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A Wesleyan theology of law and gospel for narrative preaching

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A WESLEYAN THEOLOGY OF LAW AND GOSPEL FOR NARRATIVE PREACHING

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation critically engages Wesley's theology of law and gospel and uses it to construct a Wesleyan plot for narrative preaching. Paul Scott Wilson describes homiletician Eugene Lowry's narrative sermon plot as a theological movement from law as trouble to gospel as solution. In this view, law functions largely as bad news; gospel as good news. Lowry's plot assigns a largely negative role to law in that it convicts of sins, or in the case of narrative preaching, creates tension in a plot. John Wesley, however, defines law as "privilege and glorious liberty" for those who desire and participate in sanctification, a continuing growth in love for God and neighbors. This thesis, therefore, proposes a Wesleyan plot for narrative preaching that begins with law, moves to gospel, and ends with renewed law.

This dissertation attempts to integrate narrative form and theological content in sermons, even though recent homiletical theories tend to move one way or the other. In doing so, it also bridges the gap between Lowry's narrative preaching and that of postliberal homileticians, insofar as they tend to start either with experience or the biblical world, respectively. Instead, this work recognizes a kind of redemptive narrative in the relationship of justification and sanctification and suggests this for a Wesleyan

model for narrative preaching. Ultimately, a discussion of law in Wesley's covenantal sense challenges Lowry's central, individualistic notion of freedom as a result of experiencing the gospel only after the law.

This dissertation is an exercise in practical theology. It begins by critically analyzing the context and mode of Lowry's narrative preaching. After consulting Wesley's theology of law and gospel as normative, it critically engages black preaching traditions in the U.S. as a way of bridging the gap between Wesley's time and today, especially recognizing the pastoral context of contemporary listeners. In connection with an analysis of black preaching traditions that creatively tell the redemptive narrative of God, the works of Edward Wimberly and Dale Andrews are especially instructive for showing how black churches narrate their members' responsibilities in acts of justice and reconciliation in covenantal relationship with God and people.

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INTRODUCTION

1. Statement of the Problem

This dissertation critically reflects on a Wesleyan theology of law and gospel as a homiletical method for Wesleyan narrative preaching. John Wesley consistently reinforced the importance of keeping both law and gospel through his sermons, letters, journals, and conferences. Regarding the view of the law, it can be helpful here to give a comparison between Wesley and Martin Luther. Luther describes two uses of law, namely a political use to order civic life and a theological use to convict people of their sins. By contrast, Wesley recognizes law as an active means of grace that would help people to grow in their love for God and other people, specifically as in the process of sanctification and as empowered by the Holy Spirit. With this point in mind, this study considers the dynamic relationship between law and gospel in Wesley's theology to form a homiletical narrative that reflects Wesley's soteriology of justification and sanctification. In engaging Wesley's theology of law and gospel for narrative preaching, this study also learns from traditions of black preaching where social justice and covenant still have narrative homiletical currency and both enrich preaching practice by offering a narrative vision with a more positive view of law.

In recent decades, many Euro-white pulpits—including the Methodist pulpit—have been much influenced by Eugene Lowry, an ordained minister of the United Methodist Church and a scholar of homiletics at St. Paul School of Theology in Kansas City (1968–1998). Lowry suggests an experiential mode of narrative preaching, which he defines as "any sermon in which the arrangement of ideas takes the form of a plot

involving a strategic delay of the preacher's meaning."[1] In his monumental work, *The Homiletical Plot* (1981), Lowry argues that a sermon must be conceived as a plot through which the listeners experience (1) upsetting the equilibrium, (2) analyzing the discrepancy, (3) disclosing the clue to the resolution, (4) experiencing the gospel, and (5) anticipating the consequences. He states that "A sermonic idea is a homiletical bind; a sermon is a narrative plot!"[2] Lowry's method was instantly welcomed by both the Academy of Homiletics and Methodist pulpits who had been searching for a creative way to engage with listeners.

However, Lowry's mode of narrative preaching has met with some criticism, especially from Charles L. Campbell, a postliberal homiletician. Campbell argues in *Preaching Jesus* that Lowry's method is too experiential and individualistic and could imply theological relationalism in Hans Frei's term, namely "a relationalism that dares to make no claims for God apart from the experience of human beings."[3] While Campbell raises valid concerns, what is most alarming to me is that Lowry's understanding of the plot as the genre of preaching seems incongruent with Wesley's soteriology, especially regarding sanctification. Wesley considers justification as an event in which a person was regarded as righteous by the merit of Christ. At the same time, justification must lead to sanctification, a process through which a person is restored in the lost image of God, who

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[1] Eugene Lowry, "Narrative Preaching," in *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, ed. William H. Willimon and Richard Lischer (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 342.

[2] Eugene Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 14.

[3] Charles L. Campbell, *Preaching Jesus: New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei's Postliberal Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1997), 140-141.

is perfect in love. Here, Lowry's narrative preaching seems to miss the link from experiencing the gospel to solid action as the means of grace for believers to grow in their love for God and their neighbors. This limitation is evident in Lowry's hesitancy to engage with the human response to the gospel because of his fear that this might reduce to a "form of works righteousness."[4] The highlight of the sermon for Lowry is to experience the gospel with God as the main actor, rather than placing an emphasis on human efforts in response to the gospel.

While Lowry has a limited view of human action after hearing the gospel, Paul Scott Wilson's analysis of law and gospel in modern and contemporary homiletics offers a different insight. In *Preaching and Homiletical Theory*, Wilson claims that Lowry's plotted gospel is essentially a law-gospel approach to preaching. Beginning with Luther, he describes how some key theologians and preachers over the centuries have developed a theological structure of law and gospel for the movement of a sermon. Although Lowry does not specifically use the language of law and gospel, Wilson places his homiletical plot in the school of law and gospel structure because it seems to him that both Milton Crum and Frederick Buechner anticipate Lowry's homiletical plot by suggesting a movement from law to gospel.[5] In Lowry's case, the movement is from bad news to good news. In endorsing such an analysis of Lowry as posed by Wilson, this dissertation

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[4] Lowry, 83.

[5] In *Manual on Preaching*, Milton Crum suggests a movement from situation (sinful status of human beings), complication (consequential experience of sins), and resolution (gospel). In *Telling the Truth*, Frederick Buechner argues, "The gospel is bad news before it is good news." Paul Scott Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004), 85-88.

explores the law and gospel dynamic implicit in Lowry's homiletical plot in comparison with the Wesleyan theology of law and gospel.

In light of Wilson's homiletic analysis of Lowry's narrative preaching, this study considers how Wesley not only preaches law and gospel in his sermons but also teaches his itinerant preachers to use them as a homiletical method.[6] As previously mentioned, classic law and gospel theologians tend to view law as the conviction of sins and gospel as the forgiveness of sins.[7] While Luther acknowledges the positive role of law in ordering civic life, Wesley emphasizes a more active function for law in the process of salvation. For Wesley, law is "explaining and enforcing the commands of Christ briefly comprised in the Sermon on the Mount,"[8] and he recognized its ongoing function in Christian life by considering it as "privilege and glorious liberty" [9] for those who yearn for and participate in sanctification. He also believes that law "keeps the love of Christ continually before their eyes, that thence they might draw fresh life, vigour, and strength to run the way of his commandments."[10]

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[6] In his letter "Letter on Preaching Christ," John Wesley strongly encourages Wesleyan preachers to preach both law and gospel in their sermon. John Wesley, "Letter on Preaching Christ," December 20, 1750. *The Works of John Wesley,* vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1871)

[7] For example, Martin Luther described law as a "large and powerful hammer" of God that convicts one of one's sins. Gospel is understood as forgiveness of sins by one's faith in God as "merciful Father." Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 4, *Lectures on Galatians* 1535, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), 310.

[8] Wesley, 486.

[9] Ibid, 487.

[10] Ibid.

If Lowry's plot, as analyzed by Wilson, is indeed based on a movement from law to gospel that views the former as bad news and the latter as good news, Wesley might counter by saying, "Neither one of them (law and gospel) *supplants* the other, but they perfectly *supplement* [emphasis added] each other."[11] In his time, Wesley encourages his fellow preachers to mix law and gospel for the salvation of souls: "Undoubtedly, both (law and gospel) should be preached in their turns; yea, both at once, or both in one."[12] He especially warns others about the "gospel preachers" who taught others that a person who is convinced of the gospel is free from the law. While Lowry might sound like the gospel preachers in contending that "freedom is a consequence of the grace of God,"[13] Wesley would argue that the freedom that a person experiences in justification by faith and new birth is the "freedom to love God and neighbor."[14] Randy Maddox describes the way that God's grace works in human beings as "responsible grace."[15] The organic relationship between law and gospel reflects how a person experiences salvation through prevenient grace, justifying grace, and sanctifying grace. Therefore, it is my argument

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[11] John Wesley, "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount: discourse 5," *John Wesley on the Sermon on the Mount: The Standard Sermons in Modern English*, ed. Kenneth Cain Kinghorn (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 131.

[12] Wesley, "Letter on Preaching Christ," 489.

[13] Lowry, 83.

[14] Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 226.

[15] Maddox describes God's grace at work in the world as "responsible grace" to hold the tension between two truths: "Without God's grace, we *cannot* be saved; while without our (grace-empowered, but uncovered) participation, God's grace *will not* save." Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), 19.

that Wesley's theology of law and gospel—as in his understanding of the way of salvation—provides the plot for narrative preaching.

While Wesley's theology of law and gospel needs to play the normative role in envisioning Wesley's mode of narrative preaching for the contemporary pulpit, this dissertation recognizes the difficulties in transposing Wesley's homiletic from the 18th century to the 21st century. It is challenging for a contemporary audience to be receptive to the idea of law as accusatory—a point that Wesley includes in his theology of law. In *Preaching Law and Gospel*, Herman Stuempfle Jr. also addresses this issue and brings out another view on the law that is more horizontal than vertical. He calls it "law as the mirror of existence" since it simply reveals the broken reality of the world.[16] While Stuempfle raises another significant aspect of law for contemporary minds, he still fails to address the responsibility of the individual for their active response to the salvific work of God in the world. In other words, it is necessary to translate Wesley's theology of law and gospel for the 21st century while trying not to hammer contemporary audience members but rather constructively holding them accountable for their words and actions.

For this reason, I turn to black preaching traditions. They address and empower their audiences in a society that constantly oppresses them and attempts to undermine their communal efforts to fight racism and oppression. This study draws especially on the work of Edward Wimberly and Dale Andrews. Wimberly addresses how Wesley's salvific narrative focuses on redefining happiness in the world by being in relationship with God and being grounded in a community that affirms the identities of all individuals

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[16] Herman Stuempfle Jr. *Preaching Law and Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 24-25.

in it.[17] Rather than shaming or holding the listeners to be guilty, Wimberly's understanding of Wesley's homiletic narrative helps audiences to focus on a better way. Andrews describes how covenantal theology in black narrative preaching implies responsibility to God and to one's community, and his vision of ecclesiology encompasses both refuge and prophetic engagement.[18] Although both Wimberly and Andrews do not explicitly address law and gospel in their works, they help to translate a Wesleyan theology of law and gospel to contemporary listeners by suggesting how social justice and covenantal theology take part in the narrative for preaching.

2. Significance of the Problem

This dissertation addresses three theological problems that are too often neglected in the academy in general and the church. First, this work recognizes that many narrative homiletical approaches fail to integrate the narrative form and theological content in preaching. According to Thomas G. Long, the homiletic field has moved in a circular fashion from focusing on either the content or the form of a sermon. In the past, the field of homiletics focused on the content of the sermon by articulating points as in a deductive sermon. Long asserts that the recent decades of homiletic studies have seen a reaction against the previous paradigms of preaching, and the studies have become increasingly obsessed with a creative form of preaching. Influenced by H. Grady Davis, Fred B. Craddock, and Charles Rice, Lowry emphasizes plot as a form to create an experience of

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[17] Edward P. Wimberly, *No Shame in Wesley's Gospel* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), xviii.

[18] Dale P. Andrews, *Practical Theology for Black Churches* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 89.

the gospel for listeners. Following this line of thought, Long points out that the field of homiletics has searched for new paradigms for preaching in the second half of the 20th century, especially with regard to rhetoric, or the form of sermons.[19] For many preachers, including some Methodists, narrative preaching has provided a solution.

However, the homiletic search for form to facilitate the experience of the gospel—and also possibly to solve boredom in pulpits—has led some to question whether the form of a sermon corresponds with the content of the sermon. Richard Lischer refers to this obsession of contemporary preachers with narrative as the "Cinderella period." He argues, "The implicit hope is that if we could find the perfect glass slipper of form, not only would the sermon be transformed into a beautiful princess, but we would also be transformed."[20] In the suggestion given by Lowry on how to make any sermon into narrative form, all that preachers need to do is to distill their exegesis into the five sequences, through which they can create an experiential encounter of the good news through dramatic surprise in reversal. In relation to Lowry's thesis, Lischer points out a naïve belief among many preachers who think that narrative plot can automatically deliver sound theology for Christian life.

While the homiletical field still seems to lean toward either the form or content of a sermon, Kevin J. Vanhoozer provides a fresh way to view the doctrine of the church as a script to be performed and practiced while being led by the Holy Spirit. Although

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[19] Thomas G. Long and Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, eds., *Teaching Preaching as Christian Practice* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 10-11.

[20] Richard Lischer, "Preaching and the Rhetoric of Promise," *Word and World* 8, no. 1 (Winter 1988): 69.

doctrine has often been considered as lifeless in the church or irrelevant in exegesis, Vanhoozer reasons that "doctrine proceeds from an authoritative script and gives direction as to how individuals and the church can participate in the drama of redemption."[21] Since contemporary theater recognizes the active part of a spectator, he believes that our life is "divine-human interactive theater, and theology involves both what God has said and done for the world and what we must say and do in grateful response."[22] In considering Christian doctrine as a script to be performed, Vanhoozer integrates form, content, and practice through the doctrine. In gaining insight from his work, I also believe that the Wesleyan way of salvation must play a role, not only in the exegesis of scripture but also in informing the content, form, and practice of the Wesleyan narrative sermon.

Here, I find it interesting that there have not been many attempts among Wesleyan homileticians to reflect on Lowry's method of preaching through Wesleyan theology. It may be because Wesley's written sermons are not clearly narrative in form, and there seems to be no immediate connection between a Wesleyan homiletic and narrative preaching. However, Wilson's analysis of Lowry's narrative preaching allows one to enter into a conversation between Lowry and Wesley regarding their theologies on law and gospel. It could be said that Lowry's view on law and gospel—as described by Wilson—is not theologically problematic itself. His perspective is only one of many

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[21] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 78.

[22] Ibid., 37-38.

views on law and gospel. However, when compared with Wesley's theology of law and gospel**,** Lowry's homiletical plot does not speak of the renewed role of law once a person is justified in the salvific process.[23] For Wesley, law is also a means for sanctification as God invites people to participate in the redemption process.

Therefore, in suggesting a narrative mode of preaching guided by Wesley's theology of law and gospel, this dissertation attempts to further the discussion of how to integrate both form and content in preaching. Since Wesley's understanding of law and gospel is based on his soteriology of justification and sanctification, his theology of salvation is what holds both the sermonic form and content in a consistent manner. While many Christians in Wesley's time were lethargic, it was the evangelical zeal of Wesley that radically drew him out to the field to travel every day and to preach the gospel, namely to present what Christ had already done for people and what the Holy Spirit would do with them in God's saving grace. Such a theological framework of salvific narrative could integrate both form and content of sermon in a constructive way.

Secondly, this dissertation seeks to find a way beyond both the impasse of Lowry's vision for narrative preaching who tends to favor a plot that is mainly informed by popular culture, and the critiques of postliberal homileticians including Campbell who focus on a plot derived from a biblical plot exclusively. Lowry's narrative preaching is

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[23] Lowry could argue that his homiletical plot's final stage—as in anticipating the consequences—could indicate the renewed role of law by speaking how human beings could respond to gospel. However, his view on the human response seems passive, where "considering human response as central to the sermon constitutes a form of work righteousness." On the contrary, Wesley speaks of active response from human beings as a means to participation in God's grace. Maddox, 19.

focused on creating a dramatic experience for the listeners by holding the tension until later on in the sermon; the usage of such a technique is informed by the structure of TV series. For Lowry, a plot formed by "the interaction of problem and theme" is what leads a "genuine generative sermon idea."[24] However, postliberal homileticians—including William Willimon, Charles L. Campbell, and Richard Lischer—have confronted the notion of the centrality of individual experience to biblical interpretation. For them, the biblical narrative is the authentic story by which culture, experience, and interpretation should be appropriately understood, as Willimon argues that the biblical world is "real" and provides a lens to interpret our world.[25] Thus, Campbell criticizes Lowry's narrative preaching for centering on human experience and for being "anthropological," "individualistic," and "too experiential."[26]

While postliberal homileticians have encouraged preachers to be suspicious of the American cultural valuing of individualism, it seems premature to dismiss human experience as utterly unreliable in interpreting the biblical narrative. When a person recognizes how black narrative preachers creatively use their experiences to point out and confront the evil of racism and oppression, the question is more about the nature of experience in the individual and communal setting. In criticizing the notion of the reality of the world in the text triumphing over our world, David Lose insightfully challenges postliberal homiletics in this way: "Our question, most simply, is what happens to the

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[24] Lowry, 18.

[25] William Willimon, "This Culture Is Overrated," *Christianity Today* 41, no 6 (1997): 27.

[26] Campbell, 138-141.

world of the hearer, the world that she or he is invited to leave behind for, or at best bring along into, the storied, biblical world?"[27] While we may reconceive the world as the biblical narrative challenges us, Lose points out that we are still sent out to the world to live, love, and transform.

Here, this dissertation attempts to find a third way by finding a plot for narrative preaching related to the narrative of salvation, as understood by Wesley. This proposed way avoids over-relying either on plot forms from popular culture—as put forth by Lowry—or on biblical plots exclusively, as put forward by postliberal homileticians. Wesley adopts law and gospel not only as theological content but also as a homiletical grammar to understand how God initiates salvation by God's prevenient grace, justifies sinners by the love of Christ, and strengthens them to strive for the holiness of God. While Wesley's theology of law and gospel avoids being anthropological by understanding the presence of the Holy Spirit throughout the sermon, it also emphasizes the role of the listeners as active participants in the redeeming work of God, who calls them to transform themselves and the world with God's assistance.

Although Wesley never wrote a formal book on preaching, viewing Wesley as a practical theologian helps us to construct a Wesleyan narrative of law and gospel by consulting his sermons, minutes, letters, and teaching (i.e., "On the Sermon on the Mount," "The Law Established through Faith," "Letter on Preaching Christ"). In viewing

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[27] David Lose, "Narrative and Proclamation in a Postliberal Homiletic," *Homiletic* 23, no. 1 (Summer 1998): 8.

both law and gospel as a means of God's grace for people,[28] Wesley points out the ongoing relation between law and gospel: "On the one hand, the law continuously prepares us for; and points us to, the gospel. On the other hand, the gospel continually leads us to a more precise fulfilling of the law. For instance, the law requires us to love God, to love our neighbor; to be meek, humble, and holy."[29] It is a key homiletical suggestion of this study to begin with law, move to gospel, and end with law. The renewed role of law is thus not merely the application of theory into practice. Rather, it equally "nourishes and strengthens the soul" as the gospel does[30] by inviting the listeners to be actively responsible for God's redeeming grace.

Finally, the study on the integral role that law plays in the Christian life—as in sanctification for Wesleyans—addresses a question of whether the gospel is about freedom or obedience. In 1971, Fred B. Craddock, who was a major influence on Lowry, introduced a model of inductive preaching that begins with the particular experiences of the audience members and then invites them to arrive at their own conclusions at the end of the sermon. Such a method of preaching enables the listeners to participate in preaching actively by using their own stories, metaphors, or images. For Craddock, the inductive method corresponded to an American lifestyle that emphasizes the role of

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[28] Wesley defines the means of grace as "outward signs, words, or actions, ordained of God, and appointed for this end, to be the ordinary channels whereby he might convey to men, preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace." Wesley, "The Means of Grace," Sermon 16. For the purpose of this dissertation, I use his term analogously in that our Christian practice might be viewed as a concrete way of responding to the redemptive grace of God.

[29] Wesley, "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount: Discourse 5," 131-132.

[30] John Wesley, "Letter on Preaching Christ," 488.

experience for a person's reflection and action.[31] Craddock's inductive approach reflects the shift in the relationship between the preacher and the audience in his time. The former could no longer assume that there was authority in one's clergy credentials, institution, or scripture.[32]

By contrast, Walter Brueggemann claims that the disregard of law in the Western tradition of Christianity is concerned with individual "autonomy of modernity"; this kind of autonomy can eventually distort the "commanding authority of Yahweh, which is not coercive but generative, not repressive but emancipatory."[33] Brueggemann's view on law seems to be in agreement with Wesley's in that Wesley argues how our "perfect freedom" can only come from "keeping God's law, and to walk in all God's commandments blameless."[34] In other words, there is need to revisit the notion of freedom in Lowry's narrative preaching because it seems to be based on American culture, which emphasizes individualistic autonomy. Rather, the biblical understanding of freedom is grounded in one's relationship with God and neighbors.

It seems helpful to point out the misconception of many commentators that Luther completely disregards the role of law in the ongoing life of Christians. Philip S. Watson

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[31] Fred B. Craddock, *As One without Authority* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001), 49.

[32] Ibid., 14.

[33] Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 199-200.

[34] Wesley, "The Original, Nature, Property, and Use of the Law," *John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology*, ed. Albert C. Outler & Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 266.

in *Let God Be God!* points out that Luther considered both law and gospel as "works of one and the same God, whose inmost nature is pure love."[35] In reflecting the will of God, the law implies the gospel in which "God Himself displays towards us precisely the love that He requires of us in His Law."[36] However, the fallen nature of human beings blocks people from perfectly obeying the law or even finding hope in discovering salvation from it. In other words, although Luther views the law as an expression of God's perfect love, he believes that the human beings as sinners distort it constantly for their self-interest—for instance, people would boast of keeping the law, judge others for failing to do so, and eventually claim their own salvation through their self-righteousness. Therefore, the sinful nature of human beings—even after experiencing justification by faith—led Luther to limit the role of the law as "'to bridle the flesh', 'to punish transgressions' and 'to restrain sin.'"[37]

As will be demonstrated later, Wesley avoids the accusation of legalism by emphasizing the role of the Holy Spirit, who works especially in prevenient grace. In other words, it is not human works that bring individuals to realize that they are sinners before God. Rather, it is the Holy Spirit who helps to convict people of their sins and brings them to Christ for justification by faith. Although Lowry's homiletical plot tends to end with celebrating what God does for people in Christ—who overturns the world of the listeners by surprise—I believe that narrative preaching in the Wesleyan tradition

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[35] Philip S. Watson, *Let God Be God* (London: The Epworth Press, 1947), 159.

[36] Ibid., 160.

[37] Ibid., 155.

needs to recognize the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit, who empowers the listeners in their faithful response to the redemptive work of God.

3. Method of Investigation

The main method of this dissertation is practical theological. Although practical theology is often understood as applied theology—or the application of theory to practice—I believe that practice requires critical theological analysis and reflection because it is already intermingled with theory. In *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, Don S. Browning argues that Christian practices are "theory-laden," by which he means that all our practices "have theories behind and within them."[38] Instead of merely applying theory to practice, Browning suggests that practical theology go from "practice to theory and back to practice."[39] An individual can develop a "thick description" of Christian practice by utilizing various disciplines to understand a situation as thoroughly as possible. The analysis of the practice then needs to be in dialogue with what is considered to be normative theory, and finally leading to more faithful practice for the community.[40]

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[38] Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 6.

[39] Ibid., 7.

[40] Richard R. Osmer also suggests a similar approach by suggesting four tasks of practical theological interpretation. It begins with the descriptive/empirical task to understand the question *What is going on?* by drawing on various disciplines. It then moves to the interpretive task that asks *Why is this going on?* This is followed by the normative task, which discerns *What ought to be going on?* Finally, it ends with the pragmatic task suggesting *How might we respond?* Osmer names each task of the hermeneutical cycle respectively as priestly listening, sagely wisdom, discernment, and servant leadership. Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 4-5.

While I agree with Browning on the movement of practical theology, I distinguish my work from his in terms of how normative theory is defined. Browning considered the disciplines of theology and science with a "critical correlational approach"[41] which means that they possess equal powers to inform, influence, and modify each other. However, preaching is essentially an ecclesial practice centered on the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, who calls people to proclaim the good news in Christ and faithfully participate in the redemptive work of God in the world. Therefore, my approach to practical theology is "critical confessional" which "focuses primarily on interpretation and reinterpretation of the Christian story and tradition and treats this story as normative for today."[42] This does not mean embracing the Christian story in an uncritical way. Rather, it is "self-critical and willing to examine its cognitive assumptions and its social location" by considering philosophy and science as serious dialogue partners, albeit not equal.[43]

The overarching question for this dissertation is as follows: *What does a Wesleyan manner of narrative preaching look like*? To explore the answer, I begin the

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[41] James N. Poling and Donald E. Miller hold that Browning and Tracy's method is critical correlation that "points to the fact of an essentially equal dialogue between theology and science." James N. Poling and Donald E. Miller, *Foundations for a Practical Theology of Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 44.

[42] Ibid., 50.

[43] This is taken from John Swinton and Harriet Mowat regarding a more confessional model of practical theology; see John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2006). They define practical theology as "critical, theological reflection on the practices of the Church as they interact with the practices of the world, with a view to ensuring and enabling faithful participation in God's redemptive practices in, to and for the world." Swinton and Mowat, 6.

hermeneutical circle as described by Richard Osmer by examining what goes on with the kind of narrative preaching proposed by Lowry. I attempt to answer the question by explaining the biblical, theological, and homiletical context in which narrative preaching came to be popular in American pulpits in the 20th century. After developing the description of narrative preaching, I interpret the current mode of narrative preaching as essentially a theological movement from law to gospel postulated by Wilson. Following this, I consult with Wesley's theology of law and gospel as normative for those in the Wesleyan tradition. Here, I approach Wesley's theology in a critical reflective mode by conversing with black preaching traditions and their use of narrative. Narrative preaching in black traditions helps to envision how Wesley's homiletic could be practiced in a narrative mode today while avoiding shaming the listeners (Wimberly) and eliciting a human response in covenantal theology (Andrews).

In considering Wesley's practical theology as normative for a more faithful practice of narrative preaching, it must be acknowledged that Wesley is often not considered to be a serious theologian. After all, Wesley did not develop a systematic theology nor write a formal manual on preaching. However, Randy Maddox advocates that "Wesley's theological activity could only be adequately understood and asserted in terms of the approach to theology as a practical discipline (*scientia practica*)."[44] He maintains that Wesley's practical theology was for the purpose of "nurturing and shaping the worldview that frames the temperament and practice of the believers' lives in the

[44] Maddox, 16.

world."[45] Wesley as a practical theologian challenges the *ethos* of some Western modern seminaries in which theological and philosophical disciplines are considered as superior to other disciplines, therefore reducing practical theology to applied theology. With this point in mind, this dissertation proposes that practical theology allows us to approach sermons, letters, journals, and minutes as a critical and normative source for theology for the Christian church.

While I consider Wesley's practical theology on law and gospel as normative for Wesleyan narrative preaching, I do so through critical dialogue with black narrative preaching for three reasons. First of all, black narrative preaching seems more consistent with Wesleyan theology than Lowry's homiletical plot, especially regarding the integral role of law as participating in a covenantal relationship with God. In *Practical Theology for Black Churches*, the late Dale P. Andrews, an ordained minister in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church and a homiletic and pastoral theologian, addresses the impossibility of separating religious life and moral law. In other words, a person who worships God is also obliged to keep the law given to the community as part of the covenant. Therefore, Andrews argues that "the foundation of social morality rested in the ethics of covenantal law."[46] When the community breached the covenantal law, prophets encouraged their people to come back to it, but not simply as "legal reformers."[47] For

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[45] Ibid., 17. In *Theologia,* Edward Farley also argues that in the Pre-Enlightenment era, theology was never separate from the spiritual disciplines that sought the salvific knowledge of God; this knowledge involves communal practices of communities to receive the knowledge of God as God's grace. Edward Farley, *Theologia* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1994), 35-36.

[46] Andrews, 112.

[47] Ibid.

Wesley, law as discipline is not a form of legalism but a communal invitation that encourages a community to respond actively to God's sanctifying grace.

Secondly, while the narrative preaching movement has often been appreciated as a representative of a New Homiletic[48] in both the academy and church in the United States, it must be noted that black churches have long integrated the narrative form as a part of their culture and tradition. Andrews again suggests that in the black preaching traditions in the U.S., the biblical narratives were always retold to remember God's self-revelation to their ancestors. Although the slaves from Africa received biblical narratives from their masters, they quickly transformed them as *their stories* by retelling them by means of both *memorization* and *improvisation*.[49] Here, Andrews points out that listeners in black churches are active participants in preaching by not only associating themselves with the biblical ancestors but also by being part of God's redemptive plan for God's children.[50] Therefore, the use of the term New Homiletic has been offensive to faith-communities that are oriented to oral culture and folk tradition. Andrews also contends

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[48] It was David James Randolph who first coined the term "New Homiletic" in his paper presentation at the Academy of Homiletics in 1965. O. Wesley Allen Jr. briefly summarizes it by pointing out its "focus on the hearer, the use of inductive, narrative sermonic forms, and the centrality of imagistic, storied language to create an experience of the gospel." O. Wesley Allen Jr., ed., *The Renewed Homiletic* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 9.

[49] Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 20. Mitchell argues that black people, who could not utilize print in the beginning, have preached the gospel from "combined memory and narrative improvisation, in the common tongue, with all its freshness and relevance."

[50] Dale P. Andrews, "Black Preaching Praxis," in *Black Church Studies: An Introduction*, ed. Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 218.

that such a term "reflects the cultural racism at play in American Christianity."[51] Since the Wesleyan movement was critical for the formation of black narrative preaching during the Great Awakening, it may be possible to argue that black preaching could help Wesleyans recover what has been lost over the centuries.

Finally, the context of black preaching as understood by Edward Wimberly helps to reinterpret Wesley's narrative of law and gospel for the contemporary listeners in the 21st century. While Wesley recognizes the first use of law—the use which condemns sinners with guilt—Wimberly asserts that the theme which shapes the postmodern society is shame, not guilt.[52] While guilt assumes "a more intact community" where individuals learn social values through relationships, Wimberly argues that contemporary society has long ago lost such a community. While such an experience is emphasized in the African American context, he asserts that it seems to be a universal experience for all individuals in Western society as they experience the shame of being isolated from a relational community and therefore feeling never loved.[53] Wimberly notices how both pastoral care and preaching in the African American community situate an individual in a communal relationship through which one can be restored in love, dignity, and identity. In particular, he engages with Wesley's narrative rhetoric as the clue for inviting people to overcome such isolation and shame.

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[51] Ibid., 217.

[52] Wimberly, xiii.

[53] Ibid., xvi.

Regarding the main research question, chapter 1 provides the context for how certain kinds of narrative preaching have come to dominate North American homiletics for the past decades. It analyzes the key homileticians in the 20th century who have helped to pave the way for narrative preaching. The definition of *preaching* is introduced by Barth as the event in which God speaks. The advocates of the New Hermeneutic—such as Ernst Fuchs and Gerhard Ebeling—also emphasize the eventfulness of the word, but they focus more on the place of human language as the place of its disclosure. The New Hermeneutic in turn led to the so-called New Homiletic, whose pillars include Fred B. Craddock's inductive preaching, Charles L. Rice's storytelling preaching, and Lowry's narrative preaching. This study analyzes Craddock's and Rice's homiletical theories to see how they correspond and anticipate Lowry's narrative preaching or how they anticipated it. This study also critically examines the theological problems which are inherent in Craddock's and Rice's homiletical theories and are also found in Lowry's narrative preaching.

Chapter 2 theologically probes into Lowry's narrative preaching by critically examining primary sources by Lowry—namely *The Homiletical Plot*, *Doing Time in the Pulpit*, *The Sermon: Dancing the Edge of Mystery*, and *How to Preach a Parable: Designs for Narrative Sermons*. Through his works, Lowry consistently argues that a plot based on reversal is the best way to experience the gospel for the audience. Along these same lines, this study considers the works of Wilson, who believes that Lowry's narrative mode is essentially a movement from law to gospel—that is, the former as bad news and the latter as good news. This chapter also engages with Lowry's sermon as his practical

discipline not only to preach in the church but also to teach others how to preach in a narrative way. As an example, it theologically analyzes Lowry's sermon, "*Strangers in the Night"* based on John 3:1-9, and it reflects on how his understanding of law and gospel are implicit in his homiletic form and content.

Chapter 3 delves into Wesley's theology of law and gospel, as he struggles extensively with those who argue that an individual who was justified by God did not need to keep the law. In considering Wesley as a practical theologian, this study critically reflects on Wesley's theology of law and gospel by studying primary sources, such as his sermons, letters, journals, and conference minutes. Sources such as "On the Sermon on the Mount," "The New Birth," "The Law Established through Faith," and "Letter on Preaching Christ" are theologically studied to understand how he understood the relation between law and gospel. This chapter also contemplates a selection of secondary sources to balance scholarly work on Wesley by engaging with Randy Maddox's *Responsible Grace*, Richard Heitzenrater's "John Wesley's Principles and Practice of Preaching," and Wilson's "Wesley's Homiletic: Law and Gospel for Preaching."

Chapter 4 engages with a black preaching tradition because this form helps to translate Wesley's theology of law and gospel for contemporary listeners. Black preaching traditions have long adopted narrative as a mode of communicating the gospel. Here, I believe that although such theological terms are not explicitly used, much contemporary black narrative preaching is more theologically consistent with Wesleyan

theology on law and gospel.[54] For this reason, this study engages with African American narrative preaching as a hermeneutic tool to appropriate Wesley's theology of law and gospel for narrative preaching today. In *Black Preaching*, Henry H. Mitchell helps readers to understand the formation of black narrative sermons by exploring black history, culture, and hermeneutics. In *Practical Theology for Black Churches*, Dale P. Andrews discusses the critical role of covenantal theology. Even though he does not talk about Wesley specifically, I use Andrew's covenantal theology to show how law and gospel function together rather than supplant each other.

Chapter 5 concludes this study and proposes a more faithful practice for narrative preaching grounded in Wesleyan theology. Specifically, this study suggests an outline of a Wesleyan narrative homiletic that begins with law, moves to gospel, and ends with law. If law is still necessary for Christian sanctification, narrative sermons must end with speaking law as a means of sanctification for the Christian community—that is, not as legalism, but as an active response to God's redemptive grace. I offer two sermons as examples of the Wesleyan narrative preaching to analyze and reflect upon: Zan Holmes's "Are We for Real?" based on John 13:34 and my own "Whose Conversion?" from Acts 4:1-19. In these sermons, I present how law leads to the gospel by suggesting ethical dimensions of God's words in the communal life of Christians. Therefore, a Wesleyan

[54] This study acknowledges diverse theories and practices within contemporary black preaching tradition that may not be consistent with Wesleyan theology of law and gospel. For example, Frank Thomas follows a homiletic methodology that moves from bad news to good news. Please see Frank Thomas, *They Like to Never Quit Praisin' God* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1997), 75.

theology of law and gospel suggests that a narrative sermon begins with law, moves to gospel, and ends with renewed law.

CHAPTER 1

THE CONTEXT OF NARRATIVE PREACHING IN THE UNITED STATES

While Lowry has enabled many to make sense of narrative preaching by providing a homiletical plot as a concrete structure for the sermon, he is not alone in his effort to help contemporary pulpits move away from deductive preaching. Since the 1950s, many preachers in the United States have intuitively recognized that their listeners were not interested in deductive preaching that sounded dogmatic, propositional, and authoritarian to their contemporary minds. It seemed urgent that in both the academy and church, there was a need for a new paradigm of preaching that would breathe new life into the pulpit. In sensing such urgency, some homiletic scholars actively started suggesting alternative ways of preaching that tend to center around experience, listeners, and imagination. This chapter describes this particular homiletic movement in the United States in the 20th century and also discusses the homiletic scholars who contributed to this movement. Particular focus is placed on Karl Barth, the New Hermeneutic, Fred B. Craddock, and Charles L. Rice. By identifying the elements that contributed to Lowry's work as well as his contemporary homiletics, this chapter illustrates the context of narrative preaching in the United States.

1. Karl Barth: Preaching as Event

As a Swiss Reformed theologian, Karl Barth (1886-1968) is best known as a systematic and dogmatic thinker rather than as a homiletician. However, he always considers preaching as a primary way to undertake theology by arguing that "theology as a church discipline ought in all its branches to be nothing other than sermon preparation

in the broadest sense."[55] In fact, his neo-orthodox theology was deeply rooted in his ministerial experience as a preacher. Barth was initially a strong advocate of liberal theology, which considered human history and experience as the "point of contact" through which one can recognize the revelation of God. In other words, the good in human beings was viewed as something not so quite foreign to God. However, Barth experienced a crisis in his theology after the beginning of World War I through which he witnessed how easily the "good" in human beings could be corrupted and consequently take the side of evil. His sermons then became more reliant on the Word of God as having the only authority to determine Christian faith and action.

One of Barth's important theological discussions of preaching is found in his book *Homiletics*, originally published in 1966. It is based on his seminars conducted in Bonn in 1932 and 1933. In his work, Barth defined preaching as follows;

> Preaching is the Word of God which he himself speaks, claiming for the purpose the exposition of a biblical text in free human words that are relevant to contemporaries by those who are called to do this in the church that is obedient to its commission.[56]

Here, Barth's unapologetic claim—that is, preaching is the Word of God—is based on his understanding of revelation. He believes that as God revealed Godself in Christ, God wills to reveal this over again and over again.[57] According to him, although human beings have fallen from the righteousness of God, God still reconciles them to God by becoming

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[55] Karl Barth, *Homiletics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991), 17.

[56] Ibid., 44.

[57] Ibid., 50.

flesh in Christ. For Barth, the incarnation of Christ was the truth that God had revealed Godself to human beings—that is, demonstrating that God is with us. In other words, it is only by the grace of God alone that human beings could be drawn into the revelation of God. Therefore, preaching is considered an event in which the gathered audience listens to the "self-revealing will of God."[58]

Since Barth believes that it is God who is the true Subject of preaching,[59] he defines the role of preacher as the *herald* (*kēryx*) who is "commissioned to deliver"[60] a message from God. This is not to suggest that a preacher received a message from God miraculously without any exegetical work, for Barth still argues that preaching is "an attempt that is made with human means," albeit an inadequate one.[61] However, the message is delivered as long as the authority of the preacher to proclaim the message solely rests on God, who sent the preacher to the listeners as the recipients. In other words, preaching could still be considered a "good work" only when it is justified by God's grace, "done in light of revelation, church, commission, and ministry."[62] In this case, preachers as heralds must not add or subtract from what God has first proclaimed to them; they must only repeat what God has revealed in the Bible. It is not that Barth

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[58] Ibid., 50.

[59] James F. Kay argues, "For Barth, God is not primarily a doctrine of 'subject of religion' on which preachers expound. Rather, God is the Subject of a sermon; not simply as its topic, but as its Agent." James F. Kay, *Preaching and Theology* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2007), 34.

[60] Barth, 50.

[61] Ibid., 73.

[62] Ibid.

believes that the Bible was the Word of God in a static sense. Rather, as Mary C. Hilkert posits, Barth wants to highlight the event in which God makes Godself known to human beings in Jesus Christ and thus is what constitutes the Word of God.[63] In other words, the Bible "becomes God's Word" as an event in which God acts to reveal Godself again.

For this reason, Barth's definition of preaching indicates that preaching is none other than biblical interpretation through which the preacher presents "who and what Christ is."[64] It is not human effort that provides a way to realize the divinity of Jesus as Christ. Rather, it is God who reveals Godself as one faithfully attempts to read and interpret what is in the scripture by relying on grace alone. Since Barth defines preaching as the "exposition of a biblical text," it could not be based on human experience.[65] For him, a sermonic form that breaks the text into parts would violate the unity of the text. Since the unity already lies in the text itself, the preacher must only "repeat what the text says."[66] Therefore, he opposes having any introduction and conclusion because they were nothing other than a detraction from hearing the call of God.

However, David Buttrick points out that his "uncompromising biblicism" became a target for many later criticisms that a sermon is nothing other than a mere "reiteration of the text."[67] According to Thomas G. Long, such homiletic methods as

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[63] Mary C. Hilkert, *Naming Grace: Preaching and the Sacramental Imagination* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 22.

[64] Barth, 45.

[65] Ibid., 46.

[66] Ibid., 121.

[67] David G. Buttrick, foreword to *Homiletics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 9.

Barth's are ultimately inadequate since they ignore sermonic form and language. In *Teaching Preaching as a Christian Practice*, Long indicates the mood of the Christian hearers in Germany by quoting from Heinz Zahrnt, who states,

> There is no question that preaching in Germany today, and not only in Germany, would be very different without Karl Barth and his theology. But the effect of Barth has been twofold. On the one hand, without it present day preaching would not be so pure, so biblical, and so concerned with central issues, but on the other hand, it would also not be so alarmingly correct, boringly precise, and remote from the world.[68]

Many listeners could not relate to the preachers influenced by Barth because their messages sounded remote from the daily lives of the listeners. This sense of remoteness was felt across many pulpits not only in Germany but also in the United States, where they were merely hearing what was in the scripture. For Barth, such boredom is aroused because the sermons are not biblical enough, for the scripture in itself is the element of fascination: "Holy scripture is in fact so interesting, and has so much that is new and exciting to tell us that listeners cannot even think about dropping off to sleep."[69] However, people were growing tired of Barth's focus on the sermonic content at the expense of other elements. In any event, homileticians such as H. Grady Davis started

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[68] Heinz Zahrnt, *The Question of God: Protestant Theology in the 20th Century* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1966), 118 quoted in Thomas G. Long and Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, eds., *Teaching Preaching as a Christian Practice: A New Approach to Homiletical Pedagogy* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 9.

[69] Barth, 80.

turning their attention to a sermon form that could engage lively images, actions, and experiences that would anticipate the era of the New Homiletic.[70]

Although many believe that Barth turned the practice of preaching into a matter of biblical exegesis due to his strong biblicism, it must be noted that he also contributed to the birth of the New Homiletic through his emphasis on the eventfulness of the Word. Barth strongly insists that preaching is "the Word of God which he himself speaks." He believes that preaching is an *event* in which human beings as sinners encountered God by grace alone in a new way. In *Preaching and Homiletical Theory*, Paul Scott Wilson acknowledges that the concept of God's words as eventful has not been news since it already ran through the theologies of Luther, John Donne, and Henry Ward Beecher. However, he still believes that "Barth's lasting influence has been on the word of God as an event of God's encounter."[71] The proclamation of the word implies a performance effect of the event: "The other-ness of God who nonetheless wills to become known in preaching and who, through Christ, reconciles the world to God's self."[72]

In *Sharing the Word*, Lucy A. Rose categorizes Barth's homiletic as a kerygmatic theory that describes "the purpose of preaching as a both/and: both transmission of the *kerygma* and the *event* [emphasis added] of God's speaking."[73] The eventfulness of the

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[70] Davis defines the image of a sermon as a tree. He illustrates, "It [a sermon] should be a living organism: With one sturdy thought like a single stem. With natural limbs reaching up into the light." H. Grady Davis, *Design for Preaching* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1958), 15.

[71] Paul Scott Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004), 60.

[72] Ibid., 61.

[73] Lucy A. Rose, *Sharing the Word* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997). 37.

sermon therefore assumes that listeners experience the encounter with God who speaks to them. Although Barth considers the eventfulness of preaching as the event of revelation, Rose argues that "this image of the sermon as event recognizes what worshipers sometimes experience while a sermon is being preached."[74] Barth's notion of eventfulness in preaching is confirmed by his colleague Rudolf Bultmann and carried forward by his students Gerhard Ebeling and Ernst Fuchs in the New Hermeneutic.[75] Although many contemporary homiletic scholars have criticized Barth for his opposition to any point of contact, it is Barth himself who ironically introduced a revolutionary idea about event. For many homileticians today, the gospel must always be *experienced* over and over again precisely as an event of the gospel in the interpretation of the scripture for listeners.

2. The New Hermeneutic and New Homiletic: Language as the "Word-Event"

Although Barth's approach to preaching dominated many pulpits in both Europe and the United States for a while, it was not long before people started to ask the question of hermeneutics: How are the ancient texts of scripture, historical faith, and Christ still relevant to the contexts of the contemporary Christians? While exegesis refers to the work of understanding the meaning of the scriptural texts in more accurate terms, hermeneutics is the work of "translating" or "interpreting" that which needs to come alive in the ears of the modern audience. Here, homileticians including Lose and Dawn Ottoni-

[74] Ibid., 48.

[75] Kay, 80.

Wilhelm posit that it is important to understand the influence of the New Hermeneutic as a bridge to the New Homiletic as a catalyst for a homiletical turn in the century.[76]

Lose considers that there were three factors which facilitated such a transition into the homiletical field. The first factor was a more holistic sense of preaching, which stressed the experiential, emotional, and creative dimension of preaching that would lead to changes in individuals and society. The second was a renewed appreciation for the literary character of the Bible. As H. Grady Davis argues in *Design for Preaching*, the form and content of the passages should not be considered as separate, not just in exegeting but also in "growing" the sermon.[77] While Lose claims that the former two factors greatly helped to introduce the era of the "New Homiletic," he contends that they can "neither can claim the influence—or historical precedence—of the third factor that is the New Hermeneutic.

In *An Introduction to the New Hermeneutic*, Paul J. Achtemeier explores how Gerhard Ebeling and Ernst Fuchs—both students of Rudolf Bultmann—use the philosophy of Martin Heidegger for their biblical and theological movement called the New Hermeneutic. Heidegger's early work centers around the ontological contemplation of person as a being who responds to Being. Regarding the two terms, Achtemeier

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[76] I summarize Lose's argument below. See David Lose, "Whither Hence, New Homiletic?" *Academy of Homiletics*: 35th Meeting, Dallas, November 30 – December 2, 2000. For another perspective, see Dawn Ottoni-Wilhelm, "New Hermeneutic, New Homiletic, and New Directions: an US – North American Perspective," *Homiletic* 35, no 2 (2010): 17-33

[77] Davis argues that preaching must be understood as a living organism that consists of substance and form in unity. He states that "the relation of substance and form in the communication of thought is the kind of relation that exists between living tissue and organism." Davis, *Design for Preaching*, 1.

distinguishes beings as "things that are" and Being as "that by which they are."[78] Since the opposite of Being is non-being, Being is what enables beings to exist in the world.[79] For Heidegger, Being reveals itself while it also hides. Since Being needs beings in order to reveal itself, he argues that the "place" where Being can be allowed its "lighting-process" is in the human being. Human beings are the only creatures that can step back and ponder Being. Therefore, Heidegger calls human beings *Dasein*, which means "there-being," in which such ontological contemplation takes place.

As Being constantly comes and reveals, beings have the potentiality of a "further comprehension of Being." Human beings can be more than what they are in the present, as they are open and engage in the ontological contemplation of Being. Although the early Heidegger is suspicions of language, for the later Heidegger, language is the only medium in which human beings can ponder Being and understand it in relation to themselves and the world. Although language is culturally understood as a way to express one's thoughts, emotions, and stories, Heidegger assigns an ontological role to language since it "owes its existence not to human being, but to Being" because it is Being that summons language.[80] Since language is where Being reveals and dwells, he calls it the "house of Being." Therefore, human beings are defined by what they speak because a human being is "what Being discloses through him (her) in language."[81]

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[78] Paul J. Achtemeier, *An Introduction to New Hermeneutic* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969), 28.

[79] Heidegger is careful not to identify Being as God in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

[80] Achtemeier, 48.

[81] Ibid., 51.

In adopting Heidegger's early ontology for his biblical hermeneutic, Bultmann claims that history is closed with "cause and effect operative in it."[82] This means that any decisions made in the past were undertaken in the given conditions. Since Bultmann views history as a cohesive unit, he argues that the role of the historians is to understand the motivation and context of the event in the past. In his method for biblical hermeneutic, he advocates *demythologization*, which eliminates all supernatural miracles such as a "myth" that provided frameworks for thoughts and actions in the past. Rather, the role of interpreter is "to see through the historically conditioned mode of expression found in the New Testament Text to the 'fundamental idea' that lies behind and motivates that (mythical expression)".[83] This led Bultmann to focus more on the cross than the resurrection of Christ because the former indicates the abandonment of selfhood even to the extent of death while the latter is myth that is a pure act of God done to Jesus. Although Bultmann insists on getting behind the text by demythologization, James F. Kay asserts that Bultmann still retains some supernatural acts of Christ, which is seen in Bultmann insisting that "Christ, the Crucified and Risen One, encounters us in the world of proclamation— nowhere else."[84]

Meanwhile, Ebeling and Fuchs further the work of Bultmann by arguing that the transforming power of the word was in "the Word-event" itself. They focus on the later

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[82] Ibid., 58.

[83] Rudolf Bultmann "Jesus and Paul," in *Existence and Faith: Shorter Writings of Rudolf Bultmann* (New York: Meridian Books, 1960), 197, quoted in Achtemeier, 60.

[84] Kay, 81.

development of Heidegger's work that emphasizes on the role of language. Ebeling claims that the idea of *word* "in its essence is encounter." It can be said that God's speaking in words is also God acting toward human beings at the same time, and such an encounter can be defined as event. For Achtemeier, preaching is "suited to be the final outcome of interpreting the New Testament text" because it not only conveys mere information to the audience but also asks the existential questions and calls for decisions in their lives.[85] Therefore, the New Hermeneutic grounds an encounter between God and human beings in the *word-event* (Ebeling) or *language-event* (Fuchs), where revelation is given and responses are elicited.

Lose points out how this post-Bultmannian New Hermeneutic functions as a bridge to the New Homiletic. First of all, preaching at that time was also considered event in which human beings need to respond to the gospel. In other words, preaching is not a mere application of biblical exegesis; rather, it is a present encounter with the gospel that calls for the interpretation and determination of the listeners for the future. Second, such eventfulness of preaching calls for an understanding of truth as being more experiential rather than cognitive. Therefore, preaching started to turn more from doctrinal and deductive preaching to experiential and inductive preaching. Lose insists that such a view of language in preaching naturally led to a more listener-oriented approach in Craddock, who uses the "evocative power of image and story."[86] Finally, Lose asserts that in making the effort to bridge the ancient text to contemporary listeners, the followers of the New

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[85] Achtemeier, 100.

[86] Lose, 260.

Hermeneutic paved the way for the New Homiletic to be "experiential" in their attempt to create more authentic self-understanding.

Along the way, the New Hermeneutic passed down a serious theological issue to the New Homiletic. While Barth insists that the event is created by God who directly speaks to listeners, the New Hermeneutic claims that there is the transforming power inherent in the language that creates the event. Does it mean that the event that language creates always indicates the story of God? In other words, as much as the language has "evocative power," how do we know that the experiences evoked by the language are attuned to the redemptive narrative of God that culminated with the life, death, and resurrection of Christ? How do we know, for example, that the experience generated by the word-event does not promote American individualism? Above all, how does the word-event lead to a change in the action of listeners? These are the questions that are inherited by the New Homiletic and it appears that they have not yet been answered constructively. How these theological issues develop in the work of Craddock, Rice, and Lowry is discussed in the following sections.

3. Fred B. Craddock: Inductive Preaching

In 1971, Craddock published *As One without Authority*, which primarily shifts the focus of preaching from the text and preacher to the listeners—namely their cultures, experiences, and stories. In his work, he argues that there was a crisis with preaching because many Christians in his time simply considered it to be an *anachronism*. Craddock believes that this came from activism within mainline Christianity that trivialized the power of words while elevating the necessity of work to change the world.

He also argues that there was a fundamental problem with seminary education that tends to separate the content from the form of a sermon. The theological curriculum often made students undertake courses in theology and biblical studies at the beginning of their education, and then students were sent to study preaching. Such a direction suggests that the only thing students need to do is to work out how to fit their theology into a rhetorical frame.

For Craddock, in the larger context, a more serious problem with the traditional way of preaching came from the shift in the speaker-listener relationship. With the tumultuous years of the Vietnam War and Civil Rights Movement in the United States in the 1960s, many people came to question authorities that had power over them. Likewise, in many churches, preachers could not view themselves as automatically endowed with divine authority to preach the Word of God anymore. With many Christians in the United States losing their interest in the power of words and their respect for the pulpit, a new "mode of proclamation that is relevant to the present speaker-hearer relationship" was desperately needed.[87]

In seeking a new mode to communicate the gospel, Craddock believed that how one communicates always reflects one's theology. He posited that "the method is the message … *how* one preaches is to a large extent *what* one preaches."[88] Craddock noticed that many preachers use deductive strategies for their sermons. In homiletics, deductive movement indicates that a sermon usually begins by stating the thesis; the preacher then

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[87] Fred B. Craddock, *As One without Authority* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001), 17.

[88] Ibid., 44.

divides it into points by explaining or illustrating them and applies them in the end to the situations of the audience. Since a deductive sermon begins with the conclusion drawn from a preacher's exegesis, Craddock argues that it is the "authoritarian foundation of traditional preaching" that suppresses the participation of the listeners. Another concern Craddock raises about the deductive sermon was rhetorical: "How does one move from point 2b to main point II?"[89] In other words, the move from one point to another point in a deductive sermon is an artificial one that does not naturally flow. It seems authoritarian again because such a disconnected move in a sermon forces the listeners to remember each point instead of experiencing the movement in the sermon organically.

The alternative Craddock suggests to his audience is the reverse of deductive logic—that is, an inductive movement. Instead of drawing the conclusion and stating it at the beginning of a sermon, inductive movement invites listeners to experience exegesis creatively by reliving the exegetical process through the sermon. It begins with the particular experiences of the audience and arrives at the general truth in the end. Craddock believes that an inductive sermon respects individuals as being capable of making their own conclusions or applying them to their situation. It is not merely a preacher's journey; it is also the journey the listeners make on their own by actively participating in the sermon through their experiences, stories, and imagination. Since inductivity in a sermon values the autonomy of the individual, Craddock contends that "the inductive process is fundamental to the American way of life."[90] His view on the

[89] Ibid., 47.

[90] Ibid., 49.

inductive movement is also firmly grounded in his analysis of human reality that "everyone lives inductively, not deductively."[91]

Craddock's inductive preaching assumes an elevated role for listeners as active participants in a sermon rather than passive ones, compared with some traditional methods of preaching. For Craddock, inductivity in a sermon assumes that the listeners would not be viewed as utterly alien to God. Barth claims that the use of an introduction in a sermon is "plain heresy" because it is "nothing other than the search for a point of contact, for an analogue in us which can be a point of entry for the Word of God."[92] Craddock is also aware that human beings are sinners who have come into conflict with the Word of God. However, he does not believe that such conflict with God simply stopped human beings from actively participating in the process of listening to the Word of God, as explained by him in this way: "A point of conflict is also a point of contact. Even a perverted relationship is a relationship; were there no relationship, there would be no conflict."[93]

Another argument for active participation is Craddock's perception of the listeners, which can be seen in his second book, *Overhearing the Gospel*, published in 1978. His work is based on the following statement by Søren Kierkegaard: "There is no lack of information in a Christian land; something else is lacking, and this is a something

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[91] Ibid., 50.

[92] Barth, 124.

[93] Craddock quotes his view from Clemens E. Benda. Clemens E. Benda, "Language, Consciousness and Problems of Existential Analysis," *American Journal of Psychotherapy* 14, no. 2 (April, 1960), quoted in Amos Wilder, *The Language of the Gospel* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1970), 19.

which the one cannot directly communicate to the other." Craddock identifies a similarity between Denmark in the 19th century and the United States in the 20th century—both represent a Christendom in which everyone was informed of Christian knowledge through Sunday worship, Sunday school, and Bible study. Yet, while he believed that people already had biblical knowledge, they lacked something else: namely, an existential experience of the gospel. Kierkegaard considers the Bible as having the "quality of a conversation between God and God's people,"[94] and Craddock also believes that preaching should help to facilitate such conversation between God and the listeners. He argues that such active participation is enabled by evoking the experiences of the listeners, and these experiences could remind them of the gospel story.[95]

Craddock's inductive preaching naturally led to Charles Rice's storytelling preaching and Eugene Lowry's narrative preaching. His inductive approach included concern for the narrative genre. For Craddock, the scripture provided not just what to preach but also how to preach. In other words, how biblical authors delivered their message to the readers needed to be transposed to how preachers delivered their own sermons. Craddock argues that a sermon must "attempt to make the form and spirit of the message congenial with the form and spirit of the text."[96] If this argument holds, there can be as many forms of a sermon as genres of the text—such as doxology, lamentation, parable, and narrative. However, Craddock's inductive approach seems to contradict his

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[94] Fred B. Craddock, *Overhearing the Gospel* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2002), 50.

[95] Ibid., 90.

[96] Craddock, *As One without Authority*, 131.

own argument by claiming that everyone thinks inductively. It may just be that the reason he avoids mentioning the genre of commandment in Deuteronomy is because it contradicts the inductive way of thinking. Perhaps this is why James F. Kay argues in *Preaching and Theology* that when an inductive sermon is concerned with sharing the preacher's own experience of text, "the process of sharing one's inductive discoveries seems inherently biased toward a narrative form." [97]

While Craddock's inductive preaching was influential in shaping homiletics in the second half of the 20th century, it also drew criticism culturally and ecclesiastically. Although Craddock believed that people in his time were immersed in Christian culture, this is no longer the case in the 21st century, where the majority in society do not attend services of worship, participate in a Bible study, or engage in Christian tradition as they used to in the middle of the 20th century. Therefore, in *Preaching from Memory to Hope*, Long shares an observation that "now there *is* a lack of information, and it *isn't* a Christian land."[98] Since individuals do not inherently possess the content of Christian faith, a person's experience has nothing to evoke in terms of the Christian gospel, since personal experience is central in inductive preaching. It seems that a more serious issue today is not just that Christians are becoming more illiterate in scripture but also that they rely on other resources for their metanarrative. Many stories depicted in TV, film, and

[97] Kay, 89.

[98] Thomas G. Long, *Preaching from Memory to Hope* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 9.

popular literature often provide distorted images of both God and human beings as the normative story to guide the faith and practice of contemporary Christians.

In his later years, Craddock seems to have changed his view on the role of preaching slightly by giving the preacher more authority than he did in the 1970s. As preachers attempt to replicate their own experiences of the text through stories, images, or metaphors, it is the responsibility of the listeners to make connection between their stories and the Story. However, the problem of biblical illiteracy in Christianity today makes it harder for listeners to succeed in finding their stories in the Story anymore. In *The Renewed Homiletic*, a 2010 compilation of essays from scholars in the New Homiletic, Craddock states that he is also aware of such shifts in the Christian culture in the United States over the past decades. For this reason, he encourages preachers to pay more attention to the tradition and scripture than he did in *As One without Authority* and *Overhearing the Gospel*. He acknowledges that many listeners today lack biblical knowledge and consequently suffer from an absence of a metanarrative. Therefore, he suggests that preachers share the content of Christian faith rather than assume it and help the people make connections between themselves and the metanarrative.[99]

Another issue with inductive preaching is its tendency to promote individualism among listeners. In *Preaching Jesus,* Campbell points out that inductive preaching is "open-ended" with freedom for the listeners to arrive at their own conclusions. As individuals always return home with their own conclusions, it is unlikely that a corporate

[99] Fred B. Craddock, "Inductive Preaching Renewed," in *The Renewed Homiletic*, ed. O. Wesley Allen (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 51-53.

identity is formed to bind such individuals in the context of a church. Therefore, the church becomes more of an aggregate of many individuals who do not share a common identity. Although Craddock in *Overhearing the Gospel* discusses the importance of listeners being exposed to the Christian community and its tradition, his indirect method is ultimately intended to show "respect for another's privacy coupled with the theological position that every person is responsible for his or her own faith."[100] Therefore, Campbell contends that such a method ultimately results in the "inwardness of each person's life," which makes everyone isolated from each other.[101]

While I agree with Campbell that Craddock's inductive approach has an inherent danger of individualism, it is questionable whether any emphasis on the matter of experience in a sermon always leads to individualism among the listeners. In many African American churches, experience often tends to be communal—particularly in their experiences of racism, sexism, urbanization, violence, poverty, and lack of opportunity. Since holistic preaching needs to address cognitive, emotive, and intuitive contexts,[102] black preachers may often share the gospel as a story of how God faithfully promises to liberate God's people who suffer unjustly in the world and God's people respond to God's redeeming story through their faith and action. With this view in mind, this dissertation discusses black preaching and how it uses the genre of narrative to shape

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[100] Craddock, *Overhearing the Gospel*, 84.

[101] Charles L. Campbell, *Preaching Jesus* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1997), 134.

[102] Henry Mitchell, *Celebration and Experience in Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 18-32.

communal identity and action. It suffices for now to argue that experience is not necessarily bound to be individualistic; rather, it is more the theology itself, and the particular form of narrative, that generate specific kinds of experiences for listeners.

4. Charles L. Rice – Preaching as Storytelling

While many pulpits in the 1960s were still occupied with doctrinal, propositional, and academic preaching, Rice believed that such preaching tends to neglect the experiences of the listeners. For him, preaching has to be more grounded in the actual lives of people—that is, in terms of touching their concerns, humor, experiences, and questions. Along this line, Rice published a short article "The Preacher as Storyteller" in 1976 and a collaborative work with Edmund A. Steimle and Morris J. Niedenthal entitled *Preaching the Story* in 1980, in which he argues that preachers must view themselves as storytellers who live and speak in a community.

Rice offers three reasons why storytelling is the ideal method for Christian preaching. First, in a biblical and liturgical sense, storytelling has been a natural way to communicate faith. For example, in giving his account to the religious leaders in the Sanhedrin, Stephen recounts a "saga" that begins with a story about Abraham and ends with the climax of the cross and resurrection of Christ. In agreement with Amos Wilder who views the form of a story as a "natural speech-form for the gospel," Rice likewise argues that storytelling is "essential to the community's initial and continuing celebration of the gospel."[103]

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[103] Charles L. Rice, "The Preacher as Storyteller," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 31, no 3 (Spring 1976): 189.

Second, Rice contends that storytelling helps preaching to be more humanized and not so foreign to the experiences of listeners. It is clear for Rice that someone who wants to affect a human life would need to live and speak from human life. Therefore, Rice believes that a preacher must be more human because "being human serves the gospel."[104] Specifically, Rice argues that preachers are more likely to serve the Word of God when they feel freer to be themselves, live with the community, and feel the joy and pain of the people for whom they preach. Accordingly, faithful preaching does not exclude personal or communal experience as being foreign to the Word of God but rather considers the experience as congenial because the "Word of God takes human form."[105] As the Bible tells us stories about people who often failed as well as were restored, Rice argues that such storytelling that carries human personality and experience helps us to preach more faithfully. He called such a task of preaching the "humanizing of preaching."

Third, Rice stresses that our stories help us value our uniqueness and particularity. He believes that society with its highly developed technology and organized structure is leading people to view themselves as "manufactured objects," which meant being lost in the crowd and thus lacking individuality.[106] He refers to the work of Stephen Crites, who wrote, "It is perhaps a genuine human possibility that faces should be reduced to complex stimulus-response systems, names to numbers, dates to matters of bookkeeping, history to

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[104] Charles L. Rice, *Preaching the Story* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1980), 26.

[105] Ibid., 29.

[106] Rice, "The Preacher as Storyteller," 185.

the undifferentiated consistency of mashed potatoes."[107] What is needed is more personal ways to connect with one another that would value the uniqueness of individuality. Rice believes that the media, especially the marketplace, has been using the power of a private realm as a way to reach out to customers in more personal ways. Therefore, he argues that the church needed to recover the power of storytelling as the "most uniquely human means" to value each individual in his or her unique experience.

Rice's view on storytelling is grounded in his earlier work *Interpretation and Imagination*, published in 1970, in which he discusses homiletics as a hermeneutical task that engages cultural dialogue between the scripture and the listeners. While Rice appreciated Barth's definition of the Word of God as eventful, he criticizes him for making preachers stay only within the biblical world. He wishes that Barth had been more attentive to Schleiermacher, who argues that religion should be based more on the existential experience of God. For Rice, the homiletical task itself is hermeneutical, as people cannot approach the Bible without bringing to it their personal experiences of the world. Rice argues that in following the path of Schleiermacher, Paul Tillich also "met the world as a man of faith and spoke of the faith as a man of the world."[108] In living through the time of Nazi Germany, Tillich could not equate religion and culture because the latter could be easily corrupted. At the same time, he believed that religion should speak of what is the ultimate concern of the human beings as in culture. Therefore,

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[107] Stephen Crites, unpublished paper, quoted in Rice, "The Preacher as Storyteller," 185.

[108] Charles L. Rice, *Interpretation and Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 3.

Tillich argues, "Religion is the substance of culture and culture the form of religion."[109] In other words, it can be said that the experiences of the listeners are a critical religious means to communicate faith with one another. Therefore, Rice contends that hermeneutics is essentially a way of being in the world because "the specific place where the Christian tradition meets present experience is the sermon."[110]

In addition to suggesting the image of the preacher as storyteller, Rice also insists that preachers must understand themselves as artists who pursue the beauty found in concrete, provincial, and unique worldliness. In contrast to the traditional image of a preacher who is raised and lives in a parsonage remote from the world, Rice explains that an artist begins where people are—that is, what people see, feel, suffer, and imagine. Rather than being bound by institutional normativity, artists freely detach themselves in order to see the lives of people as they are and prophetically raise their voices in protest. For Rice, the nature of the artist reveals the identity of Protestantism because it is "more true to itself when it lives outside stained glass, in the world."[111] When the church withdraws from the world, it becomes a self-concerned institution that misses how the Word became flesh and dwells among us.

Similar to Craddock's inductive preaching, Rice's storytelling also places an emphasis on human experience as a primary way to encounter the Word in the event. For

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[109] Paul Tillich, *The Protestant Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 58 quoted in Charles Rice, *Interpretation and Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 6.

[110] Rice, 18.

[111] Ibid., 29.

Rice, storytelling is the best way to generate religious experience as he claims that "the seriousness with which the storyteller takes the concrete factuality of human experience is well accommodated by the doctrines of the sacraments and the incarnation."[112] Here, on the one hand, Long asserts that there is some strength in preaching as storytelling or as a poem, since it "balances the concern for the objective truth of the gospel with a passion for religious experience." On the other hand, he is concerned that God in the gospel story may not always provide us with the experience whenever we want. In other words, Long warns of the danger in measuring the effectiveness of preaching through its ability to generate religious experience:

> Theologian Hendrikus Berkhof has reminded us that, in the Old Testament, one of the reasons that Israel was continually abandoning Yahweh for Baal was that Baal was always more available, more visible, providing blessings that were more predictable. One could always count on Baal for a religious experience, but not so Yahweh. Yahweh tended, on many occasions, to have a hidden face to be absent in those times when the people yearned for a more readily available God.[113]

Long is suspicious of storytelling that always provides some religious experiences for the listeners because God may not always "move us when we desire to be moved." In agreeing with Long's critique of storytelling, Campbell holds to the belief that such emphasis on the experience in storytelling could lead to "theological relationalism—a relationalism that dares to make no claims for God apart from the experience of human

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[112] Rice, "The Preacher as Storyteller," 191.

[113] Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 44.

beings."[114] In other words, storytelling could make God dependent on human experience, not vice versa.

Richard Lischer also warns preachers against too readily flocking to storytelling as a way to redeem their sermons and entertain their listeners more easily by generating religious experience. In his article, "Preaching and the Rhetoric of Promise," Lischer contends that "the implicit hope is that if only we could find the perfect glass slipper of form, not only would the sermon be transformed into a beautiful princess, but we ourselves would also be transformed."[115] He bemoans the rhetoric of the sermon that has given way to theories of anthropology in order to make it work instantly for listeners rather than consulting with Christian scripture and tradition. Lischer's proposal to preachers has been that "homiletics understands the speech act upon which it reflects not merely by means of rhetorical, literary, or anthropological principles, but in terms of the rhetorical implications of the gospel itself."[116] Lischer claims that the promise is the answer. As it is God who gives promise to human beings, the language of promise recognizes God who binds Godself to human beings in God's grace. It reflects God's commitment to human beings in God's love for them. Promise indicates a history in the past when the promise was made, broken, and restored. It may be shared in narrative form but need not be bound by it.

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[114] Campbell, *Preaching Jesus*, 141.

[115] Richard Lischer, "Preaching and the Rhetoric of Promise," 69.

[116] Ibid., 70.

In his article, Lischer discusses a Christian hermeneutic and homiletical rule that is being forgotten or lost in many pulpits—law and gospel. Regarding these two points, Lischer asserts that they provide a way for the preacher to speak as well as for the listeners to hear. It is apparent that Lischer is highly invested in this topic; he has already written much on law and gospel in his previous work, *A Theology of Preaching: The Dynamics of the Gospel*. As the homiletic movement in the United States was shifting its emphasis—namely from deductive to inductive, from proposition to experience, and from exposition to storytelling—it seems that the homiletical language of law and gospel was being forgotten in the excitement of an anthropological search for the ideal homiletic form.

In the next chapter, Wilson's critical analysis of Lowry's narrative preaching will help us reconsider law and gospel as homiletical and hermeneutical language. It will also help us study how law and gospel could help narrative preaching be more biblical, theological, and practical.

CHAPTER 2

EUGENE LOWRY'S HOMILETICAL PLOT

There was a time when homiletic scholars such as H. Grady Davis, Craddock, and Rice were fervently trying to find a new paradigm for preaching that would replace deductive, dogmatic, and argumentative preaching. As this was taking place, the homiletic field was ripe for Lowry to introduce his concept of the sermon form as plot. In 1980, Rice published *Preaching the Story* along with Edmund Steimle and Morris Niedenthal, and in the same year Lowry introduced *The Homiletical Plot*. In his work, he contends that the former deductive theories of homiletics are comparable to the construction of a car in which they were supposed to put the right bolts and nuts—anecdotes and biblical texts.[117] He criticizes such a view of preaching as neglecting the fact that preaching happens as an "event in time." According to him, it must pay attention to the transitions that he believes are the "key to sermonic process."[118]

For Lowry, the device of a plot is the ideal answer to his search for an alternative way of preaching. It is based on a movement that begins with discrepancy or tension that must be resolved in the end. As he argues, "Like any good story-teller, the preacher's task is to 'bring the folks home'—that is, resolve matters in the light of the gospel and in the presence of the people."[119] Such sermonic movement is actually based on Davis's argument that the design of a sermon reflects the continuity of time. Lowry interprets

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[117] Eugene Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 6.

[118] Ibid., 7.

[119] Ibid., 12.

Davis's words as if Davis is implying a "narrative plot."[120] Here, Rose insightfully points out that while Davis's generative idea is a statement that gave birth to the sermon, Lowry's generative idea is closer to the seed of discrepancy, not a combination of subject and predicate.[121]

After Lowry introduced his method of narrative preaching, it was widely appreciated by many preachers who were trying to find a fresh way for their audience to experience the gospel in preaching. While it was Davis who laid a foundation for what was to come later as "storytelling" and "narrative preaching," Raymond Bailey claims in a book review that Lowry's work is an "elaboration of Davis' concept of the sermon as an organic evolution from a generative idea."[122] Baily argues that Lowry provided a "clearer, more developed, and more practical" tool for people to understand what narrative preaching should look like. Many people believe that such a creative way of preaching would revitalize the pulpit and make preaching the center of Christian practice again.

This chapter analyzes each of the stages in Lowry's plot and critically engages in dialogue with several key homileticians and responses to Lowry himself. Moreover, this chapter explores Long's argument that narrative preaching often neglects the didactic and ethical dimensions of preaching in favor of experiencing. Lowry's signature sermon

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[120] Ibid., 14.

[121] Rose, 115.

[122] Raymond Bailey, review of *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form*, *Review & Expositor* 79, no. 1 (Winter 1982): 175.

"Strangers in the Night" is an excellent example to prove Long's analysis. Following this, the chapter turns to Paul Scott Wilson, who has insightfully identified Lowry's plot as a movement from law to gospel. In this chapter, I argue that the lack of didactic and ethical dimensions in Lowry's plot is due to the understanding of law in his homiletic method, which is better enhanced with the Wesleyan theology of law and gospel.

1. The Five Stages in the Homiletical Plot

Lowry argues that the sermon narrative must begin with a felt discrepancy and then move toward a known resolution. He borrows his idea from a television series plot, which usually introduces tension at the beginning of each episode. While a movie, by contrast, may lead the audience to an unknown resolution, a television series always leads to a known resolution—that is, the main actor or actress survives by solving the mystery. Lowry asserts that the key to this kind of a narrative plot is the "suspense of ambiguity," since that is what holds the attention of the audience. Such ambiguity in a sermon narrative is based on the quality of living that often pushes them to choose either between two good things or two bad things—meaning the choice is not necessarily between good and bad. For Lowry, the gospel offers an answer that is more faithful, not just correct or wrong.

The First Stage: Upsetting the Equilibrium (Oops!)

What is the best way to engage the listeners in the movement of a sermon? For Lowry, the answer lies in finding an ambiguity that upsets the equilibrium of the listeners. Since listeners vary in terms of their readiness to engage with a sermon, Lowry argues that it is the responsibility of the preacher to invite listeners to engage with the

topic of the sermon.[123] If a preacher cannot hold the audience's attention in the beginning, the rest of the sermon will be easily missed. Therefore, the component of ambiguity is the key for a preacher to keep the listeners' interest until the end of the sermon. Lowry emphasizes that ambiguity must be felt not just by the preacher but also by the listeners.[124]

How can preachers find such ambiguity that would captivate their listeners and lead them to follow their sermons until the end? Lowry maintains that whether the preacher begins with a biblical text, life experience, or church doctrine, there is always some ambiguity that arises from our "being human" that needs to be resolved. It has the elements of being both "vital and at risk."[125] For example, the opening statement of a sermon such as "I want to talk about love today" lacks vitality. However, it changes its nature when the preacher makes a remark such as this: "Our problem is that so many times we extend our hand in love only to bring it back bruised and broken. To love is to risk rejection."[126] Such a statement has enough ambiguity in relation to the nature of our lives that it is ready to be developed as a sermon.

While it sounds highly pragmatic that ambiguity is used to hold the attention of the listeners, Lowry provides a theological reason for upsetting the equilibrium in a sermon: "When it is resolved and the gospel proclaimed, one can experience the good

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[123] Lowry, 29.

[124] Ibid., 31.

[125] Ibid., 30.

[126] Ibid.

news."[127] Lowry is convinced that the gospel is not something that individuals merely know intellectually. Rather, it is something a person must experience existentially as good news.

The Second Stage: Analyzing the Discrepancy (Ugh!)

After ambiguity in the human condition upsets the listeners' equilibrium in the listeners, the preacher is ready to probe into why both the listeners and the preacher experience such a discrepancy between what is and what should be. Lowry proposes that this stage of the sermon could be much lengthier than other stages because it pursues in-depth analysis that reaches the fundamental cause of the problem. A doctor takes time to diagnose the symptom of his or her patient; otherwise, he or she cannot genuinely treat the illness and lead him or her to a cure. Likewise, Lowry argues that a preacher who is not willing to struggle to deal with the complexity of the problem will "not be trusted in the sermon, in a counseling chamber, or in the church board meeting."[128] While the first stage introduces discrepancy in the human condition, the second stage must invite the listeners to into an in-depth diagnosis.

For Lowry, the second stage is also the most critical stage of the plot because he believes that "the ultimate form of presentation of the gospel is directly dependent upon it."[129] In other words, this stage helps the listeners to be prepared for the gospel. Since the homiletical plot invites the listeners to experience the gospel, he understands that it is

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[127] Ibid., 35.

[128] Ibid., 46.

[129] Ibid., 39.

also a process through which the listeners embark on a journey with the preacher to analyze the heart of the trouble they face together. Here, it is the job of the preacher not to introduce a dualistic notion of good and bad that might destroy the tension too early. If the ambiguity about the villain is resolved too easily, Lowry worries that listeners would lose their interest soon and cut short their journey with the preacher for the remaining part of the sermon. He is also concerned that simplistic black and white thinking will not help the sermon gain credibility. Moreover, Lowry claims that accuracy in the diagnosis eventually determines the "correlation of gospel and human condition."[130]

The Third Stage: Disclosing the Clue to Resolution (Aha!)

As the second stage builds on the ambiguity that leads the listeners to a dead-end, the third stage discloses the clue to the resolution through what Lowry calls the "principle of reversal." It is possible for some that when they struggle with a difficult question, they later find out that they had been struggling with the wrong question throughout the process. At the moment when Lowry's clue to the resolution is introduced, the audience may realize that they have been captivated by their commonly held assumptions. Lowry assumes that such reversal has been utilized not just by prominent preachers, but also by literature, humor, television drama, and puzzles. For example, Plato's allegory of the cave presents the prisoners in the cave who only see their reality through a fire behind them that projects the shadows on the wall. Their true reality can be realized only when they come out of the cave.

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[130] Ibid., 49.

Lowry maintains that the device of reversal is essential to the gospel because it pushes listeners to reassess their thinking—or in the words of Lowry, it turns human understanding "upside down." Such a work is not the work of human beings; it is rather the work of God who keeps silent when people seek God more fervently, and it is also God who reveals Godself when people keep silent. Therefore, Lowry asserts, "To claim that the preached Word is a 'stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles' (1 Cor. 1:22) surely is to suggest that there is something about the gospel which is upside down to the world's way of viewing truth."[131]

Here, Lowry attempts to position himself standing between neo-orthodoxy and liberalism. He argues that the nature of the gospel as reversal reveals a "radical discontinuity between the gospel and worldly wisdom."[132] While liberals would claim that the gospel is continuous with their experience in the world, Lowry distances himself from them by arguing that it is the case only "after the gospel has turned human experience upside down."[133] At the same time, Lowry also disagrees with neo-orthodox thought that departs from worldly experience and that only stays within scriptural exegesis and exposition. Therefore, Lowry attempts to integrate both the deductive and inductive ways of preaching into his homiletical plot with reversal as the connector between them. While speakers should begin with human experiences that present

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[131] Ibid., 70.

[132] Ibid.

[133] Ibid., 71.

existential problems, it is the gospel that offers an unexpected solution, not human experience.

The Fourth Stage: Experiencing the Gospel (Whee!)

After the analysis of the problem is established and the clue to the resolution is revealed, the preacher can reveal the gospel as the answer to the problem. For Lowry, the effectiveness of the gospel is that "it does what it says" as well as revealing "that to which it refers."[134] In other words, the gospel does not just proclaim relief from the pain that the audience experiences, but it also produces the same relief so that listeners can experience liberation from pain. In order for listeners to experience the power of the gospel, Lowry proposes that it is essential for the sermon to set the context by diligently fulfilling the function of the first three stages. According to Lowry, the gospel is not so much a human effort as much as it is the grace of God who finds the lost ones. While so many individuals attempt to search for their true identity, the gospel reveals this identity as a gift from God who finds them where they are.

Lowry often adopts the metaphor of a disease and a cure as the basic frame of his homiletical movement from problem to solution. He is cautious not to implement a dualistic notion of human nature because there is often "bad motive in good behaviors" and a "noble intention in an evil situation."[135] While the human situation seems complicated, the work of the preacher is to identify the cause of the problem at a fundamental level. In fact, the task of diagnosis is what leads to the solution. Lowry calls

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[134] Ibid., 77.

[135] Ibid., 78.

a sermon that tries to skip the process of diagnosis in favor of a quick answer to the problem a "homiletical short circuit."[136] Such a solution, however good as it may sound, may not come across as the true answer because it is not the right medication for the illness from which the patient is suffering.

The Fifth Stage: Anticipating the Consequences (Yeah!)

After listeners experience the gospel that comes as the solution to their problem, the final stage introduces how their lives could be imagined differently as the result of the gospel. For Lowry, the climax of the sermon is not the final stage of the homiletical plot but experiencing the gospel.[137] Unlike many traditional sermons that challenge listeners to make a decision or commitment, a sermon in Lowry's plot form seeks to liberate people from their various entanglements, which are things that prevent them from doing what God wills for them. To support his own argument, Lowry uses the work of Kurt Lewin, a scholar in behavioral change. In assuming that a static status results from a balance of tensions on both sides, Lewin contends that there are two options leading to behavioral change. One option could increase tension on one side and push for the direction that is desired; the other option is simply to decrease tension in the desired direction, leading to a natural move toward it.[138] In line with the grace of God, Lowry prefers the second option and believes that the gospel liberates from that which hinders listeners from moving in the direction God desires for them.

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[136] Ibid., 74.

[137] Ibid., 83.

[138] Ibid., 84.

Lowry is critical of traditional sermons that focus too much on human work and responsibility because they are often reduced to a "form of works righteousness."[139] Lowry contends that the focus of a sermon must be on the remarkable activity of God in Jesus Christ, not human response. After God liberated the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, it was God who initiated the covenant while the Israelites were merely called to respond to it.[140] This is why Lowry contends that the highlight of a sermon is what God does for God's people in experiencing the gospel, not what they attempt to do in their response to it. While many claim on their bumper stickers that they have found God, Lowry asserts that it is actually God who finds them, not vice versa.

2. Lowry's Revision of the Homiletical Plot

Since his initial work in 1980, Lowry has modified his homiletical plot from five stages to four stages in *The Sermon: Dancing the Edge of Mystery*, published in 1997. In this book, Lowry suggests four stages—conflict, complication, sudden shift, and unfolding. While these four stages are similar to Lowry's previous model, they also differ in terms of the shape of his loop, in that it does not necessarily include reversal anymore. He confirms this revision in his second edition of *The Homiletical Plot* (2001) and his most recent work, *The Homiletical Beat: Why All Sermons Are Narrative* (2012).[141]

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[139] Ibid., 83.

[140] Ibid.

[141] Lowry acknowledges that while reversal may be "angular, sharp, and decisive," it "may not be exactly a 180-degree turn." Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot*, 120. He confirms this again in *The Homiletical Beat* arguing, "Regarding step 3, disclosing the clue to resolution, I realized that the decisive turn is not always an absolute reversal." Lowry, *The Homiletical Beat* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012), 32.

The First Stage: Conflict

In his revised model, the first stage is very similar to upsetting the equilibrium that seeks a felt discrepancy from either the contemporary situation or scripture text. It seeks to introduce a problem that would make the listeners anxious enough to keep their attention until they find its solution. As for the differences, Richard Eslinger analyzes perceptively how Lowry seems to show more interest for the text as the "perceived conflict emerges in the course of the immersion in the text."[142] Lowry finds support for grounding the sermon in a biblical text from Barth who argues that "the Bible contrariwise brings an answer, and seeks the question corresponding to this answer."[143]

The Second Stage: Complication

The second stage of complication probes the trouble more deeply. Lowry confesses that in his previous work, he was still approaching the discrepancy by relying heavily on logical questioning such as, Why? He then expands the way one approaches conflict by introducing what David Schlafer calls "Discerning a Strategy of Integration."

> The Scriptures engage our senses and our emotions directly by means of images. They also invite us to enter as participants in stories—historical, fictional, and mythical narratives. They further confront us with arguments –orderly presentations of evidence intended to lead us to certain conclusions.[144]

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[142] Richard Eslinger, "Tracking the Homiletical Plot," in *What's the Shape of Narrative Preaching*, ed. Mike Graves and David J. Schlafer (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2008), 73.

[143] Eugene Lowry, *The Sermon: Dancing the Edge of Mystery* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 65.

[144] David Schlafer, *Surviving the Sermon* (Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 1992), 63. quoted in Lowry, *The Sermon*, 73.

As Lowry chose to use the expression "analyzing the discrepancy" in *The Homiletical Plot* (1980) to imply complication, his previous work with complication tends to utilize an argument over an image or story as the major means to probe and analyze the ambiguity. He enlarges his view now by encouraging others to pay attention to the genre of the scripture text, as it should concern the way of complicating the matter "partly, but not conclusively."[145] The purpose of the sermon might also decide a strategy among those three modes, based on the nature of the congregation.

The Third Stage: Sudden Shift

The third stage is a sudden shift that includes a great reversal but does not point to it exclusively. Both in *The Homiletical Plot* and *Doing Time in the Pulpit*, Lowry asserts that the escalated tension created by analyzing the discrepancy would lead to a reversal of the previous situation. As he states, "Resolution comes only by reversing the assumption of 'common sense.'" However, just as the New Testament scholar John Dominic Crossan defines "parables of reversal" as only one of the three types of parables,[146] Lowry observes that not every decisive moment in a plotted sermon takes the form of a 180-degree turn. The point is to indicate the decisive moment of reversal that changes one's perspective in a significant way so that "there is no way to go back to the previous view."[147] Therefore, Lowry now calls this stage a "sudden shift" instead of great reversal.

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[145] Ibid., 74.

[146] John Dominic Crossan, *In Parables* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 37-120.

[147] Lowry, 77.

While Lowry does not include the "experiencing the gospel" stage in his revised model, he does maintain that this stage may happen at various points. In his previous work, he held that the good news came as the result of "disclosing the clue to resolution." However, he now recognizes that the location of the good news is not as simple as he thought, considering that there are scripture texts which contain good news in different stages. For example, in Jesus's parable of the workers in the vineyard, the good news is seen as a "sudden shift" where the reign of God is not based on the worldly business but on "God's family" in which everyone is invited home. Also, in the story of Bartimaeus the good news comes in right after the second stage of complication as Jesus heals him so that he can now see. As stated by Long, Lowry envisions experiencing the gospel as "potentially occurring at any one of a number of places in the sequence."[148]

The Fourth Stage: Unfolding

The fourth and final stage is unfolding. Lowry contends that hearing of the gospel opens the door to the future of God where the listeners can witness a different reality. While this stage is not much different from Lowry's "anticipating the consequences," he again adopts the strategy of Schlafer, who observes the different relationships between preacher and listeners through the choices of argument, story, and image. Depending on which strategy the preacher decides to adopt, Lowry argues that the form of unfolding could be different. For example, the unfolding of an argument could look like communal agreement between the preacher and the listeners. The unfolding of a story could look like a journey with them hand in hand. Finally, using an image as a strategy would result

[148] Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 127.

in both the preacher and the listeners being drawn to the image with their identities joined.

Sermon: "Strangers in the Night" (Text: John 3:1-9)[149]

Sermon Analysis

"Strangers in the Night" is a sermon by Lowry that reflects both his homiletic method and theology. In describing the encounter between Nicodemus and Jesus in the night, Lowry journeys with his listeners to show how the former goes through transformation by the latter. In the first stage of upsetting the equilibrium, Lowry briefly sets the scene by explaining that this event takes place at night because Nicodemus did not want to be seen by others. Using the image of a lonely figure "jumping from shadow to shadow" and "never using the major streets of the town," Lowry clearly introduces tension in Nicodemus, as he anxiously visited Jesus but did not want others to see him. Lowry then shifts his focus to the illogical answer of Jesus to Nicodemus's question: "Rabbi, you must come from God, because nobody could do the signs you do except God be with them." Jesus answered, "Truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, one cannot even see the Kingdom of God." For Lowry, this conversation creates ambiguity for listeners, as they may wonder why Jesus answered in such a strange way. This ambiguity in this biblical text is intended to hold the attention of the listeners until the end of the sermon when they find the answer.

Lowry then moves on to the second stage, analyzing the discrepancy. He does not go into in-depth biblical studies to excavate why Jesus responded in the strange way that

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[149] Eugene Lowry, "Strangers in the Night," in *Journeys Toward Narrative Preaching*, ed. Wayne Bradley Robinson (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1990), 78-84.

he did. Instead, he briefly explains that the audience in Jesus's time would not have regarded their conversation to be so weird. The authenticity of the prophets was often judged by whether they had "some visionary-type experience" or had "engaged in prophetic proclamation." Although Nicodemus came to tell Jesus that he had already worked out that Jesus was a true prophet of God, Jesus was saying that he could not just arrive at such an understanding on his own work. Since Nicodemus did not quite understand what Jesus meant with his expression "born again," Nicodemus asked with a literal question, "How can an old man reenter a mother's womb?" Similar to how Nicodemus had a hard time understanding what Jesus meant by the expression "be born again," Lowry shares with his listeners the frustration he felt when his family was traveling across western Kansas and came upon a sign on the highway that said, "Ye must be born again." Lowry remarks that the road sign seemed both puzzling and pushy.

Lowry then introduces his friend Fred as a way to suggest the clue to the resolution, which is the third stage. Lowry recounts that Fred is a minister and also a winner. He would win the hearts of people anywhere he went by being successful with his career. A few years after he started to work at a church in a suburban setting, the church began experiencing success, as seen in Fred's doubling the membership and tripling the budget. However, in conversation Fred's wife revealed to Lowry that Fred should take some rest since "he does nothing but work." In fact, we learn that Fred's tireless work was corroding his relationship with his wife and eventually led to divorce. "I'm just restless," said Fred to Lowry. In recounting his conversation with Fred, Lowry realizes that Fred is like a modern Nicodemus who suffers "an existential emptiness."

While both Nicodemus and Fred ask, "What do I have to do?" Lowry realizes that they are asking something that a person cannot achieve simply by doing. The resolution to the ambiguous dialogue between Nicodemus and Jesus is finally announced by Lowry: "The one thing no one can ever do is to birth oneself. Birth is always a gift of another."[150]

After Lowry discloses the resolution, the sermon moves to the fourth stage—experiencing the gospel. He invites the listeners to experience joy in having found the answer. He laments how Nicodemus, Fred, and even John Wesley would run from one place to another, searching for something that cannot be answered or achieved by their works. For the people who work tirelessly to obtain some ultimate direction, triumph, or peace, Lowry shares that the message of being born again is "the good news of the gift."[151] As no one truly knows where the wind blows, no one can control or know the when, or where, or how in life. In a declarative voice, Lowry tells his audience to let go of their control: "Nicodemus, give it up; stop trying too hard. Fred, give it up; success will never secure it for you. Sharon, give it up …. Allen, give it up …. Martha, give it up …. Gene, give it up."

After experiencing joy in hearing the gospel, Lowry's hearers can anticipate its consequence in the fifth stage. However, this sermon does not seem to describe what different futures would be laid out for the listeners. Rather, Lowry decides to end his sermon with a celebration upon discovering the answer to the ambiguity. He simply

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[150] Eugene Lowry, "The Narrative Quality of Experience as a Bridge to Preaching," in *Journeys Toward Narrative Preaching*, ed. Wayne Bradley Robinson (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1990), 83.

[151] Ibid., 84.

invites his listeners to give it up. According to him, "The wind blows where it will, the gentle breeze of God's unconditional love." This stage is closer to what Lowry describes as "unfolding" in his modified version of the plot. In journeying through the story of Nicodemus and projecting the image of the wind, the preacher and the listeners stand together, encouraged to give up their will and might and to trust in the Holy Spirit, who causes them to be born again.

For Lowry, reversal is the nature of the gospel that turns worldly wisdom upside down. He argues that it is a mistake for Protestant preachers to believe that the gospel is continuous with human experience.[152] This does not mean that the gospel is always discontinuous with human lives. Rather, it can be continuous only after the gospel overturns our worldview and experience. Here, Lowry cleverly weaves both the inductive and deductive ways of preaching with the reversal as the turning point between them. He believes that when the clue to resolution transforms people's worldview, it can prepare the setting in which "the Word of God can be proclaimed—deductively ordered in good Barthian fashion."[153] However, it is possible to observe in "Strangers in the Night" that Lowry does not completely take the deductive way of preaching even after the clue to the resolution is disclosed. Rather, he laments poetically the spiritual burden on Nicodemus, Fred, and Wesley, and he invites people to simply give up their ego to find their existential meaning because it is God who finds them.

Sermon Reflection

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[152] Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot*, 71.

[153] Ibid, 72.

This sermon by Lowry has several strengths that can be pointed out. Firstly, his narrative sermon overcomes the historical and cultural gap between the scriptural world and the contemporary one by identifying with the inner-motivations of the characters. Such a homiletic method does not view the scripture as a foreign book that requires heavy historical exegesis and traditional interpretation. Rather, the genre of narrative causes two worlds to clash with each other and allows one to interpret the other. Secondly, as Lowry argues that a sermon is an "event in time," this sermon creatively moves from the tension to resolution by inviting the listeners to feel uncomfortable with the illogical conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus, which then leads to a more perplexing question: "What does it mean to be born again?" Rather than being interested in merely imparting doctrinal information, Lowry is more concerned with inviting his listeners to journey through the plot with their stories, feelings, and imaginations. Thirdly, as a result, Lowry invites the listeners not as passive listeners but as active participants.

However, Lowry's sermon does present several theological problems. Firstly, his sermon challenges a listener to wonder whether the gospel is absent in the beginning of the sermon. Lowry argues that the gospel is continuous with human experience only after the reversal, which discloses the clue to resolution. In "Strangers in the Night," the metaphor of the night seems to symbolize a status in which the ambiguity is so great that the answer is hidden from both Nicodemus and the listeners. However, if the gospel is viewed as something that God has *initiated* in God's grace for God's people, one may wonder why Nicodemus's coming to visit Jesus in the first place is not considered the

gospel. Although Lowry might argue that Nicodemus came because of his agitated mind and heart in search for his existential meaning, it seems that the grace of God was already at work even when Nicodemus did not realize it, and this grace led him to come and meet Jesus. In other words, while the world may be a place filled with ambiguities, conflicts, or troubles, it does not mean that the gospel initiated by God is absent in the beginning.

Secondly, Lowry's sermon does not challenge the listeners to be active in their response as a result of hearing the gospel. In his first model of a homiletical plot, Lowry describes the fifth stage as anticipating the consequences when one hears the good news brought by God through Christ. In his fear of reducing the human response to works righteousness, Lowry underemphasizes the active response of human beings to challenge themselves socially and ethically. As seen in his modified version of the homiletical plot, Lowry even tones things down by renaming the old *anticipating the consequences* as *unfolding* so that a different reality might be imagined. The reversal emphasizes both the dead-end of human works for finding answers to their existential questions and the decisive act of God when God comes to surprise the listeners. However, as in Lowry's sermon, narrative preaching often neglects the response of human beings as an active participation in the redeeming work of God. This raises a theological question of whether the speaking of a human response would reduce the gospel as work righteousness. Lowry may answer, as in his sermon, "Give it up!" because it is God who is the main character now. Does God then work all by the Godself without inviting human beings as partners to redeem God's creation?

Finally, while Lowry's sermon utilizes the metaphor of the wind as an unconscious image of letting go of one's ego to find purpose for his or her life, it does not seem to engage more intellectually and deductively. Rather, once the resolution is revealed, Lowry hurries to finish his sermon as if he intends to leave the listeners with a good surprise. In other words, Lowry does not ask why it is necessary to give it up, how one can give it up, and what one needs to give up. Such questions might complicate the whole order of experiences in the plot by adding more tensions. Nevertheless, Lowry's sermon seems too experience-oriented and possibly too full of emotions for the listeners at the thought of giving up their tireless search for the meaning of their lives. Although the metaphor of the wind and the emotional message of letting go may leave the listeners with a good feeling of "It is about God, not me," it does not seem to engage them more on a holistic level both consciously and emotionally.

3. Lack of Teaching and Persuading in Lowry's Plot

In Thomas Long's *Preaching from Memory to Hope,* he offers a compelling analysis of narrative preaching as revived by the New Homiletic. Long reminds his readers of what St. Augustine defines as the purpose of a sermon in *On Christian Doctrine*, Book IV—"to teach, to delight, and to persuade."[154] According to Augustine, a preacher must teach people with the content of the gospel. However, one cannot teach people unless the speaking is heard as delightful. In other words, people need to experience the content as true to their own experiences, beliefs, and traditions. Augustine

[154] St. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D. W. Robertson, Jr. (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1958), 136.

also believes that when people are taught the Christian gospel in a delightful way, they would change their behavior more ethically. Here, Long wonders whether Augustine was "inadvertently" describing the seasons in the history of preaching and tending to focus on one purpose over the others. There are times when the pulpit needs to impart Christian content in a form of lecture. There are also times when the world witnesses an ethical crisis, and at these times the pulpit must raise its prophetic voice to challenge the status quo of the society. Long is convinced that since the 1950s, the majority of American pulpits have immersed themselves in a season of delight as they were already full of teaching and moral instruction. Therefore, the natural consequence is that narrative preaching as it is today often lacks the didactic and ethical dimensions in preaching.

1) Lack of Teaching

In *On Christian Doctrine,* St. Augustine explains that among the purposes of preaching, teaching is the most essential. Augustine even cites Cicero to support his point: "To teach is a necessity, to please is a sweetness, and to persuade is a victory."[155] While the style of presenting the truth is important, St. Augustine believes that the style naturally comes out of the truth being taught, rather than it being separated from the truth in order that the style might please the audience. When the truth is "revealed simply," it gives pleasure to audiences because "it is true."[156] Lischer contends that one may find it odd that St. Augustine actually devotes most of *On Christian Doctrine* not to the discussions of the simple truth but to that of hermeneutics and rhetoric. In other words,

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[155] Ibid., 136.

[156] Ibid., 137.

Book IV of *On Christian Doctrine* seriously lacks Christian doctrine, but it is close to a "brilliant text-to-sermon manual."[157] This may be why contemporary homiletics often experiences an estrangement of theology from preaching.

In *A Theology of Preaching*, Lischer presents four issues that arise when theology is separated from preaching. First of all, preaching's exclusion from theology means that there is no substance in the sermon. He asserts that when "speech does not emerge from and rearticulate the organizing principles of the church's life—its theology—because it does not offer life of God in Christ, it suffers the same fate as the seed sown on rocky soil."[158] Second, the separation of theology from preaching leads to a lack of coherence. He holds to the belief that the coherence of a sermon comes from the unity and coherence of the gospel itself. Thirdly, the lack of theology makes preaching lose its authority. While many confuse authority with authoritarianism through individual skill or personality, a sermon rooted in the gospel carries the authority of Christ who drove out demons, healed the sick, forgave the sinners, and commissioned his disciples. Finally, the estrangement of theology from preaching makes preaching irrelevant. Such preaching often misses the true human conditions that are in need of God's grace to transform them.

While Lischer does not specifically mention narrative preaching as the target of his criticism, the issues above seem to overlap with what Long also identifies as the lack of teaching. After hearing a narrative sermon, the audiences might say, "Wow, it was a good sermon" or "It was an inspiring sermon." However, it is very unlikely that they

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[157] Richard Lischer, *A Theology of Preaching* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1992), 1.

[158] Ibid., 2.

would say, "I have learned something to reflect on later." In other words, there is little substance that the listeners to engage with intellectually. There is no coherence with the whole narrative of the gospel, but only a fragmented snapshot of a good story as a lesson. Furthermore, there is no sense of urgency within the listeners to change their behavior so that it could be more in accordance with the gospel. There is also no truth that pierces into the struggles of human life as the result of sin and brokenness.

Here, it is possible that Lowry might confront Lischer by distinguishing between discursive knowing and aesthetic knowing. In *Doing Time in the Pulpit*, Lowry suggests that there are two largely different ways of knowing just as our brain has two different lobes. He draws from Robert Ornstein who argues that the left lobe of our brains is associated with "typical, rational (propositional) functions" while the right lobe is involved with "aesthetic, intuitive functions."[159] For example, when a person reads a book, the left brain is used to focus on understanding the propositional idea. However, when the person experiences a painting, the right lobe of the brain dominates, thus emphasizing being present in the moment. While a person needs both functions of the brain as the image is absorbed, Lowry argues that religious conversion is enabled particularly by an aesthetic form of communication as listeners are grasped by the revelation of God rather than them entirely deciding their own conversion. Therefore, conversion happens on the preconscious level of communication.

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[159] Eugene Lowry, *Doing Time in the Pulpit: The Relationship between Narrative and Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 81.

Although Lowry is correct in that the gospel sometimes communicates with the listeners through preconscious images on an experiential level, there are times when the preacher needs to speak simple truth directly in plain language. In "Theology Undergirding Narrative Preaching," Ronald Allen points out that certain occasions arise in the life of the congregation or in the situation of society when preaching needs to communicate more directly with the audience, such as in times of natural disasters, war between nations, economic recession, or the death of a beloved church member. In facing these occasions, Allen states, "Such events often evoke such an immediate awareness that the congregation is hungry to get directly to the heart of a straightforward theological explanation. 'How is God related to this situation?'"[160] He also describes less urgent occasions that could benefit from plain propositional language, such as baptism and communion. While the participants are expected to experience the mystery of God's presence through those sacraments, the sermon that leads to them could explain the theological rationale directly to the audiences so that they can understand the biblical, historical, and ecclesial meaning of those mysterious events in the life of the church.

Lischer would agree with Allen's analysis which describes the consequence of the estrangement of theology from preaching, namely the irrelevance of preaching. Lischer puts forward that there is a biblical issue with aesthetic experience in narrative preaching. In other words, the aesthetic approach to the scripture often elevates the genre of the parable as normative in biblical interpretation and thereby merely focuses on the in-

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[160] Ronald Allen, "Theology Undergirding Narrative Preaching," in *What's the Shape of Narrative Preaching?*, ed. Mike Graves and David J. Schlafer (St. Louise: Chalice Press, 2008), 38.

meaning of the story, which can be isolated from its contexts in theology, history, tradition, and even church. In other words, Lowry's narrative preaching is bound to neglect the historical and dogmatic dimensions of biblical interpretation because it always focuses on the transient experience of the gospel for now. As a consequence, Lischer maintains that it "atomizes the community's experience of the gospel—of which texts are organic parts."[161] In other words, the homiletical plot inherently leads to a hermeneutic issue that fragments the scripture as a corpus of many stories, poems, commandments, epistles, and songs that are unrelated to one another—instead of a whole narrative of God's redemptive work.

If Lowry's plot does not succeed in teaching the truth didactically, what does it communicate to the audience then? Firstly, Long suggests that "narrative" is the wrong label for Lowry's plot. Long also maintains that the way the episodes of his plot move is closer to the "creativity paradigm familiar to researchers in the field of human problem-solving" than actual narrative plots.[162] Researchers usually approach a problem by asking many possible questions and then testing them to see whether the hypotheses work until the researchers arrive at certain conclusions. When researchers can identify some answers that address the question, they know that they have discovered the solution and can apply it to a future question. Long states that such a methodology is not so new, as it has been

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[161] Richard Lischer, "The Limits of Story," *Interpretation* 38, no 1 (January 1984): 27.

[162] Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 127.

the "typical pattern of human creativity."[163] If Long is right, it could be argued that the message Lowry's plot communicates is that the gospel is the solution to the problems and trouble in life with which human beings struggle.

2) Lack of Persuading

In following Cicero's definition of a great orator, St. Augustine believes that teaching is a "matter of necessity" and considered it to be the most essential, while persuading was a "triumph" because it cannot be always called for.[164] A person may hear the truth and judge whether it is true or not but still not give consent to it. A great orator, however, can persuade the hearts of the listeners by presenting the truth in the most pleasant way. Here, Lowry does not view persuading as the triumph of the narrative sermon. Rather, he argues that the "highlight" of narrative sermon is "the resolution stage when matters are turned upside down and are thereby seen in a new way."[165] Lowry was both taught traditional types of sermon that ask the listeners to commit to change, and he also practiced this type of sermon himself, yet he criticizes such an approach as a "form of works righteousness, no matter how much the preacher tries to avoid it."[166] Lowry asserts that the focus of narrative preaching is the act of God, who finds us where we are, not the act of human beings who seek God.

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[163] Ibid., 128. While narrativity that stimulates human creativity might be helpful in drawing attention of the audience, Long points out that human creativity is "fragile and unpredictable." Narrative preachers relying on the great reversal cannot expect their listeners to have the same experience of discovering the truth at an unexpected time every Sunday. Ibid., 129.

[164] St. Augustine, 136.

[165] Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot*, 82.

[166] Ibid., 83.

Lowry's concern about works righteousness is also reflected in Craddock's inductive preaching that views the deductive, dogmatic, intellect-focused sermon as authoritarian and seemingly denying the freedom of the listeners to choose their own conclusions and applications. Therefore, Lowry maintains, "*Freedom is a consequence of the grace of God*."[167] However, in this context, it is crucial to ask whether asking for a change in the listeners' behavior necessarily mean works righteousness, as well as whether this takes away a person's freedom to love God. Regarding this point, St. Augustine adds,

> But when that which is taught must be put into practice and is taught for that reason, the truth of what is said is acknowledged in vain and the eloquence of the discourse pleases in vain unless that which is learned is implemented in action.[168]

It seems that St. Augustine points out how the truth revealed in the Christian gospel foresees action to be a result of hearing.

In *Naming Grace*, Mary Catherine Hilkert contends that "radical revision of one's life according to the values of the reign of God is the only response that fits the new order of reality."[169] As a result of hearing the gospel, human life could be reconfigured as "an encounter with God." She follows the process of conversion as described by Paul Ricoeur in his threefold mimetic structure of narrative.[170] First, in the preaching moment, the listeners always bring the preunderstandings of their life experience and culture. Second,

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[167] Ibid.

[168] St. Augustine, chapter 13:29.

[169] Mary Catherine Hilkert, *Naming Grace: Preaching and the Sacramental Imagination* (New York: Continuum, 1997), 98.

[170] Ibid., 93.

as they hear the gospel story, they configure their experiences and events that seem unrelated to one another as a meaningful narrative. Thirdly, this imaginative configuration opens up the possibilities for reconfiguration of their lives.[171] Hilkert argues that when one finds his or her story grafted onto the gospel story and therefore reshapes his or her worldview, there can be a radical change that calls for response. Although she recognizes Lischer's critique of aesthetic knowing that a story is not sufficient for ethical change until it is interpreted,[172] Hilkert points out that the stories also have power to remember those who have been culturally and historically forgotten and marginalized and expect a radically different reality.

While Lowry's homiletical plot seems to be a God-centered approach, it is also grounded in a Western individualism that highly values individual experience and autonomy while rejecting any external force that calls for a change in one's heart and behavior. In *Preaching Jesus*, Campbell contends that "the experiential orientation in narrative preaching leads not only to an overly individualistic understanding of preaching, but also to a tendency toward the very experiential-expressivist understanding of Christianity."[173] Campbell observes that Lowry's plot is focused on how subjectivities and inner-motivation of the characters shift through each stage of the sequence. Campbell alludes to a doctor-patient relationship by pointing out how Lowry tries to diagnose what is the problem at the fundamental level and offer the gospel as the "cure" at the end.

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[171] Ibid., 94.

[172] Lischer, "The Limits of Story," 35.

[173] Charles Campbell, *Preaching Jesus*, 122.

Because Craddock's inductive approach similarly focuses on individual participation in preaching that allows one to arrive at one's own conclusion, Campbell argues that Lowry's homiletical plot is "open-ended so each individual hearer can experience his or her own feelings and think his or her own thoughts."[174] Therefore, he criticizes Lowry's homiletical plot as having a "decidedly individualistic orientation."[175]

4. Law and Gospel in Lowry's Homiletical Plot

While Long suggests that it is possible to redeem narrative preaching by being "theologically smarter and more ethically discerning in its practice,"[176] I believe that the solution is more concerned with the homiletical grammar that is grounded in the theology that teaches and persuades more biblically, traditionally, and culturally. Here, I turn my attention to Wilson who argues that "the plot Lowry came up with is a law/gospel plot,"[177] and using this point I analyze the reason why he locates Lowry's plot in the law and gospel school. Wilson describes Wesley as also using law and gospel for his homiletic method, and a critical reflection on law and gospel as homiletical language will help to envision a new way of narrative preaching based on Wesleyan theology.

Paul Scott Wilson's Analysis of Law and Gospel

In his first book, *Imagination of the Heart: New Understandings in Preaching*, Wilson argues that law and gospel are not just a theological structure but also a

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[174] Ibid., 143.

[175] Ibid., 140.

[176] Thomas G. Long, *Preaching from Memory to Hope*, 18.

[177] Paul Scott Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004). 88.

homiletical grammar. Although imagination has been historically and culturally defined as an artistic gift, Wilson assumes that it also needs to be considered as a skill that could be learned in its interrelationship with faith: "Imagination is inspired by faith and faith is strengthened by imagination."[178] Wilson maintains that imagination is critical to preaching since it works through "the bringing together of two ideas that might not otherwise be connected and developing the creative energy they generate."[179] He compares the nature of imagination to a spark that jumps when wires from the negative and positive poles of a generator are brought closer. In other words, when two ideas that seem to have no connection with each other are creatively brought together, the spark of imagination happens, thereby making the gospel heard. Wilson states that imagination can work to bring two separate components together—namely the biblical text and our situation, story and doctrine, pastor and prophet, and finally law and gospel.

While not many homiletic scholars in the 21st century have paid explicit attention to law and gospel as a homiletical grammar, Wilson maintains that there is a strong need for churches to restore the forgotten theological language as they witness the decline of churches. In *The Practice of Preaching*, Wilson argues that there is a crisis in preaching today because many preachers have simply forgotten to preach the gospel that gives hope to people—that is, Jesus Christ is risen.[180] He even shares the result of his research in

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[178] Paul Scott Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart: New Understanding in Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), 17.

[179] Ibid., 32.

[180] Paul Scott Wilson, *The Practice of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 158.

analyzing preaching in *The Best Sermons* anthologies. He once realized that in one volume with twenty sermons, six had no hope, seven only briefly mentioned it, and seven spoke about it relatively longer than the others.[181] In another volume with forty-one sermons, Wilson learned that eighteen did not proclaim any hope, ten only mentioned it, and thirteen discussed it substantially. Wilson contends that any preaching that does not recognize the gospel as the dominating factor not only leaves God out but also fails to offer faith to the next generation.[182]

In order to offer redemption for such a crisis in preaching, Wilson considers that it is essential that preachers learn law and gospel (or later, trouble and grace) as the homiletical grammar that can help listeners hear the gospel. The apostle Paul discusses law and gospel in Romans, as did St. Augustine in *On the Spirit and the Letter*, and they have been historically studied to make sense of theological meaning and to be used as homiletical guides. According to Wilson, Luther spoke of law and gospel as components containing the gospel message and functioning as tools to discern the word of God. One of his sermons introduces their basic meaning as follows;

> Consequently, we must now learn to distinguish between the two parts which are called the law and the gospel…. The law brings us before the judgment seat, for it demands that we must be good and love out of a pure heart and a good conscience…. But we teach that one should know and look upon Christ as the one who sits there as the advocate of the poor, terrified conscience; believe in him, not as a judge, who is angry and ready to punish, but as a gracious, kindly, comforting mediator.[183]

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[181] Ibid., 159.

[182] Ibid., 160.

[183] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 51, *Sermons I*, ed. John W. Doberstein (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 279-280.

Here, it is possible to see that law functions as the judgment that makes a person recognize his or her own sinfulness while gospel is the grace that offers an answer. In the following sections, what Wilson means by law and gospel in preaching is considered in turn by Luther, Stuempfle, Jr., and Lischer.

1) Law in Preaching

Wilson acknowledges that the starting point for understanding law is that it was given to the Israelites as a "gift" in their responsibility to the covenant with God. The Hebrew word *torah*, though often regarded as law, historically has also been used as a synonym for word, commandment, testimony, or teaching.[184] While many contemporary Christians may have a negative view of law as burdensome, Wilson argues that law for the Jews was originally regarded as a privilege because "praising God was the purpose of life and the law made this a possibility."[185] He then quotes from Brueggemann who introduced how law was understood and practiced by the Jewish community as follows;

> Torah that marks the new community is not a practice of law to clobber people, not a censure to expel and scold people, not a picky legalism. It is rather a release from small moralisms to see things through the eyes of God's passion and anguish. The Torah is a reminder that God's will focuses on large human concerns and that we also may focus on weighty matter of justice, mercy and righteousness.[186]

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[184] Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 99.

[185] Ibid., 99.

[186] Walter Brueggemann, "Covenant as a Subversive Paradigm," *Christian Century* 97 (Nov 1980): 1096, quoted in Wilson, 99.

However, due to the fallen nature of human beings, the law comes across as a harsh judgment because law is thought to activate a person's conscience to recognize his or her sin and guilt. Herman Stuempfle, Jr. explains that when Paul defines the role of law as tutor (NIV) or disciplinarian (NRSV) in Gal 3:24, he uses it more as "a special slave" in this world whose function was "to threaten and punish the boys in his charge."[187] In other words, a more suitable word is *chastiser* who exists before us as an "implacable enemy."[188] Another reason why law is perceived as harsh judgment is because people often reduce it to a legalistic matter of whether people obeyed it or not. For instance, when Jesus saw a man with a withered hand, he asked those who were watching to see whether he would violate the law by healing him on the Sabbath this question: "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" (Mark 3:4). While the purpose of law is to give life to God's people in their responsibility to God's covenant, it is often used as the end in itself dividing people by asking who is sinful and what is lawful.

According to Wilson, Luther held a negative view of law, calling it "the hammer of judgment." However, Luther believes that there are two uses of the law. The first use is referred by him as the *political* use of the law. This function of the law primarily restrains human wickedness in order to prevent "the world from degenerating into a jungle of self-destructive violence."[189] Even the state itself mainly takes such a function

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[187] Herman G. Stuempfle, Jr., *Preaching Law and Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 21.

[188] Ibid.

[189] Ibid., 22.

with a threat to punish when its citizens violate the rules. Luther's second view on the law is his primary use of the law, which he calls the *theological* use. With this use in place, the political use of the law no longer functions since God requires inner-righteousness. Although God demands obedience to God out of our joy and love, the fallen nature of human beings always defies the Law of God. When the law is seen as a "hammer of judgment," it attacks people's conscience and makes them realize their own sinfulness. Moreover, the law as the hammer of judgment is vertical in its relationship between God and human beings, with the former holding the latter responsible for its heart and action. This is a harsh view on the law for which the remedy is God's forgiveness for God's people.

In addition to Luther's views on law, Wilson explains that there is another view, one that is horizontal and relational and which he calls "the law of the Fall; or the law of the world; or the law of human systems."[190] He acknowledges that Stuempfle has called it "law as mirror of existence" because it simply mirrors the world, as it is—that is, a desperate and broken place. As Paul Tillich describes the fundamental human situation as the "state of estrangement," Stuempfle contends that such a term does not indicate our responsibility for our condition, but rather is morally and ethically neutral. It mirrors our life, indicating its estrangement, which is illustrated as "alienation, meaninglessness, brokenness, finitude, anxiety, and despair."[191] Wilson argues that the law of the Fall may

[190] Wilson, 102.

[191] Stuempfle, 24.

be better received by the audience in today's world than the hammer of judgment because there are many individuals including Christians who regard such a harsh view of the law as suspicious. Therefore, Wilson agrees with Stuempfle that in the contemporary world, guilt is not the primary way for people to define their situations. Rather, words such as emptiness, alienation, or despair tend to resonate better with individuals.

2) Gospel in Preaching

Wilson explains that while the burden of law rests on human beings, the burden of the gospel rests on God. It is the redemptive act of God through Christ. More notably, it is the answer to the problem recognized by the law: "For the wandering one there is now a home; for the anxious one there is now a soothing voice to calm the night; for the desperate one there is more hope than the soul can contain; and for the one who has been hurt too many times there are the open arms of friends gathered around a table."[192]

Here, Stuempfle is helpful in distinguishing two modes of the gospel as the good news. First, Stuempfle addresses the gospel as forgiveness. This is the ultimate answer to the souls who are judged in their consciences by the law of God and therefore desperately seek "justification by faith," as in the Reformation tradition. It is said that Luther preached such a sermon every time he stood at the pulpit declaring God as the merciful Father. In such a view, God graciously forgives sinners by declaring them righteous through the grace of Christ and liberates them from their bondage to the law. In particular, the incarnation of Christ points out such a gracious act of God, who condescends to human beings to meet them where they are and forgives them as God's

[192] Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 104.

children. Here, Luther argues that it is critical that the gospel be preached as if it is addressed to us, not to some vague individual.

> … Christ [ought] to be preached to the end that faith in him may be established that he may not only be Christ, but be Christ for you and me, and that what is said of him and is denoted in his name may be effectual in us. Such faith is produced and preserved in us by preaching why Christ came, what he brought and bestowed, what benefit it is to us to accept him.[193]

In order for the gospel as God's forgiveness to be heard as personal, Stuempfle advises that preachers need to find contemporary idioms for the gospel, interpret it, speak it directly, and deliver it with focus on the person and work of Christ. While churches utilize the words *atonement*, *redemption*, and *justification*, Stuempfle argues that the usage of the words are rooted in the cult of animal sacrifice, slave trade, and the Roman legal system respectively. Such classic terminologies may not have the same effect on the contemporary audiences as they did before. Instead, he points out how Steimle illustrates in his sermon the forgiveness of God using the analogy of the unconditional love of a parent for his or her child. Preachers also need to take time to interpret what this forgiveness might mean for their contemporary audiences rather than assuming that such a concept automatically makes sense or that all listeners define the term the same way. In speaking the gospel personally and directly, Stuempfle contends that the sermon is an event in which the listeners meet Christ who then offers them forgiveness through his grace.

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[193] Luther, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 31, *Career of the Reformer: I*, ed. Harold J. Grimm (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 357.

Stuempfle presents another mode of the gospel as "antiphon to existence." Since the mirroring of our existence describes diverse conditions of our broken world, it is also necessary to offer the gospel in corresponding terms. Therefore, he introduces the relationship between law and gospel as one between alienation and reconciliation, anxiety and certitude, despair and hope, and transience and homecoming. In arguing that the preaching of the gospel is always dialectical, Lischer assumes that the dialectic is not just the words for preaching but ways of hearing God's words. Thus, preaching extends an invitation to "the dialectic of salvation history."[194] For instance, it always moves from one point to another—from chaos to order, from bondage to deliverance, from rebellion to obedience, from accusation to vindication, from despair to hope, from guilt to justification, from debt to forgiveness, from separation to reconciliation, from wrath to love, from judgment to righteousness, from defeat to victory, and finally from death to life.[195]

3) The Movement from Law to Gospel

Wilson acknowledges that the sermonic movement from law to gospel appeared first in Milton Crum's *Manual on Preaching* published in 1977. Although Stuempfle emphasizes the roles of law and gospel in preaching, he calls a sequential movement from law to gospel a "distortion."[196] This is because the roles cannot be sharply defined

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[194] Lischer, *A Theology of Preaching,* 33.

[195] Ibid.

[196] Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory*, 84.

and may move in unpredictable ways. Here, in conceiving the sermon as event, Crum introduced five "dynamic factors" that move in a narrative shape, namely (1) symptomatic behavior, (2) root, (3) resulting consequences, (4) gospel content, (5) new results. It is a movement that begins with a situation, moves to complication, and ends with resolution. Wilson assesses that Crum's homiletic method anticipated the later development of law and gospel that views them not just as theological terms but as the organic structure of a sermon.[197] Wilson claims that Lowry greatly depended on Crum in devising his homiletical plot.

Borrowing from Friedrich Schleiermacher's hermeneutical circle, Wilson shares the following diagram in Figure 1 to show how a sermon based on the movement from law to gospel works.

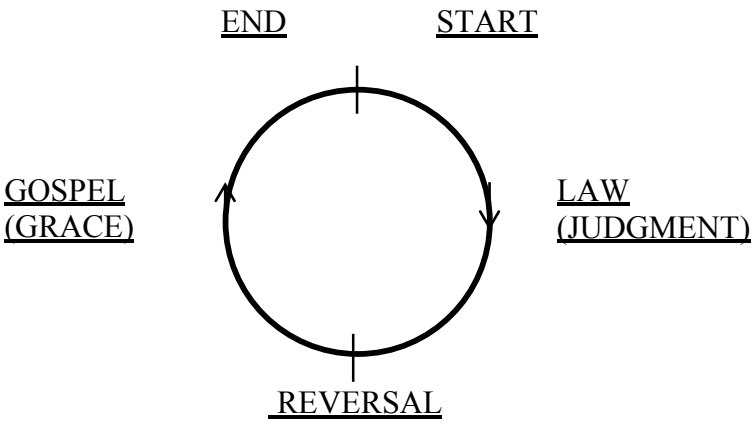

Figure 1. A structure of the sermon based on law and gospel[198]

It is evident that Wilson's law as judgment is very similar to Lowry's understanding in that it introduces the problem for the sermon. Whether law judges or mirrors, it holds the

[197] Ibid., 86.

[198] Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 122.

attention of the listeners by discovering the concerns for both the text and sermon. The sermon then moves to the lowest point at the reversal. As Lowry defines the function of the gospel as overturning the order of the world, Wilson also argues that "the reversal point is the containing wall that holds back the predominance of law from gospel."[199] After the reversal is disclosed, the sermon then moves to gospel or grace which provides an answer to the problem raised by law or judgment. Wilson is cautious not to identify gospel as a solution to a problem because it is "a relationship with God… the fruit of that lived relationship of faith, not a substitute for it."[200] However, Long continues to view his homiletic method—along with Lowry and Craddock's—as based on a problem-solution approach.[201]

4) Theological Problems with Sermonic Movement from Law to Gospel

In light of Wilson's analysis, there are two theological problems that need to be addressed regarding a sermon that moves from law to gospel, as in Lowry's plot. First, a sermon that ends only with gospel could inadvertently describe law as a problem to be solved or an ambiguity to be analyzed and overturned. Although Wilson acknowledges the positive role of law as "a gift and privilege" in Jewish history and context, he does not further develop how it might help to guide listeners. He briefly mentions John Calvin, who added a third use of law to Luther's first two uses of law, and Calvin calls this third use "an excitement to obedience, which comes close to some of the Jewish notions of

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[199] Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 123.

[200] Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory*, 86.

[201] Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 127.

Torah."[202] As a postmodern homiletician who utilizes law and gospel for sermon, Wilson maintains that it is necessary for listeners to be able to relate to the theological terms used by contemporary preachers. Therefore, he translates law and gospel as "judgment and grace" in *Imagination of the Heart*, and as "trouble and grace" in *The Practice of Preaching*. Such a shift in translation emphasizes the horizontal dimension of law as the "mirroring of lives," while not emphasizing the vertical dimension.[203] It may also lead to the impression that law only comes to human beings as trouble or burden that they bear, as they are waiting to be liberated by God.

Such a negative view of law is based on the fear of reducing the gospel to legalism, which is a view shared by both Wilson and Lowry. As Lischer and Stuempfle suggest, the only valid reaction from human beings—as the result of hearing the gospel—is to obey it hopefully out of growing joy in God. This is why Lowry also defines the last stage in his first model of the homiletical plot as anticipating the consequences, which he later dismisses because of its impression as punishment.[204] Law as a matter of obedience reduces the role of the human beings as unforgiveable sinners—those who still find themselves miserably falling short of obeying the commands of God even after experiencing justification by faith. Such a notion of human beings clearly differs from a Wesleyan theology that views them as active participants in the redeeming grace of God

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[202] Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 100.

[203] Wilson, *The Practice of Preaching*, 172.

[204] Lowry, *The Sermon*, 85.

in the world. In his explanation of law, Wesley has a more positive view, which actually helps a believer toward Christian perfection in the world as privilege and guidance.

Second, a neglect of law in the lives of Christians is connected with a false notion of autonomy that could easily turn into individualism. Brueggemann argues that the Western tradition of theology has often advocated the "autonomy of modernity as articulated by René Descartes and John Locke." This kind of autonomy is primarily about "emancipation from authority that impedes full maturation."[205] He believes that such a misconception of law has led Western Christianity not only to the trap of antinomianism but also to a theological gap with Judaism. For Brueggemann**,** there are two biblical reasons to restore command in the contemporary society. One reason is that the obedience which the Israelites were called to uphold is an *Exodus obedience* that reminded them that God intends to liberate those who are oppressed and enslaved. The other is the obedience that was meant to encourage the Israelites to find their true desire by living in communion with Yahweh. In naming it *Torah obedience*, Brueggemann argues, "[it] is distorting to imagine command outside of covenant; it is equally distorting to imagine covenant that has at its center anything other than command."[206]

In *No Shame in Wesley's Gospel*, Edward P. Wimberly argues that shame is the dominating experience of people today. Shame makes people feel unloved, disconnected from the community, and therefore uncared for.[207] According to Tillich, the fear of guilt

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[205] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 199-200.

[206] Ibid., 200.

[207] Wimberly, *No Shame in Wesley's Gospel*, xv.

and judgment was prevalent in the Middle Ages when people feared the wrath of God and condemnation from their community. It continued to dominate church and society until the Reformation and Enlightenment when the anxiety of spiritual emptiness and meaninglessness became more prevalent. Wimberly claims that this feeling of guilt presumed individuals who could develop their identities by being nurtured in their communal setting. A person can feel guilty when realizing a failure to be morally and ethically responsible in his or her community—whether it is family, church, or society. However, shame is "developmentally prior to guilt," in that it is often focused on developing oneself. Wimberly argues that people who are not grounded in a relational community are driven by shame and tend to pursue self-admiration, through which they attempt to find their happiness by relying on wealth and fame.[208]

Wimberly's argument can help us understand what happens when homileticians shift their interpretation of the law from judgment to trouble. Preachers should therefore intuitively understand that guilt is not the paradigm through which people understand how their identities were grounded in their communities. As shame becomes the dominant way through which individuals feel anxiety, it is very likely that listeners do not want to bear responsibility but merely seek pleasure in admiring themselves. Campbell argues that Lowry's approach offers an expressive-experiential sermon that is bound to be individualistic. Wimberley's insight points out how sermons that only interprets the law as something descriptive of our broken world only reflect the individualism of our society. According to Wimberly, disconnection from the community

[208] Ibid., 19.

does not allow the full development of one's identity. Wimberley claims that it is necessary to turn to Wesley's therapeutic narrative because shame can only be healed through "our relationships with God through Jesus Christ as well as our being empowered by the Holy Spirit to live *sanctified lives of love of God and neighbor*. [emphasis added]."[209]

[209] Ibid., xx.

CHAPTER 3

JOHN WESLEY'S THEOLOGY OF LAW AND GOSPEL

For John Wesley, the theological debate on law and gospel was not new at all. As the Methodist movement progressed, Wesley encountered so-called "gospel preachers" who were teaching others that there was no need for the law for Christians who were saved by the gospel of Christ. From Wesley's perspective, these preachers considered law inevitably as leading to works righteousness. They were worried that this undermined the saving power of Christ who justifies us by our faith alone. In his work, Wesley distinguishes between ceremonial law and moral law, and he contends that a person is still bound to keep the latter while striving for the holiness of God in sanctification. As John B. Cobb rightly notes, the law in Wesley's perspective is based on a person's love for God and neighbors.[210] Through his sermons, letters, and meetings, Wesley encourages his fellow Methodists to keep both the law and gospel as a way to understand and participate in the redemptive work of God. This chapter explores the context of antinomian teaching in gospel preaching. It then analyzes Wesley's theology on the law and gospel. Finally, the chapter reflects on Wesley's homiletic theology as the way of salvation in Christian life.

Wesley's theology of law and gospel can provide those in Wesleyan traditions today with a more adequate theological basis for a narrative theory of preaching. According to Wilson's analysis, Lowry's narrative preaching moves from law (trouble) to

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[210] John B. Cobb, Jr. *Grace and Responsibility: A Wesleyan Theology for Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 120.

gospel (grace). By contrast, Wesley recognizes a more active role of law after the experience of the gospel. Understanding Wesley's interpretation of law with the narrative of salvation could therefore provide insight on how to discern a salvific plot for a Wesleyan way of narrative preaching.

1. John Wesley and His Practical Theology

Before exploring Wesley's theology of law and gospel, it is interesting to consider whether Wesley could offer anything theological to homiletic study and practice in the 21st century. Since he was an Anglican priest who sought a religious revival in England in the 18th century, many do not consider him a serious theologian. There is a popular notion that he was more interested with practical Christianity than with theology. Maddox acknowledges that even some Methodist scholars who evaluate Wesley's theological convictions have traditionally apologized that Wesley was "not a real theologian."[211] It seems that the phenomenon of undervaluing Wesley as a theologian still continues among many scholars today. For example, William J. Abraham argues in his recent collaborative work in 2010 that Wesley "belongs in the canon of saints and evangelists more than he does in the canon of theologians. More precisely, he belongs in the canon of the church's preachers."[212]

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[211] Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), 15.

[212] William J. Abraham, "Wesley as Preacher" in *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley*, ed. Randy L. Maddox and Jason E. Vickers (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 111. For more detail on the antithesis between enlightenment and enthusiasm for Methodism, see "Enlightenment and Enthusiasm" in David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven: Yale University, 2005), 32-54.

However, Wesley's work as a theologian can be genuinely appreciated when he is viewed as a practical theologian who challenges the whole notion of theology today. In 1988, Maddox wrote an article "John Wesley: Practical Theologian?" in which he argues that Wesley's theological work can be adequately "assessed in terms of the approach to theology as a practical discipline (*scientia practica*) and remained influential in eighteenth-century Anglicanism."[213] According to Farley, until the Middle Ages, theology was considered a *habitus*—that is, a disposition of the soul toward God. This *habitus* was not bestowed upon conversion into Christianity; rather, it had to be nurtured by rigorous disciplines and reflection.[214] Theology, as developing one's *habitus*, was inherently practical since the primary forms of such theology and discipline were "the production of catechisms, liturgies, commentaries, and spiritual discipline manuals."[215] However, with the emergence of universities in the medieval period, theology started to lose its status as a spiritual discipline and an Aristotelian model of theology was adopted that valued rational knowledge as superior.

With theology becoming more theoretical, practical theology became a separate discipline and was pushed to the margins of theological education. Practical theology

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[213] Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 16.

[214] Edward Farley elaborates more on how the meaning of theology has gone through many changes since the early churches. In *Theologia*, he argues that theology originally had double meanings. First, it was a term for "an actual, individual cognition of God and things related to God, a cognition which in most treatments attends faith and has eternal happiness as its final goal." Second, it was a term for "a discipline, a self-conscious scholarly enterprise of understanding." Farley, 31.

[215] Randy Maddox, "John Wesley—Practical Theologian?" *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 23, no 1-2 (Spring – Fall 1988): 123.

gradually became a discipline in which theory was applied to practice, and specially reserved for preparing the clergy for the "technical aspect of their professions."[216] For the field of homiletics, this meant a new tension between theology and rhetoric with either of them taking importance over the other for the past century. In "A New Focus for Teaching Preaching," Long argues that the field of homiletics has gravitated toward a paradigm of theology as science, ever since the time of Philips Brooks.[217] In his lectures on preaching, Brooks defines preaching as communicating "truth through personality."[218] This expression suggests that while there is a fixed truth acquired from dogmatic and biblical studies, it is the responsibility of homileticians to mold their personalities to be effective speakers.

However, Barth took offense at the idea that the personalities of preachers could even be part of God's direct speech to the congregation through a sermon. Therefore, he puts heavy emphasis on theology as the truth to be delivered, not the preacher's personality. This is why Long claims that recent works by Craddock, Rice, and Lowry

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[216] Ibid., 125.

[217] Thomas G. Long, "A New Focus for Teaching Preaching," in *Teaching Preaching as a Christian Practice*, ed. Thomas G. Long and Leonora T. Tisdale (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 7-8.

[218] Brooks delivered Lyman Beecher Lectureship on Preaching in 1877 at Yale Divinity School in New Haven, Connecticut. In his lecture, he argues, "Truth through Personality is our description of real preaching. The truth must come really through the person…. It must come through his character, his affections, his whole intellectual and moral being." Phillips Brooks, *Lectures on Preaching: Delivered before the Divinity School of Yale College in January and February 1877* (London: H. R. Allenson, 1877), 8.

bring the argument full circle by pointing to the personality of the preacher again, since the effectiveness of storytelling depends on the one who tells the story.[219]

For this reason, Long suggests the envisioning of practice as the next organizing principle of preaching. He adopts the definition of *practice* from Dorothy Bass and Craig Dykstra—practices are "things Christian people do together over time to address fundamental human needs in response to and in the light of God's active presence in the world."[220] Long claims that their definition suggests something crucial—namely that the Christian life is not merely holding onto certain doctrines or sets of rules, but rather it is understood as "a way of life, a way of being in the world."[221] In other words, practices are where Christians do theology, not just ideas or feelings.

Wesley's understanding of theology is also concerned with nurturing and shaping a worldview that guides the lives of Christians in their response to the redeeming grace of God in the world. Maddox argues that Wesley was concerned with shaping the kind of worldview that guides Christian life and that he does this while drawing on various disciplines. Of course, Christian discipleship cannot be formed merely through acknowledgement of faith; it needs to be lived out in the lives of the believers. Nevertheless, Wesley still believes that "this basic worldview was a *sine qua non* of such

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[219] Long, 11.

[220] Craig Dykstra and Dorothy C. Bass, "A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices," in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life,* ed. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. P. Eerdmans Publishing, 2002), 18.

[221] Long, 12.

discipleship."[222] In *John Wesley: A Preaching Life*, Michael Pasquarello III also holds to the belief that Wesley was concerned with nurturing habitus—the salvific knowledge of God—through theology and Christian life. Therefore, Pasquarello argues, "The life of Christian people, which includes preachers as exemplary witnesses, is the fruit of the new law of the gospel ruling the intellect, affect, and will through the grace of the Holy Spirit."[223]

Viewing Wesley as a practical theologian concerned with nurturing the salvific knowledge of God through practices helps us overcome the separation between theology and rhetoric. Similar to how St. Augustine adopts Cicero's rhetoric as a way to convey the Christian message, Lowry's narrative preaching utilized narrative plot from popular culture to shape the sermonic content. However, such a separation leads to a theological fragmentation within the practice of homiletics with rhetoric as merely a matter of communication, not a matter of theology. If the way we communicate is a very theological act—as has been argued by Craddock—Wesley's theology of law and gospel can inform Methodist preachers not only about how to interpret the scripture but also how to shape and deliver the sermon. Therefore, Pasquarello argues, "the Methodist manner of preaching provided a practical wisdom for construing both law and gospel in light of the truth of Christ through the work of the Spirit who calls and creates a people in the knowledge and love of God."[224]

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[222] Maddox, "John Wesley – Practical Theologian?", 134.

[223] Michael Pasquarello III, *John Wesley: A Preaching Life* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), 4.

[224] Ibid., 15.

Secondly, Wesley's practical theology concerns transforming lives. Wesley certainly did not avoid engaging in philosophical debates regarding Christian faith, as can be seen in his theological responses to a heretical claim within the Methodist movement. However, his main concern was how to be assured of forgiveness of sins by the love of Christ and remain under the grace of God. Maddox claims that Wesley's practical theology is transformative since "one important criterion for assessing any doctrine would be consideration of its positive or negative results on Christian life in the world."[225] The call for a renewal of theology today begins with the fact that human practices are not perfect. Dykstra and Bass also argue that Christian practices "share in the mysterious dynamic of fall and redemption, sin and grace."[226] The goal of theology increases awareness of how the human condition or any human act is entangled with sin and is in need of correction. For Wesley, his practical theology is concerned not only with suggesting a better action for Christians but with forming Christian character in those who are responsible for a holy living that is grounded in the love of God.

Finally, Wesley's practical theology needs to be understood in light of his soteriology of how God works with human beings in God's redemptive work. For Wesley, doing theology was not only an anthropological effort to improve one's character or action. Rather, doing theology begins with God who already surrounds human agency in God's grace, and continues to help a person discern the will of God while striving for holiness of God. Therefore, Pasquarello maintains that Wesley's

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[225] Maddox, 134.

[226] Dysktra and Bass, 27.

preaching cannot be merely reduced to a skill set or method "divorced from the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit through the means of grace."[227] In other words, Wesley's preaching based on his theology of law and gospel can only be fully understood when it is situated in the redemptive narrative of God through the means of grace—namely prevenient grace, justifying grace, and sanctifying grace. These form the core of Wesley's narrative theology.

As a practical theologian, Wesley often had to respond to the conflicts within his Methodist circle as well as accusation from his opponents. One fierce attack on his movement is that his method was only works righteousness, as labeled by the "gospel preachers." In this analysis of their theological debate, it is interesting to note that the theology of the gospel preachers has similarities to that of some contemporary narrative preachers who tend to move from law to gospel as truncated in bad news to good news. Wesley's practical theological responses to such arguments in his sermons, letters, and journals help to discern the theological differences between gospel preachers and contemporary narrative preachers.

2. John Wesley and the Gospel Preachers

In the 1740s, Wesley worried that antinomianism in England was tempting some Christians to abandon the moral law. Its followers taught others that their faith cancelled out any need for good works. Thankfully, it is possible to get a glimpse of how Wesley and other Methodists understood antinomianism since this matter was discussed in the

[227] Pasquarello, xxi.

form of questions and answers at the Conference of Preachers on June 25, 1744 as follows:

Q. 19. What is Antinomianism?
A. The doctrine which makes void the law through faith.
Q. 20. What are the main pillars hereof?
A. (1.) That Christ abolished the moral law.
(2.) That, therefore, Christians are not obliged to observe it.
(3.) That one branch of Christian liberty is liberty from obeying the commandments of God.
(4.) That it is bondage to do a thing because it is commanded, or forbear it because it is forbidden.
(5.) That a believer is not obliged to use the ordinances of God, or to do good works.
(6.) That a preacher ought not to exhort to good works; not unbelievers, because it is hurtful; not believers, because it is needless.[228]

As one can observe, the antinomian teaching did not see faith and law as being continuous with each other; rather, those who have faith in Christ do not need to keep the law because Christ has liberated them from all commands. Two years later in 1746, Wesley had a conversation with an antinomian teacher and recorded this account in his journal:

> 'Do you believe you have nothing to do with the law of God' 'I have not. I am not under the law. I live by faith.' 'Have you, as living by faith, a right to everything in the world?' 'I have. All is mine, since Christ is mine.' 'May you then take anything you will anywhere? Suppose, out of a shop, without the consent or knowledge of the owner?' 'I may, if I want it. For it is mine. Only I will not give offence.' 'Have you also a right to all the women in the world?' 'Yes, if they consent.' 'And is not that a sin?' 'Yes, to him that thinks it is a sin. But not to those whose *hearts are free*.'[229]

[228] John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley: Volume VIII Addresses, Essays, Letters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1872), 278.

[229] W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater, eds., *The Works of John Wesley: Volume 20 Journal and Diaries III* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 117-118.

The antinomian teacher did not seem to have any moral obligation as the result of his faith in Christ. Rather, he seemed to believe that the freedom in Christ allowed him to live freely of any moral sins in the world. Wesley was offended by such a view and exclaimed, "Surely these are the first-born children of Satan!"[230] Wesley was concerned that even some of the Methodist preachers were being influenced by such a false teaching.

In his letter "To an Evangelical Layman" in 1751, Wesley responds to a critic who accused him of being a "legal preacher" by explaining why law is still needed for Christians in their pursuit of the holiness of God. He also described his issue with James Wheatly, one of the circuit preachers, who was "never clear, perhaps not sound, in the faith."[231] Wheatly gradually became a very popular preacher and was admired by many wherever he went. In being influenced by the Moravians, he spoke "much of the promises," but "little of the commands." Wesley once expressed a deep sorrow as Wheatly and others who followed him had not only harmed themselves but also wrongly accused the Methodist preachers as "legal preachers, legal wretches" or "Doctors," or "Doctors of Divinity."[232]

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[230] Ibid., 118.

[231] John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*. vol. 26, ed. Frank Baker (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 486.

[232] Ibid., 487.

Wesley was agitated that the antinomian teaching of the "gospel preachers" diffused the minds and hearts of Christians with wrong doctrine so that they eventually lost their appetite for sound doctrine.

> Why, this is the very thing I assert: That the gospel preachers, so called, corrupt their hearers; they vitiate their taste, so that they cannot relish sound doctrine; and spoil their appetite, so that they cannot turn it into nourishment; they, as it were, feed them with sweetmeats, till the genuine wine of the kingdom seems quite insipid to them. They give them cordial upon cordial, which make them all life and spirit for the present; but, meantime, their appetite is destroyed, so that they can neither retain nor digest the pure milk of the word.[233]

Wesley believes that the gospel preachers were spreading "death, not life, among their hearers." He presents evidence of the spiritual death spreading among the Methodist circles as he observes the dreadful impact of antinomianism that pulled some members away. Toward the end of this letter, he offers this observation:

> When I came to review the societies, with great expectation of finding a vast increase, I found most of them lessened by one-third; one entirely broken up. That of Newcastle itself was less by a hundred members than when I visited it before. And of those that remained, the far greater number in every place were cold, weary, heartless, dead. Such were the blessed effects of this gospel preaching! of this new method of preaching Christ![234]

Therefore, Wesley contends that "this so-called 'gospel-preaching' was only a 'new' method of spreading a perverse antinomianism that sapped their preaching of all sound doctrine and spiritual nourishment." Wesley's struggle with the followers of the antinomianism or the "gospel preachers" continued on until the later years of his movement as he wrote a letter to Miss Bishop in 1778, saying,

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[233] Ibid., 487.

[234] Ibid., 488.

> Nay, I find more profit in sermons on either good temper or good works than in what are vulgarly called gospel sermons. That term has now become a mere cant word. I wish none of our society would use it. It has no determinate meaning. Let but a pert, self-sufficient animal, that has neither sense nor grace, bawl out something about Christ and His blood or justification by faith, and his hearers cry out, 'What a fine gospel sermon!' Surely the Methodists have not so learnt Christ. We know no gospel without salvation from sin.[235]

Wesley's confrontation with the "gospel preachers" had historical connection to his confrontation with some Calvinists and Moravians in Wesley's day who held to antinomian teaching. While it is necessary to acknowledge that there is a wide array of doctrinal positions even among the Methodists, Wesley evidently struggled both theologically and ecclesiastically with those groups and had to provide his doctrinal position in defense of the Methodist movement. Wesley's debate with the Calvinists and English Moravians reveals deeper theological questions that are embedded in the "gospel preachers." The following section considers Wesley's theological debate with the Calvinists, which touches on the role of humanity in the process of salvation. His contention with the English Moravians demonstrates faith and assurance as distinctive realities, the latter being concerned with sanctification.

1) The Context of Theological Debates between Wesley and the Calvinists
The Nature of God – Sovereign or Relational?

To understand why Wesley was accused of legalism, it is essential to understand the context of England in the 16th century when the tension between Arminian and Calvinist beliefs started to build. In the 16th century, Queen Elizabeth I attempted to find a middle way between the Catholics in Trent and Calvinism in Geneva.

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[235] John Telford, ed., *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.: Vol., VI* (London: The Epworth Press, 1931), 326-327.

However, the returning Marian exiles brought the Geneva Bible to the common people and sought church reform, which led to the Puritans.[236] In the late 16th century, Jacob Arminius confronted the Calvinist theology that taught predestination—that the salvation of people was already predetermined by God. Although the Calvinist view of predestination emphasizes the sovereignty of God who was all powerful and all knowing, Arminius believes that such a theology undermines the role of human response in the process of salvation. While he acknowledged that God still knows what is going to happen, he held that human beings can still make their own choices in response to the divine initiative.[237]

Traditional Calvinists strongly reacted against the followers of Arminius and were offended by the idea that human beings could actually effect their own salvation. Such a theology directly contradicts the theology of the Reformers, namely *sola fide*—one is saved by faith alone, not by works. Furthermore, Arminian theology seems to undermine the sovereignty of God, who freely chooses those for whom salvation would be granted. Salvation is a gift to the elect in God's will, but not to everyone. However, Arminius believed that Christ died for all, not just for the few elect—in this way, he claims the universal atonement of Christ for all. The theological dispute between the Arminian and Calvinist views led to the Synod of Dort in 1619, whose well-known acronym TULIP stood for total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement,

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[236] Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013), 7.

[237] Ibid., 11.

irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints. The followers of Arminius were therefore condemned as semi-Pelagian.

While Wesley agrees with the Calvinists that human beings are sinful because of original sin, he also believes that the grace of God enabled people to have a certain measure of responsibility in response to the grace of God. Using their freedom, people may accept the gift of salvation from God or reject it. Wesley's view of human freedom in the process of salvation is based on his belief in God as love. In *Calvin vs Wesley*, Don Thorsen astutely argues that Wesley's understanding of God's sovereignty rests on the nature of God as love. Although God is omnipotent, God still graciously intends to be in relation with God's creatures by allowing them to make their own decisions. In other words, Wesley views both sovereignty and love not as "contradictory; [but] they are complementary."[238] However, this does not mean that human beings make their own decisions based on whether to receive or reject the salvific grace of God autonomously. Rather, it is the work of the Holy Spirit who already surrounds human beings in God's prevenient grace. The Spirit helps people to choose between right and wrong, convinces them that they are sinners, and brings them to Christ for justification. It is ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit to help them to be restored in the holiness of God through sanctification.

While the dispute between them still continued on even into the 17th century, Heitzenrater claims that their theological argument was becoming abstract in keeping with the "growing rationalism of the age, which was flowering into various patterns of

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[238] Don Thorsen, *Calvin vs Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013), 12.

scientific, philosophical, and religious thinking."[239] Although theological debates of faith were critical, many Christians in England—whether Puritans, non-conformists, or Arminians—were concerned with the growing tendency of "spiritual lethargy and moral laxity" in their society. Whether holy living was the proof as argued by the Puritans or an acceptance of the empowerment by God by the Arminians, the people in England needed spiritual revival that would encourage piety and holy living among the people. In being influenced by German Pietism, the religious societies—which were started by Anthony Horneck in the 1670s—began sprouting in England with a goal to encourage moral life and a rejuvenation of religion among its people. It is in this context that Wesley was instructed in his discipline by his parents and was pursuing a holy living that would be fruitful through his Methodist movement later.

2) The Context of Theological Debates between Wesley and the Moravians: Salvation as Event or Process?

There is no doubt that Wesley was greatly influenced by the Moravians in his faith journey. When he set sail for Georgia to work as a missionary in the colony there in 1735, his ship met powerful Atlantic storms. As he faced imminent death, he realized how fragile his faith was and questioned his salvation. When the ship was battling against the third and worst storm, Wesley attended an evening service by the German Moravians and witnessed how boldly they continued to sing the psalms and prayed together. It is clear that Wesley was deeply impressed with the audacious faith of the Moravians as he wrote in his journal, "Many of the English screamed out. The Germans looked up, and

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[239] Ibid., 19.

without intermission sang on."[240] However, Wesley was struggling in his heart since he lacked the assurance of the faith that the Moravians demonstrated. Being influenced by the faith he had witnessed, Wesley maintained a friendship with the Moravians in the colony of Georgia for the next two years.

In 1738, Wesley returned to England in bitterness and disappointment over his seemingly failed work in Georgia. He came into contact with Peter Böhler, a Lutheran minister ordained into the Moravian ministry who was waiting to embark on his own journey to Georgia. While Wesley was struggling with the assurance of faith and wondering whether his faith was weak, Böhler convinced him that it was not a matter of the level of faith but the absence of faith. In other words, according to Böhler, there were "no degrees of faith"—that is, either you have faith or you do not have it. He also argues that faith is always followed by freedom from sin, fear, and doubt. Therefore, any sign of these three in a person indicates that this person does not have faith in Christ at all. On April 23, Wesley came to believe that "faith converts at once" after being convinced by five Moravians, including Böhler. However, the more Wesley was drawn to the teaching of the Moravians, his relationship with other Methodists worsened—including with his brother Charles— as they were "much offended at his worse than unedifying discourse."[241]

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[240] W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater, eds., *The Works of John Wesley: Volume 18* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), 345.

[241] Heitzenrater, 85.

Convinced by Böhler that conversion was instantaneous, Wesley started preaching "Justification by Faith Alone" from March 1738. Finally, in May 1738, Wesley experienced an event that caused him to claim that he had not been a Christian at all before. On May 24, Wesley attended a Moravian meeting in Aldersgate Street and experienced his faith as a new reality, and this account is found in his journal:

> In the evening, I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.[242]

Wesley experienced that Christ was the One who liberated him from the guilt of sins, and who convinced him that he was a child of God. It is clear how his conversion experience affected him as he preached "Justification by Faith" at St. Mary Episcopal Church only a few days later.

Although his Aldersgate experience transformed his life with zeal for the "new gospel," it still concerned him that he woke up "in peace, but not in joy," which was a sign of the lack of faith, according to the Moravians in England. Deeply troubled, Wesley decided to visit the Moravian community in Germany and found out that the English Moravians "collapsed sanctification into justification and, in Pietist fashion, extended forgiveness of sins (imputed righteousness) into freedom from sin (infused righteousness)."[243] For Wesley, such a belief still posed conflict with both his tradition as

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[242] Ward and Heitzenrater, eds, 249-250.

[243] Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 91.

an Anglican and his personal experience. Although one could have faith in God, it was still possible for a person to have fear and doubt. Therefore, Wesley contends that assurance and faith are two distinct realities that do not necessarily merge into one as argued by the Moravians in England.

For Wesley, while faith is given as a gift from God, it needs to grow in the hearts of people with willful acts and discipline. Christ justifies people from their sinful status, thus delivering them from the dominion of sin and guilt. However, Wesley believes that it is possible to lose righteousness unless a person continually strives for the love and holiness of God throughout life. In other words, the way of salvation for Wesley is a constant process through which God empowers God's people to be restored in the image of God that is the perfect love for God and neighbors. Although the Moravians view salvation as an event granted by the power of God, Wesley encourages his followers to cultivate the habit of growing in love for God and others because salvation is a process. He often describes it as a growth of Christians who begin as infants and grow to be adults through such a process.

Wesley's theology of God and the way of salvation provide a theological framework to interpret how he understands the relationship between law and gospel. For Wesley, God in the Trinity created the world in God's love. In Christ, God not only saves people from their sins (as the Priest), but also gives them law to stay in their response to the grace of God (as the King). While many accuse Wesley of works righteousness, he counters these claims by emphasizing the work of the Holy Spirit, who is already present

in the journey toward perfection in God's love. Therefore, the following section moves on to examine Wesley's understanding of God as the *creator*, *redeemer*, and *helper*.

3. Wesley's Theology of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit

1) God—Creator, Provider, Governor, and Healer

According to Maddox, Wesley discusses four aspects of God revealed to us in scripture and experience, namely creator/sustainer, provider, governor, and healer. First, Wesley affirms that God is the creator and sustainer of the world. Maddox argues that Wesley held to the general assumptions of his time, in that "creation per se had occurred relatively instantaneously (i.e., in six days) about six thousand years earlier, and there had been no origination of loss of matter since creation, only regulated fluctuations in its form."[244] Although the scientific evidence that was found later in the century might confront such traditional doctrines, for Wesley it is important to acknowledge that it is God who created the world out of nothing—or, *creatio ex nihilo*. Despite the Fall later, he argues that the creation is not inherently evil because it was essentially created out of God's love. Kenneth Collins elaborates more on this point by claiming that such doctrine is the essential characteristic of God, who is eternal. If God did not create the world out of nothing, it means that there is something else that is eternal and independent of anything else for its existence.[245]

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[244] Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 58.

[245] Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 34.

Since God created the world in God's love, God still surrounds the world in God's grace and does not abandon it. Instead of abandoning the world, God is the sustainer who desires harmony and connection among God's creatures, who then glorify the beauty of God. In his sermon "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse 6," Wesley describes this thought more fully: "'Our *Father'*—our Preserver, who day by day sustains the life he has given; of whose continuing love we now and every moment receive life and breath and all things."[246] Wesley believes that God gave the law—which is the perfect will of God at the beginning—so that creatures could depend on one another in its love for God and others.

Secondly, God is a provider. While God as the creator/sustainer allows the creation to operate through the law, Wesley also believes that God gives particular providence to those whom God chooses in God's grace. In his sermon, "On Divine Providence," he argues,

> Admitting then, that, in the common course of nature, God does act by general laws, he has never precluded himself from making exceptions to them, whensoever he pleases; either by suspending that law in favor of those that love him, or by employing his mighty angels: By either of which means he can deliver out of all danger them that trust in him.[247]

Wesley found the evidence for this firstly in scripture—specifically that God protects God's children by performing miracles that may operate the natural law established in the

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[246] Wesley, "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse 6," in *The Works of John Wesley: Volume 1*, ed. Albert C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 578.

[247] Wesley, "Divine Grace," in *The Works of John Wesley: Volume 2*, ed. Albert C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 546.

beginning of God's creation. Then, he also witnessed this through his own experience that God saved him from attacks by mobs on more than one occasion.

According to Collins, Wesley did not limit such providence of God only to those who believe in God. Rather, Wesley describes a threefold circle that God shows God's care and concern.[248] First, the outer circle includes all humanity, which is not only Christians but also "the heathens likewise." Second, a smaller circle has all the Christians who believe in Christ as their Lord. Finally, the third circle contains real Christians, those who "worship God, not in form only, but in spirit and in truth." Therefore, it is possible to argue that Wesley's view of God as the provider is universal in a way that God cares for everyone regardless of who they are. However, as people desire a more sincere relationship with God, God also shows more care for them and helps them to grow in their love for God.

Thirdly, through his writings, Wesley called God the governor or judge. God is the ultimate governor who rules the world with justice and order.[249] Moreover, God is the supreme judge who distinguishes right and wrong. Maddox acknowledges that God as the governor is bound to provoke a theological debate on theodicy. If God is the ruler of all, does God also cause the suffering and pain in the world? In other words, does God allow evil to be inflicted on people? Maddox argues that Wesley did not support the dualistic notion of God and evil because this notion naturally reduces the role of humanity in

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[248] Ibid., 542-543.

[249] Maddox, 61.

making decisions based on free will. Rather, Wesley connects suffering and sin to human sin, which originally came into the world through disobedience to the command of God.

In the meantime, Wesley believes that there are innocent individuals in the world who suffer greatly. In realizing the limits of tying suffering to human sin too closely, Wesley defends the idea that suffering could be beneficial in terms of encouraging spiritual growth. When going through turmoil either personally or socially, a person may rely more on God in these circumstances, since it is God who promises deliverance from dangers and trials in this world by God's grace. Therefore, Wesley also focuses on the redemption of God when God brings healing and liberation to those who suffer evil temporarily, in the present. Wesley declares this point in his sermon: "It is enough, that we are assured of this one point, that all these transient evils will issue well, will have a happy conclusion, and that 'Mercy first and last will reign.'"[250]

Finally, Wesley believes that God is a physician and healer. Maddox indicates that Wesley's view of God as a healer was not limited only to the souls of people. By contrast, Wesley pursues the notion of holistic healing for human beings in body as well as soul. The Fall brought sin into the world with death as the final consequence for disobeying the words of God. While God did not intend the Fall, God promises to restore what was lost through the redemptive work of God in Christ. Maddox proposes that Wesley went even further, believing that God would give more glory for creation.[251] Therefore, it is not merely a question of restoring what human beings lost through the

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[250] Ibid., 499.

[251] Ibid., 62.

Fall but of receiving more blessings than could even be imagined in creation, before its corruption. Wesley puts this idea into his sermon entitled "Original Sin" that God has already given us healing for life: "You 'that were dead in sins hath he quickened'. He hath already given you a principle of life, even 'faith in him who loved *you,* and gave himself for *you*'! Now 'go on' 'from faith to faith', until your whole sickness be healed, and all that 'mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus'!"[252]

2) Christ—Prophet, Priest, and King

In his commentary on Matthew 1:16, Wesley explains that the word Christ in Greek and Messiah in Hebrew means the "prophetic, priestly, and royal character."[253] According to Jewish tradition, the anointed were to assume the offices of "Prophets, Priests, and Kings," Along this line, Wesley believes that Christ is the one who fulfilled these offices in God's love for humanity.

First, Wesley holds to the belief that Christ is the Prophet who gives us the moral law. It is the condition of human beings that they live in "total darkness, blindness, ignorance of God." Although they try very hard to find "the things of God," they are bound to fail because of their corruption in the Fall. Here, Wesley argues that Christ is a prophet who "enlightens our minds and teaches us the whole will of God."[254] In his sermon, "The Origin, Nature, Properties, and use of the Law," Wesley describes how God created the "firstborn creatures" or "angelic beings" to please God by knowing who

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[252] Ibid., 185.

[253] John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* (London: Epworth Press, 1952), 12.

[254] Ibid.

their creator was. According to Wesley, God gave them understanding so that they could "distinguish truth from falsehood and good from evil."[255] The purpose of the law is to increase their happiness by helping them to know the perfect will of God. Wesley describes the same law as being given also to human beings by being "engraved upon their inmost spirits." As Christ was in the beginning with God, Wesley argues that Christ is the law-giver since he is "the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being."[256]

Collins perceptively connects Christ, moral law, and prevenient grace in his dissertation, "John Wesley's Theology of Law." Along the line of Christ being the "true light" who gives "light to everyone coming into the world" (John 1:9), Wesley comments in his note, "Who lighteth every man—By what is vulgarly termed natural conscience, pointing out at least the general lines of good and evil."[257] Even when people still do not know Christ, Wesley believes that Christ is revealed to them through their conscience in knowing what is right and wrong. Collins argues that such a conscience as a "manifestation of prevenient grace" is "irresistible."[258] Since Christ is the incarnation of God who reveals the perfect love of God, Christ gives the moral law to human beings so that they might have some idea about their creator who governs the world in love and

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[255] John Wesley, "The Origin, Nature, Properties, and Use of the Law," in *John Wesley on Christian Practice: Volume III*, ed. Kenneth Cain Kinghorn (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 21.

[256] Ibid.

[257] Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament,* 299.

[258] Kenneth J. Collins, "John Wesley's Theology of Law" (PhD diss., Drew University, 1984), 91.

constantly calls them to be restored in their broken relationship with their creator. Christ does so by revealing the whole will of God through giving law.

Secondly, Wesley refers to Christ as a Priest who reconciles the world to its creator through his sacrifice. As sin alienates people from God, human beings have no capacity to ensure "free access to God."[259] In his sermon "Salvation by Faith," Wesley explains that although the law as the perfect will of God reveals our sins, it "cannot bring deliverance from sin."[260] He also claims that there is no one who can perfectly uphold the law because of their fallen condition, and Christ is the only One who can offer the appropriate sacrifice on behalf of human beings so that they might be reconciled to God. To support this point, Wesley uses Paul's words in Romans 3:24: "People are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood."

Although Wesley uses the language of atonement—that is, Christ offered a sacrifice in his mediating work through death—Maddox raises a caution against viewing Wesley's theology of Christ's work as a *Priest* as "changing God's mind about us" as much as "our mind about God."[261] He is concerned that Christ's mediating work often leads to an anthropomorphic misunderstanding that "God must be repeatedly persuaded to forgive and accept us."[262] Rather, Maddox proposes that Christ's atoning work is to

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[259] Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, 12.

[260] John Wesley, "Salvation by Faith," in *John Wesley on Christian Beliefs: Volume 1*, ed. Kenneth Cain Kinghorn (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 40.

[261] Maddox, 110.

[262] Ibid.

pardon and restore the fallen creatures to the favor of God so that they could be empowered to participate in the sanctifying work of God in them. In other words, while Christ reconciles us to God, Christ also helps us to maintain our restored relationship with God.

Finally, Wesley describes the work of Christ as a King. Although people are justified through the atonement of Christ, they still experience a "strange misrule of appetites and passions."[263] While Christ frees believers from the power of sin through justification, they still suffer from sins remaining in them. In his sermon "On Sin in Believers," Wesley states that Christian believers—even after their justification—still "have a natural tendency toward evil, a proneness to depart from God and cling to the things of earth."[264] He argues that they are disposed to backslide with "pride, self-will, unbelief, and sin." Therefore, Wesley believes that people still need Christ, who in "his royal character, reigns in our hearts, and subdues all things to himself."[265] In other words, people still need a king who can rule them as they are in the process of being "restored to the image of God those whom God first reinstates in God's favor."[266]

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[263] Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, 12.

[264] John Wesley, "On Sin in Believers," in *John Wesley on Christian Doctrine*: *Volume 1*, ed. Kenneth Kinghorn (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 218.

[265] Ibid.

[266] John Wesley, "The Law Established through Faith, Discourse 2," in *John Wesley on Christian Practice: Volume III*, ed. Kenneth C. Kinghorn (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 56.

Collins suggests that regeneration as a new birth for believers links the "juridical theme of forgiveness and the participatory one of renewal."[267] Wesley views God as a physician, and with this thought he also sees how Christ's work brings about regeneration, through which a person begins the journey to become holy as God is holy. Wesley's understanding of salvation was not only juridical—that one is pardoned from sin, but also therapeutic. One is restored in the image of God, which was given in the beginning. In relation to this notion, Collins argues that "genuine imparted holiness must never be understood apart from being in Christ by means of the *Holy Spirit* [emphasis added] who is the fount of all holiness."[268] The following section turns to consider the work of the Holy Spirit, who is present throughout the way of salvation for God's people.

3) The Holy Spirit—the Helper

Wesley gives a brief summary of the identity and work of the Holy Spirit in his *Letter to a Roman Catholic*.

> I believe the infinite and eternal Spirit of God, equal with the Father and the Son, to be not only perfectly holy … but the immediate cause of all holiness in us: enlightening our understandings, rectifying our wills and affections, renewing our natures, uniting our persons to Christ, assuring us of the adoption of sons, leading us in our actions, purifying and sanctifying our souls and bodies to a full and eternal enjoyment of God.

Clearly, Wesley acknowledges that the Holy Spirit is equal to God the Father and the Son Christ in sharing the same substance. Wesley comments in his note that the Holy Spirit "proceeds from the Son, as well as from the Father, may be fairly argued from His being

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[267] Collins, 111.

[268] Ibid., 112.

called 'the Spirit of Christ' (1 Peter 1:11), and from His being here said to be sent by Christ from the Father, as well as by the Father in His name."[269] The Holy Spirit humbly obeys the will of God by being sent faithfully to the world and to work in believers.

Why does God in Christ send the Holy Spirit to the world? Wesley writes that the Holy Spirit is the immediate cause of all holiness in us. On this point, Maddox argues that while God graciously pardons sins for people, God also strengthens them through "a renewed empowering Presence" in their lives.[270] Such a presence of the Holy Spirit is described as "the presence of Responsible Grace" by Maddox and "the presence of Holy Love" by Collins. What seems to bind both Maddox and Collins together is the notion that the Holy Spirit helps believers to become children of God and live as children of God. In other words, the Holy Spirit is the presence of help working in the lives of people, specifically by inviting them to Christ, helping them accept him, and empowering them to strive for the holiness of God.

In prevenient grace, the Holy Spirit already surrounds sinners and helps them realize that they are fallen. As argued in the office of Christ as the Prophet, the Holy Spirit sent by Christ reveals the law already engraved in the hearts of sinners through their conscience. They intuitively distinguish right from wrong, albeit imperfectly. The Holy Spirit convinces them that they are sinners whose destiny is to be headed for destruction unless they accept Christ as their Lord. The Holy Spirit brings them to Christ, who offers pardon for their sins. Collins asserts that the Holy Spirit must play "a leading,

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[269] Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, 366.

[270] Maddox, 119.

superintending role in the process of repentance: convicting, illuminating, and teaching—even actively wooing the sinful soul."[271] It is important to note here that although individuals have the freedom to reject the redeeming grace of Christ, they do not make such a decision alone. Therefore, Collins contends that for Wesley, the saving faith comes "sometimes by reading; though ordinarily by hearing" whereby "the Spirit is mediated through the Word, moral law, as well as the promises of the gospel."[272]

4. The Wesleyan Way of Salvation

Prevenient Grace, Justifying Grace, and Sanctifying Grace

As a practical theologian, Wesley's main concern is how a person experiences salvation in this world. For Wesley, salvation is not merely concerned with going to heaven. Rather, it is a present experience as one is restored to the original image of God. He described the basic sequence of salvation as follows:

> Our main doctrines, which include all the rest, are three: that of repentance, of faith, and of holiness. The first of these we account, as it were, the porch of religion; the next, the door; the third, religion itself.[273]

Wesley also gave a more detailed description in his sermon, "On Working Out Your Own Salvation." He begins with preventing grace, moves to justification, and finally leads to sanctification. Wesley defines justification as being "saved from the guilt of sin and restored to the favour of God" and sanctification as "we are saved from the power and

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[271] Collins, 123.

[272] Ibid., 124.

[273] Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. VIII, 472.

root of sin, and restored to the image of God."[274] The direction of the sequence is noted by Colin W. Williams in his study on Wesley: "To be true to Wesley, therefore, we must present his theology through the order of salvation (*ordo salutis*)."[275]

While the term "the order of salvation" implies a direction within one's salvific movement, Maddox is concerned that it does not exactly capture the dynamic in Wesley's theology of salvation, but is closer to Reformed theology. First, the term suggests each aspect of salvation as a discrete stage that a person achieves rather than a gradual growth in a relationship with God. Second, it implies that one moves from the lower stage to a higher one while not being worried about regression. For Wesley, there is always a possibility for someone to lose the grace that was initially received from God if the person fails to strive for the holiness of God. Finally, Maddox considers that the order of salvation originates in scholastic concern to define each stage in technical terms. He postulates that Wesley was more interested in addressing the "pastoral needs of his revival movement" than in explaining the movement of one's salvation.[276] Therefore, Maddox suggests that Wesley's theology of salvation must be understood as "the way of salvation" rather than "the order of salvation." This attention to the possibility of backsliding has implications for a Wesleyan way of narrative preaching.

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[274] John Wesley, "On Working Out Our Own Salvation," in *John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology*, ed. Albert C. Outler & Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 488.

[275] Colin W. Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960), 40.

[276] Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 158.

1) Prevenient Grace

In "On Working Out Your Own Salvation," Wesley defines prevenient grace as "preventing grace; including the first wish to please God, the first dawn of light concerning his will, and the first slight transient conviction of having sinned against him." It marks the beginning of God's saving work to restore the lost image of God in human beings in God's love for them. Prevenient grace already exists even before human beings are conscious of such work of God in Christ. It is described as something that is already free in all and for all—it surrounds people and is ready to call them to Christ through repentance and justification.

For Wesley, there is no one in the world who does not have prevenient grace; he compares this with a person's moral conscience, even if distorted:

> For, allowing that all souls of men are dead in sin by *nature*, this excuses none, seeing there is no man that is in a state of mere nature. There is no man, unless he has quenched the Spirit, that is wholly void of the grace of God. No man living is entirely destitute of what is vulgarly called "natural conscience." But this is not natural: it is more properly termed "preventing grace." Every man has a greater or less measure of this, which waiteth not for the call of man.[277]

Despite arguments about a mere state of nature, Wesley believes that everyone carries the light of conscience, which he saw as the evidence of prevenient grace.

However, it is easy to mistreat prevenient grace as if it were meritorious—that is, something that depends on human beings' works for their salvation. Collins traces such a theological argument to one between Calvinists and Arminians in the 16th and 17th century England. During this time as they engaged in heated debates regarding the role of

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[277] Wesley, "On Working Out Our Own Salvation," 490-491.

humanity in the salvific process, Arminians believed that "total depravity," the sinful condition as understood by the Calvinists, necessarily led to predestination. Since human beings lack any ability to respond to the saving work of Christ, it is God's sole responsibility to decide who would be saved or not. Here, Arminians would object to this thought by arguing that God empowers human beings to respond to God's saving work through prevenient grace in that it involves "not only the general illumination of sinners that makes them responsible (again as a result of the work of Christ), but also the conviction of sin brought about by the ministrations of the Holy Spirit."[278]

In *Practical Divinity*, Thomas A. Langford points out that Wesley opposes the Calvinistic notion of predestination because it implied unconditional reprobation. If some are unconditionally elected by God for salvation, others are destined to the path of destruction regardless of their will. Such cruelty by God seems to betray the ultimate attribute of God as love. Therefore, Langford argues that for Wesley, the teaching of predestination disregards prevenient grace; it also "makes preaching vain, tends to destroy holiness, fosters pride, tends to antinomianism, creates a disregard for those considered reprobate, undermines acts of charity, and dishonors the loving of God of Christian revelation."[279]

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[278] Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 75.

[279] Thomas A. Langford, *Practical Divinity: Theology in the Wesleyan Tradition*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 29.

2) Repentance

When individuals are awakened by the Spirit to realize that they are sinners before God, they would cry out for divine help. In his sermon "The Way to the Kingdom," Wesley calls for repentance, conviction, or self-understanding since a person is corrupted in every capacity and faculty of the soul. Wesley refers to the recognition of being very distant from the original righteousness of God through depravity. For someone to understand that he or she is sinful, the realization can be devastating because there should also be the realization that the consequence is death. Wesley asks, "Do you not know that 'the wages of sin is death?' This death is not only temporal, but also eternal."[280] In facing judgment before God, there is absolutely nothing that human beings can do to save themselves. Although a person may do many good works prior to repentance and justification, Wesley believes that these are not enough to count them as righteous before God. Therefore, Maddox emphasizes that repentance prior to justification is "not a human initiative but a response to God's gracious prevenience in awakening."[281]

For Wesley, believers need repentance even after they were justified by God's grace because he believes that inward sin still remains in them. A person may repent of his or her sins, ask for forgiveness from God, and decide not to commit sin any more. However, in his sermon "On Sin in Believers," Wesley argues that a believer who is born of God still struggles with sin, namely inward sin. By this term, Wesley is referring to

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[280] Wesley, "The Way to the Kingdom," in *John Wesley on Christian Beliefs*, vol. 1, 133.

[281] Maddox, 162.

"any sinful disposition, emotion, or affection, such as pride, self-will, and any kind of love of the world—for example, lust, anger, or any inclination contrary to the mind that was in Christ." He justifies his arguments by taking an example from Paul who addresses the believers at Corinth: "I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh." (1 Corinthians 3:1) Wesley also provides experiences of Christians who constantly backslide on their way to salvation. Along with this idea of progress, Wesley compares those who are born of God as "infants in Christ who are holy." However, they are not fully holy yet.

Maddox considers Wesley's two aspects of repentance as integral to a person's constant need of Christ as he or she strives for the love and holiness of God. Maddox explains,

> Repentance prior to justifying faith is characterized as a conviction that is not initially mitigated by a sense of forgiveness. By contrast, repentance within the Christian life retains the confidence of one's renewed pardoning relationship with God, even as it acknowledges continuing sin and need.[282]

When a person recognizes the need for God's forgiving grace and is constantly reminded of it, Maddox argues that the person can continually be revitalized in "responsible growth in holiness."

3) Justification

While repentance is the acknowledgment of the need for divine help, justification is the grant of it. Wesley defines justification in one word in his *Dictionary*—

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[282] Ibid., 165.

forgiveness.[283] By the justifying grace of God, a person is pardoned and considered as righteous by the merit of Christ. Salvation is not earned through good works; it can only be obtained through faith as a gift of God. Langford points out that although Wesley once grounded moral achievement as the foundation of salvation during his time at Charterhouse, Christ Church, Oxford, his experience at Aldersgate in 1738 made him find "the base for true holiness," which is faith. Therefore, in only eighteen days after his transforming experience, he preached his sermon "Salvation by Faith" at the University of Oxford in the Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary:

> We have been considering the present day salvation that comes through faith. This salvation delivers us from sin and its consequences. We often refer to this work of God as justification. Understood in its largest sense, justification means deliverance from guilt and punishment through the atonement of Christ, which is applied to the soul of the sinner who trusts in him. This trust leads to deliverance from the power of sin, through Christ who lives in the heart. Those who are justified in this way—that is, saved by faith—are truly born again of the Spirit into a new life.[284]

Wesley acknowledges that although the law makes individuals aware of their sins, the law "cannot bring deliverance from sin." It is only through faith that a person is delivered from the power and guilt of sin.

What kind of faith makes justification possible? Wesley acknowledges that saving faith is "not merely a speculative, rational thing, a cold, lifeless assent, or a train of ideas in the head."[285] According to the scriptures, even the devil has intellectual knowledge that

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[283] Ibid., 166.

[284] Wesley, "Salvation by Faith," in *John Wesley on Christian Beliefs*, vol. 1, 41.

[285] Ibid., 39.

Jesus is the Son of God. By contrast, Wesley defines faith as "a disposition of the heart"[286] that one has "trust and confidence that God both hath and will forgive our sins."[287] Faith is the gift of God when God graciously offers it to those who sincerely acknowledge that they are guilty before God. It produces humility as its very nature. For Wesley, such faith is not bestowed on people upon justification. Rather, he believes that God gave faith to individuals even prior to their justification in God's prevenient grace. In realizing their sin and need, they become convicted and then desire to flee from judgment. Wesley call it the faith of a servant. However, upon being justified by God's grace, a person could have the faith of a son.

While justification liberates people from the dominion of sins by the merits of Christ, Wesley is careful not to insist that a person is completely free from sin as in "imputed righteousness." In his letter to James Hervey, he argues along this point:

> Then, for Christ's sake, and for the sake of the immortal souls which He has purchased with His blood, do not dispute for that particular phrase "the imputed righteousness of Christ." It is not scriptural; it is not necessary …. But it has done immense hurt. I have had abundant proof that the frequent use of this unnecessary phrase, instead of 'furthering men's progress in vital holiness,' has made them satisfied without any holiness at all—yea, and encouraged them to work all uncleanness with greediness.[288]

While God offers people the good news of pardon through the merits of Christ, God also empowers them to participate in the redeeming history of God in the world. In other

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[286] Ibid.

[287] Wesley, "Justification by Faith," in *John Wesley on Christian Beliefs*, vol. 1, 105.

[288] John Telford, ed., *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley*, *A. M.*, vol. III (London: The Epworth Press, 1931), 372.

words, although justification as the good news is quite remarkable in the process of one's salvation, it is not the end of it as the ultimate celebration. As Outler insightfully names it, "Wesley's characteristic emphasis was that we are pardoned in order to participate."[289] Since the justifying grace of God comes with both pardon and power, for Wesley justification naturally leads to sanctification, which gradually removes one from sin and recovers the image of God.

4) New Birth/Regeneration

After a person is pardoned by God's justifying grace, Wesley argues that the person is ready for the new birth or regeneration. Although justification and new birth are related to each other and bound by the saving faith of God, Wesley distinguishes a difference between them in his sermon "The New Birth" where he explains the matter: "Justification refers to the main work that God does *for* us in forgiving our sins. The new birth refers to the grand work that God does *in* us by renewing our fallen nature."[290] While justification changes the outer relationship with God where the person is called righteous by relying on the merits of Christ, the new birth is the initial stage of process that actually enables the person to be holy inwardly. In a chart reproduced below, Collins helpfully summarizes the theological marks of justification and new birth recalled from Wesley's sermon entitled "The Great Privilege of Those That Are Born of God."

Justification	Regeneration
Implies a relative change	Implies a real change
God does something "for us"	God does something "in us"

[289] Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 168.

[290] Wesley, "The New Birth," in *John Wesley on Christian Practice*, vol. *III,* 226.

Changes our outward relation to God	Changes our inmost souls so that we become saints
Restores us to the favor of God	Restores us to the image of God
Takes away the guilt of sin	Takes away the power of sin

Table 1. Wesley's understanding of justification and regeneration (Kenneth Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 201)

Wesley's theology of the new birth distinguishes him from Luther, who holds the view that Christian is *simul Justus et peccator*—at the same time justified but still a sinner. By being born of God, Wesley believes that a person could actually become holy by going on the journey toward Christian perfection. For Wesley, the pursuit of holiness is to recover the fallen image of God that was once given to human beings in the beginning. He emphasizes that it is primarily God's *moral image* that believers need to recover since that is what Paul called "true righteousness and holiness." This moral image defines the relationship of the human beings with God and one another: love. Collins argues that for Wesley, the new birth entails not just freedom from the power of sin, but also freedom to love God and neighbor.[291] Although faith is the gracious gift of God that draws one to embark on the journey toward the holiness of God, it is love that is the foundation of such faith as Wesley defines Christian perfection as nothing but "perfect love."[292]

While justification is the saving work of Christ for us, Wesley considers the new birth as the work of the Holy Spirit in us. This does not mean that Christ is neither

[291] Collins, 226.

[292] Wesley, "The Scripture Way of Salvation," in *John Wesley on Christian Practice,* vol. III, 194.

present in the work of the new birth, nor is the Holy Spirit absent in justification. Williams points out, "It is the Spirit who brings us to faith reliance upon Christ …. But Christ has sent the Spirit to work in us."[293] In other words, although believers must rely on the merits of Christ for their justification, Christ empowers them to transform them in His likeness through the work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, Wesley stresses this point again in his sermon:

> From what has been said, the nature of the new birth becomes clearly evident. God works this momentous change in the soul, bringing it into life and raising it from the death of sin to the life of righteousness. It is the change worked in the soul by the almighty *Spirit of God*, [emphasis added] who "creates us anew in Christ Jesus, according to the image of the Creator.[294]

The new birth and regeneration is the beginning of sanctification. According to Wesley, "It is a part of sanctification, not the whole; it is the gate to it, the entrance into it." Therefore, the new birth implies the dynamic movement within Wesley's theology of salvation, encouraging believers to go forward with the confidence that it is God who empowers them to strive for holiness and happiness in God.

5) Sanctification

Maddox asserts that in Wesley's own words, sanctification is "growth in grace" and "going on from grace to grace."[295] Although the English Moravians believed that full assurance is bestowed upon one's justification, Wesley contended that believers are still not free from sin. In his sermon "The Scripture Way of Salvation," he describes how

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[293] Colin Williams, 100.

[294] Wesley, "New Birth," in *John Wesley on Christian Practice*, vol. III*,* 233.

[295] Maddox, 177.

even those who are born of God still struggle with sin because "they find that sin was suspended but was not destroyed."[296] They have the will and power to love God but still feel in themselves "pride, self-will, anger, or unbelief."[297] Even if they might stop committing sins actively and outwardly, Wesley believes that sanctification is concerned with an inward transformation that actually makes believers holy in their love for God and their neighbor. Such a transformation is still initiated by the grace of God with an invitation for believers to faithfully respond with growth in grace. In his sermon "Christian Perfection," Wesley uses an analogy for those who are just born of God as infants who need to mature in grace.

For Wesley, sanctification is not obtained by one's good works but by faith, which he clarifies as "faith working by love." As the fruition of a mature Christian life, Langford contends that "theology (for Wesley) cannot be separated from ethics; gracious ordering is continuous, from the point of beginning to the consummate realization of human life."[298] As believers strive for the holiness of God—who is restoring the moral image of God—they manifest growth in grace by their love for God and neighbors. Since such new life is ethical in content, Langford suggests that Wesley proves his commitment through his Covenant Service prayer: "Put me to what Thou wilt, rank me with whom Thou wilt—put me to doing, put me to suffering." For Wesley, there is no holiness other

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[296] Wesley, "The Scripture Way of Salvation," 193.

[297] Ibid.

[298] Langford, 35.

than social holiness. In other words, faith can be genuinely and fully nurtured in God's grace, and only in one's relationship with others.

4. Wesley's Theology of Law and Gospel

As outlined above, Wesley's view of the identity of God and the salvific work of God provides a hermeneutic lens to understand his theology of law and gospel—that is, God not only pardons sinners but also empowers them for holiness. When Wesley instructs his fellow preachers on the use of law and gospel for their preaching, he encourages them to "intermix" both law and gospel, not to preach either law or gospel only. Just as Barth addresses the relation between law and gospel as both sides of the same coin, Wesley also proclaims that if the word of God came to us as the commandment, it was law, and if it was heard as promise, it was the gospel. Although there is an interrelationship between law and gospel, it seems helpful to analyze Wesley's understanding of them separately. The "third use" of law in Wesley's theology needs special attention in terms of "building up of one who has received Christ."[299] While law and gospel refer one to the other, they should not be merged as one together. In this section, Wesley's sermons, letters, and journals are used for analyzing his theology of law and gospel.

John Wesley's Theology of Law

1) Definition of the Law

[299] Richard Lischer, ed., *The Company of Preachers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 126.

What does Wesley mean by the law? In his letter "Mixing Law and Gospel," Wesley argues that when his expression of "preaching the law" means "explaining and enforcing the commands of Christ, briefly comprised in the Sermon on the Mount." While some in Wesley's time argued that Christ abolished all the commandments, Wesley had a slightly different view. He does hold the belief that Christ indeed came to "destroy, dissolve, and utterly abolish the ritualistic (or ceremonial) law delivered by Moses to the children of Israel."[300] However, he contends that Christ did not abolish the *moral law* which is included in the Ten Commandments and spoken by the prophets. In fact, in his sermon "The Law Established Through Faith, Discourse I," Wesley argues that those who do not preach the moral law "do not know Christ, or they are utter strangers to living faith."[301]

The moral law cannot be removed because it has existed since the beginning of the world, written "not on tables of stone" but "on the hearts of all people."[302] It does not depend on "time, place, or any other changing circumstances" but on "the nature of God, the nature of humankind, and their unchangeable relationship with each other."[303] Here, Wesley argues that moral law existed even before the creation of the world. In another sermon "The Origin, Nature, Properties, and Use of the Law," Wesley claims that when God first created the angelic beings, God gave them the law "as a complete reflection of

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[300] Wesley, "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse 5," 128.

[301] Wesley, "The Law Established Through Faith, Discourse 1," 39.

[302] Wesley, "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse 5," 129.

[303] Ibid.

all truth" that was intended to increase "the angels' happiness."[304] The law is imprinted on the souls of both angels and human beings so that they would freely choose what is pleasing to God.

Although the moral law was compatible with human nature in the beginning, it soon became obliterated from their hearts because of the disobedience of the first human beings against God. Wesley says that human understanding became corrupt, not being able to distinguish between good and evil. However, God faithfully continues to reveal God's will by electing a chosen people—that is, the Jews—and God gave them the "perfect knowledge of His law." Due to their slow understanding, God gave to them "the main divisions" of God's law through the Ten Commandments. God even sent prophets and preachers to proclaim the truth of God. Finally, God sent Christ to human beings, and through his saving work, God "rewrote his law on the hearts of his dark, sinful creatures."[305] Since Christ is the culmination of God's faithful work to reveal the perfect law of God, it is absurd to argue that Christ has come to abolish the law.

While the moral law of God is holy, just, and good, a person might still question the content of it in more detail. In Collin's dissertation, he recognizes such a problem, which has also been raised by John Oswalt:

> One must confess however that when one comes to inquire of Wesley precisely what is contained in the moral law, beyond Deuteronomy 6:5 (as quoted in Matt.),

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[304] Wesley, "The Origin, Nature, Properties, and Use of the Law," 21.

[305] Ibid., 22.

> he is vague at best. Although he talks at great length about the law in 'The Law Established through Faith; he does not identify any specific passages.[306]

However, Deschner argues that Wesley tends to derive his laws from scripture. He contends that "the principal sources are the Decalogue and the Sermon on the Mount, especially the Beatitudes. He also makes prominent use of Christ's double command, the golden rule, and the ethical instruction of the epistles."[307] For Wesley, law is the expression of the will of God who is full of love and grace and extends them to God's creation.

2) The Nature of the Law

For Wesley, the essential nature of God's moral law is God's love. According to Wesley, "The moral law is the heart of God disclosed to human kind." What is the heart of God as Wesley understood it? In his sermon "The Law Established Through Faith: Discourse 2," he clarifies that love is "the goal of all the commandments of God."[308] In his understanding of the beginning of the world until the end of it, Wesley believes that the only purpose of every dispensation of God was this—love. As Paul poetically describes how love is the greatest in 1 Corinthians 13, Wesley also argues that although

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[306] John N. Oswalt, "Wesley's Use of the Old Testament in His Doctrinal Teachings," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 12 (Spring 1977): 46, quoted in Collins, "John Wesley's Theology of Law," 59.

[307] John Deschner, *Wesley's Christology* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1960), 93-94.

[308] Wesley, "The Law Established Through Faith, Discourse 2," 57.

faith is critical, it is only a temporary means through which God has "ordained to promote the eternal goal of love."[309]

As Jesus reinterprets the greatest commandment of all as one's love for God and love for neighbors, the love Wesley describes is both personal and social. In *Grace and Responsibility*, John B. Cobb Jr. argues that although Wesley does not suggest a system of government or economics from the law, Cobb believes that Wesley's theology of law is "far from privatistic."[310] Furthermore, he points out that Wesley preaches the gospel in a person's individual relation to God. Naturally, when only faith is emphasized, such preaching succumbs to being individualistic in its practice. Along this line, Cobb comments on love as the basis of Wesley's theology of law: "The law is primarily about relations. It commands love, which is inherently relational, and the command of love of neighbor is inherently social."[311]

Cobb's analysis seems to ignore the integral relationship between faith and love. Although love is viewed as the greatest of all, Wesley believes that "faith is the main means of restoring the holy love in which God originally created humankind."[312] Moreover, sanctification as the process through which a person becomes holy is none other than faith working by love. For Wesley, faith did not replace holiness. Rather, it produced the fruits of the Holy Spirit with love as the ultimate purpose.

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[309] Ibid.

[310] Cobb. Jr., 120.

[311] Ibid.

[312] Wesley, "The Law Established through Faith, Discourse 2," 59.

3) How the Law Works

Wesley believes that as the imprint of God's divine nature, the moral law works in three distinctive ways. First of all, the law of God convicts the world of sins. Wesley believes that this is the remarkable work of the Holy Spirit, who reveals to people through the law that they are "dead even while they live."[313] While the "gospel preachers" offer "sufferings and merits of Christ" as the way to convince of sin, Wesley contends that it is the distinctive aim of the law that "convinces people of sin and awakens those that are still asleep on the brink of hell."[314] Although there might be a case when preaching Christ could convince a person of sin, Wesley argues that it is not common since it is not the scriptural way. This point can be seen in a strong claim made by him: "You must first convince people that they are sick. Otherwise, they will not respond favorably to your efforts."[315] As a scriptural support, he quotes Jesus: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick." Along this line, Wesley comments, "It is absurd, therefore to offer a physician to those who are whole, or who at least imagine themselves to be whole."[316]

It should be noted that Lowry has also made a similar point in arguing that the sermon must hold the attention of the listeners by analyzing the problem effectively. For Lowry, the key to upsetting the equilibrium is the internal problem within the text that

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[313] Wesley, "The Origin, Nature, Properties, and Use of the Law," 29.

[314] Wesley, "The Law Established Through Faith, Discourse 1," 40.

[315] Ibid.

[316] Ibid.

can be noticed and elaborated by the preacher. He relies on anthropological efforts to analyze and convince the listeners that there is a problem with the text or themselves. However, for Wesley it is by the work of the Holy Spirit through the moral law that individuals are awakened to realize that they are far from the righteousness of God. The consequence is the realization of the distorted relationship with God and neighbor. It convicts them that they are not well but sick.

Secondly, the law brings sinners into Christ so that they might live. In realizing that the consequence of sin is death, it is devastating then to learn that a person cannot be saved by his or her own merit. In relation to this issue, Wesley writes that the Holy Spirit acts as a "strict schoolmaster" in bringing the sinners to Christ. As the law "drives sinners, stripped of everything, to cry out in bitterness of soul, or groan from the depth of their hearts,"[317] the Holy Spirit guides them by teaching that they can surely find redemption through Christ. Here, Wesley writes about how this takes place:

> But the moment the Spirit of the Almighty strikes the heart of him that was till then without God in the world, it breaks the hardness of his heart, and creates all things new. The Sun of Righteousness appears, and shines upon his soul, showing him the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. He is in a new world.[318]

Since it is the Holy Spirit who brings hearers to Christ, a person does not find Christ through his or her own will. Rather, it is always the guidance of the Holy Spirit through the moral law that brings us to Christ, who makes everything new.

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[317] Wesley, "The Origin, Nature, Properties, and Use of the Law," 29.

[318] Wesley, "On Living without God," in *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 4, ed. Albert C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), 172.

The role of the Holy Spirit working in convincing individuals of sin and bringing sinners to Christ points out that a Wesleyan manner of preaching is not individualistic with regards to striving to find an answer to his or her problem themselves. Rather, a person is always guided by the Holy Spirit even when there is no realization about it, and this happens because of God's love and grace. Although Campbell has argued that narrative preaching which is too experiential is bound to be individualistic, it seems that any type of preaching that ignores the presence of the Holy Spirit working in the contexts of the listeners may already be individualistic. Such a preaching would believe that it is up to the individual to discover what is causing either a person or a community to be sick. Rather, it is the Holy Spirit as the loving presence and "schoolmaster" that urges the listeners to come to Christ because Christ is the One who has the ultimate answer to the sins and brokenness they suffer in the beginning.

Finally, the law maintains our spiritual life. According to Wesley, "The law is the foremost means by which the blessed Spirit prepares the believer for larger measures of the life of God."[319] He acknowledges that the third use of law is the most ignored or misinterpreted, even by Christians. Although law does not justify people from their sins, Wesley argued that law "keeps us in him (Christ)." As believers contemplate "the breadth and length and height and depth" of the law, Wesley believes that the law would bring them together and encourage one another as they strive for the holiness of God who is full of love. In order to illustrate his point, he quotes his brother's poem,

> Closer and closer let us cleave
> To His beloved embrace;

[319] Wesley, "The Origin, Nature, Properties, and Use of the Law," 30.

Expect His fullness to receive,
And grace to answer grace[320]

Wesley describes three ways that the moral law keeps us in Christ in our process of recovering the image of God—sanctification. First, the moral law convinces us of our sins that still remain after justification. Wesley argues that the moral law "keeps us close to Christ so that his blood can cleanse us every moment."[321] While Lowry's narrative preaching focuses on the event of justification—that is, experiencing the gospel—as the highlight of the sermon, Wesley's theology of law teaches that soteriology is close to a process through which a person is guided by the Holy Spirit in growing toward the perfect love of God. Although sin does not have dominating power over listeners, they are still reminded that they must strive in humility and acknowledge that they are still prone to evil. This is not to engrave guilt on the hearts of the listeners, but rather it is to help them remain humble and open to the help of the Holy Spirit who continues to work in them.

Secondly, the third use of law reminds hearers that it is eventually Christ from whom they "receive strength into ourselves as living members of his body." In other words, it is not up to them that they decide all of sudden to live a moral life as the result of experiencing the gospel. Rather, Christ empowers them to live what his law commands through the work of the Holy Spirit. Such a notion theologically contradicts sanctification as works righteousness. It is not by a person's own determination that he or she is able to

[320] Ibid.

[321] Ibid.

be holy. Rather, God helps God's people to be holy by giving them the strength they need to participate in the redemptive work of God. In other words, God initiates the salvific work of God, not human beings. However, God graciously invites them to respond to the grace of God if they sincerely seek to love God more by sending the Holy Spirit as their guide.

Finally, the moral law confirms that individuals can continue to receive the grace of God until "we actually possess the fullness of his (Christ's) promises." As Wesley believed that human beings lost the moral image of God through the fall, the process of sanctification is not only to be restored in it, but it is also to attain more glory than when they originally lost it—that is, attaining to Christian perfection. In viewing "the Circumcision of the Heart" as a mark of entire sanctification, Wesley argues that circumcision is a "habitual inclination of soul toward what scripture terms *holiness*."[322] Collins explains that it is the "characteristics of holy love reigning in the human heart, a love that not only embraces the love of God and neighbor, but that also excludes all sin."[323] Here, the moral law as a copy of the perfect will of God encourages the believers not to stay where they are in the present but to move forward in their process of salvation. This takes place when believers are being convinced that they can assuredly experience the perfect love of God that is in Christ. Homiletically, Wesleyan preaching must encourage the hearers not to be satisfied with the grace they received in the past but to

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[322] John Wesley, "The Circumcision of the Heart," in *John Wesley on Christian Beliefs*, vol. 1, ed. Kenneth Cain Kinghorn (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 287.

[323] Collins, 298.

continue to work, so that God may give them more until their habitual disposition replicates that of Christ in his love for God and neighbors.

John Wesley's Theology of Gospel

1) The Definition of the Gospel

In contrast with Wesley's discussion of the law, he does not seem to engage deeply with what he means by the gospel. Perhaps he already shares similar views with other commentators regarding this matter, namely that the gospel is centered on who Christ is and what he has done for the salvation of people. While Wesley explains the definition and role of law in detail, his view on the gospel is mainly seen through his sermons and letters, in which he defines the gospel primarily as the love of God offered through Christ. One example is found in his sermon "The Way to the Kingdom" in 1746:

> The gospel (that is, glad tidings of good news for guilty, helpless sinners) in the largest sense of the word means the entire revelation made to humankind by Jesus Christ. Sometimes the gospel means the complete account of what our Lord did and suffered while he lived among us. The substance of the gospel is, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." The Gospel is that "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." Again "He was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed."[324]

In his letter "Letter on Preaching Christ" in 1751, he again offers a similar definition on the gospel,

> I mean by preaching the gospel, preaching the love of God to sinners, preaching the life, death, resurrection, and intercession of Christ, with all the blessings which, in consequence thereof, are freely given to true believers.[325]

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[324] John Wesley, "The Way to the Kingdom," in *John Wesley on Christian Beliefs*, vol. 1, ed. Kenneth Cain Kinghorn (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 135.

[325] Wesley, "Letter on Preaching Christ," 486.

In Wesley's definition of the gospel, it can be noted that although it is offered to anyone universally, the gospel can only be received by the individuals who sincerely acknowledge that they are sinners before God. Since they do not realize that the consequence of their sin is death, they do not recognize Christ as the good news for them. The gospel does not offer much to those who are not prepared to receive it as the good news for them. Rather, it is the role of the Holy Spirit to convict them of their sins through the law, and this point is highlighted also by Wesley in his sermon:

> It is absurd, therefore, to offer a physician to those who are whole, or who at least imagine themselves so to whole. You must first convince people that they are sick. Otherwise they will not respond favorably to your efforts. It is equally absurd to offer Christ to those whose hearts have not yet been broken.[326]

Wesley's soteriological concern is that people might find the answer to their sins within themselves, not from Christ when they are not ready for the gospel. In his letter, he states,

> After more and more persons are convinced of sin, we may mix more and more of the gospel, in order to beget faith, to raise into spiritual life those whom the law hath slain: but this is not to be done too hastily neither. Therefore, it is not expedient wholly to omit the law; not only because we may well suppose that many of our hearers are still unconvinced; but because otherwise there is danger that many who are convinced will heal their own wounds slightly.[327]

Such a claim from Wesley seems to resonate with Lowry's homiletical plot—that the preacher analyzes the problem and helps the hearers realize that there is no answer to the issue they seek until the plot is turned upside down and they experience the gospel.

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[326] Wesley, "The Law Established through Faith, Discourse I," 40.

[327] Wesley, "Letter on Preaching Christ," 487.

2) How the Gospel Works

Since Christ is the one through whom God offers pardon to sinners, it seems proper to point to the offices of Christ as a way to understand how the gospel works. As discussed above, in the section on the view of Christ held by Wesley, Christ assumes three offices: Prophet, Priest, and King. While Christ acts as the Priest and offers himself as the sacrifice for redemption, he also gives law to people and rules their hearts so that they may receive grace upon grace. As the Priest, Christ opens the door for people to enter into sanctification—the process of being restored in the image of God—through regeneration. As people experience the gospel of Christ and see Christ as the one who offers them pardon, they are also empowered to journey in the process of sanctification since Christ rules their hearts and drives their fear and sins away.

For this reason, Wesley writes in his letter that the preachers should preach the gospel only to those who are thoroughly convinced of their sins. When believers grow in grace and knowledge of Christ, the preachers should preach "the law to them again; only taking particular care to place every part of it in a gospel light, as not only a command, but as privilege also, as a branch of the glorious liberty of the sons of God."[328] Wesley believed that the genuine work of preaching the gospel always leads to encouraging the hearers to keep the law because it is the "fruit" of their faith. In other words, the good works out of the moral law are not means through which one earns salvation, but rather they are the fruits of their faith that God graciously bestows on the believers. Again, this view of sanctification will help to shape a Wesleyan mode of narrative preaching.

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[328] Wesley, "Mixing Law and Gospel," 127.

In facing charges from the "gospel preachers"—who may be grounded in antinomian teaching—Wesley responds to these charges by stating how the Methodist movement does not pursue works righteousness. By contrast, the pursuit of holiness is grounded in Wesley's theology of law and gospel. It is argued in this chapter that Wesley's theology of law and gospel can only be appropriately understood in a continuum of his view of the Trinitarian God and soteriology. More specifically, it should be understood that God creates the world out of God's love; since love is relational, God continues to care for God's creation, provides for it in special manner, and heals it in its brokenness. In conjunction with the identity of God, Christ and the Holy Spirit work to restore the glory of God that was lost in human beings by emphasizing the importance of their works along the process of redemption. It is Christ who offers forgiveness for people, while the Holy Spirit brings sinners to Christ and empowers them to remove the remaining sins and be restored in the image of God.

In reflecting on how law and gospel operate in Lowry's narrative preaching, it seems clear that his basic movement from bad news to good news does not correspond to the theological depth in law and gospel according to Wesley. First of all, although it may seem like bad news to acknowledge the sins and brokenness of people, it is nevertheless the Holy Spirit who works with sinners in God's prevenient grace. Therefore, what seems to be bad news in Lowry's narrative preaching is not always strictly bad news in a Wesleyan theology of law and gospel. Secondly, the Holy Spirit does not abandon people to find Christ by their own will. Rather, the Holy Spirit helps them to realize their sins and brings them to Christ. Although Cobb notices rightly that experiencing the gospel

tends towards an individualistic expression of redemption, Wesley's theology of law and gospel relies on the Holy Spirit as the Helper who accompanies them from the beginning to eternity, as people sincerely desire to grow in their grace of God. Finally, while many contemporary homiletic theories have emphasized the sermon as "event," it seems that they only pay attention to the juridical dimension of salvation—that is, how one is pardoned or liberated from the dominion of sin or brokenness. However, Wesley's theology of law and gospel views the way of salvation as a *process* and not merely as an *event*. When a person experiences the gospel, Wesleyan preaching sees this experience as the door to a deeper relationship with God as believers meditate and follow the moral law that is the perfect will of God for them.

With the discussions in this chapter in mind, I argue that in critically reflecting on Wesley's law and gospel, contemporary narrative preaching often lacks adequate acknowledgment of the Holy Spirit and the dimension of sanctification for salvation. In suggesting a more faithful mode of narrative preaching based on Wesley's understanding of law and gospel, I am also aware that many black preachers practice the narrative of salvation. Much of black preaching also emphasizes the Holy Spirit who not only helps in the moment of preaching but also invites individuals to be nurtured in the community. In addition, a lot of black preaching also highlights the importance of sanctification as it recognizes the brokenness of the world—that is, the realities of racism, poverty, sexism, and inequality that still dominate society, even as sin remains individual as well as communal. However, much of black preaching teaches that it is God who has already

initiated the process of redemption for God's people and actively invites people to participate in a holistic way.

The next chapter briefly discusses some of the origins of black preaching in the United States, the theology of black preaching, the Holy Spirit in black preaching, and how law and gospel operate in black covenantal theology through redemptive narrative.

CHAPTER 4

COVENANTAL THEOLOGY FOR BLACK PREACHING

Wesley's view of law and gospel for preaching tells us that his homiletical method is directly concerned with his understanding of salvation—this can also be considered the dynamic process of soteriology. While many contemporary narrative preachers such as Lowry tend to focus on an event that moves from bad news to good news, Wesley's theology of law and gospel emphasizes the importance of the process of justification and sanctification being held together for preaching. Since the renewed role of law in sanctification empowers the listeners to grow in their love for God and neighbors, a Wesleyan sermon cannot end with merely experiencing the gospel, at least not without actively inviting the listeners to grow in their love for God and neighbors in sanctification. It is not that Wesley's theology dismisses the freedom of listeners as irrelevant, but rather Wesley would argue that God gives us the freedom to love God and others. Unless believers keep striving for holiness by the power of the Holy Spirit, they are always likely to backslide to a sinful status without knowing the grace of God in an active sense.

In a similar vein, black preaching in the United States has also recognized the dynamic process of justification and sanctification as an integral component to proclaiming the word of God.[329] It has prophetically proclaimed the unjust reality of the

[329] Olin Moyd argues, "The Black church is the place in which soul was nurtured and developed. As Black folks moved through the dark and desolate valleys of segregation and dehumanization, they developed a clear understanding of the concepts 'justification' and 'sanctification.'" Olin P. Moyd, *Redemption in Black Theology* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1979), 182.

society that has pushed black communities to the margins and has intentionally stripped them of their culture, identity, language, sexuality, educational opportunities, and human rights. Throughout their histories, black communities have experienced the reluctance of the privileged in society to dismantle white supremacy and pursue equality for all together. In pointing out the urgent need to challenge the sinful system of society, black preaching is not only concerned with the right theology for its audience but a more faithful action as the result of hearing the gospel. This point can be seen in the argument made by Olin P. Moyd: "This [African American] preaching not only has a specific address, it also gives or implies specific directions for action—for involvement in the divine plan of redemption."[330]

This chapter attempts to reflect critically on how black preaching also uses law and gospel creatively. Among contemporary homileticians, Henry H. Mitchell has been at the forefront of arguing for a proper appreciation of black preaching in the academic field, namely as part of the New Homiletic. Mitchell's theology of black preaching is not identical with homiletical theories of inductive, storytelling, and narrative preaching—nor can the New Homiletic be reduced to them. While many other theories for the New Homiletic elevate *experience* as a critical component of preaching, an important question to raise is, What kind of experience are we talking about? In *Other-Wise Preaching*, John S. McClure describes how the experiences of minority groups challenge the hegemonic experience claimed by the New Homiletic. While it should be acknowledged that law and

[330] Olin P. Moyd, *The Sacred Art: Preaching and Theology in the African American Tradition* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1995), 94.

gospel could function as a homiletical method for black preaching, law in the view of black communities is often introduced again as part of a new covenant to empower individuals to be grounded in their communal life and pursue God's justice and love.

1. Black Preaching and the New Homiletic

In discussing black preaching, it must be acknowledged that there are diverse voices within the black community who are still trying to define what black preaching is. In *I Believe I'll Testify*, Cleophus J. LaRue acknowledges that even blacks "are not in agreement about how we define *black preaching*" as there is still ongoing discussion to define what the black church is.[331] There have even been many voices within the black church rejecting the idea of defining what black preaching is. There is a famous story about Martin Luther King, Sr. who once argued from his pulpit of the Ebenezer Baptist Church of Atlanta that "there was no such thing as Black preaching or Black theology."[332] There were also voices like that of Samuel D. Proctor who believed that there was "too much diversity within the [black] tradition historically or as presently constructed to make accurate generalizations."[333] All these voices seem to indicate that there is no monolithic way to define black preaching as multiple denominations, cultures, theologies, traditions, and histories exist within black communities.

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[331] Cleophus J. LaRue, *I Believe I'll Testify* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 31.

[332] Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 11.

[333] LaRue, 32.

While acknowledging the diversity within the black church and black preaching, many contemporary homileticians would agree that Mitchell is the most important figure who has laid the ground for black preaching to be considered as an academic discipline to be analyzed, studied, and practiced. In 1970, he published *Black Preaching* that "formally introduced the theological academy to black homiletics."[334] In his work, Mitchell discusses black hermeneutics, the history of black preaching, the black Bible, black English, and the black sermon.[335] His work on black preaching challenges the traditional paradigm of white preaching as deductive, intellectual, and philosophical. It also met with praise for being in broad agreement with other contemporary homileticians who attempt to rejuvenate the pulpits through a focus on culture, creative language, listeners, and experience.

Sensing the crisis in the mainstream pulpits and the confusion of solutions coming from various scholars, Richard L. Eslinger published *A New Hearing* in 1987 in which he analyzes and evaluates the works of Rice, Mitchell, Lowry, Craddock, and Buttrick. Eslinger's initial work was later reinvigorated by O. Wesley Allen Jr. who edited *The Renewed Homiletic* in 2010. In this collection, Rice, Craddock, Mitchell, Lowry, and Buttrick—also known as the "pillars of the New Homiletic"—reflect on their previous works and suggest any modification of them in accordance with the contemporary situation. Although homileticians such as Eslinger have already published works

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[334] Frank A. Thomas, *Introduction to the Practice of African American Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016), 33.

[335] Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970)

regarding their analysis and reflection on the pillars of the New Homiletic, Allen's editorial work has contributed to the field of homiletic in a unique way by allowing them to speak for themselves in critical theological mode. Their articles are accompanied by reflections from a selection of homileticians.

In his work, Allen calls Mitchell "the father of African American homiletics" who articulates a unique preaching method in the black community that has its roots in the African continent and has provided a way to survive and resist during the time of slavery and racism. Like many other analyses of homileticians, Allen points out that one may find a unique contribution in Mitchell's work—the importance of celebration in preaching. Allen explains that while Western preaching tends to be "rational and propositional" in a traditional sense, Mitchell's black preaching pursues a holistic mode of preaching by engaging the whole person in a number of ways, namely intellectually, emotively, and intuitively. As black preachers recognize the oppression deeply ingrained in their community, it is critical that they "embrace new images of God and self through storytelling, folk language, and evocative imagery."[336]

For many, Mitchell's focus on image, culture, listener, and storytelling offers good reasons for him to be considered a part of the New Homiletic. In contrast to the deductive sermon that moves from biblical exposition to moral application, Allen argues that inductive or narrative sermons "empower and authorize the hearer to do the work of application" through the descriptive language that is evocative of the gospel message.[337]

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[336] O. Wesley Allen, ed., *The Renewed Homiletic* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 12.

[337] Ibid., 9.

In *They Like to Never Quit Praisin' God*, Frank A. Thomas elaborates Mitchell's discussion of celebration as evocative of the gospel experienced in the sermon. He clarifies that, in the beginning of his work, "Following the thought of Henry H. Mitchell, I have long believed that the genius of African American preaching has been its ability to celebrate the gospel."[338] In providing theology, design, and practice of celebration in preaching, Thomas points to the use of reversal as in Lowry. According to Thomas, "Reversals set the stage for fresh encounter."[339]

However, Mitchell also wishes to redirect the focus of argument for black preaching to *behavioral change* as the reason why one celebrates. As he states, "Every preacher needs to choose an appropriate behavioral purpose, as opposed to a cognitive purpose such as facts or truth, as a final goal."[340] He seems to regret not knowing to what extent his colleagues would agree or disagree with him on his concept of behavioral change as the center of the preaching practice.[341] Nevertheless, he confronts a critical aspect in those parts of the New Homiletic that embrace open-endedness: "The 'Comfort ye' by which we survive demands more than a 'maybe' or a 'perhaps.' And the justice we demand is not subject to convenient relativity. The kingdoms of this world will surely fall, and so will our oppressors."[342]

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[338] Frank A. Thomas, *They Like to Never Quit Praisin' God* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1997), 4.

[339] Ibid., 13.

[340] Ibid., 66.

[341] Ibid., 66.

[342] Ibid., 68.

Mitchell has pioneered the acceptance of black preaching as an academic discipline for the next generation of homiletical researchers, not only as a topic to be analyzed theologically but also to be taught for practice. However, it seems that Mitchell's work on black preaching has been prematurely regarded as in the same vein, if not identical to the New Homiletic. Therefore, its unique contribution—which even challenges some aspects of the New Homiletic itself—has been obscured. There are three points that distinguish Mitchell's view of black preaching from inductive and narrative homiletics: (1) the behavioral purpose as the primary focus of preaching, (2) the different nature of experience, and (3) a holistic way of preaching. These points need to be addressed in order to gain a deeper understanding on his stance.

First, the primary focus of preaching for Mitchell is always to lead to change in behavior. Although celebration is often emphasized to explain Mitchell's view of black preaching, he argues that celebration is critical in that it helps to effect a behavioral change. In *Black Preaching*, Mitchell describes how "celebration dramatizes the main idea of sermon and supports the behavioral purpose or motivational goal," and that "people relate to and remember what they celebrate, and it influences their behavior."[343] He recognizes some critiques that contend that celebration in black preaching is "too emotional, manipulative of people, and unnecessary to the moves of the sermon." While he agrees that irrelevant celebration that does not match the theme of a sermon needs to be corrected, Mitchell strongly puts forward the view that celebration is critical in that it

[343] Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Act* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), 121.

"addresses the whole person – the cognitive, intuitive, and emotive."[344] Celebration in preaching forms in consciousness and motivates one to "do the will of God."[345]

Mitchell elaborates on the relationship between celebration and behavioral purpose in *Celebration and Experience in Preaching*, published in 1990. He bases his argument for the behavioral purpose on the fact that "Jesus' teachings seemed concentrated on the '*observing*' of all the things he had commanded (Matt. 28:20), rather than on knowledge, assent, or verbal confession."[346] In other words, the essence of the gospel is not just concerned with imparting a certain kind knowledge for people or generating some universal experience in the gospel, but also empowering them to live it out. Mitchell claims that sermons consisting mostly of "don'ts and other negatives" are likely to make the audience leave the church more than before. Celebration in black preaching is not just to praise God for what God has done in the past or present but also to hope for what God will do through them by guiding and empowering the marginalized and powerless.

Interestingly, the relationship between celebration and behavioral purpose in Mitchell's argument is often omitted in the analysis of many homiletic scholars, possibly in favor of celebration as the venue of experience. For example, in *A New Hearing: Living Options in Homiletic Method*, Eslinger analyzes the homiletic theories of Mitchell along with Rice, Lowery, Craddock, and Buttrick, as representatives of what he calls the

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[344] Ibid.

[345] Mitchell, *Celebration and Experience in Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 63.

[346] Ibid.

New Homiletic. In his analysis of Mitchell's work, Eslinger identifies three components of black narrative preaching: characterization, climax, and dialogue. In his more recent work, *The Web of Preaching: New Options in Homiletic Method*, published in 2002, it should be noted that Eslinger does not highlight the importance of Mitchell's argument of the behavioral purpose as he lists him as one of the narrative homileticians.

It seems reasonable to argue that Mitchell's emphasis on the behavioral purpose makes him distinct from most of his colleagues in the New Homiletic. This argument is formed in the view that preachers such as Craddock, Rice, and Lowry in the inductive, storytelling, and narrative line hesitate to influence the decision-making of the audience, at least directly. It is a critical aspect of much of the New Homiletic that sermons are "expressed in the indicative instead of imperative…. Inductive or narrative sermons empower and authorize the hearer to do the work of application."[347] However, Mitchell's concern raised in *The Renewed Homiletic* points out that his homiletic approach is more urgent regarding recognizing the struggles of the black community and proclaiming the good news in God's response with more conviction and commitment.

Secondly, although Mitchell is praised for using experience as a fresh way to hear the gospel along with other pillars of the New Homiletic, his view of experience is specifically with black experience that is radically different from white experience. In *Black Preaching*, Mitchell holds the view that the black preaching tradition did not come into existence all of a sudden. Rather, it was developed as the result of contacts between "the Christian gospel, variously interpreted, and African men and women caught up in

[347] Allen, 9.

the Black experience of slavery and oppression."[348] Black preaching recognizes the suffering and pain in the black community that experiences racial injustice, trauma from slavery, lack of opportunity, and institutional poverty. If a black preacher is to preach the good news for his and her listeners, the preacher must recognize such experience of bad news for the black community, which is not the same as that for the white community in the United States.

The difference in the nature of experiences between black and white communities also addresses how the good news is experienced differently. In "Sanctification, Liberation, and Black Worship," James H. Cone discusses white intellectuals who compare "celebration" in black preaching with shouting in white churches as the same concerning their common sociological and psychological traits. He criticizes them for their theological mistake: "It is absurd on sociological, psychological, and theological grounds to contend that the Ku Klux Klansman and the black person who escaped him are shouting for the same or similar reasons in their respective church services."[349] For Cone, the black audience celebrates in joy because they are affirmed in their sacred personhood by God when their society denies it politically, socially, and economically. Since it is an experience of dying and rising again, Cone even calls it a "conversion" for blacks who rise with a new life from God on resurrection day.

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[348] Mitchell, *Black Preaching*, 23.

[349] James H. Cone, "Sanctification, Liberation, and Black Worship," *Theology Today* 35, no 2 (July 1978): 146.

Since Mitchell points out the black experience of oppression and suffering as the theological matrix of black preaching, it is critical that there must be changes as a result of hearing the gospel.[350] While the black audience might experience that the kingdom of God breaks into their lives in the midst of their struggles, they may also know that it is not fully realized yet.[351] When they return to everyday society during the week, they know that they must confront harsh realities in which their lives are often threatened by the evil of society. They might have experienced conversion during the sermon, singing, or prayer on Sunday. However, the black community also intuitively knows that unless it actively confronts the racism and evil of society through words and acts, the community itself is institutionally silenced or dehumanized as inferior to the white community. When a person realizes such a reality for the black community, the sermon cannot just end as an event of celebration. Rather, it must empower the audience to reclaim their image of God and fight for human dignity. Having a choice of whether to act or not—as described by Craddock, Rice, or Lowry—is unfortunately not a luxury the black communities can afford politically, economically, and spiritually.

Thirdly, Mitchell's black preaching needs to be distinguished from the New Homiletic in that he pursues a holistic way of preaching. In *The Renewed Homiletic*,

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[350] It must be acknowledged that not all black churches embrace black prophetic tradition that challenges the status quo of the society, which marginalizes certain groups in oppression. In *Practical Theology for Black Churches*, Andrews argues that there are many black churches that are contaminated by western individualism, and this leads to a misdiagnosis of black folk religion as "other-worldly." This point is discussed later in this chapter.

[351] As Olin P. Moyd argues, "Eschatological hope says that complete sanctification will take place at the end of history, and the complete union of human creature with the Creator, and of being with Being, will come to fruition." Moyd, *Redemption inn Black Theology* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1979), 181.

Mitchell argues that despite the rise of inductive, storytelling, and narrative preaching in the recent era of homiletic in the United States, he believes that "the last fifty years have not greatly changed the Western culture's commitment to preaching as cognitive enterprise."[352] This could be a provocative statement for the other pillars of the New Homiletic since they have attempted to shift the paradigm of preaching from the cognitive to creative, poetic, and imaginative approaches through their homiletic methods. Despite their various efforts, Mitchell criticizes the field of homiletics for still "seek[ing] to convince the mind" while the sermon in African American culture is "a meaningful, holistic, and life-changing experience of God and the Word."[353]

Mitchell believes that the current academy is still occupied with making "argument for a mental processes" rather than "a profoundly meaningful experience for the whole person." His statement could be contested by the other pillars of the New Homiletic, who may preach to the whole person through the use of images, stories, and poetic language. While Mitchell does not go further to explain his argument, Rose's homiletical distinction may be helpful here. She identifies Mitchell's black preaching as "kerygmatic" while categorizing Craddock, Rice, and Lowry's homiletics as "transformational." She argues that a recurring practice of this transformational homiletics is to replace "one set of understandings with another."[354] As Craddock

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[352] Henry Mitchell, "Celebration Renewed," in *The Renewed Homiletic*, ed. O Wesley Allen (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 68.

[353] Ibid.

[354] Rose, 62.

describes preaching as exchanging "one set of images for another," the primary concern of transformational preaching is to help the audience to have "a new way of perceiving or being in the world."[355]

However, Mitchell considers black preaching to be essentially concerned with embracing a new personhood. The sermon is not about arousing curiosity for the listeners and inviting them to find fresh answers to the questions. Rather, preaching breaks the chain of oppression in political, economic, societal, and spiritual forms and invites listeners in the ongoing work of God, who liberates God's people. Rose defines Mitchell's black preaching as "kerygmatic preaching" that focuses on the "eternal truth" in the words of God that needs to be translated in the language and culture of people.[356] However, for Mitchell, the eternal truth is not a set of ideas that can be communicated only cognitively. Rather, it is centered on faith, hope, and love that can be only nurtured in emotive and intuitive encounter with God and developed in mutual relationship within the community of faith.

Mitchell has laid the foundation of black homiletics as a discipline of preaching to be taught in an academic setting. Could it be that the largely white homiletic academy welcomed it prematurely as just part of the New Homiletic?[357] On this point, Eslinger

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[355] Ibid.

[356] Ibid., 38.

[357] Dale P. Andrews argues that the use of the term *New Homiletic* has been offensive to faith-communities that are oriented to oral culture and folk tradition. Andrews contends that such a term "reflects the cultural racism at play in American Christianity." Dale P. Andrews, "Black Preaching Praxis" in *Black Church Studies: An Introduction*, ed. Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 217.

identified a number of common factors, such as the importance of form, experience, language, image, culture, listeners, and movement. As a result, some important theological attributes of black preaching have not been adequately explored by many contemporary homileticians. I believe that one of the undervalued characteristics of black preaching is a commitment to sanctification—a commitment that is deeply rooted in liberation from sin and oppression. Lowry's narrative homiletics often highlights the reversal from bad news to good news in justification, while for black preachers, any sermon existentially concerned with experiencing justification needs to include sanctification in the world. Therefore, my argument here is that in discerning a Wesleyan theology of law and gospel for narrative preaching, black narrative preaching creatively uses law and gospel—especially law functioning as the covenant for sanctification.

2. African Slaves in Early Methodism

The history of the black church in the United States can never be told without addressing the influence of Methodism. Cone asserts that the redemptive narrative of God in Wesleyan theology played a significant role in attracting many African slaves to Methodism. Allen, the founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, argues that "there was no religious sect or denomination [that] would suit the capacity of the colored people as well as the Methodists."[358] Cone contends that this was the case because the "process of salvation in terms of repentance, forgiveness, and new birth, so important for John Wesley" is prevalent in the black religious tradition, especially in black

[358] Richard Allen, *The Life Experience and Gospel Labors of the Right Reverend Richard Allen* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960), 29.

Methodism.[359] Black worship in the Methodist tradition is to witness the movement of the Holy Spirit, who actualizes the narrative of salvation for the people who are oppressed and marginalized in their society.

In *Black People in the Methodist Church*, William B. McClain holds to the belief that there are numerous accounts of black Americans accepting the evangelistic message of the Methodist preachers and converting to Christianity in the early days. Many of these preachers have recorded how "hundreds upon hundreds who accepted Christianity in emotional and celebrative rejoicing."[360] For example, Richard Boardman wrote a letter to Wesley in 1769 describing how blacks were eager to attend the meetings to hear the gospel.

> Our house contains about seven hundred people. About a third part of those who attend get in, the rest are glad to hear without. There appears such a willingness in the Americans to hear the word as I never saw before. They have no preaching in some parts of the black settlements. I doubt not but an effectual door will be opened among them. O! May the Most High give his Son the heathen for his inheritance. The number of blacks that attend the preaching affects me much.[361]

While the Catholics and Puritans were among the first to convert slaves, Mitchell also acknowledges that the Methodists and the Baptists at that time experienced much more rapid growth in black membership than other denominations because they were not stuck with "technicalities related to apostolic succession, or the education of the clergy." Their

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[359] Cone, 148.

[360] William B. McClain, *Black People in the Methodist Church* (Cambridge: Schenkman Publishing Company, 1984), 19.

[361] Letter to John Wesley, quoted in Abel Stevens, *History of the Methodist Church* (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1866), Vol. I, 103.

message could reach out more effectively because of their zeal for the poor and oppressed in proclaiming the gospel.

The *Discipline* of the United Methodist Church has attributed "its evangelistic appeal" and "the Church's attitude toward slavery" as the main factors in winning favor with black people. While he certainly endorses such a view, McClain suggests four additional reasons for the catalyst of rapid conversion of black ancestors to Methodism: (1) a sincere and simple message: a call to righteousness; (2) the early opposition to slavery; (3) the appeal to emotion with the preacher, his style, and his message; and (4) a refashioned Christianity.

First of all, black ancestors were drawn to a sincere and simple message that proclaims the love of God for every sinner. McClain claims that the core of Wesleyan preaching was "a simple gospel of salvation, designed to awaken a godly experience in its hearers of a conscious fellowship with God."[362] The early preaching of Methodism was firmly grounded in the lives of people for whom the grace of God already surrounded them with God's love, since God forgave sinners and called them righteous by the love of Christ. Because Christ died for all—not just a few, as claimed by the Calvinists—slaves had hope that they were also saved by Christ, who loved them as equal children of God. McClain provides a record of John Thomson, born as a slave in Maryland in 1812, as a firm example of how the early Methodist preachers connected with the African slaves through their vernacular communication.

> My mistress and her family were all Episcopalians. The nearest church was five miles from our plantation and there was no Methodist church nearer than ten

[362] McClain, 21.

> miles. So, we went to the Episcopal Church, but always came home as we went, for the preaching was above our comprehension, so we could understand but little that was said. But soon the Methodist religious was brought among us, and preached in a manner so plain that the wayfaring man, though a fool, could not err therein.[363]

Preaching in the language and culture of the listeners is still prevalent in the black preaching tradition. While Mitchell claims that it has always been inherent in the history of African Americans—as they were retaining their culture—it seems that Methodism in the early days provided a theological foundation to proclaim the good news in plain language so that people can understand it more efficiently.

Secondly, many early evangelists of Methodism opposed slavery as against the will and law of God. In 1780, seventeen Methodist ministers at a conference in Baltimore made a declaration in this line: "Slavery is contrary to the laws of God, man and nature—hurtful to society; contrary to the dictates of conscience and pure religion, and doing that which we would not others should do to us and ours." The stance of antislavery in Methodism appealed to both slaves and slaveholders, in that the gospel surely changed the heart and behavior of people. For example, when Freeborn Garrettson, a slaveholder, felt that he had a conversion experience in 1777, he immediately freed his slaves claiming, "It was God, not man, who showed him the impropriety of holding slaves."[364] Another example given by McClain is Gabriel Prosser. As a twenty-five-year old man,

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[363] John Thompson, *The Life of John Thompson, A Fugitive Slave* (Worcester, MA: J. Thompson, 1856), 18-19.

[364] Ibid., 23.

Prosser felt that God called him to free all the slaves in Virginia. His scheme of insurrection, however, failed and resulted with him and others being hanged.

McClain argues that slavery was what decisively split Wesley and Whitefield. While Wesley believed that Christ saved sinners once for all (universal salvation), Whitefield argued that Christ saved only the elect (predestination). Therefore, Whitefield viewed slavery as a natural order of God in which the status of slaveholder and slave should not change.[365] Moreover, both groups were to recognize their positions as God-given and be satisfied to maintain them. However, Wesley's vigorous opposition to slavery fueled the aspirations for the justice and righteousness of God on the part of not only the slaves but also that of other outcasts such as poor white farmers. Even today, such a message continues to be a comfort for the oppressed but a threat to the privileged.

Thirdly, the evangelistic preaching and worship of Methodism encouraged black ancestors to express their emotions as in accordance with their African tradition. McClain points out that while the established churches such as the Presbyterians and Anglicans focused on "moralizing and teaching doctrines," the Methodists present their message in a plain manner, concentrating on release from sin and oppression through the "experience of conviction, repentance, and regeneration."[366] Singing also played a vital role in drawing African ancestors and Wesley has emphasized its importance since the beginning of the Methodist movement. Since singing is an integral part of African

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[365] McClain, 22.

[366] Ibid., 26.

heritage, the act of singing drew the community together to share their hope in God, who promises them liberation.

Since the common traits of the black slaves are used in communicating religion, some of the slaves were empowered to preach and became licensed as local preachers in the Methodist movement. Mitchell discusses the importance of proclaiming the word in particular languages and cultures in pointing out the experiences of these black preachers, namely how they shared pain and suffering with their fellow slaves and then interpreted the scripture for them in their specific context. As their gifts and power with words became recognized, some of them were even allowed to preach to white congregations. However, McClain acknowledges that these lay preachers were later pushed to the margin of the Methodist movement by being denied in their license to preach. Therefore, they created a new preaching category of *exhorters*, often sending them to accompany white lay preachers. Despite the ensuing discrimination within the Methodist circle, black preachers empowered their people with an "experiential, dramatic, and picturesque message" of hope and grace.[367]

Finally, McClain claims that blacks in the past were drawn to Methodism because it was easy to adapt it to serve the needs of their community. According to E. Franklin Frazier, when the African slaves were forced to come to America, they became "atomized" in their new setting. Moreover, the slaves could not practice their religious traditions and beliefs grounded in their community. Frazier argues that Methodism

[367] Ibid., 33.

provided "a new way of life and drew them into a union at first with whites, but later formed a stronger bond with members of their own race."[368] Mitchell hesitates in endorsing Frazier's view because he believes that culture "has an impressive tenacity" that ensures the survival of community.[369] For example, Mitchell describes how African slaves communicated with one another through the drumming codes and practiced African traditional medicines, which are even manifest today. In such a context, storytelling was a critical part of the slaves' experience, as they recounted where they came from and as they anticipated the redemption by the power of God; such storytelling worked in reminding them of their origin, reinterpreting their situation, and preaching the eschatological hope that God would deliver them from slavery.

Wesley's theology was prophetic in England in the 18th century when society was being impacted by the development of industrialization, and his message was that there could be no holiness but social holiness. In other words, to strive for the holiness of God, a person had to be grounded in the community of faith where everyone shares in the covenant and hold each other accountable for their spiritual growth. Likewise, African slaves responded favorably to the communal aspect of early Methodism not because it was new to them, but because it was already in affinity with their cultural and religious value systems. In facing oppression and injustice, they intuitively knew that they could

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[368] Frazier, 339.

[369] Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 12-13.

sing, pray, and proclaim together in order to survive the hardship from slavery and anticipate the justice and liberation of God.

As African slaves promptly responded to Methodism in the early years, it seems appropriate to argue that these theological attributes of Methodism are still prevalent in many black churches today. Although slavery legally ended through emancipation after the Civil War, racism still divides the United States today and it still institutionally threatens many lives in the black community. While many white churches and denominations are rapidly declining in their numbers, many black churches still play a significant role in their communities by retaining their culture and language, recounting their origin and story, and empowering to strive for justice and equality for many. They intuitively and experientially know that the redemptive narrative is an ongoing process in which justification and sanctification are critical parts of their Christian lives.

3. Justification and Sanctification in the Black Church

In the black church, justification and sanctification are not merely theological concepts that the preacher discusses intellectually. Rather, they are theological processes of how God works in black community in God's redemptive plan. Their meanings are existential in ways where they embrace a new identity and begin the process of justice and reconciliation. In *Redemption in Black Theology*, Moyd argues that justification by faith in the black community is "an ontological reality which gives meaning to Black religionists who dangle in a state of existential absurdity."[370] Although believers in the black community intuitively know that they are children of God—that is, they are created

[370] Olin P. Moyd, *Redemption in Black Theology*, 159.

in God's image and are equal to whites—they also experience racism and oppression in a society that denies their personhood. In other words, they are regarded as "nobody" during the week, but when they gather at a church on Sunday, they become "somebody" with their identity given by God. Cone describes such transition as "a rupture in time, a Kairos—event which produces a radical transformation in the people's identity."[371]

As Wesley defines justification as the forgiveness of sins by the grace of God, the sinner is deemed righteous by the merit of Christ. This is not the work of human beings—by contrast, it is the work of Christ who redeems in the midst of their sins and brokenness. Moyd also points out that justification in the black community comes from "above while there is no justice below."[372] The source of one's worth as a human being in the black community is not grounded in the efforts of human beings to claim their sacredness. Rather, it is primarily grounded in the grace of God who comes and meets people who struggle and suffer in their contexts. Moyd even identifies the shouts during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s—such as, "I am somebody!" or "I'm Black and I'm beautiful!"—as being grounded in such a religious tradition that God is the One who fearfully and wonderfully created them in God's image. Therefore, justification in the black community is a conversion experience that transforms a person's denial in society and world into the person's acceptance in the reign of God.

Although it is the justifying act of God who comes, meets, and loves God's people who groan and suffer in pain and evil of the world, God does not leave them

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[371] Cone, 140.

[372] Moyd, 153.

alone, nor does God make them wait for God to redeem the world fully in the end. For the black community, while they may experience the justifying grace of God who redeems them as God's righteous children, they may intuitively know that they have to return to their society, which may continue to degrade their new identity given by God. These believers in the black community may recognize the need for their community to raise a prophetic voice against the personal and institutional racism that threaten many innocent lives. It is not an option whether to respond to the initial grace of God through their words and actions. Rather, it is an urgent call concerned with their survival; moreover, it is a call recognizing that the society and the world still deny their God-given identity. This is why sanctification is critical to the black community as it is concerned with the ongoing struggle for justice and liberation. As Cone argues, "When the meaning of sanctification is formed in the social context of an oppressed community in struggle for liberation, it is difficult to separate the experience of holiness from the spiritual empowerment to change the existing societal arrangements."[373]

In discussing the ongoing process of sanctification in believers, Moyd discusses the ethical dimension of sanctification in the black church. He introduces James Seller's analysis that ethics and morality refer to the same thing etymologically. While *ethics* comes from the Greek, *morality* comes from the Latin, originally meaning "custom, conventional conduct, and habitual way of action." Seller contemplates how both later came to connote different meanings because the Greeks tended to be more philosophical while the Romans were more practical. Moyd proposes that consequently, morality is

[373] Cone, 149.

more associated with "daily conduct and behavior of individuals," while ethics refers to "the standard of excellence which gives rise to conduct and behavior." In other words, although morality and ethics once implied the inseparability between reflection and behavior as the practice of moral reflection, in Western society they have come to be considered as separate disciplines.

However, Moyd does not consider morality and ethics to be separate concepts in black folk religion because "the communicant moves directly from religious conviction and faith to conduct and behavior."[374] Such a dichotomy is a "Western approach evolving out of Greek Philosophy."[375] As Wesley's Methodism is a practical religion, Moyd also suggests that Black folk religion is "very practical in application."[376] While this does not mean that black folk religion rejects a philosophical approach to faith, it means that their reflection on divinity must be translated to how they live their ordinary lives in a way that may reflect on the character of their god. For example, Moyd alludes to E. Bolaji Idowu who writes in *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief*, "For the Yoruba, moral values derive from the nature of God Himself, Whom they consider to be the 'Pure King,' 'Perfect King."[377] As Wesley also defines the sanctification as growing in Christ-likeness through disciplines, the black church also considers the ethical dimension of life as participating in the redeeming work of God.

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[374] Moyd, 175.

[375] Ibid.

[376] Ibid.

[377] Ibid., 177.

In *The Sacred Art*, Moyd specifically addresses the role of preaching that empowers people in the process of salvation by guiding them to right action in the world. As he argues, "The African American sermon has also been preoccupied with or planned to elicit right action. The preaching helps the people to discern the times and to act with God in improving the lot of the dispossessed."[378] Moyd admits that in the black church, songs, prayers, and testimonies often seem to focus on individual salvation.[379] However, he also argues that the essential nature of the gospel preached in the black church urges its audience to become "involved in interpreting situations and becoming involved with God in challenging distortions and solving problems and correcting errors."[380] In a similar vein, Cone plainly denies that black religion is often accused of being "otherworldly." Rather, he states that the prophetic vision suggested by black religion offers a "spiritual vision about the reconstruction of a new humanity" that is not defined by injustice but by freedom in God.[381] For Cone, liberation and sanctification are not separate entities—he views sanctification to be liberation.[382]

4. Law and Gospel as a Homiletical Grammar of the Holy Spirit

Cone describes black worship as truthful because "the Spirit's presence authenticates their experience of freedom by empowering them with courage and strength

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[378] Moyd, *The Sacred Art*, 95.

[379] Moyd, *Redemption in Black Theology*, 178.

[380] Moyd, *The Sacred Art*. 95.

[381] Cone, 150.

[382] Ibid.

to bear witness in their present existence, what they know is coming in God's own eschatological future."[383] It means that the Holy Spirit is the One who ultimately meets people in the midst of their struggle and suffering. The Holy Spirit empowers the listeners calling them to be the active participants in the redeeming work of God that liberates the dispossessed and marginalized. As James Forbes perceptively outlines in *The Holy Spirit & Preaching*, the practice of preaching is an act participating in the work of the Holy Spirit, since it is a "living, breathing, flesh-and-blood expression of theology of the Holy Spirit."[384] The Holy Spirit anoints the preacher, helps to prepare the sermon in discernment, and even helps to deliver the sermon.[385]

Preaching as an act of participating in the work of the Holy Spirit or "collaborating with the Holy Spirit"[386] challenges the form of narrative sermon as creating an event for divine-human encounter. While experiencing the presence of God is important for any type of preaching, it is essentially not the human scheme but the work of the Holy Spirit who helps individuals experience the presence of God. Luke A. Powery presents this view in his argument: "Regardless of the nature of a sign of the Spirit, the Spirit is the One who allows humanity to experience and participate in the gracious life of

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[383] Cone, 139.

[384] James Forbes, *The Holy Spirit & Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 19.

[385] See James H. Harris's discussion on Preaching and the Holy Spirit in *Preaching Liberation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 34-35.

[386] Ibid., 80.

God."[387] He then quotes Wesley: "The natural man discerneth not the things of the Spirit of God,' so that we never can discern them until 'God reveals them unto us by his Spirit.'"[388] Powery's insight on the work of the Holy Spirit for preaching calls preachers to receive the wisdom of the Holy Spirit who may reveal what to preach and how to preach rather than inserting our theology into a predetermined form for the sermon.

With this view in mind, how does a listener know that the Holy Spirit is speaking to the audience through the practice of preaching? Powery explains that there are four manifestations of the Holy Spirit that can be discerned—the Spirit of Lament and Celebration, the Spirit of Grace, the Spirit of Unity, and the Spirit of Fellowship. First, Powery argues that while celebration has been much discussed as the critical aspect of black preaching, lament has not been highlighted as the way the Holy Spirit groans with people who are hurting personally, socially, economically, politically, and spiritually. He contends that people are not separated from God in their groans of suffering because God meets them in the midst of pain and suffering. While God's creation and people groan in pain over their sins and brokenness, it is the work of the Holy Spirit who leads them to the celebration found in Christ's resurrection. For Powery, the material to be celebrated in preaching is grounded in "this act of the resurrection and the hope and new life the Spirit promises."[389]

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[387] Luke A. Powery, *Spirit Speech: Lament and Celebration in Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009), 38.

[388] John Wesley, *A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, *The Works of John Wesley*. 8:106.

[389] Ibid., 29.

Second, Powery claims that the Holy Spirit not only pardons one's sins but also empowers people. Here, he consults Wesley's sermons to illustrate the salvific process of both God's creation and people through the work of the Holy Spirit. For him, the process of salvation can be discerned through *creation grace*, *forgiving grace*, *transforming grace*, and *sacramental grace*. The first three graces correspond with Wesley's view of grace, which is discernable as prevenient grace, justifying grace, and sanctifying grace. The fourth one, sacramental grace, is the "means of grace" in Wesleyan theology.[390] Although the sacraments such as the Eucharist or baptism have no merit in themselves, the Holy Spirit "nurtures and sustains the Christian faith of individuals through grace received personally."[391]

Whether one experiences the presence of God directly or indirectly, Powery argues that it is critical that preaching must speak of grace and invite the audience to experience it because the primary purpose of preaching is salvation.[392] Although Lowry's view of narrative sermon is concerned with arousing a curiosity among the audience that leads to the answer in experiencing the gospel, Powery's view of preaching in the black church tradition is always concerned with one's salvation. Such a view is also in agreement with Wesley's primary concern for his practical theology—that is, to save people from their sins by the grace of God.

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[390] Ibid., 39-46.

[391] Powery, 46.

[392] Ibid., 47.

Thirdly, Powery argues that the mark of unity is the sign of the Spirit's work in the community. As he claims, "The Spirit fosters unity within the faith community, guiding Christians to do the same; thus, any sign of this emphasis within sermons may be discerned to be a manifestation of the Spirit."[393] He discusses the church in Corinth that suffered conflict in the midst of its diversity. Whether it was due to the authority of the apostle, the understanding of the gospel, social stratification, and sexual misbehavior within the community, he acknowledges Paul's complaint that the church was not of one mind. For this, Paul urges the congregation to come together in the Spirit to worship together and care for one another as one body of Christ. The church needs to reflect the character of Christ, who is full of love and humility. Therefore, Powery argues that "promoting unity by lamenting disunity or celebrating unity is a sign of the Spirit in sermons."[394]

While Powery shares an insightful point about unity as the manifestation of the Holy Spirit, he seems to confine the work of the Spirit to only unity. Could disunity also be the work of the Holy Spirit? When Methodism failed to recognize the pain and suffering of African slaves under oppression, Allen and Absalom Jones, two black Methodist preachers, bemoaned that their people were forced to sit segregated from the white congregants at St. George's Methodist Church. In 1787, they led the black members of that church out of the door and founded the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1816. Their act is based on the prophetic urge of the Holy Spirit, who

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[393] Ibid., 51.

[394] Ibid., 75.

recognizes the injustice of the church and celebrates liberation in confronting institutional racism under a false unity. Interestingly, Powery does not recognize the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the midst of disunity. However, the black preaching tradition has recognized the injustice in the midst of false unity being suppressed for the sake of unity in society and religion.

Finally, Powery claims that the Spirit forms a fellowship in the community of faith.[395] Such fellowship is not confined to the four walls of the church. Rather, it embraces its mission to the world in hospitality and service. For Powery, this work of the Holy Spirit is grounded in the Trinitarian nature of God.[396] The three persons of God—Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit—are not subject to one another but collaborate with one another in love. Through the act of love, Christ came to the world to serve others rather than to be served. Christ's loving nature in relation to God is the foundation that the Holy Spirit works upon within the believers; the intention is that they would form fellowship with one another as they are sent out to the world for the ministry of shalom for the oppressed and needy.

Powery views the Spirit of Grace in regard to the individual domain, while the Spirit of Fellowship is communal. As he states, "The individual and personal experience of God's grace happens through justification by faith in Christ and the work of sanctification. The unity of a church community happens with a focus on Christ,

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[395] Ibid., 77.

[396] Ibid., 78.

particularly on the way of the cross, which suggests humility in human relationship."[397] Powery seems to believe that the nature of experience tends to be individualistic, and thus he adds the Spirit of Fellowship to compensate what is lacking in his previous argument. However, Wimberly argues in *No Shame in Wesley's Gospel* that Wesley's narrative rhetoric of salvation is "communal by its very nature."[398] As a result of hearing the gospel, people are encouraged to form societies and congregations to "sustain the sanctification process."[399] This is because Wesley may have known the danger of falling back into a sinful nature unless people find mutual support as they desire growth to be like Christ and to have perfection in their love for God and neighbors.

Powery admits that his homiletical method of preaching lament and celebration resonates with the sermon patterns of "law and gospel," "trouble and grace" by Wilson, "antithesis and thesis" by Samuel D. Proctor, and "exposing/envisioning" by Campbell.[400] At the same time, he also tries to distance himself from the dialectical method because he asserts that the movement of the Spirit cannot be confined to a move from bad news to good news. In *Homiletical Theology: Preaching as Doing Theology*, David S. Jacobsen also observes such a distinction in Powery and shares a note from his personal correspondence. Here, Powery remarks,

> I am trying to distance myself from a rigid dialectic through my embrace of culture, particular African American. I would also add that my embrace of the

[397] Ibid., 103.

[398] Wimberly, *No Shame in Wesley's Gospel*, 43.

[399] Ibid., 43.

[400] Powery, 96.

> Spirit, or should I say the Spirit's embrace of me, suggests a broader approach beyond the dialectic because the Spirit blows where she wills, even working in inverse (grace to trouble or celebration to lament) if and when necessary or moving in totally different ways.[401]

Whether his homiletical method moves from lament to celebration, or celebration from lament, Powery states that their juxtaposition needs to be called doxology because "as a unified tensive paring these manifestations of the Spirit in preaching represent the full glorification of God during times of joy and sorrow."[402] Here, Jacobsen points out that Powery discerns the movement of lament and celebration in preaching through a cultural understanding pointing to the Spirit's activity.[403]

While Powery is correct in pointing out that the Holy Spirit freely moves the audience from lament to celebration or celebration to lament, it is difficult to treat these movements as equal to each other. The reason for this is that the lament which comes after the celebration of the good news in Christ cannot be the same as the lament before celebrating the freedom in Christ. For example, Powery acknowledges that there are the lament psalms such as Psalm 39 that do not end with praise and celebration but rather with lament again. However, the lament in v. 12—"Hear my prayer, Lord, listen to my cry for help"—comes after the confession of the psalmist who declares, "But now, Lord, what do I look for? My hope is in you." In other words, the lament of the psalmist at the end of Psalm 39 is not hopeless groaning in pain. By contrast, it is based on the

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[401] David S. Jacobsen, ed., *Homiletical Theology: Preaching as Doing Theology* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2015), 27.

[402] Powery, 96.

[403] Jacobsen, 28.

eschatological hope that God, from whom the psalmist seeks help will surely deliver him from the wickedness of his foes.

In the same way, Powery mentions Psalm 88 as the inversion of lament and celebration. The psalm does not end with celebration but with lament.

> But I, O Lord, cry out to you;
> in the morning my prayer comes before you.
> O Lord, why do you cast me off?
> why do you hide your face from me?
> Wretched and close to death from my youth up,
> I suffer your terrors; I am desperate.
> Your wrath has swept over me;
> your dread assaults destroy me.
> They surround me like a flood all day long'
> from all sides they close in on me.
> You have caused friend and neighbor to shun me;
> my companions are in darkness. (v.13-18)

While Psalm 88 seems to end with a pessimistic tone, the song of the psalmist is actually based on his trust in God as "God of my salvation" (v.1) He believes that God would listen to his prayers when "at night, I cry out in your presence." He trusts that God would "incline your ear to my cry." Such a trust in God as the redeemer does not reduce the lament to "bad news." Rather, it recognizes the reality where evil seems to prevail in the world even after one comes to acknowledge the sovereign power of God. As one is placed in the eschatology of "already" but "not yet," one laments the current situation of oppression and evil with hope that God will surely bring victory to the oppressed and victimized.

While Powery views lament and celebration as a "grammar of the Spirit underlying the preaching of African Americans,"[404] it may be that he is reflecting theologically on the process of salvation as defined by law and gospel. The Holy Spirit helps people lament by revealing sins and evil in the world through the law. In other words, a person would not be able to distinguish wrong from right without law. The Holy Spirit leads people to Christ, who forgives them and redeems them as children of God through the gospel. In the meantime, the Holy Spirit leads people out to the world where they are still faced with injustice and sins. The Holy Spirit empowers them to grow in their love for God and their neighbors through the renewed law while anticipating the final victory in God. Therefore, the law works as a nourishment for souls, empowering them to act boldly in accordance with the will of God in the world.

Nevertheless, it seems that while Powery reflects the language of law and gospel through the dynamic of lament and celebration, he does not seem to recognize the renewed role of law that works as a means of sanctification. Although he argues that the Holy Spirit forms the fellowship, I believe that the Holy Spirit works in people as they take their responses to the grace of God seriously and situates them in an intentional community to commit to the morality of God. To support my argument, I turn to Dale P. Andrews's work on covenantal theology for black churches because it seeks to ground individuals in an intentional community that hold themselves responsible to their covenant with God. I will discuss how a

[404] Powery, 95.

Wesleyan theology of law and gospel corresponds with covenantal theology so that a person can envision how it could be practiced as a homiletic and ecclesial vision.

5. Covenantal Theology for Black Churches

In *Practical Theology for Black Churches*, Andrews recognizes the growing chasm between black theology and black churches since the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. At that time, the proponents of black power were not satisfied with the rate of dismantling racial injustice in political and private realms. In functioning as a theological voice, black theology adopted the militancy of the black power movement by endorsing a "complete emancipation of black people from white oppression by whatever means black people deemed necessary."[405] Moreover, black theology attacked black churches as "spiritually removed or 'otherworldly.'"[406] The messages of preaching and pastoral care back then were believed to be too focused on personal salvation and forgiveness. Andrews also notices that even the black churches that acknowledge the importance of blackness for "self-esteem and empowerment" do not quite agree with the whole idea of black theology for its "inherent reductionism and divisiveness" and most of all, for neglecting "the gospel message of universal Christian love."[407]

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[405] James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (New York: Seabury Press, 1969), 6.

[406] Dale P. Andrews, *Practical Theology for Black Churches* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 3.

[407] Ibid., 4.

In standing between black theology in the academy and black religious lives in church, Andrews attempts to bridge the chasm as a practical theologian. He defines practical theology as "an engaging process between theology, theory, and practice, with each one feeding back upon the others."[408] Such a term captures the reflexive aspect of theology in how it is intended to have an impact on how the church faithfully lives out its mission in the world. In other words, practical theology in Andrews's view is not just the application of theory into practice, but it implies an inductive aspect of theology that approaches the practices of ministry being intermingled with theory. The ultimate purpose of such reflexive activity is always to fulfill what God intends for God's faith community by constantly reflecting and modifying the way one lives in the world in the communal context.

With such an approach, Andrews contends that the criticism of black churches being too otherworldly is a misdiagnosis by black theology. According to him, such a misdiagnosis is a result of failing to ground its prophetic consciousness in the religious folk tradition of African American community. Both preaching and pastoral care in African American churches assume the importance of community. In such a community, members develop a sense of both personhood and peoplehood as they hear, interpret, and reinterpret the realities of racism, slavery, segregation, and injustice through the narrative of God, who not only provides hope but also empowers God's people. Andrews asserts that black theology neglects the importance of the black church as a "refuge paradigm," which includes "concerns for

[408] Ibid., 1.

the survival, nurture, and growth of African Americans through the Christian faith."[409] He holds to the belief that the black church as a refuge was not escaping from reality, but instead it "commonly fostered black wholeness and human rights."[410] In a life-threatening situation, forming a refuge itself could be a non-conforming act against the dominant culture, which usually disregards the value of the oppressed and marginalized.

Since the critique of the black church by black theology is a misdiagnosis, Andrews points to American individualism as the actual target that black theology needs to combat since it "disrupts the group-centric strength of the African American social and religious community."[411] With the increasing size of the black middle class, the black community has fallen victim to American individualism—meaning that it is up to the individual to find happiness and prosperity in the society and the world. Such a critique is supported by Deborah J. Mumford in her work *Exploring Prosperity Preaching*.[412] While forsaking the black prophetic tradition, many black churches foster a prosperity gospel that promises material wealth and physical health for those who believe and obey the word of God. In recognizing the pollution of

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[409] Ibid., 34.

[410] Ibid.

[411] Ibid., 67.

[412] Mumford critically reflects how the prosperity gospel in the United States rooted in American individualism allures many black churches to abandon their prophetic voice. This is likely because of their "emphasis on the individual over the group, earth over heaven, and success over service." Deborah J. Mumford, *Exploring Prosperity Preaching* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2012), xii.

black churches with American individualism, Andrews turns to covenantal theology as a bridge between black theology and black churches to find a common language that is concerned with liberation, repentance, reform, and reconciliation.

Here, Andrews's discussion of covenantal theology in black churches is critical to the purpose of this study since it shows how the renewed role of law could be practiced in the life of the church. Although his discussion might be in a slightly different dimension, it is possible to detect a connection when considering how the United Methodist Church has also been experiencing a growing chasm due to theological interpretation and practice. While the church claims to have experienced the gospel in Christ who liberates us from the power of sin, it still continues to suffer from divisiveness and marginalization of minorities in the forms of ethnicity, gender, nationality, class, and sexual orientation. While many clergy continue to preach the good news found in Christ, the present time is perhaps one of the most opportune times that they can interpret and reinterpret with their audiences how that good news needs to be lived out in their personal and communal settings. As people who are justified by the love of Christ, Andrews's discussion of covenantal theology seems to suggest how preachers could share the renewed law of God as empowerment for Christian life of peace, forgiveness, justice, and reconciliation.

First of all, covenantal theology not only emphasizes freedom in God but also responsibility for being accountable to God and community. The Sinai covenant is grounded in the context of the Israelites who had just been freed from slavery in Egypt. Andrews is seen to be in agreement with Jon Levenson: "The focus of the Sinai covenant

lies within the moral character of the relationship between Yahweh and the Israelites."[413] In other words, the exodus could take place because of God's sovereign acts. As Yahweh and the Israelites came to the covenant in Sinai, Andrews argues that the Israelites accepted "certain responsibilities" which were "not a partnership between equals." While the Decalogue in Exodus 20:2-17 and the Book of the Covenant in Exodus 20:22-23:33 suggest the basic conditions of covenant, these also indicate the responsibilities on both sides that God would be faithful to the Israelites as long as they obey the covenant with God with their hearts, minds, and acts. Andrews further explains that these covenant stipulations eventually became the contents of "commandments and laws."[414]

Along the same line, Andrews points out that the responsibilities of the Israelites are concerned not only with God but also with their community. He argues that "personal and social morality were held in the same regard as ceremonial acts of worship."[415] As Wesley defines personal holiness as being inseparable from social holiness,[416] covenantal theology for black churches assumes that prophetic vision always stems from the liturgical language and context of their community. According to R. E. Clement in *Prophecy and Covenant*, the Israelites believed that their ethical code in the law was closely tied to their worship. As Clement argues, "Yahweh was known as the God who

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[413] Andrews, 114.

[414] Ibid.

[415] Ibid., 115.

[416] John Wesley, *Hymns and Sacred Poems: Published by John Wesley* (Bristol: Felix Farley, 1743), viii.

watched over the conduct of all who claimed to worship him, and the cult itself was a vital instrument for the making known of his will."[417] The covenant with God comes with responsibility on the part of God's people, namely that they would act in accordance with the holiness and character of God. In other words, the authority of morality was not considered separate from "God's will and sovereignty."[418]

Andrews's vision of covenantal theology for black churches sheds light on how to understand the renewed role of law for narrative preaching. While God liberates people from the power of sin and slavery, God again draws people into a covenantal relationship by giving them the law, which marks them as God's people. As the ethical code of law stems from worshiping God, it is natural to conclude that narrative that tells how God meets people, calls them, and acts for them, in turn drawing them to a deeper relationship of the covenant by reflecting the characteristics of who God is for them. As God meets black people who come from feeling hurt, neglected, and marginalized and embraces them as people of God, it is senseless to argue that God sends them out to the world without altering their identity, which is done by giving the new law as the mark of God's people.

Second, covenant theology in black churches leads to the forming of an alternative community that is committed to morality and social reform.[419] In other

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[417] R. E. Clement, *Prophecy and Covenant* (Naperville: Alec R. Allenson, INC, 1965), 75-76.

[418] Gerhard von Rad, *God at Work in Israel,* trans. John H. Marks (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980), 185-186, quoted in Andrews, *Practical Theology for Black Churches,* 112.

[419] Andrews, 115.

words, covenantal theology rejects American individualism which falsely places one's privilege and success as the highest achievement. The alternative community—which is in a covenantal relationship with God—nurtures the identity of peoplehood as they experience God who delivers them from sin and oppression. In *A Social Reading of the Old Testament*, Walter Brueggemann also points out the metaphor of covenant "mediates to us a very different notion of social life and social practice" by repudiating "conventional modes of social organizations that are exploitative and hierarchical in favor of equity, justice, and compassion."[420] While blacks experience racism that denies their peoplehood outside the church, they gather at churches on Sunday morning and live a radically different reality where they are embraced as the beloved by God who is full of justice, love, and compassion.

Andrews also points out that the covenant theology mediates not only a radical reality of alternative community but also an invitation for the wider world to participate in such social reform. This view is shared by Brueggemann in his work, particularly with this utterance: "The covenantal paradigm affirms that the world we serve and for which we care is a world yet to be liberated. A theology of covenanting is not worth the effort unless it leads to energy and courage for mission."[421] For this reason, covenantal theology calls the worshiping community to engage in mission in the world as an active way to participate in the redeeming work of God, who desires

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[420] Walter Brueggemann, *A Social Reading of the Old Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 61.

[421] Ibid., 50.

liberation, repentance, peace, and reconciliation. While black Christians witness that they form a radical reality within their church as a refuge, prophetic tradition grounded in the ritual of God eventually empowers them to challenge and reform the unjust society in accordance with the principles of equity, justice, and compassion.

In building upon this belief, the renewed law of narrative preaching invites listeners not to be left to their own conclusions on how to live their lives, but to act as a community with a mission to resist, proclaim, and reform society. The law as empowerment for a person's sanctification calls the listeners to find a new identity by belonging to an alternative community. Such preaching implies the urgent language of commissioning rather than leaving listeners with questioning. The transforming purpose formed by preaching recognizes the temptation of the world that lures listeners to remain satisfied with the status quo of the society. Unless they are grounded in the community that already lives in the reign of God—a realm where love, compassion, and peace prevail—they will likely be assimilated into the world where they may take for granted that the powerless are pushed to margins of the society and may run the risk of falling victim to American individualism.

Finally, Andrews points out that covenantal theology in black churches is not mere obedience to the law of God but an ongoing reinterpretation of it for liberation, reform, repentance, and reconciliation. While black theology often takes a militant stance by reducing the gospel to liberation, black churches also fail to establish the prophetic tradition. Andrews believes that the covenantal model of black ecclesiology offers "a source of accountability for prophetic inspiration as a

corrective for the often costly predominance of refuge spirituality in religious praxis."[422] He also believes that the covenant traditions of black churches could offer "a heuristic methodology," which is observable in "reader response criticism." Reader response criticism emphasizes the role of the reader in the task of interpretation. The effects of the biblical text become part of interpretation, not just the result of it. Since meaning can only be established in the process of interaction between the reader and text, Andrews has argued that such a reader response criticism often turns to "hearer-response criticism" in black churches as the meaning formation takes place within the community, which leads to faith and commitment for reform.[423]

Andrews's vision of covenantal theology in the mode of practical theology offers an insightful guide for the renewed law in narrative preaching. While popular notions of law seem to imply something coercive, mandatory, and judgmental, the law in the context of covenantal theology is an active work of interpreting and reinterpreting the praxis of the faith community in response to the gospel. Preachers could share modified behaviors with the audience, as people who are committed to a covenantal relationship with God. Preachers invite their audiences to practice ethical behaviors in a way that the listeners can reinterpret or reimagine their situation because of the prophetic tradition correctly embedded in the preachers' suggestions. When people may agree with preachers that ethical commitment stems from the

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[422] Andrews, 122.

[423] Ibid., 125.

characteristics of God whom they worship in ritual, they may not consider these characteristics as judgmental or coercive. Rather, these are likely seen as participatory and invitational with joy and vision when the audience realize that it is God who empowers them to transform and reform the world through the help of the Holy Spirit.

A number of devices have been creatively adopted by black preachers as folk religious ways—these devices include singing hymns, reciting poems, or inviting to discipleship. This is done not only to reinforce the message they preach but also to invite the listeners into a deeper covenantal relationship with God. In the next chapter, these areas are explored as possible methods for narrative preachers to adopt, to proclaim the renewed law in their sermons.

6. Wesley's Therapeutic Narrative of Salvation

As Andrews argues, the accusation against black churches of being otherworldly represents a misdiagnosis of American individualism by black theology. The practice of preaching in the 21st century takes place in a context where many pursue their own happiness without a regard for others. Wimberly points out the devastating impact of individuals living as wanderers without being grounded in community, and he describes such people as "relational refugees." In *Relational Refugees,* he explains his view:

> Relational refugees are persons not grounded in nurturing and liberating relationships. They are detached and without significant connections with others who promote self-development. They lack a warm relational environment in which to define and nurture their self-identity. As a consequence, they withdraw into destructive relationships that exacerbate rather than alleviate their predicament.[424]

[424] Edward Wimberly, *Relational Refugees* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 20.

In a similar vein, Wimberly describes the context of the African American community as having lost the village where people used to gather to share their meaningful experiences through storytelling. As Homer Ashby illustrates in *Our Home Is Over Jordan*, Wimberly argues that many African Americans today have lost their village where they could share their sacred stories due to "fragmentation and relational disconnections," which is something that lead to "the violence, crime, and confusion rampant in our community."[425] In other words, many individuals do not develop a sense of guilt today because they are detached from a solid communal context.

For Wimberly, the loss of the meaningful community leads to shame in that one does not feel loved by others—namely God, family, and neighbors. The feeling of shame "produces a sense of being unloved, and people often seek social status and material wealth to satisfy the resulting need for love."[426] Here, he argues that Wesley's therapeutic rhetoric of salvation is the answer to dismantling shame in the 21st century. Wimberly describes this rhetoric as follows:

> Wesley's therapeutic rhetoric was based on his belief that happiness and healing of earthly spiritual, emotional, and interpersonal ills rested on a significant relationship with God through Jesus Christ as well as significant relationships with the faith community. It is this emphasis on relationship that makes Wesley's ideas and rhetoric significant for dealing with twenty-first-century shame. Of course, a relationship with God through Jesus Christ was central to dealing with sin and the behaviors associated with sin for Wesley. The key element in Wesley's practical theology for this century is the fact that shame can only be healed

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[425] Wimberly, *African American Pastoral Care, Revised Edition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), viii.

[426] Wimberly, *No Shame in Wesley's Gospel* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 21.

> through relationships. These relationships include the primary relationship with God as well as relationships with others.[427]

Wesley viewed salvation not only as juridical—that is, in being pardoned by the merit of Christ—but also as therapeutic in recovering the lost image of God who is love. As people today suffer from a shame that originates from being disconnected from God and a meaningful community, Wimberly believes that "happiness comes from our relationship with God through Jesus Christ as well as our being empowered by the Holy Spirit to live sanctified lives of loss of God and neighbor."[428]

Due to shame being the dominating force in our culture, Wimberly claims that it is necessary to update Wesley's practical theology by focusing on "his therapeutic and healing model of salvation rather than on his juridical or guilt-oriented model of salvation."[429] He analyzes the different ways in which Wesley delivers his preaching on salvation. The first is a juridical view of sin that urges people to change for the fear of condemnation. The second is a therapeutic view of sin that individuals can find a cure for their "sin-sickness" by coming to God. These first two models are grounded in justification. A third model is concerned with sanctification and is motivated by a fear of backsliding unless a person constantly strives for God's holiness. Wimberly notes that the fourth model shifts from a therapeutic model of sanctification to a "narrative

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[427] Edward Wimberly, "No Shame in Wesley's Gospel," in *The Shame Factor: How Shame Shapes Society*, ed. Robert Jewett (Eugene: Cascade, 2011), 109.

[428] Wimberly, xx.

[429] Ibid., 25.

understanding of sanctification," which focuses on "growing toward perfection."[430] By telling the biblical story, the listeners are drawn into it, which then leads the listeners to find their own stories; ultimately, they are persuaded that there is a better way to find their happiness in the world—that is, being in relationship with God and in service to others.

Wimberly's analysis of Wesley provides a way to update his theology of salvation as a narrative that draws the contemporary listeners to find their stories in light of the biblical stories of salvation. Wimberly argues that Wesley's narrative rhetoric is "grounded in a story of a hopeful vision of God's future defined as an 'already but not yet eschatology'."[431] Listeners are encouraged to assess the dominating stories, cultures, and experiences of the world that often lead to narcissism, self-destruction, and isolation from others in light of what God has already done for them. In suggesting a better way to find wholeness, listeners are called to live in relationship with God, who ensures a continuing growth in love for God and others. Wimberly holds the view that Wesley's narrative rhetoric "focuse[s] on convincing people that trusting God to work out providentially God's plot within the world led to happiness and virtue."[432]

In Wesley's narrative of salvation, God initiates God's redemptive work by accepting a person through the love of Christ. In other words, people are justified by the

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[430] Ibid., 38.

[431] Ibid., 46.

[432] Ibid., 50.

grace of God, who not only pardons their sins but also embraces them as God's children in God's love. For those who struggle with a sense of shame, it is the initial stage of salvation that God first meets them and embraces their shame as God's own through the sacrifice of Christ. While the world suffers "the loss of love,"[433] God acts first by imbuing broken people with a new identity grounded in God's love. For African Americans who have been enslaved and suffer racism, it is not necessarily their behaviors that lead to their sufferings and sins but rather the fallen nature of their oppressors. Therefore, a Wesleyan view of justification resonates with the renewal of their identity that cures their broken identity through the love of God, who unconditionally embraces them as God's children.

This view of justification in the black community is insightful in that it does not simply focus on God's pardon of a person's sinful behavior. Rather, it points to the transformation of one's status by the grace of God, and it leads to sanctification by focusing on the transforming power of God who heals us in the process of salvation. This is why Wimberly contends that Wesley's therapeutic view of salvation is much needed in contemporary society where the dominating paradigm of human experience is *shame* rather than *anxiety* as defined by Tillich. Wimberly recognizes that society in the United States today causes individuals to disconnect from one another and from meaningful relationships in pursuit of an accumulation of wealth and self-recognition. He argues convincingly that such false dreams are destructive in that they only promote a narcissism that does not offer true happiness for people. For Wimberly, as Wesley also argues in his

[433] Wimberly, xvii.

sermons, true happiness can only be found in a genuine relationship with God and neighbors.

CHAPTER 5

A WESLEYAN WAY OF NARRATIVE PREACHING

This study began with an analysis of the context of narrative preaching. While Barth defines the practice of preaching as event of revelation, the post-Bultmannians embrace the idea of preaching as a word-event or a language event. Many homileticians also attempt to provide an alternative event-oriented method of preaching by focusing on experience, image, and form. Lowry's narrative sermon is a creative use of a narrative centered on the radical reversal from bad news to good news, and Wilson insightfully analyzes Lowry's homiletical method in terms of law and gospel. This study reflects on Wesley's theology of law and gospel, and thus far I conclude that law is not only bad news but also intrinsic to a means of grace for sanctification. Such a renewed role for the law could be observed in the theology and practice of many black churches, as it challenges their audiences to participate in the ongoing work of God's liberation in the world. In summarizing the previous chapters, I suggest a more faithful practice of narrative preaching grounded on Wesley's theology of law and gospel.

This final chapter follows the discipline of practical theology; it begins with practice, then analyzes and reflects on the theory behind it, and ends by revising practice. In *Foundations for a Practical Theology of Ministry*, James N. Poling and Donald E. Miller point out the importance of the development of guidelines and specific practices as the final step of practical theology. As they argue, "Refusal to return to experience leaves one's ideas floating in this air where they may have striking coherence and clarity, but

they may be irrelevant to real life."[434] In the discipline of practical theology, theological thinking does not end with merely abstract interpretation of the situation. Rather, it always suggests a more faithful practice that might lead theologians to a different place than their starting point.

Of course, words of caution must be shared here. There must be care exercised not to universalize one sermonic form as the only way to preach the word of God. In *The Four Codes of Preaching*, John S. McClure contends that he is "personally suspicious of any kind of homiletical imperialism that claims to be the only way to preach in the contemporary world or the only biblical method of sermon preparation."[435] Homileticians have suggested their homiletical strategy in reflection of their contemporary theology, popular rhetoric, personal history and culture, and the needs and expectations of the churches in which they are active. When one claims that there is only one way to preach the words of God faithfully, such a person already stumbles in his or her arrogance, thus limiting the movement of the Holy Spirit who often works beyond our expectation, culture, and intellect. On this point, McClure asserts that "homiletics, like theology, art, and science, is always a provisional discipline."[436]

Nevertheless, this study suggests a Wesleyan mode of narrative preaching so that those who work with Wesleyan churches can contemplate a homiletical method that

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[434] James N. Poling and Donald E. Miller, *Foundations for a Practical Theology of Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 93.

[435] John S. McClure, *The Four Codes of Preaching: Rhetorical Strategies* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 4.

[436] Ibid.

integrates both Wesleyan theology and rhetoric. A Wesleyan theology of law and gospel can suggest a homiletical method that reflects on Wesleyan soteriology, which is grounded on the communal context where individuals are empowered to pursue the perfect love of God and neighbors. A Wesleyan manner of narrative preaching could also challenge other traditions to reflect on their theology more critically and on how coherent their methods of preaching are. This preaching method takes the form of a narrative while being open to the didactic, expository, apologetic, or conversational at any point in the narrative. Whichever form one might choose, a homiletician must probe into the theology chosen and find a homiletical method that integrates content and form. Just as Wesley considers "saving the soul" as the primary purpose of ministry,[437] Wesleyan preachers must critically engage with a Wesleyan theology of salvation for the practice of preaching.

With that in mind, this chapter suggests a Wesleyan manner of narrative preaching that begins with law as bad news, gospel as good news, and renewed law as an invitation to growth in the grace of God. I have selected two sermons by the United Methodist preachers, Zan Holmes and myself, with which I critically reflect on how a Wesleyan movement of law and gospel is observed in them.

1. What Is a Wesleyan Way of Narrative Preaching?

What does a Wesleyan way of narrative preaching look like? Here, I define it as a way of preaching that tells the salvific narrative of God who saves us from our sins in Christ and whose Spirit invites us to participate in our growth of love for God and our

[437] John Wesley, *"*The Scripture Way of Salvation."

neighbors. Such a way presupposes the presence of God, who journeys from the beginning to the end of the narrative in God's grace, initiates the salvific narrative, and also invites listeners to be active participants in it. It can be seen that Lowry's plot reversal is not the only way of experiencing the good news narratively. Rather, it is possible for a person to experience the good news in the grace of God at any moment in the salvific narrative. As a result of hearing the good news in Christ, Wesley's way of narrative preaching suggests the renewed law as the means of God's grace in the sanctification process, which tries to recover the image of God who is perfect in love. It is also essential that holy living can be realized more faithfully in a communal setting.

First, Wesleyan narrative preaching uses narrative as the form of preaching. Here, I do not mean the narrative as defined by Lowry whose plot begins with bad news, leads to reversal, and ends with good news. Instead, I refer to the way Wesleyan narrative preaching tells the salvific story of God for God's people. As Wimberly argues, Wesley uses narrative in order to encourage listeners to find themselves in the narrative of God's salvation. They could identify their stories with that of biblical characters and understand that God continues to work with them in their ongoing process for Christian perfection. What I suggest in this study is that we still adopt the form of narrative for preaching but make a modification with an emphasis on the renewed law as an invitation for the listeners to enter more deeply into active discipleship. The law as a means of sanctification empowers people to grow more in the grace of God and be more like Christ in his love for God and God's people. Wesleyan narrative preaching not only encourages listeners to make a difference in their lives by having them join in discipleship, but also

channels the power of God, who is already transforming them as new creations under the grace of Christ.

Therefore, I offer the diagram below as a tool to visualize how the plot of Wesleyan narrative preaching moves.

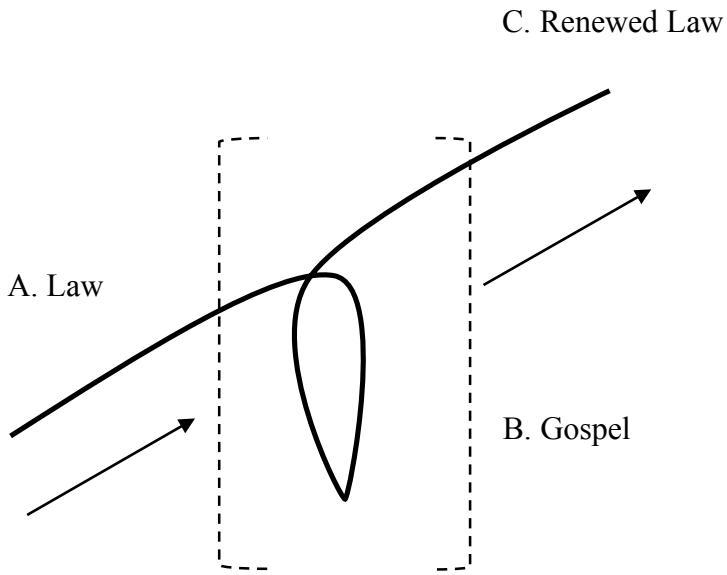

Figure 2. Wesleyan way of narrative preaching

At first glance, this diagram may not seem all that different from Lowry's homiletical plot. However, just as the arrows indicate a movement going upward, a Wesleyan mode of narrative plot emphasizes how hearers grow in the holiness of God. In other words, the sermon should not end where it begins. The sermon may begin with the bad news where listeners find themselves in the midst of sin, brokenness, or evil. However, the good news in Jesus Christ not only pardons, amends, and delivers, but also empowers them to strive for the love of God. While Lowry initially defines one plot

element as *anticipating the consequences* as the result of hearing the gospel, my suggestion is to replace this element with *actively empowered by the Holy Spirit*. In being empowered by the Holy Spirit, the preacher encourages listeners to bear the fruits of the gospel actively by stepping out of their comfort zone, overturning the status quo of individual and society, and following the way of Christ, who goes before them to bear the sins of the world and share sacrificial love for others.

The reversal between law and gospel may not happen in every narrative sermon, which is why this possibility is represented by the two dotted lines. The reason for marking this as a probable event is because the gospel may not always come to listeners as a life-changing surprise. As Long asserts, "Sometimes the gospel does not come to us as an Aha!—an unexpected word surprising us or turning our world upside down—but instead as a familiar and trusted word of confirmation, as the 'old, old story.'"[438] Wesleyan theology recognizes that a person still is capable of committing sins even after the person's initial justification—that is, the person is not under the power of sin but is still not completely free from it. Therefore, Wesley argues that a person still needs to come to repentance while on the journey to Christian perfection. Such repentance is left open in Lowry's otherwise complete reversal. A person still needs the continuing assurance of Christ, who forgives each individual as they come to Christ in humility. This is why the diagram above demonstrates the possibility that justification—or the forgiveness of sins—might come in two different ways, namely being pardoned either in one's sinful nature or in one's sinful acts.

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[438] Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 129-130.

Second, since a Wesleyan way of narrative preaching does not always celebrate the reversal from law to gospel, it is necessary to redefine the highlight of the sermon. A Wesleyan way of narrative preaching does not strongly divide between bad news and good news because the salvific process is initiated by the prevenient grace of God, according to Wesley. Such a dichotomy could imply that individuals bring themselves before Christ, as if they have the capacity to find salvation. Since it is God who works in all processes of one's salvation—namely prevenient grace, justifying grace, and sanctifying grace—Wesleyan narrative preaching places the possibility of good news at any point in the narrative plot. In other words, it is also the good news when one feels hungry for the kingdom of God in the process of being enlightened by the Holy Spirit and also being empowered to grow in his or her holiness by working in a communal setting.

For example, in her sermon "Walking Upright, Anyway!" (Luke 13:10-17), Safiyah Fosua describes the bent-over woman who suffered for eighteen years. Fosua observes that this woman was neglected for so many years that the public grew accustomed to her misery. Although the crowd remained silent, Jesus saw her, broke the silence, and healed her. The trouble came because he was not supposed to perform the miracle on the Sabbath. For Fosua, while the miracle of healing is the gospel, the grace of God is already present in the woman's condition before Jesus healed her. This can be seen when Fosua reads what she writes to the woman in Luke in the beginning of her sermon.

> I'm sure that no one understood your old point of view, Woman-Once-Bent-Over. Though some choose to look at the ground in despair and say, "I don't care"; for you, looking up was indeed difficult. How narrow your options had become over eighteen long years. Did you compare your prison with the prostitutes? They are

> in prison too. They, too, are captured by a *spirit* that holds them and forbids that they walk like the rest of us. Perhaps you compared your prison with the *workaholics* and the alcoholics who also are bound by things unseen. Or were you alone in your suffering, in your own private cell, left to contemplate how you would spend the rest of your life in that condition? What does it feel like, to finally be free from a prison that held you so long, Woman-Once-Bent-Over? Did you sigh with relief or rise in disbelief? How did it feel to stand once again? What were your thoughts? Did you prepare to run with glee? Surely all who had seen you before Jesus touched your life celebrated your good fortune. Or did they? More likely, you had to take time to come up with a story that would satisfy those who preferred seeing you bent over.[439]

For Fosua, the healing of the woman is identified as the good news: "But I am encouraged, because in spite of all that we Christians do to frustrate the grace of God, that woman *still got healed in church!*"[440] However, the good news is also found in Jesus's act of breaking silence, which is manifested in Fosua's letter that she listens to the cry of the Woman-Once-Bent Over, as well as to contemporary ones who are on the margins of society, such as prisoners, prostitutes, workaholics, and alcoholics.

Third, instead of shying away from suggesting specific practices as in Lowry's theory of narrative preaching, Wesleyan narrative preaching needs to engage in discussing practices precisely as a means of sanctifying grace. Its object is not to coerce the audience, making them feel shameful if they disagree. The practices point instead to "the positive consequences of investing in a relationship with God" rather than being focused on juridical guilt.[441] Its tone is invitational so that hearers might find joy in their

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[439] Safiyah Fosua, "Walking Upright, Anyway!" in *Black United Methodist Preach!* ed. Gennifer Benjamin Brooks (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012), 96.

[440] Ibid., 101.

[441] Wimberly, *No Shame in Wesley's Gospel*, 32.

growing in the holiness of God. Campbell also argues that preachers should not consider suggesting specific practices in sermons as the opposite of grace. He claims,

> Practices can lead one into grace just as often as grace empowers practices. Engagement in the concrete practices of the Christian community may, in fact, become not a means of work righteousness but a means to coming into a fuller sense of God's grace.[442]

As in the examples of Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount and Paul's advocacy for ecclesial practices in his letters, Campbell claims that specific practices can be shared with the congregation as their "grateful response to God's gracious acts of redemption."[443]

As a practical theologian, Wesley fervently encourages his fellow Methodists to uphold specific practices as the means of grace—namely the works of piety and mercy. For the former, Wesley suggests prayer, scriptures, Holy Communion, fasting, Christian community, and healthy living. For the latter, he refers to doing good, visiting the sick and prisoners, feeding and clothing people, earning, saving, and giving all one can, and opposition to slavery. In his sermon "The Means of Grace," Wesley defines the means of grace as "outward signs, words, or actions, ordained of God, and appointed for this end, to be the ordinary channels whereby he might convey to men, preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace."[444] While these do not have any inherent power in themselves, Wesley argues that they can conduct the "knowledge and love of God" only when they are

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[442] Charles L. Campbell, *The Word before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching*, 148-149.

[443] Ibid., 150.

[444] Wesley, "The Means of Grace" Sermon 16.

sustained by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, he warns his audience not to boast about themselves in their keeping these ordinances but to seek God alone by upholding them. For example, while prayer is the chief means of grace, it is a means to wait for the coming of Christ who saves one from his or her sin, not that prayer itself cleanses one from one's sin.

While these practices seem still relevant today, a Wesleyan method of narrative preaching can be creative in suggesting more practices that reflect on the locality of the church and the ongoing issues of the world. In facing racial discrimination, poverty, human-trafficking, terrorism, hate crime, limited healthcare, lack of education, deportation of undocumented immigrants, and homophobia, Wesleyan narrative preachers could encourage to "do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with their God"[445] through practices and guidelines. For example, Adam Hamilton, pastor of the United Methodist Church of the Resurrection, once preached a sermon on baptism and invited his congregation to remember their baptism each day.[446] To do so, he prepared a prayer card and encouraged his audience to hang it in their shower and recite it each time they stepped into the shower. The prayer goes as follows,

> "Lord, as I enter the water to bathe, I remember my baptism
> Wash me by your grace. Fill me with your Spirit
> Renew my soul.
> I pray that I might live as your child today and honor you in all that I do."[447]

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[445] Micah 6:8 (NRSV)

[446] Adam Hamilton, *The Way: Walking in the Footsteps of Jesus* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012), 32. Thomas G. Long defines Hamilton's preaching as based on a wisdom genre that utilizes bullet points. Although he is not a narrative preacher, he often encourages his congregation to grow in their love for God by suggesting specific practices.

[447] Ibid., 33.

It is an invitation to a powerful practice that reminds them that they are beloved children of God by remembering their own baptism.

Fourth, a Wesleyan mode of narrative preaching that ends with the renewed law as an invitation to participate in God's holiness ultimately projects the role of a preacher not just as a storyteller but also as teacher and ethical guide. Such multi-dimensional narrative preaching not only satisfies the purpose of sermon defined by St. Augustine—which is to delight, teach, and move—but it also mediates between the gospel as a narrative and popular culture that struggles to discern any unified narrative at all. In *Preaching from Memory to Hope*, Long argues that although narrative preaching is popular for engaging listeners and renewing interest in the pulpit, there is still a number of listeners whose minds do not process in a narrative way. To deal with this, Long points to Galen Strawson's essay, "Against Narrativity":

> "Strawson then proceeds to divide humanity into Diachronics, those who figure themselves 'as something that was there in the (further) past and will be there in the (further) future),' that is, people who tend to take a narrative outlook on life, and Episodics, those who don't."[448]

Following Strawson, Long points out that people who are Episodic do not relate their Christian belief and practice necessarily through narrative. As a result, Long observes elsewhere that many mega-churches take advantage of approaching the sermon as wisdom genre by developing the bullet points for the listeners.[449]

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[448] Long, *Preaching from Memory to Hope*, 12.

[449] "Thomas Long Talks about the Narrative and Episodic Natures of Our Parishioners," interview by *Working Preacher*, January 16, 2011, https://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?m=4377&post=2303

Long attempts to find the middle ground by blending both inductive and deductive as Lowry does. He argues, "If we tell stories in sermons—biblical and otherwise—we will need also to step away from those stories and think them through in non-narrative ways, drawing out explicitly the ideas and ethical implications of the stories."[450] In other words, an alternative method of narrative preaching for contemporary listeners is to loosely stick to the pure form of narrative but to integrate it with explanation of points and instruction for ethical behavior. Again, in his interview with *Working Preacher*, he makes a similar suggestion for future narrative preaching.

> I think what we do is that we preach narrative, the gospel narrative, but we step aside and do some bullet pointing, some instructions on how to process the narrative. Ways to get into the narrative. Ways to appreciate the narrative. So, we become the teachers and storytellers at the same time.[451]

In this way, Long revises the role of the preacher from a *witness*—as he defined it in *The Witness of Preaching*—to include teaching, based on his reflection on the culture and theology of preaching in a changing context.

My suggestion for a more faithful practice for narrative preaching is to encourage the preacher not only to be storyteller and teacher but also an ethical guide for the listeners. A person's commitment to ethical behavior in the world is not a requisite for his or her assurance of salvation. Rather, it is a faithful response to the gospel that the person has just heard in the communal context. Suggestions for ethical behavior recognize the sinful nature within individuals—even after they hear the gospel that meets them where

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[450] Long, *Preaching from Memory to Hope*, 15.

[451] Long, *Working Preacher*.

they are. Although a person is declared forgiven, accepted, and loved by the grace of God, Wesleyan theology teaches that people are not completely free from the dominion of sin that tempts them to return to where they were before hearing the gospel. Therefore, ethical instruction for listeners works as an invitation and guide for them to participate in the sanctifying work of God who restores the love of Christ in them. When listeners go back to the world where evil and sin still lurk, ethical behavior is a faithful response for them, through which listeners commit to witnessing the redeeming work of God for the world and participate as active followers of Christ.

2. Drama as an Alternative Form of Narrative

In envisioning the renewed law for the narrative sermon, a person is likely to ask whether a sermon that preaches the renewed law can still be considered a narrative sermon. In other words, if the theology of law and gospel is considered a doctrine to preach, does the practice of renewed law destroy the integrity of the narrative sermon's form? Is there a way to integrate doctrine and narrative in a constructive way? With these questions in mind, it is helpful to turn to Kevin J. Vanhoozer's works, which introduce drama as a theological method to integrate doctrine, narrative, and performance. While there might be various communication theories that could be helpful in this dissertation, Vanhoozer sheds light on the practice of drama not just because it is relevant in terms of the contemporary understanding of communication, but also because it has biblical, historical, and theological heritage for the use of Christian communities today.

In *The Drama of Doctrine*, Vanhoozer bemoans the fact that doctrine has gradually faded from many contemporary churches, because it often appears as "insipid

and irrelevant, maintaining no vital contact with the complications and particulars of everyday life."[452] On the contrary, he believes that doctrine helps believers to cope with many crises in our lives, because what is real is "located in the way of Jesus Christ."[453] Doctrine helps Christian communities to understand their place in the redemptive story of God, as they are located between the "definitive event of Jesus and the concluding event of the eschaton."[454] As it is God who has taken action in creating the world, being incarnated in Christ, and sending the Holy Spirit, doctrine should not be considered as static but as active, in that it is based on the dynamic movement of the Trinity. Therefore, Vanhoozer describes doctrine as "something dramatic: something to be not only heard and believed but also demonstrated, done, and *acted out*."[455] Doctrine requires a holistic approach to Christianity by indicating "what we should believe (*credenda*), what we may hope (*sperenda*), and what we should do (*agenda*).[456]

Doctrine tells the story of who God is and what God has done, as primarily found in the authoritative script, the Bible, and also provides "direction for playing one's role in the same drama of salvation that lies at the heart of the Scriptures."[457] Vanhoozer defines the drama of redemption as mainly consisting of five acts—Act 1 (Creation), Act 2

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[452] Vanhoozer, 3.

[453] Ibid., 2.

[454] Ibid., 3.

[455] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 19.

[456] Ibid., 26.

[457] Ibid., 21.

(God's election, rejection, and restoration of Israel), Act 3 (God's definitive Word/Act in Jesus Christ), Act 4 (the risen Christ and sending of the Holy Spirit to create the church), and Act 5 (the eschaton).[458] As actors performing in the world, which Vanhoozer refers to as "divine-human interactive theater," doctrine helps believers tell the biblical stories and locate their story as a part of God's theo-drama. Meanwhile, being located between the decisive event with Christ and the final fulfillment in Christ, the believers are expected to participate faithfully in the divine act by both proclaiming what they believe and practicing their response to God. Therefore, Vanhoozer argues that "doctrine is less theoretical than it is theatrical, a matter of *doing*—speaking and showing—what we have heard and understood."[459]

As doctrine is theatrical, requiring the actors' faithful performance of the drama, Vanhoozer argues that drama is better suited to draw attention to participation as part of the redemptive plot. While narrative often presents a "sequence of actions in the third person," he notes that the words in drama are spoken in "the first and second person." Put differently, those who perform drama refuse to be confined to monologue or narration in merely telling the audience what they have seen and heard. On the contrary, the actors in a drama present their story not just as witnesses but also as participants. If the world is divine-human interactive theater, God is the ultimate director, as well as the protagonist who communicates and acts initially in God's grace for the world. God, who initiates the communication, expects the believers to participate faithfully in God's redemptive

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[458] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 2-3.

[459] Ibid., 20.

history. Vanhoozer asserts that this is why he finds theatrical theology "superior to narrative theology: Disciples are not mere storytellers but *story-dwellers*."[460]

As doctrine is viewed as a theo-drama, Vanhoozer believes that preaching is a "means of grace" that reveals not only the identity of the audience members, but also the role they are playing.[461] Preaching completes this task by inviting the audience members to be caught up in the drama that God has initiated in Christ and also leads them to participate in what God is doing through the Holy Spirit. In speaking the theo-drama, preaching helps the audience members "determine what they can say and do in order rightly to participate in the drama."[462] Vanhoozer is aware that the fact that drama emphasizes performance—doing what we believe—may sound like works righteousness. However, he argues that theo-drama is "not a technique or a program for self-improvement but a way of conceiving, concentrating on, and participating in what God is doing for us (theodrama = God doing)."[463] As the congregation practices fidelity, generosity, or hospitality, they put on Christ, who lived these virtues through his life and ministry. Vanhoozer believes that such a fitting guide for discipleship is unique, because these practices of Jesus are also unique by virtue of their "being hypermoral and eschatological rather than merely moral and ethical."[464]

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[460] Ibid., 29.

[461] Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding*, 131.

[462] Ibid., 132.

[463] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Putting on Christ: Spiritual Formation and the Drama of Discipleship," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 8, no. 2 (2015): 156.

[464] Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding*, 153.

Vanhoozer's understanding of drama helps to conceive a creative way to integrate narrative, doctrine, and practice. Preaching as performing theo-drama helps the audience to locate their place and identity within God's redemptive narrative as primarily revealed in the scripture. At the same time, preaching provides guidance for the audience to allow them to perform their faith in the most fitting way. As Wesley defined the role of Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King, preaching as the means of grace imparts Christ who also calls the audience to participate in what Christ is doing in the Holy Spirit—commanding them to uphold the law as people who are justified by the grace of God. Through their active participation in performing the words and faith, they become exactly what they are called to be—faithful actors in the divine-human interactive theater.

3. How to Preach the Renewed Law

The next critical question seems to be, in what way could one preach the renewed law in a sermon? How can one preach a narrative sermon with the renewed law while not making it a legalistic sermon? I find the genres of proclaiming the gospel as described by Wilson to be helpful strategies to preach the renewed law. It is interesting that Wilson modified his own arguments in his recent work *Setting Words on Fire*, stating that he recognizes the presence of grace in God's law. While Wilson in his earlier work strongly divided between law and gospel (trouble and grace), he acknowledges that the "third use of law [in Calvin] is a proclamation of the gospel in that through it, the identity and activity of God are made known in Christ. The law both highlights and enacts in the Spirit the help a person receives in obedient living."[465] He argues that exhortation could

[465] Paul Scott Wilson, *Setting Words on Fire* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 176.

be a form of proclaiming the gospel. Here, I believe that if we consider exhortation as calling for a faithful response from hearers to the grace of God by the grace of God, such exhortation can be viewed as part of the gospel, or more precisely it can be seen as the renewed law. Preachers proclaim the renewed law when they encourage, describe, and instruct about what God is doing in their listeners' lives, not just doing for them, as in sanctification. Wilson identifies genres of the gospel to be testimony, prayer, nurturing exhortation, proclamatory statements, doxology, and celebration. As a way of emphasizing their gospel nature, I will reinterpret the genres by reflecting their practice in black preaching traditions.

1) Testimony as Renewed Law

First, a person can preach the renewed law by sharing a testimony and inviting others to do the same practice as a means of grace. Wilson defines testimony as "the practice of speaking truthfully about one's faith."[466] While it could be an experience of someone other than the preacher, testimony should be authentic in one's witness to the faithfulness of God. Wilson acknowledges that in African American churches, the testimony is a popular form of sharing one's faith in community. One example is seen in this prayer: "Thank you, God, for waking me up this morning; for putting shoes on my feet, clothes on my back, and food on my table. Thank you, God, for health and strength and the activities of my limbs. Thank you that I awoke this morning clothed in my right

[466] Wilson, 149.

mind."[467] In a traditional understanding, testimony celebrates what God has done for God's people and encourages them to do the same.

Although Wilson's understanding of testimony sounds like an individualistic practice, Thomas Hoyt Jr. points out that testimony is a "deeply shared practice—one that is possible only in a community that recognizes that falsehood is strong, but that yearns nonetheless to know what is true and good."[468] Since call and response are essential to black preaching traditions, Hoyt regards testimonies as a way for the preacher to open space for listeners to add their own witnesses of what God is doing in the world for them. In a society that denies the worth of those discriminated against and marginalized, Regina Shands Stoltzfus has asserted that testimony is a way of announcing "your humanity in encounter with the divine."[469] Therefore, testimony must be viewed as a "practice of the whole church"[470] that not only shares what God is doing in the world but also invites the listeners to do the same in the world.

A Wesleyan manner of narrative preaching could use testimony as a way to share what God is doing and will continue to do in us. In *No Shame in Wesley's Gospel*, Wimberly points out that Wesley uses the testimony not only to encourage people to

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[467] Thomas Hoyt Jr. "Testimony," in *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997), 94.

[468] Ibid., 90.

[469] Regina Shands Stoltzfus, "Couldn't Keep It to Myself": Testimony in the Black Church Tradition" *Vision* 10, no 2 (Fall 2009): 45.

[470] Hoyt, 96.

come to know God but also to "continue to persevere in the faith."[471] When a preacher shares a testimony of what God is doing in either the preacher or another person's life, one could do so in a manner which can empower others to expect that God could do the same in them. Although Wilson raises a legitimate concern of making the preacher "the hero of a story,"[472] a Wesleyan narrative preacher could avoid such a pitfall. This can be done by being reminded about the purpose of testimony—which as the renewed law is to empower the listeners to pursue the holiness of God—and by overhearing what God is doing in the preacher or another person.

Second, another way to preach the renewed law is to invite the congregation to share a testimony as their response to the gospel. Cone defines testimony as "to stand before the congregation and bear witness to one's determination to keep on one's 'gospel shoes.'" He imagines a sister who experiences the good news of the gospel in Christ standing and sharing her testimony with others.

> I don't know about you but I intend to make it to the end of my journey. I started on this journey twenty-five years ago, and I can't turn back now. I know the way is difficult and the road is rocky. I've been in this valley, and I have a few more mountains to climb. But I want you to know this morning that I ain't going to let a little trouble get in the way of me seeing my Jesus.[473]

Such a testimony reinforces one's conviction in the grace of God who empowers God's people to keep their course toward the holiness of God. It is not based on one's righteousness or self-will to commit the way of justice, peace, and love. Rather, it is the

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[471] Wimberly, *No Shame in Wesley's Gospel*, 5.

[472] Wilson, 161.

[473] Cone, 146.

Holy Spirit who empowers hearers to make ethical decisions in reflecting the love of God, by keeping on their "gospel shoes."

2) Exhortation as Renewed Law

Second, a Wesleyan narrative preacher could use Wilson's nurturing exhortation as a direct form of preaching the renewed law. Wilson refers to it also as "encouragement" that involves "admonishment or petition." He claims that it is different from "stern exhortation" which, in his view, belongs to lamentation or a similar to the first use of law according to Calvin that convicts people's sin.[474] Nurturing exhortation comes with "the warmth, comfort, and love associated with God as a nurturing parent."[475] Using a similar example, a parent may give an exhortation to his or her child because he or she loves the child. There is a responsibility that a parent has in seeing their child grow in love, grace, and hope. Therefore, the motivation for nurturing exhortation is love—not judgment or hatred—when the preacher and congregation are engaged in sharing their faithful response to God's grace. In this way, nurturing exhortation takes the form of the renewed law.

Wilson suggests several ways of preaching exhortation—such as exhorting Christian virtue, exhorting communal identity and social justice, communicating the power of God, building up the value of each individual, improvising on other people's exhortation, and exhorting seekers by introducing people to God and asking for response. Just as Wilson acknowledges that nurturing exhortation is "largely encouragement to

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[474] Wilson., 174-175.

[475] Ibid., 174.

greater faith or better living,"[476] Wesleyan narrative preachers could exhort listeners to recognize the joy in growing in love for God and God's people. They can warmly encourage hearers not to backslide in the dynamic process of salvation. While salvation is initiated by God and ultimately belongs to God—as Wesley argued—Wesleyan narrative preachers could teach that God increases God's grace in those who sincerely yearn for God through their minds and actions.

Several preachers included in *Black United Methodists Preach!*, edited by Gennifer B. Brooks, use nurturing exhortation as a way to conclude their sermons. For example, Linda Lee, the first African American woman to be elected as bishop in the North Central Jurisdiction, delivered her sermon "Choose Life" in celebration of Black History Month at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in 2011. In comparing the situation of the African American community and that of Moses and the Hebrews, Lee holds to the belief that people have a choice to choose between life and death. She prophetically describes the circumstances that those of African descent face in the United States by saying, "Like the Hebrews in Egypt, Africans in the Diaspora of the U.S. continue to experience brutal oppression, marginalization, demoralization, and exclusion."[477] Throughout her sermon, Lee encourages listeners to choose life. The same God who worked with African descents under slavery, Jim Crow, and the Civil Rights

[476] Ibid., 187.

[477] Linda Lee, "Choose Life" in *Black United Methodists Preach!* ed. Gennifer Benjamin Brooks (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012), 5.

Movement would surely help contemporary people of African descent as they continue to struggle with dehumanizing mass media, politics, economics, and education.

As she finishes her sermon, Lee does not leave the listeners with an open-ended conclusion for them to make their own decisions. Rather, she exhorts them to choose life:

> God has sent before us today life and death, blessings and curses. Let us choose life, let us choose to love God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength, and our neighbors as ourselves. Let us choose life, to plant seeds of hope and build up faith, even the faith of obedience, seeking God's kingdom. Let us choose life by holding on to God's unchanging hand until the day that every tear is wiped from human eyes and death is no more, mourning and crying and pain are no more, and the new heaven and the new earth have come! We can choose life because we serve a Savior who is the way, the truth, and the life. "You ask me how I [we] know he lives? He lives within my [our] heart." My sisters and brothers, choose life![478]

Leo W. Curry, another black Methodist pastor, also reflects on the importance of exhortation in preaching. While he argues that every sermon must proclaim the good news of the gospel, Curry also notes what a sermon should do: "However, along with the good news, a well-constructed sermon aims to confront, challenge, or admonish when necessary."[479] In his sermon "What God Tells Us: Imitate!" Curry concludes by sympathizing with listeners in terms of the difficulty in being perfect as God is in God's love. Despite difficulties in forgiving enemies, Curry exhorts his listeners to imitate God because "God gives us the power, the means, and the example of Jesus step by step along

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[478] Ibid., 9-10.

[479] Ibid., 75.

our pilgrim journey."[480] In this way, nurturing exhortation uses the law as a means of grace.

3) Singing as Renewed Law

A person can also preach the renewed law by inviting the congregation to sing together and by empowering those listeners to grow in their love for God. In *Setting Words on Fire*, Wilson also observes that Wesley often cites "poems and hymns frequently in the bodies of his sermons, and numerous ones have a verse of a hymn at or near the end."[481] As a practical theologian concerned with the salvation for people through ordinary disciplines, Wesley approaches the hymns as a means of not only communicating theology but also nurturing love for God. As people gathered to sing the hymns, they touched on intellectual, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of the gospel. In reflecting on Wesley's use of hymn, Wilson views the hymn placed at the end of sermon as the way to celebrate the work of God in the past, present, and future. He also believes that celebration in music often "provides an effective summary of the faith."[482]

Although Wilson does not recognize the sanctifying role of music, Wesley engages the verses of hymns at the end of his sermon not only to summarize his message but also to empower the listeners to grow in their love for God. In his sermon "The

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[480] Ibid., 82.

[481] John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Frank Baker (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), quoted in Paul Scott Wilson, *Setting Words on Fire* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 213.

[482] Ibid., 210.

Scripture Way of Salvation," Wesley encourages his audience to be more active in their sanctification.

> Do you believe that we are sanctified by faith? Then be true to your belief and look for this blessing just as you are, neither better nor worse than you are. As a poor sinner, you have nothing to pay or plead except 'Christ died for me.' And if you look for sanctification as you are, then expect it now. Wait for nothing. Why should you? Christ is ready. And he is all you want. He is waiting for you. He stands at the door! Let your inmost soul cry out,
>
> Come quickly in, Thou heavenly Guest;
> Nor ever hence removed,
> But sup with us, and le the feast
> Be everlasting love.

Wesley often ends his sermon with a hymn or poem written by his brother, Charles Wesley. Hymns grounded in sound theology reinforce the message which people heard in the sermon and lead to more conviction in God who strengthens them. The key is to have song that invites hearers to join in the action of crying out to God.

In black church traditions, music has been considered a critical means not only to reinforce the identity of individuals as God's people, but also to create a sense of community. In "*Somebody's Calling My Name*," Wyatt Tee Walker believes that while black slaves suffered injustice and oppression, black spiritual music was then considered as the "implicit tenacious insistence on the slave's humanity." [483] Slaveholders at that time attempted to deny the humanity of African slaves by stripping them of their names, language, and culture. However, Walker argues that the cruelty of slavery could not

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[483] Wyatt Tee Walker, *"Somebody's Calling My Name": Black Sacred Music and Social Change* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1979), 46.

destroy the "oral tradition of the slave's African heritage."[484] In music, the slaves sang the message of peace and freedom. In doing so, they felt restored in their humanity as they affirmed that they were created in the image of God.

At the same time, black sacred music formed a sense of community that not only helped with survival under oppression and injustice but also actively resisted oppressors. Cone also acknowledges the effect of music in many black churches: "Song not only prepares the people for the Spirit, it also intensifies the power of the Spirit's presence with the people."[485] In black worship, singing is a certain sign that the Holy Spirit is present among the worshippers not only by calling them to Christ but also by empowering them in the world. Cone bemoans that many black churches in recent years have adopted the practice of the white churches that "replace the congregational singing with choir singing."[486] He argues that an authentic black service always has the "entire congregation in song" since it unites the community emotionally and spiritually and sanctifies it together for the ongoing work of God in the world.

Whether in personal holiness or social holiness, singing as renewed law could help to form a communal consciousness in which people are invited to live in active relationship with God and also commit to participate in God's redemptive work in the world. C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya describe "In Christ There Is No East or West" as one of the beloved hymns among Black Christians.

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[484] Ibid., 45.

[485] Cone, "Sanctification, Liberation, and Black Worship," 144.

[486] Ibid., 145.

In Christ there is no east or west
In Him no south or north,
But one great fellowship of love
Throughout the whole wide earth.

In Him shall true hearts everywhere
Their high communion find;
His service is the golden cord
Close binding all mankind.

Join hands, the, brothers of the faith,
Whate'er your race may be;
Who serves my Father as a son
Is surely kin to me.

In Christ now meet both east and west,
In Him meet south and north;
All Christly souls are one in Him
Throughout the whole wide earth.

It must be noted that masculine language dominates this hymn. Nevertheless, as Lincoln and Mamiya argue, "In addressing the idea of human oneness in the body of Christ, the hymnist also suggests that there is an equality in Him which ignores the accidents of race."[487] Verse 3 especially invites hearers to gather in what God is doing by joining their hands across races. Such music and poetry can become a means of grace in the form of renewed law.

4) Prayer as Renewed Law

Wilson describes prayer as "speech addressed to God."[488] Although prayer

[487] C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 358.

[488] Wilson, *Setting Words on Fire*, 165.

typically comes before or after the sermon, Wilson believes that prayer in a sermon could be a way to offer not only praise and thanksgiving but also proclaim the gospel. Moreover, it could be a form of teaching and proclaiming "the identity of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, the creating and saving nature of God, the names of God, and the actions of God in history."[489]

While Wilson categorizes prayer as a form of proclaiming the gospel, I believe that prayer also binds the community together especially by helping hearers to recommit to the covenant with God as God's people. Richard Heitzenrater notes that as the Methodist movement grew, the concern to nurture individuals in society led to a contemplation of the means by which "the societies could be more firmly and closely united together."[490] Therefore, Wesley at one point started using the "language of covenant renewal" as a way to ensure that people continued on their journey of sanctification firmly grounded in communal lives. In England, Wesley encourages the Methodists to use his Covenant Prayer as a way to recommit to their relationship with God especially around the New Year. His prayer is as follows:

> I am no longer my own, but thine.
> Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom you wilt.
> Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
> Let me be employed for thee or laid aside for thee,
> exalted for thee or brought low for thee.
> Let me be full, let me be empty.
> Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
> I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal.
> And now, O glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
> thou are mine, and I am thine.

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[489] Ibid., 165.

[490] Richard Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 185.

So be it.
And the covenant which I have made on earth,
let it be ratified in heaven.
Amen.

When Wesley recited the prayer, "I will be no longer mine own, but give up myself to thy will in all things," it is said that one day there were 1,800 Methodists who stood up "in testimony of assent." According to Heitzenrater, Wesley was convinced that "he had come upon another useful instrument of God's grace."[491]

Wilson warns that prayer as a way to proclaim the gospel could sound manipulative because there could be diverse voices among the listeners who do not necessarily agree with the address by the preacher. For example, Walter J. Burghardt, S.J. preached his entire sermon as a prayer at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City during the Vietnam War in 1969. In the middle of his sermon as prayer, he offered this utterance: "That is why, Lord, in much hope and some fear, I am asking the men and women in front of me to take a first step toward peace." Wilson describes that Burghardt acknowledges the unrest by mentioning many differing voices coming from diverse backgrounds in the beginning of his prayer. While he does not judge people for disagreeing with him, Burghardt "simply urges all to follow Christ's way of peace."[492]

In a similar way, Wesley's Covenant Prayer might sound manipulative to those who are not ready to commit their relationship to God. As the Book of Worship suggests for the Covenant Renewal Service, it would be more fruitful if the prayer is shared with

[491] Ibid., 222.

[492] Wilson, 173.

listeners in advance so that they could prepare their minds before actually reciting it in the faith community. As Wesley believed that gospel does not come as the good news to those who are not convinced of their sin by law, I believe that this prayer will not produce the full effect for those who have not experienced the justifying grace and are not ready to continue on their journey for sanctification. Nevertheless, it is still a means of God's grace that meets listeners where they are in God's love for them and that invites them to a deeper relationship with God and God's people. In this way, prayer is also a means of grace in the form of renewed law.

4. Homiletic Analysis of and Reflection on Two Wesleyan Narrative Sermons

A. Sermon: "Are We for Real?" John 13:34
by Rev. Zan W. Holmes Jr.[493]

1) Analysis

Zan Wesley Holmes, Jr. is Pastor Emeritus of St. Luke Community United Methodist Church in Dallas, Texas where he served as pastor for 28 years. He also taught at Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University as Adjunct Professor of Preaching for 24 years.[494] In serving a predominantly African American congregation, his preaching is recognized not only for prophetically naming the unjust nature of political and economic systems for the black community, but also for empowering his audience to transform their community. The following sermon is selected for the purpose of this

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[493] Zan Holmes Jr. "Sermon: Are We for Real? John 13:34" in *Power in the Pulpit: How America's Most Effective Black Preachers Prepare Their Sermons*, ed. Cleophus James LaRue (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 83-88.

[494] "Zan Wesley Holmes Jr," Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, last modified June 9, 2017, 06:10, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zan_Wesley_Holmes_Jr

study because it shows how the commandment of Jesus—namely "You also should love one another"—is given to his audience as the new law as the followers of Jesus. Through the forms of repetitive phrase and poem, Holmes manifests how celebration in black preaching could function as an invitation to sanctification where law empowers the listeners to grow in their love for God and neighbors.

Holmes begins his sermon by introducing his clergy friend who boasted of his new Rolex watch that he bought while traveling in Japan. He was proud of buying the $6,000 Rolex watch for the bargain price of $25. However, he was embarrassed later to discover that his watch was actually a cheap imitation. Holmes uses the illustration as an indication of many churches: "This incident is a reminder to us that we the church are called to witness and to make disciples for Jesus Christ in a society in which so many people have been sold a false bill of goods."[495] Clearly, Holmes's theological analysis of many churches implies bad news. In a culture bombarded with many fakes, churches are challenged also with the question, Are you for real? This can also be seen as, Are you really practicing what you believe, or are you really following the way of Jesus?

Interestingly, the way Holmes elaborates on the "trouble" of his sermonic theme is not pure bad news. Rather, the bad news for Holmes in his sermon implies the grace of God at work in trouble at the same time. He says that Jesus not only knew that his disciples would face such suspicious questions by others but that he himself also would face the same challenges as he was asked by the followers of John, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" The grace of God is at work as Christ

[495] Holmes, 84.

understands the doubt, anxiety, and question of human beings. He was incarnated in flesh sharing the human nature. The grace of God, therefore, is that Jesus does not leave his disciples or contemporary audience alone while they experience challenge, but that Jesus is present all along. In Wesleyan narrative theology, the Holy Spirit does not come at the end of the sermon to help the preacher and audience to celebrate what God has done for them, but the Holy Spirit is present from the beginning to help them understand what is happening and why it is happening to them. It is also the work of the Holy Spirit who leads people to the need of Christ for their redemption.

Holmes explains that Jesus already gave the answer by saying, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." Here, Holmes does not jump into moral instruction for his audience to love one another as if it is their responsibility to uphold the law. Rather, he takes time to convince his audience that the commandment of Jesus to love one another is based on the love of God for them first. For this reason, Holmes quotes the words of his colleague, Albert Outler: "We must stop telling ourselves and others that we must love one another. Instead, we must tell ourselves and others that we can love ourselves and others because we are loved by Jesus!"[496] As believers experience justification, they are embraced and forgiven by God first, as Holmes witnesses: "It is a love that does not depend on who we are, but on who Jesus is. It is a love that does not depend on what we have done, but on what Jesus did on Calvary's cross."[497]

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[496] Holmes, 86.

[497] Ibid.

Holmes' proclamation of God's love then becomes a basis for invitation to live out by loving others as their neighbors. He believes that it is "an invitation and call for them and us to get real and present a united front to a divided, hostile, and suspicious world by hanging together with acts of love."[498] Here, Holmes shows a creative method of instructing a moral dimension of the new commandment of Jesus by interweaving a story, using a repetitive phrase, and finally singing a hymn. In sharing a story about an African village, he emphasizes the importance of interconnectedness by "hanging together in acts of love." A villager notices that a dam is about to break and destroy many lives. Since he does not have a time to go down and warn them, he decides to set his house on fire, knowing that others would hurry to his house up the hill in following the principle of hanging together in love. Holmes beautifully illustrates the story so that his audience can learn interconnectedness as a matter of life and death, as well as a matter of redemption and fall.

While his illustration functions as the beginning of the sermon's celebration, Holmes draws his audience to deeper joy by using repetitive phrases as often manifested in black preaching traditions. He shouts, "Therein lies our hope in a broken, hostile, and suspicious world, if there is a problem, by the power of the liberating love of Jesus that enables us to hang together in acts of love, we can solve it together. If there is a burden, by the power of the liberating love of Jesus that enables us to hang together in acts of love, we can lift it together …"[499] The way Holmes celebrates in his sermon is not only to

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[498] Ibid., 87.

[499] Ibid., 88.

praise Christ for what he has done, but also to proclaim his love "that enables us to hang together in acts of love." In other words, his use of celebration in preaching empowers his audience to grow in their love for others because of the love of God they experience first.

Holmes assures that loving others does not exempt them from challenges, as seen in the following utterance: "If there is a challenge… we can meet it together. If there is a race … we can run it together. If there is a fence … we can climb over it together. If there is a fault … we can fix it together." He convinces his audience that they could overcome any challenges ahead of them through the "liberating love of Jesus that enables us to hang together in acts of love." Holmes then ends his sermon by inviting his audience to sing James Rowe's "Love Lifted Me."

> I was sinking deep in sin,
> Far from the peaceful shore,
> Very deeply stained within,
> Sinking to rise no more;
> But the Master of the sea heard my despairing cry,
> From the waters lifted me,
> Now safe am I …
> Love lifted me!
> Love lifted me!
> When nothing else could help,
> Love lifted me.

2) Reflection

Holmes is a master of storytelling, and he is recognized as one of the great preachers of the twentieth century.[500] As Long argues in *The Witness of Preaching*, storytelling as a model for the sermon might come across as difficult to grasp or practice for those who are new to the practice of preaching or are not accustomed to storytelling

[500] His sermon is featured in *Great Preachers* by Odyssey Productions, Gateway Films.

as a way of communicating faith. Nevertheless, Holmes's sermon creatively interweaves the biblical story with the contemporary story in a way that the listeners are invited to discern their roles in the communal setting as the result of hearing the gospel.

Holmes offers the bad news and good news through his interpretation of the Bible and observation of the world. The bad news is that we Christians often find ourselves not being real about our love for God and God's people. However, the good news is that despite our failures, God first loved us through Christ. While most narrative preachers would end their sermon with celebrating the good news of the gospel, Holmes does not let the listeners go yet because the love of God also enables them to "get real and present a united front to a divided, hostile, and suspicious world by hanging together with acts of love." In other words, the proclamation of the good news leads to the responsibility of the listeners in the world as the renewed law follows the gospel. He does not want the listeners to be ignorant or to backslide in their journey toward holiness because the world they go out into is never a neutral place. He lists the challenges in the world: "Racism is still alive and well. African Americans have the fastest growing AIDS rate, the highest teenage pregnancy rate, the second highest school dropout rate, and the highest rate of drug-driven violence in the nation."[501]

Holmes creatively uses testimony, exhortation, and singing as his invitation to practice the renewed law in his sermon. He shares the story of how people care for one another in acts of love in an African village. He then exhorts people to overcome any obstacles by hanging together in a celebrative tone. He finishes his sermon by inviting the

[501] Holmes, 87.

listeners to sing a song together. The lyrics of the music "Love Lifted Me" could sound individualistic since it highlights the justifying grace of God. However, a Wesleyan narrative sermon could invite the congregation to sing a song that praises the Holy Spirit who would go to the world with them in calling them as a church to be more loving, forgiving, and prophetic.

B. Sermon: "Whose Conversion?" Acts 4:1-19
by Rev. Song Bok (Bob) Jon

1) Analysis

The second sermon is preached by the author of this dissertation. I originally preached this sermon in my final semester of the Master of Divinity Program at Boston University School of Theology in May 2007. While I originally came from South Korea, I was shaped and nurtured in a black church tradition through Union United Methodist Church in Boston, in which I served as a seminarian intern and later as an assistant pastor. In deepening my understanding of black preaching and black theology, I brought my learning experience to the pulpit as a student preacher to address how to forgive and reconcile with one another despite our differences regarding race, ethnicity, sex, nationality and sexual orientation. I confess that I was still young and immature in knowledge and experience when I preached this sermon. However, I believe that this sermon implies a Wesleyan theology of salvation and that it also adopts this theology as the narrative plot.

The sermon began by reminding people that the Book of Acts is not just about the story of Paul, but it is mainly about the Holy Spirit who calls the world to God. While many would consider the conversion of Paul as one of the key events in Acts, the sermon

"upsets the equilibrium" as described by Lowry by hinting that Paul was not the only person who experienced conversion. The sermon then introduced Ananias as another key figure in this story who is often forgotten by many listeners.

The sermon then moved to what Lowry refers to as "analyzing the problem" by imagining what Ananias may have felt. When Jesus told Ananias to go and heal Saul, he answered in Acts 9:13, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name." After this, I invited people to experience the anger that Ananias may have felt by cross-culturally sharing the massacre by Seung-Hui Cho at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University only a month before this sermon was preached. I challenged the audience to consider how difficult it might be to forgive Cho who murdered thirty-three innocent people.

The sermon provides a clue to the resolution by describing how Jesus commissioned Ananias: "Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel." Such words of Jesus reveal the nature of God, who chooses to work with those who are abandoned, despised, and neglected in our religion and society. Such theology is illustrated by how healing and reconciliation took place at Virginia Tech where the faculties and students set up thirty-three stones in memory of those who were victimized, which included the shooter, Cho. Some people even left flowers and cards for Cho and his family, offering prayers of healing and reconciliation. According to the New York Times, a handwritten card said, "Dear Cho, you are not excluded from our sorrow in death although you thought you

were excluded from our love in life."[502] Therefore, the stone and cards of reconciliation indicate how this sermon would be celebrated in the gospel of Christ who forgives sinners.

When Ananias met Saul and told him what Jesus told him, a miracle occurred—Saul's eyes were healed. Here, a reversal takes place with the insight that this story points to two conversions, not just one—namely the one of Saul and the other of Ananias. While Saul was converted to Paul as a result of meeting Jesus, Ananias also experienced a conversion himself by growing "in his love to be like Jesus in his love for God and God's people." While Saul's conversion indicates the justification that comes to us by being forgiven by Christ, Ananias's conversion implies the sanctification, specifically that a person is constantly called to forgive others and reconcile with them in pursuit of God's holiness. The sermon articulates the Wesleyan theology of justification and sanctification as the salvific process in which they are integral together.

The gospel that can be found in the forgiveness of our sins by Christ leads to the renewed law—or what I refer to as *actively participating in God's redemptive plan*. The sermon continued with a testimony about the life of Rev. Sohn, who shared the radical love of Christ with not just with the lepers but also with the enemy. Since the gospel in Christ—who meets and forgives us—is already proclaimed, this testimony comes in a way of how a person might visualize living out the love of Christ in our world. The story itself is cross-cultural, and it may come across as unfamiliar to many American students

[502] Christine Hauser, "Virginia Tech Sets Out to Preserve Objects of Grief, Love and Forgiveness," *The New York Times*, April 25, 2007.

and listeners. However, the universal love of Christ in different contexts empowers listeners to visualize their own forgiveness in their situations. During the Yeosu-Suncheon Rebellion in 1948, Sohn's two sons were brutally murdered along with other civilians by radical communists. When the words reached him that the murder was arrested and held for trial, Sohn explained to his daughter why he would go and appeal for his exoneration: "Listen Dong Hee, I spent five years in prison in order to keep the commandments of God. If the first and second commandment are God's commandments, then why should I not keep the commandment to love your enemy?" His words come across as moral instruction for the contemporary listeners as they are also challenged to live out the radical love of Christ through their action in the world.

The sermon ended by reminding the listeners that it is Christ who first forgives us so that we can forgive others and that this act is meant to empower them. While it is difficult to forgive others, it is through Christ that we can participate in the saving work of God in the world—just as Christ calls the most unlikely people as the instruments of God's justice and reconciliation in the world. In the conclusion of the sermon, it takes on a celebratory tone for the initiating work of God's redemption as well as the ongoing empowering of the listeners to make a difference in their moral decision about forgiveness and reconciliation.

2) Reflection

As the title "Whose Conversion?" indicates, this sermon challenges the listeners to reflect on the nature of conversion. Many believe that conversion happens when a person is brought to justification in a dramatic way. Although there is one way to

experience conversion as in Saul's case, this sermon invites the audience to envision sanctification also as the result of encountering Christ in the Holy Spirit. Ananias provides a wonderful example of how a believer gradually grows in the love of God in the struggle to forgive others and embrace them as one's neighbors. As God is the one who forgives and loves us first, people who are in a covenantal relationship with God are held accountable in their behavior to imitate the love of God for others.

According to Lowry's vision for narrative preaching, it could be possible to say that Saul exercised his human effort to uphold the law perfectly, even to the point of searching for the people who followed the Way and executing them. His conversion experience is what happens to those who constantly search for answers to their ontological agony. However, a Wesleyan manner of narrative preaching would not exclude the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of Saul before he experienced his conversion on his way to Damascus. It is necessary to remember that the Holy Spirit is the One who reveals our sins and brokenness and brings us to Christ.

In this sermon, reversal takes place when listeners realize that conversion does not happen only with justification; it also happens gradually with sanctification. As listeners realize that they are on a continuing journey of growth in their love for God and others, they are held up by the challenges of how they can pursue the holiness of God. The renewed law comes here with the testimony from Sohn. Just as Wesley's narrative rhetoric invites listeners to recognize the positive consequence of their relationship with God, the story here encourages listeners to see how God can change the lives of people even when they have done wrong to us. As a result of forgiving and loving enemies,

believers themselves can also experience the transforming power of God's grace that changes them as well.

This sermon could be even stronger in its use of the renewed law by suggesting specific practices for forgiving others. Although true forgiveness could only arise out of people's hearts, a Wesleyan narrative preacher could suggest practices through which listeners might nurture the habit of forgiveness and love for the enemies. One approach to such nurturing would be to invite people to a time of prayer in which they could pray for those who have done wrong to them. Another approach could be that people are invited to write a card with their message at the end of the sermon. In this way, it could be an opportunity for them to confess their emotions even when it is difficult to forgive others. The preacher could encourage them to pray for their enemies and send them the card when they feel ready for reconciliation.

CONCLUSION

Since I started working on this dissertation in 2013, much in our society has changed, especially with the current administration with the election of Donald Trump as the 45th president of the United States in 2016. Recently, our society has been witnessing social, political, and economic evils rising more intensely than ever. For instance, white supremacists marched in the middle of the University of Virginia claiming their powers and privileges. Children at school were massacred with a semi-auto weapon, but there was no action to follow up mostly because of the funding of the National Rifle Association for the lawmakers. Moreover, the government has attempted to eliminate the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals while deporting undocumented immigrants and separating parents from children. Bigotry against Muslims led to a travel ban. Furthermore, the government plans to build a wall against Mexico because the president condemns Mexicans as "rapists, drug-dealers, and criminals." The government has withdrawn from the 2015 Paris Agreement because the United States economy, and workers are more important than the preservation of environment.

As many churches and Christians in the United States decide to remain silent with the direction of the current administration, Rev. William J. Barber II raises a prophetic voice by leading the "Moral Movement." It is insightful to note that the word *morality* is not an option for Christians to choose or not when the politics and economy explicitly violate what God has commanded for God's creation. In *Forward Together*, Barber contends, "The moment when misery abounds necessitates messages that can move the masses to engage in deeply moral actions that question mean and hurtful public

policies."[503] It is the responsibility of those who believe in the radical love of God to advocate those who are marginalized and oppressed in our society regardless of their race, ethnicity, sex, class, nationality, immigrant status, and sexual orientation.[504] Both the individual and communal effort of Christians to fight for justice and righteousness should not be considered works righteousness, as if it makes them more lovable or forgivable in the eyes of God. Rather, it is grounded in a covenantal relationship with God, who demands us to proclaim God, who liberates the oppressed, and who commands us to love our neighbors in God's love.

However, contemporary narrative preaching, as suggested by Lowry, could be easily distorted when it is too focused on experiencing the gospel by journeying through the homiletical plot, and instead leaves the actions of people as something to freely choose on their own. As seen more so in Lowry's revised model of plot, narrative preaching often shies away from demanding concrete action, exhortation, or faithful practice because they are considered works righteousness. However, it is crucial to remember that Wesley—who argued that there is no other holiness other than social holiness—actively opposed slavery and child labor and advocated for the poor and needy in his time. Through his sermons, letters, and meetings, Wesley encouraged the Methodists to proclaim the kingdom of God already on this earth as they preach the good

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[503] William J. Barber II, *Forward Together: A Moral Message for the Nation* (St. Louise: Chalice Press, 2014), viii.

[504] In his sermon at the Riverside Church, Barber condemns silence in facing moral injustice and unjust policies as sin. William J. Barber II, "When Silence Is Not an Option." Sermon, The Riverside Church, New York City, NY, April 2, 2017.

news and also live it out through their Christian lives together. In his redemptive narrative of God, he invites Methodists to participate in what God had already done for them through Christ's love and what God was empowering them to do in society.

One of Wesley's important theological legacies for contemporary minds is his theology of law and gospel, especially his view on the renewed law as a means of sanctification. In considering the way of salvation as more dynamic and organic, contemporary Wesleyans need to understand that unless they constantly strive for the holiness of God, they are likely to slide back. Such a fall is not based on fear. Rather, it is founded on constant yearning for the love of God who calls them to love their neighbors. As Wesleyan preachers continue to stand at the pulpit and preach the words of God, they need to envision that they do not stand alone. Rather, they stand in the rich tradition of all those who faithfully proclaimed the good news of Christ in their contexts. Wesley's theology of law and gospel, therefore, calls contemporary Wesleyan preachers to preach the renewed law more than ever as they witness many social phenomena that contrast the mind of God for God's world today.

As critically reflected in this dissertation, the law for Wesley perfectly mirrors the will of God for God's creation—that is, the love for God and love for neighbors. Since God is the One who initiates giving the law as a means of growing love for God, God also compels people to respond in their faithful participation in the redemptive work of God in the world. In observing and experiencing the immoral direction of the current administration and complicity of many churches, Wesleyan preachers must realize that their sermons need to envision faithful actions as the result of experiencing the gospel

together. If God meets God's people where they are—painful, broken, and suffering—God also empowers them together with a vision of an alternative future and with courage to take actions in order to make differences in their lives and in the world. Such an envisioning of faithful responses should not be left to the audiences as their individualistic options. Rather, Wesleyan narrative preachers need to walk with their listeners together in realizing brokenness of the world, as enlightened by the Holy Spirit while experiencing the good news in Christ and discerning their actions as their grateful response to God.

APPENDIX

Sermon Title: "Whose Conversion?"[505]
Sermon Text: Acts 9:1-20

We all know about the Apostle Paul, the greatest Apostle in the history of the church, the author of many epistles in the New Testament, and the missionary to the gentiles. Of course, we also know the story about his conversion, as was read to us from the passage this morning. But if we read Acts from the beginning to the end, we realize that Paul is not the only character who experienced conversion. Chapter 8 tells us about the Ethiopian eunuch who was converted by the help of Philip. Chapter 10 tells us about Cornelius and his family, who were converted at the time of the ministry of Simon Peter. The story of Acts is not just about Paul, but I believe it is mainly about the Holy Spirit who unfolds God's redemptive plan for both Jews and Gentiles. Therefore, if we only focus on Paul's conversion, we are likely to miss another important character in this passage.

There was one more person involved in Paul's conversion. His name was Ananias. He was a pious Christian who lived in Damascus. One day, Jesus appeared to him in a vision, asking him to meet Saul and restore his sight. Ananias had already heard about Saul of Tarsus. He was a persecutor who went from house to house looking for the followers of Jesus, dragging them off, and putting them in prison. Now he was coming for Ananias, his family, and his fellow Christians. Who knows whether Ananias was actually happy to hear it from Jesus saying, "Thanks for the heads-up, Jesus! We are

[505] This sermon was preached by the author of this dissertation at Marsh Chapel of Boston University on May 2, 2007.

going to take our revenge this time for all our brothers and sisters who died in his hand." If Saul had the potential to persecute more of the followers of Jesus, would it not have been better if Saul died? He was frustrated, afraid, and outraged as seen in his response to Jesus, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem." (v.13)

Ananias seemed angry that Jesus was asking him to go and meet Saul. Ananias was upset because he knew what that meant. When people meet together, there is an opportunity of reconciliation and forgiveness. When people block themselves from each other, there is only division and miscommunication. In my work as a pastor, I often observe that being present with one another is the best way to resolve the conflict. Just sending emails or responding on the social media is an easy way to avoid our contact that might bring two parties together and be healed in relationship. I have heard about a minister who heard many complaints from his parishioner. "I don't like your sermon. I don't like your leadership. I just don't like you." Guess what this pastor did? The pastor decided to go to the workplace of his parishioner and be with him, helping his work for hours. He did not say anything the whole time. But his time together with his parishioner eventually opened his heart leading to reconciliation later.

Ananias was upset because he knew that Jesus's invitation to meet Saul meant also to forgive him for what he had done. In 2007, there was a horrifying incident that shook the U.S.—a massacre of 32 students and faculties at Virginia Tech University. When the news first identified the shooter as an Asian male student, I just hoped, "Please not a Korean. Please not a Korean." The next day, the news released the photo of the

shooter as a Korean student—Seung Hee Cho. Many Korean students at the Boston University School of Theology seemed worried because there may be regulations or even bans on the international students. As I look back the event, I think that it was such a stupid hope that I wished that the shooter would not be a Korean. Many people do not know whether I am a Korea, Chinese, or Japanese. What differences would it have made? If any, there would be regulations on the international students as whole because what mattered was that we were strangers and different in this society. And I was upset with Cho for his senseless act, feeling betrayed by him as a fellow Korean.

But we see that Jesus was persistent with Ananias. Jesus said to him, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument!" God was going to use Saul who was the great enemy of Christians as God's vessel to bear a witness to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. I strongly believe that this is how God works in this world. When people mocked Matthew because he was a tax collector, Jesus called him as one of his disciples. When people hated Zacchaeus and called him "a sinner," Jesus called him first and forgave him saying, "Salvation has come to this house." When the Samaritan woman at the well tried to avoid the public because of shame, Jesus comes and meets her, offering the living water. God turns someone whom we consider less likely to be used by God into the chosen instrument through which the kingdom of God will be proclaimed. God never abandons those we call "outcasts," but calls them in order to entrust them with a great mission.

So, Ananias went and entered the house where Saul had been fasting for three days. Saul did not even know who just entered the house. He had become a blind person.

He was weak because he did not eat or drink for three days. If Ananias could finish all the tragic deaths of his Christian brothers and sisters by Saul, this was the time to end it all. But Ananias called Saul, "My Brother Saul." He called the one who had been killing his Christian brothers and sisters, "My Brother Saul." And he said, "The Lord, Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." A miracle happened. Saul's eyes were healed. More surprisingly, he was baptized in the name whom he had long despised. Ananias forgave Saul for what he had done to the people of God. If Ananias did not forgive Saul from the bottom of his heart, I wonder if Saul would have been healed, commissioned, and baptized with the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, I believe that this was not just Saul's conversion. It was also Ananias's conversion. It is by the grace of God that we come to know Christ and believe that he is our Lord who forgives our sins. Whether you were first led to the church by your grandparents or mothers, you received the good news in Christ that he forgives us and embraces as God's children. That is not what we work for. That is a gift from God just as Saul met Christ on his road to Damascus. Saul now becomes Paul, a believer who goes out and proclaims who Jesus is. That is conversion. But for those who believe in Christ, the story does not end there. God still works in us increasing the grace in us. The Holy Spirit empowers us to be more like Jesus in his love for God and love for neighbors. Ananias meets Christ and experiences a growth in his love for enemy through forgiveness. That is another conversion—change that happens to us not only dramatically but also gradually in us.

After the Virginia Tech tragedy, I read that people put 33 memorial stones, not 32, for the victims on the grass of the school. One of the stones is for Seung Hee Cho, the shooter. A woman named Barbara left a card and flower on his memorial stone. The card reads, "I feel bad in knowing that you did not get help that you so desperately needed. I hope that your family will find comfort and healing. God bless." Also, on the news I saw another woman saying, "Love can overcome." When a tragedy like that happens, people may ask a question, "Where is God?" "If God were alive, could not God have prevented something like this?" People talk about the absence of God in the midst of tragedy. However, I believe that we witness the presence of God in the midst of tragedy when people are brought together in forgiveness and reconciliation.

Desmond Tutu is the archbishop in South Africa who witnessed how apartheid was tearing apart his country. He prophetically proclaimed the healing and reconciliation of his nation through forgiveness. He said, "To forgive is not just to be altruistic. It is the best form of self-interest. It is also a process that does not exclude hatred and anger. These emotions are all part of being human. You should never hate yourself for hating others who do terrible things: the depth of your love is shown by the extent of your anger. However, when I talk of forgiveness, I mean the belief that you can come out of the other side a better person. A better person than the one being consumed by anger and hatred. Remaining in that state locks you in a state of victimhood, making you almost dependent on the perpetrator. If you can find it in yourself to forgive, then you are no longer chained to the perpetrator. You can move on, and you can even help the perpetrator to become a

better person too."[506]

In 1948, there was a pastor named Rev. Yang Won Sohn in South Korea. During the tie of the Japanese colonization of Korea, all Korean men and women were ordered to worship the emperor of Japan. Rev. Sohn refused to do so because he believed that it violated the first Commandment—"There will be no other God." He spent five years in prison being tortured. Right after the Independence from Japan in 1945, South Korea was going through social, political, and economic chaos. During this time of chaos, Rev. Sohn spent his life caring for those with leprosy. In November 1948, there was conflict in a military camp in a small city called Yeo-Soo. The soldiers believed that the communism was the solution to the chaos and took control of the city. They went from house to house, seeking those who disagreed with their ideology. Rev. Sohn's two sons were arrested for their Christian faith and were executed under the direction of Jae-Sun Ahn.

Finally, the military government put down the "revolt." Rev. Sohn heard that the guy who had killed his two sons was captured and about to be executed. He hurried to the court and pleaded to save his life. He even adopted the killer of his two sons as his own child. His little daughter told him that she could not accept the murderer as her brother. Then Rev. Sohn told his daughter, "Listen Dong Hee, I spent five years in prison in order to keep the commandments of God. If the first and second commandment are God's commandments, then why should I not keep the commandment to love your enemy? If I do not save his life, the time I spent in prison and the sacrifice of my two sons will become in vain. But I can save his life today, then I am not only obeying God's

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[506] Archbishop Desmond Tutu in Marina Cantacuzino, *The Forgiveness Project*.

commandment, but also saving his soul." It is said that Jae-Sun Ahn, the murderer became a pastor later. When the Korean War broke out in 1950, Rev. Sohn refused to flee for safety but remained with those with leprosy. He was arrested by the North Korean soldiers and executed. If you ask how he could have done this, I would say with conviction that the love of Jesus inspired him to love the one who killed his two sons.

In the midst of these conversions of both Saul and Ananias stands Jesus. He is the One who first appeared to Saul to forgive him and commission him as his witness. He is the One who said on the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." He is the One who came to this world to reconcile us to God. He is the One who showed us how to love our God and our neighbors. This is Good News, beloved. Because we have Jesus, we can forgive and reconcile with our neighbors. Because we have Jesus, we can step out of our own tradition, background, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation, and rejoice in God's presence who welcomes everyone regardless of who we are. Because we have Jesus who showed us how to love God and our neighbors, we can go out to the world with confidence that God loves God's people and God's creation.

As Jesus told his disciples to be the light and salt in the world, we have to shine the light of Christ in this world. The light that blinded the eyes of Saul but changed his whole life—the light that led Ananias into the reconciliation with Saul.

This little light of mine,
I'm gonna let it shine.
This little light of mine,
I'm gonna let it shine.
This little light of mine,
I'm gonna let it shine.
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

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