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AN ANALYSIS OF PROPHETIC RADICALISM IN THE SOCIAL  
CRISIS PREACHING OF KELLY MILLER SMITH, SR.

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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
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Doctor of Philosophy

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by  
Anthony Tyshawn Gardner  
December 2019

**APPROVAL SHEET**

AN ANALYSIS OF PROPHETIC RADICALISM IN THE SOCIAL  
CRISIS PREACHING OF KELLY MILLER SMITH, SR.

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To and with, Shonetay:

For your unselfish sacrifices, unfailing support, and comforting companionship this whole journey. “Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all” (Prov 31:29).

To all of our children and grandchildren, Corey, Coretta, Tristan, Titus, and Tyson; Ayla, Carter, Brenna: You all are my inspiration.

“With God all things are possible” (Matt 19:26).

To my mama and daddy, Ednar and Edward Gardner: for your steadfast devotion.

“I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength” (Phil 4:13).

Thank you.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE .....	vi
 Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Thesis .....	9
Definitions of Terms .....	12
James Earl Massey’s Sermonic Component of Radicality .....	22
Background and Significance of the Field of Study .....	24
Distinguishing Elements for Social Crisis Preaching .....	29
Methodology .....	33
2. THE CULTURAL CONTEXT AND THE ECCLESIAL PRAXIS OF KELLY MILLER SMITH AND JAMES EARL MASSEY .....	36
Kelly Miller Smith .....	38
James Earl Massey .....	62
Conclusion .....	70
3. AN EXAMINATION OF THE COMPONENTS OF THE SOCIAL CRISIS SERMON .....	74
Ancient Rhetoric and Christian Proclamation .....	76
The Pre-Proclamation, Pre-Crisis Function of the Preacher .....	84
Development of Content .....	92
Words, Words, Words .....	96
The Perceptual Power of Focus .....	107
Structure .....	110

Chapter	Page
Delivery of the Social Crisis Sermon .....	119
The “Post-Delivery” Function of the Preacher .....	121
Conclusion .....	125
4. AN ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL CRISIS PREACHING: USING JAMES EARL MASSEY’S SERMONIC COMPONENT OF RADICALITY .....	126
Christ-Centered Prophetic Radicalism .....	126
Insights from the Black Preaching Tradition .....	129
Social Crisis Preaching through the Lens of Radicality .....	135
Root-Work .....	137
Courage .....	146
Personal Address .....	158
Confrontation .....	164
Analysis and Conclusion .....	176
5. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH .....	179
The Social Crisis Sermon and Samuel Dewitt Proctor’s Adapted Hegelian Method .....	181
Social Crisis Homiletic and Matthew Kim’s Cultural Intelligence Model .....	186
Social Crisis Preaching through Bryan Chapell’s Christ-Centered Preaching .....	190
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	196

## PREFACE

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary is a special place. This bastion of theological flourishing continues to churn out disciples for Jesus Christ who serve His church with biblical fidelity and global impact. I am grateful for their (our) place in the world. The Lord blessed me to be supervised by Dr. Hershael York, a man of impeccable character, intellectual sagaciousness, and pastoral perspicacity. I cannot thank him enough for his advice, encouragement, and wisdom. I want to thank Dr. Robert Vogel for taking keen interest in my work and lending helpful insights and wisdom to my projects. I am grateful for Dr. Michael Pohlman, his willingness to serve on my committee, and the unique way he challenged me in his preaching colloquiums. My committee has supported me and advised me in my research and writing about my passion; I am grateful. Likewise, I am thankful to the late Dr. T. Vaugh Walker, who insisted that I finish with excellence.

My love for truth and mercy was inspired by my parents, Ednar and Edward Gardner. My love for the Lord's church was instilled in me by my dear mother, who demanded not only that we attend church every Sunday, but that we serve. Most of all, my mother exemplified the deepest commitment to Christlikeness I have witnessed to this very day, by modeling self-denial and cross bearing. My daddy was not a churchman; however, he modeled the truthfulness, courage, and conviction-filled living sometimes missing among churchmen. My daddy imbued truth-telling and truth-living. He required me to be true to myself, to live a life above pretense, guise, and vanity. More than anything else, Daddy taught me that to know the truth about the world and people in it is painful and often dangerous, but to know the truth is a must.

From the day I laid eyes and ears on Frank Kennedy, Jr., I knew what my life's calling would be. I followed his footsteps to Beeson Divinity School. His love for the Lord, commitment to ministerial excellence, and magnanimous, giving heart represent what is best about the body of Christ. As my father in ministry, his impact on my life is indelible. In equal measure, his father, Frank Kennedy, Sr., has modeled strong pastoral leadership, an ethic of ecclesial service, an unrivaled devotion to community, and wisdom. Kennedy, Sr. has supported me, my family, and ministry in some of the most trying times, and I will forever thank the Lord for his firm and loving fatherly presence in my life. Freddie Robertson's encouragement and help are invaluable and a blessing from the Lord. I owe him so much thanks.

I would not be at the prestigious Southern Baptist Theological Seminary if it were not for Dr. Robert Smith, Jr. I will never forget the day he called me into his office and told me that I would be going to Southern to earn a PhD in Christian Preaching. Some people see things in you that you do not see in yourself—Dr. Smith required excellence of me because he believed I was capable, even when I did not. He remains the greatest professor I have ever had and a homiletical genius worthy of emulation.

I want to thank the personnel at the Jean and Alexander Heard Library at Vanderbilt University for their help and assistance on this important project. Dr. Kelly Miller Smith, Jr. was generous, accessible, and encouraging. He is an incredible bearer of his father's legacy. I want to thank Alice C. Smith, widow of Kelly Miller Smith, Sr.; Dr. Kelly Miller Smith, Jr., son of Kelly Miller Smith; the Smith Family; Dr. Peter J. Paris; Dr. Forrest Harris; Dr. Curtiss Paul DeYoung; Dr. Bernard Lafayette; Dr. J. Alfred Smith; and in memoriam, Dr. James Early Massey, for the countless phone calls, text messages, and conversations about their husband, father, dear friend, and gift to Nashville and the world, Kelly Miller Smith, Sr. Special gratitude is owed to the mayor of Mound Bayou, Mississippi, Dr. Eulah Peterson, for her commitment to Mound Bayou and her help in this dissertation.

The Plum Grove Baptist Church family has been a community of love, patience,



support, and understanding. For every seminar and colloquium, I was equipped with gas money, goodie bags, spending money, and the assurance that my family would be well while I was away in Louisville studying with my awesome professors and cohort. They allowed me to pursue graduate studies and financially supported along this journey. I love you all. I also want to give appreciation to Rev. Tim Plant and the Calvary Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, for their love and support. The Macedonia Ministry in Tuscaloosa has been extremely supportive, I thank God for them. I am grateful for you.

The Stillman College community and family has been a blessing to me for over a decade. I am grateful not only to be a graduate of this prestigious historically Black college and university, but to serve as an administrator and professor. I want to thank Dr. Cynthia Warrick for giving me the opportunity to serve my school and for her vision. I want to thank some of the most astute biblical scholars in the nation, my colleagues, who have shown interest in my work and offered advice along the way: Dr. David Ngong, Dr. Joseph Scrivner, Dr. Linda Beito, Dr. Mary Jane Krotzer, Dr. Mark McCormick, and Dr. Donald Chinula. Ms. Evelyn King provided invaluable support by tracking down several sources that are critical in this dissertation.

I want to thank our children, Coretta, Tristan, Titus, and Tyson. They have endured my absence with grace and patience. Each of them is a unique blessing to our family. You all are destined for greatness for the glory of the Lord. Remember, do not ever give up! Lastly, and most importantly, I owe this degree to my wife, Shonetay. My wife is the backbone of our family, the smartest person in our home, and the most unselfish person in the world. I would not have made it had it not been for her support, her accompanying me to Louisville on a number of occasions, and her demand that I would not quit or drop out. I appreciate her kindness to me in making my dream come true. I love you.

Tyshawn Gardner

Northport, Alabama

December 2019

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Kelly Miller Smith, Sr. contends, “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.”<sup>1</sup> Ronald J. Allen defines what constitutes a social issue:

I consider a social issue to have the following characteristics. It is public. People are aware of it, or should be aware of it. The issue affects the community as a community, that is, it creates social consequences. It affects the well-being of the society. Many social issues are systemic. Social issues may call for the community to invoke a common understanding or behavior in light of the issue.<sup>2</sup>

Christian preaching has inevitable social ramifications. In that spirit, the divine call of the herald brings the sacred into contact with the social. The herald is the ineluctable ambassador between heaven and earth, a homiletical synthesis of celestial proclaimer and civic practitioner. Smith argues against those who posit that “the preacher as *citizen* may appropriately participate creatively and constructively in social critical situations but, as *preacher* must not do so.”<sup>3</sup> The indissoluble truth is that, for the Christian herald, who is a citizen of the terrestrial and celestial kingdoms (Phil 3:20), ambassadorship interpenetrates the realm of both advocacy and activism. God has joined praxis and proclamation as the two essential entities of social crisis preaching.

Smith stands as hero of the Nashville Civil Rights movement, beloved pastor of Nashville’s First Baptist Church Capitol Hill of thirty-three years, and preacher par

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<sup>1</sup> Kelly Miller Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching: The Lyman Beecher Lectures* 1983 (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984), 33.

<sup>2</sup> Ronald J. Allen, “Preaching on Social Issues,” *Encounter* 59, nos. 1/2 (1998): 59.

<sup>3</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 10, emphasis original.

excellence.<sup>4</sup> Smith's social crisis preaching and social activism evinced during the nation's Civil Rights Era.<sup>5</sup> The necessity of his social crisis preaching in the Southern city of Nashville during that time was due in part, according to Benjamin Houston, to "Nashville's story is at least somewhat analogous with other southern-and, indeed, U.S.-places."<sup>6</sup> One of the most defining eras in American history, the Civil Rights Era was simultaneously a time of great division and unprecedented unity among Americans, and a period marked by the systematic disenfranchisement of African Americans amidst strategic progress for all Americans. It was an era described by Smith as one of "shame and glory."<sup>7</sup> Smith was deeply ensconced in the civil rights movement and, according to Houston, "was part of the founding of Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in 1957."<sup>8</sup>

Most African American pastors navigated the dual role of churchmen and civic leader through the platforms of church and socio-religious organizations, which is often normal within the black church context. Smith was also founder of the Nashville Christian Leadership Conference, an affiliate of the SCLC. Due to the lack of political and social

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<sup>4</sup> Smith was recognized by *Ebony* magazine in 1954 as one of the ten most outstanding preachers in America. *Ebony* is the widest circulated magazine of any African American publication in history. Also mentioned in the article are nine of the most notable black pastors in the United States: Dr. J. H. Jackson, Dr. Miles Mark Fisher, Dr. Benjamin E. Mays, Dr. Mordecai Johnson, Dr. Howard Thurman, Dr. Williams H. Boarders, Rev. Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., Father Shelton Hale, Bishop, and Rev. Archibald J. Carey, Jr. "Ten Most Popular Negro Preachers: Ministers Lead Vigorous Public Lives," *Ebony* 9, no. 9 (July 1954): 26-30.

<sup>5</sup> Although racial segregation and disenfranchisement preceded the 1950s, historians date the commencement of the Civil Rights Era with three major events: (1) The Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* in 1954, (2) the Lynching of Emmett Till in Money, Mississippi, in August 1955, and (3) the 381-day Montgomery bus boycott (December 5, 1955-December 20, 1956) to 1968, the year of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination. Darlene Clark Hine, William C. Hine, and Stanley Harrold, *The African American Odyssey: Combined Volume*, 6th ed. (Boston: Pearson, 2014), 570-76.

<sup>6</sup> Benjamin Houston, *The Nashville Way: Racial Etiquette and the Struggle for Social Justice in a Southern City* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2012), 2.

<sup>7</sup> Houston, *The Nashville Way*, 121.

<sup>8</sup> Houston, *The Nashville Way*, 82.

enfranchisement of black Americans, the African American pastor, often the most educated and the most independent in the black community, was not only parish pastor but also public minister, who executed spiritual and social responsibilities with ease. For his entire life, Houston states, “Reverend Smith never lost his passion for integrating church and community, perhaps the primary hallmark of his leadership.”<sup>9</sup>

Smith’s primary role in Civil Rights advocacy and activism in Nashville was that of architect of the Nashville Leadership Training Model, which served as the primary platform of training for non-violent direct action, such as planned sit-ins throughout segregated restaurants in Nashville. Smith was strategist, organizer, and trainer of non-violent direct action, and the primary negotiator of the Nashville lunch-counter sit-ins. Writing about the tumultuous times of racial strife in Nashville, Barry Everett Lee contends that Smith “was the only one in Nashville who could connect all the components of the movement together.”<sup>10</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., praised The Nashville Movement as the most organized, most effective, and most disciplined Civil Rights movement in the South, mainly due to Smith’s impeccable leadership.<sup>11</sup>

Smith did not desire nor look for the fame afforded some of the most notable Civil Rights leaders, such as his dear friend and mentor, Martin Luther King, Jr. However, he is responsible for the development of the most notable figures in Civil Rights history, such as John Lewis, C. T. Vivian, James Bevel, Diane Nash, and Bernard LaFayette, referred to by Lee as “the most talented corps of youth leadership in the nation’s history.”<sup>12</sup> Lee explains that these activists “were able to propagate their knowledge

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<sup>9</sup> Barry Evertt Lee, “The Nashville Civil Rights Movement: A Study of the Phenomenon of Intentional Leadership Development and Its Consequences for Local Movement and National Civil Rights Movement” (PhD diss., Georgia State University, 2010), 226.

<sup>10</sup> Lee, “The Nashville Civil Rights Movement,” 361.

<sup>11</sup> Lee, “The Nashville Civil Rights Movement,” 114.

<sup>12</sup> Lee, “The Nashville Civil Rights Movement,” 114.

regionally and nationally and thereby help spread the movement.”<sup>13</sup> The Nashville Leadership Training Model, which took place at Smith’s church, First Colored Baptist Church, later renamed, First Baptist Church, Capitol Hill, were workshops designed to train and develop the Nashville Movement’s student activists from American Baptist College (then known as American Baptist Theological Seminary), Fisk, Meharry, Tennessee State, and Vanderbilt. Smith’s ability as masterful strategist and indispensable organizer is only eclipsed by his skillful ability to bring the Word of God to bear on social crisis as gospel communicator and pastor of First Baptist Church Capitol Hill.

Smith, in contradistinction to many Civil Rights activists, discharged his activism as the pastor of Nashville’s First Baptist Church Capitol Hill. Houston exclaims that First Baptist Church Capitol Hill was “the lone piece of black-owned property in Nashville’s downtown and the place of worship for much of the city’s black elite.”<sup>14</sup> As a pastor, Smith stands as an influential figure in the prophetic preaching tradition of the African American church.

The independent black church movement was born out of the experience of rejection, dehumanization, and marginalization in white churches toward its black members. Historian L. H. Welchel, Jr. comments, “The independent Black church movement emerged as a result of the struggle to hold on to a sense of dignity and self-worth in the face of enslavement, degradation and, humiliation.”<sup>15</sup> Born out of rejection

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<sup>13</sup> Lee, “The Nashville Civil Rights Movement,” 114.

<sup>14</sup> Houston, *The Nashville Way*, 83.

<sup>15</sup> L. H. Welchel, Jr., *The History and Heritage of African-American Churches: A Way Out of No Way* (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 2011), 145. The most notable classic texts on the black church and the independent black church movement include C. Eric Lincoln, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 1990); E. Franklin Frazier and C. Eric Lincoln, *The Negro Church in America/The Black Church Since Frazier* (New York: Schocken, 1974); Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Church Beginnings: The Long-Hidden Realities of the First Years* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2004); and Carter G. Woodson, *The History of the Negro Church* (Washington, DC: 12th Media Services, 1972).

and struggle, Cornel West claims, “The Christocentric language of the Black Church that produced the radical King . . . exemplifies the intimate and dependent relationship between God and person and between God and a world-forsaken people.”<sup>16</sup> Even de facto white allies of black Christians fell short of embracing and propagating a theology of humanization that led to equality. Thabiti M. Anyabwile confirms, “Many of the early defenders of African humanity stopped well short of extending their theological position to an ethical conclusion entailing the social and civil equality of Africans with whites.”<sup>17</sup> Social crisis preaching is rooted in the milieu of the black church, thus, Cleophus LaRue asserts, “Black preaching originated in a context of marginalization and struggle, and it is to this context that it still seeks to be relevant.”<sup>18</sup>

Smith hails among the ranks of the most prominent and powerful preachers produced by the black church, thrust into priestly and prophetic roles in response to rampant racism and injustice perpetrated upon African Americans from the slavery, reconstruction, and Jim Crow eras.<sup>19</sup> The crippling social, economic, and political circumstances in which African Americans were forced to live required preaching in the

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<sup>16</sup> Cornel West, ed., *The Radical King* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2015), xv.

<sup>17</sup> Thabiti M. Anyabwile, *The Decline of African American Theology: From Biblical Faith to Cultural Captivity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2007), 102.

<sup>18</sup> Cleophus J. LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 14.

<sup>19</sup> Among the most prominent African American preachers of these three major eras, known for their prophetic and priestly roles in the black church, are Richard Allen (1760-1831), Bishop Daniel Payne (1811-1893); Bishop Henry McNeal Turner (1834-1915), Adam Clayton Powell, Sr. (1865-1953), Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. (1908-1972), Gardner C. Taylor (1918-2015), Samuel Proctor (1921-1997), Fred Shuttlesworth (1922-2011), Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968), and J. Alfred Smith (1931-). Kenyatta R. Gilbert defines African American preaching as “Trivocal Preaching,” which contains the elements of prophetic, priestly, and sagely voices. For Gilbert, the prophetic element is an expression of the ministry of the prophets, especially Jeremiah, who was called to “building up, and tearing down” (Jer 3:15). The prophetic is theo-rhetorical discourse, which “conveyed an outlook of divine intentionality that related to freedom and justice for all humankind. The priestly element is “nurturing and nourishing dynamics of the church’s life” and is effective in helping church members cope and respond to racism and social crisis. Kenyatta R. Gilbert, *The Journey and Promise of African American Preaching* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011).

black church to bear the distinction of a prophetic radicality. Not only are social crisis preachers before, during, and after Smith called to confront what Kenyatta Gilbert describes as “oppressive world systems that dehumanize persons on a regular basis,”<sup>20</sup> but they are called to be self-critical and to speak truth to the powerless by teaching personal responsibility, calling for confession and repentance, and inspiring hope. Smith joined the ranks of preachers that also called the black community to look in the mirror.

Within the prophetic radicalism of Smith’s social crisis preaching exists a marriage of praxis and proclamation. In this dissertation, praxis is understood as reflective actions that motivate gospel proclamation through the resignation that the herald and those affected by social crisis are active participants in the ongoing struggle to establish community through justice and truth. Myriad examples throughout the Bible of prophetic radicalism are embodied in proclamation and praxis. Proclamation and praxis are Ezekiel sitting *with* the exiles in Tel Aviv, and in holy resignation uttering, “I sat where they sat.” (Ezek 3:15 AV). Moses exhibits this model by “choosing rather to suffer affliction *with* the people of God” (Heb 11:25). Paul is the creative exemplar of the proclamation and praxis replica by renouncing his privilege and position, and in Philippians 1:25 uttering, “Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue *with* you all, for your progress and joy in the faith.” Chief and paramount is the incarnate second Person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, engaged in *kenosis*, self-emptying, to dwell among us (John 1:14), fallen humanity, those He came to save and deliver.

The social crisis sermon is the outgrowth of the inherent qualities of the herald in the function of proclamation. The praxis of Kelly Miller Smith made him the quintessential social crisis preacher and therefore one of the most powerful racial reconcilers in the United States.<sup>21</sup> Due to his Christological praxis, and the influence of a

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<sup>20</sup> Gilbert, *The Journey and Promise of African American Preaching*, 15.

<sup>21</sup> Smith was born and raised in the all black city of Mound Bayou, MS, a small town in the Mississippi Delta, founded by black people who had formerly run away from the danger of racism. Smith’s

strong and positive African American culture, Smith's social crisis preaching displayed unprecedented effectiveness among the Nashville community. Primarily because, as John Swinton suggests, the effectiveness of praxis is due to the fact that praxis "generates actions through which the church community lives out its beliefs (holistic, theory-laden action)."<sup>22</sup>

As a pastor and scholar, Smith's commitment to hermeneutics and homiletical integrity distinguished his social crisis sermons from being labeled as civic discourse or from being characterized by the folk preaching style heard by the majority of African American communities from the eighteenth century to the present.<sup>23</sup> Smith preached the Bible and believed the Bible to be the source of social crisis preaching. Because of his commitment to biblical fidelity, the passion to resolve social crises did not usurp or impede exegetical integrity. Smith believed that prior to the act of proclamation, the social crisis

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father, Perry Monroe Smith was a strong and steady mentor to him, a well-respected leader in Mound Bayou, and the principle founder and Chief Administrator of the famous Taborian Hospital. Peter J. Paris, "The Theology and Ministry of Kelly Miller Smith, Sr.," *The Journal of Religious Thought* 48, no. 1 (1991): 6-9. According to African American religious scholar, Peter Paris, in a telephone interview and in the introduction of the Kelly Miller Smith Papers, claims, "Besides his father, Smith "was shaped by two major institutional responses to the omnipresent reality of racism: namely, the black church and the Knights and Daughters of Tabor." Peter Paris, telephone interview with author, December 24, 2018. Paris is a personal friend and colleague of Smith, and a distinguished scholar.

<sup>22</sup> John Swinton, *From Bedlam to Shalom: Towards a Practical Theology of Human Nature, Interpersonal Relationships, and Mental Health Care* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), 11.

<sup>23</sup> William J. Pipes dates the history of the Negro preacher to the latter half of the eighteenth century. Pipes refers to the preaching style of the negro preachers as folk style or old-time negro preaching, characterized by emotion and sensation. Black Harry and John Jasper were among the first negro preachers to employ folk preaching. William Pipes, *Say Amen, Brother! Old Time Negro Preaching: A Study in American Frustration* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1951), 63-65. Frank A. Thomas defines folk preaching as a strand of the African American preaching tradition. Thomas contrasts folk preaching with intellectual preaching and claims that both genres of preaching "exist til today." Frank Thomas, "What Is Folk Preaching #African American Preaching Ep 15," April 10, 2017, <https://youtu.be/yk0XBXIa6U>, 2:45. Intellectual preaching is preaching done by formally trained preachers, and is usually void of emotional appeal, but rather preaching that targets the mind or intellect. Thomas explains, "Folk preaching is African-American preachers who operated from either a grass-roots folk approach called old-time and old-fashioned negro preaching . . . folk preacher represented preachers without formal education. . . . It is an oral tradition of folk preaching that affirmed the power of story, imagination, imagery, analogy, metaphor, narration, extemporaneous, and a dramatic retelling of Bible stories." Thomas, "What Is Folk Preaching," 3:05.



preacher faithfully interprets the Word of God, a practice described by Kenyatta Gilbert as “teasing out its historical, theological, sociocultural, and sociopolitical elements.”<sup>24</sup>

This dissertation provides evidence that Smith’s proclamation from a Christological praxis led to the spiritual and social liberation of black and white citizens in Nashville. Barry Everett Lee surmises, “Smith had a vision for a new Nashville, one without a color line that was part of the beloved community.”<sup>25</sup> Smith’s prophetic radicalism required intercultural competence. This rare and needed inherent personal quality in the life of Smith, during a time of social and racial upheaval, proved to be indispensable in solidifying trust from both black and white communities in Nashville during the 1950s and 1960s.

Intercultural competence is a necessary component of prophetic radicalism. The goal of social crisis proclamation is reconciliation to God and to those who are ideologically and socially estranged. Jared Alcántara defines intercultural competence as “the cultivation of knowledge, skills, and habits for effectively negotiating cultural, racial, and ecclesial difference.”<sup>26</sup> Though segregation made Smith’s audience majority African American, the goals of liberation and reconciliation in his social crisis sermons were directed toward all those caught in the inescapable web of social crisis. Retired scholar Peter J. Paris notes, “Kelly was trusted by both blacks and whites; black people trusted that he would not sell them out in negotiation, and white people trusted him because of his temperament and honesty.”<sup>27</sup> Lee observes, “Reverend Smith . . . proved

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<sup>24</sup> Kenyatta R. Gilbert, *Exodus Preaching: Crafting Sermons about Justice and Hope*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 2018), 36.

<sup>25</sup> Lee, “The Nashville Civil Rights Movement,” 123.

<sup>26</sup> Jared E. Alcántara, *Crossover Preaching: Intercultural-Improvisational Homiletics in Conversation with Gardner C. Taylor* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2015), 194.

<sup>27</sup> Paris, interview.

to be intellectually and temperamentally well-suited to lead the Nashville Movement.”<sup>28</sup> Smith’s unifying caliber among blacks and whites in Nashville was most effective due to his ability, suggests Houston, to “move among poor blacks and white power brokers with equal ease.”<sup>29</sup> Smith’s prophetic radicalism exposed the ugliness of the sins of racism and injustice, and at the same time constructed a bridge of reconciliation for estranged races to meet and ultimately merge as one integrated people.

### Thesis

This dissertation contends that Kelly Miller Smith embodies the component of James Earl Massey’s prophetic radicalism in his social crisis preaching. Four aspects make up Massey’s prophetic radicalism: root-work, courage, personal address, and confrontational qualities.<sup>30</sup> Wesley White’s commentary concerning Massey’s homiletical acumen undergirds this insightful approach because “no one . . . has written or spoken more cogently about the social and political substance of African-American homiletic than James Earl Massey.”<sup>31</sup> By using Massey as a lens to analyze the social crisis preaching of Smith, I provide two major authorities that offer a powerfully effective alternative to addressing social crisis through preaching. White comments, “Massey’s contentions particularly deserve serious consideration because of his vast experience both as a practitioner and academician, his Civil Rights involvement, and his standing as a through-going evangelical within the mainstream black church.”<sup>32</sup> I sought to answer the

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<sup>28</sup> Lee, “The Nashville Civil Rights Movement,” 60.

<sup>29</sup> Houston, *The Nashville Way*, 83.

<sup>30</sup> James Earl Massey, *The Responsible Pulpit* (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 1974), chap. 6, Kindle.

<sup>31</sup> Wesley W. White, “Incorporating Perspectives from the African American Homiletic Tradition in Order to Increase Socio-Political Awareness and Activism among Evangelicals” (DMin thesis, Denver Seminary, 2000) 51.

<sup>32</sup> White, “Incorporating Perspectives,” 53.

following research question: “What distinguishing elements of social crisis preaching did Kelly Miller Smith make both plausible and practical as a means for all ethnicities and evangelical Christian traditions to address social crises through preaching?” This question is answered by exploring the three major purposes for this dissertation. First, this dissertation examines the social crisis sermon of Kelly Miller Smith, Sr. and his seven components of the social crisis sermon, as Smith presents them in his book *Social Crisis Preaching: The Lyman Beecher Lectures, 1983*.<sup>33</sup> These seven components reveal a Christocentric and biblical focus inherent in his social crisis sermons. Smith’s sermons impart prophetic radicalism, which are birthed from biblical integrity with overtones of spiritual and social liberation and reconciliation. Forrest Harris precisely argues,

In the Kelly Miller Smith Research Collection, many sermons exhibit balanced treatment of the inner and outer dimensions of liberation, this is, prophetic and pastoral responses to social problems. Smith’s sermons discussed severe social crisis with prophetic precision and provided hope for overcoming the crisis, externally and internally.<sup>34</sup>

Cleophus LaRue in *The Heart of Black Preaching* says that the most distinctive element in black preaching is its hermeneutic of Scripture.<sup>35</sup> This dissertation argues that what is most distinctive about Kelly Miller Smith, Sr.’s approach to social crisis preaching is its commitment to biblical authority of the Bible as the Word of God. Second, I provide analysis of the social crisis preaching of Kelly Miller Smith using as a lens James Earl Massey’s sermonic component of radicality as presented in his classic preaching text, *The Responsible Pulpit*. I use examples of proclamation as exhibited through his pastoral preaching, his ministry of proclamation in the city of Nashville and throughout the United States, and his Lyman Beecher Lectures entitled “Social Crisis Preaching.” Third, I

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<sup>33</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 80.

<sup>34</sup> Forrest E. Harris, Sr., *Ministry for Social Crisis: Theology and Praxis in the Black Church Tradition* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1993), 86.

<sup>35</sup> LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching*, 10. I provide in-depth commentary on these five perspectives in chap. 4 of this dissertation.

thoroughly present three recommendations for future research, using the sermon development techniques of three multi-ethnic homiletic scholars. These three future research considerations provide a paradigm for social crisis preaching in the twenty-first century by expanding upon Smith's theology of social crisis preaching. Smith and these three scholars, an African American, a Korean-American, and European American provide the architectonic as an additive to address social crises through Christian proclamation.

Smith's method of social crisis preaching can be as equally effective in the twenty-first century as it was in Nashville in the 1960s. By offering recommendations for future research, I answer the question: Can the social crisis preaching model constructed by Smith and Massey be transferred into other cultural traditions with the same effect? Or, is this model culturally bound? The data presented in chapter 4 and the recommendations in chapter 5 answer this question solidly.

Massey is heralded as a homiletical sage across racial and denominational lines. His inestimable insights in biblical preaching cannot be undervalued, especially his five unique perspectives of the African American preaching tradition. Massey defines these perspectives:

1) an existential accounting of the gospel. Massey intends by this the application of the good news to the personal, immediate and social needs of people; 2) a trinitarian hermeneutic in which God is liberator is axiomatic, the manhood of Jesus is prominent, and the sermon is approached as pneumatological event designed to facilitate a divine-human-encounter. Here the Trinity is approached not so much doctrinally as functionally; 3) an emphasis on eschatological hope. This is not a millennial debate, but the promise of justice; 4) cognizance of the communal destiny of people which ignores sacred/secular distinctions. Black preaching deliberately addresses the community at large, not just believers, for the betterment of the community's future; 5) pragmatics that place great weight upon story and affective speech. Massey contends that the African American homiletic tradition excels in the use of narrative and persuasion designed to gain an emotive response.<sup>36</sup>

Massey's grasp as a homiletical authority of preaching, and black preaching specifically, aids the argument for these perspectives being employed by other ethnicities. This

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<sup>36</sup> White, "Incorporating Perspectives," 52.

dissertation is an analysis of prophetic radicalism within the social crisis preaching of Kelly Miller Smith, Sr., through the lens of James Earl Massey's sermon component of radicality as a paradigm for social crisis preaching.

### **Definitions of Terms**

This dissertation explores the neglected relationship of praxis and proclamation as mandates for social crisis preaching. Therefore, *prophetic radicalism*, as well as *praxis* and *proclamation*, are terms that must be defined and understood in light of their usage in this dissertation. Much of the need to define the terms in this dissertation is to rescue them from their political, secular, and cultural usage, and to reassign them in biblical and Christian categories. Terms such as *liberation*, *radicality*, and *praxis* must be restored and recaptured for their biblical origination and value, rather than as words used to create suspicion within the body of Christ, which also often results in the polarization of evangelical communities. Neither should these terms be associated with Marxism and the stifling political philosophy of socialism, as they have been used by liberal scholars. These terms are not general and veneer theological terms, but they enjoy specificity and distinction.

### **Prophetic Radicalism**

It is a colossal misfortune that the majority of African American Christians and churchgoers associate the words *prophetic* or *prophecy* with the impotent and idolatrous prosperity gospel message. The prosperity gospel message fosters a false hope in the lives of hundreds of thousands of churchgoers around the globe by the insistent hyper-spiritual message of future blessings and potential imminent promises of wealth and health. The prosperity gospel is materialistic in embodiment, anthropocentric in its focus, individualistic in essence, and moralistic in principle. This genre of teaching measures faith by the attainment of material possessions and makes the goodness and ability of the person, the determining factor of favor and grace. Moreover, the prosperity gospel lacks

corporate and communal responsibility. Michael Horton describes the response of American churches to the message of prosperity by suggesting that “we are swimming in a sea of narcissistic moralism: an easy-listening version of salvation by self-help.”<sup>37</sup>

However, *prophecy* and *prophetic* both in the spirit of the black church and the Old Testament are the antithesis of this kind of misuse, as Walter Kaiser authoritatively asserts,

Too often the prophets are thought of mainly as predictors of the future. But the truth is that they were mainly forthtellers, for they spoke forth the word of God over against the rising tide of idolatry, apostasy, and sin of the nation. The forthtelling types of messages occupy well over two-thirds of their books; only one-third is devoted to any type of prediction of the future-fortelling.<sup>38</sup>

In this dissertation, *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 tradition. John McClure argues a common distinction in African American preaching: “The black tradition of social prophecy also links prophetic preaching to a practical theology of enlistment, pastoral care, and community organization for social action.”<sup>39</sup>

This activity is rooted in the biblical imagery of the Old Testament prophets, whose oracles were inspired by Yahweh to communicate to Israel their conformity to Yahweh’s vision for His people, especially in times of crisis. Willem A. VanGemeren alludes to this fact: “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

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<sup>37</sup> Michael Horton, *Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 71.

<sup>38</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Preaching and Teaching from the Old Testament: A Guide for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 111.

<sup>39</sup> John S. McClure, *Preaching Words: 144 Key Terms in Homiletics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 117.

message to the issues at hand.”<sup>40</sup> Prophetic preaching in the church should always beckon the people of God to conform to God’s vision for humanity in light of the redemptive work and grace of Christ. Dawn Ottoni-Wilhelm insists, “Prophetic preaching proclaims God’s Word from within the Christian tradition against all that threaten God’s reconciling intention for humanity.”<sup>41</sup> The vision of an inclusive community can only be sustained by the biblical mandates of justice and unity. Marvin McMickle declares, “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.”<sup>42</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson consistently exhorts, “The prophetic word can be considered as God’s vision for humanity, which more often than not, comes into conflict with humanity’s own vision for itself.”<sup>43</sup> VanGemenen states, “Through the prophets, people heard the “voice” of God and received a new vision for life . . . the prophet viewed human activities from God’s vantage point.”<sup>44</sup>

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. More akin to the American dream than John’s vision of the coming kingdom of God, these cultural narratives are normative and dominant in secular society and are often

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<sup>40</sup> Willem A. VanGemenen, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word: An Introduction to the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 68.

<sup>41</sup> Dawn Ottoni-Wilhelm, “God’s Word in the World: Prophetic Preaching and the Gospel of Jesus Christ,” in *Anabaptist Preaching: A Conversation Between Pulpit, Pew & Bible*, ed. David B. Greiser and Michael A. King (Telford, UK: Cascadia Publishing, 2003), 77.

<sup>42</sup> Marvin McMickle, *Where Have All the Prophets Gone? Reclaiming Prophetic Preaching in America* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2006), chap. 1, Kindle.

<sup>43</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *Prophetic Jesus, Prophetic Church: The Challenge of Luke-Acts to Contemporary Christians* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2011), 72.

<sup>44</sup> VanGemenen, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word*, 27-28.

pervasive in the American churches. Smith would agree that, prophetic radicalism is the rejection of what Otis Moss describes as “the existential tragedy manufactured by a false anthropology and demented theology”<sup>45</sup> espoused by American culture and often preached in white churches during Smith’s ministry. Likewise, African American churches have been guilty of an anthropologically-centered theology that has sought to enculturate the biblical narrative to the exclusion of others. Anyabwile states that there is extreme danger in manufacturing a theology which holds that blackness is an “ultimate reality and the controlling principle and experience in any Christian doctrine of revelation.”<sup>46</sup> The prophetic preacher offers the oppressed and the oppressor a different reality: an alternate vision, community, and identity. Walter Brueggemann insists, “Prophetic utterance is offered in circumstances dictated by dominant imagination but is utterance that contradicts what is taken for granted. Such imagination refuses to accept accepted explanations for present circumstances.”<sup>47</sup>

The telos of prophetic radicalism is a reconciliation to genuine community that arises from the result of confronting, exposing, and ultimately dismantling the root causes of spiritual malady and social malfeasance. John S. McClure defines prophetic preaching as “an imaginative reappropriation of traditional narratives and symbols for the purpose of critiquing a dangerous and unjust present situation and providing an alternative vision for God’s future.”<sup>48</sup> Prophetic radicalism has been identified as the presentation of God’s alternative vision (McClure, Johnson, and Brueggeman), during times of crisis (VanGemenen), which resists the acceptable and unbiblical dominant visions of society

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<sup>45</sup> Otis Moss III, *Blue Note Preaching in a Post-Soul World: Fining Hope in an Age of Despair* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015), 15.

<sup>46</sup> Anyabwile, *The Decline of African American Theology*, 50.

<sup>47</sup> Walter Brueggeman, *The Practice of Prophetic Imagination: Preaching an Emancipating Word* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 41.

<sup>48</sup> McClure, *Preaching Words*, 117.



(Ottoni-Wilhelm), and calls the believer to embrace justice, righteousness, and reconciliation for all (McMickle). When does prophetic preaching become radical and what defines radicalism?

Prophetic preaching becomes radical when it strikes at the root of social crises. Prophetic radicalism exposes and uncovers the root causes of social crises and identifies those causes specifically. The social crisis preacher does not settle for utopian fantasies of interracial communities, nor does it rest on half-hearted apologies void of truth and righteous justice. While it biblically exposes the flawed theologies, oppressive politics, economic disparities, and personal sins at the root of social crisis, it also heals and extends reconciliation to once divided and fractured parties. The effectiveness of prophetic radicalism cannot be measured with decibel markers, nor with the thermometer of emotional boisterousness. Prophetic radicalism can be as powerful in a whisper as in a thunderous roar; it can be as moving in the facial expression of streaming tears as in a grimacing scowl. Neither Smith nor Massey bore the ethnographic element of sonorous and magniloquence in their preaching which is often descriptive of the sermonic celebration in African American preaching.<sup>49</sup> However, both men are heralded as two of the greatest preachers in history.

## **Praxis**

Praxis is not synonymous with practice. In theological context, praxis is not to be defined as the carrying out of a task or as exercising a theory. Olin P. Moyd informs, “Praxis is the milieu out of which mores, practices, and institutions are formulated.”<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> For an in-depth analysis of the perils and praise of celebration in the African American preaching tradition, see Henry H. Mitchell, *Celebration and Experience in Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990); Frank A. Thomas, *They Like to Never Quit Praising God: The Role of Celebration in Preaching* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1997); and Cleophus J. LaRue, *Rethinking Celebration: From Rhetoric to Praise in African American Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016).

<sup>50</sup> Olin P. Moyd, *Sacred Art: Preaching and Theology in the African American Preaching Tradition* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1995), 84.

Ray S. Anderson explains that praxis “involves task, but in the performing of tasks, meaning is discovered, not merely applied.”<sup>51</sup> Anderson further states,

I mean by praxis something of what Aristotle meant when he distinguished between *poiēsis* as an act of making something where the telos lay outside of the act of making and praxis as an act that includes the telos within the action itself. . . . Praxis is an action that includes the telos, or final meaning and character of truth. It is an action in which the truth is discovered through action, not merely applied or “practiced.” In praxis one is not only guided in one’s actions by the intention of realizing the telos, or purpose, but by discovering and grasping this *telos* through the action itself.<sup>52</sup>

Effective social crisis preaching requires that the preacher share in the lived experiences of the hearer, an intrinsic condition of the social crisis preacher. This praxis gave added effectiveness to the *savoir faire* of Kelly Miller Smith. The social crisis preacher is engaged in reflection and action before and after the social crisis sermon. Concerning praxis, Stephen B. Bevans writes that praxis requires “focus on the identity of Christians within a context particularly as that context is understood in terms of social change.”<sup>53</sup> The ability of the preacher to deliver more precise applicable truths through the transformative power of the Word of God is enhanced because, as James M. Childs, Jr. states, “Through the involvement of God’s people in the arena of human need, the biblical story comes to life as it intersects with the continually unfolding stories of our world experience.”<sup>54</sup> Olin P. Moyd interprets “praxis” in the context of his research:

Praxis is not synonymous with practice. Praxis has to do with the critical correlation or relationship between theory and practice. The correlation is dialectical. This means that theory and practice engage each other and are formed and revised by each other. The dialectical process is operative when theory negates practice and practice seems to negate theory. However, this process opens up new theoretical and practical

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<sup>51</sup> Ray S. Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001), 47.

<sup>52</sup> Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, 49.

<sup>53</sup> Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology: Faith and Cultures*, rev. and expanded ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992), 70.

<sup>54</sup> James M. Childs, Jr., *Preaching Justice: The Ethical Vocation of Word and Sacrament Ministry* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), 70.

possibilities, and the process continues. Praxis involves all of the social and cultural thoughts and practices of persons involved in social and cultural interaction upon each other and upon themselves. . . . It is a dynamic process in all communities and societies.<sup>55</sup>

Praxis involves the act of the herald reflecting upon the relationship between his social location and that of those adversely affected by social crisis, while Christian actions and solutions are employed to the end that a Christ-honoring telos is reached. Bevans writes that praxis is “reflected upon action and acted-upon reflection-both rolled into one.”<sup>56</sup> Moreover, praxis serves to shape, influence, and instill passion within the herald, comments Bevans, “by first acting and then reflecting on that action in faith, practitioners of the praxis model believe that one can develop a theology that is truly relevant to a particular context.”<sup>57</sup>

Praxis is a particular model of contextualization. For the social crisis preacher, praxis provides the epistemological undergirding necessary to interpenetrate the social realities of divided factions with a theology of biblical justice and reconciliation. Praxis involves the critical reflection of the cultural and social locations of both the preacher of and the hearer of the social crisis sermon while requiring both to construct effective applications from that sermon to address a specific social crisis situation. Stephen B. Bevans argues, “When we speak of the praxis model of contextual theology, we are speaking about a model the central insight of which is that theology is done not simply by providing relevant expressions of Christian faith but also by commitment to Christian action.”<sup>58</sup> Since the root of social crisis is the ideological estrangement of people, caused by sin, a contextualization of praxis is the indispensable and axiomatic element of social crisis preaching.

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<sup>55</sup> Moyd, *Sacred Art*, 83.

<sup>56</sup> Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 72.

<sup>57</sup> Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 74.

<sup>58</sup> Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 72.

This dissertation focuses on the particular gospel-centered, cultural praxis of Kelly Miller Smith as a distinctive element in his prophetic radicalism. Smith is a paragon of the prophetic preaching tradition of the black church. His quest was for spiritual and social liberation for African Americans in Nashville and racial reconciliation between blacks and whites in times of intense social crisis.

This particular kind of contextualization allows effectiveness in preaching to a myriad of racial and ethnic audiences. Timothy Keller explains,

The first step in active contextualization is to understand and, as much as possible, identify with your listeners, the people you are seeking to reach. This begins with a diligent “and never-ending” effort to become as fluent in their social, linguistic, and cultural reality as possible. It involves learning to express people’s hopes, objections, fears, and beliefs so well that they feel as though they could not express them better themselves.<sup>59</sup>

From this praxis, Kelly Miller Smith, like Fredrick Douglass, William Lloyd Garrison, and Phillis Wheatley, and other prophetic voices before him, “incorporated both piety and protest without allowing the latter to obliterate the former.”<sup>60</sup> Praxis serves to create identity and connection with those to whom Christ came to save and those most adversely affected by social crises.

This dissertation uses Smith’s social location as an example of how praxis impacts social crisis proclamation. Smith was born and raised in the once thriving, now economically deprived, all-black town of Mound Bayou, Mississippi, in the heart of the Mississippi Delta.<sup>61</sup> From the testimony of personal and professional friends, no other environment shaped and developed him as much as his experiences in Mound Bayou,

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<sup>59</sup> Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 120.

<sup>60</sup> Curtis Anthony Woods, “The Literary Reception of the Spirituality of Phillis Wheatley (1753-1784): An Afrosensitive Reading” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018), 15.

<sup>61</sup> Melissa Block, “Here’s What’s Become of a Historic All-Black Town in the Mississippi Delta,” March 8, 2017, <https://www.npr.org/2017/03/08/515814287/heres-whats-become-of-a-historic-all-black-town-in-the-mississippi-delta>.

Mississippi.<sup>62</sup> Smith witnessed first-hand the vile atrocities of racism and the dignity of the African American church and community in the face of these social crises. Smith's preaching and ministry from a Christocentric praxis saved Nashville from racial destruction during the Civil Rights era. During this time, Lee states that Smith "remained the most influential Black leader in the city."<sup>63</sup> Forrest E. Harris, Sr. notes,

Smith's leadership was informed by a keen theological mind that understood the relationship between religious experience and political awareness. . . . The theological and practical wisdom that shaped Smith's ecclesiology and guided his liberation praxis contributed to the development of collective and critical consciousness at a crucial period in the city of Nashville.<sup>64</sup>

## Proclamation

Proclamation is the specific work of the *kēryx*, the herald, whose responsibility is *kerygma*—the gospel of Christ.<sup>65</sup> A topic of this magnitude dispels the historical myths and fears concerning preaching and social issues; such phobias are rooted in the fear of a resurrection of the Social Gospel Movement and a resolve not to return to the heretical hermeneutic that sprang from those in that era who denounced the divinity of Christ and other foundational evangelical tenets.<sup>66</sup> Smith's argument is for Christ-centered

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<sup>62</sup> Paris revealed, "Mound Bayou was the place that shaped Kelly like no other, his father and the black men of that community were examples of integrity, strength, and excellence." Paris, interview. Bernard LaFayette, former President of American Baptist College, civil rights leader, and current Chairman of the Board for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, who kept Smith's yard and was later mentored by Smith, affirms, "Kelly Miller Smith grew up in Mound Bayou, Mississippi, at a place in that time, was one of the most prominent, if not the most prominent black town in America." Bernard LaFayette, telephone interview with author, December 27, 2018.

<sup>63</sup> Lee, "The Nashville Civil Rights Movement," 361.

<sup>64</sup> Harris, *Ministry for Social Crisis*, 85.

<sup>65</sup> For an in-depth and comprehensive study of *kēryx*, see John R. W. Stott, *The Preacher's Portrait* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1961); Robert H. Mounce, *The Essential Nature of New Testament Preaching* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1960); Thomas Long, *The Witness of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1989); and Karl Barth, *Homiletics* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991).

<sup>66</sup> This dissertation does not address the theological validity or lack thereof of the Social Gospel Movement, nor does it seek to address the debate at the center of the Social Gospel Movement, which argues whether social reform is the most important dynamic of Christianity. The aim is not to argue

proclamation rooted in the Bible. The Word of God is the source of social crisis preaching. Smith contends, “Social crisis preaching will more nearly achieve its potential if that task is perceived as the proclamation of the Word of God rather than something extraneous or tangential to that Word.”<sup>67</sup> This research claims that social crisis sermons, which are rooted in the gospel and the biblical witness for justice, are not civic sermons. Those who preach to confront social crisis are not primarily civil rights leaders, but heralds who have the responsibility of addressing social crises within the context of the Bible. Smith states, “The Word of God in scripture is the most logical source of the ideas upon which sermons are based.”<sup>68</sup> Christian proclamation is the function of the herald. It involves faithfulness and obedience to the One who extends the commission to preach. From the preacher’s praxis and faithfulness, the herald of the gospel of Christ radically impacts, for the glory of God, the social conditions of His people.

*Kerussein* is liberative activity, as pronounced and ordained of God, for those who have been oppressed. Robert Mounce pronounces, “Herein lies a uniqueness that characterizes New Testament heralding: while it proclaims, it brings to pass its proclamation. The proclamation of liberty at the same time frees.”<sup>69</sup> Heralds do not embellish on the essence and exactitude of the One they are sent to represent, but “the true herald is careful first to make a thorough and thoughtful proclamation of God’s great deed of redemption . . . and then to issue a sincere and earnest appeal to men to repent and

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for or against Social Gospel proponents such as Walter Rauschenbusch, who would contend, “The body of ideas which we call the social gospel is not the product of a fad or temporary interest; it is not an alien importation or a novel invention; it is the revival of the most ancient and authentic gospel, and the scientific unfolding of essential elements of Christian doctrine which have remained undeveloped all too long.” Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1996), 26.

<sup>67</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 32.

<sup>68</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 82.

<sup>69</sup> Mounce, *The Essential Nature of New Testament Preaching*, 18.

believe.”<sup>70</sup> Smith argues, “It must be recalled that social crisis preaching is preaching for a decision-*for* Christ.”<sup>71</sup> The preaching of the gospel is social crisis preaching, for Mounce defines the breadth of this activity as “the full kerygma thus included a historical proclamation, a theological evaluation, and an ethical summons,”<sup>72</sup> which directly impacts the social order.

### **James Earl Massey’s Sermonic Component of Radicality**

Unique to this dissertation is the lens through which Smith’s social crisis preaching is measured and evaluated. Smith and Massey were friends, and both are widely recognized as American preaching giants. They both quote and refer to each other in their writings and lectures and were admirers of one another’s preaching effectiveness.<sup>73</sup> Massey remains the quintessential model of homiletical sagacity across multi-cultured evangelical traditions. Massey’s voluminous contributions are regarded in high esteem in both white evangelical and African American evangelical preaching traditions. His experience as an academic and homiletician spanned predominantly white institutions (PWI) and historically black colleges and universities (HBCU), as Curtiss Paul DeYoung informs, “he would serve as both the dean of chapel at the predominately white Anderson University and at the historically black Tuskegee University.”<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Stott, *The Preacher’s Portrait*, 58.

<sup>71</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 80.

<sup>72</sup> Mounce, *The Essential Nature of New Testament Preaching*, 52.

<sup>73</sup> Smith refers to Massey’s idea concerning the development of sermon content in *Social Crisis Preaching*, 82, chap. 4. Massey refers to Smith’s social crisis preaching and Smith’s emphasis on the “biblical concern for the togetherness of human life in celebration of God and the furtherance of the divine purpose for our lives.” James Earl Massey, *The Burdensome Joy of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 50, 51, 79.

<sup>74</sup> Barry L. Callen and Curtiss Paul DeYoung, *Views from the Mountain: Select Writings of James Earl Massey* (Anderson, IN: Aldersgate, 2018), 234.

In contrast to Smith, Massey was born in a “bicultural setting” in Detroit. To understand Massey’s prophetic radicality, the reader must grasp a precise knowledge of his ecclesiastical tradition, social location, intellectual and academic pedigree, and spirituality. Massey’s theological formation was shaped by the doctrinal emphasis of the Church of God denomination.

In *The Responsible Pulpit*, Massey lists five components of the African American preaching tradition that “help any preacher from any tradition to sense more clearly how to keep the verbal witness of the pulpit both virile, engaging, and effective.”<sup>75</sup> The five sermonic components are functional, festive, communal, radical, and climactic. While one may detect traces of each component in social crisis preaching, the sermonic component most consistent and impactful in social crisis preaching is the *radical* component. Historically, *radicality* has been the most critical and constructive response to racism from the black church that groomed Smith and Massey. There are four aspects of the radical component of proclamation: root work, courage, personal address, and confrontation.<sup>76</sup> Massey describes radicality:

Radicality in the sermon engages the hearer. It makes him know that he is being confronted, that necessity is being laid upon him to respond. True preaching is always confrontational. As proclamation it is not exactly or completely dialogical. This is not to say that there is compulsion in the kerygma against which man would rightly rebel; nor is it to say that the preacher exercises his will to power in making an arbitrary demand by his words. It is rather to say that the speaking of God’s word to man is a radical act; it places man before God as a “thou” but not as an equal, who needs to be guided, confronted, helped, taught, disciplined, forgiven, renewed. Preaching is a special process with a special goal and end in view. Radical means are essential to that process and end.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Massey, *The Responsible Pulpit*, chap. 6.

<sup>76</sup> Massey defines *root work* as “taking the hearer to the roots of personal life and vital response.” Courage must be coupled with politeness. Massey states that for the preacher, it is “wedding the radical offensiveness of his stand for rights with the reasonableness of peaceful means.” As for personal address, Massey suggest that it is “the authoritative address, the address of the Word of God . . . spoken by man . . . as God’s representative.” Massey argues, “True preaching is always confrontational. . . . The speaking of God’s word to man is a radical act; it places man before God . . . as one who needs to be guided, confronted, helped, taught, disciplined, forgiven, renewed.” Massey, *The Responsible Pulpit*, chap. 6.

<sup>77</sup> Massey, *The Responsible Pulpit*, chap. 6.



This dissertation uses Massey's "radical" sermonic component as a lens to view the social crisis preaching of Smith. I also propose that Massey's prophetic radicalism, along with Smith's seven component of the social crisis sermon, can be a paradigm for contemporary social crisis preaching that can be employed by preachers from any evangelical tradition and by preachers of any race within the evangelical faith.

### **Background and Significance of the Field of Study**

Four major stimuli stir my passion in the study of social crisis preaching and also bear significance on the thesis for the field of study. First, as an African American pastor of nineteen years, I have ministered to those who have experienced, witnessed, and been most affected by racism and social crises in our country. As a son of the African American church, I am part of a tradition in which this quality of Christian proclamation has given life, sustained communities, and nurtured Christian discipleship in the life of its hearers, the church, and the nation.

Second, my passion is aroused by the incompleteness and ineptitude of social crisis preaching. An unprecedented rise of social crises—mass incarceration, abortion, violence, poverty, human trafficking, drug abuse, and racism to name a few—dominate too many African American communities. However, the church is alarmingly silent on many of the issues that affect the "least of these." When the church does speak, its message is often incomplete and void of the historical causes of these crises. As such, the message is often paternalistic, legalistic, and mostly insensitive, therefore limiting receptivity. Without a Christocentric praxis, an attempt to bring the gospel to bear on today's social conditions results in an ineptitude of social crisis preaching.

This ineptitude takes one of two extremes. On one hand is an interest in only addressing the social conditions. This extreme is symbolic of having one eye open to the social crisis but the other eye closed to Christ. I have witnessed many "great sermons" that fail to offer Jesus as immediate and ultimate solution to social crisis. Many of these sermons assess the historical and cultural statistics that accurately address the plight of

those adversely affected by social crises by exposing corruption in the systems that perpetuate racism and injustice. However, these sermons forfeit legitimacy as they too often simply find satisfaction and aim with winning adherents to a particular social or political position. Any attempt to address social crises apart from Jesus Christ as deliverer, Savior, and Redeemer is a failed attempt to offer lasting hope and help. With strong conviction Smith contends,

The church has a far greater role to play than the government in bringing freedom to the inhabitants of our cities. Our message is a cure-all-a panacea for the physical, social, and moral ills of society. These social ills are the result of sin. Because its remedy for these social ills comes from the Great Emancipator, the Lord Jesus Christ, our message is a new Declaration of Independence far more important than any nation could devise. The declaration of freedom was drawn up by the Ruler of the universe, who sent His only begotten Son to ratify it by the shedding of His own blood. God has set in motion a plan whereby we may enjoy the freedom that He offers to all.<sup>78</sup>

The other extreme of ineptitude avoids social crises altogether without any regard for the lives of those described by Howard Thurman as those who “stand at any point in time with their backs against the wall.”<sup>79</sup> These preachers and their sermons often have an eye open to Christ but the other eye is closed to the social conditions of the poor and marginalized around them. During the majority of Smith’s ministry in Nashville, the white church was a microcosm of the social order, and therefore lacked a theological or social praxis to understand the effects of those social crises that axiomatically emanated from racism. The church did not offer a counter-cultural alternative to the social order, but rather, in many cases, Christians sustained and perpetuated racial and social injustices both explicitly and implicitly. When Christian proclamation is void of prophetic urgency in times of social crisis, the church is often accused as a complicit participant and silent observer in the injustices perpetrated upon the vulnerable in society.

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<sup>78</sup> W. W. Robinson, “The Black Preacher—Man for All Seasons,” *The Message Magazine* 1, no. 2 (December 1954): 29.

<sup>79</sup> Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston: Beacon, 1996), 13.

On April 9, 2019, Senator Doug Jones (D-AL) led a bi-partisan reading of Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1963 "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" in the United States Senate chamber. This act of commemoration was a testament to social and racial progress. This reading of the "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" was also a clarion call to remember the circumstances that provoked the need for the 1963 letter, and the frightening similarities with the current social crisis, thus causing a need for a fresh hearing.<sup>80</sup> From the Senate chamber, this letter was read by a bi-partisan, multi-ethnic group.<sup>81</sup> The impetus behind "The Letter from a Birmingham Jail" was the distinct but disturbing gradualist approach and the quietude of white Christians and white churches as the nation grappled with racial and social maladies. King wrote,

For years now I have heard the word "Wait!" It rings in the ear of every Negro with a piercing familiarity. This "wait" has almost always meant "never." It has been a tranquilizing thalidomide, reliving the emotional stress for a moment, only to give birth to an ill-formed infant of frustration. We must come to see with the distinguished jurist of yesterday that "justice too long delayed is justice denied." We have waiting for more than three hundred and forty years for our constitutional and God-given rights. The nations of Asia and Africa are moving with jet like speed toward the goal of political independence, and we still creep at horse and buggy pace toward the gaining of a cup of coffee at a lunch counter. I guess it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say, "Wait."<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Addressed to eight white clergymen from Alabama, "The Letter from a Birmingham Jail" was written on April 16, 1963, by King as he was imprisoned in the Birmingham City Jail for peacefully disobeying a ruling from Circuit Judge W. A. Jenkins that prohibited boycotting and demonstrations. S. Jonathan Bass, *Blessed Are the Peacemakers: Martin Luther King Jr., Eight White Religious Leaders, and the "Letter from Birmingham Jail"* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), 117. On April 12, 1963, the eight ministers published an op-ed in the *Birmingham News* entitled "A Call for Unity," which prompted King's response. Prior to the "Call for Unity" letter, the same group of ministers published an op-ed entitled, "An Appeal for Law and Order and Common Sense" in January 1963. Both letters were an appeal for the local ministers in Birmingham to withdraw support of King's direct action methods of protest and to allow Jim Crow laws to be resolved in the local courts. Bass, *Blessed Are the Peacemakers*, 19-20.

<sup>81</sup> Joining Jones were Senators Lamar Alexander (R-TN), Ted Cruz (R-TX), Kamala Harris (D-CA), Tim Kaine (D-VA), and Lisa Murkowski (R-AK). Cruz is of Cuban and Italian descent, Harris is of Indian and Jamaican ethnicity, and Murkowski is of Polish descent; the other senators are Caucasian Americans.

<sup>82</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Plea from the Birmingham City Jail," in *Witness to America: A Documentary History of the United States from the Revolution to Today*, ed. Douglass Brinkley (New York: Harper, 2010), 435.

Historically, confronting social crisis through preaching and theology has not been an explicit priority for white mainline denominations and churches, as King alludes to in his letter to these ministers. Jonathan Bass echoes this reality about the eight interdenominational group of ministers, to whom the “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” was addressed: “Throughout much of the twentieth century, each of the Protestant denominations represented in the group of eight clergymen practiced a regional brand of conservative Christianity that primarily focused on conversion, moralism, and institutional growth.”<sup>83</sup> Arguably, widespread silence in the pulpit towards social crisis, fear of backlash from the white public, and theological irrelevance toward social crisis was the synthesis that contributed to the proliferation of the controversial black liberation theology in liberal academies and churches.<sup>84</sup> James H. Cone argues,

Our intellectual ideas of God, Jesus, and the Church were derived from white European theologians and their textbooks. When we speak of Christianity in theological categories, using such terms as revelation, incarnation and reconciliation, we naturally turn to people like Barth, Tillich, and Bultmann for guidance and direction. But these Europeans did not shape their ideas in the social context of white racism and thus could not help us out of our dilemma. But if we intended to fight on a theological and intellectual level as a way of empowering our historical and political struggle for justice, we had to create a new theological movement, one that was derived from and thus accountable to our people’s fight for justice.<sup>85</sup>

Likewise, when the preacher’s eye and sermons are closed to the social crisis in their community, sermons often recognize that social crises exist but fall short of offering any

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<sup>83</sup> Bass, *Blessed Are the Peacemakers*, 6.

<sup>84</sup> Several of the pioneers of “black theology” or “black liberation theology” concur that one of the primary reasons black theology was born was the lack of response of the theology taught in white seminaries to the social plight of African Americans. Black liberation theologians claim that during times of wide-spread injustice, which included lynching, segregation, and political and economic disenfranchisement, the white church and white schools of theology were silent. See J. Deotis Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation: A Black Theology*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005); James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, eds., *Black Theology: A Documentary History*, vol. 1, 1966-1979 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2003); Dwight Hopkins, *Shoes That Fit Our Feet: Sources for a Constructive Black Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993); James Cone, *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1984).

<sup>85</sup> Cone and Wilmore, *Black Theology*, 267-68.

specific biblical application in which to address them. They also often fail to draw specific parallels between biblical social crisis examples and contemporary social crisis realities.<sup>86</sup> Also, a lack of unbiased and robust exegesis of the biblical text haunts those who attempt this work, which makes for a political speech or a cultural treatise. In the words of Robert Smith, Jr., “We can’t not socialize the gospel; we must gospelize the social.”<sup>87</sup>

Third, my passion is stirred due to the fact that Smith has been ignored. He is deserving of note and worthy of academic study as a community reconciler, ecclesiastical servant, social reformer, and homiletical genius. Most profoundly, Smith is one of only twelve African Americans to give the Lyman Beecher Lectures at Yale in its almost 150-year history.<sup>88</sup> Sadly, no major works dedicated exclusively to Smith’s impact exist on the PhD level. Additionally, PhD dissertations and doctoral research projects from Southern Seminary and other top tier theological institutions have not focused on Smith and his social crisis preaching lectures or his social crisis preaching in general.

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<sup>86</sup> One could consider the biases between Samaritans and Jews with the historical conflict of racism between black and whites in the United States.

<sup>87</sup> Robert Smith, Jr., conversation with author, Beeson Divinity School, March 2, 2018.

<sup>88</sup> Established April 12, 1871, The Lyman Beecher Lectures at Yale Divinity School are one of the most prestigious lecture series on preaching in the nation. At the request of Henry Ward Beecher, the annual lectures were to be named after his father, Lyman Beecher. At the behest of the chief donor, Henry W. Sage and the Yale Corporation, “the Lyman Beecher lecturer shall be invited to lecture on a branch of pastoral theology or any other topic appropriate to the work of the Christian ministry.” Yale Divinity School, “Bibliography of the Lyman Beecher Lectureship on Preaching,” accessed December 12, 2018, <https://www.library.yale.edu/div/beecher..html>. Among the notables to have delivered these lectures are J. A. Broadus (1888), P. T. Forsyth (1906), John Henry Jowett (1911), Reinhold Niebuhr (1944), Fred Craddock (1977), and Walter Brueggemann (1988). There are less notable names, but the sermons delivered during the 146 years of the lectures’ existence are parallel in substance and scholarship. In 1949, Edgar DeWitt Jones conducted a survey of the Lyman Beecher lecturers, and within that survey he listed several categories, among which is a group that he labels “Prophets of Social Change.” The distinguished preachers under that label include Washington Gladden (1886 and 1901), Henry Sloan Coffin (1917), Garfield Bromley Oxman (1943), and Kelly Miller Smith, Sr. (1982-1983). The other African Americans to preach the Lyman Beecher Lectures are James H. Robinson (1954-1955); Henry Mitchell (1973-1974); Gardner C. Taylor (1975-1976); James Forbes (1985-1986); Samuel D. Proctor (1989-1990); Thomas Hoyt (1992-1993); Peter Gomes (1998); Otis Moss, Jr. (2004); Renita J. Weems (the only African American woman) (2008); Brian K. Blount (2011); Otis Moss III (2014). Yale Divinity School, “Bibliography of the Lyman Beecher Lectureship on Preaching.”

The fourth factor that stirs my passion is my desire to forge a “recovery of preaching,”<sup>89</sup> so that the sacred and the social are remarried at the altar of God’s eternal intention for preaching, resulting in proclamation that is canonical in its revelation and contemporary in its relevance.

### **Distinguishing Elements for Social Crisis Preaching**

This dissertation investigates a substantial sampling of sermons from Smith, parlaying the findings into a perfect archetype of the social crisis preaching genre. Smith’s social crisis preaching bore three distinctive elements: Christ-centeredness, the pastor as sacred anthropologist bearing cultural intelligence, and elements of proclamation and beyond, as Smith defines as seven components of the social crisis sermon.<sup>90</sup>

### **Christ-Centered Proclamation**

Smith was first and foremost a pastor and herald who was convinced that preaching should be anchored in the Bible and lead the hearer to Christ. Smith’s social crisis sermons, as shown in this dissertation, lift Jesus Christ as the answer to social crises. Smith’s preaching bore the evidence of a theologian who knew Christ intimately. He was also among several African American pastors who had formal theological training.<sup>91</sup> Among his leadership roles in Nashville, Smith was also Assistant Dean of Vanderbilt Divinity School. Although *Social Crisis Preaching* was Smith’s only published text, he wrote extensively, lectured in colleges and seminaries across the country, and

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<sup>89</sup> This term was used by Henry H. Mitchell as the title of his Lyman Beecher Lectures at Yale University in 1973. Mitchell later published *The Recovery of Preaching* (New York: HarperCollins, 1977).

<sup>90</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 80.

<sup>91</sup> For a thorough reading on the formal and informal theological training of black preachers and pastors, see chap. 3, “Training for Black Preachers Through the Years,” in Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of A Powerful Art* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), which includes discussions on “Black Preachers Receive Formal Training” and “The Emergence of African American Seminaries.”

served as professor and Administrator at American Baptist College and Vanderbilt Divinity School.

I examined over fifty sermons preached at First Baptist Church Capitol Hill and elsewhere to reveal distinguishing elements of effective social crisis preaching, where Smith brought his pastoral calling and academic acumen to bear in his role as resident theologian. Social crisis preaching is pastoral preaching. Effective social crisis preaching also requires an in-depth understanding of humanity, as well as the contemporary social, economic, and political issues and their intersectionality with Christian theology. The sermon speaks to members of the body of Christ, both those who are victims of social crisis and those who are complicit in social crisis and injustice. The social crisis preacher is under no obligation to mention any particular social crisis at all, but to pastorally lift the biblical principles of evangelical Christianity. One must not assume that all social crisis preaching is “speaking truth to power” or confronting a specific contemporary social issue. In this way, theological themes such as the love and sovereignty of God, justification, sanctification, eschatology, the Trinity, and spiritual gifts all have social crisis ramifications. Application of any biblical sermon has a direct impact upon spiritual and social, individual, and collective identities.

There does not necessarily have to be a label for the kind of preaching that confronts social crisis or racism (i.e., social crisis, prophetic utterance, African American, social justice preaching). Doctrinal preaching and preaching the redemptive narrative of Scripture addresses individual and corporate sins. Smith contends, “The preaching enterprise is in some measure of trouble when the trappings of preaching-eloquence, scholarship, voice control, and so forth, are more in evidence than the “big idea” being presented and with which the preacher is wrestling.”<sup>92</sup> Will Willimon writes, “Christian preaching begins, not with astute sociological analysis of the human condition, but rather

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<sup>92</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 81.

with Scripture.”<sup>93</sup> A pastoral methodology of preaching that confronts social crises must be intentional in pointing the hearer to Christ.

### **The Pastor as Sacred Anthropologist**

Considering the flawed anthropology, faulty exegesis, and scientific racist theories responsible for racial division in the US since the time of its inception until the present time, it is essential that the pastor become a *sacred anthropologist*. Smith functioned as a sacred anthropologist through his understanding of both black and white racial groups and his ability to bridge these cultures through peaceful negotiations and preaching. The sacred anthropologist studies other cultures and people groups with three specific aims in mind: to learn their history as told from their most respected historians and scholars, to learn their valuable contributions to the world, and to celebrate how God has used them and people in their culture in salvation history. Robert Hughes and Robert Kysar state, “Christianity has the opportunity to retell a story that fills the void of a storyless people.”<sup>94</sup> In this spirit the sacred anthropologist, through the proclamation of the Word of God, is faithful to tell the biblical narrative, as inclusive of all people.

Smith demonstrates cultural intelligence by living and leading others to engage in what Matthew Kim describes as a “move from xenophobe to xenophile, from relying on cultural stereotypes to fostering cultural empathy, and from cultural assimilation into cultural celebration.”<sup>95</sup> Hershael York advises the preacher to know the *cultural detail* because these are “the factors that explain the meaning of stories, events, or teachings.”<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Will Willimon, *Who Lynched Willie Earle? Preaching to Confront Racism* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2017), 99.

<sup>94</sup> Robert G. Hughes and Robert Kysar, *Preaching Doctrine: For the Twenty-First Century* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 9.

<sup>95</sup> Matthew D. Kim, *Preaching with Cultural Intelligence: Understanding the People Who Hear Our Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 47.

<sup>96</sup> Hershael W. York and Bert Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance: A Solid and Enduring Approach to Engaging Exposition* (Nashville: B & H, 2003), 55.



Often anthropological clues in the cultural details allow hearers to develop empathy for cultures in which they may be unfamiliar. The sacred anthropologist serves as the resident theologian of the church by bringing theological truths to bear on the plight of the communities of the Other. The sacred anthropologist as resident theologian teaches the gathered community concerning the *imago Dei* in every human being and how God, in his Sovereignty, fulfills the Abrahamic Covenant by involving and offering salvation through Christ to all people. Preaching with cultural intelligence involves faithful exegetical study and a firm awareness of the cultural and historical background of the original author. York and Decker claim that by “coupling this knowledge base with modern cultures,” a more accurate interpretation of Scripture is embraced.<sup>97</sup> The sacred anthropologist is called to preach with cultural intelligence.

### **Elements of Proclamation and Beyond**

In *Social Crisis Preaching*, Smith list seven essential proclamation considerations of the social crisis sermon and ministry, all of which gave his ministry in Nashville national prominence and his social crisis preaching national notoriety. Smith list these seven considerations as “(1) The “pre-proclamation, pre-crisis” function of the preacher; (2) the content; (3) the words used; (4) the perceptual powers of focus; (5) the structure; (6) delivery of the social crisis sermon; and (7) the post-delivery function of the preacher.”<sup>98</sup> The social crisis sermon encompasses actions and attitudes prior to the preaching event and entails the essential hermeneutical and homiletical components of expository preaching.

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<sup>97</sup> York and Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance*, 37.

<sup>98</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 80.

## Methodology

Primary sources of research for this topic were interviews conducted with Kelly Miller Smith, Sr.'s son, Kelly Miller Smith, Jr., who is also the current pastor of First Baptist Capitol Hill Nashville. I visited and exchanged numerous text messages and emails with Kelly Miller Smith, Jr., since I began this project. I also had the distinct honor of interviewing Smith's widow, Alice. Ms. Alice was gracious, patient, and kind in sharing memories of Smith as a man who made his family his number one priority in the midst of countless demands upon his time and energies. Additional primary sources for this research include fifteen sermons on cassette tapes, lent to me by Smith, Jr., which I had professionally transcribed to have them in print form for this research. These sermons offered me insight into the sermon structure, congregational response, method of delivery, hermeneutic, and the pastoral approach of Kelly Miller Smith, Sr. I also used a sampling of at least thirty-five additional sermons from the Kelly Miller Smith Collection at the Jean and Alexander Heard Library at Vanderbilt University.

Personal friends and colleagues of Kelly Miller Smith, Sr., scholars Peter Paris and Bernard Lafayette, also afforded me interviews on December 24, 2018, and December 27, 2018, respectively. Besides the personal interviews, the most valuable source was the Kelly Miller Smith Collection at the Jean and Alexander Heard Library at Vanderbilt University, which was also a component of the Kelly Miller Smith Institute on the Black Church. On my initial visit, I spent six hours with the Kelly Miller Smith Collection on June 3, 2018. I made four additional trips to the Jean and Alexander Heard Library at Vanderbilt, where I invested hours dedicated to research for this dissertation. The Kelly Miller Smith Collection houses personal papers, speeches, lectures, essays, and sermon manuscripts developed for racially diverse audiences on a myriad of occasions. The Kelly Miller Smith Collection is a valuable resource for researching the praxis and proclamation of Kelly Miller Smith, Sr. Most importantly, *Social Crisis Preaching: Lyman Beecher Lectures 1983* remains the initial catalyst and primary construct for this dissertation and is Smith's only published book.

Robert Smith, Jr., was a personal friend of Massey's and co-editor with Timothy George and Massey in a book concerning the preaching ministry of Gardner C. Taylor.<sup>99</sup> Robert Smith has worked with Massey on countless occasions as a scholar, friend, and colleague. Robert Smith is my mentor and afforded me counsel, interviews, and phone conversations, and served as external reader for my dissertation. One primary source for Massey's sermonic components was obtained in a personal conversation I had with him in July 2016. My wife and I visited his home in Greensboro, Alabama, to deliver a gift for his seventy-fifth preaching anniversary for Robert Smith—I did not know this visit would be a providential moment. I was also afforded a phone interview with Massey in early 2018; he recommended resources for my work and gave advice on a number of approaches to study the social crisis preaching of Kelly Miller Smith. Massey was a frequent preacher, lecturer, and visitor at Beeson Divinity School during my matriculation in the Master of Divinity program. His sermons, lectures, and conversations often informed students and faculty of the characterological elements of the African American preaching tradition. *The Responsible Pulpit* and other books written by Massey were used as primary sources as I applied Massey's prophetic radicalism as a lens in which to measure the social crisis preaching of Kelly Miller Smith, Sr.

This first chapter of the dissertation presents the definition of social crisis preaching. It also presents the thesis and research question along with introducing the three main purposes for the dissertation. This chapter gives concise definitions of the key terms *prophetic radicalism*, *praxis*, and *proclamation* as indispensable elements in social crisis preaching. I provide evidence for the importance of praxis and proclamation to remain intertwined in social crisis preaching. Last, this chapter offers the academic definition of *social crisis preaching* as given by Kelly Miller Smith, and presented him as the chief model of praxis and proclaimer of social crisis preaching.

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<sup>99</sup> See Timothy George, James Earl Massey, and Robert Smith, Jr., eds., *Our Sufficiency Is of God: Essays on Preaching in Honor of Gardner C. Taylor* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2013).

Chapter 2 provides biographic detail of Kelly Miller Smith and James Earl Massey. I focus on the life and experiences of Smith in Mound Bayou, Mississippi, as a foundational component of praxis. I also introduce Massey and provide details of his stellar academic and pastoral career. The chapter also highlights the relationship shared between Smith and Massey. Essential to this chapter is the evangelical theology and preaching of Smith and Massey.

Chapter 3 focuses on proclamation and beyond, and Smith's seven components of the social crisis sermon. Five of these components are identical to the five canons of Greco-Roman rhetoric. I use two of Smith's sermons and one lecture to show examples of how Smith's canons of social crisis preaching bears similarities to the Greco-Roman canons of invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery.

Chapter 4 presents the proof of the thesis statement. I provide a detailed analysis of twenty sermons from Smith. Massey's insights from the African American preaching tradition are presented. As the lens to measure and evaluate the social crisis preaching of Smith, I employ Massey's sermonic component of "radicality," with its four aspects, which is an African American preaching insight.

Chapter 5 presents recommendations for future academic and scholarly research. Smith's life, preaching, and ministry are vast and will provide future academics and opportunity to study him and his homiletic through a myriad of lens. I highlight and recommend three homiletical areas from three multi-cultural scholars that can be expanded in future academic studies about Smith. In these three examples lie the answer to the research question: "What distinguishing elements of social crisis preaching did Kelly Miller Smith make both plausible and practical as a means for all ethnicities and Christian traditions to addressing social crises through preaching?"

## CHAPTER 2

### THE CULTURAL CONTEXT AND THE ECCLESIAL PRAXIS OF KELLY MILLER SMITH AND JAMES EARL MASSEY

Douglas John Hall maintains, “In a certain sense all theological thought reflects its context, intentionally or not. We are, after all, creatures of time and space. There is no such thing as non-contextual human thought, including theological thought.”<sup>1</sup> In this same vein, Kelly Miller Smith relates, “Communication actually begins not when the text and the sermon title are announced, but when the minister functions in the community in relation to critical social circumstances.”<sup>2</sup> Henry H. Mitchell calls attention to this truth by commenting, “Preaching is carried out in the idiom, imagery, style, and world view of a particular people.”<sup>3</sup> Smith further exclaims that the social crisis preacher is consistently engaged in “reflecting in their preaching an understanding of the social relevance of the Christian gospel before a specific crisis arises.”<sup>4</sup> This chapter examines the cultural context of Kelly Miller Smith and James Earl Massey as an integral and established element in the praxis that highly influenced their prophetic radicalism.

This examination will serve to specify the presuppositions resident in Smith’s hermeneutic and to lay the groundwork of answering the research question: “What

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<sup>1</sup> Douglass John Hall, *Thinking the Faith: Christian Theology in a North American Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 76.

<sup>2</sup> Kelly Miller Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching: The Lyman Beecher Lectures 1983* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984), 80-81.

<sup>3</sup> Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 12.

<sup>4</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 81.

distinguishing elements of social crisis preaching did Kelly Miller Smith make both plausible and practical as a means for all ethnicities and evangelical Christian traditions to address social crises?”

The life experiences and personal careers of Kelly Miller Smith and James Earl Massey are eerily similar. Born ten years apart, the two men held a mutual respect for the homiletical contributions of the other. They were known to quote each other, and each held the other high as models of homiletical effectiveness worthy of mirroring.<sup>5</sup> Both men were considered resident theologians in the churches they pastored. Both men enjoyed long tenures as pastor in their respective churches; Smith served as pastor of First Baptist Church Capitol Hill for thirty-three years (1951-1984), Massey served as senior pastor of Metropolitan Church of God in Detroit for twenty-two years (1954-1976). Well respected across denominational and racial communities, both Smith and Massey earned trust sufficient to engage in ecclesial and racial reconciliation.

Smith and Massey were raised in strong Christian homes by middle class parents, where their lives were undergirded by the presence of a strong father.<sup>6</sup> Both Smith and Massey had lifelong plans to become classical pianists, until those plans were interrupted by the call of God to preach. Inevitably, both men employed their gifts and skill as trained musicians but embraced music as secondary to what Massey describes as “the burdensome joy of preaching.”<sup>7</sup> The black church experience was crucial in the spiritual development, worldview formation, and preaching influence of both Smith and Massey. The thought of the African American theologian and philosopher Howard Thurman had a

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<sup>5</sup> Smith was born October 28, 1920, while Massey was born January 4, 1930. Smith refers to Massey’s idea concerning the development of sermon content in *Social Crisis Preaching*, 82, chap. 4. Massey refers to Smith’s social crisis preaching and Smith’s emphasis on the “biblical concern for the togetherness of human life in celebration of God and the furtherance of the divine purpose for our lives” in *The Burdensome of Joy Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 50, 51, 79.

<sup>6</sup> See “Roots in Home and Church,” in James Earl Massey, *Aspects of the Pilgrimage: An Autography* (Anderson, IN: Anderson University Press, 2002), 7.

<sup>7</sup> Massey, *The Burdensome Joy of Preaching*.

tremendous bearing on the preaching and spirituality of both men. Martin Luther King, Jr. enjoyed close friendship and the counsel of Smith and Massey. However, rather than leading marches, both men served the Civil Rights Movement by providing spiritual counsel and strategic advice for those on the front lines of the movement. Smith and Massey both taught in the historically black colleges and university setting, as well as predominately white institutions of higher learning. Most importantly, the analysis of Smith and Massey's lives in this chapter is an introduction to the make-up of the first element in Smith's seven components of the social crisis sermon, "pre-proclamation," which will be further discussed in chapter 3. This chapter will focus on the cultural context that shaped Smith and Massey, as well as examine the ecclesial praxis which influenced their social crisis proclamation and ministry.

### **Kelly Miller Smith**

The impact of Mound Bayou, Mississippi, upon Kelly Miller Smith was indelible and so impactful that Smith's life cannot be imagined or told divorced from the story of Mound Bayou. The vision of Mound Bayou is the culmination of a shared dream to form a self-sustaining, cooperative, utopian community during the antebellum period. This utopian project was the dream of one of the wealthiest slaveholders in the state of Mississippi and one of his former slaves.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Few stories concerning Southern antebellum culture are more fascinating than the narratives that describes the pioneering spirit of Jefferson and Joseph Davis. There were several attempts to form a self-sustaining, cooperative, utopian community during the antebellum period. The idea to pioneer such a project in the US was inspired by Robert Owen, described by Janet Hermann, as "the successful British industrialist and social reformer." Janet Sharp Herman, *The Pursuit of a Dream* (Jackson, MS: Banner Books, 1999), chap. 1, Kindle. Based on this idea, in 1825, Owen started New Harmony, a small colony in southwest Indiana, which collapsed shortly after it was founded. Undeterred from the novel idea, Joseph Davis, elder brother of Confederate President Jefferson Davis, was fueled by the prospect of establishing a community defined by Hermann, where "all men, white and black, are capable of living harmonious, productive lives through rational cooperation." Herman, *The Pursuit of a Dream*, chap. 1. Davis took his enthusiasm and determination to Mississippi and purchased 11,000 acres of rich fertile land on the Mississippi River, to start a plantation known as Davis Bend. The Davis Bend plantations were decimated during the Civil War. After the plantations of Davis Bend fell into the hands of the Freedman's Bureau, Davis soon, like most Southern slaveholders, petitioned the President for pardon and restoration of their seized land. Joseph Davis was pardoned by President Johnson, and his land restored in 1866. In the same year, Davis leased, then

Mound Bayou, Mississippi, was founded by former slaves, and remains an all-black town located in the Northwest quarter of Mississippi, part of the Mississippi Delta.<sup>9</sup> Once hailed by President Theodore Roosevelt as “the jewel of the delta,” Mound Bayou was founded by Isaiah T. Montgomery and his cousin Benjamin T. Green, former slaves of Joseph Davis, older brother of President of the Confederate, Jefferson Davis. Mound Bayou was a self-governing and self-sustaining all black community in 1887.<sup>10</sup> Booker T. Washington commented, “Outside of Tuskegee, I think that I can safely say there is no community in the world that I am so deeply interested in as I am in Mound Bayou.”<sup>11</sup> Frank B. Hood informs, “I. T. Montgomery visited the site of present day Mound Bayou which was near two bayous surrounded by some Indian mounds. He returned later with six hundred dedicated followers and opened a colony.”<sup>12</sup> Historians David T. Beito and Linda Royster Beito report,

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later sold the Davis Bend plantations to Ben Montgomery, his former slave, and father of Mound Bayou founder, Isaiah Montgomery. According to Hermann, “poor crops, the declining price of cotton, severe credit losses among their tenants” led to the Montgomery’s losing the property in 1880. Hermann, *The Pursuit of A Dream*, chap. 6. Isaiah Montgomery moved to nearby Natchez, Mississippi, until he purchased the land that is now Mound Bayou from the Louisville, New Orleans, and Texas Railroad in 1888. Perhaps the most detailed treatment of the ventures of Joseph Davis and his attempts to establish a utopian colony in Mississippi is found in Hermann, *The Pursuit of A Dream*. See also Joel Rosen, *From New Lanark to Mound Bayou: Owenism in the Mississippi Delta* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> Linda Royster Beito writes, “The Delta is a flat expanse that encompassed twelve Mississippi counties stretching from Tennessee in the north to Vicksburg in the south. The rich soil enabled farmers to produce more cotton than any other place in the United States. In 1940 blacks were more than 70 percent of the Delta’s population. Most lived in extreme poverty and worked as tenant laborers or sharecroppers.” David T. Beito and Linda Royster Beito, *T. R. M. Howard: Doctor, Entrepreneur, Civil Rights Pioneer* (Oakland, CA: Independent Institute, 2018), 51. Robert W. Twyman explains,

Social scientist most often encounter the words “Mississippi Delta” when investigating the riverine bottomlands of northeast Louisiana, southeast Arkansas, and northwest Mississippi. One of the richest agricultural regions in the world, it is an area of slight relief where conspicuous features are natural levees, cutoff lakes, and backswamps. Initially settled from the Southeast, the Delta was ideal for plantation agriculture.” (David C. Roller and Robert W. Twyman, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Southern History* [Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979], 837)

<sup>10</sup> Milburn Crowe, John Martin, and Luther Brown, “The Mound Bayou Mississippi Story,” pamphlet from The Delta Center for Culture & Learning, Delta State University, 4.

<sup>11</sup> Crowe, Martin, and Brown, “The Mound Bayou Mississippi Story,” 1.

<sup>12</sup> Frank B. Hood, in “A Pictorial History of Mound Bayou,” pamphlet from the 95th



The town of Mound Bayou in Bolivar County, in the heart of the Delta, stood out as an island of black self-rule in a sea of white supremacy. Founded in 1887 by two cousins, Benjamin T. Green and Isaiah T. Montgomery. . . . Montgomery's father helped to manage the plantation of Joseph Davis, the brother of Jefferson Davis. Mound Bayou soon earned a reputation as a haven for black entrepreneurship, self-help, and political rights. . . . Mound Bayou was one of a handful of towns in the South where blacks had voting rights and held office.<sup>13</sup>

The unique environmental factors prevalent in Mound Bayou, Mississippi, during 1920-1940 served to shape Smith's worldview and disposition as he was propelled to be one of Nashville's most celebrated leaders and one of the most effective Civil Rights leaders in the South. These environmental factors sprang from the Judeo-Christian concept of the *imago Dei*, lived out in a milieu of racial terror and injustice. Providing a description of how these environmental elements shaped his thinking, Smith explains, "I think my most important education was not necessarily in institutions where I received my formal education but growing up in Mississippi. I think that taught me an awful lot about what pertains to living and the problems of society."<sup>14</sup>

### **Mound Bayou Mississippi and the Order of Twelve Knights and Daughters of Tabor**

Kelly Miller Smith was born October 28, 1920, to Perry and Priscilla Anderson Smith in Mound Bayou, Mississippi. Smith was named after the African American intellectual Kelly Miller, dean and professor at Howard University, who argued that black people must resist segregation to maintain their self-respect.<sup>15</sup> Smith completed his elementary education in Mound Bayou and graduated high school at nearby Magnolia High School in Vicksburg, Mississippi. Growing up in Mound Bayou, Smith had the

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Founder's Day Celebration in 1982, The City of Mound Bayou, 6.

<sup>13</sup> Beito and Beito, *T. R. M. Howard*, 51.

<sup>14</sup> Dwight Lewis, "Memory of Lynch Mob Shaped Minister's Life," *Tennessean*, February 23, 1986, Vanderbilt University, Jean and Alexander Heard Library, Special Collections and University Archives, Kelly Miller Smith Papers, box 16, file 21.

<sup>15</sup> Leila A. Meier, "'A Different Kind of Prophet': The Role of Kelly Miller Smith in the Nashville Civil Rights Movement, 1955-1960" (MA thesis, Vanderbilt University, 1991), 2.

unique experience of learning two competing narratives: (1) the narrative of African Americans as people of profoundly deep Christian spirituality, who were responsible and astute, hard-working land-owners, and (2) the narrative where those very qualities were unrecognized, unappreciated, and denied. Mound Bayou, located in Bolivar County, is a mere forty-four miles from Money, Mississippi, the town where the nationally known murder of fourteen-year-old Emmett Till (1955), at the hands of J. W. Milam and Roy Bryant, took place.<sup>16</sup>

Between 1877, one year after Smith's father's birth, and 1940, 654 lynchings of African Americans were reported in Mississippi; more than any state in the nation.<sup>17</sup> During that same span of time, Smith's home county of Bolivar County, Mississippi, ranked eighth among all counties in Mississippi of the most active lynching counties in Southern states.<sup>18</sup> Barry Everett Lee comments, "Smith's racial outlook was significantly shaped by an incident he witnessed at age nine."<sup>19</sup> Peter Paris reports on this encounter with lynch mobs of Mississippi:

Raised in the all-black town of Mound Bayou, Miss. Smith had little experience with the whites until a gun-toting lynch mob roared into town when he was twelve. The mob threatened to shoot a black doctor whom they suspected of treating the man they were chasing. As young Smith watched, the doctor defied them: "Well shoot." The would-be lynchers drifted away.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> According to current Mound Bayou mayor, Eulah Peterson, who grew up in Mound Bayou, "since blacks could not lodge in local hotels, Till's mother, their lawyer, and several black reporters stayed in Mound Bayou during the trial of Milam and Bryant, at the home of famed physician and civil rights leader, T. R. M. Howard." Eulah Peterson, interview with author, Mound Bayou City Hall, Mound Bayou, MS, May 22, 2019.

<sup>17</sup> Equal Justice Initiative, "Lynching in America," accessed May 26, 2019, <https://lynchinginamerica.eji.org/report/>, table 1,

<sup>18</sup> Equal Justice Initiative, "Lynching in America," table 6.

<sup>19</sup> Barry Everett Lee, "The Nashville Civil Rights Movement: A Study of the Phenomenon of Intentional Leadership Development and Its Consequences for Local Movements and the National Civil Rights Movement" (PhD diss., Georgia State University, 2010), 53.

<sup>20</sup> Peter Paris, "The Theology and Ministry of Kelly Miller Smith," *The Journal of Religious Thought* 38, no. 2 (1984): 6.

Despite the pandemic of racial terror surrounding Mound Bayou, the infectious spirit of white supremacy during the early twentieth century was not transmissible to the citizens of the all black town of Mound Bayou. Paris states that even though everyone in Mound Bayou knew of the “monster’s existence, they all lived, for the most part, geographically distant from its ubiquitous threat.”<sup>21</sup> Milburn Crowe, John Martin, and Luther Brown refer to Mound Bayou as a city of sanctuary, refuge, and oasis:

At a time when blacks faced repercussions as severe as unemployment, eviction, or even death just for registering to vote, in Mound Bayou they were casting ballots in every election. . . . During the 1950s and ‘60s when the rest of the Delta was a hornet’s nest of intimidation and violence, black visitors and those sympathetic to the cause for racial equality knew they could find refuge there. Emmett Till’s mother, Mamie Till, stayed there when she came down from Chicago to testify in the trial, two counties over, of the two white men who lynched her 14 year old son.<sup>22</sup>

This positive and affirming social milieu for blacks in the town of Mound Bayou was a direct result of the moral example, work ethic, and strong leadership of Smith’s father, Perry M. Smith and other men in Mound Bayou. To understand the praxis of Smith and the forces responsible for his Christian worldview, his belief of communal responsibility, and his passion for social activism and preaching, it is necessary to provide a brief history of the fraternal organization, the Knights and Daughters of Tabor. This powerful fraternal organization was only second to the church as the most prodigious organization in Mound Bayou. Smith’s father was leader and principle founder of the famous Taborian Hospital, the most notable undertaking in this history of Mound Bayou.

Perry M. Smith, held the title of Chief Grand Mentor of the Knights and Daughters of Tabor for over sixty-five years and earned the respect as the most influential and powerful person in Mound Bayou.<sup>23</sup> The Knights and Daughters of Tabor was

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<sup>21</sup> Paris, “The Theology and Ministry of Kelly Miller Smith,” 6.

<sup>22</sup> Crowe, Martin, and Brown, “The Mound Bayou Mississippi Story,” 1.

<sup>23</sup> P. M. Smith, widely known as “Sir P.M.” succeeded his father in holding the title of Chief Grand Mentor of the Knights and Daughters of Tabor. He held the title until his death in 1970, at the age of ninety-four. David T. Beito and Linda Royster Beito, *Black Maverick: T. R. M. Howard’s Fight for Civil Rights and Economic Power* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 46-47; David T. Beito, *From*

founded in St. Louis in the mid-nineteenth century by Rev. Moses Dickson (1824-1901), an ordained minister in the African Methodist Episcopal Church.<sup>24</sup> During the era of slavery, Dickson devised a plan to overthrow the inhumane institution by enlisting twelve men from eight pro-slavery states.<sup>25</sup> On August 12, 1846, twelve men gathered in St. Louis to hear Dickson's plan and to pledge their lives to fearlessly fight to end the dark night of slavery. According to the *Manual of the International Order of Twelve Knights and Daughters of Tabor*, in 1856, the total number of Knights of Tabor totaled 47,000.<sup>26</sup> Organized throughout the slave states, these brave men stood in readiness waiting on Dickson to give the battle cry to overthrow slavery throughout the South. The call never came.<sup>27</sup> However, by the time of the Civil War, the Knights of Tabor, totaling 147,200, joined the Union Army to fight for their freedom.<sup>28</sup> Paris states, "In 1872 the organization became a benevolent order with the aim of serving the needs of black people."<sup>29</sup>

The Knights and Daughters of Tabor served the black town of Mound Bayou with dutiful superintendence by providing aid to the residence, but most importantly, as stated by Beito, "the society dedicated itself to Christianity, education, morality and temperance and the art of governing, self-reliance and true manhood and womanhood."<sup>30</sup>

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*Mutual Aid to the Welfare State: Fraternal Societies and Social Services, 1890-1967* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 182, Kindle.

<sup>24</sup> Beito, *From Mutual Aid to the Welfare State*, 182.

<sup>25</sup> Beito, *From Mutual Aid to the Welfare State*, 182.

<sup>26</sup> Moses Dickson, *Manual of the International Order of Twelve Knights and Daughters of Tabor* (St. Louis: A. R. Fleming & Co., 1891), 14, accessed June 15, 2019, <https://archive.org/details/manualofinternat00interich/page/5>.

<sup>27</sup> Dickson, *Manual of the International Order*, 14-15.

<sup>28</sup> Paris, "The Theology and Ministry of Kelly Miller Smith," 8.

<sup>29</sup> Paris, "The Theology and Ministry of Kelly Miller Smith," 8.

<sup>30</sup> Beito, *From Mutual Aid to the Welfare State*, 182.

The greatest achievement of the Mississippi Jurisdiction of the Knights and Daughters of Tabor, and the crown jewel of Mound Bayou, was the Taborian Hospital. The founding and construction of the Taborian Hospital was in response to the lack of quality health care afforded black citizens in state and private hospitals across the country due to segregation laws under the system of Jim Crow.<sup>31</sup> In the state of Mississippi, black citizens were often denied medical attention, from the most minor of injuries and sicknesses to life threatening illness and injuries. Beito reports, “In Bolivar County twenty beds were designated for blacks in private and public hospitals. Those beds served a black population of approximately 52,000.”<sup>32</sup> Paris states, “Under the leadership of Sir Perry M. Smith, the Knights and Daughters of Tabor founded the Taborian Hospital in Mound Bayou, to mention only one of their many achievements.”<sup>33</sup> Beito captures this defining moment:

In 1942 more than 7,000 black people gathered in the small town of Mound Bayou, Mississippi, to celebrate the opening of the Taborian Hospital. The project had been undertaken by the Mississippi Jurisdiction of the International Order of Twelve Knights and Daughters of Tabor. To many celebrants it seemed a miracle. Through their combined efforts they had raised enough money to build a hospital in one of the poorest counties in the nation. For the first time, men and women could visit a doctor by walking through the front door rather than the side entrance for the “colored section.”<sup>34</sup>

Without a doubt, by the perpetual reminders of the intellectual, moral, and paternal example of Mound Bayou’s founders, and the grit and determinism of Mound Bayou’s leaders, such as his father and T. R. M. Howard, Smith’s worldview and hermeneutical presuppositions were being formed long before he received the call to preach. The undergirding principles of Smith’s prophetic radicalism was influenced by his being raised in a Christian home that demonstrated outstanding moral, civic, and intellectual capacities. The witness of Mound Bayou served to undergird the biblical truth

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<sup>31</sup> Beito, *From Mutual Aid to the Welfare State*, 183.

<sup>32</sup> Beito, *From Mutual Aid to the Welfare State*, 183.

<sup>33</sup> Paris, “The Theology and Ministry of Kelly Miller Smith,” 9.

<sup>34</sup> Beito, *From Mutual Aid to the Welfare State*, 181.

of the *imago Dei* and served to shape his anthropological understanding, thus leading eventually to his advocacy of justice. His social crisis preaching construct, rooted in Scripture, proved to be essential during a time when racism and the injustices perpetrated by racism was being undergirded by both theology and science. Paris explains, “The logic of the system was based on the proposition that blacks were not fully a part of the human race, a view that frequently sought legitimation in both science and religion.”<sup>35</sup>

### **Post-Mound Bayou**

Smith left Mound Bayou in 1938, armed with the biblically-supported view of the inherent worth of all humanity, which was influenced by the teachings in his Christian home. His exodus from the Mississippi Delta was also rooted in an ethnic self-understanding and racial consciousness implanted in his spirit by the stellar achievements and moral courage of the Order of Twelve of Knights and Daughters of Tabor.

Smith had plans to be a professional musician when he left Mound Bayou to matriculate at Tennessee State University in Nashville.<sup>36</sup> Smith’s stellar academic training took place in the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) of Tennessee State University, Morehouse College, and Howard University.<sup>37</sup> After Smith received the

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<sup>35</sup> Peter Paris, *The Social Teaching of the Black Churches* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 4.

<sup>36</sup> Kelly Miller Smith, Jr., informs, “If he had not gone into the ministry, he said, that his real passion was to be a jazz musician.” Kelly Miller Smith, Jr. and Alice Smith, interview with author, Griggs Hall, American Baptist College, Nashville, May 30, 2019. Also see “A Memorial to the Life and Ministry of Kelly Miller Smith, Sr.,” obituary, *Nashville Spotlight*, July 30, 1984, Vanderbilt University, Jean and Alexander Heard Library, Special Collections and University Archives, Kelly Miller Smith Papers, box 16, file 22.

<sup>37</sup> Historically Black Colleges and Universities are institutions founded before the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and which had as their primary mission, the training of African Americans. Prior to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (and beyond), African Americans were barred from predominantly white institutions in the US. Smith attended two of the most prestigious HBCU’s in the country, Morehouse College and Howard University. *US News and World Report* ranks Howard University and Morehouse College second and fourth respectively, as the best HBCUs in the country. Briana Boyington and Josh Moody, “Top 10 Historically Black Colleges and Universities,” *US News and World Report*, February 3, 2019, <https://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/slideshows/top-10-historically-black-colleges-and-universities>

call to the preaching ministry, he transferred to Morehouse College in Atlanta in 1940, graduating in 1942 with a bachelor's degree, where he double majored in Religion and Music. Smith joined the cavalry of Morehouse Men, which included Howard Thurman, Mordecai Johnson, and Martin Luther King, Jr., known for combatting social injustice with intellectual acumen and skillful rhetoric and writing. Barry Everett Lee informs,

Morehouse comported with his middle-class upbringing and, no doubt, attracted Smith with its aura and mystique. African American men who graduated from Morehouse became "Morehouse Men," young men cultivated to be social and civic role models in their communities. . . . Smith's grandfather and father had already demonstrated this ethos and Morehouse only reinforced what was already Smith's family legacy.<sup>38</sup>

Smith's matriculation in theological studies, which led to the Master of Divinity, took place at Howard University in 1945. Howard University awarded him with an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree in 1976. Smith also studied at Vanderbilt University in 1955, and Harvard University as a Merrill Fellow in 1967.<sup>39</sup>

Smith's pastoral ministry began back in his home state of Mississippi at Mound Heroden Baptist Church in Vicksburg, two hours south of Mound Bayou. Smith was the pastor of Mound Heroden from 1946-1951. During this tenure, he launched a lifelong career in the academy, serving as head of the religion department at Natchez College from 1946-1948.<sup>40</sup> While pastoring Mound Heroden, Smith married Alice Mae Clark, a native of Jackson, Mississippi, in 1950. Smith left his native Mississippi in 1951 for the call of ministry at First Baptist Church Capitol Hill in Nashville, and for further work in the academies of Nashville, most notably at American Baptist Theological College and eventually for his groundbreaking work at Vanderbilt Divinity School.

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<sup>38</sup> Lee, "The Nashville Civil Rights Movement," 56-57.

<sup>39</sup> "A Memorial to the Life and Ministry of Kelly Miller Smith, Sr."

<sup>40</sup> Lee, "The Nashville Civil Rights Movement," 57.

## **First Baptist Church, Capitol Hill**

On May 6, 1951, Smith became the pastor of First Baptist Church, Capitol Hill. He remained there for thirty-three years, until his death in 1984. Smith's presence was felt immediately at First Baptist Church and in Nashville, exclaims his church: "In his two years of service at First Baptist Church, has nearly tripled the church membership roll, and the financial status, and his by his profound exposition of the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, attracted many visitors from far and near to the church services."<sup>41</sup> Smith's tenure catapulted him into one of the most pivotal position in the Civil Rights Era and proved to cement his legacy as one of the nation's most sought-after preachers. Lee contends that Smith's move to Nashville led

to his ascendancy as the most important Black churchman in Nashville and one of the most dynamic Black Baptist preachers in the country by the 1950s. Smith's church became the nerve center of the Nashville movement while he functioned as the driving force. Therefore, he and First Baptist Church became a force around which the local civil rights movement coalesced.<sup>42</sup>

Smith's tenure with First Baptist Church, Capitol Hill, was harmonious and loving. According to Smith's widow, Alice Smith, "they respected him to the utmost degree, because of his commitment to their welfare beyond the church."<sup>43</sup> In 1963, Smith was called to become the pastor of one of the largest African American churches in the country, Antioch Baptist Church in Cleveland, Ohio. However, after only three months, Smith sensed that his work in Nashville was not complete, and since First Baptist Church, Capitol Hill had not yet chosen a successor for Smith, according to John Britton, they "voted to re-call their beloved minister, with only about 25 objections out of over

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<sup>41</sup> First Baptist Church Pastor Anniversary Committee, "Second Anniversary Services, March 8, 1953, First Baptist Church Honors It's First Family," Kelly Miller Smith Papers, Jean and Alexander Heard Library," Vanderbilt University, Jean and Alexander Heard Library, Special Collections and University Archives, Kelly Miller Smith Papers, box, 37, file 7.

<sup>42</sup> Lee, "The Nashville Civil Rights Movement," 62.

<sup>43</sup> Smith and Smith, interview.



250 voting.”<sup>44</sup> Smith’s love for his Nashville church, and the unfinished business of racial reconciliation in Nashville, explains why, as Britton states, “Rev. Kelly Miller Smith, of the distinguished Mound Bayou, Miss. Smiths, was about to turn his back on a rich prestigious Cleveland Baptist Church to return to the much smaller congregation, First Baptist.”<sup>45</sup> Among the welcoming party of Smith’s return to Nashville was the clergy community in Nashville. Smith, Jr. states, “Dad had an excellent relationship with both black and white clergy in Nashville. They supported him and his efforts to level the playing field in Nashville, he had a special connection with them, and they shared a mutual respect.”<sup>46</sup> Smith’s acceptance among Nashville’s clergy community was due in part to the description Leila Meier provides of his demeanor, when she insinuates,

The sharing of power was another component of Smith’s leadership style which set him apart and contributed to the fidelity which he inspired. He did not seem to conduct himself as a man who coveted authority; he was more likely than not to give credit to others for achievements in which he himself had played a central role. This attribute made him a natural leader among clergymen, who recognized that he would never consciously abuse his influence and power. the congregation of First Baptist and Nashville’s other supports of civil rights likewise appreciated his qualities of humility, integrity, and generosity, all which intensifies his attraction as a moral example and trustworthy chieftain.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> John Britton, ‘Why Minister Quit \$1 Million Baptist Church,’ *Jet*, January 23, 1964, 18-26. Smith’s son, Kelly Miller Smith, Jr. also recalls stories of his family’s unannounced departure from Antioch Baptist Church on a Sunday morning after his father’s sermon. Britton’s article in *Jet* includes an interview with Smith, with questions focusing on the reason of his return to First Baptist Church, Capitol Hill. Britton states, “At Antioch, Smith presided over 2,670 members. He commanded a \$10,000 salary, plus \$250 monthly living expenses. A 17-year old credit union at Antioch has assets estimated at over \$400,000. The edifice and all its equipment might add up to a half-million dollars, if not more. First Baptist is indeed modest in comparison. It has 450 members, no credit union, and a church valued at about \$100,000.” Britton, ‘Why Minister Quit \$1 Million Baptist Church,’ 25-26.

<sup>45</sup> Britton, “Why Minister Quit \$1 Million Baptist Church,” 18.

<sup>46</sup> Smith and Smith, interview.

<sup>47</sup> Meier, “‘A Different Kind of Prophet,’” 22.

## Family Life and Ecclesial Impact

Most impressive about Smith's calling and career in Nashville is the fact that there have never been any reports of scandal, impropriety, or moral failings. Smith never allowed the consuming time demands of the pastorate and activist roles to invade and infect his home life. Smith's widow, Alice Smith, reports that they had dinner as a family at the table every night and "he never allowed his work to take him away from home for long periods of time."<sup>48</sup> Smith, Jr. recalls that his father took them on vacations every year, and that his fondest memories of his father are the games they played as a family and the songs they would often sing around the piano at home.<sup>49</sup>

These displays of paternal fidelity and marital faithfulness reflect the impact Smith's father and the men of Mound Bayou had on his life. Moreover, Smith was a shining example of pastoral leadership and civic exemplar. Darrell W. Johnson describes this example as "the life of the preacher is lived in the gospel."<sup>50</sup>

Most importantly, even these common and normal acts of familial fidelity were radical acts of resistance against a narrative in the 1950s and 1960s that caricatured black families as lacking these qualities. In the Moynihan Report, Patrick Moynihan admits the difficulty of white Americans to understand some of the systemic causes to the plight of black families: "It is more difficult, however, for whites to perceive the effect that three centuries of exploitation have had on the fabric of Negro society itself. Here the consequences of the historic injustices done to Negro Americans are silent and hidden from view."<sup>51</sup> *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, which later came to be

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<sup>48</sup> Smith and Smith, interview.

<sup>49</sup> Smith and Smith, interview.

<sup>50</sup> Darrell W. Johnson, *The Glory of Preaching: Participating in God's Transformation of the World* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2009), 201.

<sup>51</sup> Patrick Moynihan, *The Moynihan Report: The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (New York: Cosimo Reports, 2018), 5.

known as the ‘Moynihan Report,’ is a controversial document that exacerbated an already racially polarized society and a less than stellar narrative about the black family.<sup>52</sup> In 1965, Assistant Secretary of Labor, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, produced, according to James T. Patterson, a “seventy-eight-page report, which painted a dismal portrait of lower-class black family life in the inner cities.”<sup>53</sup>

Smith defied those narratives not only in his social crisis preaching, but with his life, which is a critical quality of “root work”—one of Massey’s aspects of radicality. The congregational context of Smith’s preaching reaffirmed before a group of predominantly black worshippers that African American fathers were raising families and leading Christian homes. Since, at the time, there were a few white members at First Baptist Church, Capitol Hill, whites were also able to witness the integrity of Smith as a family man and the solid family structure of many other black families under his leadership. Smith’s life demonstrated the best of humanity and Christian values, embodied in a black man and his family. Meier states, “Smith commanded the respect and inspired the pride of the affluent and the needy, blue-collar and professional, illiterate and college-educated; out of these sometimes-contentious forces he constructed a unified front.”<sup>54</sup>

As a respected family man, Smith’s character and integrity aided his proclamation effectiveness. Smith possessed the artistic proofs of persuasion touted by the ancient Greek rhetoricians—logos, pathos, and ethos—qualities that every social

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<sup>52</sup> See United States Department of Labor, Office of Planning and Research, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Library, 1965). Most controversial about The Moynihan Report’s was Senator Moynihan’s narrative concerning female-headed households and the lack of males leading and living in black homes. Moynihan framed this issue as a matter of personal responsibility without addressing the historical institutional barriers that served to dismantle African American families.

<sup>53</sup> James T. Patterson, *Freedom Is Not Enough: The Moynihan Report and America’s Struggle over Black Family Life—from LBJ to Obama* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), preface, Kindle.

<sup>54</sup> Meier, “‘A Different Kind of Prophet,’” 20.

crisis preacher needs in order to be effective.<sup>55</sup> His ethical example provided trust and validation from every community in Nashville. Abraham Kuruvilla underscores this truth: “Without ethos, without the moral grounding of a speaker, every rhetorical transaction, including preaching, though it be a powerful communication, is only demagoguery.”<sup>56</sup> Smith’s intellectual acumen, the passion in which he preached from the biblical text, and his character, commanded trust and respect. Those rhetorical qualities exuding through his social crisis preaching also sought to confront and change those negative narratives. Smith’s acclaim as a preacher of national renown is complemented by his moral fortitude and uncompromising integrity, neither of which can be forfeited by the preacher.

Smith’s commitment to his role as pastor of First Baptist Church, Capitol Hill, displayed a particular ecclesiological praxis that commits evangelical Christianity to be involved with people afflicted through social crisis, therefore joining the spiritual and the social. For Smith, engagement of the social is a reflection of spirituality. The church should be engaged in social crisis, following the example of Jesus Christ. The words of Jesus resound, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed” (Luke 4:18). According to Dale P.

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<sup>55</sup> With the arrangement of a rhetorical piece being *exordium, narration, proposition, probation, refutation, and peroration*, Ben Witherington states, “What primarily determines the character of a piece of rhetoric was not whether it has all the elements of the standard textbook arrangement of speech. One or more of those elements were often omitted in actual speeches and in all the elements the speaker attended to the matters of *ēthos*, *logos*, and *pathos*.” Ben Witherington III, *Conflict & Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 44. Rhetoric played a powerful and pervasive role in first-century Greco-Roman society. As a result, the orator was required to be sort of “a jack of all trades,” to acquire knowledge in ideas and language. He had to possess an encyclopedic knowledge of a wide variety of subjects, a profound understanding of his listeners, and an ability to express himself masterfully in language. Aristotle’s classical modes of persuasion, *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos* were employed by most serious orators of his day. *Ethos* is the perceived character of the speaker. *Pathos* resides in the hearer and is stirred by the orator, while *logos* is the logic and reason embedded in the content of the message.

<sup>56</sup> Abraham Kuruvilla, *A Vision for Preaching: Understanding the Heart of Pastoral Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), 43.

Andrews, the ecclesiology of the black church is distinct because “the self-image of black churches involves a caring community that cultivates both spiritual and social liberation.”<sup>57</sup> Few systematic theologies articulate the role and function of the church in times of social crisis. This ecclesiological approach has generated competing voices among some of the most reputable scholars.

Smith’s theology is evangelical. His theology on major doctrinal subjects, such as the authority of Scripture, the deity of Christ, Trinitarian theology, and salvation, mirror the tenets of evangelical theology. His ecclesiology, however, takes on a different form of application. In his lecture, “The Black Church Applying the Gospel,” Smith says,

I submit that the black religious experience and the white religious experience in America are vastly different, that they work towards different goals, that the image of such experiences is quite different in the different communities. The black church was born as a protest movement and has, therefore, always been more or less on the case for liberation. The white church has hardly ever had the cause of liberation on its agenda at all.<sup>58</sup>

His doctrinal positions are reflective in his preaching as well as his writing. Smith argues, “Black Baptist agree with the ‘Moral Majority’ on such doctrinal matters as ‘belief in God, The Holy Spirit, The Deity of Jesus Christ, The Fall of Man, The Doctrine of Sin, Salvation, Redemption, etc. . . . [However], there are wide divergences in our teachings and practices in the areas of social concern, racism, politics, etc.’”<sup>59</sup> For Smith, in times of social crisis, the church joins God in the liberation of people both spiritually and socially through the liberating power of Jesus Christ and the ethical teachings in the New Testament. According to Smith, the church “has served as a liberating

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<sup>57</sup> Dale P. Andrews, *Practical Theology for Black Churches: Bridging Black Theology and African American Folk Religion* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 8.

<sup>58</sup> Kelly Miller Smith, “The Black Church Applying the Gospel” (lecture delivered at First Baptist Church Capitol Hill, n.d.), 2, Vanderbilt University, Jean and Alexander Heard Library, Special Collections and University Archives, Kelly Miller Smith Papers, box 27, file 1.

<sup>59</sup> Kelly Miller Smith, “Religion as a Force in Black America,” paper, 14, Vanderbilt University, Jean and Alexander Heard Library, Special Collections and University Archives, Kelly Miller Smith Papers, box, 114, file, 9.

force within the Black community—a place of refuge. . . . The greatest expansion in the work of the church is in the area of social ministry. Here the physical and emotional as well as the spiritual needs of the community are met.”<sup>60</sup> Smith did not interpret the fundamentalist and conservative voices of his day with sharing this ecclesiology. Peter Paris, Smith’s colleague at Vanderbilt Divinity School and close friend, describes Smith’s ecclesiology: “The foundational source of authority for Kelly Smith’s ecclesiology was the Bible because he believed that the biblical message was redemptively correlated with the needs of African Americans.”<sup>61</sup> His frustration with the religious right is luminous when he expresses,

There is an absence of humaneness in the proclamations and protestations of the spokespersons of some sections of the religio-political right. While we know that we cannot absolutize on this, it is generally known and conceded that conservatism and a passion for human rights do not ordinarily abide in the same ideological entity. We do not deny that there are exceptions. As a general rule, however, conservatism is bad news for the oppressed, the poor, ethnic minorities and others whose fare is greatly conditioned by the issue of humanness.<sup>62</sup>

Smith criticizes the towering evangelical theologian Carl F. H. Henry based on Henry’s dichotomizing of spiritual and social concerns. Smith writes,

In view of Jesus showing that his social ministry is based upon the anointment by the spirit and is not in opposition to it, how can conservatives act as if those matters which pertain to human liberation are somehow off limits for those with “spiritual” concern? Carl F. H. Henry has a strange position. In “Evangelicals at the Brink of Crisis,” he allows social and political action to come under his “permissive will” and even comes to the brink of giving such action his blessing. Yet, for some curious reason, he considers such action as off limits for the church. The gospel, then, becomes applicable to the individual, but not to the agency to which he relates as a Christian. There must be some brilliant reasoning here, but it eludes me.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> W. R. Robinson, “The Black Preacher: Man for All Seasons,” *The Message Magazine* 28, no. 2 (1982). Vanderbilt University, Jean and Alexander Heard Library, Special Collections and University Archives, Kelly Miller Smith Papers, box 43, file 12.

<sup>61</sup> Paris, “The Theology and Ministry of Kelly Miller Smith,” 11.

<sup>62</sup> Kelly Miller Smith, “Perspectives on the New Religious Right” (lecture delivered at Vanderbilt Divinity School, n.d.), 3, Vanderbilt University, Jean and Alexander Heard Library, Special Collections and University Archives, Kelly Miller Smith Papers, box 27, file 8.

<sup>63</sup> Smith, “The Black Church Applying the Gospel.”

Paris further states concerning Smith's ecclesiology, "In Smith's ecclesiology the black church have been called into existence by God and charged to be faithful institutional ambassadors in the service of God's justice by rendering faithful opposition to all forms of injustice."<sup>64</sup>

### **Smith among the Theologians: A Conversation in Ecclesiology**

Two dominant theological voices of the twentieth century that loom large and share ecclesiological convictions with Smith are Karl Barth (1886-1968) and Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945). Barth recognizes social justice as a responsibility of the church in his essay entitled, "The Christian Community and the Civil Community," where he writes,

The church must concentrate first on the lower and lowest levels of human society. The poor, the socially and economically weak and threatened, will always be the object of its primary and particular concern, and it will always insist on the state's special responsibility for these weaker members of society. . . . The church . . . will always choose the movement from which it can expect the greatest measure of social justice (leaving all other consideration on the side).<sup>65</sup>

These ecclesiological convictions that the church has a duty to the lowest members of society were not shared with Barth's opponents who presupposed to keep the gospel separate of social and political affairs. Petitioning more social engagement from the church, Barth writes, "Consider, then, whether as followers of Jesus you ought to bring more understanding, more goodwill, more participation in the movement for social justice in time than you have up to now."<sup>66</sup> Smith and Barth understood the church to be solely under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Barth asserts, "The church must remain the

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<sup>64</sup> Paris, "The Theology and Ministry of Kelly Miller Smith," 12.

<sup>65</sup> Karl Barth, 'The Christian Community and the Civil Community,' in *Karl Barth: Theologian of Freedom*, ed. Clifford Green, The Making of Modern Theology Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Text (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 284.

<sup>66</sup> Karl Barth, 'Jesus Christ and the Movement for Social Justice,' in Green, *Karl Barth: Theologian of Freedom*, 113.

church. The Christian community has a task of which the civil community can never relieve it and which it can never pursue in the forms peculiar to the civil community. It proclaims the rule of Jesus Christ and the hope of the Kingdom of God.”<sup>67</sup>

Likewise, much of what can be said about Barth’s views of the church can be applied to Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s ecclesiology. The influence of the black church, through Bonhoeffer’s African American classmate, Frank Fisher, and the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, New York, in 1930-1931 upon Bonhoeffer’s ecclesiology, has been undervalued and largely ignored.<sup>68</sup> However, J. Deotis Roberts explains, “Attending this church [Abyssinian Baptist Church], listening to the sermons of Adam Clayton Powell Sr., and teaching Sunday School made Bonhoeffer sensitive to the depths of the racial divide in the United States. . . . Bonhoeffer was a different person when he returned from America.”<sup>69</sup> Bonhoeffer states, “Only in the Negro churches did he find that they spoke and heard in a Christian way of sin and grace and love toward God and the final hope.”<sup>70</sup> Bonhoeffer had a deep disdain for the liberal theology of Harry Emerson Fosdick, and he found in the black church a theology rooted in Scripture, sufficient to address racial injustice.

The connection of Bonhoeffer’s ecclesiology and that of the black church that influenced Smith is the Christian ethic of love. Love requires duty and obedience, such as seen in the example of Jesus in the Gospels (John 3:16, 14:21, 15:13; Matt 20:28). Love

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<sup>67</sup> Barth, “The Christian Community and The Civil Community,” 272.

<sup>68</sup> For texts which focus primarily on the impact of Abyssinian Baptist Church, racism in New York and the United States, and the spirituals in the black church upon Bonhoeffer’s theology, see J. Deotis Roberts, *Bonhoeffer & King: Speaking Truth to Power* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005); Reggie L. Williams, *Bonhoeffer’s Black Jesus: Harlem Renaissance Theology and an Ethic of Resistance* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014); and Willis Jenkins and Jennifer M. McBride, ed., *Bonhoeffer and King: Their Legacies and Import for Christian Social Thought* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010).

<sup>69</sup> Roberts, *Bonhoeffer & King*, 21.

<sup>70</sup> E. H. Robertson, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (London: Carey Kingsgate, 1966), 17.



calls the Christian beyond the narrow confines of individualism and into community participation and actions on behalf of the community. Bonhoeffer writes, “The church is the church only when it exists for others. . . . The church must share in the secular problems of ordinary human life, not dominating but helping and serving. It must tell men of every calling what it means to live in Christ, to exist for others.”<sup>71</sup> Like Smith, Bonhoeffer felt that the call of the gospel is also a call to stand with victims of social crisis as it propels the Christian to act on their behalf. Furthermore, he informs,

There are three possible ways in which the church can act toward the state: in the first place, as has been said, it can ask the state whether its actions are legitimate and in accordance with its character as state. . . . Second it can aid the victims of state action. The church has an unconditional obligation to the victims of any ordering of society, even if they do not belong to the Christian community. The third possibility is not just to bandage the victims under the wheel, but to jam a spoke in the wheel itself. Such action would be direct political action, and is possible and desirable when the church sees the state fail in its function of creating law and order.<sup>72</sup>

These theological actions are the result of reflective actions, as the preacher understands a direct correlation between doctrine, confession, and ministry as they relate to the social. Smith’s most impactful expression of this concept became manifest in his tenures at American Baptist Theological College and Vanderbilt Divinity School.

### **Scholar and Activist: American Baptist Theological College and Vanderbilt Divinity School**

Smith’s social crisis ministry extended to the classroom. Smith held key positions of leadership at American Baptist Theological College (later and currently named American Baptist College) and Vanderbilt Divinity School. American Baptist College and Vanderbilt Divinity School employed Smith as professor and Assistant Dean and lecturer

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<sup>71</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Letters to Eberhard Bethge,” in *A Testament of Freedom: The Essential Writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelly and F. Burton Nelson (New York: HarperOne, 1995), 512.

<sup>72</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “The Church and the Jewish Question,” in Kelly and Nelson, *A Testament of Freedom*, 132.

respectively. However, within Nashville, Smith's reach extended well beyond these two institutions and into several HBCUs in Nashville, as student activists from the surrounding HBCU colleges desired participation in the move for equality and justice through Nashville's sit-ins.<sup>73</sup>

Smith's role and influence as pastor of First Baptist Church, Capitol Hill, and professor at American Baptist College galvanized college students from all over Nashville into social activism. Lee claims,

The ties between student activist and the local churches went even deeper when one considers that many of the primary leaders such as Lewis, Vivian, Bevel, and LaFayette attended ABT [American Baptist College] where Reverend Smith was one of their professors. In making the connection, James Bevel, recalled that "the first Baptist Church basically had the Baptist people who went to Fisk and Meharry and Tennessee State, and the seminary were basically members of his church. Therefore . . . attending First Colored Baptist inevitably meant being introduced to the movement."<sup>74</sup>

At American Baptist College, Smith joined with and led an activist delegation of students that included C. T. Vivian, James M. Lawson, John Lewis, Bernard LaFayette, James Bevel, and Diane Nash, who would each later hold prominent positions on the national civil rights stage, and Lewis eventually becoming a United States Congress Representative (D-GA, 1987-). Like Smith, each of these key individuals who served in the Nashville movement came to Nashville to pursue careers in ministry but considered activism as much a part of ministry as verbally spreading the Good News. Lee explains,

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<sup>73</sup> Sit-ins were a non-violent, direct-action tactic, mostly held in lunch counters, restaurants, and other business establishments that did not serve blacks, or which did not serve blacks as dine in customers. Chet Huntley informs, "The sit-in is the dramatic spearhead of a changing mood, and behind it is the Negro's growing awareness of their economic power; the ultimate weapon in achieving, without violence, what they feel is their right. What we are witnessing is a new kind of militancy and with it a new kind of solider." Chet Huntley, *NBC White Papers #2*, produced by Al Wasserman for NBC, 1960, VHS provided by Kelly Miller Smith, Jr. This documentary, taped in 1960, focused on the sit-in movement in Nashville from the first sit-in, in February 1960 to April 19, 1960. This documentary featured footage of actual sit-ins, interviews from Kelly Miller Smith, Sr. and the student activists, as well as white citizens who supported integration and desegregation. Interviews from Nashville's segregationist politicians, citizens who supported segregation, as well as business owners who were proponents of segregation were also in the footage.

<sup>74</sup> Lee, "The Nashville Civil Rights Movement," 190.

“Because most of these individuals not only understood the concept of providence but also hoped for careers in the ministry, their activism should be considered in that context and should be evaluated as intertwined with and guided by force they considered beyond their control.”<sup>75</sup> Beyond the classroom, The Nashville Student Movement provided the extension for Smith’s social crisis ministry. The Nashville Student Movement was a result of the Nashville Leadership Training Model, which according to Lee was “too indigenous adults and a small group of college students who were drawn to the city by the forces of providence and trained them for roles as activist.”<sup>76</sup>

This movement’s most powerful feature was the “sit-ins,” whereby Smith and James Lawson provided training according to the principles of non-violent resistance, propagated by Mahatma Ghandi. During the early 1960s, the sit-ins in Nashville became the model for sit-ins across the country. According to Lee, “the Nashville sit-in movement proved to be the most organized, disciplined, and effective sit-in campaign in the entire nation.”<sup>77</sup> Lee further admits that the Nashville training model gave “Nashville cornerstone status in terms of the sit-ins.”<sup>78</sup> Ultimately, these sit-ins, which targeted the lunch counters of the city’s two largest department stores and four variety stores, were responsible for making Nashville the first major city in the South to integrate lunch counters, on May 10, 1960.<sup>79</sup>

During the late 1950s, Nashville’s resistance to desegregation became violent. Smith’s oldest daughter, Joy, became the first African American child to enroll in an all-

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<sup>75</sup> Lee, “The Nashville Civil Rights Movement,” 55.

<sup>76</sup> Lee, “The Nashville Civil Rights Movement,” 4-5.

<sup>77</sup> Lee, “The Nashville Civil Rights Movement,” 114.

<sup>78</sup> Lee, “The Nashville Civil Rights Movement,” 5.

<sup>79</sup> Huntley, *NBC White Papers* #2.

white school on September 9, 1957.<sup>80</sup> Smith's involvement in desegregation prompted him to form the Nashville Christian Leadership Conference, an affiliate of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, founded by Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1957, after the Montgomery Bus Boycott's successful end on December 20, 1956. Nashville Christian Leadership Conference sponsored the sit-in training at his church, First Baptist Church, Capitol Hill. These sit-ins became pivotal instruments in the racial integration of Nashville's business establishments.<sup>81</sup> Smith's team of student activists and the tactics within the Nashville Student Movement were the byproduct of critical theological reflection (praxis). Lee explains, "Smith's entire career as a minister was defined by this brand of theology. For him and Lawson, politics and ministry were not conflicting social entities but co-dependent social structures in necessary relationship with each other."<sup>82</sup>

Bernard Lafayette, Chairman of the Board for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and Forrest Harris, current president of American Baptist College, remember Smith as a role model, father figure, and scholar from the time they spent as Smith's students at American Baptist Theological College. Harris states, "Smith had a great charisma and was celebrated in Nashville as one who bridged the black and white community. Kelly was the prophetic intellectual activist . . . scholar, activist, preacher"<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Smith and Smith, interview. See also Lee, "The Nashville Civil Rights Movement," chap. 4.

<sup>81</sup> Since this dissertation's focus is primarily preaching, a detailed analysis of Kelly Miller Smith's civil rights work will not be provided. Except to establish Smith's ecclesial praxis, the measure of the man, and to assess how his civil rights activity was an example of "root work," one of the elements of James Earl Massey's sermonic component of radicality, which will be used to examine the prophetic radicality of Smith's social crisis preaching, the primary focus centers on social crisis proclamation. For a detail examination of Smith's role and work in the Nashville Student Movement and the Nashville Civil Rights movement as a whole, see Lee, "The Nashville Civil Rights Movement"; Benjamin Houston, *The Nashville Way: Racial Etiquette and the Struggle for Social Justice in a Southern City* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2012); and Huntley, *NBC White Papers* #2.

<sup>82</sup> Lee, "The Nashville Civil Rights Movement," 130.

<sup>83</sup> Forrest Harris, President, American Baptist College, interview with author, American Baptist College, Nashville, May 30, 2019.

Lafayette boasts, “He commanded the respect of the entire student body, mainly because we knew he cared for us, because he took time to teach beyond the class room . . . he cared for our welfare.”<sup>84</sup>

In June 1969, Walter J. Harrelson, former dean of Vanderbilt Divinity School, hired Smith as the first African American faculty member, Smith was appointed as assistant dean and lecturer in Church and Ministries. Peter Paris describes Smith as “an eloquent orator with rare intellect and astounding persuasive powers” where his “personal attributes of grace, warmth, dignity, and diplomacy commanded the respect of the ruling white elites in the city as well as the entire black community.”<sup>85</sup> In the late 1960s, Vanderbilt was attempting to lead the nation as a racially progressive campus and, according to Paris, “Vanderbilt had desegregated its undergraduate student body and all of its schools.”<sup>86</sup> Smith was responsible for supervising the recruitment of black students and teaching.

Even though the appointment of the most powerful African American in Nashville was a breakthrough for Vanderbilt, it did not come without challenges for Smith. For Smith, neither the Divinity School nor the university had race relations or the expansion of theological studies for minorities as a budgetary priority. Smith’s former student and mentee, Forrest Harris reports that Smith did not have a budget in the first few years of supervising the Black Studies program, and that he would have to go from year to year uncertain of his status as well as the status of the program.<sup>87</sup> This fact is

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<sup>84</sup> Bernard LaFayette, Chairman of the Board, Southern Christian Leadership Conference, telephone interview with author, December 27, 2018.

<sup>85</sup> Peter J. Paris, *Vanderbilt Divinity School: Education, Contest, and Change*, ed. Dale A. Johnson (Nashville: University Press, 2001), 240.

<sup>86</sup> Paris, *Vanderbilt Divinity School*, 241.

<sup>87</sup> Harris, interview.

underscored by Paris' statement: "Harrelson's letter made no mention of benefits or program budget."<sup>88</sup>

Smith's prophetic radicalism and social crisis ministry took a different form at Vanderbilt Divinity School than it did at American Baptist College. At Vanderbilt, Smith's goal was to empower African American divinity students through quality theological education. He also sought to engage and strengthen Nashville's black churches and their pastors through annual conferences, through a hybrid model, which took place on the campus of Vanderbilt as well as in the black churches in the Nashville community.<sup>89</sup> The intentional genius of Smith to expose Vanderbilt to the community and the community to Vanderbilt was part of Smith personal strategic plan to see an integrated Nashville and the formation of a community where both races thrived together in united harmony, especially in the church and academy. Paris states, "Smith's greatest joy in his years at Vanderbilt came from those conferences."<sup>90</sup> At Vanderbilt, Smith established the Black Church Studies program as well as the first program of study in the country on prominent African American theologian and philosopher Howard Thurman.<sup>91</sup>

With the progress at Vanderbilt Divinity also came problems. Paris explains, "Few whites in the Divinity School fully understood or appreciated the import of his work for the life and mission of the school."<sup>92</sup> Smith waged this battle in some measure for the duration of his tenure at Vanderbilt. Smith remained on the faculty at Vanderbilt until his health failed and his passing in 1984. Smith's effort to assist the administration in realizing that racial reconciliation must extend beyond sincere apologies and verbal

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<sup>88</sup> Paris, *Vanderbilt Divinity School*, 241.

<sup>89</sup> Paris, *Vanderbilt Divinity School*, 242.

<sup>90</sup> Paris, *Vanderbilt Divinity School*, 242.

<sup>91</sup> Harris, interview.

<sup>92</sup> Paris, *Vanderbilt Divinity School*, 242.

platitudes, and into substantial and sustainable financial investments sufficient to address centuries of injustice, paid off. Vanderbilt committed memorials to Smith's legacy with the inauguration of the Kelly Miller Smith Institute on the Black Church, as well as the Kelly Miller Smith Research Collection in the Jean and Alexander Heard Library, on April 25, 1985.

The accolades and awards for Smith are too numerous to catalog in this dissertation. His name is immortalized in Mound Bayou and Nashville. The far-reaching impact of his pastoral ministry, intellectual contributions, and social crisis ministry are uncalculatable, and the impact of the prophetic radicalism in his social crisis preaching is the task of this dissertation.

### **James Earl Massey**

On July 25, 2016, my wife and I had the opportunity to deliver a mahogany clock to James Earl Massey as a seventy-fifth preaching anniversary gift from Robert Smith, Jr. Engraved on the gold plate under the clock was Psalms 75:24, "You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory." These sacred words represent the manner in which James Earl Massey lived: *sub specie aeternitatis*, under the light of eternity. Massey is revered as one of America's foremost theologians and churchmen. An analysis of his ecclesial context and cultural environ disclose factors that shaped his ecclesiology and influenced his devotion to a passionate and scholarly prophetic radicalism.<sup>93</sup> As a biblical and homiletic scholar of world renown, Massey's contribution to this dissertation, through providing unparalleled sermonic critique, is invaluable. Massey's commitment to "holiness and unity," the two major tenants the Church of God,

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<sup>93</sup> James Earl Massey's life story and background will not be treated with the same detail and expansion of Kelly Miller Smith in this dissertation. Since Massey is not under critique in this dissertation, a brief synopsis of his highly impactful life will be undertaken, specifically to answer the research question, posed in chap. 1. It is imperative to share the stories, events, and experiences concerning Massey in this section to lay a foundation of his ecclesiology and the formation of his sermonic component of radicalism, which is the instrument to measure the social crisis preaching of Kelly Miller Smith. Massey has written an insightful autobiography: *Aspects of My Pilgrimage*.

were the principle elements of a theology that he used to radically challenge injustice in the church and society. Massey confronted injustice with theological accuracy, while possessing a quiet, dignified, yet serious demeanor, that demanded respect and hearing. Few have rivaled his contributions to theological education and to the academy. According to Barry L. Callen, he was academic lecturer, visiting professor, or guest preacher at over one hundred colleges, universities, and seminaries, and his most cherished professional title is “Dean Emeritus & Distinguished Professor-at-Large, Anderson University School of Theology.”<sup>94</sup>

### **The Influence of the Church of God (Indiana)**

Massey was born on January 4, 1930, in Detroit, Michigan, to parents that were natives of Alabama. His father migrated to Detroit after being discharged from the United States Army in 1917. Massey’s father, a stern, disciplinarian who, according to Massey, “experienced Christian conversion in Detroit, Michigan in 1920 . . . during a Sunday service of worship at the Church of God of Detroit.”<sup>95</sup> Massey’s father, who was also a preacher within the Church of God denomination, is one of the towering figures that would have a profound impact on his life and preaching.

Like Smith, Massey was surrounded by positive, accomplished, Christian, African American men, who served as models of morality and productivity in a time where those qualities had little to no bearing on social mobility. Unlike Smith, Massey was not exposed to the daily sights and sounds of blatantly brutal Southern racial injustice, though its undeniable existence could not be refuted. Rather, Massey had a vantage point of racial solidarity and equality by being exposed to an integrated Army as a soldier, and as a

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<sup>94</sup> Barry L. Callen and Curtiss Paul DeYoung, eds., *Views from the Mountain: Select Writings of James Earl Massey* (Anderson, IN: Aldersgate, 2018), 19.

<sup>95</sup> Massey, *Aspects of My Pilgrimage*, 11.



lifelong member of the Church of God denomination, which he describes, “What is Afro-American can be in essential agreement with what is Anglo-Saxon when both traditions are informed by agape love.”<sup>96</sup> Massey further reports,

From an early age I was made aware of the Reformation Movement heritage of the God-given call for unity of believers and because most of the members of our local group were Negroes, I was very aware of the Reformation Movement heritage of the God-given call for unity of believers and, because most of the members of our local group were Negroes, I was very aware of Black Church vitality. As for unity, our local group was an interracial fellowship. There were three white families in our church in those days, and the interaction and intimacy seemed natural.<sup>97</sup>

Massey was saved at a Church of God revival meeting at the tender age of six.<sup>98</sup> Recalling his encounter with the Lord, the memory of conversion was etched in Massey’s memory as he “understood the call the preacher made to those needing to ‘come to Christ,’ and I obeyed the prompting I felt within myself to answer that call affirmatively.”<sup>99</sup> Even as an teenager, Massey’s consciousness of God’s presence and call on his life was evident. He contends, “My reaching out to God became especially active in my life in 1944. I had turned fourteen and was sensing the need to determine the direction my life should take.”<sup>100</sup> These spiritual impressions were a byproduct of the emphasis the Church of God denomination placed on the teachings of unity and holiness, and the importance of a disciplined life as the result of the sanctifying work of the Spirit.

Massey sensed the Lord’s prompting and calling to the preaching ministry in 1946, at the age of sixteen. Music had preoccupied Massey’s heart and mind, and since he was already memorizing scores by Bach, Brahms, and Chopin, his desire and destiny was to be an accomplished classical pianist. Massey’s description of his call story is also

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<sup>96</sup> Massey, *Aspects of My Pilgrimage*, 26.

<sup>97</sup> Massey, *Aspects of My Pilgrimage*, 26.

<sup>98</sup> Massey, *Aspects of My Pilgrimage*, 29.

<sup>99</sup> Massey, *Aspects of My Pilgrimage*, 29.

<sup>100</sup> Massey, *Aspects of My Pilgrimage*, 30.

a reflection into his spirituality. Combined with a keen intellect and biblical scholarship, he used this spirituality of holiness to confront and challenge injustice and racism with deliberate prophetic radicalism. Massey describes,

The morning worship was in progress, but my attention was not on God but on a music score I had brought with me that day. It had been my custom to carry a music score with me and use any available time to study it. That day I had with me the score of a waltz by Chopin, and I was deeply engrossed in it, intent to overcome some problem that hindered my memorizing of the piece. But during the brief let up in my concentration on the score, I found myself being captured by the spirit of the worship occasion. As I honed the meaning of the worship hour and opened myself to God, I felt caught up into an almost transfixed state, and I heard a Voice speaking with my consciousness: “I want you to preach!”<sup>101</sup>

Massey did not abandon music altogether. He remained a respectable and skilled classical pianist, but preaching consumed his passion, and the preparation to the call of preaching and later the devotion of preparing others to the preaching ministry, became the paramount priority for the rest of his life. Throughout the years of his early ministry, several men of honor played a role in his theological and homiletical development.

### **Pastoral and Theological Mentors**

Raymond Samuel Jackson was a revered pastor and preacher within the Church of God movement. Massey recalls, “Raymond Jackson was . . . a leader for me after I experienced ‘the call’ to prepare for ministry. He was one of the most successful ministers within the Church of God and was pastoring one of the great churches within the Movement.”<sup>102</sup> Jackson served as Massey’s pastor and mentor, and alongside Massey’s father was a major preaching influence. However, the greatest theological influence on his life was Howard Thurman. In Thurman, Massey sensed a theologian and preacher worthy of emulation. Massey comments, “Thurman helped me to experience spoken truth more vividly than any preacher I had ever heard before.”<sup>103</sup> Thurman embodied a deep

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<sup>101</sup> Massey, *Aspects of My Pilgrimage*, 52.

<sup>102</sup> Massey, *Aspects of My Pilgrimage*, 59.

<sup>103</sup> Massey, *Aspects of My Pilgrimage*, 66.

spirituality and a commitment to the “beloved community,” which resonated with Massey early on in Massey’s preaching ministry. The two men became lifelong friends with Thurman serving as a mentor to and major influence on Massey. After Thurman’s death, Thurman’s widow asked Massey and Smith to officiate Thurman’s memorial service. Thurman met racial injustice head on, not through the brute force of an army of followers, but rather through an appeal to humans to love and to be reconciled. For Thurman, “the discipline of reconciliation for the religious man cannot be separated from the discipline of religious experience.”<sup>104</sup> Thurman’s impact on Massey from their first encounter in 1949, was lasting and deep. Massey’s describes,

Howard Thurman did not preach like most of the African American preachers I had heard. There was no stormy struggle in his manner, no loud blaring of words; his was a rather softly-spoken, assured and assuring witness, a statement that seemed to me more like an “inside word” about some treasured truth and not an outside attempt to break into the truth. His style seemed so uniquely at one with his subject.<sup>105</sup>

Massey served in the Church of God denomination in various service and leadership roles, including the presidency of the National Youth Fellowship, until he was drafted by the United States Army in March 1951.<sup>106</sup> While home on leave after basic training, Massey married Gwendolyn Inez Kirkpatrick on August 4, 1951. His next duty station took Massey to Europe. While in Austria, Massey served as a Chaplain’s Assistant in an integrated Army, under a Chaplain who was white, Southern, and kind to him, and open to racial integration.<sup>107</sup> Massey’s tour of duty in the Army, which ended in February 1953, and his experiences of human relations void of blatant racial hostility, further

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<sup>104</sup> Howard Thurman, *A Strange Freedom: The Best of Howard Thurman on Religious Experience and Public Life*, ed. Walter Earl Fluker and Catherine Tumber (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 179.

<sup>105</sup> Massey, *Aspects of My Pilgrimage*, 66.

<sup>106</sup> Massey, *Aspects of My Pilgrimage*, 67.

<sup>107</sup> Massey, *Aspects of My Pilgrimage*, 89.

confirmed his convictions of the possibilities of multiculturalism within the body of Christ in the United States.

### **Ecumenicism and Evangelicalism**

Massey's return to the Church of God of Detroit after his honorable discharge precipitated a tumultuous set of events that tried his faith and at the same time set him on a trajectory of ministerial acclaim. Massey returned home to serve as Jackson's assistant until Jackson's resignation in August 1953, precipitated by conflict between he and some of the leaders in the Church of God of Detroit congregation. The relationship between Massey and Jackson became strained during this time as well because the church requested Massey to remain as their interim pastor. Massey became the senior pastor of the Church of God of Detroit in 1954 after serving as interim.

The Church of God held some doctrinal teachings and practices that in Massey's estimation were legalistic, such as its strict teachings on modesty, manifested in the restriction of "finger adornments" for married couples. As a pastor within the denomination, he challenged this teaching; both he and his wife choose to wear wedding rings, and he also gave his congregation's married couples the freedom to abide by the traditional teaching of wedding ring restrictions or they could choose to make the wedding ring a symbol of marital fidelity and love. It can be argued that Massey's biblical, yet seemingly too progressive teachings within the denomination on this matter and others was the catalyst for the founding of the Metropolitan Church of God in Detroit in 1954, where Massey spent twenty-two years as senior pastor.

One of the most painful experiences in Massey's denominational tenure centered around his practice and teaching of ecumenicism. Massey reports, "My openness to leaders and believers from other church communions became a problem for some members when they learned that I had been a visitor on several occasions at Bethesda

Missionary Temple, a large church with a Pentecostal orientation.”<sup>108</sup> Shortly after being named the senior pastor at his first pastorate, Church of God of Detroit, Massey’s Michigan denomination sought to censure and remove him as pastor after bitter factions in the church tried to levy charges of “teaching doctrines out of harmony with the doctrinal teachings and practices of the Church of God”<sup>109</sup> because of their disdain of him visiting the local Pentecostal church.

Since unity was a foundational teaching of the Church of God, for Massey, the theme of unity, was “an expression . . . to relate to all of the church and receive from it . . . the need and will to relate with the rest of the church, with all of God’s people.”<sup>110</sup> Four leaders of the church brought a “Bill of Complaint” against him to further his removal as pastor. According to Massey, “the court case against me affected the entire body of Church of God ministers in Michigan, white and black, and the ministers and congregations of the National Association of the Church of God.”<sup>111</sup> After a civil court trial, Massey was exonerated of the charges, but not before, according to his own testimony, “257 persons, together with their families, covenanted together and became the charter members of what we chose to call ‘The Metropolitan Church of God.’”<sup>112</sup>

Massey’s position on ecumenical fellowship and his disdain for racial segregation motivated his prophetic radicality through the pen and pulpit and set the tone for his barrier-less ecclesiology, which was rooted in Ephesians 2:14. Massey and his followers did not break with the Church of God denomination, but rather providentially, Massey was able to envision something that even the earlier founders could not bring to

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<sup>108</sup> Massey, *Aspects of My Pilgrimage*, 127.

<sup>109</sup> Massey, *Aspect of My Pilgrimage*, 134.

<sup>110</sup> Massey, *Aspects of My Pilgrimage*, 130.

<sup>111</sup> Massey, *Aspects of My Pilgrimage*, 137.

<sup>112</sup> Massey, *Aspects of My Pilgrimage*, 139.

pass: an interracial congregation with solid footing in Church of God doctrines, extending love and fellowship to God's people in other denominations. Massey writes,

Metropolitan Church of God, as I envisioned its scope and sought to shape its life and direction, was to be an interracial and cross-cultural fellowship. This was the initial character and the original pattern of the Church of God fellowship at its beginnings in Detroit. Our setting in the Detroit metropolitan area not only allowed for an interracial and cross-cultural congregation, it demanded nothing less. . . . I taught about the New Testament example provided in the Acts account concerning the church at Antioch, a specific biblical instance of what is possible for a diverse people and what that possibility can bring to pass through vital ministry.<sup>113</sup>

Massey's ecumenicism extended to the academy and into other traditions of evangelical Protestantism. As pastor of Metropolitan Church of God, Massey continued his undergraduate degree program which began at the University of Detroit, by transferring to Detroit Bible College, a fundamentalist and interdenominational school. Massey's time at Detroit Bible College was fruitful and enlightening. Detroit Bible College provided Massey with significant mentors among the faculty and an appreciation for evangelical orthodoxy. Massey states,

Among the focal points . . . Detroit Bible College had a theological posture that included: the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures, with the autographs understood as inerrant and completely authoritative in all matters . . . the second coming of Christ as personal in manner . . . the primacy of evangelism and the mandate to witness about Jesus. . . . I appreciated the obvious strengths of the evangelical movement, but I was not blind to its weakness, especially its shortsighted view about how biblical spirituality and social concern relate.<sup>114</sup>

Massey graduated from Detroit Bible College in May 1961, and continued his seminary studies at Oberlin Graduate School of Theology with concentration in biblical languages, and graduating June 1964. In 1972, he was awarded an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree from Asbury Theological Seminary where he also served as trustee, before being named a "Life Trustee."

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<sup>113</sup> Massey, *Aspects of My Pilgrimage*, 147.

<sup>114</sup> Massey, *Aspects of My Pilgrimage*, 190-91.

Besides Massey's distinguished tenure as pastor of Metropolitan Church of God, he was also noted for his service as Dean of the Chapel of Tuskegee University (1984-1989) and Dean of Anderson School of Theology (1989-1995) in Anderson, Indiana. Massey also served as Principal of a School of Theology in Jamaica, and radio speaker for the Church of God on its national program, the Christian Brotherhood Hour.<sup>115</sup> A highlight of Massey's career was his participation in the World Congress on Evangelism in 1966, in Berlin, Germany, at the invitation from Billy Graham and Carl F. H. Henry.<sup>116</sup>

Like Smith, Massey's accolades, especially in the academy, are too numerous to list. Callen states, "On three separate occasions, Massey presented the William E. Conger, Jr. Lectures on Biblical Preaching at Beeson Divinity School. Massey served as senior editor for *Christianity Today*, *Leadership*, *Preaching*, and *The New Interpreter's Bible*."<sup>117</sup> As a published author, Massey has written extensively on preaching, Christian spirituality, and New Testament studies; his eighteen books and countless articles in academic journal ensures his impact in theological education for years to come.

## Conclusion

Smith and Massey share a similar cultural background as well as an ecclesial praxis, which requires prophetic radicalism. In this dissertation, praxis is an indispensable element of prophetic radicality and has been defined in this dissertation as "reflective action." To this end, the social crisis preacher commits to orthopraxy and engages in critical reflection so as to further hone theological practices and preaching for the purpose of effectively addressing social crisis through preaching. Ray S. Anderson explains this truth by stating, "Praxis then reveals theology in a very tangible form. In this sense, actions

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<sup>115</sup> Callen and DeYoung, *Views from the Mountain*, 16.

<sup>116</sup> Massey, *Aspects of My Pilgrimage*, 233.

<sup>117</sup> Callen and DeYoung, *Views from the Mountain*, 16.

themselves are theological and as such are open to theological reflection and critique. Through the praxis of the church is the embodiment of theology.”<sup>118</sup> The content and character of Smith’s social crisis preaching resides in the reflective practices of his social crisis ministry, influenced in large measure by the impact of his life in Mound Bayou, Mississippi. Smith’s radical social ministry at First Baptist Church, Capitol Hill, and his radical involvement as founder, organizer, and administrator of the Nashville Christian Leadership Conference infused his social crisis preaching with insightful biblical application for spiritual transformation and behavioral formation for his weekly congregation. Congressman John Lewis, one of Smith’s mentees in Nashville during the early 1960s, proclaims, “He was committed as much to the needs of the community around him as to the disposition after death of the souls of his congregation.”<sup>119</sup>

In equal measure, Massey’s theology of ecumenicism and evangelicalism reveals an ecclesial praxis in which a spirituality of holiness, reconciliation, and the Word of God is constantly at work. Massey was shaped by the traditions of the Church of God and the African American cultural experience but was not limited to these expressions. Timothy George sums up his ministry,

He was spiritually formed by Wesleyan theology, the Holiness movement, and the African American tradition. . . . The rich spiritual resources of these cultural and church traditions have informed and are still reflected in Massey's approach to ministry and preaching. But there is a sense in which he transcends them all. The quest for authentic Christian unity is a major motif that runs deep through all of Massey's ministry; his work has been at once both evangelical and ecumenical.<sup>120</sup>

Prophetic radicalism is anchored in the conviction that there is inherent value in human life as confirmation of the vision of God for His people. The primary conviction

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<sup>118</sup> Ray S. Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001), 48.

<sup>119</sup> John Lewis, *Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1998), 74.

<sup>120</sup> Timothy George, “Died: James Earl Massey, the Church of God’s ‘Prince of Preachers,’” *Christianity Today*, June 26, 2018, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2018/june/died-james-earl-massey-preacher-church-of-god.html>.



of the preacher who engages in social crisis preaching is founded upon the abiding assurance of one's identity in Christ, in spite of any narrative or myth contrary to that truth. Furthermore, Smith and Massey witnessed, as sons in the black church, the spiritual, moral, and intellectual contributions of their own race, which served as empirical evidence of the worth of all people as creatures of God. Smith and Massey's acute cultural awareness undergirded their personal faith and affirmed their own belief that "God made man in his own image" (Gen 1:27).

For Smith, the embrace of this biblical truth produced both a sacred anthropology from which to view humanity, and at the same time a sacred animus toward the dehumanizing and hypocritical narratives of racial superiority and its manifestation of injustices during his ministry in the Nashville. Therefore, as a social crisis preacher, Smith could affirm the unique cultural distinctives of his mostly African American congregation as part of God's brilliant creation, while submitting to the identity-forming power of the gospel, which through spiritual transformation transcends cultural and social boundaries. Massey captures the essence of Smith's ministry:

Kelly Miller Smith, like many others not so prominent, were African Americans who knew the torments of being viewed and treated as outsiders in the land of their birth simply because they were black. Exposed to racism across their years while seeking to relate to the majority culture, each man had reasons enough to question their sincerity of the American system of democracy, to get side-tracked in lamenting, or to become prickly or even poisoned in disposition. But each one instead drew steadily upon the strengths and insights of the Christian faith and that influential cultural heritage that helped them to see why a creative response to human friction was a *must*.<sup>121</sup>

For Smith, life in Mound Bayou, Mississippi, was an everyday reminder of the "somebodiness" of African Americans. By daily visual reminders, he was made aware of the invaluable contributions of African Americans in the United States and the biblical testimony that "the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on *all* who call on him" (Rom 10:12). Throughout his life, critical reflection on Mound Bayou's history fueled a

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<sup>121</sup> Massey, *Burdensome Joy of Preaching*, 51-52.

perpetual hope that racial injustices would cease and harmony between fractured humanity could be restored. Massey's commitment to confront social crisis through prophetic radicalism was instilled in him since his inception to life and ministry. For Massey, a deep and abiding spirituality penetrates and overwhelms hearts held captive by racial hatred through exegetical precision and passionate preaching of the inerrant Word of God.

### CHAPTER 3

#### AN EXAMINATION OF THE COMPONENTS OF THE SOCIAL CRISIS SERMON

Kelly Miller Smith's magisterial work *Social Crisis Preaching: The Lyman Beecher Lectures 1983* is divided into four parts: purview, perception, perspective, and proclamation and beyond.<sup>1</sup> The primary focus of this chapter is proclamation and beyond, which includes the seven components of the social crisis sermon. This section bears the rhetoric of Kelly Miller Smith and could aptly be ascribed as his seven canons of social crisis preaching rhetoric. Smith would agree, as surmised by Daniel R. Berger, that "when God wants to influence people, he chooses to persuade rather than coerce."<sup>2</sup> The social crisis sermon is designed to persuade and influence for the purposes of promoting the righteousness and justice of God for His people. Since this dissertation includes an examination of Kelly Miller Smith's sermons, an understanding of the component parts of his sermons is essential. Likewise, it is imperative to undertake a thorough examination of these seven components of the social crisis sermon prior to examining the social crisis

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<sup>1</sup> Kelly Miller Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching: The Lyman Beecher Lectures 1983* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984). In every chapter Smith is emphatic about the Bible being the source and center for social crisis preaching. Chap. 1, titled "Purview," focuses on the need for social crisis preaching and launches a defense that preaching is a viable means for addressing social crises with the Bible as the source of social crisis proclamation. Smith highlights in this chapter that "the Word of God demonstrates the relationship between ancient history and current issues" (19). Chap. 2 is titled "Perception," and addresses how social crisis preaching is perceived by the congregation as it relates to "the mental organization and interpretation of sensory data" (28). This chapter also includes Smith's definition of social crisis preaching, as well as a strong emphasis that the preacher "has the responsibility of proclaiming the Word of God in all of its uncompromising power" (32). Chap. 3, titled "Perspective," is an examination of the vantage points of those who engage in social crisis preaching as well as those affected by social crisis. Smith makes the argument that "the entire preaching enterprise must be seen in Biblical perspective. This is imperative for social crisis preaching" (62).

<sup>2</sup> Daniel R. Berger, *Speaking the Truth in Love: Christian Public Rhetoric* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 33.

preaching of Kelly Miller Smith through James Earl Massey's sermonic component of radicality, which will be the focus of chapter 4.

The social crisis sermon is unique in that it brings the gospel to bear on specific social crises within communities, with the Bible as the primary and chief source of address. Smith proclaims, "The end is *kerygma*-proclamation . . . social crisis preaching is preaching for a decision—for *Christ*."<sup>3</sup>

Smith's seven components of the social crisis sermon are essential elements for effective social crisis preaching. According to Smith, the seven components of the social crisis sermon are (1) the "pre-proclamation, pre-crisis" function of the preacher; (2) the content; (3) the words used; (4) the perceptual power of focus; (5) the structure; (6) the delivery of the social crisis sermon; and (7) the post-delivery function of the preacher.<sup>4</sup> These seven components of the social crisis sermon provides social crisis preaching with both kinship and distinction to all forms of effective proclamation.

One could clearly recognize and refer to these seven components as Smith's canons of social crisis preaching. It should be noted that five of these components reflect the five canons of rhetoric espoused by the ancient Greco-Roman orators. The five canons of rhetoric are: *inventio* (invention), *dispositio* (arrangement), *elocutio* (style), *memoria* (memory), and *pronuntiatio* (delivery). These five canons of Greco-Roman rhetoric are clearly prominent in five of Smith's social crisis sermon components: content (invention), words used (style), structure (arrangement), perceptual power of focus (memory), and delivery of the social crisis sermon (delivery). The evidence of the components of Greco-Roman rhetoric as a visible and defining aspect in Smith's social crisis proclamation reveals the conscious intention of Smith to include these timeless principles of rhetoric in his preaching for the purpose of sermonic integrity and gospel proclamation effectiveness.

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<sup>3</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 80.

<sup>4</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 80.

In this chapter, I will give recognition to the five canons of Greco-Roman rhetoric in five of Smith's social crisis sermon components to provide evidence of their similarities. Intertwined with this examination, I will also refer to several authoritative voices in the evangelical preaching tradition. I will refer to two of Smith's social crisis sermons, "I Heard the Preaching of the Elder," taken from Romans 10: 14, 15, and "We Seek a City," taken from Jeremiah 50:5, and one lecture, "The Stuff We Use," to ascertain the five rhetorical social crisis preaching components and to identify the similarities with the five canons of Greco-Roman rhetoric.

Since the first (pre-proclamation function) and the seventh (post-delivery) of Smith's social crisis sermon components do not involve the actual act of proclamation or rhetoric, I will examine Smith's first and seventh components using examples from the Bible and the African American pastoral and ecclesiological traditions.

### **Ancient Rhetoric and Christian Proclamation**

Rhetoric is present, effectively or ineffectively, in every act of public speech, social crisis preaching not excluded. Quintilian disagreed with Cicero that rhetoric belonged to the elite and educated. Quintilian argued that every speaker, regardless of socio-economic location, possesses the ability to persuade (rhetoric), when he argues,

Cicero, it is true, attributed the origin of oratory to founders of cities and legislators, who must indeed have possessed the power of speech. But I do not see why he makes this the actual origin, because there are nomadic peoples even today who have no cities or laws, and yet people born among them act as ambassadors, prosecute and defend, and, indeed, think that some people are better speakers than others.<sup>5</sup>

Rhetoric was so intensely imbued in the era of New Testament writings that, according to Duane Litfin, "this pervasive rhetorical tradition was a prime ingredient in the cultural heritage that Greco-Roman world and gave the ancient mind its shape. The

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<sup>5</sup> Quintilian, *The Orator's Education*, Books 3-5, ed. and trans. Donald A. Russell (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 23.

people thrived on eloquence and treated its practitioners as celebrities.”<sup>6</sup> Laurent Pernot, suggests, “Contrary to a commonly held view . . . that associates rhetoric with the idea of manipulating others’ mind, antiquity located rhetoric closer to debate and exchange and bound it up with freedom of expression in the search for persuasion a deliberation in common.”<sup>7</sup>

Early Christian proclamation and ancient Greco-Roman rhetoric were similar in function, but entirely different in motive and intent. Whereas the Greco-Roman rhetor focused on persuasion by the power of rhetoric, Christian proclamation focused on transformation of the heart by the power of the Holy Spirit. Laurent Pernot, suggests, “It is essential . . . to see clearly that for a long time nothing walled off paganism from Christianity concerning rhetoric. Some Christian orators were students of pagan rhetors.”<sup>8</sup> Most notable of Christian proclaimers, influenced by Greco-Roman rhetoric, was Augustine. As a student and teacher of rhetoric, Augustine confesses, “At a vulnerable age I was to study the textbooks on eloquence. I wanted to distinguish myself as an orator for a damnable and conceited purpose, namely delight in human vanity.”<sup>9</sup> Some of the most eloquent of Christians in the early church were trained in the art of rhetoric, among them, according to Pernot, was “a line of truly great names . . . sheds luster on Christian rhetoric. In Greek, there were Eusebius of Caesarea; the Cappadocian Fathers, Gregory of Nazianzus, called ‘Christian Demosthenes,’ Gregory of Nyssa, and Basil of Caesarea; and John Chrysostom.”<sup>10</sup> A brief summary of the ancient principles

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<sup>6</sup> Duane Litfin, *Paul’s Theology of Preaching: The Apostle’s Challenge to the Art of Persuasion in Ancient Corinth* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2015), 57-58.

<sup>7</sup> Laurent Pernot, *Rhetoric in Antiquity*, trans. W. E. Higgins (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 202.

<sup>8</sup> Pernot, *Rhetoric in Antiquity*, 207.

<sup>9</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 38.

<sup>10</sup> Pernot, *Rhetoric in Antiquity*, 206-7.

and the most notable personalities of Greco-Roman rhetoric tradition and the contrast of a Pauline theology of Christian proclamation is necessary to provide a credible examination of Smith's seven components of the social crisis sermon.

## Aristotle

Rhetoric's intricate details were organized into a structured system and categories first by Aristotle and later refined by Cicero and Quintilian. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg contend, "Aristotle reduced the concerns of rhetoric to a system that thereafter served as its touchstone. To speak of classical rhetoric is thus to speak of Aristotle's system and its elaboration by Cicero and Quintilian."<sup>11</sup> Aristotle (384-322BC) in his classic text, *Rhetoric*, defined rhetoric "as the faculty of discovering the possible means of persuasion in reference to any subject whatever"<sup>12</sup> Aristotle contributed two major ingredients to classical rhetoric that are employed, although in varying forms and nomenclature, in contemporary public speaking and social crisis preaching: the three kinds of speech and the three modes of persuasion. First, Litfin states, "From the time of Aristotle public speech in the Greco-Roman world were divided into three types . . . according to Aristotle, these three types corresponded to three kinds of hearers who faced three kinds of decisions."<sup>13</sup> These three kinds of speech were: *deliberative*, *declamatio*, *epideictic*. According to Aristotle, "each of the three kinds has a different special end, and as there are three kinds of Rhetoric, so there are three special ends."<sup>14</sup> Aristotle defines *deliberative*, *declamatio*, and *epideictic*:

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<sup>11</sup> Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg, eds., *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001), 2.

<sup>12</sup> Aristotle, *The "Art" of Rhetoric*, trans. John Henry Freese (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), 15.

<sup>13</sup> Litfin, *Paul's Theology of Preaching*, 67.

<sup>14</sup> Aristotle, *The "Art" of Rhetoric*, I.iii.5, 35.

There are (1) speeches of counsel or advice (deliberation)- as political speeches addressed to an assembly or to the public on questions of State, but also, for example, a speech addressed to an individual (a ruler, or, indeed, any person who is to be advised); (2) judicial speeches, used in prosecution and defence (more generally, in any kind of attack or defence); and (3) panegyric or declamatory speeches, in the nature of an exhibition or display, eulogies- in general, speeches of praise (or blame).<sup>15</sup>

Aristotle's second major contribution lists the three modes of persuasion as *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*. In ancient classical Greek rhetoric, the ancient orator's rhetorical acumen was measured by his possession and utility of *ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos*. The rhetor's *ethos* was a testament to moral fiber and perceived character, while *logos* had to do with logic, and the speaker's ability to reason, and finally *pathos* was measured by the orator's passion and emotional appeal. Aristotle states, "Since proofs are affected by these means, it is evident that, to be able to grasp them, a man must be capable of logical reasoning, of studying characters and the virtues, and thirdly the emotions-the nature and character of each, its origin, and the manner in which it is produced."<sup>16</sup>

## Cicero

Roman rhetor Cicero (106-43BC) is considered the quintessential and most famous Roman orator, authority,<sup>17</sup> and founder of the most relevant elements of rhetoric, which he distills in his *De Inventione Rhetorica*. The canons of *inventio* (invention), *dispositio* (arrangement), *elocutio* (style), *memoria* (memory), and *pronuntiatio* (delivery), became inseparable, and essential for every prized ancient orator. Cicero defined those most relevant elements:

Invention is the discovery of valid or seemingly valid arguments to render one's cause plausible. Arrangement is the distribution of arguments thus discovered in the proper language to the invented matter. Memory is the firm mental grasp of matter

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<sup>15</sup> Aristotle, *The Rhetoric of Aristotle*, 1.3, trans. Lane Cooper (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1932), 17.

<sup>16</sup> Aristotle, *The "Art" Rhetoric*, I.ii.7, 17-18.

<sup>17</sup> Anthony Everitt, *Cicero: The Life and Times of Rome's Greatest Politician* (New York: Random House, 2003), preface, Kindle. See also Berger, *Speaking the Truth in Love*, 115.



and words. Delivery is the control of voice and body in a manner suitable to the dignity of the subject matter and the style.<sup>18</sup>

Cicero argued, “Wisdom with eloquence has been of little help to states, but eloquence without wisdom has often been a great obstacle and never an advantage.”<sup>19</sup> For Cicero, rhetoric included eloquence and “the function of eloquence seems to be to speak in a manner suited to persuade an audience, the end is to persuade by speech.”<sup>20</sup>

Although recent scholars have determined that the authorship of *Rhetorica ad Herennium* is unknown, because the content of this oldest surviving textbook on rhetoric concentrates on the five canons of rhetoric, it was previously believed to be authored by Cicero. In Ciceronian fashion, the author states, “The speaker, then, should possess the faculties of Invention, Arrangement, Style, Memory, and Delivery.”<sup>21</sup>

Cicero also believed that the orator should possess knowledge in a variety of disciplines, and according to James M. May and Jakob Wise, “Cicero’s ideal orator embraces all traditional areas of philosophy (cf. 1.68): ethics, physics, and dialectic.”<sup>22</sup> According to Duane Litfin, who quotes Quintilian’s admiration of Cicero, Quintilian declares, “For posterity the name of Cicero has come to be regarded not as the name of a man, but as the name of eloquence itself . . . therefore let us fix our eyes on him, take him as our pattern.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Cicero, *De Inventione: De Optimo Genere Oratorum*, Book I, trans. H. M. Hubbell, Loeb Classical Library (1949; repr., Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), 18-21.

<sup>19</sup> Cicero, *De Inventione*, Book I, 1, 3

<sup>20</sup> Cicero, *De Inventione*, Book I, 15

<sup>21</sup> Cicero, *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, trans. Harry Caplan, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954), 6-7.

<sup>22</sup> Cicero, *On the Ideal Orator*, trans. James M. May and Jakob Wise (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 11.

<sup>23</sup> Litfin, *Paul’s Theology of Preaching*, 115.

## Quintilian

Litfin refers to Quintilian as Rome's "leading pedagogue. . . . Quintilian's life and work consisted mainly of training others for public speaking."<sup>24</sup> Quintilian (35-100), in his classic *Institutes of Oratory*, developed Cicero's five canons at length in order to train rhetoricians to masterfully persuade their audiences. While Quintilian in *Institutes of Oratory* gives primary attention to dealing with the five canons of rhetoric, he also devotes considerable treatment to the life and character of the rhetor. According to Berger, Quintilian believed that "rhetoric should take over the training of the character and speech so that a properly trained individual would be 'a good man speaking well.'"<sup>25</sup> The first of Smith's seven social crisis sermon components, the "pre-proclamation functionality of the preacher," bears this Quintilian quality most visibly.<sup>26</sup> As this dissertation proves, both in reference to the *ethos* of ancient rhetors and to the moral standing of the social crisis preacher, integrity is a vital attribute in the determination of what the audience will hear and accept. Quintilian contends that rhetoric has "three aims to fulfill: to instruct, to move, and to delight."<sup>27</sup>

## Paul

In Greco-Roman rhetoric, the orator is responsible for the *inventio*. The most distinguishing feature of Christian rhetoric is the fact that the *inventio* (content) originates with God, not the wisdom of the orator. Preachers from Jesus to Paul to expositors in the present era are called to preach the *rhema* of the Lord. The apostle Paul's theology of preaching, which also bears Paul's convictions of Greco-Roman rhetoric, is best gleamed

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<sup>24</sup> Litfin, *Paul's Theology of Preaching*, 115.

<sup>25</sup> Berger, *Speaking the Truth in Love*, 7.

<sup>26</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 80.

<sup>27</sup> Quintilian, *The Orator's Education*, Books 3-5, ed. and trans. Donald A. Russell (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 39.

in 1 Corinthians 1-4. Paul could not escape the use of rhetoric; neither did he try. Litfin states, “Paul was forced by the situation in Corinth to explain and defend his *modus operandi* as a preacher.”<sup>28</sup> Paul’s motive in proclamation was his faithfulness as a herald of the gospel. The ancient orator’s motive was to obtain results, which were rooted in his ability to persuade the audience from eloquence and wisdom. Paul was a herald, with motives entirely distinct from that of the ancient orator. However, Paul does employ a variety of rhetorical strategies to reach his audience. For instance, in Acts 14 he appeals to Jewish history, but in Acts 17, at the Areopagus, Paul contextualizes his message and employs the content of Greek poets to explain the true and living God.

Most importantly, for Paul, the power of his speech was not in *his* words, but rather in the power of the Spirit (1 Cor 1:17; 2:1-5). Paul did not depend upon mere words, nor did he try to appease and impress his hearers (or readers) by his eloquence. Porter states of Paul that “he was an able teacher and debater, but not an orator. In his native town of Tarsus, there was a famous school of rhetoric, but he does not seem to have attended it.”<sup>29</sup> The Corinthians chided him on his elementary speech, unpleasant appearance, and lack of eloquence in presentation (2 Cor 11:6). Paul did in fact use or engage in the available means of persuasion; a glimpse of his rhetorical strategy is found in 1 Thessalonians 1:5: “Our gospel came to you not in word only [logos], but also in power and in the Holy Spirit with full conviction [pathos]. For you know the manner of men we were among you for your sake [ethos].” Like the ancient orator, Paul wanted desperately to persuade men. He was aware of the culture’s desire for appeal and amusement in speech. However, Paul was more concerned with pointing his hearers beyond himself as a preacher, and toward Jesus Christ. In like manner, Smith’s social

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<sup>28</sup> Litfin, *Paul’s Theology of Preaching*, 141.

<sup>29</sup> Stanley Porter, *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period 330 B.C.-A.D. 400* (Boston: Brill, 2001), 430.

crisis preaching is intended to exalt the justice of God by proclaiming spiritual and social liberation through the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

## Summary

The links of Greco-Roman rhetoric, early Christian proclamation, and social crisis preaching are tightly fastened. The five canons of rhetoric (invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery), the three modes of persuasive speech (ethos, logos, and pathos), along with the three kinds of rhetorical speeches (deliberative, declamatio, epideictic), are necessary qualities for any serious orator and faithful herald of the gospel irrespective of the era. For instance, William Pipes, in his magnum opus, *Say Amen, Brother! Old-Time Negro Preaching: A Study in American Frustration*, examines the recordings of seven old-time African American preachers in Macon County, Georgia, to the discovery that each of the seven, with varying degrees of dialect and education, employed the three modes of persuasion. Pipes estimates, “Old-time preaching, as reflected in the sermons recorded in Macon County, uses all three modes of persuasion: ethos, pathos, and logical argument.”<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, as it relates to the five canons of rhetoric, Pipes states, “Despite this spur of the moment arrangement, the sermons of the old-time Negro preachers do not lack uniformity in this constituent of rhetoric.”<sup>31</sup>

Establishing an argument for the preacher’s innate ability to engage in social crisis preaching within varying educational and denominational spectrums is helpful for two major reasons. First, social crisis preaching has mainly found existence in the African American preaching tradition among preachers with varying educational and theological training; second, as Smith explained, under “structure” and “content,” two of the seven components of the social crisis sermon, social crisis preaching is often

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<sup>30</sup> William H. Pipes, *Say Amen, Brother! Old Time Negro Preaching: A Study in American Frustration*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1951), 132.

<sup>31</sup> Pipes, *Say Amen, Brother!*, 143.

impromptu and spur of the moment, but still requires structure to hit its mark. Just as Cicero developed the methodology of Aristotle, and Quintilian further developed the principles of his predecessor Cicero, preachers in every era of church history have taken the ideals of Greco-Roman rhetoric and used them for sanctified proclamatory purposes. The seven components of the social crisis sermon are a well-developed addition in that glorious history.

### **The Pre-Proclamation, Pre-Crisis Function of the Preacher**

Though preaching is the medium of social crisis proclamation, it is not the first aspect of the social crisis sermon. Smith advises, “Communication actually begins not when the text and the sermon title are announced, but when the minister functions in the community in relation to critical social circumstances and shows social sensitivity prior to proclamation.”<sup>32</sup> Smith’s insight bears relevance to preaching in general, but particularly for social crisis preaching because social crisis ministry, social crisis sensitivity, and knowledge of the social crisis are prerequisites of social crisis proclamation. The attributes of the pre-proclamation function of the social crisis preacher are inherently pastoral. Ronald J. Allen attests, “Preachers who signal the congregation that they understand the complexity of a situation gain credibility with their congregation . . . a study of listeners found that people are put off and distrustful when they think that a preacher is inadequately informed or is dealing simplistically with an issue.”<sup>33</sup> It should not be overlooked that Smith was a pastor. A critical analysis of Smith’s pre-proclamation and pre-crisis functionality of the preacher reveals that the preacher’s active social knowledge and engagement and the preacher’s theological presuppositions are vital for pastors engaging in social crisis preaching.

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<sup>32</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 80-81.

<sup>33</sup> Ronald J. Allen, “Preaching on Social Issues,” *Encounter* 59, nos. 1/2 (1998): 76.

## **Social Knowledge and Engagement in Pre-Proclamation**

The congregation must ascertain that the preacher possesses some familiarity, knowledge, and background of the social issues prior to the crisis event. This important trait arms the social crisis preacher with an accurate understanding of the issues in order to engage polemically as apologist, ensuring that social crisis arguments and solutions are launched from a biblical worldview. The social crisis preacher must be acquainted with the issues because, according to Smith, “sometimes the preacher will be tempted to present their experiences of others as illustrative matter while addressing critical social issues rhetorically, but never really identify himself with the issues of the community.”<sup>34</sup>

Paul’s philosophic engagement before the Areopagus in Acts 17 reveals, according to Craig Keener, “a sample of Paul’s Hellenistic philosophic apologetic.”<sup>35</sup> Concerning Paul’s knowledge of the social culture, Keener mentions that “the resonances with Stoicism are by no means contrary to Pauline practice”<sup>36</sup>; therefore, Paul uses his knowledge of Greek philosophers as a well-informed overture to inform the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers about the “Lord of heaven and earth” who “does not live in temples made by man” (Acts 17:24). Paul’s knowledge of Greek philosophy, as it is reflected in Acts, is also a sign of Paul’s understanding of other cultures. Keener attests, “Contemporary readings often use Paul’s ministry in Athens as a model for contextualization—that is, cultural sensitivity without syncretism.”<sup>37</sup>

Likewise, in 1 Corinthians 8 Paul exhibits his understanding of the Corinthian’s mythological society and offers an apologetic articulating his position on Christian freedom (1 Cor 8:1-13). Paul’s cultural and social awareness positions him to

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<sup>34</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 39.

<sup>35</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 3:2567.

<sup>36</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 2569.

<sup>37</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 2565.

articulate his position that there is but “one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live, and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live” (1 Cor 8:6).

The social crisis preacher’s active social knowledge and engagement is critical because, as Smith argues, “it should be clear that if the sermon is the minister’s first and only indication of concern, there is likely to be difficulty in getting the message across.”<sup>38</sup> Smith’s suggestion is akin to the need for the ancient Greek orator to possess *logos*, one of the three elements of persuasive speech. Duane Litfin attests, “The true orator must possess an encyclopedic knowledge of a wide variety of subjects, a profound understanding of his listeners and an ability to express himself masterfully in language.”<sup>39</sup> Paul’s knowledge of the customs and culture of the Gentiles was an indispensable aspect in his pre-proclamation ministry.

According to the analysis of the cultural background and the ecclesial praxis in chapter 2, Smith possessed this pre-proclamation and pre-crisis requirement, which conditioned the manner in which he presented his social crisis sermons. Smith was in intimate proximity to the social crises in Nashville as well as those who were immediately affected by those social crises. He was well-versed in non-violent philosophy and familiar with direct action tactics. Upon his arrival in Nashville, his knowledge of the issues and his willingness to be directly involved set the stage for his later success as a community leader. The crises of racial injustices that affected the predominantly African American congregation at First Baptist Capitol Hill, the black students at American Baptist Theological College, and students of color in colleges and universities throughout Nashville also affected Smith. For Smith, the preacher’s effectiveness in social crisis preaching would be severely limited if the preacher is spiritually and physically aloof and

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<sup>38</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 80.

<sup>39</sup> Litfin, *Paul’s Theology of Preaching*, 115.

speaks in abstract language about social crises in the communities where worshippers reside. Smith asserts, “If he is almost totally uninformed, the gospel places him under a moral and religious obligation to become informed as the first step in becoming involved.”<sup>40</sup>

### **The Social Crisis Preacher’s Theological Orientation**

The preacher’s theological orientation must wed theology with a keen awareness of the depth and breadth of social concerns. Smith argues, “The limitations that the preacher has may have many causes. Among these are *experience, theological orientation,* and the pressure of *practical considerations*.”<sup>41</sup> The focus on theological orientation as critical to the pre-proclamation functionality of the social crisis preacher is due in part because the preacher’s theological orientation is also foundational to social crisis preaching and ministry in general. If the preacher believes that the Bible and theology ought not be concerned with social and political issues, then social crisis preaching does not exist. However, it is the argument of this dissertation that regardless of the intent of the preacher, sound expository preaching has social implications.

As mentioned in chapters 1 and 2, Smith held the conviction that the Bible and thereby preaching is vital to address social concerns. This theological orientation is mandatory for social crisis preaching. Smith’s “pre-proclamation function” of the preacher requires the preacher to wed deep theological doctrines with the everyday realities of life. Smith insists that even preachers who are not daily affected by the effects of social crisis have a responsibility to engage in social crisis proclamation and the pre-crisis function of the preacher. These ministers, according to Smith, have specific responsibilities, which include

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<sup>40</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 39.

<sup>41</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 37, emphasis original.



(2) Giving consist attention to social concerns before they reach crisis proportions; (3) Acquainting the congregation with enlightened pronouncements and documents produced by their denominations as well as those of others that address social concerns from within the context of the Christian faith; (4) Embarking upon periods of study that point out the urgent contemporary social issues even before they have reached crisis proportions.<sup>42</sup>

The social crisis preacher is not an abstract theologian detached from the context of communal strife, nor should the preacher be engulfed in ecclesial bureaucracies, which are often anchored to political loyalties that render the preacher biased and ineffective in social transformation. Mark Strom captures this concept in *Reframing Paul: Conversations in Grace & Community* when he writes, “Abstraction, idealism and elitism lay at the heart of the agendas of pride that Paul tried to tear apart.”<sup>43</sup> Strom goes on to warn, “Academic, congregational and denominational life functions along clear lines of rank, status, and honor. We preach that the gospel has ended elitism, but we rarely allow the implications to go beyond ideas.”<sup>44</sup> While the preacher may know and understand that social crisis exists and may acknowledge that social crises are the result of sinful ethical ideologies and practices, the pre-proclamation function of the preacher requires the preacher to draw theological implications on how these social crises impact the social, political, and economic realities of the parishioners and their communities.

Though he was not referred to as a black liberation theologian, Smith was a cautious proponent of certain principles within black theology. Allan Aubrey Boesak is convinced that the liberation message, rooted in the Bible, is anchored in the covenantal relationship of Yahweh with his people, as demonstrated in Deuteronomy 7:7. Though his doctrine was rooted in the foundational truths of evangelical theology, Smith would agree with Boesak in his argument that “Black theology, taking its clue from this biblical

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<sup>42</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 81.

<sup>43</sup> Mark Strom, *Reframing Paul: Conversations in Grace & Community* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000), 14.

<sup>44</sup> Strom, *Reframing Paul*, 16.

message, refuses to let go of the truth that one cannot speak about God's love without also speaking of his righteousness, his justice, with become concrete in his relation to human beings and the relation of people among themselves."<sup>45</sup> As most black liberation theologians, he believed that theology in European and American academies, and among European and American theologians, failed to directly address racism and the plight of African Americans. Smith can be described in the manner in which Jared E. Alcántara describes Gardner C. Taylor, when he writes, "Taylor would agree in principle with James H. Cone on several important points, such as the need to critique white models of theological education and the importance of Afrocentric resources for black church preachers enrolled in white seminaries."<sup>46</sup> In similar fashion, Smith informs, "In the forties and fifties a number of Blacks began entering seminaries operated by white religious organizations. As far as these institutions were concerned, Black Christians did not exist, so what they produced were young graduate ministers who could not relate to their congregations."<sup>47</sup>

This theological orientation, which holds the conviction that theology bears impact on relevant social realities, is not monopolized by the African American church and preaching tradition, because throughout church history, various ethnicities of theologians and preachers alike have shared this theological orientation.

**Early church fathers.** St. Basil the Great's treatise *On Social Justice*, highlights the disparities of wealth and poverty in four homilies: "To the Rich," "I Will Tear Down My Barns," "In Time of Famine and Drought," and "Against Those Who Lend at

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<sup>45</sup> Allan Aubrey Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence: A Socio-Ethical Study on Black Theology and Power* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1977), 19.

<sup>46</sup> Jared E. Alcántara, *Crossover Preaching: Intercultural-Improvisational Homiletics in Conversation with Gardner C. Taylor* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2015), 180.

<sup>47</sup> Kelly Miller Smith, interview with W. R. Robinson, "The Black Preacher—Man for all Seasons," *The Message Magazine* 1, no. 2 (December 1954): 29.

Interest.”<sup>48</sup> Smith states, “In Ambrose’s letters, social sensitivity is expressed in the treatment of several topics, including Rich Possessions, Caesar and God, Double Bondage, Nature of Liberty, Some Real Riches, and others.”<sup>49</sup>

**Reformation and Martin Luther.** Martin Luther’s teaching on the Lord’s Supper bore social implications. Luther was a proponent for “both kinds” of sacrament to be served to the laity. He writes, “Just as the rites of baptism and absolution are administered to the laity in their complete form, so also should the complete sacrament of the Supper, if asked for.”<sup>50</sup> Luther’s intent was not an argument for social justice or equality; it was ultimately empowerment and equality for the laity, who were of a lower socioeconomic class. Luther’s argument was framed against the corruption of institutional power. Accordingly, he writes, “If the church has authority to withhold the wine from the laity, she can also withhold the bread; and, on the same basis, she could withhold the whole sacrament of the altar from the laity, and deprive the laity altogether of what Christ instituted. But, I deny that she has such authority.”<sup>51</sup> All injustice is ultimately a denial of the *imago Dei* (racism, sexism, abortion, etc.). The Romanists’ denial of the wine was also a denial to recognize the *imago Dei* inherent in the laity.

During the Reformation Era, Martin Luther saw the sale of indulgences as exploitive as well. His focus was not directly concerned with exploitation, but rather arguing that indulgence is not needed for salvation. However, this theological conviction had direct social ramifications. In attacking the sale of indulgences, Luther is not only

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<sup>48</sup> St. Basil, *On Social Justice*, trans. C. Paul Schroeder (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2009).

<sup>49</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 56.

<sup>50</sup> Martin Luther, “The Pagan Servitude of the Church,” in *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger (New York: Anchor Books, 1962), 249.

<sup>51</sup> Luther, *Martin Luther*, 249.

arguing that salvation is by means of grace alone, but he is defending those not able to pay. Luther's argument is one for equality under the Word of God. Moreover, his Forty-third Theses maintains, "Christians are to be taught that he who gives to the poor or lends to the needy does a better deed than he who buys indulgences."<sup>52</sup> Luther's most profound stand for the poor is in his Forty-fifth Theses: "Christians are to be taught that he who sees a needy man and passes him by, yet gives his money for indulgences, does not buy papal indulgences but God's wrath."<sup>53</sup>

**Civil War and social gospel.** During the Civil War era, when American theologians James Henley Thornwell and Robert Lewis Dabney used the Bible to sanction slavery, preachers during that era adamantly opposed slavery on biblical grounds. Oliver Johnson comments of abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison: "His opinions upon every question affecting the public welfare rested upon the solid basis of the Divine Law. Ethical considerations in his mind outweighed all others, and any compromise with an unjust or oppressive institution was, in his eyes, a sin to be rebuked and denounced."<sup>54</sup> In the Reconstruction Era, which also overlaps with the Social Gospel Movement, Ronald C. White, Jr. states of Washington Gladden: "Gladden and other proponents of the Social Gospel did not ignore racial reform. On the contrary, many of them were active in church missionary societies fostering black education, progressive movements ameliorating racial injustice, and biracial ventures in reform."<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Martin Luther, "95 Theses," accessed July 12, 2019, <https://www.luther.de/en/95thesen.html>, Theses 43.

<sup>53</sup> Luther, "95 Theses," Theses 45.

<sup>54</sup> Oliver Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times: Or Sketches of the Anti-Slavery Movement in America* (Miami: Mnemosyne Publishing, 1969), 24.

<sup>55</sup> Ronald C. White, Jr., *Liberty and Justice for All: Racial Reform and the Social Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1990), xix.

**Civil rights.** Among the most notable ministers during the Civil Rights era were Martin Luther King, Jr. and Fred Shuttlesworth. Andrew M. Manis comments concerning Fred Shuttlesworth's zeal and courage during non-violent protest in Birmingham, Alabama, are worthy of note. Manis comments, "The 1963 Birmingham protest could not have happened, and without those demonstrations Congress would have ended racial segregation in public accommodations later than it did."<sup>56</sup> Smith reminds, "Preaching has addressed critical social issues during every era in the history of the faith. This has not always been the powerful prophetic preaching. . . . There has never been a period, however, without prophetic voices being heard from within the faith addressing the issues."<sup>57</sup>

### **Development of Content**

Both Quintilian and Cicero believed that invention was the most important canon among the five. For Quintilian and Cicero, invention involves the discovery and development of content. Quintilian states, "Every utterance, at any rate every one by which some meaning is expressed, must have both content and words. If it is brief and limited to a single sentence, it may need nothing else; but if it is longer speeches do require more."<sup>58</sup> Cicero explains, "We shall make our audience attentive if we show that the matters which we are about to discuss are important, novel, or incredible, or that they concern all humanity or those in the audience."<sup>59</sup> For Smith, the discovery of content is an idea that is resident in the Word of God. To engage in the discovery of content from the Bible, the social crisis preacher must, in a posture of prayer and through the guidance

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<sup>56</sup> Andrew M. Manis, *A Fire You Can't Put Out: The Civil Rights Life of Birmingham's Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1999), ix.

<sup>57</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 57.

<sup>58</sup> Quintilian, *The Orator's Education*, Books 3-5, 23.

<sup>59</sup> Cicero, *De Inventione*, I, xvii.23, 47.

of the Holy Spirit, ask, as Allen suggests, “Does the interpretation of this text lead me to consider a social issue in its light?”<sup>60</sup> Smith contends, “The whole point of social crisis preaching is the idea that God is concerned about human issues.”<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, Allen advises, “Oracles of the prophets of Israel, and other passages having to do with justice, frequently lead the preacher to social considerations.”<sup>62</sup>

The development of content is the most important component of the social crisis sermon and is similar to the Greco-Roman rhetorical canon of invention. For Smith, this entailed the preacher wrestling with a big idea. Aristotle provides a similar analysis of rhetoric when he writes, “The function of Rhetoric, then, is to deal with things about which we deliberate, but for which we have no systematic rules.”<sup>63</sup> For Aristotle, the contents of the speech derived from deliberation or wrestling to “discover.” Malcolm Heath contends that “invention (inventio, εὑρεσις) means discovery.”<sup>64</sup> Smith explains, “The preaching enterprise is in some measure of trouble when the trappings of preaching-eloquence, scholarship, voice control, and so forth, are more in evidence than the “big idea” being presented and with which the preacher is wrestling.”<sup>65</sup> Within Cicero’s five canons of rhetoric, invention is most similar in description with the second of Smith’s social crisis sermon components: content. Cicero defines invention as “the discovery of valid or seemingly valid arguments to render one’s cause plausible.”<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Allen, “Preaching on Social Issues,” 74.

<sup>61</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 83.

<sup>62</sup> Allen, “Preaching on Social Issues,” 74.

<sup>63</sup> Aristotle, *The “Art” of Rhetoric*, 23.

<sup>64</sup> Malcolm Heath, “Invention,” in Porter, *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric*, 89.

<sup>65</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 81.

<sup>66</sup> Cicero, *De Inventione*, I.vii.9, 19.

In his social crisis sermon “I Heard the Preaching of the Elder,” Smith wrestles with the idea of how preaching, especially preaching within the African American preaching tradition, has sustained African American communities through turbulent times of social crises. Smith identifies several preachers throughout church history as well as preachers in the African American preaching tradition, including the apostle Peter, St Francis of Assisi, Martin Luther, Nat Turner, John Jasper, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Leon Sullivan.<sup>67</sup>

### **The Bible as a Source of Content**

Smith is emphatic about the Bible as the central and only source of the social crisis sermon. Smith’s sermons are rooted in the text of Scripture. Romans 10:14, 15 is the text for “I Heard the Preaching of the Elder” and Jeremiah 50:5 is the text for “We Seek A City.” He argues, “The entire preaching enterprise must be seen in Biblical perspective.”<sup>68</sup> Social crisis preaching is not the mere extrapolation of the social climate of society. It is not the espousal of a political ideology, nor is it stating the opinion of popular culture. Social crisis preaching is the proclamation of the Word of God and its relevance on social concerns. The voice of God, through His Word, requires the preacher to subjugate personality and personal convictions while lifting, what is according to Smith, the most important pre-proclamation question: “Does the idea of the preacher harmonize with the Word of God or is it simply an echo of the voice of society?”<sup>69</sup> Smith states, “It should be clear that social crisis preaching is not merely a report on some social circumstances or the expression of an opinion regarding that situation . . . the commentary

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<sup>67</sup> Kelly Miller Smith, “I Heard the Preaching of the Elder,” sermon manuscript, Vanderbilt University, Jean and Alexander Heard Library, Special Collections and University Archives, Kelly Miller Smith Papers, box 25, file 17.

<sup>68</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 62.

<sup>69</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 82.

that the preacher offers on the crisis must be based upon some idea.”<sup>70</sup> The idea stems from the Bible.

### **The Development of an Idea**

The development of this idea represents the content and, as Smith suggests, “the idea must be rooted in an expression of God’s concern for some human condition. Of course, the Word of God in Scripture is the most logical source of the ideas upon which sermons are based.”<sup>71</sup> Haddon Robinson’s treatment of the importance of the development of a single idea from the text in Scripture is paramount, to the degree that “to ignore the principle that a central, unifying idea must be at the heart of an effective sermon is to push aside what experts in both communication theory and preaching have to tell us.”<sup>72</sup> Smith and Robinson are in agreement that the idea is more than the subject of the sermon, Smith writing,

In light of the social crisis preaching, the minister may have made it clear that they will be dealing with the race problem, for instance. That is the subject. That answers the question, What is the preacher talking about? Of greater importance is the second question. There is a broad range of possibilities as to what may be said *about* the subject.<sup>73</sup>

In a similar vein, Robinson comments on the formation of the subject that “by itself it is incomplete, and therefore it needs a complement. The complement ‘completes’ the subject by answering the question, ‘What am I saying about what I am talking about?’ . . . A variety of complements could be added to this subject to form an idea.”<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 81-82.

<sup>71</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 82.

<sup>72</sup> Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), chap. 2, Kindle.

<sup>73</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 82.

<sup>74</sup> Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, chap. 2.



In his Yale lectures, British preacher and churchman J. H. Jowett comments on this matter: “I have a conviction that no sermon is ready for preaching, not ready for writing out, until we can express its theme in a short, pregnant sentence as clear as crystal.”<sup>75</sup> James Earl Massey offers, “The logic of a sermon involves ‘minute particulars’ . . . A biblical base is also imperative, so that the preacher’s words stand rooted in the Word of God, indeed growing out of it.”<sup>76</sup> In his insightful text *Designing the Sermon*, Massey further underscores this claim concerning the central idea, when he writes, “The sermon is the development of a theme growing out of an idea that focuses on a human issue or divine claim. The idea is the germ of the message, the theme forecast the direction of the message, and the sermon is the full plan to address and involve the hearer in the idea.”<sup>77</sup> Both of Smith’s sermons, “I Heard the Preaching of the Elder” and “We Seek a City,” reveal that Smith’s idea is rooted in the text he selected.

### **Words, Words, Words**

Quintilian reports in *Institutio Oratoria*, “To speak well is indeed the orator’s business, but the science of speaking well will still be rhetoric.”<sup>78</sup> The Greco-Roman rhetoricians were convinced that style (*elocutio*) played a major role in the persuasion of an audience. Smith’s third social crisis sermon component, “words,” is the equivalent to the Greco-Roman canon of style.

The third consideration of the social crisis sermon is Smith’s concern with the right use of words: “The preacher has the awesome responsibility of using words to

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<sup>75</sup> J. H. Jowett, *The Preacher: His Life and Work* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1912), 133.

<sup>76</sup> James Earl Massey, *The Responsible Pulpit* (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 1974), chap. 4, Kindle.

<sup>77</sup> James Earl Massey, *Designing the Sermon* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 31.

<sup>78</sup> Quintilian, *The Orator’s Education*, Books 3-5, II, ed. and trans. Donald A. Russel (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 29.

proclaim the Word of God. Words are at times imprecise and freighted with meaning contrary to what may be intended.”<sup>79</sup> Of style, Quintilian had four virtues—correctness, clarity, ornamentation, and propriety—all of which have to do with words.<sup>80</sup> Stanley E. Porter contends, “the ancient rhetoricians focus on the common errors, or vices, of grammar that speakers ought to avoid.”<sup>81</sup>

Smith possessed the skill to arouse the emotion by providing vivid description to his ideas by employing adjectives that gave depth to the description of the journey of African American people. In his sermon “We Seek A City,” Smith describes the journey as one of “lofty peaks,” a “dismal valley,” the “valley of sacrifice, and one of “alternate routes.”<sup>82</sup>

## Word Fallacies

Avoiding word fallacies are critically important for preachers who engage in exegetical studies. Smith says, “Words are at times imprecise and freighted with meanings contrary to what may be intended.”<sup>83</sup> D. A. Carson classical and helpful text *Exegetical Fallacies* is most helpful in alerting the preacher of the common pitfalls in exegetical studies. Among the most common causes of exegetical fallacies are “the root fallacy” and “unwarranted neglect of distinguishing peculiarities of a corpus,” which are both related

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<sup>79</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 83.

<sup>80</sup> For a description of Quintilian’s four virtues, see Porter, *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric*, 122-57. Porter writes, “Correctness involves rhetoric in grammar . . . in this case means the correct use of the speaker’s language. Clarity. . . the immediate apprehension of the speaker’s remarks even by inattentive readers or listeners. Propriety, the fourth and final stylistic virtue is achieved when all the parts of an oration harmoniously merge into one organic whole and the whole exactly fits the occasion.” See Porter, *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric*, 122-23, 154-55.

<sup>81</sup> Porter, *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric*, 122.

<sup>82</sup> Kelly Miller Smith, “We Seek a City,” sermon manuscript, Vanderbilt University, Jean and Alexander Heard Library, Special Collections and University Archives, Kelly Miller Smith Papers, box 25, file 2.

<sup>83</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 83.

to word-study fallacies in the exegetical study of Hebrew and Greek words.<sup>84</sup> In “the root fallacy” Carson states, “The root fallacy presupposes that every word actually has a meaning bound up with its shape or its components.”<sup>85</sup> Similarly, in the “unwarranted neglect of distinguishing peculiarities of a corpus,” Carson warns of “the false assumption that one New Testament writer’s predominant usage of any word is roughly that of all other New Testament writers.”<sup>86</sup>

For instance, Carson references ἀποστολος (apostle) and the verbal cognate ἀποστέλλω (I send), as an etymological example of how words that share shape or components do not always share the same meaning. In this case, ἀποστολος does not mean “one who is sent,” but a more precise meaning is *special messenger*.<sup>87</sup> In similar fashion, in Carson’s explanation of word-study fallacies that are the result of “unwarranted neglect of distinguishing peculiarities of a corpus,” he explains how Paul’s usage of δικαιοσύνη (to justification) is not the same meaning as δικαιοσύνη when it is used in Matthew 5:20. Here, Carson refers to Benno Przbylski’s definition of δικαιοσύνη as “forensic righteousness imputed to him,” whereas Paul’s use of the same word almost always means justification.<sup>88</sup> The social crisis preacher’s right use of words refers not only to careful exegesis, but to the deployment of English terminology in precise and creative ways. Smith states, “When the Word of God is filtered through carelessly chosen

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<sup>84</sup> D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 28, 62.

<sup>85</sup> Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 28.

<sup>86</sup> Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 63.

<sup>87</sup> Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 29-30

<sup>88</sup> Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 62, references Benno Przybylski, *Righteousness in Matthew and His World of Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

and inappropriate spoken words, the power of that word is negated and its potential is aborted.”<sup>89</sup>

### **Words That Communicate the Idea**

First, argues Smith, “words determine whether or not the idea conceived is the idea communicated.”<sup>90</sup> Effective preaching requires the preacher to take into account the listeners and the manner in which they potentially process what is being said. Since social crisis preaching has the potential to address highly sensitive and controversial topics, the consideration to ensure that the words the preacher uses accurately articulate the idea is important. In his sermon “I Heard the Preaching of the Elder,” Smith’s second point is that “the ebony preacher was almost always a leader of his people.” Smith goes on to describe how the African American preacher has been a leader of the people by using words that communicate his idea, such as: initiate, stimulate, coordinates, and directs the activities of others—his followers: “In the solution of some common problem or the achievement of some specific special goal.”<sup>91</sup> Smith argues, “Spoken words are sound waves that strike the eardrums and are carried immediately to the brain centers. But what the brain receives is determined by many factors other than what is intended to be sent.”<sup>92</sup> On this topic, Hershael York and Bert Decker’s insights are invaluable, as they inform, “Every time you hear someone speak or teach, there is a gateway to your mind through which communication must pass. Standing guard before the house of your rational mind is a gatekeeper.”<sup>93</sup> York and Decker’s advice calls attention to “first brain,” which

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<sup>89</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 83.

<sup>90</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 83.

<sup>91</sup> Smith, “I Heard the Preaching of the Elder.”

<sup>92</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 84.

<sup>93</sup> Hershael W. York and Bert Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance: A Solid and Enduring*

includes the emotional aspects of the listeners, as well as to the preacher's necessary attentiveness to the imperative functionality of "the thinking brain," which includes the listener's intellectual, rational, and conscious attributes.

### **Words with Emotional Hooks**

Second, Smith contends, "There are words that have emotional hooks and when they are used, the presence of the emotional hooks should be borne in mind."<sup>94</sup> Smith is not referring to the emotion of the preacher, but rather the caution the preacher must exercise so as not to incite fear, anger, or alienation due to words that provoke negative emotions. Here again the social crisis preacher has to be cautious not to offend through the wrong or insensitive use of words. Sincere preachers with an exegetically-sound sermon can potentially alienate a congregation when they lack awareness of the words and phrases that the congregation deems offensive and hurtful. The social crisis preacher must bear in mind, as suggested by Smith, "to preach before a congregation of different racial and cultural background from that to which the preacher is accustomed may well present some problems with regard to the use of words."<sup>95</sup> Cultural intelligence is an important factor at this point in preparation of the social crisis sermon. P. Christopher Earley and Soon Ang define cultural intelligence as "the capability to deal effectively with other people with whom the person does not share a common cultural background and understanding."<sup>96</sup> Cultural intelligence in preaching events is the recognition that the preacher should, as suggested by Matthew Kim, "use vocabulary, images, cultural

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*Approach to Engaging Exposition* (Nashville: B & H, 2003), 207.

<sup>94</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 84.

<sup>95</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 84.

<sup>96</sup> P. Christopher Earley and Soon Ang, *Cultural Intelligence: Individual Interactions across Cultures* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 12.

references, idioms, cognates in other languages, and definitions of terms that our diverse listeners will comprehend.”<sup>97</sup>

### Colloquialisms

Third, Smith cites, “there are colloquialisms in the use of words of which the preacher must be aware.”<sup>98</sup> Aristotle’s writing on the speaker’s awareness is relevant to this component when he proclaims, “In regard to style, one of its chief merits may be defined as perspicuity. This is shown by the fact that the speech, if it does not make the meaning clear, will not perform its proper function.”<sup>99</sup> Smith was a nationally recognized preacher. As such, his social crisis preaching was heard across the country, in every region of the United States. Smith was mindful of the potential of language fallacies. Similar to the second observation, Smith is advising “a minister going into a new community or just visiting one different . . . must put forth some effort to understand some of the colloquial expressions in order to minimize barriers to communication.”<sup>100</sup> The most imperative word in Smith’s statement is “effort.”

Since social crisis sermons are not proclaimed in silos, effective social crisis preaching entails familiarity and understanding of the diversity of the audience. According to Kim, David Livermore builds on Earley and Ang’s work on cultural intelligence, and in text *Leading with Cultural Intelligence: The Real Secret to Success* “develops a concrete framework to achieve cultural intelligence in the midst of often complex and varied congregations.”<sup>101</sup> According to Livermore, there are four stages of cultural intelligence:

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<sup>97</sup> Matthew D. Kim, *Preaching with Cultural Intelligence: Understanding the People Who Hear Our Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 27-28.

<sup>98</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 84.

<sup>99</sup> Aristotle, *The “Art” of Rhetoric*, III.2, 351.

<sup>100</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 84.

<sup>101</sup> Kim, *Preaching with Cultural Intelligence*, 6.

CQ knowledge, CQ action, CQ, drive, and CQ strategy. In this third observation concerning the right use of words, CQ drive is the most applicable, and according to Livermore, the most critical of the four stages of acquiring and maintaining cultural intelligence. As Smith advises on the minister “putting forth effort,” Livermore measures CQ drive by the leader’s motivation to learn about other cultures and communities. He contends, “Leaders with high CQ Drive are motivated to learn and adapt to new and diverse cultural settings. Their confidence in their adaptive abilities will influence the way they perform in multicultural situations.”<sup>102</sup>

### **Angry Rhetoric**

The apostle Paul’s advice to “speak the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15) best sums up Smith’s argument for his fourth observation about words. The fourth observation that Smith conveys about the right use of words is that “words in the form of mere angry rhetoric or incendiary verbalization do not constitute social crisis preaching.”<sup>103</sup> Social injustices have the potential to become inflammatory issues. However, the social crisis preacher, especially those in pastoral positions, must possess Spirit-governed passions in the preaching act. Amazingly, both Smith and Massey, who preached and pastored churches in the height of the segregation era, practiced amazing composure in the midst of incendiary conditions. Smith was successful in leading highly effective and peaceful resistance efforts through student led sit-ins, while solidifying himself as a trustworthy negotiator. Both Alice Smith and Kelly Miller Smith, Jr., testifying to Smith’s demeanor amidst threats of racial hostility, admit they never saw Smith angry or raise his voice.<sup>104</sup> Smith is not insisting that social crisis leaders should never get angry or display emotion;

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<sup>102</sup> David Livermore, *Leading with Cultural Intelligence: The Real Secret to Success* (New York: AMACOM, 2015), 43, Kindle.

<sup>103</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 84.

<sup>104</sup> Kelly Miller Smith, Jr., and Alice Smith, interview with author, Griggs Hall, American Baptist College, Nashville, May 30, 2019

he is suggesting that angry incendiary rhetoric can be counter-productive, and public displays of anger can lead to negative and uncontrollable responses from those affected by social crises.

### **Emotion in Prophetic Radicality**

Smith's sermons "We Seek a City" and "I Heard the Preaching of the Elder" both stir the emotions of the hearer by inspiring hope for those facing social crisis. For example, Smith notes in "We Seek a City" that even when

we are faced with a dismal valley. . . . We must go into the valley of sacrifice and struggle while maintaining our integrity. . . . Once we are in the valley however, we note relics that give strength to our hearts. . . . Standing above all the relics of the valley we see an old rugged cross. With the ears of our souls we hear a voice emanating from that cross saying "I am the way, the truth and the life."

The display of emotions and passion is a vital aspect of prophetic radicality. Massey lists four aspects of radicality: root-work, courage, personal address, and confrontational.<sup>105</sup> The social crisis preacher's emotion in the preaching event undergirds the "courage and confrontational" aspects of Massey's sermon component of radicality. This passion should never be misunderstood as impulsive acts of vengeance and human wrath. Prophetic radicality demands emotion.

In ancient Greek rhetoric, *pathos* was considered one of the three defining modes of persuasion. Quintilian provides a description of the orator's responsibilities and expectations when he writes, "The orator has likewise three aims to fulfil: to instruct, to move, and to delight."<sup>106</sup> The preacher's *pathos* includes the emotional tone in which the speech is delivered. For Christian preachers, however, *pathos* should never be intended to manipulate the audience, nor should the preacher rely on passion to be the determining factor in persuasion or transformation of the hearer. Although Paul incorporated all three modes of persuasion in his preaching—*logos*, *pathos*, *ethos*—he insists that the results of

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<sup>105</sup> Massey, *The Responsible Pulpit*, chap. 6.

<sup>106</sup> Quintilian, *The Orator's Education*, Books 3-5, 39.



his preaching rest in God's power. Paul insists, "When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. . . . My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power" (1 Cor 1:1, 4).

In fact, the display of emotion, even the emotion of anger, can be very effective when the biblical text calls for passion. The preacher is called to communicate the mood of the text. Since God is a God of justice and truth, His anger is against those who do injustice (Pss 1: 4-6, 34:16; 1 Pet 3:12). To be true to God and true to the Word of God, the preacher is required to communicate the emotion in the text and to communicate the heart of God in those appropriate emotions. Abraham J. Heschel demonstrates the difference between the prophet's passion arising from the righteous indignation of God and what is vengeful and incendiary in motive when he states of Jeremiah, "He was filled with a blazing passion, and it was this emotional intensity which drove him to discharge God's woeful errands."<sup>107</sup> In presenting the anger of the text, the preacher is also communicating the love of God, for his anger and wrath are byproducts of his love.

Heschel precisely captures this aspect when he writes,

Man's sense of injustice is a poor analogy to God's sense of injustice. The exploitation of the poor is to us a misdemeanor; to God, it is a disaster. Our reaction is disapproval; God's reaction is something no language can convey. It is a sign of cruelty that God's anger is aroused when the rights of the poor are violated, when widows and orphans are oppressed?<sup>108</sup>

The Holy Spirit provides the wisdom and passion necessary for communal transformation to take place during the preaching event. Walter Kaiser attests, "The Spirit

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<sup>107</sup> Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 146.

<sup>108</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, 365.

will also supply the wisdom that is needed to discover the way we should present various truths”<sup>109</sup>

### **Words Used to Design the Sermon**

The fifth observation of words in which Smith advises the social crisis preacher to be mindful is “words are part of the design of the sermon and sometimes they set the very tone for the reception of the sermon.”<sup>110</sup> Providing instruction concerning the proper use of words for all public speakers, Stephen E. Lucas advises, “Words have two kinds of meaning—denotative and connotative. Denotative meaning is precise, literal and objective. . . . Connotative meaning is what words suggests or implies. . . . Speakers use connotation to enrich their meaning.”<sup>111</sup> Connotative meaning is highly regarded in social crisis preaching, especially among African American preachers since the African American preaching tradition has been recognized for colorful and poetic language. African American preachers like Gardner C. Taylor, Manuel Scott, Sr., C. A. W. Clark, and Sandy Ray are poetic geniuses, known for their brilliant use of language in proclamation.

Cleophus J. LaRue suggests, “The traditional black church expects and appreciates rhetorical flair and highly poetic language in the preaching of the gospel.”<sup>112</sup> Henry H. Mitchell points out, “The Black congregation responds to beauty of language-to the well-tuned phrase. . . . Black culture preachers often use short, easily remembered sentences. But they use rhetorical flair.”<sup>113</sup> J. Alfred Smith, Sr. describes the vivid language

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<sup>109</sup> Walter Kaiser, *Towards an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 238.

<sup>110</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 85.

<sup>111</sup> Stephen E. Lucas, *The Art of Public Speaking* (Madison, WI: McGraw Hill, 2015), 222.

<sup>112</sup> Cleophus J. LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 10.

<sup>113</sup> Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1960), 97.

and word choice in Smith's sermons: "I don't know who his English teacher was, but they must have started very early in his education; his word choice, powerful and used glittering adjectives. He was unassuming and modest and self-deprecating and self-effaced."<sup>114</sup>

### **Limitation of Words**

The sixth observation from Smith's advice on word usage is "no matter how well-chosen words are, they fail to convey the total message which is in the heart of the committed minister."<sup>115</sup> This important caveat does not require lengthy commentary, except to acknowledge the fact that human language has limitations and boundaries. Although more will be said in this chapter about non-verbal communication under the "Delivery of the Social Crisis Sermon," it should be noted here that it is impossible to convey the pain and anguish caused by injustice and social crisis. Usually, no person feels that pain and anguish caused by injustice more deeply than those who have committed their reputation and life to confront the causes of injustice and social crisis. For Smith, even the most carefully placed words are limited when attempting to confront sin and evil. The prophet Jeremiah is a classic example of one whose passion could not be articulated into words, and thus, one so frustrated by the limitations of words to alter the human heart (Jer 20:7-12).

### **High-Sounding Words**

Smith's seventh and final observation about words is "the use of high-sounding words with which the congregation is not familiar accomplishes no good."<sup>116</sup> Porter

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<sup>114</sup> J. Alfred Smith, Sr., telephone interview with author, June 9, 2018. J. Alfred Smith, Sr. was a personal friend of Kelly Miller Smith, Sr. He pastored Allen Temple Baptist Church in Oakland, CA, where Kelly Miller Smith, Sr. preached on several occasions, including Allen Temple's 53rd Church Anniversary on October 15, 1972.

<sup>115</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 85.

<sup>116</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 86.

contends, “By far the most elaborated of style’s four main virtues is ornamentation or as Quintilian (Inst. 8.3:2) designates it, *cultus et ornatus*- elegance and adornment.”<sup>117</sup> For the social crisis preacher, Smith would argue that the use of eloquence in the social crisis sermon should be a byproduct of thoughtfully choosing the right words to convey to the appropriate audience the preacher’s intentions, and not as a means to impress or sway the congregation. Quintilian writes, “Eloquence is really nothing else than the power of giving a distinctive look to all, or at any rate most, of our thoughts.”<sup>118</sup> In this regard, the preacher should use the simplest words that capture and convey the preacher’s meaning. The preacher must exercise caution when using excessively profound words. At the height of Smith’s preaching ministry, African Americans were still excluded from most public institutions of higher learning due to segregation, which would have made Smith, and other educated ministers like him, the most educated members of the congregation. Smith was never accused of grand standing or “speaking above” the heads of his congregation.

### **The Perceptual Power of Focus**

The perceptual power of focus is the fourth component of the social crisis sermon. According to Smith, this component requires the preacher to “have a sense of what is primary and what is secondary and communicate to the congregation their relative places in the whole picture.”<sup>119</sup> During social crisis, there is great potential to be sidetracked by concerns that have minimum effect on the crisis as a whole. Preparing the social crisis sermon involves, insists Smith, “a process of developing content and structure in order to speak to a social crisis.”<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Porter, *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric*, 124.

<sup>118</sup> Quintilian, *The Orator’s Education*, Books 9-10, 33.

<sup>119</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 86.

<sup>120</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 86.

The perceptual power of focus also demands that focus is given to matters that affect the whole, or the community, rather than being diverted by issues presented by certain interest groups or individuals. For instance, the social crisis that plagued the nation during Smith's ministry at First Baptist Church Capitol Hill was the disenfranchisement of black Americans due to racial bigotry. While there were other moral issues of major importance during that era, the posterity of the entire African American race was threatened by a lack of access to housing, healthcare, education, and political and economic resources. While other moral issues garnered the sympathy and attention of the African American community, leaders during that era needed to focus on the major issue at hand: systematic disenfranchisement rooted in racism. Smith provides a vivid example:

During the civil rights era of the sixties many communities held weekly mass meetings for the purpose of providing information on the progress of the "movement," for the recruitment of participants, for raising funds, and for providing inspiration and encouragement. Speakers on those occasions were usually ministers who rose to uncommon heights in the presentation of their mass meeting sermons. One could easily see that much of the power of their message was in the fact that they had specific focus as opposed to the vague, hit-and-miss preaching often done on Sunday mornings.<sup>121</sup>

### **Expository Preaching and Application**

The perceptual power of focus is augmented by expository preaching. Expository preaching allows the preacher to remain focused because of the emphasis on authorial intent. Joel C. Gregory states, "The honest expositor acknowledges presuppositions but seeks to unpack the text only for what the text itself says. When this happens, the preacher may stand with the assurance of direct biblical authority."<sup>122</sup> Expository preaching demands focus and requires the preacher to delineate what is primary and what is secondary. Bryan Chapell's definition of expository preaching, "an

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<sup>121</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 86.

<sup>122</sup> Joel Gregory, "Expository Strengths, Part 10: Sermon," in *The New Interpreter's Handbook of Preaching*, ed. Paul Scott Wilson (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 382.

expository sermon requires that it expound Scripture by deriving from a specific text main points and subpoints that disclose the thought of the author, cover the scope of the passage, and are applied to the lives of listeners,”<sup>123</sup> accomplishes the task of maintaining focus and prioritizing primary and secondary content.

Social crisis preaching calls individuals and communities into applying the Word of God, whether that application calls the congregation to develop a sustaining spirituality in the face of injustice and evil, or if the application calls for the mobilization of communities into action, application is paramount in the social crisis sermon. Synonymous with application is the aspect of *confrontation* within Massey’s sermonic component of radicality. Massey admits, “Radicality in the sermon engages the hearer. It makes him know he is being confronted . . . True preaching is always confrontational.”<sup>124</sup> As it relates to the application of social crisis preaching, Chapell’s instruction on main-point development as a means of delivering life application within the sermon is critical. As it pertains to the relationship of sermonic application, Chapell distinguishes instructional specificity (the “what” of the sermon) from situational specificity (the “where” of the sermon), although both are needed. According to Chapell, instructional specificity “translates the text from ancient history to present guide. . . . The need to base instructions on principles found in a text further justifies the prudence of phrasing main points as universal truths that a sermon’s explanation will support.”<sup>125</sup> Chapell explains that situational specificity addresses “*where* in real life these principles apply without which, the principles will remain ‘irrelevant abstractions.’”<sup>126</sup> Donald R. Sunukjian

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<sup>123</sup> Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 132.

<sup>124</sup> Massey, *The Responsible Pulpit*, chap. 6.

<sup>125</sup> Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 215.

<sup>126</sup> Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 216.

makes an exceptional note: “Relevance is broader than application. Application implies something for the listener to do. Relevancy simply shows how the message connects to life.”<sup>127</sup>

The emotion laden issues to which social crisis preaching addresses can potentially distract the preacher to addressing secondary, irrelevant, and unproductive issues promoted by agenda-driven groups or individuals or even the preacher’s own self-interest. However, to withstand this temptation the preacher must subscribe to expository preaching. Expository preaching demands focus from social crisis preachers. Faithful expositors distinguish, but also include main points and sub-points, to challenge the hearer to apply the instructions of the text to specific areas in their lives.

### **Structure**

Quintilian captures the imperative nature of arrangement when he writes, “For it is not only what we say and how we say it that matters, but also in what sequence: disposition is therefore essential.”<sup>128</sup> Not surprisingly, of the seven social crisis sermon component, Smith places twice as much emphasis and commentary on sermon structure. Smith’s homiletic idea of “structure” is the social crisis sermon component most identical to the Greco-Roman canon of arrangement. The social crisis sermon must have as its affect the ability to sustain a people with hope and lead them to the biblical application of the text for the purpose of their liberation through spiritual and social transformation. Smith’s friend, James Earl Massey, passionately confesses, “We design our sermons and preach them—not to preserve a world or to protect it, but to create a new order through announcing hope for change and bidding all to accept and act upon that hope and need.”<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Donald R. Sunukjian, *Invitation to Biblical Preaching: Proclaiming Truth with Clarity and Relevance* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 106.

<sup>128</sup> Quintilian, *The Orator’s Education*, Books 3-5, 23.

<sup>129</sup> Massey, *Designing the Sermon*, 17.

Every sermon's effectiveness rises or falls on sermon structure, even the social crisis sermon, which at times is impromptu and highly passionate.

In the five rhetorical canons, *arrangement* deals with how the parts of the rhetorical piece is structured and ordered. Social crisis preachers must logically and strategically consider how the content is organized and how (and when) they are presented to the congregation. Smith advises, "The chances of effectiveness in the presentation of an urgent message that addresses social crisis are greatly reduced when no thought is given to the manner of presentation and when the preacher does not have the natural gifts to embark upon an effective form without deliberate effort."<sup>130</sup>

For Smith, effective social crisis preachers are conscious of the form of their sermons. In his lecture "The Stuff We Use," Smith employs a structure that resembles the progression of exordium, narration, partition, conformation, refutation, and peroration.<sup>131</sup> In the introduction (exordium) he prepares the audience and arouses their interest through the title of his sermon, a commonly used slang term among African Americans and then alluding to his "little Mississippi town," where the term was used as a chant at athletic events. Smith then moves into the narration of the message by stating the focus or the defense of his message: "When we consider the resources of the black community of Nashville and in a moment of creative fantasy think of maximizing the potentials of that community, we can face the current and impending crises with the reassuring words: We can't lose with the stuff we use!"<sup>132</sup>

As the lecture progresses to the confirmation aspect of the sermon, Smith one-by-one defines in detail what "the stuff" entails: organizational resources, financial

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<sup>130</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 87.

<sup>131</sup> Kelly Miller Smith, "The Stuff We Use," lecture, Vanderbilt University, Jean and Alexander Heard Library, Special Collections and University Archives, Kelly Miller Smith Papers, box 114, file 18.

<sup>132</sup> Smith, "The Stuff We Use."



institutions, printing and publishing, educational institutions, and churches.<sup>133</sup> In the refutation Smith addresses the fact that racism is the reason why those resources have not reached their full potential: “Most of all, it is here that Black persons, wounded in the harsh battle for survival in an unjust and cruel society come and have their hope renewed. Our potential, in terms of the resources of the black community of Nashville, are not yet reached.”<sup>134</sup> Finally in the peroration, the conclusion of the speech, Smith ends in a statement of hope; a statement that would have stirred the emotions of a predominantly African American audience: “It is rough and there are times when it appears that the struggle is a hopeless one. We are rejuvenated, however, when we recall with assurance: ‘We can’t lose with the stuff we use!’”<sup>135</sup>

### Structure and Content

Organizing content was a critical rhetorical principle for Greco-Roman rhetors and quite often the defining characteristic of a winning argument. According to David R. Berger, Cicero formulated “six parts to a persuasive speech. . . . Cicero gives order to substance focused on accomplishing the goal of persuasion.”<sup>136</sup> Those six parts, in an idea of progression, are exordium, narration, partition, confirmation, refutation, and peroration.<sup>137</sup> While Smith does not elevate structure over content, and the ancient orator

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<sup>133</sup> Smith, “The Stuff We Use.”

<sup>134</sup> Smith, “The Stuff We Use.”

<sup>135</sup> Smith, “The Stuff We Use.”

<sup>136</sup> Berger, *Speaking the Truth in Love*, 117

<sup>137</sup> *Exordium* is introductory material that prepares and conditions the audience, and often puts the audience at ease and at the same time builds anticipation. The narration is the presentation of the case or argument in a concise and clear manner and provides a comprehensive narrative of the issue to be discussed. The confirmation builds intensity and the argument is made in detailed fashion. The refutation is the body of the rhetorical speech where the orator refutes the opponent’s argument. Finally, the peroration is the speech’s ending where a summary is presented and generally where emotions are stirred against the opponent and for the orator. For a more detailed explanation of these six parts, see Berger, *Speaking the Truth in Love*, 115-18.

does not promote invention over arrangement, in the words of Pipes, Smith would agree that the preacher must “arrange what you have invented.”<sup>138</sup> Berger states, that according to Cicero, “Exordium, narration, partition, conformation, refutation, and peroration form the basic progression of rhetorical ideas.”<sup>139</sup> These elements of progression are similar to a sequential homiletical structure from the African American preaching tradition, embodied in six movements: “Begin low, go slow, rise, strike fire, retire, sit down in a storm.”<sup>140</sup> The idea is to captivate the mind and heart of the hearer, make the claim, and move them with emotional fervency toward the goal of the sermon.

The structure and content of the social crisis sermon must complement each other. The content often dictates the form the sermon will follow. Smith asserts, “In order for the social crisis sermon to fine its mark, it must exhibit a union of content and structure . . . it must be understood that form does not precede substance.”<sup>141</sup> The social crisis sermon has a mark. Since social crises exact an almost unbearable burden on those most affected, the preacher’s aim in the past was, in the words of Pipes, “to arouse, to ‘stir up,’ to excite the emotions as a means of escape from a wretched condition.”<sup>142</sup> Pipes continues to inform, “Every old-time Negro preacher is aware of his requirement, and it is this fact that accounts for a common type of arrangement in old-time Negro sermons. The arrangement consists essentially of progressive steps in the development of emotional

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<sup>138</sup> Pipes, *Say Amen Brother!*, 143.

<sup>139</sup> Berger, *Speaking the Truth in Love*, 117.

<sup>140</sup> According to Robert Smith, these six movements were borrowed from the United Kingdom and adapted for the African American preaching event. Smith provides a detailed definition of each of these movements as “a paradigmatic dictum for biblical preaching today.” Robert Smith, Jr., *Doctrine That Dances: Bringing Doctrinal Preaching and Teaching to Life* (Nashville: B & H, 2008), 40.

<sup>141</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 90.

<sup>142</sup> Pipes, *Say Amen Brother!*, 77.

excitement.”<sup>143</sup> Smith does not argue that emotional fervency is “the goal” of the sermon. Structure as a social crisis sermon component ensures that whatever goal the preacher intends, structure assures that the sermon makes its mark. In Smith’s era, as well as in today’s contemporary milieu, quite often the social crisis sermon must inspire emotion and inspiration to endure the harsh realities of social crises.

### **Structure and Deductive Method**

Smith favors the deductive preaching method, as a manner of placing “the central idea and position of the speaker before the audience at the very outset.”<sup>144</sup> In Smith’s sermon “I Heard the Preaching of the Elder,” he immediately provides a proposition: “Men suffering from wounds inflicted by an evil and uncaring society needed someone to tell them that ‘There is a balm in Gilead; there is a physician there.’ Men wandering in the darkness needed someone to tell them of one who is the light of the world.”<sup>145</sup> Smith argues that preaching that points to Christ, has sustained communities in crises, and African American pastors have been at the center of that proclamation.

Most congregations will appreciate straight and direct communication. Smith contends, “The direct method may at times be chosen with the hope that the sheer forthrightness and honesty of the preacher will aid in getting reception.”<sup>146</sup> The reasons for this method are quite apparent. Proponents of social crisis preaching would agree that the sermon cannot take the risk of polarizing the hearers or risk the chance that the goals and the reason for the goals are unclear. Social crisis preaching is purposed to mobilize, unite, and sustain social crisis victims. The preacher cannot run the risk that the message

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<sup>143</sup> Pipes, *Say Amen Brother!*, 143.

<sup>144</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 92.

<sup>145</sup> Smith, “I Heard the Preaching of the Elder.”

<sup>146</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 93.

will unite some and not others because the interpretation of the message is shared between preacher and congregation. The social crisis preacher must state the claim up front for this purpose. The inductive preaching method, often referred to as the “New Homiletic,” a method of preaching popularized in the mid-twentieth century, often leaves the application and the delineating of the principles in the text to the hearer.<sup>147</sup> The only time Smith advises using the indirect or the inductive method is when “the preacher whose congregation is conservative but who is genuinely interested in presenting a point of view contrary to the canons of conservatism.”<sup>148</sup>

Smith surmises that wisdom must be employed even when using the direct method of preaching, when emotions from the social crisis run high, or when an unpopular position must be taken. He offers as suggestions the *miniature inductive* approach in the introduction. Cicero states, “An introduction is an address which directly and in plain language makes the auditor well-disposed, receptive, and attentive.”<sup>149</sup> Smith believed that the miniature inductive method “softens the blow of the presentation of the major point . . . and that . . . the introduction moves gently but positively on to the basic thesis of the sermon . . . it employs a brief indirect procedure to make a direct announcement of a position and call to action.”<sup>150</sup> The author of *Rhetorica ad Herennium* promoted this approach, which he called “the subtle approach”: “There are three occasions on which we cannot use the Direct Opening, and these we must consider carefully: when our cause is discreditable; when the hearer has apparently been won over by the previous

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<sup>147</sup> For more detail on the philosophy and the practice of the New Homiletic and inductive and narrative preaching, see Fred Craddock, *As One without Authority* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001); Fred Craddock, *Overhearing the Gospel* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2002); Eugene Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

<sup>148</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 95.

<sup>149</sup> Cicero, *De Inventione*, I.xv.20, 43.

<sup>150</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 92-93.

speaker of the opposition; or when the hearer has become wearied by listening to the previous speakers.”<sup>151</sup> Smith’s suggestion for using the miniature inductive introduction would fall into the first or second occasion since social crisis sermons often seek to confront and correct an ideology or social position that is justified and espoused by a group or individual, but yet is responsible for social crisis.

### **The Social Crisis Sermon Outline**

There are three types of outlines in which Smith advises will help with the social crisis sermon structure: the interrogative outline, the problem-solving outline, and the Hegelian or Triadic outline. For the interrogative outline, Smith maintains, “Each point or section of the sermon may be introduced with a pertinent question regarding the issue.”<sup>152</sup> The advantages of the interrogative outline are numerous considering the social crisis preacher identifies radical questions that are crises specific to illicit thought-provoking considerations and answers. Chapell provides a similar outline in what he refers to as interrogative subpoints. He states, “Greatly aid communication because they force the preacher to ask questions listeners would ask if they were analyzing the sermon out loud.”<sup>153</sup>

On July 5, 1852, African American abolitionist Frederick Douglass used this approach in his thought provoking speech, “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?”<sup>154</sup> The form and outline of the speech was chosen to force the nation, during the era of slavery, to rethink its emphasis on freedom and liberty and the Constitutional principles

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<sup>151</sup> Cicero, *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, 17.

<sup>152</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 95.

<sup>153</sup> Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 159.

<sup>154</sup> Douglass delivered this speech in Corinthian Hall, Rochester, NY, in an address to the Rochester Ladies’ Anti-Slavery Society. See Martha Simmons and Frank A. Thomas, *Preaching with Sacred Fire: An Anthology of African American Sermons 1750 to the Present* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010), 137-59.

promised to every person but not afforded to the Africans held in chattel slavery. Douglass poses several interrogatives throughout the social crisis speech: “Why am I called upon to speak here today? Are the great principles of political freedom and of natural justice, embodied in that Declaration of Independence, extended to us? Would you have me argue that man is entitled to liberty? What to the slave is the fourth of July?” This outline form can be used with audiences interested but yet hesitant to confront social crises because it is thought provoking and conscience stirring.

Memory is one of the five canons of rhetoric in which an outline is a great asset. Cicero implies, “Memory is the firm mental grasp of matter and words.”<sup>155</sup> Social crisis sermons often appeal to historical dates and events to make a strong argument. For instance, in the introduction of Martin Luther King’s famous “I Have A Dream” speech, he calls attention to the Emancipation Proclamation, the Constitution, and the Declaration of Independence to make his point that “America has defaulted on this promissory note in so far as her citizens of color are concerned.”<sup>156</sup> In this manner, historical data and events are pictures and symbols that trigger memory. Bizzell and Herzberg comment regarding classical rhetoric’s canon of memory is deserving of note: “Memory could be improved by treating it as a system of visualized locations, somewhat similar to the way the common places are imagined to reside in actual mental locations that one tours during the invention process.”<sup>157</sup> Smith demonstrated flawless and uninterrupted articulation in his sermons due to tools and methods he employed to serve as aids to memory.

Smith contends that the problem-solving outline includes “the statement of the problem, the statement of the Biblical principle that is applicable, strategies and

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<sup>155</sup> Cicero, *De Inventione*, I.vii.9, 21.

<sup>156</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “I Have a Dream,” in *I Have a Dream: Writings and Speeches That Changed the World*, ed. James M. Washington (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1986), 102.

<sup>157</sup> Bizzell and Herzberg, *The Rhetorical Tradition*, 6.

techniques that can be applied, the plan and program for solution.”<sup>158</sup> This outline is most useful for identifying, connecting, and offering solutions for contemporary problems with those that are biblically identical. The outline Smith employed in “The Stuff We Use” is the problem solving outline, for he addresses how the African American community can overcome plight by leveraging the resources in the African American community. Smith’s outline includes an introduction, followed by “the stuff,” which includes a list of institutions within the black community that are at the disposal of the community and its leaders. Smith closes in climatic style with a line from a James Weldon Johnson anthem, “let us march on, ‘til victory is won!”<sup>159</sup>

The Hegelian or triadic outline is based on George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. This outline involves a thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. Samuel Dewitt Proctor favored this model and promoted its use in his book *The Certain Sound of the Trumpet: Crafting a Sermon of Authority*. For Proctor, the proposition is the impetus and catalyst of the sermon, similar to the “idea” previously discussed. It provides the preacher with the reason the sermon is to be preached and is formed in one clear sentence. Following the proposition, Proctor states that the antithesis is

an error that must be corrected, a condition that must be altered, a mood that must be dispelled, a sin that cries out for confession and forgiveness, some ignorance that needs to be illumined, a direction that has to be reversed . . . there has to be some condition that causes the preacher to be led to a given, certain word or proposition.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 97

<sup>159</sup> Smith, “The Stuff We Use.” The anthem entitled “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” commonly referred to as the Negro National Anthem, was written as a poem by James Weldon Johnson, then later composed by Johnson’s brother John Rosamond Johnson. It was first sang on February 12, 1900, by 500 school children in Jacksonville, FL, as part of Abraham Lincoln’s birthday celebration. For a comprehensive and detailed account of the song, see Imani Perry, *May We Forever Stand: A History of the Black National Anthem* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

<sup>160</sup> Samuel D. Proctor, *The Certain Sound of the Trumpet: Crafting a Sermon of Authority* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1994), chap. 1, Kindle.

The thesis follows the antithesis, which according to Proctor is “to be presented in juxtaposition to the antithesis.”<sup>161</sup> Proctor calls for a relevant question to bridge the thesis to the body of the message that is worked out in the synthesis. This dialectical method was also a part of the philosophy of Aristotle. As for the social crisis sermon, Smith admits that “in social crisis preaching, there are conflicting ideas. The preacher may state at the outset his thesis . . . the second point would be the antithesis, which argues with the first point. These two are combined to form the synthesis.”<sup>162</sup>

### **Delivery of the Social Crisis Sermon**

Cicero notes, “Delivery is the control of voice and body in a manner suitable to the dignity of the subject matter and style.”<sup>163</sup> As for the delivery of social crisis sermons, Smith mentions, “Sound principles for the delivery of sermons of any sort would generally apply here.”<sup>164</sup> Smith does, however, advise on the need for the preacher to exhibit emotional control since social crises can incite heightened emotions. Smith’s advice concerning angry rhetoric is worthy of note here and is deserving of repeating: “Words in the form of mere angry rhetoric or incendiary verbalization do not constitute social crisis preaching.”<sup>165</sup>

Raymond Bailey argues that preaching without notes aids the preacher in delivering the passion resident in the biblical text and necessary for persuading the listeners of the truth and emotion in the text. Bailey claims, “Freedom from notes can contribute much to a formal proclamation situation. Such freedom will enhance *ethos* in the

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<sup>161</sup> Proctor, *The Certain Sound of the Trumpet*, chap. 1.

<sup>162</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 96.

<sup>163</sup> Cicero, *De Inventione*, Book I, 21.

<sup>164</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 97.

<sup>165</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 84.



overwhelming majority of situation. An audience is likely to believe the speaker has knowledge that deserves careful attention.”<sup>166</sup> J. Alfred Smith, Sr. acknowledges that Smith never preached from manuscript and “when he preached you wanted him to continue . . . it was if you were in an airplane, when he brought you across the country with his narrative, you lamented the fact that the journey had come to a smooth landing. . . . I would wish that the landing field was not ready, he never had a bumpy landing.”<sup>167</sup> In harmony with Smith’s flawless delivery, Quintilian underscores the impact delivery has on the audience’s acceptance on what is spoken: “A delivery which is unbecoming, either in voice or in gesture, spoils the whole thing and virtually destroys it.”<sup>168</sup>

York and Decker extend the commonly promoted non-verbal delivery technique of “eye contact,” which is usually touted in most homiletical textbooks, to the more robust technique of “eye-communication.” The authors list this as their number one skill for delivery and hold the conviction that eye communication is about more than making eye-contact, it is “maintaining eye contact in a meaningful way.”<sup>169</sup> York and Decker maintain, “Your eyes literally connect your mind to someone else’s since your eyes are the only part of your central nervous system that are in direct contact with another human being.”<sup>170</sup>

### **African American Delivery**

The preacher should settle for a form of delivery that is harmonious with his personality. The delivery must show authenticity, for in the authentic delivery lies evidence of *ethos*. It is deserving of note, since in a later chapter the question will be

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<sup>166</sup> Raymond Bailey, “Proclamation as a Rhetorical Art,” *Review & Expositor* 84, no. 1 (February 1987): 19.

<sup>167</sup> J. Alfred Smith, interview.

<sup>168</sup> Quintilian, *The Orator’s Education*, Books 3-5, 25.

<sup>169</sup> York and Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance*, 224.

<sup>170</sup> York and Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance*, 226.

answered considering the portability of social crisis preaching to all cultures and ethnicities, that not all social crisis preaching is identified with the style of preaching most dominate in black churches. Black preaching has been noted for its musicality. Gerald L. Davis, in *I Got the Word in Me and I Can Sing it You Know: A Study of the Performed African-American Sermon*, captures the ethnoaesthetics of the African American preaching tradition as oral performance by examining meter and antiphony (call and response) as distinguishing marks in the African American sermon. Likewise, Evans Crawford, in *The Hum: Call and Response in African American Preaching*, focuses on how African American preachers employ voice inflection, pauses, and other oral innovations, coupled with the verbal responses from the congregation is a dominant feature in the African American sermon.

In *Doctrine that Dances: Bringing Doctrinal Preaching and Teaching to Life*, Robert Smith, Jr. notes, “There may be variations in the delivery: lecture, whoop, or tune. The proclamation is still the Word of God. The improvisation does not affect the declaration or proclamation of the Word of God.”<sup>171</sup> Smith did not preach in the style of the African American folk preacher, his son, Kelly Miller Smith, Jr. confessed: “He was a flat-foot preacher, meaning he did not move around a lot, did not have a lot of antics, he just stood flat footed and preached, raising his voice only to stress a point, but he was not a whooper.”<sup>172</sup> By Smith’s example and teaching, the social crisis sermon need not mimic the dominant styles of emotional driven sermons inherent in many African American pulpits in order to be highly effective.

### **The “Post-Delivery” Function of the Preacher**

Smith’s “post-delivery” function of the preacher is a correlation to the “pre-

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<sup>171</sup> Smith, *Doctrine That Dances*, 148.

<sup>172</sup> Smith and Smith, interview.

proclamation” function of the preacher because they both concern the life of the preacher as exemplar of servant in social crisis ministry. Smith states, “Social crisis proclamation, like any other preaching, must be continuous with the ‘pre-delivery’ and ‘post-delivery’ function of the preacher.”<sup>173</sup> The “post-delivery” function of the preacher is the preacher’s follow through and commitment to those who heard the social crisis sermon. Smith comments, “Effective social crisis preaching requires life commitment to the cause of justice and liberation . . . there must be personal involvement and action before and after the sermon is presented.”<sup>174</sup>

### **The Social Crisis Preacher’s Pastoral Relationships**

The preacher’s pastoral relationships are a critical element of post-delivery functionality because the preacher’s proximity to the social crises and proximity to those affected by the social crises are paramount for addressing social crisis within the congregation. Smith’s post-delivery functionality became a powerful asset through the means of building pastoral relationships. The apostle Paul exemplified this trait.

Due to the potentially divisive and sensitive nature of social crises, congregations depend on trustworthy and integrous leadership when being guided through the complexities of social and theological issues. How the minister relates to the congregation prior to, during, and after the actual crisis situation is critical. Smith’s argument is for the preacher to navigate social crises through normal pastoral and parishioner relationships before (pre-crisis), and after (post-delivery) the crisis. The pastoral office is best suited to this task since, according to Abraham Kuruvilla, “there cannot be a severance between preaching and pastoring, between the exposition of God’s

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<sup>173</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 98.

<sup>174</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 99.

word and the shepherding of God’s people.”<sup>175</sup> The pastoral relationship speaks of proximity and intimacy. Smith functioned as a pastor and professor, two positions that positioned him in intimate proximity to those affected by social crisis.

Paul’s pastoral relationships are clearly expressed in his fervent desire to be with the church (Rom 1:11; 1 Cor 16:7; 1 Thess 2:8), his constant prayer for the church (Phil 1:3,4; Col 1:3; 1 Thess 1:2), and his paternal love for them (Gal 4:19; 1 Thess 2:11-12; 1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2; Titus 1:4). These traits, which are foundational for pastoral relationships, also increase proclamation effectiveness. These pastoral traits are carried out among the *ekklēsia* (the church). For Paul, the *ekklēsia* transcends the mere gathering of believers. Paul’s references to the church were contextual and exhibited locality, further evidence of community and relationship. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Terry L. Wilder claim that Paul’s reference to the “church of God [ἐκκλησία Θεου]” in 1 Timothy 3:5 and “the church of the living God [ἐκκλησία Θεου ζωντος]” in 1 Timothy 3:15 refer to the local church. Köstenberger and Wilder argue, “Although Paul sometimes refers to the church in its universal capacity (such as in the letters of Ephesians and Colossians), most of his references refer to the local community of believers.”<sup>176</sup> Paul’s understanding of *ekklēsia* is inseparable from *koinōnia* and is vital for the building of pastoral relationships, a case Ben Witherington III makes: “*Ekklēsia* without *koinōnia* in both spirit and substance is neither an adequate nor an accurate representation of what we are called to be.”<sup>177</sup> Smith’s effective social crisis ministry was facilitated out of the local church where he served as pastor, through loving and trusted relationships. Smith advises,

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<sup>175</sup> Abraham Kuruvilla, *A Vision for Preaching: Understanding the Heart of Pastoral Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), 33.

<sup>176</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger and Terry L. Wilder, eds., *Entrusted with the Gospel: Paul’s Theology in the Pastoral Epistles* (Nashville: B & H, 2010), 174.

<sup>177</sup> Ben Witherington III, *Conflict & Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 93.

One may not be able to learn as much as desired, but it is important to know as much as possible about those who are expected to perceive the message correctly and to act upon it. This is especially important for social crisis preaching. The concern here is mainly with preachers who are pastors of congregations to whom the social crisis preaching is delivered. Pastors should, by virtue of their pastoral function and relation, be aware of some of the needs and desires of the congregation.<sup>178</sup>

### **Social Crisis and the Servant Motif**

The “post-delivery” function of the preacher speaks to the character and integrity of the preacher as well. Smith’s pre-proclamation function of the preacher is synonymous with the *ethos* element of classical Greek rhetoric. Aristotle argues,

Persuasion is achieved by the speaker’s personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible. . . . It is not true . . . that the personal goodness revealed by the speaker contributes nothing to his power of persuasion; on the contrary, his character may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion he possesses.<sup>179</sup>

The New Testament preaching of Paul is a testament that preaching effectiveness bears the same requirement, a claim Chapell makes concerning Paul by exclaiming, “Although his terms are not Aristotle’s, they echo features of the classic rhetor’s categories and remind us that craft cannot make a message powerful if one’s heart and character do not validate its truth.”<sup>180</sup>

Another Pauline trait that enhanced Smith’s pastoral relationships among his congregation was his willingness to epitomize servanthood. This trait, likewise, is pronounced in Paul’s model of pastoral theology. In Pauline theology, servanthood precedes and is therefore a prerequisite of proclamation, suggesting the necessity of the servant to have unrivaled commitment to the Lord. Paul’s use of *δουλος Χριστου* in Romans 1:1 is a description of Paul’s understanding of servanthood. Douglass J. Moo explains, “The phrase connotes total devotion, suggesting that the servant is completely at

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<sup>178</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 40.

<sup>179</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, Kindle Chapter 2.

<sup>180</sup> Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 35.

the disposal of his or her Lord.”<sup>181</sup> The servant’s renunciation of status and privilege exhibits devotion to the call of Christ and his willingness to identify with the people of God. Materialism and worldly acclaim have the potential to create barriers and distrust between the gospel and the hearer. Paul’s example to waive his rights and comforts (Acts 20:18-24; 1 Cor 9; 2 Cor 11:23-27; Phil 3:4-8) demonstrates his refusal to capitulate being measured by worldly standards of success. Duane Litfin observes this point:

It was not Paul’s assignment to engineer the response he desired from his audience. Success for Paul was measured not by the audience’s response but by the degree to which he faithfully executed his commission. It is in this sense that Paul’s model is obedience driven rather than result driven. . . . This dramatic paradigm shift, from *result driven to obedience driven*, is the fundamental difference between the *persuader’s stance* and the *herald’s stance*, between the *natural paradigm* and the *Pauline paradigm*.<sup>182</sup>

Smith preferred an ecclesiology that avoided sacerdotal hierarchy, and rather chooses evangelical kinship in the spirit of service.

### Summary

Smith’s life and preaching bear the evidence of his seven social crisis sermon components, which are essentially his canons of social crisis rhetoric. In five of the components of the social crisis sermon there is a direct correlation of the five canons of Greco-Roman rhetoric, as well as Aristotle’s three proofs of persuasion. More critical than the act of proclamation is *who* the preacher is before and after the social crisis sermon. Smith states, “Far more attention is devoted to what the preacher must do than to who the preacher must be.”<sup>183</sup> Social crisis preaching is the gospel proclaimed and the gospel lived.

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<sup>181</sup> Douglass J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 41.

<sup>182</sup> Litfin, *Paul’s Theology of Preaching*, 316, emphasis original.

<sup>183</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 98.

CHAPTER 4

AN ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL CRISIS PREACHING:  
USING JAMES EARL MASSEY’S SERMONIC  
COMPONENT OF RADICALITY

**Christ-Centered Prophetic Radicalism**

James Earl Massey, in *The Responsible Pulpit*, contends that there are five characteristics of the black preaching tradition—functional, communal, festive, radical, and climatic. The characteristic that provides the most accurate description of the social crisis proclamation from the African American preaching tradition is *radical*. This sermonic component, distinct from the four other characteristics that Massey uses to qualify the African American preaching tradition, is the quality most prominent and active in social crisis proclamation, and the component most visible in the social crisis preaching of Kelly Miller Smith. Massey reports that the preaching of Christ is a radical act.<sup>1</sup> Massey was influenced of this fact through the biblical witness of preaching, his experiences of being developed by African American preachers, and as he attests,

I was impressed many years ago by a sermon of Wade Robinson about Jesus as “a Radical.” Robinson explained that he was not using the term “radical” to classify Jesus as a headlong destructionist intent to make arbitrary changes nor as someone out to assail other people. He explained that his application of the word “radical” to Jesus was in honorable recognition of Jesus as “one who lived in connection with the root principles which underlie existence” and who therefore know and “announced God as the first of all facts.”<sup>2</sup>

Radical preaching and radical preachers are powerfully effective against injustices and social crises. Proclamation that lacks radicality placates the sources of evil

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<sup>1</sup> James Earl Massey, *The Responsible Pulpit* (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 1974), chap. 6, Kindle.

<sup>2</sup> James Earl Massey, *Stewards of The Story: The Task of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 42. See also Wade Robinson, *The Philosophy of the Atonement and Other Sermons* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1912), 1, 3.

power, conveniences the apathetic, and serves to make social crises in today's world and communities more palatable for those who suffer injustices by leaving the evil responsible for such crises intact and undisturbed. Radical preaching challenges the very root and foundation of social crises and threatens to dismantle and disturb the ideology, theology, and other causes responsible for its perpetuation. Sin, the source and root of all social crises, is a radical and cataclysmic disruption of God's perfect plan for his creation. God ordained a more radical plan to overcome and defeat sin and evil: *the gospel* (Gen 3:15). Throughout the ages, the proclamation of God's plan has served to address social crises. Therefore, Kelly Miller Smith contends, "The preaching, teaching, and deeds of Jesus are central to Christian social crisis preaching."<sup>3</sup>

The social crisis preaching of Smith is exemplary of a Christ-centered radicality. Smith explains, "Social crisis preaching is preaching for a decision—for Christ."<sup>4</sup> Smith's social crisis sermons point to the most radical and the ultimate solution for social crisis: Jesus Christ. To a massive audience at the 87th Annual Session of the Stones River District Association, Smith proclaimed a radical solution to social crises in his moderator's address: "Stone River must stand as an unwavering witness to the fact that for the solutions to the problems of our times we need not look for another—for Christ is the answer. He is the same yesterday, today and forever."<sup>5</sup>

An examination of Smith's sermons reveals that there were occasions when he was called upon to preach topically, or, in the hostile climate of racial segregation, many of his sermons specifically addressed racism from a biblical standpoint. However, it would be in error to suggest that the social crisis sermon is something other than gospel

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<sup>3</sup> Kelly Miller Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching: The Lyman Beecher Lectures, 1983* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983), 54.

<sup>4</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 80.

<sup>5</sup> Kelly Miller Smith, "Moderator's Address," 87th Annual Session of the Stone River District Association, Nashville, August 1957, speech manuscript, Vanderbilt University, Jean and Alexander Heard Library, Special Collections and University Archives, Kelly Miller Smith Papers, box 23, file 6.



proclamation or that it is a different category of preaching. The gospel has social ramifications and the proclamation of the gospel brings the full weight of God's power to bear on social crises. Since Smith was a pastor, his pastoral preaching also addressed social crises, but his prophetic radicalism was not something "in addition to" pastoral preaching. Thomas G. Long expounds,

Rather than arbitrarily dividing our preaching into pastoral and prophetic categories, we take the fullness of the life of the people into the encounter with Scripture and then tell the truth about what we hear. Sometimes our sermons will take a more pastoral tone, sometimes a more prophetic one, but these are not two distinct kinds of preaching.<sup>6</sup>

Through the implementation of the seven components of the social crisis sermon examined in chapter 3, Smith's radical social crisis preaching strikes at the root of the injustices that cause social crises, and at the same time, calls people to a radical reconciliation through the proclamation of the radical Word of God. In this chapter, an examination of twenty of Smith's sermons will provide an analysis of the social crisis preaching of Kelly Miller Smith under the light of Massey's sermon component of radicality and prove the thesis, as posed in chapter 1: Kelly Miller Smith embodies the component of James Earl Massey's prophetic radicalism in his social crisis preaching. Massey's sermon component of radicality is comprised of four unique aspects: root work, courage, personal address, and confrontation.

I will examine twenty different Smith sermons in this chapter to provide sufficient evidence that Smith's social crisis preaching embodies the aspects of Massey's sermon component of prophetic radicalism.<sup>7</sup> These sermons represent a larger sampling

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<sup>6</sup> Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1989), 197.

<sup>7</sup> The Kelly Miller Smith Collection of the Jean and Alexander Heard Library at Vanderbilt University contains a large number of Smith's typed, hand-written, and outlined sermons. These sermons are meticulously cataloged in a manual titled *Kelly Miller Smith Papers: 1944-1984*, Vanderbilt University, Jean and Alexander Heard Library, Special Collections and University Archives, Kelly Miller Smith Papers, Collection Number: MSS 400, Size: 66:78 linear feet. The archives also contain the original handwritten and typed Lyman Beecher Lectures at Yale from 1983. The sermons used for this dissertation were taken from Boxes 23 (20 Files), 24 (21 Files), 25 (27 Files), 26 (16 Files), and 27 (17 Files). I also had fifteen sermons on cassette tape professionally transcribed. In addition to the sermon manuscripts, Kelly Miller

of over fifty sermons that were read and/or listened to for examination in this research. More specifically, Smith's twenty sermons will reveal a Christocentric focus, rather than an anthropocentric focus, that characterizes many of the social crisis sermons of his day. The prophetic radicality characterized by Massey, as Smith's twenty sermons in this chapter will reveal, was tethered to Christ. Most complementary of this research is also the fact that Christocentric prophetic radicality in social crisis proclamation works to resolve social crises while maintaining the integrity of the gospel, as the impact of Smith's ministry upon the racial history of Nashville revealed during the mid-1960s.

### **Insights from the Black Preaching Tradition**

In 1980, DeWitte T. Holland observed, "One is now more likely to find aggressive, interesting, compelling, biblical preaching in the black church than in any other segment of Christendom in America."<sup>8</sup> Massey and Smith were products of the black church of which Holland speaks. In Massey's epic textbook on preaching, *The Responsible Pulpit*, chapter 6 focuses on "Delivery," where Massey highlights the black preaching tradition.<sup>9</sup> Massey bears the distinction of being one of the most respected

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Smith's son, Kelly Miller Smith, Jr., loaned me his father's Lyman Beecher Lectures at Yale on cassette tapes. However, a host of other boxes and files, which contained pictures, personal correspondence, personal check receipts, church programs, magazine articles, pamphlets, calendars, divinity school lectures, and other personal and professional items were examined. I conducted research at the Jean and Alexander Heard Library on five separate occasions since this collection of sermons cannot be checked out or borrowed. I was allowed the opportunity to take photographs of the sermon manuscripts and lecture notes, which I stored on my iPad. Some of the hand-written manuscripts studied for this dissertation were illegible. Many of the same sermon manuscripts were both hand-written and typed. Also, most helpful were the personal sermon notes of Smith's personal assistant, which were included in files corresponding to the sermon manuscript. The twenty sermons used for this chapter are "The Kingdom of God," "The Church in Our Today," "The Way of Christ," "The Story of Jesus," "Beauty," "Lord I Want to Be A Christian," "We Seek A City," "If Any Man," "Something Old for the New," "Stay Tuned for Another World," "A Look At Ourselves," "Everyday Will Be Sunday," "Now Is the Day of Salvation," "Too Busy to Live," "The Relevance of Ridiculous," "God's Answer: The Negro in History," "The Birth of A New Day," "Inquiry Into the Night," "47<sup>th</sup> Annual Dental Association Address," and "Thy Kingdom Come."

<sup>8</sup> DeWitte T. Holland, *The Preaching Tradition: A Brief History* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 90.

<sup>9</sup> H. Beecher Hicks, Jr. provides one of the most robust definitions of African American preaching: "African American preaching is the gift of God to those who have been sent to speak to and for

homiletics of the twentieth century. As a member of a predominately black local church within a racially diverse denomination, the Church of God Anderson, Indiana, Massey's homiletical heroes were revered African American pastors within that denomination. Besides his pastor, Raymond Jackson, and his father, George Massey, Massey lists as his preaching influences the quintessential scholar, Howard Thurman, and revered preaching scholar, George Arthur Buttrick, as his models for preaching.<sup>10</sup> The homiletical contributions and scholarship of Massey garnered respect from the widest racial and denominational spectrum. Massey embraced a "bicultural" approach to teaching preaching of which he names Smith as a model. In an interview with the African American preaching scholar Henry H. Mitchell, Massey refers to three African American preachers, Howard Thurman, Gardner C. Taylor, and Kelly Miller Smith, Sr., as bicultural preaching examples "because of their bicultural approach in preaching, each one of these pulpit masters was equally at home in any pulpit."<sup>11</sup> His aim was to celebrate preaching cultures beyond the African American tradition. He notes, "In teaching, I am committed to a bicultural approach, always seeking a two-way acculturation as most germane for classrooms filled with persons whose horizons need to be expanded."<sup>12</sup>

Massey's career as a respected academician, experience in the black church, and the impact of black preachers on his life qualify him to give commentary on the distinctive marks of the African American preaching tradition. Massey lists five insights from the black preaching tradition: functional, festive, communal, radical, and climactic.

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the oppressed and the downtrodden; it is a kind of Holy, anointed articulation designed to rescue the perishing and care for the dying." H. Beecher Hicks, Jr., *Preaching While Bleeding: Is There a Prophet in the House?* (Chicago: Urban Ministries, 2017), 9. This preaching encourages prophets among us to preach from and to a culture that sees rhetoric as a path to action and finds its power to prevail in the redemptive and salvific blood of our Christ.

<sup>10</sup> See interview with Henry H. Mitchell, in Barry L. Callen and Curtiss Paul DeYoung, *Views from the Mountain: Select Writings of James Earl Massey* (Anderson, IN: Aldersgate, 2018), 242.

<sup>11</sup> Callen and DeYoung, *Views from the Mountain*, 255.

<sup>12</sup> Callen and DeYoung, *Views from the Mountain*, 254.

While there is evidence of each component in social crisis preaching, the fourth component, *radical*, bears theological and homiletical significance for social crisis preaching. After a brief description of the functional, festive, communal, and climactic components, I will provide a thorough analysis of Smith's sermons through the lens of radicality.

### **Functional**

Massey argues, "In the black church the sermon is functional. That is, the sermon is never regarded as a product for its own sake, or even as an art form, but as a means to an end."<sup>13</sup> For Massey, preaching has a purpose, not only is it the centerpiece of the black worship experience, but the sermon from the black pulpit bears the responsibility, according to Massey, "to liberate the hearer's spirit, give him life and sustain his faith."<sup>14</sup> Massey's allusion to the sermon's functionality is directly related to the sermon's prophetic radicalism as a response to injustice and as purveyor of hope for the gathered faith community amidst injustice. Historically, as the African American pastor was often the most educated and informed member of the black community and was expected to be the leader of the community, the sermon also functioned in the black church to communicate vital information about strategic boycotts and other acts of resistance in the effort to combat social crises. Holland states, "From its earliest days the black church . . . helped its members adjust to the economic realities of being black in a white man's world."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Massey, *The Responsible Pulpit*, chap. 6.

<sup>14</sup> Massey, *The Responsible Pulpit*, chap. 6.

<sup>15</sup> Holland, *The Preaching Tradition*, 87-88.

## Festive

Robert Smith, Jr. has commented, “All I know is that I have had fun in the pulpit, and the pulpit has become a playground of the Spirit for me.”<sup>16</sup> Massey’s second component of the black preaching tradition is “festive.” Massey exclaims, “Whatever festivity and playfulness that fill the black sermon are there because they have been *won* in the midst of sorrow and lament, making the sermon itself an open expression of faith.”<sup>17</sup>

This festive quality is a crucially important aspect of social crisis preaching because the social crisis sermon is infused with the spirituality of the preacher, which conveys sustenance to people who are caught up in the crux of social crises. Massey informs, “Those who make battle daily on the many fronts of personal and public life need a worship occasion that both informs and inspires them.”<sup>18</sup> The festivity of the black sermon “excels in being an invitation to joy, even in the midst of sorrow and struggle.”<sup>19</sup> African American Christians in the twentieth century possessed a Christian spirituality induced by personal and collective spiritual disciplines that sustained the social justice activists in the pursuit of social justice. The work of social activism demands a spirituality robust and firm enough to sustain activism amidst evil and structurally oppressive forces. Diana Hayes asserts, “African American spirituality is a result of the encounter of a particular people with their God. It is their response to God’s action in their history in ways that reveal to them the meaning of God and that provided them with an understanding of themselves as beings created by God.”<sup>20</sup> An African American Christian spirituality adds

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<sup>16</sup> Robert Smith, Jr., quoted in Kristen Padillia, “Robert Smith, Jr.: 20 Years at Beeson Divinity School, Received Prestigious Preaching Award,” *Beeson Magazine*, 2018, accessed July 10, 2019, <https://www.beesondivinity.com/beeson-magazine>, 23.

<sup>17</sup> Massey, *The Responsible Pulpit*, chap. 6.

<sup>18</sup> Massey, *The Responsible Pulpit*, chap. 6.

<sup>19</sup> Massey, *The Responsible Pulpit*, chap. 6.

<sup>20</sup> Diana L. Hayes, *Forged in the Fiery Furnace: African American Spirituality* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012), 2.

depth, meaning, and a spiritual purpose to the work of social justice activism. It also provides the means in which activism should be carried out in a particular context. A spirituality keeps improper motives in check and weeds out individuals seeking self-aggrandizement. The festive nature of the sermon ensures that the joy inherent in African American spirituality is portable and transferable to those who need it most in times of social crises.

### **Communal**

The communal aspect of the sermon in African American churches is most noted in the antiphonal dynamic, known as call and response. In this way, the preacher and the congregation are participants in the proclamation event. Massey comments,

Many churches of varying denominational contexts are accustomed to plan a call-response action through a reading, a litany, a chant; the black sermon is itself a call for response. The black preacher usually allows for and expects acts of communalism among his hearers, even vocal expressions of praise, agreement, encouragement, and prompting.<sup>21</sup>

Within this communal component stands the historic reality that the black preacher has been a part of the community he was sent to address, sharing in their plight and oppression. In harmony with this thought, Cleophus LaRue explains the communalism of the black preaching tradition in terms of the black sociocultural context: “The black preacher’s social location on the boundary of the dominant culture continues to provide creative perspectives that are usually unavailable to those standing within the center of power.”<sup>22</sup> Massey states, “This aspect of the black tradition is akin in some ways to the Hebrew concept of the creative power of the spoken word.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Massey, *The Responsible Pulpit*, chap. 6.

<sup>22</sup> Cleophus J. LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 121.

<sup>23</sup> Massey, *The Responsible Pulpit*, chap. 6.

## Climactic

According to Massey, “a fifth essential characteristic of black preaching is to produce a climax of impression for the hearer.”<sup>24</sup> The climatic component of the sermon cannot be reduced to or defined as mere emotionalism. The climatic component of the black preaching tradition proposed by Massey is as cerebral and mentally stimulating as it is emotionally stirring. For the black preaching tradition, mental stimulation and emotional stirring is Holy Spirit inspired human performance. Concerning the role of the Holy Spirit in preaching, Johnson T. K. Lim confesses, “A sermon without the Spirit can be inspiring but only a sermon empowered by the Spirit is transforming.”<sup>25</sup> Both the cerebral and cardiological aspects of the climactic component are necessary to move and sustain the hearer in an experience with God. According to Massey, some aspects of the climactic component include “Scripture, interpretation, zestful speech, a concern for community, mind-engaging lines, controlled imagination—all these are calculated to incite the hearer to participate as well as listen, leading him to a climax of impression for faith and life.”<sup>26</sup>

Manipulation is a constant temptation of the climactic portion of the sermon. For Smith, Holy Spirit inspired speech and performance allow the preacher to avoid manipulation. Making the Word present, according to Smith, “is the Spirit of God working upon the mind and spirit of the preacher with the directions that he . . . proclaim the powerful, critically relevant, uncompromising Word of the living God.”<sup>27</sup> In *Rethinking Celebration: From Rhetoric to Praise in African American Preaching*, Cleophus LaRue warns of the crippling and paralyzing effects of manipulation when he writes, “Our so-

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<sup>24</sup> Massey, *The Responsible Pulpit*, chap. 6.

<sup>25</sup> Johnson T. K. Lim, *Power in Preaching* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2002), 134.

<sup>26</sup> Massey, *The Responsible Pulpit*, chap. 6.

<sup>27</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 19.

called celebratory preaching, designed to excite the congregation into action through a highly emotional closing of the sermon, has had the opposite effect. Rather than inducing action, it has lulled generations of black congregants to sleep.”<sup>28</sup> However, the performative nature of the climax is not the determinative factor of manipulation; rather, the relationship of the climax with relevant subject matter is the major indicator of manipulation. Henry H. Mitchell makes this point:

The cardinal sin of the Black pulpit is probably that of irrelevant celebration-gravy that does not match the meat, so to speak. Good gravy is always made of the essence of the meat to be served, and the same is true of the good gospel feast. When the celebration is about something else, the real message is lost, while the celebration, if it has any substance at all, is recalled.<sup>29</sup>

Massey, likewise, warns of the temptation of manipulation:

It is true that art can be exploited and turned to the false end of exhibitionism. But the prostitution of an art must not blind us to its proper end and effects. A preacher must not ignore the soundness of the theory and insistence that his sermon should produce a climax of impression for his hearers. Preaching at its best involves this, and more; but if it lacks this ability, no matter whatever else it has, such a sermon will make no difference.<sup>30</sup>

For Massey, the climactic component is designed to invite and draw the congregation into the worship experience of Jesus the deliverer, of which black preaching is the central part.

### **Social Crisis Preaching through the Lens of Radicality**

The origin of the word “radical” in Latin is *radix*, meaning “root.” Curtiss DeYoung contends, “Reconciliation is radical in that it reaches to the very root of injustice.”<sup>31</sup> Kelly Miller Smith’s social crisis preaching exposes the root of social crises.

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<sup>28</sup> Cleophus J. LaRue, *Rethinking Celebration: From Rhetoric to Praise in African American Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016), ix.

<sup>29</sup> Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 121.

<sup>30</sup> Massey, *The Responsible Pulpit*, chap. 6.

<sup>31</sup> Allan Aubrey Boesak and Curtiss Paul DeYoung, *Radical Reconciliation: Beyond Political Pietism and Christian Quietism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2016), 18.



There are four aspects of Massey's radicality: root-work, courage, personal address, and confrontation. These four aspects provide a stratagem of interlaced and complementary elements that makes Massey's sermonic component of radicality the most definitive component of Smith's social crisis preaching.

Smith calls attention to the absence of God's vision for humanity in Christ as the root cause of all social crises and posits the Christ of the Bible as the ultimate solution to social crises. Smith preaches in his sermon "The Story of Jesus,"

The simple story of Jesus is indeed more powerful than anything created by man. Through its power blind, bigoted and blundering men have been radically transformed into servants of the Most High God. Those who were cast aside as human wreckage on the junk pile of life have been able, through the instrumentality of this story, to find the abundant life.<sup>32</sup>

Smith understood that the radical nature of sin is the root cause of any social crisis and that before structures and systems could be transformed—the individual had to be saved from sin. Sinful men construct, create, and sustain evil systems. For Smith, salvation in Christ for the individual must be the catalyst for social transformation. In this sermon, three of the four aspects of radicality are prominent: root-work, courage, and confrontation. Although Smith is entirely Christ-centered in this sermon, the personal address aspect of radicality is non-existent. Smith's sermon bears the aspect of root-work, by his insistence, "We may have fellowship with this same Christ by simply accepting His way of life and believing on Him as Savior of the world." With this statement, Smith points to the root of social crises and the primary cause of societal dysfunction. Smith not only highlights the courage of Christ by proclaiming that "none of the adversities and oppositions of his life proved him a coward," but he challenges the hearer to follow Christ's example by preaching, "Such a one is well worthy of our sincerest allegiance."<sup>33</sup> In this sermon the hearers knew they were being confronted with the challenge of accepting and following

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<sup>32</sup> Kelly Miller Smith, "The Story of Jesus," sermon, Vanderbilt University, Jean and Alexander Heard Library, Special Collections and University Archives, Kelly Miller Smith Papers, box 23, file 4.

<sup>33</sup> Smith, "The Story of Jesus."

Christ. Smith's homiletical method in this sermon, much like Paul's strategy in his letter to Philemon, appeals to the hearer to embrace Christ and Christ-like behavior. In this way the bigotry and evil that undergird social crises is undermined as the hearer gives his life to Christ.

In Smith's sermon "Now is The Day of Salvation," taken from 2 Corinthians 6:2, he elaborates on the sufficiency of the cross of Christ and the desperate need for humanity to be saved:

While the thought of the bloody murder of Christ causes our eyes to become fountains of water, His resurrection, His life, and His meaning for Christianity and the world cause our hearts to be filled with exuberant joy. Ours is not a religion of gloom. Yet, we recognize the saddened state of those who worship a god of fruitless and reckless pleasure. We of the religion of the cross must tell them that theirs is a pleasure that borders on danger. We must tell them that the religion that is founded upon a crucified Christ offers joy that is deep enough to turn defeat into glorious victory. To those whose ideas are warped by the god of fruitless and reckless pleasure hear the proclamation: "Behold, NOW is the day of salvation."<sup>34</sup>

In these powerful words lies the prophetic radicalism of Kelly Miller Smith. This sermon bears every aspect of radicality: root-work, courage, personal address, and confrontation.

To provide an analysis of the social crisis proclamation of Smith, an examination of his sermons is conducted through each of these aspects of radicality to reveal an undeniable parallel between these aspects of radicality and Smith's social crisis proclamation.

### **Root-Work**

The first aspect of radicality is root-work. Massey contends, "The nature of preaching in the black church calls for the sermon to be radical: "it must take the hearer to the roots of personal life and vital response."<sup>35</sup> For Massey, root-work brings the hearer

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<sup>34</sup> Kelly Miller Smith, "Now Is the Day of Salvation," sermon, Vanderbilt University, Jean and Alexander Heard Library, Special Collections and University Archives, Kelly Miller Smith Papers, box 23, file 4.

<sup>35</sup> Massey, *The Responsible Pulpit*, chap. 6.

center stage to two intertwined realities: what it means to be created in the image of God and the acknowledgement of humanity's greatest need: God. In his sermon "This Jesus," Massey proclaims, "This Jesus is utterly distinctive in the plan of God to meet our deepest human need."<sup>36</sup>

### **Preaching to the Root of Human Identity**

A consistent refrain in the preaching from African American churches is the constant reminder that the oppressed and marginalized are *also* children of God. Smith states, "Because of the impact of that Word, the oppressed become aware that they are not hapless orphans deserted on the doorsteps of destiny, but are sons and daughters of a caring God."<sup>37</sup> African Americans have identified themselves with the marginalized in the Bible and have associated God's deliverance as a promise for His people who trust in Him. Robert Smith, Jr., Charles T. Carter Baptist Chair of Divinity and professor of preaching at Beeson Divinity School contends, "James A. Sanders, a professor of canonical hermeneutics . . . helped us to see that the biblical characters did not primarily serve as models for morality but as mirrors for identity."<sup>38</sup> Such preaching strikes at the root of the myth of the second-class citizenship, sub-human narratives that dogged African Americans for over three centuries, and which served as the platform for the social crises that Massey and Smith preached and served to obliterate.

If inequity and unjust legislation was rooted in the belief of superior and inferior races, then the root-work of Kelly Miller Smith's preaching was vitally necessary in sharing the revelation of God's Word concerning the *imago Dei*, and especially those who are a part of God's new creation in Christ (Gen 1:27; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 3:28; Col

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<sup>36</sup> Massey, *Stewards of the Story*, 68.

<sup>37</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 23.

<sup>38</sup> Robert Smith, Jr., *Doctrine That Dances: Bringing Doctrinal Preaching and Teaching to Life* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2008), 46.

3:11). In his powerful sermon from 1949, entitled “The Relevance of the Ridiculous,” taken from Matthew 10:34-36, and given for a Brotherhood Observance, Smith addresses the importance of every human to be recognized as children of God in God’s family, while he also calls out the bigotry of those who fail to recognize minorities as such:

It is ridiculous to speak of a Brotherhood observance if it excludes other persons solely because of color and racial background. Here we have a serious paradox and we must recognize it as such. We must be fair enough in our thinking to realize that the building of brotherhood cannot be built upon a foundation of bias or prejudice. Actual brotherhood cannot exist if the feeling of oneness with the human family is absent. We gain nothing of permanent value by attempting to ignore that which constitutes the basic problem of America. If our religion does not address itself to our most serious problems, it is not much value to us. These are days when issues must be faced squarely and those who are on the side of the aggressive love of Jesus must stand up and be counted.<sup>39</sup>

Smith’s sermon displays all four aspects of radicality: root-work, personal address, courage, and confrontation. His use of the plural pronoun “we” reveals personal address, as one who has shared experience with the hearer, who also uses this experience to address the hearer, personally. Likewise, Smith’s courage is demonstrated by his proclamation of “our minds have not been freed from prejudice; our hearts have not been free from hatred and our biased attitudes have expressed themselves in almost every avenue of our life,”<sup>40</sup> which points to the truth of a democracy shackled by racism.

In these proclamations, Smith is issuing the confrontational elements of the text to the hearer in order for them to hold these courageous statements in tension with their own attitudes and behaviors. Since every person is a child of God, created in the image of the Creator, every person deserves love, respect, and compassion regardless of racial identification or ethnic tribe. The theme of brotherhood rooted in our reality as image bearers and need for brotherhood is the root-work aspect of the sermon. Love for

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<sup>39</sup> Kelly Miller Smith, “The Relevance of the Ridiculous,” sermon, Vanderbilt University, Jean and Alexander Heard Library, Special Collections and University Archives, Kelly Miller Smith Papers, box 23, file 4.

<sup>40</sup> Smith, “The Relevance of the Ridiculous.”

who God loves should trump politics, economic agendas, and the sociological fear of changing cultural demographics.

Most importantly, to combat the racist causes of social crises, Smith celebrates the cultural uniqueness of African Americans as part of God's creation, in his message, "God's Answer: The Negro in History." In this message given during Negro History Week, Smith proclaims,

Examination of the record of the Negro will reveal that he is not just a black man, he is not just a brown man, but he is a MAN. He is an individual with the same potentialities as any individual of any other color or racial background. . . . In connection with the worth of the Negro, more and more of our fellow Americans are realizing that truth of the words of the Son of God, "Wherefore by their fruits you shall know them."<sup>41</sup>

Root-work is the most pronounced aspect of this message. Historically, African American preaching has been tasked with the priority of affirming the humanity of black people. The American narrative of African Americans as inferior was a historical claim evidenced by the Three-Fifths Clause of the Constitution.<sup>42</sup> These false narratives were embedded in the psyche of America and were seared into the mental perception of many white citizens and church goers. The preaching from the black church, served to remind black people of their true identity and full personhood. The black preacher affirmed the ontology of African Americans as people who have their *being* in God. The sermon "God's Answer: The Negro in History" bears the characteristics of personal address since Smith is a black man. The elements of courage and confrontational qualities are inherent in this message

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<sup>41</sup> Kelly Miller Smith, "God's Answer: The Negro in History," sermon, Vanderbilt University, Jean and Alexander Heard Library, Special Collections and University Archives, Kelly Miller Smith Papers, box 23, file 3.

<sup>42</sup> Jon Meacham refers to the three-fifths clause as "the constitutional provision that counted a slave as three-fifths of a person to establish the number of congressmen and presidential electors allocated to each state." Jon Meacham, *Thomas Jefferson: The Art of Power* (New York: Random House, 2012), 303. Until the 13th and 14th Amendments went into effect after the Civil War, the 'Three-fifths Clause,' found in Article 1, Section 2 of the Constitution, denied blacks citizenship and declared that blacks held in slavery in a particular state, would be counted as three-fifths of the number of the whites who lived in that state. The Heritage Foundation, "The Heritage Guide to The Constitution," accessed August 31, 2019, [https://www.heritage.org/constitution/#!/?\\_escaped\\_fragment\\_=/articles/1/essays/6/three-fifths-clause](https://www.heritage.org/constitution/#!/?_escaped_fragment_=/articles/1/essays/6/three-fifths-clause).

as well. Smith deals with the equality of humanity. Smith's message was not one of black superiority, but one of equality. This message was a radical rebuttal against humanistic anthropological theories such as polygenesis and faulty theological teachings, such as the curse of Ham theory,<sup>43</sup> both of which were wielded against African Americans to deny their humanity in order to subjugate and brand them, according to Dwight Hopkins, as "biologically subhuman, culturally uncivilized, and religiously heathen."<sup>44</sup> Smith's social crisis preaching railed against any sociological, theological, or historical revisions that denied black people full humanity. The need for Smith's message of racial equality among all ethnicities was due to fact that racial equality was not promoted in secular society nor in many white mainline denominations of his day. Willimon is correct when he asserts,

Though Christian theology played a part in the construction of race as human signifier, much of the ideology of labeling people racially was developed during Christian complicity with European colonization and the anti-Christian Enlightenment. . . . It is no coincidence that an American *philosophe* like Jefferson could write the Declaration of Independence and be a lifelong slaveholder.<sup>45</sup>

An overwhelming majority of Massey's and Smith's hearers found personal value in a message of truth that affirmed their identity as African American *and* children

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<sup>43</sup> *Monogenesis* is the belief that humans originate from a single creation of God. *Monogenesis* is a view in opposition to polygenism, the widely held nineteenth-century belief that promoted a Pre-Adamite race, which meant different groups of people were created on the earth separately, and that they do not have the same progenitor. This view was supported by a Humeian/Kantian ethnocentric inductive philosophy. During the mid-nineteenth century until the early twentieth century, polygenism flourished and was responsible for perpetrating racist biological ideologies which taught that there are superior and inferior races and that only polygenesis could explain human variation. Franz Boas' groundbreaking works, *Changes in Bodily Form* and *The Mind of Primitive Man*, both published in 1911, was a significant and lasting rebuttal to the unbiblical views of polygenesis and replaced the centuries old, dominant and controversial teachings of polygenesis. See Robert Wald Sussman, *The Myth of Race: The Troubling Persistence of an Unscientific Idea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); Brian M. Howell and Jenell Williams Paris, *Introducing Cultural Anthropology: A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011).

<sup>44</sup> Dwight Hopkins, "Slave Theology in the Invisible Institution," in *African American Religions Thought: An Anthology*, ed. Cornel West and Eddie S. Claude, Jr. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 790.

<sup>45</sup> Will Willimon, *Who Lynched Willie Earle? Preaching to Confront Racism* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2017), 56.

of God. They needed to be reminded that they were God's creation and a new creation in Christ. In Smith's sermon 'The Kingdom of God,' taken from Matthew 3:2, he says,

Another impressive fact as demonstrated by Jesus concerning the Kingdom of God is that it is democratic. Nowhere does Jesus intimate that the Jews nor any particular racial group would inherit the Kingdom. Racial identification and national origin were quite incidental to the Savior. Pre-eminence in the Kingdom is determined by spirit and attitude. "Blessed are the poor in spirit for their's is the Kingdom of God." . . . The evaluation of personality on basis of racial identification and national origin is purely man-made. . . . Any church that allows the force of traditionalism, of fear or of prejudice to cause it to practice discrimination and partiality is considerably less than democratic and tragically far from being Christian.<sup>46</sup>

Again, in this message given by Smith around 1949, root-work is noticeable as an aspect of radicality. The other aspects of radicality are equally disbursed throughout this sermon, as Smith empowers and informs his listeners of the contribution of African Americans. In this message, Smith suggests, "Any nation that sanctions the permission of any partiality based upon superficial grounds is essentially unchristian; that is true be that nation Germany, Great Britain or the United States of America."<sup>47</sup> A statement like this represents the radicality of social crisis preaching because it strikes at the heart of racial stereotypes and the false narratives that falsely labeled the African American race as non-contributors. This message reveals the aspect of courage in radicality since Smith delivered this message over the radio on stations WQBC and WVIM in Vicksburg, Mississippi.<sup>48</sup> The sermon would have been heard by a variety of listeners, both black and white. This message entails every aspect of radicality.

Preaching that serves to inform hearers of their spiritual identity as ultimate and primary importance, and encourages hearers to accept and appreciate the uniqueness, worth, and value of every ethnicity, mark the preaching of both Smith and Massey. With

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<sup>46</sup> Kelly Miller Smith, "The Kingdom of God," sermon, Vanderbilt University, Jean and Alexander Heard Library, Special Collections and University Archives, Kelly Miller Smith Papers, box 23, file 4.

<sup>47</sup> Smith, "The Kingdom of God."

<sup>48</sup> Kelly Miller Smith, "Microphone Messages: Nine Radio Sermons," booklet, published by Mount Heroden Church, Vicksburg, MS, September, 1949, 2.

this emphasis on spiritual and cultural identity, the social crisis preacher in the African American church constructed a biblical worldview that countered the false worldview built upon flawed anthropology and manipulative theology. Smith's message does not ask the hearer to minimize or forfeit one's cultural identity to be accepted and appreciated, but rather to embrace ethnic and cultural being as part of the family of God.

The social crisis ministry and movement in Nashville was the result of the hearers of Smith's social crisis preaching, responding pro-actively to invite the dominant group to participate in the shared fellowship of all of God's children. Robert Smith, Jr., professor of preaching at Beeson Divinity School contends, "We have to accept that all human beings as equal human, made in the image of God, a part of *imago Dei*. Whatever that means, it certainly means that God chose to image himself through us. . . . It certainly means that God intends that we be a community not only with him but with each other."<sup>49</sup> Howard Thurman, one of Massey's principal mentors, contends, "The religion of Jesus says to the disinherited: "Love your enemy. Take the initiative in seeking ways by which you can have the experience of a common sharing of mutual worth and value. It may be hazardous, but you must do it."<sup>50</sup>

### **Preaching to the Root of Human Need**

In the root-work aspect of radicality, Massey is emphatic that preaching must address that man's greatest social and economic need is a direct derivative of humanity's deepest spiritual lack. For Smith, salvation is humanity's greatest need and must be the priority of individual and communal quest. In Smith's sermon "Now is the Day of Salvation," he proclaims, "Only salvation is concerned with changing the hearts of men so

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<sup>49</sup> Robert Smith, Jr., "Shattering Wall and Veil," in *A Mighty Long Journey: Reflections on Racial Reconciliation*, ed. Timothy George and Robert Smith, Jr. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 137.

<sup>50</sup> Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1949), 100.



that everything else would be affected thereby. . . . Let every non-Christian start thinking about allowing the work of salvation to take place within his heart NOW.”<sup>51</sup> African American preaching and social crisis preaching at its best promotes the quest for spiritual intimacy with Christ as a priority over the pursuit of social and economic liberation. Spiritual deliverance and liberation from sin and the pursuit of social liberation from oppression are not opposing ideals, but rather, social liberation apart from and divorced from spiritual liberation from sin through Christ is self-destructive. In his sermon “Too Busy to Live,” taken from John 10:10, Smith anchors human fulfillment in the cross, by stating, “The Religion of the Cross embraces that which makes life full and complete. Of all our searchings and clamoring, that for which our soul—our real selves—are hungry are four: Truth, Beauty, Goodness and Happiness. These comprise the abundant life and are emphatically embraced by the Religion of the Cross.”<sup>52</sup>

This sermon incorporates the aspects of personal address with Smith’s continued use of the plural pronouns “we” and “our.” Smith states,

For our lives to be full and complete, serious consideration must be given to goodness or right-living, otherwise, ours is not living at all, but, rather, a type of “dog eat dog” existence. . . . When we have stumbled and fallen, when our lives have been wretched and ragged, when our mistakes have been many and our virtues few, we will find a deep-going joy in turning ourselves over completely to a Father who is loving and forgiving.<sup>53</sup>

Social crisis preaching offers hope in Christ and the cross for the victims and perpetrators. The aspect of confrontation in this sermon urges the hearer to forsake hatred and the manifestations of evil, for the embrace of holiness and right living.

The matter of spiritual priorities is the major distinction between the African American preaching tradition’s approach to social change and the Social Gospel

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<sup>51</sup> Smith, “Now Is the Day of Salvation.”

<sup>52</sup> Kelly Miller Smith, “Too Busy to Live,” sermon, Vanderbilt University, Jean and Alexander Heard Library, Special Collections and University Archives, Kelly Miller Smith Papers, box 23, file 4.

<sup>53</sup> Smith, “Too Busy to Live.”

Movement's approach. In *Preaching to the Black Middle Class: Words of Challenge, Words of Hope*, Marvin A. McMickle, homiletics professor and former President of Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School and who became pastor of Antioch Baptist Church in Cleveland, Ohio, shortly after Kelly Miller Smith's brief tenure there, contributes profoundly to the truth that man's greatest need is Christ, by insisting, "The challenge of the church is to call people to a different vision and a different set of priorities. . . . Jesus says in Matthew 6:33, 'Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added to you.' Life, liberty, and estate (property) are not unimportant. They must simply be made secondary."<sup>54</sup>

Smith addresses the root of human need by pointing to man's lack of spirituality in his sermon titled "The Church in Our Today":

Let us concern ourselves with man's spiritual needs. Unfortunately, our spiritual progress has not nearly kept pace with our material progress. The result is that today man finds himself materially rich but spiritually impoverished. He has been wise enough, scientifically, to invent weapons powerful enough to wipeout civilization, yet he seems not to have enough of the right kind of religion in his soul to keep him from doing just that . . . What is that something that money cannot buy and that inventors cannot supply? If we interpret this need correctly, we would pray: "As the hart panteth after the waterbrook, so panteth my soul after thee, O God." That is our need, pure and simple. We simply need to take God more seriously.<sup>55</sup>

This sermon, which bears all the aspects of radicality, was preached at Mount Heroden Baptist Church in Vicksburg, Mississippi, in 1949, and calls out the structural influences—namely the church—that is often complicit in injustice. Smith contends in this sermon, "The church cannot sit idly by and see the mighty crush the weak; it cannot afford to ignore the episode of human butchery called war; the church cannot close its eyes to the little dirty child who must beg for food in the alleys it cannot afford to be satisfied when

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<sup>54</sup> Marvin A. McMickle, *Preaching to the Black Middle Class: Words of Challenge, Words of Hope* (Valley Forge, VA: Judson Press, 2000), 88-89.

<sup>55</sup> Kelly Miller Smith, "The Church in Our Today," sermon, Vanderbilt University, Jean and Alexander Heard Library, Special Collections and University Archives, Kelly Miller Smith Papers, box 23, file 1.

people have not learned the elementary lesson of getting along with each other.”<sup>56</sup> Root-work strikes at the root of racism and idolatry, two major culprits of social crisis in Smith’s day. Smith preached valiantly against racism by primarily emphasizing the radical message that God “made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth” (Acts 17:26).

### **Courage**

Massey states, “More often than not, this radicality demands that the preacher be a man of courage.”<sup>57</sup> The risk associated with addressing social crises from the pulpit can be costly and dangerous for the preacher. However, the opportunities for the preacher to lead the congregation and individuals into applying Scripture to sensitive political, social, and economic issues that affect their lives and the lives of their neighbor are myriad and provide the preacher a platform to communicate the heart and vision of God. The reasons these opportunities are not embraced are because of several forms of fear.<sup>58</sup> Ronald J. Allen, homiletics scholar and retired professor of preaching at Christian Theological Seminary confesses, “God seeks a social world in which all relationships are loving and just. The pulpit that is silent on social issues frustrates the purposes of God.”<sup>59</sup> Therefore, to speak on social issues from the pulpit entails courage. Massey states, “Courage is that quality of spirit and ability of mind that enables us to face any difficulty,

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<sup>56</sup> Smith, “The Church in Our Today.”

<sup>57</sup> Massey, *The Responsible Pulpit*, chap. 6.

<sup>58</sup> The research conducted by Leonora Tubbs and published in her book *Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach*, lists several theories as to why pastors avoid preaching about social and justice issues. Among them were fear of conflict, fear of dividing a congregation, and fear of being disliked, rejected or made to pay a price for prophetic witness. See Leonora Tubbs, *Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010).

<sup>59</sup> Ronald J. Allen, “Preaching on Social Issues,” *Encounter* 59, nos. 1/2 (1998): 61.

danger, pain, or threatening opposition as we preach, so that fear does not curb the reason and effort to do our work.”<sup>60</sup>

Courage is the second aspect that gives validity to radicality. For the social crisis preacher, courage is not the anthropocentric audacity that often emanates from self-serving, agenda driven daring. Courage for the social crisis preacher is the evidence of the Holy Spirit’s inward call to the preacher to selflessly obey a God-ordained burden with Holy Spirit-inspired valor. For Massey, courage is exemplified when the preacher obeys the prompting of the Spirit in difficult, selfless, and risk-filled acts of service for the benefit of God’s people, which end in God’s glory. Christ-like courage can never be divorced from the Spirit of God. Smith’s conviction of social crisis preaching is inherent in his understanding that “Jesus began his preaching ministry with the startling declaration that his would be a Scripture-based, spirit-directed social ministry (Luke 4:18, 19).”<sup>61</sup> Massey testifies, “The courage God grants to his preaching stewards is a courage whose moral edge has been sharpened by biblical truth and godly values. It is a courage whose social component is rooted deep within a personal concern to help people. It is a courage that inspires a creativity which keeps us resourceful and inventive in our work.”<sup>62</sup> In his baccalaureate address at Fisk University in May 1972, entitled ‘Everyday Will be Sunday,’ Smith exemplifies the need for this resourceful and inventive work. Smith uttered these courageous words,

I challenge you to so live your lives that you will help bring about the kind of society where black folks will no longer have to look forward to some far off future life for an unfettered state of existence. You must respond to that prayer with your

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<sup>60</sup> Massey, *Stewards of the Story*, 9.

<sup>61</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 64-65.

<sup>62</sup> Massey, *Stewards of the Story*, 9.

professions, your labors, your struggles, your lives. You must create a society where EVERY DAY WILL BE SUNDAY.<sup>63</sup>

Since Smith was speaking to a predominantly African American audience, the sermonic aspect of courage may be overlooked. However, since the aspects of courage and confrontation are mostly inseparable, it deserves to be recognized that, in this sermon, Smith is challenging graduates to embrace the Christian principle of self-denial, service, and sacrifice, which are often unpopular principles in a capitalistic society. In this baccalaureate address, the aspects of root-work and personal address are evident, but courage and confrontation are most prominent.

Smith's courage in the face of evil is a testament to his calling from the Spirit of God, the source of his strength and courage. Effective, Christ-centered, social crisis preaching is a Trinitarian enterprise. Social crisis preaching requires the incorporation of Trinitarian presence, which is God's call on the preacher's life to proclaim God's vision for the world through the ministry of Christ, from the Word of God, in the power of the Holy Spirit. James Forbes drafts a description of this Trinitarian aspect of preaching:

It is a process in which the divine-human communication is activated and focused on the word of God and is led by a member of the community of faith who has been called, anointed, and appointed by the Holy Spirit to be an agent of communication. That person's authority is grounded in the self-revealing will of God as articulated and elaborated in the biblical witness.<sup>64</sup>

Courage is the direct impartation of the anointing of the Holy Spirit on the life and ministry of the social crisis preacher. Massey states, "True preaching readiness is by divine appointment to the task, and a distinct anointing for it is one of the credentials that certify our readiness and right to preach."<sup>65</sup> The anointing of the Holy Spirit is required for social crisis preaching because at the root of social crisis are spiritual forces of darkness

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<sup>63</sup> Kelly Miller Smith, "Everyday Will Be Sunday," baccalaureate address given at Fisk University in 1972, Vanderbilt University, Jean and Alexander Heard Library, Special Collections and University Archives, Kelly Miller Smith Papers, box 23, file 13.

<sup>64</sup> James Forbes, *The Holy Spirit and Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), 19-20.

<sup>65</sup> James Earl Massey, *The Burdensome Joy of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 41.

and evil. As Ephesians 6:12 says, “For we do not wrestle against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit empowers the social crisis preacher to confront not only the spiritual darkness in the social order, but also the individuals and structures under the influence of spiritual darkness. Stephen Mott address this reality:

The explanation of the injustices of history through references to angels may seem unrelated to the economic and political problems of our communities. But . . . this overshadowing community of evil, described by New Testament writers as “the powers,” is cited frequently in recent efforts to provide a biblical account of contemporary social situation . . . injustice and other evils not only depend upon the decisions of individuals but also are rooted in manifestations of culture and social order.<sup>66</sup>

The call and courage of the social crisis preacher to confront these entities and individuals are imparted from the Holy Spirit. To imbue radicality the preacher must possess courage to confront the spiritual forces that influence individuals. Spiritual forces are at the root of systematic injustice; courage can only be embraced through the anointing of the Holy Spirit on the preacher’s life.

### **Spirit-Governed Courage**

Smith’s life and sermons are a paradigmatic representation of courage—a manifest model of what Kenyatta R. Gilbert refers to as “a deep prophetic consciousness.”<sup>67</sup> God levies the restlessness and burden to address social crises in accordance with methods that match His character and His vision for His people (Exod 3:1-12; Isa 61:1; Neh 1- 2:1-5). The courage that Massey promotes compels the preacher to address social crises under the governance of the Spirit. For Smith, courage did not stem

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<sup>66</sup> Stephen Charles Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 4.

<sup>67</sup> Kenyatta R. Gilbert, *A Pursued Justice: Black Preaching from the Great Migration to Civil Rights* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 5.

from wrath or rage. He states, “Words in the form of mere angry rhetoric or incendiary verbalization do not constitute social crisis preaching.”<sup>68</sup> Smith’s courage was encapsulated in the fruit of the Spirit: self-control (Gal 5:23), so that the aim of his radical proclamation was “wedding the radical offensiveness of his stand for rights with the reasonableness of peaceful means.”<sup>69</sup> In the popular “Who Speaks for the Negro” interviews with Robert Penn Warren, Smith discusses his role as chairman of the Negotiations Committee for the sit-ins in Nashville during the 1960s, and the need for self-control. Herein lies a clear example of how the fruit of the Spirit is applied in negotiations for social justice:

We needed someone who would not “blow his top” so to speak. When something is said that everybody knows is wrong, you say okay, we don’t accept it. But if you become pretty emotional about it, then we would render ourselves useless, in going further. So somehow, we had to learn that certain people could not be used for this but could be used in another area. . . . This is an aspect of it, that is much more strenuous and significant, than many people seem to think. It’s less dramatic but it’s a tremendous thing, to sit there with a group of people, who, come from two entirely different worlds. You don’t speak the same language and they perhaps have never seen Negroes close up except as janitors and maids, never talked across the table on an equal level, You got to overcome this kind of barrier.<sup>70</sup>

The relevance of Smith’s comments in this interview with social crisis preaching has to do with the pre-proclamation functionality of the social crisis preacher. The effectiveness of social crisis preaching depends upon “what the function of the preacher has been prior to the crisis proclamation.”<sup>71</sup> Spirit-governed courage outside of the pulpit, which is manifest in the fruit of self-control is imperative for the impact of Spirit-governed courage in the pulpit. Spirit-governed courage is a distinct and evident dynamic in Smith’s social crisis proclamation. Smith’s son testifies to his father’s Spirit-governed courage and how

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<sup>68</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 84.

<sup>69</sup> Massey, *The Responsible Pulpit*, chap. 6.

<sup>70</sup> Robert Penn Warren, *Who Speaks for the Negro?* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 411. See interview manuscripts and hear audio recordings of interviews 1 and 2 at <https://whospeaks.library.vanderbilt.edu/interview/kelly-miller-smith>.

<sup>71</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 80.

it provided access and hearing from a wider Nashville audience and how that quality “made it very easy for white businessmen and politicians to have conversation with him and bring him around the table because they knew he had a very even temperament.”<sup>72</sup>

### **Christ-Like Courage**

The social crisis preacher, though dealing with rudeness and wrath, presents a radical message of justice and reconciliation while advocating for a Christ-centered peace; a peace according to Smith that only emanates from Christ. Smith exhibits this trait in his sermon “The Way of Christ,” taken from John 14:6, by proclaiming,

The way of Christ is the way of peace. When we speak of peace our minds automatically lead us to a consideration of world peace. Yes, the Christ way is certainly capable of restoring peace and order in the world. But, as imminently important as world peace is-when our consideration of the peace problem ends on the world-wide basis, it hasn’t gone far enough. Too often we concern ourselves so much with things far away that we neglect the things near at hand. There is a type of peace which the world needs which is dependent upon the way of life you and I choose. . . . It is a peace that destroys that group prejudice which makes a mockery of our so-called American Democracy and American Christianity. What is this way of Christ that introduces this type of peace to us? That answer is simple-the Christ way of peace is the way of love and understanding.<sup>73</sup>

In the crux of social crisis and blatant racism, Smith possessed perpetual courage and advocated courageously for peace by maintaining composure and never allowing anger and bitterness to take root in his heart and become an ingredient in his sermons. As demonstrated in this excerpt, Smith’s sermon, “The Way of Christ,” reflects Massey’s sermonic component of radicality through exhibiting the aspects of root-work, courage, personal address, and confrontation.

Not only did Smith exhibit courage, but he called on those affected by injustice to exhibit Christ-like courage. In his sermon “The Story of Jesus,” Smith repeatedly calls attention to the courage of Christ, while challenging his hearers to adopt courage as a

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<sup>72</sup> Kelly Miller Smith, Jr., interview with author, Griggs Hall, American Baptist College, Nashville, May 30, 2019.

<sup>73</sup> Kelly Miller Smith, “The Way of Christ,” sermon, Vanderbilt University, Jean and Alexander Heard Library, Special Collections and University Archives, Kelly Miller Smith Papers, box 23, file 4.



means of dealing with social crises. In this sermon, Jesus is an exemplar of courage and is the radical example to confront injustice through courage; a point Smith makes in his sermon by proclaiming,

A second appealing feature about the story of Jesus was the courage and moral heroism exhibited by him. All the world loves a hero; Jesus was a Hero in every true sense of the word. Then he said, "I am meek and lowly in heart," none of the adversities and oppositions of his life proved him a coward. Jesus was rejected by his townsmen, deserted by friends, and crucified by his enemies, but through it all He has remained the Great Moral Hero of all times. When ridiculed and scorned by religious authorities Jesus remained calm and undisturbed. . . . Even in the face of merciless death on the cross- when he was mocked, scorned and spat upon-the garden of courage, well cultivated in the soul of Jesus exhibited the fragrant flower of love, for it was in love, born of moral courage that Jesus prayed, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do."<sup>74</sup>

Courage is required of the preacher in order for congregations to conform to Christ-like attitudes and actions. Allen suggests, "If the Christian community is to make an adequate witness to God's unconditional love and call for justice in respect to social issues, the preacher needs to engage in frequent conscientious reflection on them."<sup>75</sup>

### **Courage in Preaching Truth**

Courage is the undeniable trait in Smith's social crisis preaching, which requires that the truth is spoken at all cost. As an element of the sermonic component of radicality, courage cuts through the morass of myths, half-truths, and impotent solutions to social crises to the root of injustices and declares in sermonic expression, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free" (John 8:32). Regardless of consequence and risk, the African American pulpit is one of courage, where the preacher is truth-teller. Cleophus J. LaRue states, "Truth is active and dynamic, it requires a personal relationship with the one who is Truth."<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Smith, "The Story of Jesus."

<sup>75</sup> Allen, "Preaching on Social Issues," 69.

<sup>76</sup> LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching*, 86.

Smith embodied courage. In an address at the Forty-Seventh Annual Session of the National Dental Association on August 1, 1960, Smith spoke to a predominantly white audience and delivered sobering and challenging statements. In this address Smith cried, “Every part of the body belongs to the total person. A man may have his dental problems solved but he may be plagued with the problem that comes with the absence of freedom. And I do not believe that a dentist or a man in any other profession can consider his job well done if this important aspect of existence is not attended to.”<sup>77</sup> Smith reveals flashes of the aspects of courage, confrontation, and root-work. Smith recognizes and addresses the crisis in the community. He does not ignore the racial injustice and the lack of freedom of black people in Nashville in 1960, nor does he keep silent about the crisis, but rather he addresses it as a prophet would. Although personal address is not a factor in this address, the effective component of radicality is clearly at work in this address to respond to social crisis.

Smith did not dodge political issues in his sermons, nor did he allow them to become the focus of his proclamation by overshadowing the gospel. Unlike many secular critics and some Christian critics of America, Smith did not alienate his hearers into racial factions or into politically opposing tribes. Smith was a Christian who loved his country, and like a true prophet of God, out of that love, spoke against her sins. He did not absolve himself from the short comings of America by levying the responsibility of reconciliation and healing on the dominant population alone. From 1 Chronicles 16:29, Smith demonstrates this shared ownership in his sermon “Beauty,” by proclaiming, “The trouble is that the heart of America is badly in need of being decorated with the beauty of

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<sup>77</sup> Kelly Miller Smith, address at the 47th Annual Session of the National Dental Association, on August 1, 1960, Vanderbilt University, Jean and Alexander Heard Library, Special Collections and University Archives, Kelly Miller Smith Papers, box 23, file 6.

holiness. Before these troubles of ours are overcome, we must work on the heart of America. And the heart of America is your heart and mine.”<sup>78</sup>

The fact that this sacred proclamation also addresses the home, educational institutions, and the church qualifies it as a social crisis sermon. Smith claims, “The three basic institutions of America are the institutions of beauty. They must be seen as being concerned about the heart of men and women.”<sup>79</sup> Smith was personally invested in these institutions as a father and husband, a scholar, and as a pastor. These historic institutions are regarded as the cornerstone of the black community, which has sustained African Americans in times of social crises. In his classic text *Crisis in the Village: Restoring Hope in African American Communities*, Robert Franklin refers to the home, church, and schools as “anchor institutions” within the black community. Franklin refers to these three institutions as the “three institutions that have played a heroic role in serving the black communities in the past . . . the church, the family, and the school.”<sup>80</sup> These institutions were vital in Smith’s time in Nashville and served as key element in combating social crisis and social injustice because, as Franklin explains,

These are institutions that African Americans control and for which they set the agenda, determine priorities, and pursue solutions. . . . If the potential and power of just these institutions were properly aligned and mobilized, no matter who occupies the White House and no matter what Wall Street is up to, African Americans could make the lives of their children significantly better.<sup>81</sup>

Smith’s sermon, “Beauty,” is personal, and it bears the aspects of root-work, courage, and confrontation.

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<sup>78</sup> Kelly Miller Smith, “Beauty,” sermon, Vanderbilt University, Jean and Alexander Heard Library, Special Collections and University Archives, Kelly Miller Smith Papers, box 23, file 1.

<sup>79</sup> Smith, “Beauty.”

<sup>80</sup> Robert M. Franklin, *Crisis in the Village: Restoring Hope in African American Communities* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 13.

<sup>81</sup> Franklin, *Crisis in the Village*, 13.

Smith's sermons displayed the aspect of courage through his willingness to address sensitive political issues in his sermons. In his sermon titled "Lord, I Want to be a Christian," taken from Psalms 119:5, Smith boldly takes a stand for the Christian faith and a stand against Communism when he ferociously argues,

The very genius of the Communist philosophy is diametrically opposed to the genius of Christian religion. True, it is that certain things emphasized by the Communists have in a certain sense, been embraced by historical Christianity. That is no strange fact. Things that are admitted to be opposite in nature are prone to have something in common. These things that they have in common are only incidental. . . . The important thing is the central idea around which the entire system evolves. Communism holds that religion is based solely upon frustration. All human frustration comes from social conditions, they contend, and a change in economic system can remove frustration. Those of us who have had and are having intimate contact with the Christian faith know that it is not born of frustration . . . A good Communist could never be a good Christian, but more important is the fact that a good Christian could never be a Communist.<sup>82</sup>

The aspects of root-work, confrontation, and courage are on full display in this social crisis proclamation. Though shallow in personal address, Smith's prophetic radicality explores the depths of the impact of the Christian faith on social conditions.

Massey's "courage" characterization of the African American preaching tradition most assuredly is drawn from the historical identification of the black preacher with the Old Testament prophet Moses, and from African Americans' identification with the oppressed Israelites. Herbert Robinson Marbury states, "For most African Americans, the Bible's stories, particularly exodus, grounded their religious knowledge. African Americans readily transferred its themes of bondage and freedom to their own context."<sup>83</sup>

Richard Lischer, James T. and Alice Mead Cleland Professor Emeritus of Preaching at Duke Divinity School and author of *The Preacher King: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Word that Moved America*, comments, "African Americans have traditionally decorated

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<sup>82</sup> Kelly Miller Smith, "Lord, I Want to Be a Christian," sermon, Vanderbilt University, Jean and Alexander Heard Library, Special Collections and University Archives, Kelly Miller Smith Papers, box 23, file 4.

<sup>83</sup> Herbert Robinson Marbury, *Pillar of Cloud and Fire: The Politics of Exodus in African American Biblical Interpretation* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 5.

their leaders with messianic imagery and have given ‘Black Moses’ to such figures as Harriet Tubman, Booker T. Washington, Marcus Garvey, Joe Louis, Martin Luther King, Jr., Jesse Jackson, and many others.”<sup>84</sup> Henry H. Mitchell, African-American church historian and the first Martin Luther King, Jr. Professor of Black Church Studies at Colgate Rochester Divinity School, also testifies, “Exposed in depth to the Old Testament, the slaves found it amazingly similar to their traditional faith . . . they understood well the tale of Exodus and devised a spiritual song to celebrate it (‘Go Down, Moses’).”<sup>85</sup> Rhonda Robinson Thomas contends, “By appropriating the Exodus story, Afro-Atlantic people posited themselves as protagonists in a major narrative of the New World filled with communities where the Bible functioned as ‘the single most important centering object for social identity and orientation among European dominants.’”<sup>86</sup>

Courage is speaking truth. Like the prophet, social crisis preaching comes from the awareness that, according to LaRue, “to keep silent and refuse to speak the truth is to deny ourselves a meaningful contribution to the human situation.”<sup>87</sup> Courage was the one trait that the Old Testament prophet employed to unmask idolatry and expose ungodly tyranny, through God’s instructions: “Do not be afraid of them” (Jer 1:8); “Do not be dismayed by them” (Jer 1:17). Smith exhibits prophetic radicality through the aspect of courage in his sermon “A Look at Ourselves,” taken from 2 Corinthians 13:5, when he proclaims, “Sometimes patriotism keeps us from looking at ourselves as a nation. Suppose America actually looked at herself for what she really is. Sometimes our zeal for

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<sup>84</sup> Richard Lischer, *The Preacher King: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Word That Moved America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 174.

<sup>85</sup> Mitchell, *Black Preaching*, 57.

<sup>86</sup> Rhonda Robinson Thomas, *Claiming Exodus: A Cultural History of Afro-Atlantic Identity, 1774-1903* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013), 6.

<sup>87</sup> LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching*, 88.

justice as bruised victims blinds us to the need for our looking at ourselves as black people in this land.”<sup>88</sup>

In this message, the aspect of courage is seen as he challenges both the nation and the victims of injustice to self-examination. Smith’s message challenges African Americans to resist embracing a victim mentality, which can sometimes cause blindness to personal responsibility and their own moral failures. Smith’s message, “A Look at Ourselves,” incorporates the sermon component of radicality through the aspect of root-work because he encourages self-examination. This sermon also contains the aspects of personal address and confrontation because Smith, even as preacher, views himself as a member of the church who is confronted with the need for self-evaluation and examination. The social crisis preacher of courage, without political ally, financial undergirding, or institutional resource faces the powerful among foe and friend alike and with the prophet is given grace to “be not afraid of them, nor be afraid of their words” (Ezra 2: 6). Smith’s example of courage in his social crisis ministry and preaching in Nashville is exemplary of Massey’s sermon component of radicality involving courage. Smith’s social crisis proclamation is consummate in Massey’s words:

There is a granted courage by which to preach, and we need it. Courage is that quality of spirit and ability of mind that enables us to face any difficulty, danger, pain, or threatening opposition as we preach, so that fear does not curb the reason and effort to do our work. Courage is that ability, that readiness, to assert ourselves on purpose, to act with purpose, fully set to serve that purpose despite changing conditions or threatening odds.<sup>89</sup>

The social crisis proclamation of Kelly Miller Smith, whose courage inspired the entire city of Nashville, Tennessee, bridged the gulf of splintered factions, all for the glory of God in Christ.

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<sup>88</sup> Kelly Miller Smith, “A Look at Ourselves,” sermon, Vanderbilt University, Jean and Alexander Heard Library, Special Collections and University Archives, Kelly Miller Smith Papers, box 23, file 13.

<sup>89</sup> Massey, *Stewards of the Story*, 9.

## Personal Address

Preaching is personal. For Massey, the sermon is God's message, to His people, proclaimed by His preacher, through His Word. For this specific aspect of radicality, Massey drew influence from Rudolf Bultmann. Massey quotes Bultmann:

Proclamation is personal address. It is authoritative address, the address of the word of God, which paradoxically, is spoken by man, the preacher. As God's representative (cf. 2 Cor. 5:20), the preacher stands over against the congregation. He does not speak as its voice nor does he bring to consciousness or to clear expression whatever may slumber in his hearers in the way of ideals and feeling, yearnings or even unexpressed certainties. To be sure, he can do all this, but only in order to confront his hearers with the word of God, to place them under the shifting and judging power of the word and therewith under the promise of grace.<sup>90</sup>

In the African American church, the pastor's authority is derived from the call of God and is properly understood as a call accepted by the congregation as divinely mandated. The pastor, a member of the believing community, is accepted and embraced as being "over" the congregation in the capacity of proclaimer and pastor.

### Personal Witness in Relation with Personal Address

The impact of *personal address* in the sermon can only be realized within the sequential relationship with *personal witness* in the sermon. Personal witness is an aspect in the "festive" component, the second African American preaching component in Massey's list.<sup>91</sup> Massey's genius is revealed through his understanding that *personal witness* precedes *personal address*. Therefore, *personal address* derives its authority from *personal witness*. In the *personal witness* of the preacher, there

is no fear to talk about religious experience, even to refer to one's own experience if this can better serve the truth. To be sure, if the black preacher cannot so call attention to his own experience—adding his own word to that of the biblical witness, he is not regarded as an authentic spokesman for God. When the call is festively regarded, and when the preacher appeals to his experience as a knowing witness, a

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<sup>90</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, quoted in Massey, *The Responsible Pulpit*, chap. 6.

<sup>91</sup> Massey, *The Responsible Pulpit*, chap. 6.

sense of authority is conveyed; the preacher speaks as one who knows “from the inside.”<sup>92</sup>

*Personal witness* gives credibility to *personal address*. Kenyatta R. Gilbert declares, “Some Black preachers are sufficiently radical but insufficiently self-critical.”<sup>93</sup> The personal witness is the testimony of the preacher’s own experiences with life, God, and community, which are akin to those of the hearers to whom the sermon is addressed, and which privileges the preacher’s authority to speak truth. Personal experience is the preacher’s testimony in the first person singular, the “I” in the personal witness, that permissions the preacher’s “you all” in the personal address.<sup>94</sup> Personal witness is Paul’s testimony to Timothy: “Which is why *I* suffer as I do. But *I* am not ashamed, for *I* know whom *I* have believed, and *I* am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me?” (2 Tim 1:12). Gardner C. Taylor’s advice to preachers resounds, “We are a part of the guilt and shame we are sent to address.”<sup>95</sup> In his classic text *Preaching and Preachers*, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones advises, “The preacher then must be a man who is characterized by spirituality in an unusual degree, and a man who has arrived at a settled assured knowledge and understanding of the Truth, and feels he is able

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<sup>92</sup> Massey, *The Responsible Pulpit*, chap. 6.

<sup>93</sup> Kenyatta R. Gilbert, *The Journey and Promise of African American Preaching* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 15.

<sup>94</sup> Robert Smith, Jr., telephone conversation with author, July 24, 2019. Our discussion was of the significance of James Earl Massey’s “personal address” in the relationship with “personal witness.” For examples of the dynamic between the personal witness and personal address relationship in sermonic form, see Robert Smith, Jr., *The Oasis of God: From Mourning to Morning: Biblical Insights from Psalms 42 & 43* (Mountain Home, AR: BorderStone Press, 2014). Smith preaches from the painfully devastating personal witness of losing a child, to give powerfully effective personal address for hope and forgiveness to his hearers.

<sup>95</sup> Gardner C. Taylor, “The Privileges and Perils of Preaching,” CD, 22:10, in the Inaugural William E. Conger, Jr., Lectures on Biblical Preaching, 1993, at Beeson Divinity School, Birmingham, AL, CD reproduced by Beeson Divinity School as an addendum to *Our Sufficiency is of God*, ed. Timothy George, James Earl Massey, and Robert Smith, Jr. (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2010).



to preach it to others.”<sup>96</sup> The social crisis preacher’s personal witness must articulate the grace of God in the life of the preacher while extending grace to those who hear the challenging words of personal address. Gilbert, in *The Journey and Promise of African American Preaching*, addresses the temptation faced by preachers who dare to preach prophetically but fail to extend the grace of God to those responsible for social crises:

Under the guise of being prophetic, preachers who take delight in detailing the mortal and venial sins of their listeners or, for that matter, bringing criticisms to oppressive world systems that dehumanize persons on a regular basis “without tears in their eyes” are preachers who have lost sight of the grace of God in their own life. Preachers of this sort abuse and wound the people of God.<sup>97</sup>

As an example of personal address, Massey cites a sermon by his pastor, Raymond Jackson, and his conviction about birth control as a pro-life advocate. Jackson was not an advocate of birth control for personal reasons: he was the fourteenth child in a family of fifteen children and the only minister in that family and believes that every child has a right to life. Massey contends, “Jackson speaks personally about the matter and his reasons are personal. . . . His reasons are both personal and religious.”<sup>98</sup> For Smith, personal address in his sermons is also a combination of personal and religious reasons. Although Smith lived a life of high integrity, as a highly educated Christian disciple he still lived an overwhelming majority of his life as a second-class citizen in a racially hostile and segregated America. However, this very experience made the personal witness in his preaching powerfully effective.

Historically, the African American preacher, irrespective of education or economic standing, was equally impacted by the same social and political policies of his congregation. Smith’s sermon “We Seek a City,” taken from Jeremiah 50:5 is a perfect example of the relationship between *personal witness* and *personal address*, and it provides

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<sup>96</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 40th anniversary ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 122.

<sup>97</sup> Gilbert, *The Journey and Promise*, 15.

<sup>98</sup> Massey, *The Responsible Pulpit*, chap. 6.

a case of his genius in radically dealing with social crisis when racism is the underlying cause:

Once when I was speaking to a group in Cleveland, Ohio, I mentioned that our children, who had recently moved from Nashville, Tennessee, were attending segregated schools for the first time. And incidentally, this was the first time that they had attended school in the North! During the discussion period one of the persons in attendance asked why we didn't simply move to a predominantly white neighborhood and avoid the problem. It took some effort to explain that this does not really solve the problem. The existence of de facto segregation anywhere is a threat to everybody. Staying away from it does not suddenly usher one into the City of Freedom. It is short of the proper goal. . . . The goal of Christians can never be more desegregation, because this is mainly external and structural while integration is internal and spiritual.<sup>99</sup>

Smith's testimony contains evidence that both he and his family suffered the devastating and dehumanizing effects of segregation. His *personal witness* gives license to radically issue *personal address* to his hearers. Smith is proclaiming why segregation should never be acceptable in the Body of Christ, and because that theme is dominant in this proclamation, this sermon projects all four aspects of radicality, as they are intertwined in the personal testimony within the message. Smith's sermon "Thy Kingdom Come," taken from Matthew 6:10, is a clear representation of how Smith combines the personal witness with the personal address using the pronouns "us" and "our." Smith proclaims,

The prayer Jesus bids us to offer is "Our Father. . . . Thy Kingdom Come." This is the sort of Kingdom that means our salvation. The King is no impersonal monarch or heartless dictator. The Kingdom of God is a family and the King is our Father. What an overwhelming difference that makes: We are accustomed to thinking of kingdoms in terms of economic, political and military power. But, not so! This is the Kingdom of a holy and righteous Father who shares its treasures with his children. . . . Jesus said that our preparation for citizenship in the Kingdom must include our becoming like children. But he did not mean that we must be as orphans. We are children of one Father. Our relationship with God, then, is the tender relationship of parent and child. It is deeply personal. What does this mean to me? That means that I am free to communicate with my Father as often as I see fit. I need make no formal application for an audience with Him. It is encouraging and inspiring to know that though I may have a record that is blackened with sin, I may confess

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<sup>99</sup> Kelly Miller Smith, "We Seek a City," in *The Pulpit Speaks on Race*, ed. Alfred T. Davies (New York: Abingdon, 1956), 181-82. See also the original manuscript in Vanderbilt University, Jean and Alexander Heard Library, Special Collections and University Archives, Kelly Miller Smith Papers, box 25, file 2.

my sins to a personal and understanding God and have my heart cleansed by His saving power.<sup>100</sup>

In this deeply personal sermon Smith not only confronts the narratives that perpetuate racial divide by maintaining that all of humanity are “children of one Father,” but he also delves into personal witness as he raises the query, “What does this mean to me?” Smith issues personal address in this sermon by encouraging his hearers to view themselves as a part of the family of God. Smith asserts personal address by emphasizing the brotherhood of all mankind and urging his listeners to join him in practicing brotherhood as a lifestyle. Personal address is the most dominant aspect of radicality in this sermon, while the other three aspects—root-work, courage, and confrontation—are not excluded.

In two sermons, “The Relevance of the Ridiculous” taken from Matthew 10:34, and “Something Old for the New” taken from Jeremiah 6:16, Smith strikes at the root of some of the causes of social crises, which he identifies as a lack of brotherhood. In these sermons, Smith’s approach is to undermine division, oppression, and inequality by promoting the biblical view of Christian brotherhood. In his sermon “The Relevance of the Ridiculous, taken from Matthew 10:34” he emphasizes,

In our everyday living we have sadly neglected the factor of brotherhood. We have not practiced what our religion preaches. Brotherhood week should not be a time when we practice brotherhood simply for a week. It should remind us of the implications of our form of government, of the basic principles of our religion, and of the very purpose of nature itself, for it has been proven scientifically that all races of mankind are basically the same; we are all members of the same family, thus, we are all brothers.<sup>101</sup>

The theme of Christian brotherhood in the aspect of personal address continues in Smith’s sermon “Something Old for the New,” taken from Jeremiah 6:16, when Smith preaches,

The other marker that we behold along the old path is clearly labeled “brotherhood.” The old-fashioned idea that men must live as brothers must find expression in our lives so that the destructiveness of this present age may be diminished and eventually destroyed. Only when the relationship between man and man is that of “brother” is

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<sup>100</sup> Kelly Miller Smith, “Thy Kingdom Come,” sermon, Vanderbilt University, Jean and Alexander Heard Library, Special Collections and University Archives, Kelly Miller Smith Papers, box 27, file 11.

<sup>101</sup> Smith, “The Relevance of the Ridiculous.”

anyone really safe in our world. Yet, that is the only logical relationship for there to be between the sons of God, for if God is our spiritual father, then man is my spiritual brother. If man is my brother, my actions toward him must be brotherly.

There is no substitute for brotherhood. There are those who confuse kindness with brotherhood. One may be kind to a pet dog or cat, but that is not brotherhood. We feed them well and provide everything that makes for material comfort, but the name brother may not be here applied. . . . Brotherhood includes the acceptance of individuals. To lend a hand is important, but it is more important to extend a brotherly hand. In brotherhood there is no room for barriers and exclusions.<sup>102</sup>

In “Something Old for the New,” personal address is the most prominent aspect of radicality. Smith also employs the courage and confrontational aspects of radicality by confronting the hearer with the attributes and majesty of God. Smith preaches, “We must know that there is in existence One whose nature is love, whose power is boundless, and whose relationship to man is that of Father.”<sup>103</sup> Smith’s resistance against social injustice is manifested in his preaching about humanity as the family of God. Nicholas Wolterstorff offers critical commentary into the principle truth that all of humanity belongs to God’s family, regardless of ethnicity or tribe, and should be loved and respected as such:

We human beings are alike in having wronged God. The main burden of Paul’s letter to the Romans is that we are alike in another way as well: God offers to justify all who have faith in God, Jews and gentiles alike. It is appropriate to see the pattern of Jesus’ actions—the pattern that gained him the reputation of showing no partiality—as displaying what it is like to live out the acknowledgment of that fundamental unity. No matter how far outside the bounds of respectability may be the human being who crosses my path, I am to treat her in a way that befits the fact that she is one to whom God offers justification. She is one with whom God desires to be a friend.<sup>104</sup>

Smith’s sermon is also evangelical in every aspect, as Smith recognizes his own sins and the power of his personal Savior to cleanse him from his sins.

Smith’s belief that the gospel speaks to social crises is also a religious issue.

The combination of the personal and the religious, the *personal witness* and the *personal*

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<sup>102</sup> Kelly Miller Smith, “Something Old for the New,” sermon, Vanderbilt University, Jean and Alexander Heard Library, Special Collections and University Archives, Kelly Miller Smith Papers, box 24, file 21.

<sup>103</sup> Smith, “Something Old for the New.”

<sup>104</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice In Love* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2015), 279-80.

*address*, is summed up in Smith's challenge to the church, in his sermon "The Church in Our Today," taken from Luke 4:18. In this sermon, Smith's speaks as a member *of* the church and as one personally affected by social crisis, and also *to* the church, as its leader with the authority of the Word of God:

The fact that I am a part of the church means that I am a crusader for human rights and righteousness. The Church and church people cannot afford to allow an unchristian system to influence their actions and words. It does not matter what anyone else says, if the position of Jesus Christ is on the side of social righteousness—and it most certainly was—my position must be the same. No fear, no criticism, no reluctance must stop me. The Church is always aggressively on the side of right.<sup>105</sup>

The personal testimony that is purely empirical and that bears no evidence of Scriptural support will be subject to rejection by the audience and by the Lord. Such a ploy is manipulation and should be avoided at all cost. Personal witness and personal address should be the servant of Scripture, not its master.

### **Confrontation**

Massey courageously contends, "Radicality in the sermon engages the hearer. It makes him know that he is being confronted, that necessity is being laid upon him to respond. True preaching is always confrontational."<sup>106</sup> Social crisis preaching is not an eloquent diatribe that simply identifies problems and introduces solutions; rather, it demands that the hearer break from any and all political, racial, economic, or theological loyalties that are complicit in social crises. Luther D. Ivory contends, "A critical prophetic voice must be accompanied by confrontational prophetic action."<sup>107</sup>

The confrontational aspect in radicality demands that the hearer make a decision for Christ, who stands with those afflicted in social crises. For Smith this stance

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<sup>105</sup> Smith, "The Church in Our Today."

<sup>106</sup> Massey, *The Responsible Pulpit*, chap. 6.

<sup>107</sup> Luther D. Ivory, *Toward A Theology of Radical Involvement: The Theological Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 90.

entails Christlikeness. Smith's sermon 'The Birth of a New Day,' taken from John 1:29b, reveals the confrontational aspect of radicality more than the other three aspects because, in this sermon, Smith confronts the hearers with what it means to be a Christian whose responsibility, like Jesus', is to usher in the kingdom of God. Smith proclaims, "He and his followers were to turn the world upside down. Incidentally, that is the task of Christians now. We must cause the Kingdom of this world to become the Kingdom of the Son."<sup>108</sup> This sermon also contains the aspect of courage but is minimal on root-work and personal address. However, Smith's challenging proclamations and courageous appeals qualify this sermon as an effective social crisis sermon within the sermonic component of radicality. Therefore, social crisis preaching within this confrontational aspect challenges the political and social loyalties of the church by proclaiming the One who transcends all human affiliations.

Smith's sermon "Inquiry into the Night," taken from Isaiah 21:11-12, demonstrates the kind of confrontational aspect that Massey describes as a hallmark of the sermonic component of radicality.<sup>109</sup> Smith's sermon centers around the question raised in verse 11 of the text: "Watchman, what of the night?" (Isa 21:11, KJV). Smith describes the social crisis of Nashville in 1969 as "night." In this social crisis sermon Smith confronts the worldviews and ideologies of all who believe that the answer to "the night" is anyone or anything other than the Messiah. Smith confronts those who believe that technological prowess, militarism, or political determinism can serve as social correctives.<sup>110</sup> For example, Smith claims, "We cannot expect the shedding of blood to be

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<sup>108</sup> Kelly Miller Smith, "The Birth of a New Day," sermon, Vanderbilt University, Jean and Alexander Heard Library, Special Collections and University Archives, Kelly Miller Smith Papers, box 23, file 5.

<sup>109</sup> Kelly Miller Smith, "Inquiry into the Night," sermon, preached at the Chicago Sunday Evening Club on December 14, 1969, Vanderbilt University, Jean and Alexander Heard Library, Special Collections and University Archives, Kelly Miller Smith Papers, box 23, file 8.

<sup>110</sup> Smith, "Inquiry into the Night."

the way to turn on the light. Rather, violence can plunge us into a darkness ‘blackier than a thousand midnights.’ When we raise the pertinent question ‘Watchman, what of the night?’ we do not address the question to those whose god is militarism.”<sup>111</sup>

In “Inquiry into the Night” the aspects of courage and confrontation are tightly bound through Smith’s courageous application of the text to the contemporary context. The aspect of personal address is reflected in a testimony within the sermon, and the aspect of root-work is seen in Smith’s appeal to the congregation that “we need not live our lives in darkness. There is light available. However simplistic it may sound, Jesus IS the light of the world. He is the Lord of life. He speaks creatively to the issues which confronts us if we but have ears to hear.”<sup>112</sup> Smith brings the Word of God to bear on the relevant issues of 1969; he bridges the social crisis facing the Edomites and Babylonians in this passage to the hearers of his message in Chicago in 1969. The social crisis preacher exposes social crises not as a new reality but as a constant companion of fallen humanity, desperately in need of a watchman whose answer to “What of the night?” is the Messiah of Yahweh, Jesus Christ.

### **Confrontation in the Imperative**

The key to the above description of the confrontational element of radicality is Massey’s phrase, “Necessity is being laid on him to respond.” Imperatives demand a response. The proclamation of confrontation that is divorced from the preacher laying the necessity to respond on the hearer amounts to intimidation in a bully-pulpit. The proclamation of confrontation should be accompanied by grace. The hearer needs God’s grace to respond to the gospel imperatives bound up in this confrontational quality in the preacher’s social crisis proclamation. In Smith’s social crisis lectures at Yale, he

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<sup>111</sup> Smith, “Inquiry into the Night.”

<sup>112</sup> Smith, “Inquiry into the Night.”

proclaims, “It may be said that the word of God is God’s living communication with members of the human family. It is dynamic in quality and imperative in mood.”<sup>113</sup>

John Carrick, former professor of preaching at Reformed Theological Seminary and Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, argues, “The relationship between the indicative and the imperative . . . reflects the relationship expressed in the Bible between the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man . . . the imperative mood expresses the action of man; it expresses man’s responsibility, man’s cooperation.”<sup>114</sup> The confrontational quality of radicality in Massey’s African American preaching component is the equivalent to Carrick’s characterization of the Scriptures exhibiting an indicative-imperative pattern of communication. Massey’s recognition and acknowledgement of the indicative-imperative sequential arrangement, rather than being exclusively the results of his familiarity with the African American preaching tradition, is most likely the result of his experience as a scholar and expert in biblical language, especially Greek.<sup>115</sup> Massey refers to the imperative as God’s *gracious imperatives*. He states, “Every call Jesus issued was uttered with graciousness. He spoke imperatively, yes, but imperative was graciously issued, and what he asked bore the marks of inspiration and the distinct challenge of a high purpose.”<sup>116</sup> Carrick explains, “God himself has, in the gospel of Christ, harnessed these two fundamental grammatical moods and invested them with theological and homiletical significance.”<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 31.

<sup>114</sup> John Carrick, *The Imperative of Preaching: A Theology of Sacred Rhetoric* (East Peoria, IL: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2016), 89.

<sup>115</sup> Massey writes about his extensive studies in the Hebrew Scriptures under Charles G. Shaw, Greek under Arthur Rupprecht, and Biblical Aramaic under Herbert G. May. See James Earl Massey, *Aspects of My Pilgrimage: An Autobiography* (Anderson, IN: Anderson University Press, 2002), 191-92, 199, 200.

<sup>116</sup> Massey, *Stewards of the Story*, 54.

<sup>117</sup> Carrick, *The Imperative of Preaching*, 5.



Just as there is a sequential order in Massey's four aspects of radicality-root-work, personal address, courage, confrontational, the confrontational element follows root-work and personal address, which both act as indicatives, whereas the function is to declare and inform. Carrick explains, "Although there is a primacy and a priority about the indicative mood in preaching, there is actually an incompleteness and an insufficiency about the indicative mood considered in isolation."<sup>118</sup> Massey reflects this pattern in his own preaching in his sermon "The Gracious Imperative," Massey proclaims,

There is in the Mishnah, in the "Benedictions" (Berakoth) section of that treasured compilation of Jewish oral tradition about the Law, a passage in which a rabbi explained what it means to respond positively to God's word as one who hears it. According to that rabbi, to "hear" truly is to take on the yoke of the kingdom of heaven' it is to willingly subject oneself to divine sovereignty and to let God fully order one's life. . . . He summoned hearers to yield their consent to God. This is what Jesus was asking of Simon, Andrew, James, and John when he issued that gracious imperative, "Follow me." This is what Jesus asks when he addresses us with his inviting word today.<sup>119</sup>

In this example, the imperative is the request and command of the Lord for the hearer to follow him and to provide a "yes" to His summons.

For Smith, the confrontational aspect is bound up in the imperative to embrace a Christ-centered ethic in impacting social crises. In his sermon "If Any Man," taken from Matthew 16:24, he challenges his hearers to deny themselves and to take up the cross of Christ. This sermon bears every aspect of radicality: root-work, courage, personal address, and confrontation. Smith confronts the bigotry of racism by identifying and attacking it at the root, which he pinpoints as the sin of egocentricity. In this sermon Smith preaches,

All too often are we so wrapped up in self that we forget that there are "other selves." When we fail to deny ourselves, we, thus, become uncharitable and, indeed, unchristian. The denying of ourselves prepares us to live in the vast expanse of brotherhood. Without this denial, we leave ourselves open for treachery and suspicion to come in and take over the reins of our hearts. We become blind, blundering bigots; we live an existence that is painfully circumscribed by a philosophy of exclusiveness. We stunt our growth, thwart our potentialities and cause our personalities to become

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<sup>118</sup> Carrick, *The Imperative of Preaching*, 83.

<sup>119</sup> Massey, *Stewards of the Story*, 54.

diseased. . . . We must see ourselves, not as an end in ourselves, but as a means to an end, in the light of the Kingdom of God.<sup>120</sup>

This sermon reflects the sequential indicative and imperative partnership expressed in Massey's proclamation of confrontation. Smith confronts the hearer with a specific request to "see ourselves . . . in the light of the Kingdom of God." The relationship of the indicative and the imperative is paramount for a theology of preaching that adequately communicates biblical truth and the responsibility of congregations and unbelievers to respond affirmatively to that truth through the grace only God provides in Christ. Carrick argues, "Thus, the indicative-imperative pattern or structure of New Testament Christianity provides the preacher with a very important and valuable framework against which he is able, to some extent, to measure and evaluate both the orthodoxy and the balance of his own preaching ministry."<sup>121</sup>

Massey insists that the hearer must know that he has been confronted, and through that confrontation the hearer is provided grace to respond positively to the gracious imperative of proclamation. Smith's sermons are identical to Massey's pattern, whereas the preacher, in Spirit inspired valor and courage, confronts the hearers through imperatives that beckon an affirmative response.

### **Confrontation and Deductive Preaching**

Smith's sermons are arranged using the deductive model of preaching.<sup>122</sup>

Bryan Chapell contends, "Deductive sermons approach listeners through the front door

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<sup>120</sup> Kelly Miller Smith, "If Any Man," sermon, Vanderbilt University, Jean and Alexander Heard Library, Special Collections and University Archives, Kelly Miller Smith Papers, box 23, file 5.

<sup>121</sup> Carrick, *The Imperative of Preaching*, 149.

<sup>122</sup> Chapell provides distinction between the deductive and inductive sermons: "Inductive sermons go through the side door, letting listeners experience the truth of the sermon alongside the preacher through their mutual experience, which is facilitated by narrative." Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 166.

by declaring the truth the preacher will prove ‘up front.’”<sup>123</sup> The form of the sermon should be decided in relation to the sermon’s goal and intent. The social crisis sermon is intended to address serious social crises through the Word of God with the goal of leading humanity to embrace the vision of God through reconciliation, justice, and restoration. Such a serious undertaking requires the preacher to engage hearers immediately in the sermon with the propositions of the text before, according to Smith, “delineating, substantiating or explaining the position thus stated.”<sup>124</sup> Smith’s defense of the use of the deductive method in social crisis proclamation is “the direct method may at times be chosen with the hope that the sheer forthrightness and honesty of the preacher will aid in getting reception for his social crisis proclamation.”<sup>125</sup> Evidence of Smith’s trustworthiness and forthrightness, presented in chapter 2, reveals that both the black and white communities and leaders of Nashville appreciated the forthrightness characteristic in Smith’s preaching and negotiation skills. Most notable of Smith’s skillful negotiations with black protesters and white power brokers, such as L.C. Langford, owner of Langford’s Restaurant, was his work that led to the eventual desegregation of Nashville’s restaurants, which begin with, according to Benjamin Houston, “Kelly Miller Smith’s clever navigation of racial etiquette in working with Langford”<sup>126</sup>

Out of fifty sermons and lectures examined in this research and the twenty presented in this chapter, which include Smith’s Lyman Beecher Lectures of 1983 at Yale, none of Smith’s sermons were inductive in arrangement.<sup>127</sup> Smith’s sermons employed the

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<sup>123</sup> Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 166.

<sup>124</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 92.

<sup>125</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 93.

<sup>126</sup> Benjamin Houston, *The Nashville Way: Racial Etiquette and the Struggle for Social Justice in a Southern City* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2012), 141.

<sup>127</sup> See n126 in this chap. for a definition of the inductive preaching method. For a defense and in-depth analysis on inductive preaching, see Fred B. Craddock, *As One without Authority* (St. Louis:

deductive method, as defined by Bryan Chapell where “general statements of principle begin each division of a message (Paul’s common approach).”<sup>128</sup> Consider the deductive arrangement in Smith’s sermon “Something Old for the New,” taken from the text Jeremiah 6:16. First, Smith’s manuscript reveals a long two-page introduction, which includes the clear establishment of the biblical text to the sermon title:

My friends, we must realize this: the wrecklessness of this age is not only true on the national and international scene. It manifests itself in our town, in our communities, in our homes. When we pick up the newspaper, we read evidence of this type of times we are living in. There is too much wreckless prevailing for any desirable destiny to be discernible. Notice the cases where husbands kill their wives, wives commit murder upon their husbands. Parents are taking the lives of those they brought into the world. Drunkenness and general rowdiness claim the interest and attention of far too many people. . . . While the grime and grit of worldliness roughen and toughen our souls, we must seek the old paths and walk therein.<sup>129</sup>

Smith’s next move is in the form of a transitional question or what Samuel D. Proctor would call the “relevant question,” which connects the introduction to the main body of the message.<sup>130</sup> Smith’s relevant question is, “What are the markers that we will find along the old paths that will lead us safely through this new age?”<sup>131</sup> In the body of the message Smith gives two “markers” to form a classic deductive sermon. Based on Jeremiah 6, Smith states, “The first marker that must claim our attention is the one

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Chalice Press, 2001); Eugene L. Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000).

<sup>128</sup> Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 160.

<sup>129</sup> Smith, “Something Old for the New.”

<sup>130</sup> In *The Certain Sound of the Trumpet: Crafting a Sermon of Authority*, Proctor maintains, The relevant question is already asked in the minds of the hearers- whether the preacher ever gets to it or not. After the sermon’s introduction and transition, the presentation of the condition addressed in the antithesis, and the answer to it in the thesis, one can imagine the congregation saying, “So What?” . . . the body of the sermon—the main points, the synthesis—is made up of answers to the relevant question. (Samuel D. Proctor, *The Certain Sound of the Trumpet: Crafting a Sermon of Authority* [Valley Forge, VA: Judson Press, 1994], chap. 5, Kindle)

<sup>131</sup> Smith, “Something Old for the New.”

labeled ‘God,’ then he proceeds to proclaim, ‘the other marker that we behold along the old path is clearly labeled “brotherhood.”’<sup>132</sup>

Smith argues for the “direct model” when engaging in social crisis preaching. Concerning the deductive approach for social crisis proclamation, Smith states, “It simply does not dally with life or death issues. This is often the mood of those who choose the deductive method.”<sup>133</sup> Smith’s deductive method best compliments Massey’s radical confrontational element in the sermon. If, as Massey states that radical preaching should “make him know that he is being confronted . . .” then the deductive method ensures such an encounter is experienced during the preaching event. The deductive method does not leave the interpretation nor the preacher’s instruction for application up for interpretation.

### **Confrontational as Spiritual and Scriptural Transformation**

The confrontational aspect in radical prophetic preaching cannot be anchored in the humanistic spirit of performance nor in the hierarchical authority of the pastoral position alone since neither of these expressions offers the power to transform societies that have been rattled by social injustices and social crises. Social crisis preaching aims to radically and permanently transform individuals, systems, and communities through the only means capable of such transformation: the Word of God. Smith states, “The Word of God is not static and placid; it is dynamic and unrelentingly disturbing.”<sup>134</sup> For transformation to occur, a significant difference between spiritual transformation and change must stem from human intimidation and manipulation.

The confrontational aspect is initiated by the preacher who first has been confronted with the Word that he is compelled to preach, which is why, in many

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<sup>132</sup> Smith, “Something Old for the New.”

<sup>133</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 92.

<sup>134</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 32.

instances, the Bible reports that the “Word of God came to . . .” the prophet, signifying that the preacher is first confronted (Jonah 1:1; 3:1; Jer 1:2; 33:19; Joel 1:1; John 3:1). In this sense, the anointing of the preacher to preach to others is inseparable from the transformative pre-requisite required of the preacher, which then qualifies the preacher to confront hearers with the Word of God in the power of the Spirit (Isa 6:1-10; Acts 9:1-22). Stanley Hauerwas, Gilbert T. Rowe Professor Emeritus of Divinity and Law at Duke Divinity School, rightfully describes that the preaching required of the church “requires that the preacher and hearer be confronted by a Word that does not illumine what they already know but rather tells us what we do not know—and, indeed, could not know on our own. That is why it must be done over and over again.”<sup>135</sup> Upon hearing the proclamation, the hearer must decide to “choose this day whom you will serve” (Josh 24:15) and decide that “we must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). The Holy Spirit who calls and provides courage to the preacher also convicts and transforms the hearer.

Confrontational social crisis preaching calls for transformation. The response in which Massey speaks in his definition of the confrontational element is not a superficial response, nor is it one forced by intimidation or garnered by the enticement of rhetoric; it is a response generated by the Spirit through the proclamation of God’s Word. The aim of preaching is salvation, deliverance, and liberation, which come by way of the transformation of those who hear and respond to the Word preached. The hearer cannot be left without the opportunity for transformation to occur. For this conviction that leads to transformation to occur, the preacher, argues Robert Smith, Jr., Charles T. Carter Baptist Chair of Divinity and professor of preaching at Beeson Divinity School, is engaged as an exegetical escort who is “escorting the hearer into the presence of God for the purpose of transformation.”<sup>136</sup> As such, the power to transform lies in the Word of

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<sup>135</sup> Stanley M. Hauerwas, “Practice Preaching,” in *Exilic Preaching: Testimony for Christian Exiles in an Increasingly Hostile Culture*, ed. Erskine Clarke (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1998), 67.

<sup>136</sup> Smith, *Doctrine That Dances*, 25.

God and the Spirit of God. Michael J. Quicke, former C. K. Koller Professor of Preaching at Northern Seminary explains,

In practice, some preachers treat Scripture as a unique resource book that comes alive through their skills and spirituality. In other words, Scripture inspires preachers to be inspired so as to make Scripture inspiring. Preachers do need to be called and gifted, but dynamic preaching requires an expectation and commitment to Scripture's own inimitable power: "All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16).<sup>137</sup>

Five of Smith's seven components of the social crisis sermon bear a keen familiarity to the five canons of Greco-Roman rhetorical criticism. The misuse of rhetoric aims to persuade through the use of human wisdom and the craft of the manipulation of words. Social crisis preaching, which is Christian preaching, should bear no such kinship. Although it is unavoidable, necessary, and even hermeneutically correct for the preacher to convey the emotion of the text and the emotion of their personal experience, it should never be the intention of the preacher to rely on the use of emotion to provoke a response from the hearer that the text does not endorse. In Acts 2, Peter preached with emotions that matched the emotion of the text from which he preached (Joel 2:28-32a), and the results showed that "they were pricked in their heart" (Acts 2:37).

The social crisis preacher is not to intimidate. Massey implies, "This is not to say that there is compulsion in the kerygma against which man would rightfully rebel; nor is it to say that the preacher exercises his will to power in making an arbitrary demand by his words."<sup>138</sup> As such, the confrontation quality of social crisis preaching should never involve "angry rhetoric."<sup>139</sup> Anger that does not convey the biblical writer's emotion and which is not extended from righteous indignation toward sin, will not accomplish the righteous purposes of God in preaching.

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<sup>137</sup> Michael J. Quicke, *360 Degree-Preaching: Hearing, Speaking, and Living the Word* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 52.

<sup>138</sup> Massey, *The Responsible Pulpit*, chap. 6.

<sup>139</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 84.

For Massey, confrontation in the act of proclamation involves the preacher “placing man before God as a ‘thou’ but not as an equal, as one who needs to be guided, confronted, helped, taught, disciplined, forgiven, renewed.”<sup>140</sup> Smith confirms Massey’s assertion in his social crisis lectures when he states, “When the social crisis-conscious preacher mounts the rostrum she or he has the responsibility of proclaiming the Word of God in all of its uncompromising power. It is Word that speaks to the condition of the oppressed. It informs, it energizes, it convicts, it converts, and it blazes the trail for social changes.”<sup>141</sup>

Quicke submits, “Preachers must realize Scripture not only says things but also does things—its ‘useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness’ (2 Tim. 3:16).”<sup>142</sup> Smith used the Bible to confront social crises, which is clearly seen in his views and convictions about the Bible as the inspired Word of God. Smith writes,

Moreover, the Bible is the written record of invaluable experiences of man with God. Herein lies the key to the superiority of the Holy Bible. God wrote on the hearts of men before they wrote on parchment. They had their experiences with God having no idea that their records would someday be considered Holy Scripture. . . . It is a book written by inspired men—who had experiences with God of which they were conscious, the most treasured of all possible experiences.<sup>143</sup>

Smith graciously confronted his congregation and Nashville citizens of every racial and denominational persuasion with the Word of truth. In his baccalaureate address at Tennessee A & I on June 5, 1966, entitled “Stay Tuned for Another World,” taken from Revelation 21:1, Smith proclaims, “The new world which you are going to help create

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<sup>140</sup> Massey, *The Responsible Pulpit*, chap. 6.

<sup>141</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 32.

<sup>142</sup> Quicke, *360 Degree-Preaching*, 53.

<sup>143</sup> Kelly Miller Smith, “A Doorway to Bible Appreciation,” pamphlet, written while Smith served as pastor and professor in Vicksburg, MS, before moving to Nashville, Vanderbilt University, Jean and Alexander Heard Library, Special Collections and University Archives, Kelly Miller Smith Papers, box 25, file 8.



must be a place where men of all ethnic identities can walk the streets together as brothers. It must be a world where Negroes will not be relegated to certain carefully selected positions in our society and where black supremacy will be seen for the folly it truly represents.”<sup>144</sup> This sermon brilliantly infuses the aspects of root-work, courage, and confrontation through the proclamation of personal address, as evident in both baccalaureate addresses in this dissertation. The fact that Smith is an alumnus of two Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Morehouse College and Howard University, provides a personable dynamic to this baccalaureate address. Smith’s preaching, a reflection of the confrontational aspect in Massey’s characterization of the African American preaching tradition, helped to tear down racial barriers at a time and place when the nation needed it most.

### **Analysis and Conclusion**

Kelly Miller Smith’s social crisis preaching embodies the prophetic radicalism espoused by James Earl Massey. An analysis of twenty sermons has affirmed the initial hypothesis that Smith’s social crisis proclamations carry the aspects of the component of radicality. This analysis has revealed that out of the twenty sermons examined, every sermon has at least two of the aspects of radicality. Smith’s sermon “The Birth of a New Day” contained the aspects of courage and confrontation, but the aspects of root-work and personal address were minimal to non-existent. Out of twenty sermons, fifteen sermons contained all the aspects of Massey’s sermonic component of radicality: root-work, courage, personal address, and confrontation. Four of the twenty sermons examined reflect three of the aspects of radicality; one aspect either did not exist in the sermon or was barely visible. Out of those four sermons that contained three aspects of radicality, personal address was the aspect missing from three sermons, and root-work was missing from one.

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<sup>144</sup> Kelly Miller Smith, “Stay Tuned for Another World,” baccalaureate address delivered at Tennessee A & I State University, June 5, 1966, Vanderbilt University, Jean and Alexander Heard Library, Special Collections and University Archives, Kelly Miller Smith Papers, box 23, file 6.

This analysis also revealed that the aspects of courage and confrontation were visible in all twenty sermons. The aspect of root-work was visible in eighteen of the twenty sermons examined, and personal address was visible in sixteen of the sermons examined in this dissertation.

The data collected in this dissertation reveals that all aspects of radicality are necessary in social crisis proclamation. The data presented in the analysis of Smith's twenty sermons provides another important truth concerning social crisis proclamation: the aspects of courage and confrontation are most needed and prominent in sermons that address social crises. Massey states, "True preaching is always confrontational."<sup>145</sup> Massey's statement also suggests, as the data in this dissertation attests, that the aspects of courage and confrontation are inseparable. The preacher must be courageous in order to "make the hearer know that he is being confronted."<sup>146</sup>

Based on the thorough analysis of this dissertation, it must be observed that the aspects of radicality can be employed in the pulpits of any ethnic group, or in multiethnic congregational context where there is Christocentric social crisis preaching, Smith's seven components of the social crisis sermon and Massey's sermon component of radicality, along with the cultural intelligence of the sacred anthropologist are the distinguishing elements that Smith makes plausible for preachers of any ethnic group to engage in social crisis preaching. Therefore, this analysis finds that the social crisis preaching of Kelly Miller Smith, which was firmly rooted in the African American preaching tradition, is transferable and not bound by cultural homiletical restrictions.

The sermon component of radicality, characteristic of the African American preaching tradition, is unique in that it privileges social crisis preaching. The aspects of radicality—root-work, personal address, courage, and confrontational qualities—are

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<sup>145</sup> Massey, *The Responsible Pulpit*, chap. 4.

<sup>146</sup> Massey, *The Responsible Pulpit*, chap. 4.

apparent in Smith's social crisis preaching. Social crisis preaching must be radical. Radicality strikes at the root of injustice and the causes of social crises in the aspect of radicality that Massey describes as root-work. Smith's faithfulness to the Bible as the inspired Word of God, coupled with his extensive knowledge of history, philosophy, and his cultural intelligence, enabled him to deal with the roots of injustice. Smith's praxis, as a member of the minority group, his Christocentric praxis, and his own spiritual experiences gave him credibility in the sight of both blacks and whites, which allowed him to engage in powerful personal address with diverse audiences and congregations. The hostile racial climate of Mississippi and Tennessee during the 1950s-1980s, which comprised the majority of Smith's pastoral career, required him to draw on the enabling power inherent in the Spirit's affirmation of his calling, which gave him courage to preach "in season and out of season" (2 Tim 4:2). Lastly, Smith employed a hermeneutical approach and homiletical method that positioned him as one who had been confronted by the Word, to confront others with the Word in the power of the Spirit. Smith's hermeneutical and homiletical approach championed the imperatives in the gospel to compel his hearers to make a decision for Christ in order to bring about social change. According to Peter Paris, close friend, colleague, and one of the principal organizers of the Kelly Miller Smith Collection at Vanderbilt University, "Kelly Miller Smith literally single-handedly saved Nashville, Tennessee, from racial destruction."<sup>147</sup>

Kelly Miller Smith's example of radical, Christ-centered, social crisis preaching remains powerfully effective in times of social upheaval because "it is not only the proclamation of what God has said: it is the proclamation of what God continues to say to the present condition."<sup>148</sup> Preaching Christ is the proclamation of God's radical answer to sin: the root cause of injustice and social crises.

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<sup>147</sup> Peter Paris, telephone interview with author, December 24, 2018.

<sup>148</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 18.

## CHAPTER 5

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Kelly Miller Smith is a colossal figure in Nashville's Civil Rights history. His preaching prowess in the academy and church rank him among the most celebrated African American preachers in American history. In spite of these accolades, Smith is largely understudied. This dissertation revealed and uncovered several theological and homiletical areas concerning Smith's social crisis preaching and ministry that are worthy of future academic research. Chapter 3 identified Smith's seven components of the social crisis sermon and their similarities with Greco-Roman rhetoric, which is one critical area that deserves an expanded analysis. Smith's preaching performance as a "bi-cultural" homiletician is another area that warrants serious study. Likewise, Smith joins some of the most distinguished scholars of homiletics who are also trained classical musicians, such as Eugene Lowry and James Earl Massey. A monumental undertaking would investigate how Smith's training and inclinations as a classical pianist influenced the structure of his social crisis sermons or how his musical pedigree influenced the improvisationist motif in the social crisis sermon.<sup>1</sup> Recognizing the vast potential for scholarly research on Smith, Barry Everett Lee of Morehouse College admits,

The most glaring gap in the history of the Movement is the lack of scholarly biographies on luminaries like John Lewis, Diane Nash, Bernard Lafayette, James Forman, Kelly Miller Smith. . . . These are not minor figures, but some of the most

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<sup>1</sup> Existing texts treat the role of music in preaching, but they are few. See Kirk Byron Jones, *The Jazz of Preaching: How to Preaching with Great Freedom and Joy* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004); Eugene Lowry, *The Homiletical Beat: Why All Sermons are Narrative* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2012); Otis Moss III, *Blue Note Preaching in A Post-Soul World: Finding Hope in An Age of Despair* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015). None of these works deal with Kelly Miller Smith, Sr. or the role of music in social crisis preaching.

important activists of the era whose contributions broke old patterns of race relations and helped give African Americans new dignity and status in American society.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter will present three recommendations for future research that focus on Smith's social crisis sermon and how structure influences social crisis content. First, future research may concentrate on Smith's social crisis sermon using Samuel DeWitt Proctor's model as espoused in *The Certain Sound of the Trumpet: Crafting a Sermon of Authority*. Second, Smith's social crisis homiletic in light of Matthew Kim's cultural intelligence model, largely promoted in Kim's *Preaching with Cultural Intelligence: Understanding the People Who Hear Our Sermon*, is an excellent opportunity for PhD students to conduct scholarly research and provide an intercultural analysis of Smith's sermons. The third recommendation for substantial academic investigation is Smith's social crisis preaching and congregational application using Bryan Chapell's Christ-centered preaching approach, delineated in *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*. Each of these research recommendations ensures that social crisis preaching can be embraced cross-culturally and within any theological tradition.

The research question raised in chapter 1 concerning the transferability of social crisis preaching from the African American church, where social crisis proclamation has found dominant expression, to other cultures where it has been minimal to non-existent, is also answered in these three recommendations for future studies. I selected recommendations for future research on Smith's social crisis preaching to be examined from preaching scholars' representatives from three different cultures: an African American (Proctor), a Korean American (Kim), and a European American (Chapell). Each of these scholars brings a distinct and necessary angle to investigate the social crisis sermon's method and structure. Social crisis preaching is not cultural bound; therefore, it can and should be extended to the pulpits of other cultures. Most importantly, these

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<sup>2</sup> Barry Everett Lee, 'The Nashville Civil Rights Movement: A Study of the Phenomenon of Intentional Leadership Development and Its Consequences for Local Movements and the National Civil Rights Movement (PhD diss., Georgia State University, 2010.

recommendations for future study ensure that the preaching, ministry, and life of Kelly Miller Smith continues to bless the church and academy for years to come and that he receives the attention he is due for the glory of God.

### **The Social Crisis Sermon and Samuel Dewitt Proctor's Adapted Hegelian Method**

Smith emphasized the importance of structure in the social crisis sermon when stating, “Both consciously and unconsciously people respond to form as well as content or substance.”<sup>3</sup> Future research must consider social crisis preaching using the sermon model espoused by Smith’s close friend, Samuel Dewitt Proctor.<sup>4</sup> Proctor states,

The social prophet, the one who every Sunday looks at the failures of the institutions of society and the unraveling of the social fabric . . . along with this social and prophetic word, the people need education in religious matters and comfort in life’s crisis moments; they need to be given an impetus to serve, to participate, and to create alliances to address the issues that are so glaring in the pastor’s sermon. So the social prophet must remember the total menu and the need for a complete diet in the weekly sermons.<sup>5</sup>

Proctor borrowed the dialectical approach for the search for truth from Georg Wilhelm Hegel (1770-1831) and adapted it for the African American pulpit. Proctor added homiletical functionality to *thesis*, *antithesis*, and *synthesis*, and then included “the

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<sup>3</sup> Kelly Miller Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching: The Lyman Beecher Lectures 1983* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984), 88.

<sup>4</sup> Samuel D. Proctor was a close family friend of the Smith family and visited Smith week before Smith died. Smith’s son, Kelly Miller Smith, Jr. studied under Proctor for his DMin at United Theological Seminary. Kelly Miller Smith, Jr., interview with author, Griggs Hall, American Baptist College, Nashville, May 30, 2019. Proctor, like Smith, is one of the twelve African Americans to give the Lyman Beecher Lectures at Yale. Proctor’s Beecher Lectures were given in 1989, and were titled “How Shall They Hear: Effective Preaching for Vital Faith.” Proctor was pastor Emeritus of the Abyssinian Baptist Church in New York City, and Professor Emeritus at Rutgers University. The Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union is named in his honor. Proctor also served as the President of Virginia Union University, Richmond, and North Carolina A & T University. Proctor served as the President of the National Council of Churches from 1964-65. Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference, “About Us,” accessed August 20, 2019, <http://www.sdpconference.info/about-us/>. Proctor has authored numerous books on preaching, including *How Shall They Hear: Effective Preaching for Vital Faith* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1992).

<sup>5</sup> Samuel D. Proctor, *The Certain Sound of the Trumpet: Crafting a Sermon of Authority* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1994), 5.

relevant question.” According to Proctor, “in order to give the sermon vitality, currency, application, and relevance, the next step is to ask a ‘so what?’ question, the relevant question- the most relevant question that anyone would normally raise after hearing the antithesis and thesis.”<sup>6</sup>

Smith was familiar with the Hegelian outline and considered it appropriate and even effective for social crisis preaching for its philosophical and homiletical value. Concerning the Hegelian or Triadic Outline, Smith mentions in *Social Crisis Preaching: The Lyman Beecher Lectures 1983*, “Contradictory realities imply and require each other, according to this perspective as is evident in Hegel’s *Philosophy of History* and his *Philosophy of Right*, which include the thesis, the antithesis, and the synthesis.”<sup>7</sup> As an example, Smith uses a social crisis sermon outline from Mark 1:14-15. Smith’s Hegelian outline is as follows:

“Human Crisis and God’s Timetable”

Text: Mark 1: 14-15

(Introduction)

Thesis: God has a timetable for the resolution of human crises (“The time is fulfilled”)

Antithesis: Crises are abated by human effort (“John . . . appeared in the wilderness, preaching [v. 4] . . . was arrested . . . Jesus came . . . preaching”)

Synthesis: God’s timetable is revealed by the combination of human effort and belief and divine involvement.

Future research may investigate Smith’s sermons to identify the racial, theological, and socio-economic demographics of the audiences when Smith used this method. This method appears to be helpful in complementing Smith’s deductive sermon style. However, Proctor explains, “The method described . . . is useful for various types of sermons: narrative, topical, exegetical, and thematic.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Proctor, *The Certain Sound of the Trumpet*, 28.

<sup>7</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 96.

<sup>8</sup> Proctor, *The Certain Sound of the Trumpet*, 27.

This method begins with the development of a “big idea” or a proposition. According to Proctor, “The proposition of the sermon says what the sermon is all about. It is the most important part because it presents the main idea, the word that has come during communion in prayer.”<sup>9</sup> In Proctor’s model, the thesis and antithesis are interchangeable in sequential order. The introduction can be comprised of the antithesis or the thesis, whichever the passage dictates to come first. After the introduction, Proctor’s model calls for the transition, which is comprised of either the thesis or antithesis, whichever is not used in the introduction. After the transition, the relevant question is raised, followed by the synthesis—the body of the sermon. The significance of Proctor’s sermon structure to social crisis preaching is that it allows the preacher to privilege the text in dictating why the social crisis in the selected biblical text is worth the contemporary listeners’ hearing. It also allows the preacher to confront the hearer with a penetrating relevant question, which challenges the hearer to ponder whether their theological convictions are in line with their lived behaviors.

The antithesis, much like Bryan Chapell’s Fallen Condition Focus (FCF) in his Christ-centered preaching model, is the condition that the sermon addresses and is a part of the introduction. According to Proctor, “The preacher needs this as much as the congregation in order to give the sermon integrity. What makes this sermon important? The answer to that question comprises the antithesis, which is presented in the introduction.”<sup>10</sup> Proctor continues, “The antithesis is a presentation of a current issue, problem, or situation and an observation of a need for a change or correction with which people are familiar, and on which they would want to reflect seriously.”<sup>11</sup> With these two facts in mind, the antithesis as the introduction and the anthesis’ functioning to address a

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<sup>9</sup> Proctor, *The Certain Sound of the Trumpet*, 33.

<sup>10</sup> Proctor, *The Certain Sound of the Trumpet*, 53-54.

<sup>11</sup> Proctor, *The Certain Sound of the Trumpet*, 64.



current issue, the social crisis preacher should be mindful not to alienate the audience in the introduction. Social issues can be hard to navigate. Social issues have deep historical roots and many congregations are culturally, economically, and theologically invested on the side of social crises that the Bible challenges through social crisis proclamation. Proctor states, “The preacher wants to win the congregation to the main point of the sermon, not lose them in negativism.”<sup>12</sup> Using Proctor’s approach, in the manner in which Smith employed this method, the preacher should speak the truth in love and extend grace that allows hearers to listen intently, with an openness to be transformed by the Word of God.

The thesis is the focus and direction of the sermon.<sup>13</sup> In Proctor’s model, the thesis expands on the proposition. Proctor states, “The thesis is presented, well-illustrated, and supported by the witness of Scripture, history, literature, and personal testimony. It has a single and unambiguous purpose and avoids trying to say too much in one message.”<sup>14</sup> The thesis will bring the ethics and the theology of the preacher to bear on the problem or issue posed in the antithesis, which is an opportunity to confront the beliefs and behaviors that may be complicit in social crises.

The most distinct element in Proctor’s model is the “relevant question.” Proctor argues, “In order to make the sermon as compelling as we can, the relevant question must rise in the preacher’s mind as soon as the antithesis and the thesis have been presented.”<sup>15</sup> The preacher has the opportunity with the relevant question to press stimulating questions that the hearer may not have the predisposition to ask. For instance, a sermon taken from Ephesians 2:11-22 that deals with Gentiles and Jewish relationships in Christ, may ask, “What theological convictions do we hold that create barriers and

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<sup>12</sup> Proctor, *The Certain Sound of the Trumpet*, 70.

<sup>13</sup> Proctor, *The Certain Sound of the Trumpet*, 73.

<sup>14</sup> Proctor, *The Certain Sound of the Trumpet*, 73.

<sup>15</sup> Proctor, *The Certain Sound of the Trumpet*, 95.

walls which prevent us holding Christ-honoring relationships with people from other ethnic groups?” The relevant question provides the preacher the opportunity to ask social and theological questions from the cultural perspective of the biblical writer or to ask the question from a different contemporary cultural perspective. The relevant question can also permit the preacher to lead the hearer into asking questions that they may be afraid to ask or to which they do not have the social knowledge to ask.

In Proctor’s model, the synthesis is the body of the sermon and answers the relevant question through applicable points that are taken from the text. Proctor states, “The synthesis should answer the relevant question in some kind of order that makes it possible for the audience to follow.”<sup>16</sup> Proctor provides valuable insight on how the social crisis sermon builds the points of the synthesis. He recommends using illustrations, appealing to witness of another discipline, offering the witness of Scripture, and personal testimony. Proctor explains, “It is like layers of finish on a surface: one layer from Scripture, one from logic, one from another discipline, and a layer from the preacher’s own observations.”<sup>17</sup> All of the elements Proctor suggests to use in the building of applicable sermon points serve to inform socially misinformed people of issues in which they are either unaware or to which they feel no responsibility to confront. Smith states, “Although much of the social evil that exists is willful, social ignorance is a major problem for pulpit and pew alike. It is sometimes alarming to discover how woefully uninformed persons in responsible positions are when it comes to matters of injustice and general racism.”<sup>18</sup> Smith often appealed to United States history, philosophy, and other disciplines to undergird his argument in a strategic way to connect to his audience on issues he may have held in common with them, realizing that “they are often abysmally ignorant of the

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<sup>16</sup> Proctor, *The Certain Sound of the Trumpet*, 111-12.

<sup>17</sup> Proctor, *The Certain Sound of the Trumpet*, 114.

<sup>18</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 36.

problems that have victimized so many in this country for so long and they are even less aware of their own complicity.”<sup>19</sup> Proctor’s synthesis serves to distill biblical truths for a solution to address the social crisis that many people are blind.

Future researchers will find that an examination of Smith’s social crisis preaching using Proctor’s adapted Hegelian method for homiletical usage, a grand contribution to the academy. A thorough investigation into the types of sermons (expository, topical, narrative) Smith used when he used this method would also be an enormous benefit for students researching social crisis preaching.

### **Social Crisis Homiletic and Matthew Kim’s Cultural Intelligence Model**

Through maintaining a historical-grammatical approach to hermeneutics, Matthew Kim argues for the preacher to understand the cultures of those who hear sermons. Homiletically, Kim offers a methodology through his “Homiletical Template” that he distills in his magisterial work *Preaching with Cultural Intelligence: Understanding the People Who Hear Our Sermons*, which compliments social crisis preaching and the social crisis sermon. Future research could provide an analysis of Smith’s hermeneutic as well as his sermons using Kim’s hermeneutical approach and homiletical template. Chapter 1 of this dissertation noted Smith as a “sacred anthropologist.” Kim’s cultural intelligence model requires the preacher to be a sacred anthropologist; one who considers the cultural context of the author of the text and the cultural context of the hearer of the proclamation.

The sacred anthropologist is one whose presuppositions about culture, race, and ethnicity are biblically informed. The sacred anthropologist views humanity through God’s eyes and understands that God has “made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth” (Acts 17:26). The sacred anthropologist has a sincere

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<sup>19</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 36.

passion to inform the congregation and hearers that God's love is for all of humanity, that every person bears the *imago Dei*, and "that there is no partiality with Him" (Eph. 6:9). In the spirit of proclaiming God's love for all ethnicities, the sacred anthropologist does not disparage any ethnicity, nor does he denigrate the country of origin of those who are culturally and ethnically other.

The sacred anthropologist recognizes one of the pillars of evangelical biblical theology: the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 12) includes all nations of the earth. For the sacred anthropologist, patriotic idolatry and nationalism are viewed as sin and contradict the biblical truth that in God "every family in heaven and on earth is named" (Eph. 3:15). Nationalism hinders reconciliation and truth and thereby distorts God's plan and design for his people. Last, the sacred anthropologist recognizes the presence of black and brown people in the biblical story of God and throughout church history. The sacred anthropologist is also a pro-life advocate. The sacred anthropologist recognizes that God is eternal, so every human life has existence with God prior to earthly manifestation, just as Jeremiah was informed, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart" (Jer 1:5). Since the sacred anthropologist promotes life *before* the womb, *in* the womb, and *after* the womb, the preaching of the sacred anthropologist promotes abundant life on earth and confronts any lifestyle that contradicts the abundant life. Since poverty, illness, disease, crime, drug abuse, and violence are anti-life dynamics, the sacred anthropologist seeks an understanding of the roots of social ills as well as the communities where these ills halt or hinder human flourishing.

The necessity of the sacred anthropologist has also been noted because many of the causes of social crises throughout history were the result of flawed exegesis and erroneous anthropology, such as the "curse of Ham" theory. Kim states, "Preaching can be error-prone when we read the text only from our limited cultural point of reference."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Matthew D. Kim, *Preaching with Cultural Intelligence: Understanding the People Who Hear Our Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 15.

Smith understood cultures outside his own. His ministry and preaching were embraced by whites as much as it was welcomed in his native black church. As such, he was able to glorify Christ through a ministry of compassion that produced radical reconciliation. Any future study of Smith should seriously consider Smith's preaching in light of Matthew Kim's "Homiletical Bridge." Kim offers his Homiletical Template for preachers who desire to preach with cultural intelligence. The Homiletical Template includes three parts: Follow your HABIT, Build the BRIDGE, and speak their DIALECT.<sup>21</sup>

While each part of the template is important for the social crisis sermon, stage 2, the BRIDGE, offers invaluable effectiveness not only for preaching to other cultures but for helping the preacher's congregation understand and share the love of Christ with other cultures. In Kim's model, BRIDGE is an acronym for Beliefs, Rituals, Idols, Dreams, God, and Experiences. Kim advises, "Depending on the subject matter or content of the sermon, use discretion to locate cultural connection points by using the acronym BRIDGE."<sup>22</sup> Kim's model is vitally powerful to address social crises because it combats stereotypes, myths, revisionist history narratives, and faulty anthropological understandings that have often been the source of false stereotypes and the ideologies responsible for social crises. These faulty narratives are often imbedded in educational curriculums, theological literature, and the worldviews of political parties.

In Kim's Homiletical Template, under each BRIDGE acronym, the social crisis preacher will be required to wrestle with several questions. Among these questions posed by Kim are the following:

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<sup>21</sup> Kim's Homiletical Template consist of three stages. Stage 1 is concerned with exegesis and exposition and is called "the HABIT." The acronym for HABIT is Historic, Grammatical and Literary Context, Author's Cultural Context, Big Idea, Interpret in Your Context, and Theological Presuppositions. Stage 3 is concerned with the delivery of the sermon and is called "DIALECT." The acronyms for DIALECT is Delivery, illustrations, application, language, embrace, content, and trust. See Kim, *Preaching with Cultural Intelligence*, 219-21.

<sup>22</sup> Kim, *Preaching with Cultural Intelligence*, 13.

1. What confessional beliefs does this Scripture text support or challenge for your listeners?
2. What cultural beliefs do your listeners embrace that conflict with Scripture?
3. Write down three to five rituals or traditions that are most important to your congregations.
4. Write down the idols of your listeners that they will struggle to hand over to God in this week's sermon.
5. What is God's dream for your listeners in this week's sermon?
6. In what ways do your listeners' dream align with or diverge from God's dreams for them in this Scripture text?
7. Which characteristics of God would your listeners most identify with in this week's sermon? Try to address these attributes of God in your sermon this week.
8. What life experiences are most influential for your listeners as they either positively or negatively receive this week's sermon?<sup>23</sup>

Kim advises, "Each week as you prepare your sermon, try to answer these questions as you build the BRIDGE into your listeners' lives."<sup>24</sup> However, even more specifically, Kim's model incorporates a view toward Christian ethics. Kim poses these questions:

1. What cultural differences exist with respect to ethics?
2. Who ultimately makes the decision?
3. What is considered acceptable behavior?
4. Which expressions of love are culturally appropriate?
5. Am I learning about how Others receive love?
6. What is just or unjust?
7. On what basis is fairness determined?
8. What power dynamics influences fairness?

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<sup>23</sup> Kim, *Preaching with Cultural Intelligence*, 227-29.

<sup>24</sup> Kim, *Preaching with Cultural Intelligence*, 226.

9. How do those in Other cultures behave and act specifically with regard to your Scripture text?
10. How can those actions and behaviors be affirmed according to Scripture?<sup>25</sup>

If future researchers investigate Smith's social crisis sermon in light of Kim's Homiletical Template, the answer to the questions in Kim's Homiletical Template lies in the difficult work in which the preacher must commit during Smith's pre-proclamation and post proclamation functionality of the preacher stages.<sup>26</sup> These questions force the preacher to consider the plight, conditions, and way other cultures understand God and Scripture and how their histories and narratives have intersected with God and Scripture. Kim states,

Popular are terms like "postracial America" presume that we, as Americans, have overcome racial hostilities and now live in a society of racial parity. Quite the contrary, racial and ethnic divides linger on across America. Even in our preaching ministry, we are either perpetuating prejudice with our silence or making progress toward peace, healing, and reconciliation in our churches. Many evangelical Christian leaders have been sluggish in exhibiting the ministry of reconciliation across racial and ethnic lines. As culturally intelligent preachers, it is paramount that we lead the charge in helping our congregation embrace and celebrate ethnic and cultural differences.<sup>27</sup>

It is probable that Kim's approach to sermon preparation through the HABIT methodology and in his insistence on understanding other cultures through BRIDGE homiletic will lead to greater harmony among unreconciled people as preachers are forced to address the sensitive social and political issues that stare congregations squarely in the eye each Sunday.

### **Social Crisis Preaching through Bryan Chapell's Christ-Centered Preaching**

Another recommendation for future scholarly research centered on Smith's social crisis preaching is the social crisis sermon using Bryan Chapell's expository

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<sup>25</sup> Kim, *Preaching with Cultural Intelligence*, 229-30.

<sup>26</sup> See Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 80-81, 98-100.

<sup>27</sup> Kim, *Preaching with Cultural Intelligence*, 95.

preaching methodology and sermon structure for developing relevant application in sermonic points and sub-points. Smith's sermons are biblical and anchored in Christ-centered proclamation, which demands the application of Christ-centered ethics to address social crises. The "Double-Helix" illustration model is the best sermon model and structure to communicate applicable biblical truths from the social crisis sermon.<sup>28</sup> Smith's recommendation of the deductive method of sermon proclamation also fits Chapell's Double-Helix model in delineating propositions in the sermon. Smith's expository preaching method employs the Fallen Condition Focus, as well as the Double Helix model, which entails the three parts of exposition: explanation, illustration, and application.<sup>29</sup>

Future research could use Chapell's FCF to point to the root cause of all social crisis to prevent the isolation and alienation that often occurs when preachers use a broad-brush approach, by mistakenly pointing to political parties, cultural groups, and communities for causes of social crises. Chapell comments, "Addressing a clear FCF as one researches and develops a sermon will keep the sermon on track biblically and practically."<sup>30</sup> In this dissertation, samples of Smith's sermons have revealed the need for Christ and have shown how sin is the ultimate culprit of society's problems. However, Chapell's model allows for the social crisis preacher to address how social crises affect individuals and communities specifically by the preacher providing explanation and application that meet the hearer where they are. Prophetic radicalism moves listeners

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<sup>28</sup> Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 176, 223-24.

<sup>29</sup> According to Chapell, the Fallen Condition Focus (FCF) is the mutual human condition that contemporary believers share with those to or about whom the text was written that requires the grace of the passage for God's people to glory and enjoy him. Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 50. Chapell defends the "Double Helix Illustration Perspective," which follows the explanation, illustration, application pattern. Chapell states, "Traditional expository messages fulfill these obligations when they include illustration and application along with explanation in every main point." Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 175.

<sup>30</sup> Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 89.



beyond positions of generalities and neutrality that often ask nothing of the hearers. Chapell states, “Generalization in the pulpit gives sin security in the pew.”<sup>31</sup> Smith argues, “Social crisis preaching is preaching for a decision for Christ.”<sup>32</sup> There is no neutral ground.

Employing Chapell’s instructional and situational specificity allows the preacher to confront social issues beyond mere generalities and positions the preacher to offer solutions through applications that extend beneath the surface. Knowing that the minister has invested time and critical theological reflection into the potential social crises provides the preacher with credibility with the congregation to address the situational specifics of social crises. Fred Craddock underscores this truth:

Preaching is a vital part of pastoral work in that it permits both preacher and parishioners to weigh, submit to theological examination, integrate, bring clarity, and express issues that are scattered through the many pastoral contacts and activities . . . preaching can bring closure to matters that otherwise would remain fragmented and dangling.<sup>33</sup>

Chapell defines instructional specificity as interpretation that “translates the text from ancient history to present guide. . . . These universal principles are then applied by giving instructions consistent with and derived from the text that direct believers in present actions, attitudes, and/or beliefs.”<sup>34</sup> Social crisis preaching, though deployed through a variety of preaching methods, is most effective in expository preaching. In this way, the social crisis sermon is distinct from a political speech or civil discourse.

Chapell’s method of main point development in the social crisis sermon can ensure that the application that the preacher calls for from the text is wedded to Christ-centered ethics. Chapell’s main point development can aid preachers in social crisis sermon construction because his method “grants present significance to a text’s enduring

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<sup>31</sup> Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 218.

<sup>32</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 80.

<sup>33</sup> Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985), 40.

<sup>34</sup> Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 215.

meaning.”<sup>35</sup> Since the development of an idea from Scripture, which focuses on a human issue or divine claim, is the foundation of social crisis preaching,<sup>36</sup> it is clearly suggestive of the “big idea” of which Haddon Robinson speaks in expository preaching:

Effective sermons major in biblical ideas brought together into an overarching unity. Having thought God’s thoughts after him, the expositor communicates and applies those thoughts to the hearers. In dependence upon the Holy Spirit, the preacher aims to confront, convict, convert, and comfort men and women through the proclamation of biblical concepts. People shape their lives and settle their eternal destinies in response to ideas.<sup>37</sup>

Likewise, late African American expositor, E. K. Bailey argues for the development of a central idea in expository preaching by defining “the expository sermon as a message that focuses on a portion of Scripture, so as to clearly define the meaning of the text, and poignantly motivate hearers to the actions and attitudes of that text in the power of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>38</sup>

Instructional specificity allows the social crisis preacher to address a specific social crisis in the text with a universal explanation in one of the main points of the sermon. However, apart from situational specificity, the universal principles in a text remain abstract and fail to bridge the chasm that exist between the context of the biblical audience and the relevance of contemporary hearers.

Chapell explains, “The aptness, relevance, and realism of situational specificity is frequently a distinguishing mark of mature and powerful preaching.”<sup>39</sup> Situational specificity brings the relevance of the biblical truth to the everyday experiences of the

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<sup>35</sup> Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 214.

<sup>36</sup> Smith, *Social Crisis Preaching*, 82.

<sup>37</sup> Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), chap. 2, Kindle.

<sup>38</sup> E. K. Bailey, quoted in Robert Smith, Jr., *Doctrine That Dances: Bringing Doctrinal Preaching and Teaching to Life* (Nashville: B & H, 2008), 19, Kindle.

<sup>39</sup> Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 216.

hearers. Since Smith was known for his social crisis ministry as much as he was known for his social crisis preaching, future researchers can investigate the “what,” “why,” and “how” of his social crisis sermons under the light of Chapell’s practice of application.

Inspiring congregations to persevere in times of social crises is a daunting task for a preacher who ministers to a people, as described by Howard Thurman, “who stand at a moment in human history with their backs against the wall.”<sup>40</sup> However, providing relevant and effective application that impacts social crises in the community is another difficult task altogether. Chapell states, “The strain of developing balanced, relevant, and fair situational specificity underscores why application is the most difficult task of expository preaching.”<sup>41</sup> Since Smith’s preaching called his congregation and citizens of Nashville to courageously stand against racism and injustice, through sit-ins and other non-violent means, finding the relevant application that would be both palatable for the hearer and faithful to the text of Scripture was difficult. Chapell captures this challenge:

Application requires creativity and courage: creativity to imagine the battles of daily life fought with the truths of God, and courage to talk about this reality on a personal level. Apart from all the homiletical jargon about form, structure, and content, preachers know instinctively what makes application the most difficult part of preaching: the rejection they invite by being specific.<sup>42</sup>

The opportunities for future research on social crisis preaching and the ministry of Kelly Miller Smith are deep and wide. Social crisis preaching is not culturally bound. Through a variety of sermon methods, preachers from any denomination and any ethnic community can practice social crisis preaching effectively because social crisis preaching does not require any skill or giftedness that is unique to the African American preaching tradition. Though no other cultural collective body has contributed more to the body of Christ in terms of prophetic radicalism than the black church tradition, social

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<sup>40</sup> Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 11.

<sup>41</sup> Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 218.

<sup>42</sup> Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 228.

crisis preaching is God's gift to the world through the black church tradition. Throughout church history, preachers from multiple ethnic persuasions and various denominational bodies have embarked upon the Spirit-inspired task of social crisis preaching, even when the terminology used to describe their proclamation was otherwise. Social crisis preaching is Christian proclamation. Robert Smith, Jr. states,

Jesus confronted the Pharisees with their boast concerning tithing and stated that yes, they should have tithed, but they also should not have neglected the matters of social justice. The moral conscience of doctrine makes arrangements for preaching to meet at the intersection of the vertical relationship between God and humans and the horizontal relationship between humans and humans. This moral conscience of doctrine insists that preachers be acquainted not only with the streets of gold in heaven but also with the streets of gloom in the ghetto.<sup>43</sup>

The work of Spirit-filled heralds have been summoned by God to speak peace, justice, and reconciliation when the world is in turmoil through crises. Silence is not the answer when social crisis threatens the very lives of God's treasured creation. Political maneuvers and civil discourse lack the power and spirit-transforming power that reside in the preaching of the Word of God. May preachers from every denomination and every ethnic group succor God's power and grace to embrace and engage in prophetic radicality during times of social crises with the same measure of the God-glorifying effectiveness as Kelly Miller Smith, Sr.

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<sup>43</sup> Smith, *Doctrine That Dances*, 19.

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## ABSTRACT

### AN ANALYSIS OF PROPHETIC RADICALISM IN THE SOCIAL CRISIS PREACHING OF KELLY MILLER SMITH, SR.

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This dissertation provides an analysis of the social crisis preaching of Kelly Miller Smith, Sr., through the lens of James Earl Massey's radicalism. The first chapter provides a brief introduction of Kelly Miller Smith and present his definition of social crisis preaching. It also present the thesis and research question along with introducing the three main purposes for the dissertation. This chapter gives a concise definition of the terms prophetic radicalism, praxis, and proclamation and provides evidence for the importance of praxis and proclamation to remain intertwined in social crisis preaching. Lastly, this chapter introduces the distinguishing elements of the social crisis preaching of Kelly Miller Smith: the pastor as resident theologian, the pastor as sacred anthropologist, and proclamation and beyond methodologies. Chapter 1 introduces and presents Smith as the chief model of praxis and proclaimer of social crisis preaching.

Chapter 2 provides biographic detail of Kelly Miller Smith and James Earl Massey. It focuses on the life and experiences of Smith in Mound Bayou, Mississippi, as a foundational component of praxis and introduces James Earl Massey and provide details of his stellar academic and pastoral career.

Chapter 3 focuses on the distinguishing elements of the social crisis preaching of Kelly Miller Smith and highlights his pastoral, civic, and academic work in Nashville. It focuses on his work through First Baptist Capitol Hill, Nashville, as well as through his

leadership in various organizations that allowed him to foster positive race relations and resolve social crises.

Chapter 4 presents James Earl Massey's insights from the African American preaching tradition and emphasizes "radicality" as the component used as the lens to measure the social crisis preaching of Kelly Miller Smith.

Chapter 5 articulates an architectonic for twenty-first century social crisis preaching, highlighting current crises in today's society and provide three sermons that serve as a model for evangelical preaching and for all ethnicities within evangelicalism.

Chapter 6 addresses the thesis statement: Kelly Miller Smith embodies components of James Earl Massey's prophetic radicalism in his social crisis preaching. The chapter also answers the research question: "What distinguishing elements of social crisis preaching did Kelly Miller Smith make both plausible and practical as a means for all ethnicities and Christian traditions to addressing social crises through preaching?"

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