness for the marginalized in one's community and around the world.[180]

Prophetic preaching and social justice are fundamental to the Black Church's existence.[181] Since its inception, the Black Church has been built by an oppressed and enslaved community whose fight was for freedom and identity.[182] The objective of prophetic preaching is to translate biblical faith into meaningful actions that contribute to positive change. William Barber III suggests:

> If we as preachers are to do our job well, then our preaching should trouble and shake the foundations of the world. Prophetic imagination introduces something beyond the available options—not left or right, liberal or conservative, but a new thing. A way out of

---

[178] Kenyatta Gilbert, *A Pursued Justice: Black Preaching from the Great Migration to Civil Rights* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 6 quoted in Gilbert, *Exodus Preaching,* X.

[179] Fearon, "Social Justice Preaching," 58.

[180] Fearon, "Social Justice Preaching," 60.

[181] Pounds, "Reasons for Pastoral and Parishioner Conflict," 67-68.

[182] Warnock, *The Divided Mind,* 1.

> no way. The prophetic imagination is a gift that comes to us from beyond ourselves, a message meant to shape not reflect public opinion.[183]

Prophetic preaching should serve as a foundation for congregants, moving them from a biblical faith to a living faith in action. The example of Moses' preaching in the Exodus narrative to the mighty Pharaoh is dangerous as he takes risks, challenging Pharaoh to free the oppressed and marginalized citizens known as slaves in Egypt. Jesus models prophetic preaching in Luke's Gospel as He shakes the foundations of the world controlled by the Romans.[184] Both of these instances address the objective of prophetic preaching, which translates biblical faith into meaningful acts of positive change. Preaching should connect God and His people in a real and spiritual way that extends beyond their ecclesiastical experience into the community in which they live, work, and reside. Brueggemann asserts, "We will never understand the meaning of prophetic preaching unless we see the connection between the religion of static triumphalism and the politics of oppression and exploitation."[185] West offers the following definition:

> Prophetic witness consists of human acts of justice and kindness that attend to the unjust sources of human hurt and misery. Prophetic witness calls attention to the causes of unjustified suffering and unnecessary social misery. It highlights personal and institutional evil, including the evil of being indifferent to personal and institutional evil.[186]

In this project, prophetic preaching is not about foretelling future events; rather, it is about recognizing the interconnectedness between spiritual and social contexts that attend to the unjust sources of human hurt and misery. Prophetic preaching is an indispensable gift within the

---

[183] William Barber III, "Foreword" in Frank A. Thomas, *How to Preach a Dangerous Sermon* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2018), 11-16.

[184] Luke 4.

[185] Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 7.

[186] Cornel West, *Democracy Matters: Winning the Fight Against Imperialism* (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2004), 114, as quoted in Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 8-9.

Black Church, addressing social justice concerns and moving toward a more equitable and just society. It casts light in darkness and gives hope in times of despair.

The Historical, Biblical, and Theological Warrant for Prophetic Preaching

Historical Warrant

Without question, the Black Church is the most significant institution within the Black Community. Since its origin in slavery as the invisible institution, its significance is far-reaching.[187] To this day, the Black Church remains a place where congregants worship, fellowship, hear the word of God, and obtain direction on spiritual and social matters. The Black Church has been instrumental in bringing to the social conscience of the United States the flaws that exist between races and the ongoing struggle for equality and justice of Black citizens. The Black Church has not only nurtured Black people through worship and fellowship but also enabled them to be resilient in the face of fierce oppression and injustice. Reginald Davis in *The Black Church: Relevant or Irrelevant in the 21st Century?* argues, "Much of the social and political gains of black America could not have happened without the power and influence of the Black Church."[188] It has been the Black Church that has acknowledged the Black experience within the United States and given meaning to being Black and human. Although Davis believes in, is proud of, and supports the Black Church, he does raise concerns about the contemporary Black Church's standing as an instrument of social change. Yet these concerns are noted after laying the groundwork that the Black Church is the foremost social institution within the Black Community. Davis aptly argues that the Black Church is responsible for promoting cultural

---

[187] LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching*, 14.

[188] Reginald F. Davis, *The Black Church: Relevant or Irrelevant in the 21st Century?* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2010), 14.

identity, hope, survival, and liberation. Without the Black Church, many Black organizations, schools, and agencies would not have been started.[189]

Similarly, Peter J. Paris discusses the role the Black Church shoulders in regard to achieving social change. He posits, "The black Christian tradition has always been the source of inspiration for Black Churches in their persistent attempts to reveal the fundamental depths of racism – that racial segregation and discrimination differ from many other social issues in that they are rooted in a worldview that is both morally and religiously false."[190] Leonora Tubbs Tisdale proposes seven hallmarks of prophetic preaching, which highlight its strong historical significance:

1. Prophetic preaching is rooted in the biblical witness: both in the testimony of the Hebrew prophets and the prophet Jesus.

2. Prophetic preaching is countercultural and challenges the status quo.

3. Prophetic preaching is concerned with the evils and shortcomings of the present social order and is often more focused on corporate and public issues than on individual and personal concerns.

4. Prophetic preaching requires the preacher to name both what is not of God in the world (criticizing) and the new reality God will bring to pass in the future (energizing).

5. Prophetic preaching offers hope of a new day to come and the promise of liberation to God's oppressed people.

6. Prophetic preaching incites courage in its hearers and empowers them to work to change the social order.

7. Prophetic proclamation requires of the preacher a heart that breaks with the things that break God's heart; a passion for justice in the world; the imagination, conviction, and course to speak words from God; humility and honesty in the preaching moment; and a strong reliance on the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.[191]

---

[189] Davis, *Relevant or Irrelevant in the 21st Century?* 13-14.

[190] Peter J. Paris, *The Social Teachings of the Black Churches* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1985), 11.

[191] Tisdale, *Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach*, 9-10.

From the invisible institution to the contemporary context, the Black Church remains the epicenter of Black existence. Historically, what happened within the Black Church extended beyond the physical walls of the building into the community where all members reside and work. Therefore, from a historical perspective, the Black Church assumes a lasting presence within the Black Community. Understanding the historical significance of the Black Church as a prophetic voice in the social, political, and economic fight for the liberation of the oppressed helps identify the historical warrant for prophetic preaching.

Biblical Warrant

Among the prophets who advocated for social justice were Amos, Micah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Isaiah.[192] Jesus also advocated for social justice in the Gospels by challenging the existing state of affairs, social provisions, financial inequality, and the freedom of the captive.[193] In the Old Testament, the prophets were tasked with conveying a message of justice for the oppressed. In the New Testament, Jesus revealed His plan for justice as a provision for those oppressed by the supremacy of Rome. This project draws upon both the prophets and Jesus by examining biblical passages, stressing not only the biblical warrant for prophetic preaching but also how the Black Church can revive its weakened and silenced prophetic voice. Johnny Bernard Hill claims, "It is the prophet who speaks truth to power, whispers in the ears of kings and sounds the trumpet before the masses."[194] These selected biblical passages show how both the prophets and Jesus spoke truth to power, whispered in the ears of kings, and sounded the

[192] Amos 5:24, Micah 6:8, Jeremiah 5:28, Isaiah 1:16-17, [NKJV].

[193] Matthew 23:23, 25:31-46, Luke 4:18-21.

[194] Johnny Bernard Hill, *Prophetic Rage: A Postcolonial Theology of Liberation* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2013), 82.

trumpet, revealing the powerful heritage of prophetic preaching and its relevance to both the Black Church and the pursuit of justice.

The Prophet Amos

In Amos 5:24, the prophet declares, "But let justice roll down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream."[195] In this verse, Amos calls for justice to flow incessantly and plentifully, like a river, and for righteousness like a vast stream. This imagery conveys the idea that the struggle for justice should not be a provisional or periodic, but an ongoing, vital force in society. According to Frank E. Gaebelein and J. D. Douglas in the *Expositor's Bible Commentary,* "Like the full commitment to 'good' called for in v.15, justice and righteousness are to 'roll on like a river, . . . like a never-failing stream.' This is one of the great metaphors in the OT and one the church needs to ponder. A momentary flow of justice and righteousness will not do; these virtues are to keep on in the social order like a stream that does not dry up with summer heat."[196] Amos challenges the people of Israel, and by extension all people, to ensure that justice and righteousness are central to their actions and way of life. This call to social justice stresses the importance of addressing systemic inequality and oppression as a matter of faith and morality. Gaebelein and Douglas further argue:

> The element that will transform the people's sterile worship into worship acceptable to God is "justice." The interpretation that the verse speaks of the Lord's judgment and righteousness that is to fill the land is inadequate because Amos addressed only the people. "Justice" and "righteousness" relate to the social order. Only when the personal concern of the law is incorporated into their social structure and "rightness" characterizes their dealings with others will their worship be acceptable. A token practice of justice and righteousness will not do.[197]

---

[195] Amos 5:24, [NKJV].

[196] Frank E. Gaebelein and J. D. Douglas, eds., *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Olive Tree Bible Software), "Amos 5:24."

[197] Gaebelein and Douglas, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, "Amos 5:24."

The Prophet Micah

In his enunciation of what the Lord requires, the prophet Micah proclaims, "He has shown you, O man, what does the Lord require of you, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?"[198] Here, the prophet discloses the Lord's expectations of His people: to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. This is a mandate to live out social justice by making justice, mercy, and humility central to one's desire to fulfill the Lord's expectations through their behavior. Gaebelein and Douglas state the following regarding Micah's words: "It is a heart response to God demonstrated in the basic elements of true religion. This was shown to Israel in the social concerns reflected in the Mosaic legislation."[199] The emphasis on justice parallels the heart of God for cultural activism, where the oppressed are liberated, the helpless are protected, and the marginalized are uplifted. Gaebelein and Douglas further assert that:

> The prophet was not indicating that sacrifice was completely ineffectual and that simply a proper heart attitude to God would suffice. In the preceding verse he painted a caricature, a purposefully exaggerated picture, of the sacrificial system to indicate that God has no interest in the multiplication of empty religious acts. God has told the people what is good. They were to act justly (lit., "do justice, *mispat*). The word "justly" has here the sense of "true religion," i.e., the ethical response to God that has a manifestation in social concerns as well (cf. note at 3:8). "To love mercy" is to freely and willingly show kindness to others (cf. Notes). The expression "to walk humbly with your God" means to live in conscious fellowship with God, exercising a spirit of humility before him.[200]

Overall, this passage serves as an indication that social justice is not merely an outward cause to which we protest, but the true character of one's faith. The revelation of true character is

---

[198] Micah 6:8, [NKJV].

[199] Gaebelein and Douglas, *Expositor's Bible Commentary,* "Micah 6:8."

[200] Gaebelein and Douglas, *Expositor's Bible Commentary, n.p.*

demonstrated in one's willingness to render social justice, show compassion to those who are disregarded and oppressed, and walk with humility.

The Prophet Jeremiah

There is a verse within the prophetic book of Jeremiah that provides biblical warrant for prophetic preaching. Postulating the wickedness of the people, Jeremiah identifies three classes of people: the rich oppressors of the poor (v. 26-28), the lying prophets, and the time-serving priest (v. 31).[201] The prophet cries out for God's judgment in dealing with the social injustices by announcing: "They have grown fat, they are sleek; Yes, they surpass the deeds of the wicked; They do not plead the cause, The cause of the fatherless; Yet they prosper, And the right of the needy they do not defend."[202] Through deceit and oppression of the poor and helpless, the wicked have amassed wealth. Regarding this wealth, Gaebelein and Douglas suggest, "As a fowler snares birds by devices, so the people accumulate wealth by deceit."[203] By condemning those in power for abandoning their responsibility to advocate for justice, particularly for the poor, Jeremiah defines the rich oppressor as being "fat and sleek." This suggests a lucrative life and reveals the evil deeds of the oppressor. Jeremiah condemns the injustice of failing to defend the fatherless and the poor, emphasizing the prophetic role of speaking truth to power, calling out oppression, and advocating for a society where all people are treated with dignity and fairness.

---

[201] Gaebelein and Douglas, *Expositor's Bible Commentary,* "Jeremiah 5:28."

[202] Jeremiah 5:28, [NKJV].

[203] Gaebelein and Douglas, *Expositor's Bible Commentary,* "Jeremiah 5:28."

Matthew 23:23

Criticizing the Scribes and Pharisees on their view of the law and tithing, Jesus says, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have neglected the weightier *matters* of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone."[204] Although religious observances are essential, Jesus suggests that they do not supersede our moral responsibilities for justice and mercy. Gaebelein and Douglass offer: "Jesus does not condemn scrupulous observance in these things ('without neglecting the former'), but insists that to fuss over them while neglecting the 'more important matters of the law' (cf. 22:34-40)—justice, mercy, and *pistis* (here rightly translated 'faithfulness')—is to strain out a gnat but swallow a camel (v. 24) both unclean creatures."[205] The thematic thrust of Jesus' words is closely aligned with the prophets' care for justice and mercy.

Luke 4:18-21

> The Spirit of the LORD *is* upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to *the* poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to *the* captives And recovery of sight to *the* blind, *to* set at liberty those who are oppressed; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD. Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."[206]

Reading from the scroll of Isaiah in the synagogue, Jesus declares His mission and ministry by identifying Himself as the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, declaring His purpose to bring hope and liberation. According to Gaebelein and Douglas,

---

[204] Matthew 23:23, [NKJV].

[205] Gaebelein and Douglass, *Expositor's Bible Commentary,* "Matthew 23:23."

[206] Luke 4:18-21.

> The quotation has significance both as our Lord's statement of his call to his saving ministry and as Luke's affirmation of this ministry as thematic in his Gospel. In saying "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing," Jesus identifies himself as the subject of Isaiah's prophetic word. As such he is: (1) the bearer of the Spirit; (2) the eschatological prophet, proclaimer of the "good news;" and, (3) the one who brings release to the oppressed (a messianic function).[207]

Jesus continues the prophetic preaching tradition by declaring the good news to the poor, bringing freedom to captives, restoring sight to the blind, and releasing the oppressed, announcing that God's favor and justice have come. Moreover, Jesus emphasizes that His ministry is rooted in social justice, compassion, and liberation. This assertion outlines His messianic role as a savior who brings wholeness, but also as one who confronts systems of oppression and restores dignity to those suffering under government oppression.

Theological Warrant

The project is grounded in a Black theology of liberation. This section will explore how the use of this framework provides a theological warrant for prophetic preaching within the Black Church. James H. Cone, Gayraud S. Wilmore, and J. Deotis Roberts contributed to the theological framework of Black theology. One cannot discuss the Black Church without also conversing about the theology that nurtured it.

Black theology as a theological discipline had its beginnings in the late 1960s.[208] It arose in the Black Church from the Black Community's struggle for liberation from white oppression and domination.[209] Cone's famed publications, *Black Theology and Black Power* and *A Black Theology of Liberation*, are two foundational texts for Black liberation theology. According to

---

[207] Gaebelein and Douglas, *Expositor's Bible Commentary,* "Luke 4:18-21."

[208] Pounds, "Reasons for Pastoral and Parishioner Conflict," 39.

[209] Kenneth Hill, *Religious Education,* 65.

Wilmore and Cone, Black theology is a theology of "blackness" that attempts to align the Black experience with the revelation of who God is in Jesus Christ, so that the Black Community can perceive God in proportion to the successes of Black humanity. [210] Cone asserts that, "The God in black theology is the God of and for the oppressed, the God who comes into view in their liberation."[211] Black theology serves as a source of validation that liberates Black people from white prejudice and rejects white tyranny. Liberation is also the freedom revealed in God as a liberator, who sets the oppressed free through the message of the Gospel. The power of the Gospel, with its liberating message, brings hope to the oppressed. As stated by Johnny Bernard Hill, "Roberts argued that indeed the essence of the gospel is liberation of the oppressed, that God is in fact on the side of black people in their quest for justice and human dignity."[212] Thus, a Black theology of liberation is the gospel message of freedom that views God in the context of Black experience.

James H. Evans Jr. makes the case for theological reflection as fundamental to the Black Church. Furthermore, he explains why Black theology varies from traditional [white] theology, similarly to the way the Black religious experience differs from the white religious experience.[213] Helmut Gollwitzer, in his chapter, "Why Black Theology" in *Black Theology: A Documentary History 1966-1979* states:

> Black theology as distinguished from white theology—this phenomenon exists because colonialism and slave trade existed. Whoever belongs to the camp of "white theology," as soon as he is confronted by "black theology," has every reason to become conscious of

---

[210] Gayraud S. Wilmore and James H. Cone, eds. *Black Theology: A Documentary History, 1966-1979* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 101.

[211] Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 64.

[212] Johnny Bernard Hill, *Prophetic Rage*, 27.

[213] James H. Evans, Jr., *We Have Been Believers* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), 1-11.

> the specific historical and societal conditioning of his theology and his view of the Christian message.[214]

Similar to how Black people established the Black Church in response to the historical injustices, there was a need to develop a theology that addressed those injustices, offering hope and portraying a liberating God who is actively engaged in their social condition. A Black theology of liberation not only gives meaning to God's existence but also places Him in the context of the injustices faced by Black people.[215] Cone maintains, "Black theology is a theology of liberation because it arises from an identification with the oppressed blacks of America seeking to interpret the gospel of Jesus in the light of the black condition. It believes that the liberation of the black community is God's liberation."[216] In the same way that God was actively engaged in the Exodus narrative, bringing the Israelites out of Egyptian bondage, a Black theology of liberation depicts God as being involved in the liberation of Black people in America.

Roberts, in *Liberation and Reconciliation: A Black Theology*, suggests:

> Liberation and reconciliation are the two main poles of Black Theology. They are not antithetical—one moves naturally from one to the other in the light of the Christian understanding of God and humanity. Liberation is Marxist or socialist in ring. White Americans have a pathological fear of Marxism. White Americans say their fear of communism is the main reason why they are in Vietnam. Fascism is something else. This may be endorsed as a means of keeping blacks and radicals in tow. Freedom sums up what is. Liberation is revolutionary—for blacks, it points to what ought to be. Black Christians desire radical and rapid social change in America as a matter of survival.

---

[214] Helmut Gollwitzer, "Why Black Theology" in *Black Theology: A Documentary History 1966-1979*, Gayraud S. Wilmore and James H. Cone, eds. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 152.

[215] James Cone, *The God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), adds to the research of Black theology by presenting a methodical theology that draws upon the resources of the Black religious experience and culture. Cone makes the point that the social context of the time has shaped the theology of Blacks, which has also been influenced by whites. Moreover, Cone raises a critical question, which causes his readers to think critically, scripturally, and theologically. For example, "Who is Jesus Christ for us today?" This work not only connects Scripture and theology, but also theology and the social context of the Black oppressed people and the need for liberation.

[216] Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 5.

> Black Theology is a theology of liberation. Christianity is rooted in the belief that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Godself" (2 Cor. 5:19), and that reconciliation between God and humans can be affected only through reconciliation between persons.[217]

Roberts argues that reconciliation between God and humans begins with humans reconciling with one another. For this to happen, Blacks and whites must see themselves as equals created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27) and given the same rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Roberts advances his point by arguing:

> "Slave mentality" has controlled American race relations through the coexistence of blacks and whites in this society. The Dred Scott decision made the point that "the Negro has no rights that a white man is bound to respect," while stating that the basis for this is the fact that "he is not a citizen. The Black person is a thing, chattel or property, an object. Black Theology is to enable black people to affirm their personhood, their dignified nature, which is God-given, and is not given or taken away by any human, black or white.[218]

The "slave mentality," which has controlled America's race relations as posited by Roberts, has led to a consciousness of separatism, elitism, and social distancing, which prevents reconciliation between races. On the one hand, this mentality is a consciousness of control and dominance by whites over Blacks as a means of keeping folks in their place. On the other hand, this mentality is a consciousness of an ill-informed identity, where Blacks are nothing without their oppressor, equal to the mindset of Israel when they complained against Moses and Aaron about how life was better in slavery.[219] Within the realm of prophetic preaching, this consciousness must be addressed through Scriptures that offer liberation from such a consciousness. James H. Harris notes that, "The preacher's task is to interpret scripture to

---

[217] J. Deotis Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation: A Black Theology,* 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 8-9.

[218] Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation,* 14-28.

[219] Exodus 16:3.

restructure human consciousness."[220] Interpreting Scripture in a way that restructures human consciousness addresses the social and political issues impacting humanity.

The Black Church is beset with what Warnock considered a "double consciousness of the black Christianity—that is, a faith shaped by white evangelicalism, which emphasizes individual salvation, while conscious of slavery and sociopolitical freedom."[221] The contemporary Black Church has to understand the God of liberation as revealed in Black theology. Moreover, as Pounds states, "The God discussed and observed through the lens of the black theologian has not shown up in today's Black Church."[222] Although this is not true of the Black Church as a whole, given that some churches have employed a Black theology of liberation bearing the fruit of their engagement, for the most part, the Black Church appears to have disregarded the call to liberation and social justice. When it comes to the ministry of liberation and social justice within the Black Church, Eddie Glaude Jr. would argue that the Black Church is dead. In his online *Huffington Post* article, "The Black Church is Dead," Glaude claims that when it comes to social life, the Black Church is dead. Although 87% of African Americans identify with some religious group and 79% say that religion is important to them, the Black Church, the once "venerable institution central to black life and a repository for the social and moral conscience of the nation has all but disappeared."[223]

A Black theology of liberation is essential to this project because it offers a hermeneutic for addressing the sociopolitical issues impacting the Black Church and community. Black

---

[220] James H. Harris, *Preaching Liberation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 9.

[221] Warnock, *The Divided Mind*, 2.

[222] Pounds, "Reasons for Pastoral and Parishioner Conflict," 42.

[223] Glaude, "The Black Church Is Dead," n.p.

theology is grounded in the biblical prophetic tradition. The attention on liberation personifies its prophetic voice.[224] The prophetic ministry of Black theology offers Black people primarily and all people in general what Walter Brueggemann suggests as an "alternative consciousness," which seeks to dismantle the dominant consciousness and motivate individuals and communities in a direction the religious community should move, adding, "The prophetic tradition knows that it bears a genuine alternative to a theology of God's enslavement and a sociology of human enslavement."[225] At its core, a Black theology of liberation has always been about Black identity and the pursuit of social, political, and economic freedom. It resembles the ministry of Jesus because the ultimate goal of Jesus' ministry was liberation and freedom. The resistance of the invisible institution, later the Black Church, to white supremacy went hand in hand with a Black theology of liberation. Eventually, it became the code of survival in the face of oppression.[226] William R. Jones posits that "the pie in the sky eschatology" is no longer suitable for Black life today; consequently, this ideology should be abdicated, not because it does not offer comfort today, but because it threatens the intention of Black liberation.[227]

---

[224] Dale P. Andrews, *Practical Theology for Black Churches: Bridging Black Theology and African American Folk Religion* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 106.

[225] Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 3.

[226] Harry Greg Zimmerman, Jr., "Understanding African American Preaching: The Style, Culture, and Rationale for the Worship Experience and the Value for Education" (D.Min. diss., Liberty University Baptist Theological Seminary, Lynchburg, VA, 2015), 9-10.

[227] William R. Jones, *Is God a White Racist? A Preamble to Black Theology* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1998), 148.

Prophetic Preaching in the Slavery Era

Since that dreadful day in 1619 in Jamestown, Black people have had to grapple with the question posed by educator, theologian, and activist Howard Thurman: "Under what terms is survival possible?"[228] The Middle Passage became the origin of Black identity, which was given to the enslaved Africans by their white abductors through the establishment of whiteness and the myth of Black submissiveness.[229] Black Americans have lived under the sense of a "royal consciousness" while fighting for survival.[230] Living in this land meant being Black and no longer African, which was one of the requirements for submission to white rule and to view the world through the eyes of the oppressor, except when Blacks were being exploited for money.[231]

The Black Church has been a fundamental organization in the lives of Black Americans throughout the history of the United States, serving as an "escape from their oppression and dehumanization by white people."[232] It was once the epicenter of the Black Community,[233] with many Black clergy engaging in demonstrations against injustices.[234] According to Perryman, "During slavery, church meetings were the only permissible gatherings for subjugated Blacks and thus revolts were often planned during worship services or Bible study sessions. The focus

---

[228] Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 10.

[229] Jones, "Reclaiming the Tradition of Prophetic Proclamation," 2.

[230] Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination,* 21-37. Brueggemann raises the concept of a "royal consciousness" which describes an elitist mindset toward those who are socioeconomically beneath them.

[231] Tara T. Green, *Reimagining the Middle Passage: Black Resistance in Literature, Television, and Song* (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2018), 3.

[232] Floyd-Thomas, *Liberating Black Church History,* 7.

[233] Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience,* 210-247. The authors offer a complete historical overview of Black Church history and its social dynamics. This book aids in the understanding of the formation and sociology of the Black Church.

[234] Florence, "Seek Justice," 1.

of Black Church sociopolitical activism during the slave period was on liberation and by necessity, survival."[235]

From the arrival of the first African slaves on the coast of America, the pursuit of freedom and equality has been the goal. Groups like the Free African Society, founded by Richard Allen, helped many reach this goal.[236] Surmising the slaves' experience, Albert J. Raboteau posits, "From the beginning of the Atlantic slave trade, conversion of the slave to Christianity was viewed by the emerging nations of Western Christendom as justification for enslavement of Africans."[237] Spreading the idea that Blacks were not human and needed to be controlled, the slave captors, and later masters, also misinterpreted Scriptures such as "slaves obey your masters" (Ephesians 6:5-9 and Colossians 3:22) to justify the institution of slavery as Christian.[238] The Christianizing of slaves was all to the profit and benefit of white oppressors who believed the slaves would be more loyal.[239] Through the efforts of colonizers and missionaries, slaves were eventually baptized and converted to Western Christianity.[240] Calvon Tijuan Jones further suggests, "Not only were slave conversions and experiences a form of

---

[235] Perryman, "The Role of the Black Church in Addressing Collateral Damage," 28.

[236] Robert B. Hill, "The Role of the Black Church in Community and Economic Development Activities." *National Journal of Sociology*, vol. 8, no. 1/2 (Winter 1994): 149.

[237] Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 96. He furthers this idea in *Canaan Land: A Religious History of African Americans* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001), by providing a historical analysis of the African-American plight from Africa to American slavery. The historical sojourn of African-American religion represents the diverse cultures and religious tradition, which powerfully came to America by slaves as they converted to Christianity. Recalling the backwoods of religion among the slaves known as "brush arbors" to the steps of the first Black Churches, Raboteau chaperons the reader through the brawls of the black preacher, portraying the foundation of black theology and their interpretation of Scripture.

[238] Jones, "Reclaiming the Tradition of Prophetic Proclamation," 32.

[239] Jones, "Reclaiming the Tradition of Prophetic Proclamation," 33-34.

[240] Jones, "Reclaiming the Tradition of Prophetic Proclamation," 33-34.

proclamation to physical and social death, but the subversiveness of slave preachers also resisted the evil powers of slavery."[241]

The roots of Black preaching began in slavery with slave preachers playing a unique role within the enslaved community.[242] Several prophetic voices emerged during this period, including Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vesey, Nat Turner, Richard Allen, John Jasper, and George Liele, among others.[243] Blending the traditions of African religion with the Christian teachings of their white slave masters, the slave preacher provided hope, resilience, and empowerment through their sermons. The slave preacher encouraged fellow slaves not to get weary and to endure suffering and oppression, knowing that hope was on the horizon.[244] Charles V. Hamilton stated, "In many ways, one could make the argument that black people needed their preachers more during slavery than at any other time in their history in this country."[245] According to Wayne E. Croft Sr., "Due in part to the lack of primary sources and fragmented stories concerning slave preachers, many scholars of preaching have been limited in their research of the slave preacher. Some have ignored slave preachers and the motif of hope in slave preaching or have limited their research to articles, short chapters, and passing comments."[246] Among the few primary sources we have of the slave preacher, Thurman offers this:

> The ante-bellum Negro preacher was the greatest single factor in determining the spiritual destiny of the slave community. He it was who gave to the masses of his fellows a point of view that became for them a veritable Door of Hope. His ministry was greatly

---

[241] Jones, "Reclaiming the Tradition of Prophetic Proclamation," 35.

[242] LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching*, 14.

[243] Wayne E. Croft Sr. *The Motif of Hope in African American Preaching and the Post-Civil War Era: There's a Bright Side Somewhere* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017).

[244] Croft, *The Motif of Hope*, 44.

[245] Charles V. Hamilton, *The Black Preacher in America* (New York, NY: William Morrow, 1972), 37.

[246] Croft, *The Motif of Hope*, 44.

> restricted as to movement, function, and opportunities of leadership, but he himself was blessed with one important insight: he was convinced that every human being was a child of God. This belief included the slave as well as the master…Many weary, spiritually and physically exhausted slaves found new strength and power gushing up into all the reaches of their personalities, inspired by the word that fell from this man's lips.[247]

The slave preacher was one of the voices of hope during the era of slavery. Exhorting fellow slaves to remain resolute, not for the sake of enduring hardship and harsh treatment but knowing that hope was a realized prospect. Through creative oratory, Scripture, imagery, unusual charisma, and rebellion against slavery, the slave preacher effectively conveyed his exhortation to fellow slaves. [248] Although not a minister nor formally educated, Sojourner Truth was also a prophetic voice who emerged during this period. Her *Ain't I a Woman?* "not only challenged the system of slavery, but also confronted the dual disadvantages of Black enslaved women."[249]

Prophetic preaching emerged during slavery as a response to oppression and ill treatment. The history of preaching within the Black Community is connected with the religious traditions of West Africa and the institution of slavery. As slaves were converted to Christianity, a blending of cultures emerged, giving birth to a new tradition of preaching.[250] Enslaved Africans developed a faith that rejected the institution of slavery and held onto the belief that God desired their freedom. The invisible institution allowed slaves to maintain hope and resist oppression through their faith. Following slavery, Black prophetic preaching addressed the challenges of the

---

[247] Howard Thurman, *Deep River: Reflections on the Religious Insight of Certain of the Negro Spirituals* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1955), 11-12.

[248] Croft, *The Motif of Hope*, 44.

[249] Jones, "Reclaiming the Tradition of Prophetic Proclamation," 44-45.

[250] Tim Sensing, "African American Preaching," *Journal of the American Academy of Ministry*, vol. 7 (Winter/Spring 2001): 38-53 (Wilmore, KY: Asbury Theological Seminary, 2001).

failed Reconstruction period, agricultural misery, and the rise of Jim Crow. Using their pulpits, Black preachers spoke out against social injustices and advocated for racial equality, which paved the way for the Civil Rights era.

Prophetic Preaching in the Civil Rights Era

The Civil Rights Movement in the United States is generally regarded as having occurred primarily during the 1950s and 1960s.[251] During the Civil Rights era, the prophetic preaching tradition of the Black Church gained significant prominence. This movement led to the decisions of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968. Prophetic voices that emerged during the Civil Rights Movement included Reverdy Ransom, Florence Randolph, Adam Clayton Powell Sr., and Martin Luther King Jr. These preachers rose to speak truth to power, awakening hope for their listeners during the Great Migration.[252] Without a doubt, Black Churches and their preachers were the prophetic voice in the fight for social justice for Black Americans. This historical period provided "people to help lead the movement; material resources such as money, phones, meeting space, and so on; and social capital and organizational structures that facilitate mobilization."[253] Martin Luther King Jr. and other leaders of the day utilized their pulpits to deliver prophetic preaching, bridging the gap between the Black Church and the government. Even today, King's name is associated with social change and prophetic preaching. King and others utilized their

[251] Black History, "Civil Rights Movement," History.com, April 8, 2025, https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/civil-rights-movement.

[252] Gilbert, *Pursued Justice*, 1.

[253] Richard L. Wood, "Religion, Faith-Based Community Organizing, and the Struggle for Justice," *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, Michele Dillion, ed. (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 398.

influence, both within and outside the Black Church, to organize campaigns that addressed the sociopolitical issues affecting the Black Church of their time, including voter rights, civil rights, and the unfair treatment of sanitation workers. The content of Black sermons during the Civil Rights Movement advanced from focusing on outward protests on social injustices of the day to an "overzealous preoccupation of praise" and an emphasis on prosperity.[254] According to Myron Krys Florence, "While praise, prosperity, and personal piety all have their place, they should not replace prophetic preaching."[255]

Henry H. Mitchell traces the evolution of the modern Black Church, from its active engagement in the anti-slavery movement to its eventual emergence as a voice for social justice. This work helped posit that the African influences of spiritual fervor and community accountability remain for social uplift in Black Churches and their local communities.[256] Pounds later outlines:

> By the 20th century, the black local organized church would evolve into national and regional organizations. The National Baptist Convention of America emerged and represented a complete organizational outgrowth of the Black Church. By 1961, The Progressive National Baptist Convention, U.S.A. came into existence adopting its liberative motto "Unity, Service, Fellowship, Peace."[257]

With the convention's continued commitment to social justice, it became a supportive force for the Black Power Movement and the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s.[258] The genius of Black prophetic preaching stems from the theology on which it was built—a theology that

---

[254] Florence, "Seek Justice," 2.

[255] Florence, "Seek Justice," 2.

[256] Savage, "Reclaiming the Black Church's Prophetic Voice," 42.

[257] Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience,* 37.

[258] Pounds, "Reasons for Pastoral and Parishioner Conflict," 19.

developed from the Black experience. Charles Galbreath makes the claim, "Black preaching has been a form of subversive speech and liberating joy since the first Africans were enslaved in the United States."[259] Galbreath further posits:

> Black preaching has helped to subvert the fabric of the United States and particularly the plight of Black people. It was Black preaching that offered euphoric hope through practical yet coded words of escape, as slave preachers subverted scriptures and hymns and presented maps leading towards self-emancipation. The crafted sermons of subversive Black preachers inspired abolitionists to write petitions, march, and even develop their own sermons for the liberation of the enslaved. The cadence and thunder of the Black preacher inspired a movement and pushed a politically untenable Civil Rights Bill to be passed by a hostile United States Congress and signed into law by an apathetic President.[260]

Thomas frames it this way: "From black pulpits and the mouths of impassioned Black preachers, some of the most stirring and inspirational words of hope have come to this nation and world down through the centuries and years."[261] As stated by Gayraud Wilmore, "Religion has always been a vital part of black life in both Africa and in the United States."[262] Religion has always sought to answer the ultimate question of life through thought, beliefs, and practice.[263] In his book *Introducing Black Theology*, Bruce L. Fields asks several questions related to Black theology, such as, "Isn't there just theology? Is it really necessary to speak of 'black theology,' and even so, if we do, should we then speak of 'Asian theology,' 'Native American theology,' and so forth?"[264] The Black preacher presents and interprets biblical stories in a way that

---

[259] Galbreath, "Preaching as Religiously Educative," 5.

[260] Galbreath, "Preaching as Religiously Educative," 6.

[261] Frank A. Thomas, *Introduction to the Practice of African American Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2016), 1.

[262] Gayraud S. Wilmore, *African American Religious Studies: An Interdisciplinary Anthology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992), 3.

[263] Wilmore, *African American Religious Studies*, 6.

[264] Fields, *Three Crucial Questions*, 11.

resonates with the language and experiences of Black people. A Cong guides this process by interpreting the Bible in terms that can be readily grasped and applied. The ministry and mission of the Black Church have been grounded in the story of God's involvement in humanity. Jones asserts:

> Although there was much progress during the Civil Rights Movement, Jim Crow would evolve into the unhinged war on drugs, police brutality, criminalization of Black body, and the neo-slave-labor and death of Black persons in the American prison-industrial complex—all of which would demand a heightened strength of social action and proclamation.[265]

Prophetic Preaching in the Modern Era

In his doctoral dissertation, Eric Arnold Johnson hypothesizes that "To preach prophetically is to raise the consciousness of the people who are listening to the preacher's message."[266] Over the decades since the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Church has experienced a decline in its ability to adequately address and respond to the contemporary sociopolitical challenges it faces.[267] During that pivotal period, the Church had its prophetic voice speaking truth to power and orchestrating significant sociopolitical changes benefiting people of all races; however, the present-day Black Church lacks the assertive prophetic voice it once possessed. There has been much debate and speculation concerning the decline of the Black Church and the Black preacher's position of moral authority.[268] Galbreath advances the idea that "The co-opting of prophetic preaching by the 'prosperity gospel' and the absence of addressing

---

[265] Jones, "Reclaiming the Tradition of Prophetic Proclamation," 71.

[266] Eric Arnold Johnson, "An Analysis of the Biblical and Expository Preaching of Manuel Lee Scott Sr." (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY, 2005), 73.

[267] Pinn, *The Black Church in the Post-Civil Rights Era*, 18-36.

[268] Galbreath, "Preaching as Religiously Educative," 61.

justice issues from the pulpit have led to an unfortunate period of a muted message."[269] Jones contends, "The Black Church became inebriated with prosperity and individual salvation rather than prophetic preaching."[270] Agreeing with this position, McMickle suggests, "The pulpits and the pews of America are being lured into a prosperity theology where wealth and material riches can be acquired by those who learn the formula, despite overwhelming New Testament evidence. . . .Prosperity preaching leaves out the importance of the mission and ministry of the church and that of each individual believer."[271]

The prophetic voice of the Black Church, in some instances, is absent due to the fact that it has bought into the "name it and claim it" prosperity gospel. Additionally, the rise of the megachurch, with an emphasis on praise and prosperity, led by influential Black preachers who promote prosperity theology, has changed the face of the Black Church.[272] Subsequently, the Black Church has forsaken the plight of its congregants and the issues impacting them, accepting the consciousness of the American dream.[273] McMickle stated it this way: "All the prophets have turned to praising."[274] Galbreath refers to the prosperity gospel as "the cancer that has corrupted the Black Church."[275] Stephanie Mitchem argues, "Part of the wealthy American fantasy is that money instantly brings about a change in social class. Prosperity preaching ties Christianity itself

---

[269] Galbreath, "Preaching as Religiously Educative," 61.

[270] Jones, "Reclaiming the Tradition of Prophetic Proclamation," 2.

[271] McMickle, *Where Have All the Prophets Gone?* 104-105.

[272] Baldwin, "Black Church Studies," 46.

[273] Galbreath, "Preaching as Religiously Educative," 62.

[274] McMickle, *Where Have All the Prophets Gone?* 15.

[275] Galbreath, "Preaching as Religiously Educative," 62.

to the accumulation of wealth. A new trinity is created: self, self-interest, money."[276] This trinity has become the new godhead in some instances within the modern Black Church, resulting in the decline of not only the prophetic voice but also the connection between spiritual and social realities.

The Black Church has been a fundamental organization in the lives of Black Americans throughout the history of the United States, serving as an "escape from their oppression and dehumanization by white people."[277] It was once the epicenter of the Black Community, with many Black clergy engaging in demonstrations against injustices.[278] The prophetic voice of the Black Church and its inspiring hope were fueled by the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, which became the balm for Black Americans in the fight for justice. Through the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Church and its preachers were akin to biblical prophets, whose preaching was prophetic in that it spoke truth to power, demanded justice, and called for liberation.

Luke Powery contributes to the criticism of the Black Church today, suggesting that it has lost its prophetic influence.[279] He contends that, "Prosperity preaching seems not to take any type of death seriously as a crucial component of the Christian life. . . .Within this spiritual purview, pain is not part of prosperity."[280] Making a bold declaration regarding Powery's critique, Jones adds that there is a "lack of attention to death, pain, suffering, and oppression

---

[276] Stephanie Y. Mitchem, *Name It and Claim It? Prosperity Preaching in the Black Church* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2007), 108.

[277] Floyd-Thomas, *Liberating Black Church History,* 7.

[278] Florence, "Seek Justice," 1.

[279] Luke Powery, *Dem Dry Bones: Preaching, Death, and Hope* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2012), 3.

[280] Powery, *Dem Dry Bones,* 3.

inflicted upon Black people; those who sit in congregations every day."[281] There is an opportunity for Black preaching to lead in the proclamation and application of the Gospel for years to come. Cone contends:

> Modern kerygmatic preaching has little to do with white ministers admonishing their people to be nice to "Negroes" or "to obey the law of the land." Nor does it involve a "good Negro" preacher to preach about race relations. Preaching in its truest sense tells the world about Christ's victory and thus invites people to act as if God has won the battle over racism. To preach in America today is to shout "Black Power! Black Freedom!"[282]

Summary

Central to the Black religious experience in America, prophetic preaching has been a cornerstone of the Black Church. From slavery to the present day, prophetic preaching has played a crucial role in mobilizing congregations and the broader community to oppose social injustices. However, the contemporary landscape of the Black Church presents new challenges and opportunities for prophetic preaching. The Black Church must embrace a theology that brought it through slavery, Civil Rights, and what is needed for such a time as this. As stated by James Harris, "The Black Church needs to return to its protest posture, armed and ready to do battle, with the help of a new and creative ally-black theology."[283] In doing so, the Black Church will interpret the gospel of Jesus Christ in a way that connects with its people in perilous times.

It is essential to acknowledge that perceptions of prophetic preaching within the Black Church may differ across congregations and denominational lines. However, the modern Black

---

[281] Jones, "Reclaiming the Tradition of Prophetic Proclamation," 3.

[282] James H. Cone, "The White Church and Black Power," *Black Theology: A Documentary History Volume One: 1966-1979*, 2nd ed. James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, eds. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 69.

[283] James H. Harris, *Pastoral Theology: A Black-Church Perspective* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1991), 77.

Church as a whole must be willing to rise once again to prophetic prominence, addressing and responding to the sociopolitical issues that impact its community. The voice of the Black preacher is needed more today than at any other time in history. Therefore, this project aims to hear and understand prophetic voices within the Black Church, as well as to motivate congregational change and cultural activism. This literature review verifies the existing research and updates that material with additional references. Understanding more about the sermons of Black preachers and the impact of the call to action in addressing and responding to social injustices makes a unique contribution to the literature. The uniqueness of this project lies in its application, which is discussed in Chapter Three on research design.

Chapter Three

Research Design

This chapter outlines the study's purpose, research question, methodology, and research design. A description of the participants, along with an explanation of the selection criteria and sampling method, is provided below. Next, an explanation of the protection of participant identity, interview questions, limitations, and the researcher's role and bias that accompany this research will be discussed. Additionally, the details of the instrumentation used in data collection and analysis that guided the research process, ensuring the continuity and integrity of the data, will be provided, along with a discussion on the ethical considerations.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore how active and retired Black pastors within the Black Church who engage in prophetic preaching describe their sermons' capacity to motivate congregational change and cultural activism. This research examines the role of prophetic preaching within the Black Church, highlighting its historical and contemporary significance. The research question for this project is: How do pastors who engage in prophetic preaching describe their sermons' capacity to motivate congregational change and cultural activism? The following sub-questions are also included:

(a) What is the impact of the call to action in the context of prophetic preaching?

(b) What are the responses of congregants to your prophetic preaching?

Research Methodology and Design

The research grew out of the desire to examine the role of prophetic preaching within the Black Church in addressing sociopolitical issues that affect both the Black Church and

community. The emphasis was on hearing the voices of active and retired Black pastors who engage in prophetic preaching. Although the Black Church has been a beacon for social and political change and occupies an elevated position of power and influence in the Black Community, the prophetic voice of the Black Church has been conspicuously silent in this modern era of social injustices.[284] The prophetic voice of the Black Church within the public square has seldom been heard since the Civil Rights Movement. The limited prophetic voices of that era have yet to be sustained in this contemporary era in addressing the social injustices that impact the Black Church.[285]

Therefore, it is likely that substantive answers to modern social injustices related to the Black Community will come from leaders who engage in prophetic preaching within the Black Church context. This research aims to examine how the practices of prophetic preaching within the Black Church motivate congregants toward congregational change and cultural activism. The prophetic tradition of the Black Church continues to be studied within academic scholarship as a means of addressing the social ills and injustices within the Black Community. This study employed semi-structured, open-ended interviews as part of a phenomenological, qualitative design, as defined by John W. Creswell.[286]

The questions were carefully crafted to glean as much information as possible. They were also as neutral and unbiased as possible, so that the true opinions of those surveyed could be discovered. Participants in this project were recruited from within the researcher's professional network of individuals who met the research criteria. As a Black pastor within the Black Church

---

[284] Perryman, "The Role of the Black Church in Addressing Collateral Damage," 74.

[285] Perryman, "The Role of the Black Church in Addressing Collateral Damage," 74.

[286] John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among the Five Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2013), 77-83.

context, this researcher's professional network refers to clergy within the same context. These participants reflect the diversity present within the Black Church context, including variations in denominational affiliation, age, church size, and years of experience. However, the researcher remained neutral and receptive to participants, utilizing semi-structured, open-ended interviews during the data collection process, as suggested by Clark and Moustakas.[287] Prior to the interviews, an email invitation was sent to potential participants soliciting their voluntary participation. After participants expressed interest, an informed consent form was emailed to them for review and signature. Once participants agreed to move forward, a mutually agreed-upon time and a private location were selected for the interviews. Each interview was estimated to last between thirty minutes and one hour. Some interviews were completed in person, while others were completed via Zoom due to distance.

Participants and Sampling

The target participants and setting in this study were Black pastors within the Black Church who engage in prophetic preaching. To examine the leaders' descriptions of their sermons' capacity to motivate congregational change and cultural activism, a set of semi-structured, open-ended interview questions was used to collect information needed to answer the research and supplemental questions. Sixteen participants were initially interviewed; however, three participants were excluded: one was subsequently identified as a lay leader and seminary professor, another was not a member of the Black Church as defined within this project, and the third participant was not used because the recording of the interview was of poor audio quality. The thirteen participants were from various denominations, congregations, and churches; the

[287] Clark Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research Methods* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994), 52.

collective of the Black Church as defined within this project. Additionally, participants varied in age and gender to achieve a balance of equity and diversity. There were three women and 10 men. The age of the participants varied from 30 to 73 years old, and they had 11 to 51 years of pastoral experience, serving congregations of 59 to 2,000 members. The smaller number of female participants reflects the contextual culture and church leadership dynamics of the Black Church, where male leadership remains more predominant.[288] Saturation was a guiding principle to determine the appropriate number of participants for this study. The concept of saturation originates from grounded theory, which suggests that data collection should cease when the categories (or themes) are saturated, meaning that no new insights or properties are revealed.[289] At this point, there is an adequate sample size.

Purposive sampling was used for the identification and selection of the chosen subjects in the phenomenon being studied, as described by L. R. Gay and Geoffrey E. Mills.[290] According to Michael Patton, purposive sampling is most useful for a student in participant selection. This process involves selecting participants based on their knowledge and experience in the phenomenon being studied.[291] Creswell and Plano Clark further support this idea by suggesting that, in a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach, participants who are knowledgeable and experienced in the phenomenon should be selected.[292]

---

[288] Christine R. Rudolph, "A Different Perspective: Examining Obstacles Faced by Black Clergywomen Through the Lenses of Critical Race Feminism," *Journal of Values-Based Leadership,* accessed February 13, 2025, https://scholar.valpo.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1454&context=jvbl.

[289] John W. Creswell and David J. Creswell, *Research Design*, 5th ed. (Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2016), 186.

[290] L. R. Gay and Geoffrey E. Mills, *Educational Research: Competencies for Analysis and Application,* 11th ed. (Boston, MA: Prentice-Hall, 2016), 159-160.

[291] Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods,* 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2015), 264-266.

[292] John W. Creswell and Vicki L. Plano Clark, eds., "Choosing a Mixed Methods Design," in *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research* (Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2011), 53-106.

Protection of the Participants

In consultation with the project chair, program Director, chief academic officer, and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Winebrenner Theological Seminary, the required steps were taken to protect the identity of participants. Protecting the privacy of the participants and their denominations, congregations, and churches was critical to prevent participant identification. Therefore, a numeric system was assigned to each participant to safeguard their actual identity. Participants were informed that their involvement was voluntary, and they were free to withdraw from the interview at any time. Additionally, participants were briefed on the project, being informed about how the interview would be conducted, and notified that the interview would be recorded.[293] The physical and mental health of the participants was not disclosed to the researcher since it is not germane to the topic.

Instrumentation

The Institutional Review Board approved the following script to use in approaching potential interview participants:

> I am a Doctor of Ministry student at Winebrenner Theological Seminary, Findlay, Ohio conducting research on prophetic preaching within the Black Church. This letter is an invitation for your voluntary participation in this research study/project. A scheduled interview will take place at a date and time mutually agreed upon, and focus on the impact of prophetic preaching in a non-prophetic age of the Black Church. The interview will take at least 30 minutes, but no more than 1 hour of your time. This interview will ask you to respond to open-ended interview questions, which address the research question: How do pastors who engage in prophetic preaching describe their sermons' capacity to motivate congregational change and cultural activism? The following supplemental questions will also be considered: (a) What is the impact of the call to action in the context of prophetic preaching? (b) What are the responses of congregants to your prophetic preaching? All responses will remain confidential and your anonymity will be ensured. Your responses will contribute to this timely research. A summary of the study/project will be published upon completion of this study/project. Please also sign and return the enclosed "Informed Consent" form if you voluntarily agree to participate in this

[293] See Appendix E for a sample Informed consent form.

research study/project. I greatly appreciate your participation in this research/project. Please let me know if you have any questions concerning this study/project or the enclosures. I may be reached by phone at [redacted] or by e-mail at [redacted]. My project chair, Dr. Bruce Coats may be reached by email at [redacted].

The instrument used for data collection was semi-structured, open-ended interviews, which utilized a predetermined set of open-ended questions. To ensure the appropriateness of the interview questions for the research study, a field test was conducted. Field testing of the research question and sub-questions enabled the researcher to assess whether the questions posed any issues. First, a fellow researcher reviewed the instrument to ensure others understand it. Secondly, a group of pastors within the Black Church who were not included in the study but had firsthand experience with the phenomenon being studied were recruited to participate in evaluating the interview questions. Each member of the group received a copy of the interview questions to assess them and provide suggestions. Their feedback was taken into consideration, and the questions were modified accordingly. Thirdly, participants in this study were notified by email to schedule the interviews and begin the data collection process. The Institutional Review Board approved the final interview instrument, and interviews were conducted as described.

Interview Questions

The questions used in the semi-structured open-ended interviews were as follows:

1. Could you tell me how many years you have been preaching and where you currently preach?

2. Can you discuss how you understand prophetic preaching?

3. Can you describe a prophetic sermon you recently preached that you consider to be prophetic? What was the central message and purpose behind it?

4. In your experience, how do congregants typically respond to sermons that you classify as prophetic?

5. Have you observed any instances where your prophetic preaching directly motivated congregational change or action within the church community? Can you provide examples?

6. How do you think your sermons contribute to shaping the perspectives and attitudes of your congregation towards social issues and cultural activism?

7. What role do you believe prophetic preaching plays in addressing societal injustices and promoting social change?

8. Can you share any stories or examples that illustrate the impact of your sermons on motivating congregants to become more actively involved in cultural transformation and social activism?

9. How do you incorporate a call to action within your sermons to inspire congregational engagement and participation in social justice initiatives?

10. In what ways have you observed the influence of your prophetic preaching in fostering congregational change within the church?

11. Can you share examples of how your prophetic preaching has inspired or contributed to cultural activism outside the church?

12. In your opinion, what are the key ingredients of a successful prophetic sermon that can effectively stimulate congregational change and social action?

13. How do you envision the long-term impact of your prophetic preaching on the culture and mission of your church in relation to broader societal issues?

Data Collection

Before conducting the interviews, participants read and signed an informed consent form indicating their voluntary willingness to participate. Participants were informed that the interview would be recorded and that the researcher would take notes during the interview. They were reminded that they could withdraw from the interview at any time. A rapport and atmosphere conducive to conducting the interviews were established before the interviews began. According to Moustakas, researchers should employ *epoche* for rapport building. *Epoche*

is "a Greek word which means to stay away from or abstain."[294] The term signals a methodological pause or suspension of judgment, allowing the researcher to encounter the lived experiences of participants as they are, rather than as the researcher expects or interprets them. This method enabled the researcher to eliminate personal biases, beliefs, preconceived ideas, and assumptions about the phenomenon, allowing them to focus on the phenomenon itself.[295] By practicing *epoche*, the researcher established authentic rapport with participants, demonstrating respect for their unique perspectives and fostering a research environment grounded in trust and mutual understanding. Ultimately, this process enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the study, ensuring that the findings genuinely reflected the participants' lived experiences rather than the researcher's preconceived notions.

Data Analysis

All interview participants completed the full interview. Once the interviews were complete, they were transcribed by a transcriptionist using Microsoft Word's auto-transcription process, followed by a detailed review for formatting and accuracy. Each transcript was reviewed and edited to ensure accuracy, particularly for terms central to Black preaching that might be misinterpreted. To deepen engagement with the data, the researcher conducted a three-step analysis: (1) re-reading transcripts while listening to audio recordings to capture vocal emphasis and pauses, (2) annotating field notes to contextualize nonverbal cues, and (3) employing an AI-assisted human coding process using Perplexity AI to identify themes and sub-themes. The themes and sub-themes will be shared in Chapter Four.

---

[294] Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research Methods*, 85.

[295] Chi-Shiou Lin, "Revealing the 'Essence' of Things: Using Phenomenology in LIS Research," *Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in Libraries* 4: 469-478, 2013, accessed February 13, 2025, http://www. https://www.qqml-journal.net/index.php/qqml/article/view/123.

Limitations of the Study

The scope of this project has intentional limitations, delimited by topic, methodology, and sampling. This research focuses on thirteen active or retired Black pastors within the Black Church who engage in prophetic preaching. This leaves the study of white pastors who engage in prophetic preaching for future research and also precludes the experience of those pastors who focus on the methodology of preaching, types of preaching, and the science and art of preaching. This research is limited to prophetic preaching as defined by this project. The research question drives the methodology employed in any research process. The research question in this study necessitated a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach, which provides richness in narrative and individual expression rather than statistical descriptions and correlations.

Researcher's Role and Bias

The role of the researcher is to attempt to gain insight into the thoughts and feelings of the participants regarding the phenomenon being studied. Due to the sampling used in this study, I drew on my existing network. Therefore, there is potential for the research subjects to validate my bias. The participants in this study were selected based on demographic variables and criteria that aligned with the study's objectives. Thirty-one percent of the research subjects were known to the researcher, while sixty-nine percent of the research subjects were not known to the researcher and identified by other subjects. The research was approached from the perspective of an insider. While some view this position as biased, others argue that it offers distinct advantages. The insider viewpoint enables the researcher to assimilate more easily, participate more effectively, and establish the rapport necessary to broach more complex issues and interpret nonverbal communications. Insiders can get to the concrete, lived experiences. Supporters of insider research also note that participants see outsiders as less trustworthy, discerning, and

lacking commitment to the group.[296] As an insider, the researcher also serves as a stakeholder with access to individuals who might be unavailable to others. Additionally, the researcher possesses a particular advantage over other researchers, such as the ability to identify the right participants and relevant questions to ask and to interpret nuanced responses in a non-biased way. This enabled the researcher to provide an expressive understanding of lived experiences rather than simply offering a descriptive account. However, the researcher's close relationships were excluded from the research to avoid a dual relationship and bias.

Ethical Considerations

Although the Black Church is not monolithic, this study was approached from the perspective of an insider. The Black religious and social contexts both contain integrated distinctions of socio-economic status, race, and class. Yet, the researcher's insider status was advantageous in obtaining access to conduct the research. Additionally, the researcher's experience as an educator enabled him to navigate in familiar contexts. Yet, the utmost care was taken to protect the privacy, names, and reputation of the interviewees. A numeric system was assigned to participants for anonymity. Interview recordings with all identifying information removed were sent to a transcriptionist unaffiliated with the research topic. This research proposal and its ethical dimensions were reviewed and approved by Winebrenner Theological Seminary's Institutional Review Board (IRB).[297]

[296] Perryman, "The Role of the Black Church in Addressing Collateral Damage," 82.
[297] See appendix A for the IRB Approval Letter.

Summary

This chapter presented the purpose of this study, the research questions, the research methodology and design, the sampling procedure, protection of the participants, instrumentation, interview questions, data collection, data analysis, limitations, the researcher's role and bias, and ethical considerations. The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore how active and retired Black pastors within the Black Church who engage in prophetic preaching describe their sermons' capacity to motivate congregational change and cultural activism. This project does not include Black Congregations in majority white denominations, nor Black Congregations led by white pastors. Future research studies could also include a womanist perspective of female pastors who engage in prophetic preaching. Additionally, there is a need for a similar study in white denominations with Black congregations, or those in Black denominations led by white pastors, as well as a study focused on congregants' perspectives, or artifacts reflecting this topic. The findings and evaluations will be shared in Chapter Four and may inform future research.

Chapter Four

Research Findings

The aim of this study was to examine the role of prophetic preaching within the Black Church, highlighting its historical and contemporary significance. Through in-depth interviews with thirteen active and retired pastors from the Black Church across the United States who varied in age from 30 to 73 years old, had 11 to 51 years of pastoral experience, and served congregations of 59 to 2,000 members, this research describes how their prophetic preaching can motivate congregational change and cultural activism. The findings aim to fill the context gap that limits the ability to understand the full impact of prophetic preaching. The central research question was: How do pastors who engage in prophetic preaching describe their sermons' capacity to motivate congregational change and cultural activism? Two closely related questions were: What is the impact of the call to action in the context of prophetic preaching? What are the responses of congregants to your prophetic preaching?

This chapter describes the results from the data analysis relevant to the research question and sub-questions. The interviewed participants were thoughtful in their responses. Each time the researcher presented a question, the participants would take a moment to contemplate the question before responding. During the interviews, stories relevant to the Bible and the Black Church religious experience were shared. The participants repeatedly emphasized the need for the contemporary Black Church to have a prophetic voice in light of the social injustices impacting its community. As this chapter will show, the themes and sub-themes emerged directly from the participants' insights and experiences. These themes and sub-themes came into practical and theological view with regard to the pastors' ability to discuss their perceptions and

understanding of prophetic preaching within the Black Church. Congregational change and cultural activism are the main goals of this form of preaching.

Results

This study examined the prophetic preaching of pastors of small to large congregations within the Black Church context in the United States. Participant demographic information, denomination of participants, and region across the United States will be presented first, followed by the major themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data analysis.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Participant	Gender	Age**	Years of Preaching/ Ministry Experience***	Current Ministry Status	Church Membership Size
1	M	39	30	Active	250
2	M	42	21	Active	100
3	F	70	42	Active	60
5	M	66	16	Active	300
6	M	51	32	Active	59
7	M	62	44	Active	2,000
8	M	43	34	Active	1,000
9	M	44	27	Active	200
10	M	73	51	Retired	1,500
12	M	30	11	Active	250
13	F	39	26	Active	1,200
14	F	66	34	Active	65
16	M	59	44	Active	400

**Median age is 52.6 years.
***Median preaching/ministry experience is 31.7 years. Within the Black Church culture, it is not uncommon for children to begin preaching and count those early years in their experience.

Table 2. Participants by Denomination

Denomination	Number of Participants
African Methodist Episcopal (AME)	1
African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ)	2
Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME)	1
Church of God in Christ (COGIC)	1
National Baptist Convention, USA (NBC, USA)	3
National Baptist Convention of America (NBCA)	1
Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC)	4

Table 3. Participants by Region across the United States

Midwest	Northeast (NE)	Southeast (SE)	Southwest (SW)
Ohio – 3	New York – 1	Tennessee – 1	Texas – 1
Michigan – 4	Massachusetts – 1		
Indiana – 1	Pennsylvania – 1		

Note: Regional Classifications as determined by the American Association of Geographers (n.d.)

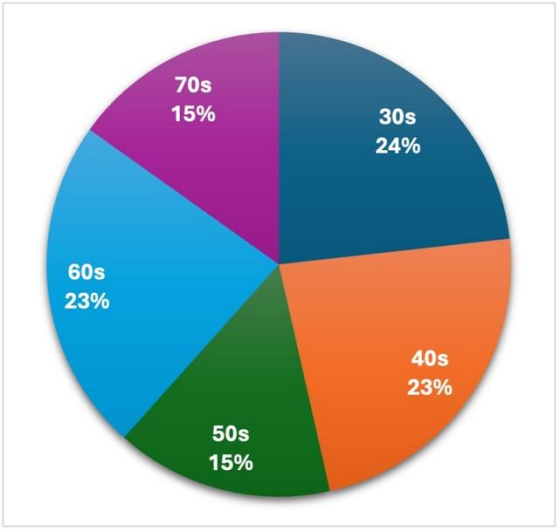

Figure 1. Participants by age group by decade

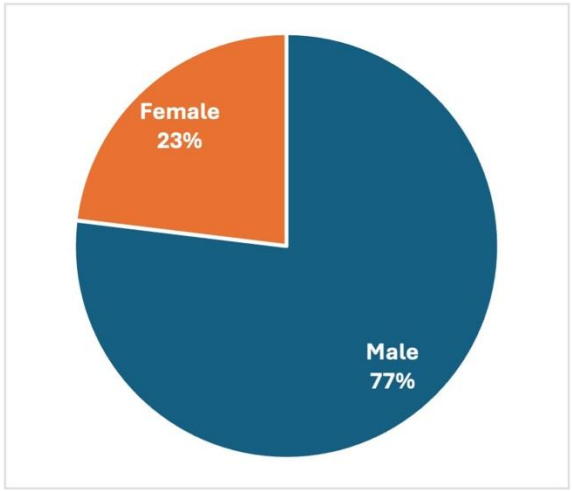

Figure 2. Participants by gender

Participants were selected to reflect the diversity present within the Black Church context, including variations in denominational affiliation, age, church size, and years of experience. The smaller number of female participants reflects the contextual culture and church leadership dynamics of the Black Church, where male leadership remains more predominant.[298]

The questions created for this project invited each pastor to discuss in depth their perceptions and understanding of prophetic preaching, as well as the motivation for congregational change and cultural activism. To answer the questions of the impact of the call to action in the context of prophetic preaching and the responses of congregants to prophetic preaching, two core foci were discussed: the application of embodying what God wants for His people in addressing social injustices, and the spiritual and social responsibility of the Black Church to its community. The following themes and sub-themes emerged from the data:

1. **Theological and Hermeneutical Foundations**
    a. Liberation Theology
    b. Biblical Authority

[298] Rudolph, "A Different Perspective," n.p.

2. **Contextual Responsiveness**
    a. Timely Engagement
    b. Localized Action
3. **Empowerment through Education and Mobilization**
    a. Voter Engagement
    b. Narrative-Driven Exegesis
4. **Balancing Prophetic Pastoral Voices**
    a. Tri-vocal Approach
5. **Challenges and Tensions**
    a. Institutional Resistance
6. **Historical and Cultural Legacy**
    a. Civil Rights Continuity

Theological and Hermeneutical Foundations

When asked, they understood prophetic preaching; the pastors in this study discussed the theological foundations that anchor prophetic preaching within the Black Church. The theme and related sub-themes illustrate how each pastor approaches and practices prophetic preaching in their ministries. In the real world, the theological foundations of prophetic preaching are made visible through sermons and ministries that explicitly link biblical mandates to the pursuit of justice, liberation, and cultural transformation. For example, Participant 1 described prophetic preaching as “God’s response to racism, gender bias, crimes against humanity,” emphasizing that its purpose is to “make the text live” in relation to modern social conditions and to call the

church to "do good, love justice, and walk faithfully with your God."[299] This theme is represented by two interrelated sub-themes of liberation theology and biblical authority.

Liberation Theology

The pastors in this study view prophetic preaching as a means of dismantling systemic barriers within society. This indicates that, within the Black Church, prophetic preaching is a liberating practice. Participant 1 stressed,

> Prophetic preaching is to address God's response to society, through the word of God, through action, and through fiduciary responsibility that is inherently Christian. We address through prophetic preaching within the Black Church and culture, God's response to liberation and oppression and the dehumanization of God's created people. So, it is mixed and intertwined of what we understand from a liberative perspective of Black theology.[300]

When Black pastors engage in speaking truth to those in social, political, and economic power, the holistic needs of the community can be met. This highlights the pastor's responsibility to serve as a prophetic voice for the church and community. The prophetic sermon in the Black Church tradition can be effectively utilized biblically, practically, and theologically; it carries multiple dimensions and purposes. It is designed to empower the powerless, to give strength to the weak, and vision to the blind. Participant 8 offered the following admission regarding the prophetic sermon, "We need to be empowered, so that we can go out and either act accordingly or get into the right rooms."[301] This perspective highlights the notion that prophetic preaching is not only a spiritual experience but also a tangible element of transformation. The historical and

---

[299] Participant 1, interview by Michael Carr, in person, May 28, 2024.

[300] Participant 1, interview by Michael Carr, in person, May 28, 2024.

[301] Participant 8, interview by Michael Carr, Zoom, June 10, 2024.

theological analysis is found in Chapter Two. Both analyses explain how and why speaking truth to power can never be used uncritically by those who major in this form of preaching.

Prophetic preaching is needed because it is intended for people who have little power. The history of the Black Church has always been one of speaking to those without power, using the power of Scripture and its message of hope and liberation to equip congregants to speak to those who have power. Participant 10 suggested, "The role of the preacher is to speak to those in power God's indictment against those powers."[302] This descriptive task of the preacher brings God's vision for both His people and society.

Participant 6 emphasized preaching as a tool to combat "systems that prohibit God's children from self-actualization," aligning with Black liberation theology.[303] Liberation theology emerges as a critical lens through which prophetic preaching within the Black Church addresses injustices, poverty, and oppression, rooted in the biblical tradition of the prophets and Jesus, who advocated for justice and righteousness on behalf of marginalized and oppressed people. As discussed in Chapter Two, J. Deotis Roberts, in *Liberation and Reconciliation: A Black Theology*, asserts that Black Theology is essentially a theology of liberation, as it originates from the lived experiences of Black people who have endured oppression and seeks to quench their thirst for freedom and liberation.[304] Additionally, Kenyatta Gilbert in his book, *Exodus Preaching, points out that prophetic preaching is grounded in the biblical tradition of the prophets and Jesus,* who were the earliest exemplars of this homiletical practice.[305] This

[302] Participant 10, interview by Michael Carr, in person, June 16, 2024.

[303] Participant 6, interview by Michael Carr, in person, June 8, 2024.

[304] Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation,* 1-19.

[305] Gilbert, *Exodus Preaching, xiii*-3.

theological approach emphasizes that the Black Church's prophetic voice be in harmony with the oppressed, calling for congregational change and cultural activism.

Biblical Authority

The sub-theme of biblical authority affirms that prophetic preaching derives its validity and direction from Scripture and is consistently used to critique social injustices. According to Participant 3, "It gives congregants information and makes connections between the Word of God and social justice."[306] Participant 5 referenced Romans 5:12-19 to highlight the origin of societal sins and called for action against various forms of injustice.[307] Participant 6 stated:

> Prophetic preaching is the pronunciation of the Word of God that is grounded in Luke 4:18, when Jesus says His mission statement, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me to preach the Gospel to the poor, recovery of sight to the blind, set at liberty them that are oppressed, and to preach the year of Jubilee, the acceptable year of the Lord, the year of Emancipation. So, prophetic preaching is grounded in the Luke 4 passage that God seeks to liberate all who are oppressed and ultimately allow for self-actualization.[308]

Just as Jesus and the prophets proclaimed liberation to the poor, the oppressed, and the captive in their time, the pastors within this study believed that scriptural authority empowers preachers to declare the same message to those in the contemporary world. As noted in Chapter Two, the prophet Amos stands as an example of this prophetic tradition. Called by God, Amos delivered a message of judgment against those who exploited the poor, criticizing them for trampling the needy and practicing deceit, making clear that steadfast faithfulness to God is demonstrated through justice and compassion for society's most vulnerable members. Biblical authority serves as the foundation for understanding and applying the parallels between context

---

[306] Participant 3, interview by Michael Carr, in person, May 29, 2024.

[307] Participant 5, interview by Michael Carr, in person, June 7, 2024.

[308] Participant 6, interview by Michael Carr, in person, June 8, 2024.

and culture. Prophetic preaching within the Black Church proposes both spiritual and social awareness in sacred and secular contexts.

Participant 6 posited, "Prophetic preaching needs to be biblical. In the Black theological tradition, Scripture is the primary tool for our arguments, and we cannot get away from that."[309] This is underscored in Chapter Two as Charlie Dates references several scholars and their research on Black preaching with a particular focus on the role of Scripture in Black preaching.[310] The Black Church has a responsibility to uphold biblical authority as it seeks to reclaim its prophetic voice, driving both congregational change and cultural activism. In their book, *To Serve This Present Age: Social Justice Ministries in the Black Church,* Danielle L. Ayers and Reginald Williams Jr. discuss the biblical authority of a social justice ministry.[311]

According to the research, Mitchell suggests that preaching in the Black Church is grounded in biblical authority because the tradition is rooted in the integration of biblical truth and the lived experiences of Black people.[312] The authority of the Bible ensures that prophetic proclamation remains anchored in the revealed will of God, providing both a foundation and a boundary for the Black Church's engagement in addressing contemporary issues. Participant 13 suggested that prophetic preaching is "Sacred proclamation that addresses the social ills of the

[309] Participant 6, interview by Michael Carr, in person, June 8, 2024.

[310] Dates, "Understudied Burden," 1-2.

[311] Danielle L. Ayers and Reginald Williams, Jr., *To Serve This Present Age: Social Justice Ministries in the Black Church* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2013), 1-20.

[312] Mitchell, *Black Preaching* (1970), 23-27.

day."[313] Clarence Wright, in his book *The Sunday After: Preaching in Movements and Movements,* also speaks to how Scripture is used to critique societal injustices.[314]

Contextual Responsiveness

Contextual responsiveness is a crucial aspect of prophetic preaching within the Black Church, reflecting a deep engagement with both the Scriptures and the lived experiences of congregants. This approach requires the preacher to interpret Scripture through the lens of the Black hermeneutic, ensuring that the message addresses the community's immediate social, political, and economic concerns.[315] Mitchell emphasizes that the "Black hermeneutic offers an understanding of the Scriptures derived from the Black religious experience and is expressed in Black preaching."[316] The theme of contextual responsiveness in prophetic preaching is represented by the sub-themes of timely engagement and localized action, both of which are evident in participant responses across the interviews. These sub-themes demonstrate that participants understand prophetic preaching not only as a response to injustices but also as a call to action on social ills affecting the Black Church and community.

Timely Engagement

Timely engagement refers to how pastors intentionally address social ills as they arise, ensuring their sermons are relevant to the current moment. Participant 1 exemplified timely engagement by responding to crises in the community, such as youth violence. He shared:

> The sermons that I preached that were relatively regarding social change, I did a lot of preaching because of the conditions in the community. The response of the sermons,

[313] Participant 13, interview by Michael Carr, Zoom, June 27, 2024.

[314] Wright, *The Sunday After,* 1-38.

[315] Zimmerman, "Understanding African American Preaching," 46.

[316] Mitchell, *Black Preaching* (1990), 17.

> however, caught the attention of the school board superintendent and they caught the attention of the 17 Congressional Congress persons….Not only that, but the members … opened up their church to where we started having these monthly gatherings of black male fathers and father figures in the community.[317]

Participant 2 described preaching about the George Floyd incident and Black Lives Matter movement using the parable of the Good Samaritan, stating, "All lives cannot matter until Black Lives Matter," directly responding to sociopolitical unrest and the needs of the congregants at that time.[318] Both participants' responses above correspond with the research of Kelly Miller Smith, cited within Chapter Two, who asserts that preaching in response to social crisis is especially relevant during periods of social conflict and tension.[319] Participant 5 shared how his congregation expected a prophetic word whenever significant local or national events occurred, such as police brutality or the closure of a local hospital, highlighting the expectation for the Black Church to speak to the moment of crisis.[320] Participant 6 also emphasized timely engagement, stating:

> My church expects that when there is a national or even local issue from homelessness, poverty, police brutality, or the Klan coming to our city, or a local hospital closing. They knew that on that Sunday morning, I would have something to say about it, and they eagerly await it. They anticipate it. And if, by chance, there is something that happens that I do not address from Scripture, with the prophetic lens, the hermeneutical lens of Black liberation theology, they often will ask me, what happened? Why didn't you say anything about it?[321]

---

[317] Participant 1, interview by Michael Carr, in person, May 28, 2024.

[318] Participant 2, interview by Michael Carr, in person, May 28, 2024.

[319] Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 33.

[320] Participant 5, interview by Michael Carr, in person, June 7, 2024.

[321] Participant 6, interview by Michael Carr, in person, June 8, 2024.

Participant 7 stated, “The Black preacher or prophetic preacher looks at the text through the right lens.[322] Through a social justice lens. Through an equity lens and looking at the text through the right lens lends to conveying a message with that kind of emphasis.” In the real world, timely engagement is demonstrated when pastors craft and deliver sermons that directly address social issues as they unfold, ensuring that the Black Church’s message is both relevant and responsive to the lived experiences of their congregants. Timely engagement is further reflected in the church’s proactive participation in civic initiatives, like organizing voter registration drives or hosting community meetings in response to spikes in local violence or political controversies.

Localized Action

Localized action is reflected in the participants’ efforts to address specific needs within their immediate communities. As stated before, Participant 1 described how prophetic sermons led to localized action where the church hosted gatherings for Black fathers and community leaders to address youth violence within the city, and they opened their doors for these meetings when no other venue was available.[323] This is consistent with Cornel West’s *Prophetic Fragments*, referenced in Chapter Two, where he argues that the prophetic tradition is institutionally grounded in the Black Church.[324] Additionally, Participant 2 shared multiple examples of localized action, including organizing a “Census Sunday” in partnership with the local community college, where congregants assisted community members in completing the

[322] Participant 7, interview by Michael Carr, in person, June 9, 2024.

[323] Participant 1, interview by Michael Carr, in person, May 28, 2024.

[324] West, *Prophetic Fragments*, 3-14.

census on church grounds.[325] The church also became a sponsor for county-wide Juneteenth events.

According to Dotson, "The Black Church was called upon to fight the evils of the world, leverage relationships, and rise in times of adversity and injustice."[326] Participant 5 described hosting forums with police and sheriff departments to address tensions between law enforcement and Black youth in his city, as well as advocating for the church to serve as a voting precinct to ensure residents had accessible polling places. He shared:

> After the George Floyd issue, I had a forum here with the police and sheriff's departments … to try to deal with the matter between law enforcement and youth and young adults, specifically black, and to try to tamp down some of the attention that was going on even in this city.…We are a voting precinct. We had to compete for that … as a result of that, we have a very high number of voters for our city that actually come here to vote.

Likewise, Participant 6 recalled organizing voter registration drives at a local mall and setting up transportation to polling places, describing a "three-pronged approach: registration, education, and transportation," which was tailored to the community's barriers to voting.[327] As with timely engagement, localized action is further reflected in the church's proactive participation in civic initiatives, like organizing voter registration drives or hosting community meetings in response to spikes in local violence or political controversies. Participant 13 added, "Prophetic preaching motivates believers to take action in the world."[328] These examples of the referenced participants illustrate that the Black preacher's role and reach extend far beyond the

---

[325] Participant 2, interview by Michael Carr, in person, May 28, 2024.

[326] Dotson, "Develop and Evaluate an Outreach Manual for Black Churches," 10.

[327] Participant 6, interview by Michael Carr, in person, June 8, 2024.

[328] Participant 13, interview by Michael Carr, Zoom, June 27, 2024.

pulpit and into the communities they serve. This idea is supported by Charlie Dates as written in Chapter Two.[329]

Empowerment through Education and Mobilization

Empowerment through education and mobilization refers to equipping congregants with the knowledge, critical awareness, and practical tools needed for congregational change and cultural activism. Education is reflected in the participants' commitment to teach biblical principles that connect faith to real-world issues, fostering critical thinking and contextual understanding. For example, Participant 2 described leading a ten-week Bible study series on the Black Church and social justice, stating, "We were able to unearth some embedded theologies … and see how God had issues with Israel for things such as what we know now to be gentrification."[330] This illustrates how education helps congregants comprehend the relevance and contextual understanding of Scripture in relation to contemporary injustices. This aligns with the research of various scholars as cited in Chapter Two regarding a Black hermeneutic.[331] Mobilization is demonstrated through concrete actions inspired by this education, such as those described previously. The theme of empowerment through education and mobilization is expanded through two related sub-themes of voter engagement and narrative-driven exegesis.

Voter Engagement

Voter engagement is a hallmark of civic responsibility. Historically, it has been a key avenue through which individuals within the Black Community have influenced public policy

[329] Dates, "Understudied Burden," 12.

[330] Participant 2, interview by Michael Carr, in person, May 28, 2024.

affecting their daily lives. Within the Black Church, voter engagement has long been recognized as both a spiritual and social mandate, empowering congregants to exercise their agency and advocate for justice at the ballot box. As noted in Chapter Two, O. M. McRoberts describes how prophetic preaching embodies activism for community involvement.[332] In referring to his congregation, Participant 3 stated, "They vote and encourage their family members to vote. When we are asked to be involved in community action, they are likely to show up and/or give financial support when asked for. Like I have a member now who is very committed to making sure that our folks not only register but actually vote come November, because we see how critical our participation in that process is."[333] Participant 5 discussed how preaching should move congregants towards congregational change and cultural activism:

> Part of the preaching should include encouraging the congregation to be a part of the political process, to vote, when they have town hall meetings, to be a part of those meetings, to actually give the Christian perspective and community perspective on various kinds of needs in the community. We are a voting precinct. We had to compete for that… as a result of that, we have a very high number of voters for our city that actually come here to vote. We had to compete against four groups and then, of course, there were four people on the panel, three Republicans, one Democrat, and we had a unanimous decision for us to have the precinct here.[334]

This is supported in Chapter Two by the research of James and Christine Ward who posit that prophetic preaching not only addresses issues of social injustices but also offers hope and inspiration to marginalized individuals while influencing a call to action for transformative change.[335] In response to voter engagement, Participant 6 shared, "We have actively participated in voter registration. We set up a booth at a mall and sat outside in the mall area, asking people if

---

[332] McRoberts, *Stories of Glory*, 123-150.

[333] Participant 3, interview by Michael Carr, in person, May 29, 2024.

[334] Participant 5, interview by Michael Carr, in person, June 7, 2024.

[335] Ward and Ward, *Preaching from the Prophets*, 11.

they were registered to vote and helping them register if not. We worked actively to encourage people to register to vote. I forgot, maybe we got maybe 56 people registered to vote in that."[336]

Narrative-Driven Exegesis

Narrative-driven exegesis is seen as the way pastors use biblical stories to connect Scripture to contemporary social issues, making the call to action both theologically grounded and personally relevant. In *The Heart of Black Preaching,* Cleophus LaRue examines the distinct characteristics of Black preaching, including its reliance on storytelling and narrative forms to make the Scripture relevant and powerful for congregants in the modern era.[337] Participant 2 explained, "I have found that when people realize the oppression of Jesus and his people, it mirrors the oppression of our people. So, I may throw in … parallels to where our people can see it's not that different, and yet, if God can move then, He could still move now."[338] Advancing the argument further, Participant 3 suggested that having "biblical knowledge and good hermeneutics will allow you to ask questions of the text and say, how does this text speak to what I need to say to these people. This is important not to continue repeating the same interpretations, the same dialogue, that has been passed down to us."[339] Understanding what the Bible says and applying it in a modern context is essential for addressing the social ills affecting the Black Church.

This is underscored in Mitchell's work on Black preaching where he emphasizes that effective Black preaching is not simply about biblical literacy or doctrinal accuracy, but about

---

[336] Participant 6, interview by Michael Carr, in person, June 8, 2024.

[337] LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching*, 17-27.

[338] Participant 2, interview by Michael Carr, in person, May 28, 2024.

[339] Participant 3, interview by Michael Carr, in person, May 29, 2024.

making Scripture come alive in the lived experience of the congregants; Mitchell argues that Black preaching is inherently narrative, dialogical, and contextual, requiring the preacher to interpret ancient texts in ways that speak directly to contemporary injustices impacting the Black Church.[340] As seen in both Mitchell's scholarship and the pastoral interviews, prophetic preaching draws upon biblical authority to confront social ills, embodying a tradition where the preacher "makes the text live as it relates to what God says in Micah 6:8: 'What does the Lord require? You do good, love justice, walk faithfully with your God,'" so that the Gospel becomes a source of liberation, empowerment, and practical guidance for congregational change and cultural transformation.[341]

According to Participant 1, "When you are exegeting the text, you want to keep in mind that you want to address the social, political, historical, and cultural realities of the text. How do they relate to the social conditions of the world we live in. And what is God's method for application? God's method for making this make sense?"[342] In the real world, narrative-driven exegesis manifests as churches mobilizing around the social ills that affect the Black Church, with sermons that not only interpret biblical passages but also motivate congregants to engage in congregational change and social activism. It is essential to note that, although this emerged as a sub-theme from the interviews, it was not highlighted in Chapter Two of this study.

[340] Mitchell, *Black Preaching* (1970), 38-59.

[341] Participant 1, interview by Michael Carr, in person, May 28, 2024.

[342] Participant 1, interview by Michael Carr, in person, May 28, 2024.

Balancing Prophetic Pastoral Voices

Balancing prophetic pastoral voices involves integrating bold, truth-telling aspects of the prophetic role, speaking out against injustice, and challenging the status quo. As referenced in Chapter Two, Fearon argues that preachers should challenge the status quo and pursue justice.[343] This integrated approach helps the Black Church remain both a voice for justice and a refuge for healing, ensuring that congregants are challenged to grow while also being supported and loved.

Tri-Vocal Approach

The theme of balancing prophetic pastoral voices is exemplified through the sub-theme of a tri-vocal approach, where pastors intentionally integrate prophetic urgency, pastoral care, and sage wisdom to address societal injustices. Participant 1 describes the tri-vocal approach as essential for effective and holistic ministry, ensuring that sermons address injustice, provide care, and draw on historical wisdom. According to Gilbert, who coined the tri-vocal approach of prophet, priest, and sage in his book, *A Pursued Justice: Black Preaching from the Great Migration to Civil Rights*, argues that these three voices should not stand alone but must be integrated and mutually reinforce one another to address the complex realities facing Black communities.[344]

Therefore, the Black preacher must assume all three voices in the preaching moment, but particularly the prophet when addressing the specific challenges faced by the Black Church to instill practices of congregational change and cultural activism within the congregation.[345] This

---

[343] Fearon, "Social Justice Preaching," 60.

[344] Gilbert, *A Pursued Justice*, 60-75.

[345] Gilbert, *A Pursued Justice*, 75-110.

approach enables congregants to gain a deeper understanding of their reality and empowers them to navigate the world around them. Participant 9 suggests, "You cannot be prophetic every Sunday . . . but it's ministerial malpractice to ignore major events. Preachers have to recognize when to be the prophet, priest, or more pastoral, and when to be the sage or voice of wisdom."[346] The tri-vocal approach is presented as essential for the survival of both the Black Church and community, enabling clergy to be both relevant and transformative in their ministry.

Challenges and Tensions

Calvon Tijuan Jones, as cited within Chapter Two, discusses how the Black Church has become focused on prosperity and individual salvation rather than prophetic preaching.[347] The theme of challenges and tensions is represented by the sub-theme of institutional resistance, as illustrated by participants who encountered reluctance from within their congregations or the wider church when engaging in prophetic preaching and activism. Some congregations resist activism due to comfort with the "prosperity gospel."

Institutional Resistance

The Black Church has a historic legacy of prophetic proclamation and resistance. Galbreath advances the argument by suggesting that the prosperity gospel has become a "cancer" within the Black Church.[348] Participant 3 described resistance within her congregation when addressing social justice issues, noting that some members preferred a "pie in the sky" theology and were uncomfortable with sermons that challenged the status quo or called for activism.[349]

---

[346] Participant 9, interview by Michael Carr, Zoom, June 10, 2024.

[347] Jones, "Reclaiming the Tradition of Prophetic Proclamation," 2.

[348] Galbreath, "Preaching as Religiously Educative," 8.

[349] Participant 3, interview by Michael Carr, in person, May 29, 2024.

This reflects a reluctance among some congregants to embrace prophetic preaching that pushes for congregational change and cultural activism. Participant 5 discussed how the Black Church had to "compete" to become a voting precinct, facing skepticism and bureaucratic hurdles from both within and outside the congregation.[350] This example highlights institutional resistance not only from external authorities, but also from internal congregants that may be wary of overt political engagement. Participant 6 reported pushback when organizing counter-protests against the KKK and advocating for the reopening of a local hospital.[351] He described how some in the broader community, and even within the Black Church, questioned the appropriateness of such activism, illustrating the tension between a call to action and institutional comfort. Participant 12 shared:

> Our church is no stranger to social justice. We have been on the front lines of social issues and see them as our relevance as Black people. Whether gentrification, inequity in funding of schools, voter suppression, or whatever the issue, our congregants see salvation and social justice as co-existing. You cannot have one without the other. We become engaged in social action, which has changed and transformed our congregation.[352]

Participant 7 furthered the discussion stating:

> There has to be a raised awareness, instigated action, and a consciousness of how the American political system, the American judicial system, and the American educational system, which promises equality, but it is a false narrative and a false proposal. In the job market, there is what is described as a glass ceiling, you only get so far. In the political arena, Black faces in key policy-making positions are extremely rare. So, we continue to fight this fight that our people have become aware of because I keep honing on Black consciousness and Black self-determination. [353]

---

[350] Participant 5, interview by Michael Carr, in person, June 7, 2024.

[351] Participant 6, interview by Michael Carr, in person, June 8, 2024.

[352] Participant 12, interview by Michael Carr, Zoom, June 21, 2024.

[353] Participant 7, interview by Michael Carr, in person, May 28, 2024. Raphael Warnock in *The Divided Mind of the Black Church* suggests that the Black Church wrestles with a double consciousness of its Black Christianity and white evangelism.

These examples align with broader scholarship, which notes that prophetic preaching often encounters resistance and rejects "the vision, mores, theologies, and narratives constructed in hierarchic and homogeneous silos often responsible for the discrimination and oppression of disenfranchised minority groups."[354] Thus, real-world prophetic ministry often involves persistent, creative leadership to overcome internal barriers and mobilize the church as an agent of transformation in both spiritual and social spheres.

Historical and Cultural Legacy

The sub-theme of civil rights continuity characterizes the theme of historical and cultural legacy, as pastors intentionally tie modern activism to the Black Church's pivotal role in the 1950s and 1960s Civil Rights Movement. This connection is evident in how pastors invoke the legacy of leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and the institutional strength of the Black Church as a pillar within the Civil Rights Movement, shaping both the objectives and methods of contemporary justice work. In real-world applications, this manifests as the Black Church organizing voter registration drives, hosting forums on racial justice, and serving as community hubs for advocacy. These practices echo the Black Church's foundational role in the Civil Rights Movement and demonstrate how its prophetic tradition continues to motivate congregational change and cultural activism.

Civil Rights Continuity

The participants referenced how the Black Church provided both spiritual guidance and safe spaces for activists during the Civil Rights era, and they draw on this legacy to motivate congregational change and cultural activism. Participant 3 recounted, "The Black Church met,

[354] Gardner, "An Analysis of Prophetic Radicalism," 16.

prayed, and strategized during the Civil Rights era, and then went to speak truth to power in a prophetic way. Because we had prayed, strategized, and said, 'these are our needs, here is how we addressed those needs, which resulted in the legislative action in the 1960s."[355] Participant 5 shared that this happened "through preaching and teaching, as well as encouraging people to take part in the process."[356] According to the research in Chapter Two, Richard L. Wood describes this historical period as providing "people to help lead the movement; material resources such as money, phones, meeting space, and so on; and social capital and organizational structures that facilitate mobilization."[357]

Summary

The Black Church is called upon to continue its social activism in addressing the social ills that impact its community. In the same manner that the Black Church spoke about and maintains programs concerning social and civic issues, it must be an active participant in developing and implementing solutions to such social ills. While the activism may reside within the Black Church, it is essential that the determination for activism does not remain confined to the Black Church. The message of social justice and social action should be disseminated from the Black Church to others who are a part of the broader community. As the Black Church continues to reclaim its prophetic voice and expand its activism beyond its walls, it stands as both a spiritual and civic leader within the broader community. This ongoing commitment to social justice and engagement not only honors the church's historical legacy but also addresses

[355] Participant 3, interview by Michael Carr, in person, May 29, 2024.

[356] Participant 5, interview by Michael Carr, in person, June 7, 2024.

[357] Wood, "Religion, Faith-Based Community Organizing," 398.

the pressing needs of today. Chapter Five will focus on the practical applications of these findings, exploring how the insights gained from this study can inform future ministry strategies, community partnerships, and actionable steps for sustained impact.

Chapter Five

Research Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the role of prophetic preaching within the Black Church, highlighting its historical and contemporary significance. It sought to discover how active and retired Black pastors within the Black Church who engage in prophetic preaching describe their sermons' capacity to motivate congregational change and cultural activism. This study, with its focus on prophetic preaching within the Black Church, examined its role in addressing the sociopolitical injustices that affect the Black Church and its community. Therefore, the goal at the outset of this research was to discover the extent to which the Black Church must reclaim its prophetic voice as a catalyst for cultural transformation and social activism, highlighting the historical and contemporary significance of prophetic preaching within the Black Church. Consequently, the relevant question becomes: How does prophetic preaching within the Black Church address the sociopolitical and socioeconomic injustices that impact the Black Church and community?

This research examined the practices of thirteen pastors within the Black Church who engage in prophetic preaching, with an emphasis on the congregants' responses to this type of preaching. A specific focus of the study was the historical and contemporary significance of prophetic preaching within the Black Church in addressing the sociopolitical and socioeconomic injustices impacting the Black Church and community. A phenomenological approach was employed, utilizing semi-structured, open-ended interviews with a purposive sample of Black pastors aged 30 to 73, recruited from within the researcher's professional network, as discussed in Chapter Three. The results of this qualitative research were derived from the interviews that examined the approaches of thirteen pastors within the Black Church throughout the United

States as they addressed the role of prophetic preaching in addressing the sociopolitical and socioeconomic problems affecting the Black Church. The purpose of this chapter is to synthesize key findings from the study on the role of prophetic preaching in motivating congregational change and cultural activism within the Black Church. It outlines research conclusions, limitations of the study, implications for ministry practice, and recommendations from the study grounded in the study's themes and sub-themes.

Key Findings

The primary research question for this study was: How do pastors who engage in prophetic preaching describe their sermons' capacity to motivate congregational change and cultural activism? This study was also shaped by two closely related sub-questions:

(a) What is the impact of the call to action in the context of prophetic preaching?

(b) What are the responses of congregants to your prophetic preaching?

Based on the research question, sub-questions, themes, and sub-themes that emerged from the findings, four primary conclusions are drawn as follows:

First, prophetic preaching within the Black Church is a transformative practice rooted in biblical authority and liberation theology, aimed at confronting systemic injustice. Pastors in this study described their approach as deeply rooted in scriptural mandates and the lived experiences of their congregants, employing narrative-driven exegesis to connect biblical tradition with contemporary realities, fostering congregational resistance.[358]

[358] Kenyatta R. Gilbert, Chelsea Brooke Yarborough, and Larrin Robertson, "African American Preaching," *St. Andrews Encyclopedia of Theology*, Brendan N. Wolfe et al, eds. 2022, https://www.saet.ac.uk/Christianity/AfricanAmericanPreaching.

Second, the effectiveness of prophetic preaching is contingent upon its contextual relevance. Timely and localized action is essential for sustaining cultural activism. Pastors who engage in timely and localized action in response to systemic injustices are better able to motivate congregational change and foster cultural activism. This responsiveness ensures that sermons remain meaningful and actionable for congregants, addressing both immediate and universal challenges.

Third, empowerment of the congregation is achieved through a dual focus on education and mobilization. Participants emphasized the importance of equipping congregants with critical biblical literacy and practical tools for civic engagement, such as voter registration initiatives and community forums, thereby facilitating both spiritual growth and social transformation.

Fourth, effective prophetic preaching requires pastors to balance prophetic boldness with pastoral understanding, employing a tri-vocal approach that integrates the roles of prophet, priest, and sage. This balance enables clergy to navigate institutional resistance, such as a preference for the prosperity gospel, while honoring the Black Church's historical legacy and maximizing the church's impact on both its members and the broader community.[359]

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations of this study can be identified. First, the participant pool was limited to active or retired pastors from the Black Church who practice prophetic preaching, which restricts the religious and denominational diversity represented. Including voices from a broader religious and denominational context could yield additional insights concerning the historical and contemporary significance of the prophetic preaching tradition. Second, the study does not

[359] See the "Prophetic Preaching in the Modern Era" section in Chapter Two.

consider white pastors or white congregations, so the variable of race and the diversity of perspectives it brings to this topic are absent. Third, the research does not address the integration of a specific preaching methodology during the sermon itself. Employing a methodological framework could help ensure that sermons identified as prophetic are firmly rooted in Scripture, contextually relevant, and focused on addressing social injustice and advocating for liberation.

Implications for Ministry Practice

Black religious life has been extensively analyzed across disciplines, from the humanities to social science and theology, with particular attention on the Black Church's multifaceted roles as a spiritual bastion, prophetic voice, and social resource. This study aligns with post-Civil Rights Movement critiques highlighting the decline of the Black Church's prophetic voice, despite its historical commitment to liberative praxis aimed at confronting oppression and fostering collective transformation. In his doctoral dissertation, Daryl L. Horton documents how the Black Church's prophetic tradition, once central to social movements from slavery through the Civil Rights era has faced significant decline in the post-Civil Rights period, noting that "In the 21st century African American pastors like Dr. Gardner C. Taylor, Dr. James Cone, and Rev. William J. Barber III have been visible examples of African American pastors whose voices contribute to the living legacy of the Black Social Gospel. However, this Black Social Gospel has been significantly challenged since the 1960's."[360]

Horton's research contextualizes the decline of the Black Church's prophetic voice within broader societal shifts, including the assumption that racial inequities were resolved during the Civil Rights Movement. His focus on the Black social gospel to address racism and

[360] Horton, "Discerning the Call to Prophetic Civic Leadership," 23.

the persistent need for prophetic civic leadership directly supports the claim that the Black Church's prophetic voice has waned despite its historical commitment to liberation. While the Black Church has historically prioritized social justice issues—from civil rights to criminal justice reform—its modern engagement often lacks the urgency and innovation needed to address contemporary crises, such as voter suppression, mass incarceration, healthcare and educational disparities, police brutality, food insecurities, white supremacy and white privilege, the rise of white evangelicalism, white Christian nationalism, and the like. Consequently, the diminishing prophetic voice reflects a broader struggle to adapt historical frameworks such as Civil Rights-era strategies to twenty-first-century challenges, leaving many current injustices inadequately addressed. Therefore, to address the disconnect between historical frameworks and contemporary challenges, this research proposes the following strategies to revitalize the Black Church's prophetic voice.

First, seminaries and divinity schools should integrate liberation theology and narrative-driven exegesis into homiletics courses, equipping clergy to connect biblical texts to contemporary injustices and directly address issues affecting the Black Church and the broader community. This aligns with Gilbert's call for prophetic preaching that "speaks justice, divine intentionality, and hope" while grounding sermons in Black hermeneutics.[361]

Secondly, Black Churches must forge alliances with local organizations, such as schools and grassroots coalitions like Black Lives Matter, to amplify their civic impact. Examples include hosting voter registration drives, census workshops, and town halls on various issues, as demonstrated by participants who transformed their churches into polling precincts and community hubs.

[361] Gilbert, "Making the Unseen Seen," 1–13.

Thirdly, formal and informal training for clergy should prioritize the tri-vocal approach (prophet, priest, and sage) to help pastors balance prophetic critique with pastoral care, ensuring sermons inspire activism without alienating congregants. This model addresses institutional resistance to social justice ministries while honoring the legacy of the Black Church. By reclaiming its prophetic voice through these practices, the Black Church can bridge the gap between academic theology and grassroots ministry, ensuring its relevance in confronting systemic inequities. This study highlights the importance of aligning preaching with practical action, transforming sermons into effective tools for both congregational transformation and cultural engagement.

Recommendations from the Study

This research demonstrates the value of prophetic preaching within the Black Church, highlighting its historical and contemporary significance. Despite its limitations, this study lays the groundwork for future studies that can support, to a considerable extent, the recovery of the Black Church's prophetic voice. Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations aim to position the Black Church to reclaim its prophetic voice, enhance cultural activism, and address social injustices through intentional theological, educational, and structural interventions.

Training Programs for Clergy

Recognizing the urgent need for the Black Church to reclaim its prophetic voice in response to contemporary social injustices, it is essential to equip clergy with the tools necessary for transformative ministry. One way this can be accomplished is for seminaries to develop programs that integrate liberation theology and narrative-driven exegesis into homiletics. For

example, Black Churches might consider partnering with academic institutions to create curricula that teach pastors to interpret Scripture through a Black hermeneutic, linking passages like Luke 4:18 to contemporary issues such as voter suppression or housing discrimination. This aligns with Participant 6's emphasis on grounding sermons in God's mission to liberate the oppressed. By investing in such targeted training initiatives, the Black Church can ensure its preachers are both theologically grounded and contextually responsive, empowering congregations to pursue justice and meaningful cultural activism in the modern era.

Civic Engagement Strategies

Building on the tradition of prophetic preaching as a motivator for congregational change and cultural activism within the Black Church, it is crucial to implement practical strategies that foster civic participation and social responsibility. Additionally, Black Churches should establish church-based voter engagement task forces equipped with standardized toolkits for registration, education, and mobilization. For instance, adopt models like Participant 5's "three-pronged approach" (registration, education, transportation) or Participant 6's voter drives.[362] These frameworks should inspire civic engagement as a spiritual practice, reflecting the Black Church's historical role in movements like the Civil Rights era. Prioritizing such initiatives, the Black Church can motivate congregants to become active agents of justice, ensuring that the prophetic voice remains both relevant and impactful in addressing today's pressing social issues, while also remembering that church's 501(c)(3) status does not allow endorsement of specific parties or candidates but does allow responses to particular issues.

[362] Participant 5, interview by Michael Carr, in person, June 7, 2024. Participant 6, interview by Michael Carr, in person, June 8, 2024.

Community Action Committees

To further strengthen the Black Church's impact on social justice and community transformation, it is essential to create intentional structures that foster ongoing engagement at the grassroots level. Black Churches should form intra-church committees to identify and localize social justice initiatives, such as housing advocacy or youth mentorship. For example, replicate Participant 1's strategy of hosting monthly gatherings for Black fathers to address youth violence, or Participant 5's forums with law enforcement to reduce community tensions.[363] These committees would ensure sustained, grassroots-driven activism tailored to regional needs. By empowering congregants to take ownership of these initiatives, the Black Church can cultivate a culture of active participation and sustained advocacy that addresses both immediate and long-term community challenges.

Prophetic-Pastoral Partnerships

To further expand the reach and effectiveness of prophetic preaching and social justice advocacy, Black Churches need to look beyond denominational boundaries and collaborate on a broader scale. The creation of interdenominational coalitions would sustain this collaboration to address regional inequities through policy advocacy and the sharing of resources. For instance, churches could collaborate on campaigns for criminal justice reform or equitable school funding, mirroring Participant 12's emphasis on salvation and social justice as co-existing.[364] Such partnerships would amplify the Black Church's collective impact while honoring its legacy of communal leadership. Nurturing these alliances, the Black Church can leverage its shared

[363] Participant 1, interview by Michael Carr, in person, May 28, 2024. Participant 5, interview by Michael Carr, in person, June 7, 2024.

[364] Participant 12, interview by Michael Carr, Zoom, June 21, 2024.

resources and unified voice to drive systemic change and ensure that its prophetic mission remains relevant and transformative for future generations.

Social Justice Sermon Series

To further equip congregants for meaningful engagement with contemporary social issues, Black pastors can leverage the pulpit as a platform for both education and mobilization. In doing so, Black pastors might design a sermon series linking biblical narratives to contemporary issues affecting the Black Church. Each sermon should pair exegesis, such as Amos 5:24 on justice, with actionable steps, such as organizing town halls or partnering with legal aid organizations. Participant 2's use of the Good Samaritan parable to address the Black Lives Matter movement exemplifies this approach, intentionally connecting Scripture to present-day realities and offering concrete avenues for action through an impactful sermon series to inspire congregants to embody the church's prophetic mission in their daily lives and within the broader community.[365]

Civic Hub Model

As Black Churches seek to deepen their civic engagement and serve as anchors of community empowerment, repurposing church facilities for broader public use offers a powerful model. Therefore, Black Churches might consider using their facilities as polling stations, census centers, and community forums. Participant 5's success in securing their church as a voting precinct, resulting in high voter turnout, demonstrates the viability of this model. Churches could host "Know Your Rights" workshops or expungement clinics, institutionalizing civic engagement as part of their ministry. By embracing these practices, Black Churches can affirm

[365] Participant 2, interview by Michael Carr, in person, May 28, 2024.

their prophetic mission, foster greater community participation, and ensure their facilities remain vital centers for both congregational change and cultural activism.

Conclusion

In his doctoral dissertation, Donald L. Perryman documents how, in the Gospel of Matthew, John the Baptist, while in prison near the end of his ministry, questions his "earlier professed faith in and proclamation of Jesus as the Messiah."[366] He refers to John as the once firm-tongued prophet who boldly spoke truth to power, but now finds himself in a state of despair.[367] Sending a group of messengers to Jesus, John asked him, "Are you the one we've been expecting? Or should we keep looking for someone else?"[368] Conclusively, according to Perryman, "those who look for the Black Church to play some prominent public role in addressing the social ills that affect the Black Church and community share John's same sentiment. Is the Black Church who we thought it was? Is the Black Church dead or irrelevant? Or should we look for someone else to do something about our immediate predicament? When John's messengers arrive and pose that question, rather than directly answering it, Jesus instead points to His works, which, unlike John's, are focused on healing, restoration, and transformation rather than speaking truth to evil institutional power."[369] Jesus says, "Go back to John and tell him what is being done to address the needs of people on the margins—the blind see, the lame

[366] Perryman, "The Role of the Black Church in Addressing Collateral Damage," 165.

[367] Perryman, "The Role of the Black Church in Addressing Collateral Damage," 165.

[368] Luke 7:19 [NLT].

[369] Perryman, "The Role of the Black Church in Addressing Collateral Damage," 166.

walk, those with leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, and the Good News is being preached to the poor."[370]

This approach to ministry, centered on liberating the oppressed and meeting the needs of those on the margins, diverges from John's message of urgent repentance and the imminent arrival of God's kingdom. As a result, John may have felt that authentic ministry was not taking place, since Jesus' actions did not fit his expectations of prophetic engagement with power.[371]

As Perryman further suggests, "The Black Church was born out of an effort to help oppressed and marginalized people meet and overcome the practical challenges they face in this world."[372] Therefore, this work is a call for the Black Church to reclaim its prophetic voice. While it does not suggest that prophetic voices no longer hold a presence in the pulpits of the Black Church today, it argues that the Black Church appears to have fallen short in its call to liberation and social justice.[373] According to Perryman, "It is also, perhaps even more directly, written to those who, like John, are bothered by the continuation of social injustices plaguing our contemporary landscape and frustrated by the hyper-spiritualized church culture that exists within the Black Church, where we are more concerned about praise and prosperity versus prophetic proclamation on systemic sociopolitical issues."[374] This research asserts that the Black Church must reclaim its prophetic voice. The intent of this work is to make known the role of prophetic preaching from both historical and contemporary perspectives.

---

[370] Luke 7:22.

[371] Perryman, "The Role of the Black Church in Addressing Collateral Damage," 166.

[372] Perryman, "The Role of the Black Church in Addressing Collateral Damage," 166.

[373] Glaude, "The Black Church Is Dead," n.p.

[374] Perryman, "The Role of the Black Church in Addressing Collateral Damage," 166.

As a change agent operating in both faith-based and educational systems, the researcher believes the Black Church needs to reclaim its prophetic voice, enabling it to address the complex challenges faced by the Black Community in a post-Civil Rights Movement context. Prophetic preaching remains a vital mechanism for the Black Church to enact congregational change and cultural activism. By implementing these recommendations—grounded in liberation theology, contextual responsiveness, and communal partnership—clergy can honor the tradition's legacy while addressing contemporary injustices. Future research should investigate the longitudinal effects of these strategies, particularly their impact on fostering intergenerational engagement and systemic transformation.

The researcher's primary goal was to conduct research that effectively addresses the burdensome social issues affecting the Black Church. This research has demonstrated that the practice of prophetic preaching unites the social and professional supports of the Black Church, motivating congregants to drive change within their congregations and engage in cultural activism.

The challenge of prophetic preaching in the modern era ultimately requires an understanding of the role prophetic preaching plays within the historical and contemporary Black Church, as well as reclaiming this voice to address the contemporary community's crises. Even in the modern era, Black Americans still find themselves oppressed and in need of God's help and deliverance. This work should inspire the Black Church to hear from a collection of contemporary voices who are carrying the mantle, to embrace the legacy of our prophetic tradition, and to push the Black Church in a considerable measure to return to being the liberating voice that speaks truth to power on behalf of and for Black people.

Appendix A:

Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

WINEBRENNER
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Institutional Review Board Decision Regarding Research Proposal

From Mary Iiames <[redacted]>
Date Tue 4/16/2024 10:45 AM
To Michael Carr <[redacted]>
Cc Kathryn Helleman <[redacted]>; Bruce Coats <[redacted]>; David Barbee <[redacted]>; Andrew Draper <[redacted]>; Martin Johnson <[redacted]>

1 attachment (53 KB)
IRB Recommendations -Michael Carr.docx;

Dear Michael:

On behalf of the Winebrenner Institutional Review Board, I want to congratulate you on the approval of your research proposal. A letter of approval and recommendations for your research materials is attached for your review. Please contact me if you have any questions. Best wishes upon the implementation of your research project.

God's blessings upon your journey!

Dr. Iiames

Dr. Mary Steiner Iiames, Ph.D.

Interim Chief Academic Officer
Assistant Professor in Clinical Counseling
Director of Master of Arts in Clinical Counseling
Institutional Review Board Chair
Chi Sigma Iota, Nu Epsilon Chi Chapter, Core Faculty Advisor
Winebrenner Theological Seminary
950 North Main Street, Findlay, Ohio 45840

Appendix B:

Institutional Review Board Recommendations

Institutional Review Board

Research Proposal Recommendations

Principal Researcher: Michael Carr

Proposed Research Title: Black Preaching Matters: The Impact of Prophetic Preaching in a Non-Prophetic Age of the Black Church

Dear Michael:

Congratulations! Upon review of your research proposal and related materials, the Winebrenner Institutional Review Board has approved your research proposal indicating that you may begin to implement your research procedures according to the timeline established by you and your research advisor.

Prior to beginning your research, we encourage you to include details about the specific measures you will take to de-identify your participants, as your participants may be familiar with one another within your network. Specifically, this information should be included in your initial invitation letter to participants (paragraph three). Please note, these suggestions in no way affect your permission to implement your research; rather, these notes are included to align your informed consent document with your Ethical Research Proposal.

Once again, congratulations and best wishes upon implementing your research. May God grant you His wisdom, knowledge, understanding, strength, and persistence as you carry out this work. In all, may He be gloried.

Please contact me if you have any questions ([redacted]).

Best wishes,

Dr. Mary Steiner Iiames

Winebrenner Theological Seminary Institutional Review Board Chair

Appendix C:

Institutional Review Board Report

June 10, 2025

Dear Dr. Helleman,

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval letter that I received from Dr. Mary Iiames on April 16, 2024, does not state any requirement regarding the need to submit a final IRB report.

The IRB letter did offer one recommendation:

1. Prior to beginning your research, we encourage you to include details about the specific measures you will take to de-identify your participants, as your participants may be familiar with one another within your network.

This recommendation was implemented prior to the use of the specified informed consent documents.

Sincerely,

Michael A. Carr, Jr.

Appendix D:

Request to Participate in a Study

Dear Pastor,

You are being invited to participate in a doctoral study. I am a Doctor of Ministry student at Winebrenner Theological Seminary conducting research regarding the role and impact of Prophetic Preaching within the Black Church. This email is an invitation for your voluntary participation in this study. You were selected as a possible participant for this study because your position as an active or retired pastor within the Black Church who engages in prophetic preaching.

If you decide to participate, you may be selected to contribute to the study in an individual interview. Participation in an individual interview will take approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour to complete, possibly a little longer based on follow up questions. Please know that your decision whether to participate in this study/project is completely voluntarily. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice. No other benefits accrue to you for your participation, except for contributing to scholarly research. The records of this study/project will be considered private information.

Private information herein means information ascertained by the investigator and constitutes research involving human subjects. Furthermore, private information includes information about behavior that occurs in a context in which an individual can reasonably expect that no observation or recording is taking place, and information which has been provided for specific purposes by an individual and which the individual can reasonably expect would not be made public. In any sort of report that might be published, no information will be included that would make it possible to identify a participant. Only the candidate/researcher will keep and safeguard the research records.

In closing, thank you for your time and consideration. If you are interested in participating, please reply to this email at your earliest convenience using the following information below. This will allow for interviews to take place at a mutually agreed time.

- *I, _____ meet the criteria for participation and I am interested in being a participant in this study. I understand that my participation means I have been selected for an interview. The best way to reach me is by email at _____ and phone at _____.*

- *I do understand that responding via email does not guarantee that I will be selected for the interview. If I am chosen to participate, I will be contacted by the candidate/researcher via email or phone. I further understand that my email response will serve as my signature.*

Sincerely,

Participant Name

Respectfully,

Michael Carr, Ed.D.
University of Findlay, Adjunct Education Professor
Winebrenner Theological Seminary, D.Min. Student

Appendix E:

Informed Consent Form

WINEBRENNER
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Michael Carr
[redacted]

[Participant Name]:
[Participant Address]:
[Date]:

Dear [Participant Name]:

I am a Doctor of Ministry student at Winebrenner Theological Seminary, Findlay, Ohio conducting research on prophetic preaching within the Black Church. This letter is an invitation for your voluntary participation in this research study/project.

A scheduled interview will take place at a date and time mutually agreed upon, and focus on the impact of prophetic preaching in a non-prophetic age of the Black Church. The interview will take at least 30 minutes, but no more than 1 hour of your time. This interview will ask you to respond to open-ended interview questions, which address the research question: How do pastors who engage in prophetic preaching describe their sermons capacity to motivate congregational change and cultural activism? The following sub-questions will also be considered: (a) What is the impact of the call to action in the context of prophetic preaching? (b) What are the responses of congregants to your prophetic preaching?

All responses will remain confidential, and your anonymity will be ensured. Your responses will contribute to this timely research. A summary of the study/project will be published upon completion of this study/project. Please also sign and return the enclosed "Informed Consent" form if you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study/project.

I greatly appreciate your participation in this research/project. Please let me know if you have any questions concerning this study/project or the enclosures. I may be reached by phone at [redacted] or by e-mail at [redacted]. My project chair, Dr. Bruce Coats may be reached by email at [redacted]

Sincerely,

[Michael A. Carr, Jr.,
Researcher/Project Lead]

Informed Consent Form

An important component to any submission to the IRB committee is the informed consent form. This form will be used by the researcher to document that the subject(s) were aware of the requirements of the study/project and that they were aware that they could refuse to participate or withdraw at any time up until publication of the dissertation or project report. It is important that this document contain adequate information so that the subjects can make an informed decision regarding participation.

Black Preaching Matters: The Impact of Prophetic Preaching In a Non-Prophetic Age of the Black Church

Participant Information

Participant Name

Participant Address

Participant Phone Number

Participant Email

Prospective Research Subject

Read this consent form carefully and ask as many questions as you like before you decide whether you want to participate in this research study/project. You are free to ask questions at any time before, during, or after your participation in this research.

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to discover the impact of prophetic preaching in a non-prophetic age of the Black Church. In recent years, police brutality against Black men and women has garnered national attention. Within the last decade, the multiple deaths of Black Americans at the hands of those chosen to serve and protect has not only garnered national attention, but also prompted countless protests and other socio-politico-spiritual undertakings aimed addressing centuries old issue of racism, injustice, segregation faced by Black Americans. The researcher will interview twelve (12) active or retired pastors using a qualitative phenomenological approach to understand the lived experiences of participants within the Black Church.

Michael Carr, a Doctor of Ministry student at Winebrenner Theological Seminary, is conducting this study/project. You were selected as a possible participant because of your role as an active or retired pastor within the Black Church who engages or has engaged in prophetic preaching.

Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate.

Background Information

This investigation seeks to explore the impact of Prophetic Preaching In a Non-Prophetic Age of the Black Church.

Procedures

Participation entails completion of semi-structured open-ended interviews.

You will be asked to provide a pseudonym to replace your personal name and church names. Only anonymous demographics would be used in this study. Provide your address or e-mail to make the findings of the study available to you once documented.

The results of this study will be used to increase knowledge within the Black Church as well as bring awareness about the topic and what is missing as well as a desire to return to what is lost.

Confidentiality

The records of this study/project will be considered private information. Private information herein means information ascertained by the investigator and constitutes research involving human subjects. Private information includes information about behavior that occurs in a context in which an individual can reasonably expect that no observation or recording is taking place, and information which has been provided for specific purposes by an individual and which the individual can reasonably expect would not be made public. In any sort of report that might be published, no information will be included that would make it possible to identify a participant. Only the candidate/researcher will keep and safeguard the research records.

Voluntary Nature of this Study

Your decision whether to participate in this study/project will not affect your current or future relationship with the candidate-researcher or the associated seminary or company. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice.

Compensation

Participation in this study/project is completely voluntary. You will not receive monetary compensation-reward for your participation. The personal benefits of your participation are as mentioned in the following section.

Benefits of Participating in this Study

The possible benefits to participating in this study/project are contribution to scholarly research on prophetic preaching within the Black Church.

Risks of Participating in this Study

There is a less-than minimal risk to participating in this study/project, meaning that the risks of harm anticipated in the proposed research are not greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life. If you experience some psychological, social, or emotional discomfort after your participation, you are invited to contact the student-researcher at the telephone number or e-mail address listed in the following section to discuss your reactions.

Contacts and Questions

You may ask any questions you have by contacting the researcher by telephone at [redacted] or by e-mail at [redacted].

Participant Statement of Consent

I have read the information herein, I have asked questions and received answers, and I have received a copy of this form. I consent to participate in this study/project.

Signed: _____ _____
Type/Sign Full Name Date

Researcher Statement

I have provided the participant with a copy of this form.

Signed: _____ _____
Michael A. Carr, Jr. Date

Bibliography

Aaron, Scottie L. “Purposeful Preaching with Transformative Leadership for the Black Church in the Twenty-First Century.” D.Min. diss. United Theological Seminary, Dayton, OH, 2015.

Anderson, Bernhard W. *The Eighth Century Prophets: Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah.* Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1978.

Andrews, Dale P. *Practical Theology for Black Churches: Bridging Black Theology and African American Folk Religion.* Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.

Ayers, Danielle L. and Reginald Williams Jr. *To Serve This Present Age: Social Justice Ministries in the Black Church.* Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2013.

Baldwin, Lewis V. “Black Church Studies as an Academic Interest and Initiative: A Historical Perspective.” *The Black Church Studies Reader.* Alton B. Pollard and Carol B. Duncan, eds. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

Barber, William, III. “Foreword.” In Frank A. Thomas, *How to Preach a Dangerous Sermon* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2018).

Barndt, Joseph. *Understanding and Dismantling Racism: The Twenty-First Century Challenge to White America.* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007.

Barnes, Sandra L. “Black Church Culture and Community Action.” *Social Forces,* Vol. 84, no. 2. Dec 2005. https://doi.org/10.1353/sof.2006.0003.

Battle, Michael. *The Black Church in America: African American Christian Spirituality.* Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006.

Belle, Curtis. “Preaching Matters: Reclaiming the Prophetic Voice of the Black Church.” D.Min. diss. New Brunswick Theological Seminary, New Brunswick, NJ, 2021.

Black History. “Civil Rights Movement.” History.com. April 8, 2025. https://www.history.com/.

Brooks, Eleanor. “What Is Activism: Definition, Types, Role, Examples, and Importance.” *Democracy & Justice,* 2023. March 17, 2025. https://www.liberties.eu/en/stories/activism/44871.

Brueggemann, Walter. *Deep Memory, Exuberant Hope: Contested Truth in a Post-Christian World.* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000.

_____. *The Practice of Prophetic Imagination: Preaching an Emancipatory Word.* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000.

Coates, Ta-Nehisi. *Between the World and Me.* New York, NY: Random House, 2015.

Cole, Steve. *The Black Church: The Root of the Problems of the Black Community.* Memphis, TN: M2N Publishing, 2006.

Cone, James H. *A Black Theology of Liberation, 50th Anniversary Edition.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2020.

_____. *God of the Oppressed*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997.

_____. "The White Church and Black Power." *Black Theology: A Documentary History Volume One: 1966-1979, 2nd ed.* James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, eds. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993.

Cone, James H. and Gayraud S. Wilmore, eds. *Black Theology: A Documentary History, 1966-1979,* 2nd ed. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993.

Costen, Melva Wilson. *African American Christian Worship.* Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993.

Crawford, Evans E. with Thomas H. Troeger. *The Hum: Call and Response in African American Preaching.* Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995.

Creswell, John W. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among the Five Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2013.

Creswell, John W. and David J. Creswell. *Research Design*, 5th ed. Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2016.

Creswell, John W. and Vicki L. Plano Clark, eds. "Choosing a Mixed Methods Design." *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research.* Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2011.

Croft, Wayne E., Sr. *The Motif of Hope in African American Preaching and the Post-Civil War Era: There's a Bright Side Somewhere.* Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017.

Cross, Michael, Jr. "The Black Preaching Tradition: The Art of Preaching in the Black Church Tradition with Sermon Analysis." Master's thesis. Western Illinois University, Macomb, IL, 2020.

Dallas, Kelsey. "Where Are Churches in the Black Lives Matter Movement?" *Desert News.* July 24, 2020. https://www.deseret.com/indepth/2020/7/24/21334268/black-lives-matter-protests-civil-rights-movement-john-lewis-race-religion-churches/.

Dates, Charlie. "Donald Parsons and the Understudied Burden of Biblical Black Preaching." Ph.D. diss. Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, IL, 2016.

Davis, Reginald F. *The Black Church: Relevant or Irrelevant in the 21st Century?* Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2010.

Delgado, Richard and Jean Stefancic. *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction.* New York, NY: University Press, 2001.

DiAngelo, Robin. *What Does It Mean to Be White? Developing White Racial Literacy.* New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 2012.

Dictionary.com. "Social Justice." Accessed March 17, 2025. https://www.dictionary.com/browse/social-justice.

Dixon, Lewis J. "Black Churches and their Communities: an Exploration of the Impact of a Declining Prophetic Voice and Space." D.Min. diss. Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School, 2021.

Dotson, Kenyetta. "A Project to Develop and Evaluate an Outreach Manual for Black Churches Located in Flint, Michigan." D.Min. diss. Ashland Theological Seminary, Ashland, OH, 2023.

Edwards, Andrew W. *Human Services and Social Change: An African-American Church Perspective.* Cleveland, OH: The Inner-City Renewal Society, 1992.

Emerson, Michael O. and Christian Smith. *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America.* Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Evans, James H., Jr., *We Have Been Believers.* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012.

Fearon, Demar Felix. "Social Justice Preaching in the Seventh-Day Adventist Church." D.Min. diss. Drew University, Madison, NJ, 2022.

Feille, Laurie P. "Confessional Biblical Preaching in the Face of Whiteness: Challenging the Preacher's Understanding of White Supremacy." D.Min. diss. Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN, 2018.

Fields, Bruce L. *Introducing Black Theology: Three Crucial Questions for the Evangelical Church.* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academics, 2015.

_____. "The One and the Many: What Can Be Learned from a Black Hermeneutic." *The Covenant Quarterly.* Vol. 73, No. 2. 2015.

Florence, Myron Krys. "Seek Justice: How the Prophetic Preaching of Martin Luther King Jr. Can Speak to the African American Church Today." Master's thesis, Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, GA, 2018.

Floyd-Thomas, Juan Marcial. *Liberating Black Church History: Making it Plain.* Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2014.

Fluker, W. E., ed. *The Stones That the Builders Rejected: The Development of Ethical Leadership from the Black Church Tradition*. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998.

Gaebelein, Frank E. and J. D. Douglas, eds., *Expositor's Bible Commentary.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, Olive Tree Bible Software.

Galbreath, Charles O. "Preaching as Religiously Educative: Black Preaching as a Liberating Pedagogical Model for Black Millennials." Ph.D. diss. Fordham University, New York, NY, 2020.

Gardner, Anthony Tyshawn. "An Analysis of Prophetic Radicalism in the Social Crisis Preaching of Kelly Miller Smith Sr." Ph.D. diss. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY, 2019.

Gates, Henry Louis, Jr., *The Black Church: This is Our Story, This is Our Song.* New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2021.

Gay, L. R. and Geoffrey E. Mills. *Educational Research: Competencies for Analysis and Application.* 11th ed. Boston, MA: Prentice-Hall, 2016.

Gilbert, Kenyatta R. *A Pursued Justice: Black Preaching from the Great Migration to Civil Rights.* Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016.

_____. *Exodus Preaching: Crafting Sermons About Justice and Hope.* Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2018.

_____. "Making the Unseen Seen: Pedagogy and Aesthetics in African American Prophetic Preaching." *Homiletic.* Vol. 34, no. 2, 2009. Accessed June 1, 2024. https://homiletic.net/index.php/homiletic/article/view/3378.

_____. *The Journey and Promise of African American Preaching.* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011.

Gilbert, Kenyatta R., Chelsea Brooke Yarborough, and Larrin Robertson. "African American Preaching." *St. Andrews Encyclopedia of Theology.* Brendan N. Wolfe et al, eds. 2022. https://www.saet.ac.uk/Christianity/AfricanAmericanPreaching.

Glaude, Eddie, Jr., "The Black Church Is Dead." *Huffington Post.* April 26, 2010. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/eddie-glaude-jr-phd/the-black-church-is-dead_b_473815.

Gollwitzer, Helmut. "Why Black Theology?" *Black Theology: A Documentary History 1966-1979.* Gayraud S. Wilmore and James H. Cone, eds. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979.

Green, Tara T. *Reimagining the Middle Passage: Black Resistance in Literature, Television, and Song.* Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2018.

Grujic, Filip. "Towards Contextual Prophetic Preaching." *Kairos: Evangelical Journal of Theology.* Vol. 14, No. 1 (2020). https://doi.org/10.32862/k.14.1.4.

Hamilton, Charles V. *The Black Preacher in America.* New York, NY: William Morrow. 1972.

Harper, Keyona. "A Study to Understand the Experiences of Black American Christian Women in Leadership Positions Who Serve within the Black Church." Ph.D. diss. Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA, 2025.

Harris, James H. *Pastoral Theology: A Black-Church Perspective.* Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1991.

_____. *Preaching Liberation.* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995.

Haynes, Frederick D., III. *Healing Our Broken Village.* Dallas, TX: Saint Paul Press, 2008.

Hill, Johnny Bernard. *Prophetic Rage: A Postcolonial Theology of Liberation.* Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2013.

Hill, Kenneth H. *Religious Education in the African American Tradition: A Comprehensive Tradition.* St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2007.

Hill, Robert B. "The Role of the Black Church in Community and Economic Development Activities." *National Journal of Sociology.* Vol. 8, no. ½. Winter 1994.

Holy Bible: King James Version. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 2007.

Holy Bible: New King James Version. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 2007.

Holy Bible: New Living Translation. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 2007.

Horton, Daryl L. "Discerning the Call to Prophetic Civic Leadership within the African American Pastoral Tradition." D.Min. diss. Brite Divinity School, Fort Worth, TX, 2020.

Hoyt, Thomas, Jr. "Interpreting Biblical Scholarship for the Black Church Tradition." *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation*. Cain Hope Felder, ed. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991.

Jersild, Paul T. and Dale A. Johnson. "The Church's Response to Social Issues." *Moral Issues and Christian Response.* 5th ed. Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1993.

Johnson, Eric Arnold. “An Analysis of the Biblical and Expository Preaching of Manuel Lee Scott Sr.” Ph.D. diss. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY, 2005.

Jones, Calvon Tijuan. “Reclaiming the Tradition of Prophetic Proclamation in the Black Church: The Significance of Proclaiming Life in the Face of Death.” D.Min. diss. Duke Divinity School, Durham, NC, 2023.

Jones, William R. *Is God a White Racist? A Preamble to Black Theology.* Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1998.

Kendi, Ibram X. *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America.* New York, NY: Nation Books, 2016.

LaRue, Cleophus J. *I Believe I’ll Testify: The Art of African American Preaching.* Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011.

_____. *The Heart of Black Preaching.* Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000.

Leavell, Roland Q. *Prophetic Preaching Then and Now.* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1963.

Lin, Chi-Shiou. “Revealing the ‘Essence’ of Things: Using Phenomenology in LIS Research.” *Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in Libraries.* 4: 469-478, 2013. Accessed February 13, 2025. http://www. https://www.qqml-journal.net/index.php/qqml/article/view/123.

Lincoln, C. Eric and Lawrence H. Mamiya. *The Black Church in the African American Experience.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990.

Mason, Eric. *Woke Church: An Urgent Call for Christians in America to Confront Racism and Injustice.* Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2018.

Massey, James Earl. *The Responsible Pulpit.* Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 1974.

McClain, William B. *Come Sunday: The Liturgy of Zion.* Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1990.

McMickle, Marvin. *Where Have All the Prophets Gone? Reclaiming Prophetic Preaching in America.* Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2006.

McRoberts, O. M. *Streets of Glory: Church and Community in a Black Urban Neighborhood.* Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago, 2023.

Mitchell, Henry H. *Black Preaching; The Recovery of a Powerful Art.* Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 1990.

_____. *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art.* Philadelphia, PA: J. B. Lippincott, 1970.

Mitchem, Stephanie Y. *Name It and Claim It? Prosperity Preaching in the Black Church.* Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2007.

Moustakas, Clark. *Phenomenological Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994.

Ottoni-Wilhelm, Dawn. "God's Word in the World: Prophetic Preaching and the Gospel of Jesus Christ." *Anabaptist Preaching: A Conversation Between Pulpit, Pew and Bible.* David B. Greiser and Michael A. King, eds. Telford, UK: Cascadia Publishing, 2003.

Paris, Peter J. *The Social Teachings of the Black Churches.* Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1985.

Patton, Michael Quinn. *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods.* 4th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2015.

Perryman, Donald L. "The Role of the Black Church in Addressing Collateral Damage from the U.S. War on Drugs." Ph.D. diss. Antioch University, Yellow Springs, OH, 2019.

Pinn, Anthony B. *The Black Church in the Post-Civil Rights Era.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002.

Pounds, Roderick C., Sr. "A Project to Discover Reasons for Pastoral and Parishioner Conflict." D.Min. diss. Ashland Theological Seminary, Ashland, OH, 2020.

Powery, Luke. *Dem Dry Bones: Preaching, Death, and Hope.* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012.

Proctor, Samuel D. *The Certain Sounds of the Trumpet: Crafting a Sermon of Authority.* Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1994.

Raboteau, Albert J. *Canaan Land: A Religious History of African Americans*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001.

_____. *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South.* Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1978.

Roberts, J. Deotis. *Liberation and Reconciliation: A Black Theology,* 2nd ed. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005.

Rudolph, Christine R. "A Different Perspective: Examining Obstacles Faced by Black Clergywomen Through the Lenses of Critical Race Feminism." *Journal of Values-Based Leadership*. Accessed June 5, 2025. https://scholar.valpo.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgin ?article=1454&context=jvbl.

Savage, Keith A. “Reclaiming the Black Church’s Prophetic Voice for Social Justice Through the Social Critique of the Eighth-Century Hebrew Prophets.” D.Min. diss. United Theological Seminary, Dayton, OH, 2013.

Sensing, Tim. “African American Preaching.” *Journal of the American Academy of Ministry.* Vol. 7, Winter/Spring 2001. Wilmore, KY: Asbury Theological Seminary, 2001.

Simmons, Martha and Frank Thomas. *Preaching with Sacred Fire: An Anthology of African American Preaching from 1750 to the Present.* New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 2010.

Simmons, Martha J., ed., *Preaching on the Brink: The Future of Homiletics.* Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996.

Slaughter, F. Keith. “The Impact Potential of Liberative Black Preaching on the ‘Beingness” of African Descent Persons in the Black Church Context: The Therapeutic Dimensions of Black Preaching.” Master’s thesis. Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta, GA, 2009.

Smith, E. Dewey, Jr., “Prophetic Preaching: A Model of Male Transformational Ministry at the Greater Travelers Rest Baptist Church of Decatur, Georgia.” D.Min. diss. United Theological Seminary, Dayton, OH, 2012.

Smith, Kelly Miller. Social Crisis Preaching: The Lyman Beecher Lectures 1983 (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984), 33.

Smith, Robert, Jr. *Doctrine that Dances: Bringing Doctrinal Preaching and Teaching to Life.* Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2008.

Thomas, Frank. *How to Preach a Dangerous Sermon.* Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2018.

_____. *Introduction to the Practice of African American Preaching.* Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2016.

_____. *They Like to Never Quit Praisin’ God: The Role of Celebration in Preaching.* Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1997.

Thurman, Howard. *Deep River: Reflections on the Religious Insight of Certain of the Negro Spirituals.* New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1955.

_____. *Jesus and the Disinherited.* Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1976.

Tisby, Jemar. *The Color of Compromise: The Truth About the American Church’s Complicity in Racism.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019.

Tisdale, Leonora Tubbs. *Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach.* Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010. topics/black-history/civil-rights-movement.

VanGemeren, Willem A. *Interpreting the Prophetic Word: An Introduction to the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990.

Ward, James and Christine Ward. *Preaching from the Prophets.* Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995.

Warnock, Raphael G. *The Divided Mind of the Black Church: Theology, Piety, and Public Witness.* New York, NY: New York University Press, 2014.

Warren, Mervyn A. *King Came Preaching: The Pulpit Power of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001.

West, Cornel. *Democracy Matters: Winning the Fight Against Imperialism.* New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2004. Quoted in Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach,* Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010.

_____. *Prophetic Fragments.* Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1988.

Wilmore, Gayraud S. *African American Religious Studies: An Interdisciplinary Anthology.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992.

Wilmore, Gayraud S. and James H. Cone, eds. *Black Theology: A Documentary History, 1966-1979.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979.

Wimberly, Edward P. *Pastoral Care in the Black Church.* Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1979.

Wogaman, J. Philip. *Speaking Truth in Love: Prophetic Preaching to a Broken World.* Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998.

Wood, Richard L. "Religion, Faith-Based Community Organizing, and the Struggle for Justice" *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion.* Michele Dillion, ed. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Woodson, Carter G. *History of the Negro Church.* Washington, DC: Associated Publishers, 1945.

Wortham, Robert A. ed. *W. E. B. DuBois and the Sociology of the Black Church and Religion, 1897-1914.* Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018.

Wright, Clarence E. *The Sunday After: Preaching in Moments and Movements.* Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2022.

Zachary, William, Jr. "Prophetic Preaching that Transforms A Congregation into A Prophetic Church." D.Min. diss. United Theological Seminary, Dayton, OH, 2015.

Zimmerman, Harry Greg, Jr., “Understanding African American Preaching: The Style, Culture, and Rationale for the Worship Experience and the Value for Education.” D.Min. diss. Liberty University Seminary, Lynchburg, VA, 2015.