

Bibliography of Black Preaching

Bowers, Calvin. "Creating the Black Church." *Gospel Advocate* (January 1990): 17-18.

Bowers reviews the development of the black church in American history. He argues against the gradualism that has been prevalent from the white perspective and some blacks. He specifically notes how some black churches may be the last place to see integration due to the desire to maintain a major power base not available to them elsewhere.

Bond, Adam L. *The Imposing Preacher: Samuel DeWitt Proctor and Black Public Faith*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013.

Cannon, Katie Geneva. *Teaching Preaching: Isaac Rufus Clark and Black Sacred Rhetoric*. New York: Continuum, 2002.

Casey, Michael W. *Saddlebags, City Streets, and Cyberspace: A History of Preaching in the Churches of Christ*. Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 1995.

The black response to segregation manifested itself in two distinct ways. First, there was an acceptance of Jim Crow as seen in the writings of Booker T. Washington. However, W. E. B. DuBois would not give racism even a hint of being acceptable. In Churches of Christ, both these positions were advocated. G. P. Bowser was raised in the AME church, the oldest exclusively African-American denomination in the United States. The AME church was founded in 1816, a few years after Richard Allen had been expelled from the white St. George's Church in Philadelphia. Bowser left the AME church in 1897 and became a member of the Jackson St. Church of Christ in Nashville working with Marshall Keeble. Bowser broke away from the white supported Keeble. His preaching was a synthesis of a rational discourse and traditional black preaching and is best exemplified by R. N. Hogan. Bowser was instrumental in opening Southwestern Christian College in Terrel Texas. R. N. Hogan opposed the segregation of such schools as Pepperdine. Hogan did not resemble the emotional style of the Baptists as described by Mitchell's book (discussed below). His sermons were topical, logical, rational patterns that appealed to the intellect. Hogan has a high view of education and literacy. He challenged congregations to read the Bible for themselves and not accept blindly what any pastor says. He allowed open questions and investigations during his sermons. Casey describes his sermons under the categories rapport, illustrations, and call and response.

Marshall Keeble (1878-1968) appealed to blacks and whites. He trusted the white congregations for financial support throughout his long career. Although Keeble spoke on race relations, he used "double-speak" to convey his message. His preaching style was similar to Hogan's yet without the direct judgment against racism and other offensive topics to whites.

Crawford, Evans E. *The Hum: Call and Response in African American Preaching*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1995.

DuBois, W. E. B. "The Faith of Black Folk." In *Theories of Preaching: Selected Readings in the Homiletical Tradition*. Edited by Richard Lischer. Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1987.

A description of the negro church, the preacher, music, and the "frenzy."

Hatch, Gary Layne. "Logic in the Black Folk Sermon: The Sermons of Rev. C. L. Franklin." *Journal of Black Studies* 26 (January 1996): 227-244.

Hatch argues against the following thesis: The persuasive strategy behind black preaching is to appeal to the emotions so that the audience can escape from an impossible world. Hatch offers a case study to show how logic and reason are used and embedded in narratives, examples, comparisons, and biblical references. C. L. Franklin used associational logic to establish a relationship with the intellect, imagination, and the emotions. Hatch calls this a type of poetic logic that is neither inductive or deductive in nature but analogical. Sermons proceed from particular instances of the same relationship.

Hatch analyzes the black sermon by looking for associational logic. He also sees elliptical sentence structure used throughout. He recognizes metaphor as more than a stylistic ornament but an example of poetic logic and a type of concrete reasoning. That is why there is such a high use of figurative language. Most sermons are organized around a central image which are often criticized as digressions. He analyzes three example sermons. Hatch offers a matrix of correspondence as a method of analysis. The matrix demonstrates parallel instances of the same relationship between diverse sections of the sermon.

Jones, Kirk Byron. *The Jazz of Preaching: How to Preach with Great Freedom and Joy*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2004.

LaRue, Cleophus J. *I Believe I'll Testify: The Art of African American Preaching*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011. 127-144

_____. *Rethinking Celebration: From Rhetoric to Praise in African American Preaching*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016.

_____. *The Heart of Black Preaching*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000.

_____. "Two Ships Passing in the Night," In *What's the Matter with Preaching Today?* Edited by Mike Graves. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004.

Lischer, Richard. "The Word That Moves: The Preaching of Martin Luther King, Jr." *Theology Today* 46 (July 1989): 169-182.

Lischer reviews the traditional understanding of King's background being firmly influenced by his liberal education at Boston University. "The figures and ideas he engaged in his graduate study gave him a vocabulary with which he rationalized a more original black response to the events of his day" (p. 170). The word does not function as a theoretical base for action. Rather, the word is a kind of action that cannot legitimately be separated from the struggles, temptations, sufferings, and hopes of the people who live by the word. Therefore, Lischer concludes that it is from the black church pulpit that King found his authority.

Lischer states that King's voice is lost in the published materials which are decontextualized because of the editorial process. The published sermons of King lack the themes that struck the chords in the black church. For example, the fatigue in his voice that was overwhelmed by his awakened urgency in his own message. King often found his voice in the pulpit. Published sermons lose the sense of style ("the how of the what"). The distinctions between what is said and how it is said is lost. Lischer states, "the style is the message" (p. 173). Under the heading of style, Lischer also notes King's fascination with words and phrases, his force of repetition, and set-pieces.

Lischer compares King's style with the medieval function of the Bible as a mirror that contains all life. King reads the pain of the black experience into the text and interprets that experience by means of the text.

King had a communal hermeneutic. The congregational dialogue that occurred every Sunday was an establishment of a connection between the text and the audience. Many internal meanings shared by the preacher and the congregation are signaled by certain passages, phrases, or set-pieces. The text is then experienced presently. Some of the same sermons are preached in white congregations. Lischer notes how the same messages and words are used but without the fire. The audience allowed him to "cook."

Lischer documents how King's own self-understanding changed. Primarily, these changes are seen as one looks at the hope expressed by King. He became a suffering servant. Success would come by his own redemptive suffering. King began to rule out success for the movement but never faithfulness. He believed in the power of the word either to redeem the soul of America or to consign it to judgment.

_____. *The Preacher King: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Word that Moved America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Massey, James Earl. "An African-American Model." In *Hermeneutics for Contemporary Preaching: Approaches to Contemporary Interpretations of Scripture*. Edited by Raymond Bailey. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992.

Massey roots the African-American model in Robert Funk's definition: "the hermeneut—the one who practices hermeneutics—is he who, having been addressed by the Word of God and having heard, is enabled to speak, interpret, or translate what he has heard into human vernacular so that its power is transmitted through speech. If the minister is not a hermeneut, he has missed his vocation." (In *Language, Hermeneutics, and the Word of God* (1966): 13-14.

_____. *Designing the Sermon: Order and Movement in Preaching*. Abingdon Preacher's Library. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1980.

Each sermon needs a goal (what the sermon plans to achieve). Sermon design is matched to that goal so that the goal is accomplished. Massey believes sermon design should meet the following concerns: increasing the understanding of listeners; increasing the connection between the sermon and the worship context; transforming the community of faith through preaching; meet the increasing need to pay attention to both the story of the text and the story "quality of human life;" and the arrangement of the sermon centered around a theme that meets these concerns.

Massey concisely describes several organizational methods for structuring the sermon. He discusses narrative, textual/expository, and doctrinal/topical methods pointing out both the strengths and weaknesses. A methodology for special occasion sermons using the funeral sermon as a paradigm is offered. Massey suggests a method to explore the design of sermons by the "masters." If one can uncover jewels in the "masters" methods, then this becomes an effective resource for improving sermons. Finally, he offers three of his own sermons as models.

Maxwell, James. Restoration Movement. *Gospel Advocate* (January 1990): 15-16.

Maxwell briefly reviews African-American involvement in the Restoration Movement. Although many of the white leaders in the Movement taught their slaves the gospel and allowed them to worship in segregated balconies, and eventually freed them, they were slow in doing so. The doctrine of gradualism was not accepted by most blacks.

McKim, Donald K. *The Bible in Theology and Preaching: How Preachers Use Scripture*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994.

McKim connects black hermeneutics with liberation theology. He speaks about black preaching be concerned with anthropological poverty (a denial of black culture and a subsequent denial of humanity). The themes of suffering, oppression, and powerlessness points to liberation and salvation. Such salvation is not to be left to the end of history but is to be played out in our present-day struggles. Freedom equals self-determination.

Scripture is seen as being written by oppressed people for oppressed people. Three paradigms are often explored: exodus; biblical references to black nations, and Jesus' stance toward the oppressed. These paradigms become the lens to see all other texts.

Miller, Keith D. "Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Black Folk Pulpit." *The Journal of American History* 78 (June 1991): 120-123.

There is great debate about the source of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s philosophy. Miller opts to support that his philosophy comes from African-American folk religion. Although King is heavily criticized for plagiarism, Miller argues that King understood oral language as public language. No one can own or have private language. Oral language is passed down and shared from generation to generation. Miller states, "In the folk pulpit, one gains an authoritative voice by adopting the persona of previous speakers as one adapts

the sermons and formulaic expressions of a sanctified tradition” (p. 121). Miller calls this “voice-merging.” The process of voice-merging results in “self-making.”

_____. “Voice Merging and Self-Making: The Epistemology of ‘I Have a Dream.’” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 19 (Winter 1989): 23-31.

Reviews the argument concerning the source of King’s philosophy. Do we have a King influenced by white schools (mainly Boston University) or a King influenced by the slave experience of African-Americans? This article gives examples of how King merged his voice with past preachers, teachers, writers, songs, and scripture. A secondary feature of voice-merging occurs when the preacher’s voice, the familiar set-pieces, the formulaic expressions, merge with the congregational consciousness. The merging enables churchgoers to participate more freely through speaking, clapping, gesturing, or dancing. King’s agenda was to merge all voices in America so a resultant brotherhood would result (identity convergence).

Mitchell, Henry H. “African-American Preaching.” In *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*. Edited by William H. Willimon and Richard Lischer. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1995.

People hear the good news in their own idiom, images, and cultural communication styles. Whooping is the most stereotypical element in black preaching. It is far from universal and on the decline. It is used only when welcomed by the congregation and done by those who can do it sincerely and with culture integrity. Spontaneity is also prevalent in black preaching. Black preachers are able to move with the moment and express deep feeling without shame. Black sermons are structured around the imaginative use of narrative. This experiential encounter with the Word is a holistic experience of the cognitive, intuitive, and emotional aspects of the hearer. Mitchell notes the cultural roots of black preaching recently discovered from Africa. These roots were brought to the slave situation and not born out of it.

_____. *Black Preaching*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990.

This volume is a revision of two earlier works by Mitchell who is advocating the recovery of the powerful art form of black preaching. The best of black preaching is learned at church by listening to good preaching. The purpose of this book is to develop those students who have not had that cultural upbringing. Although black preaching is primarily “caught” rather than “taught,” he reminds the reader that this does not indicate a lack of training. The distinctiveness of black preaching (essential quality) is found in several elements: a combination of a narrative style with imagination and emotion; the use of the congregation’s language; the use of imagination to embellish scripture; speaking to real needs with a liberation theme woven throughout. Mitchell’s analysis of style is based on transcripts of actual sermons by black preachers.

Mitchell offers a history of black preaching and a theology of black preaching that should prove useful to all preachers of the gospel. He correlates the hermeneutic of the black preacher with the “New Hermeneutic.” This hermeneutic sees the preaching event rooted in the gospel as an oral event. The narrative is used to create identification between the gospel story and “my” story. Mitchell defines in chapter 5, “Black English.” People’s faith is most naturally communicated in their mother tongue. Black English creates identity.

Black sermons rely more on the charisma of the speaker than the structure. Structure can be varied. The introduction establishes rapport, states the issue at hand, and sometimes is omitted. Next, he identifies distinctive features of style. Both of these last two chapters elaborate upon the effectiveness of communicating to the black culture. An analysis of three sermon forms often employed in the black pulpit exemplifies the discussion. Sermon types fall into all categories including: textual (design of the sermon is determined from the text’s divisions), expository (design is determined from an extended text and develops one main idea), narrative, and metaphorical (the use of one central image). What makes these sermons black is the delivery and reception?

Celebration preaching is criticized as being too emotional. Celebration is merely dramatizing the main idea and a keeping of the functional purpose of the sermon in mind (the behavioral and motivational goal). Celebratory preaching addresses the whole person.

Mitchell knows that the word is central for the black speaker and that how the preacher chooses to employ sound on that word is as much a matter of invention as the choosing of the word itself. The creative interplay between sound, rhythm, cadence, and harmony may be as important as the precise message. Some black preachers depend more on the voice than they do the precision of the message.

_____. "Preaching as Celebration." In *Theories of Preaching: Selected Readings in the Homiletical Tradition*. Edited by Richard Lischer. Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1987.

A true understanding of good news climaxes in celebration. This occurs through what Mitchell terms "transconsciousness" defined as: the result of immemorial existential situations. Proclamation will lead to celebration. The genius of black preaching is the capacity to generate praise or joy in the hardest of circumstances. Joy is a deep feeling that draws people into community. Joy defines ones living space. Joy transcends tragedies. Celebration preaching concentrates on the great and worthy themes of scripture and the satisfying of human need. Mitchell concludes by discussing how timing and emotional pace are necessary to reach a climax of celebration.

Mott, Wesley T. "The Rhetoric of Martin Luther King, Jr.: Letter from Birmingham Jail." *Phylon* 36 (1975): 411-421.

Mott argues that the success of 'the Letter' can be attributed to the confluence of three distinct rhetorical traits: King's heritage of the highly emotional Negro preaching tradition, his shrewd sense of political timing and polemical skill, and his conscious literary ability. These points are seen in the following ways: 1. Emotional arousal is greater than theme. 2. Greater concern is given to inspiration than to logical organization. 3. Rhythm and cadence is oral in nature designed for affect. 4. The use of many stock phrases and patterns. 5. Message development occurs through repetition (repetitive refrains, rhetorical questions, formalized dialogue, and narrative). Mott concludes, "The rhythm is the message" (p. 412).

Niles, Lyndrey A. "Rhetorical Characteristics of Traditional Black Preaching." *Journal of Black Studies* 15 (September 1984): 41-52.

Niles offers three limitations in analyzing black sermons. These sermons were not prepared in manuscript form. Most sermons are in dialogue form and the manuscripts that do exist do not satisfactorily represent what actually took place in the church. Furthermore, sermons in the black tradition were not written to be read. Much of the impact, therefore, is lost unless the critic knows how the words would have sounded, and can picture the delivery in his or her mind as he or she reads the manuscript.

Niles reviews the three aspects of the black sermon. The introduction is designed to present the preacher before the congregation by establishing his credibility and ethos. By establishing rapport, deep feeling can be expressed in the context of acceptance. The introduction also launches the text. Secondly, the black sermon will entail narrative so that the story is relived and experienced by the listener. Finally, the strength of the sermon is in the celebration.

The language and style of the black sermon is presented with the language and culture of the congregation no matter what the educational achievement of the speaker. Niles also reviews cadences and call and response.

Norris, Frederick W. "The Catholicity of Black Preaching." In *Sharing Heaven's Music: The Heart of Christian Preaching: Essays in Honor of James Earl Massey*. Edited by Barry L. Callen. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995.

Norris makes a connection between Greek orthodoxy and black preaching discussing the categories of: rhythm, cadence, moving of the will through emotion, the use of scripture allusions, allegorical interpretation, the parallel between the narrative of the liturgical year and black narrative theology, and the high use of imagery.

Pipes, William H. *Say Amen Brother! Old Time Negro Preaching: A Study in American Frustration*. Westport, CN: Negro Universities Press of Greenwood Press, 1970.

Pipes identifies recurrent structural patterns in black sermons. The introduction is designed to establish common ground of religious feeling between the audience and the speaker. The introduction is followed by a statement of the text of scripture. The body of the sermon is a series of repeated emotional climaxes. Finally, the conclusion resolves the emotional tension aroused by the sermon by drawing sinners to God.

Pitts, Walter. "West African Poetics in the Black Preaching Style." *American Speech* 64 (Summer 1989): 137-49.

Pitts identifies three stages in the organization of the black folk sermon: a conversational introduction, an emotional build-up, and a climax. The black folk preacher is not trained in seminary. He is called to preach primarily from the black working class. Delivery depends upon rhythmic speech, use of black vernacular, use of the King James language, volume and pitch modulations, repetition, and the use of formulaic phrases. Pitts identifies black preaching as related to the West African experience. The remainder of this article analyzes one particular sermon.

Proctor, Samuel D. *"How Shall They Hear?" Effective Preaching for Vital Faith*. Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1992.

This book is based upon Proctor's 1990 Lyman Beecher Lectures on Preaching. The book is organized around four themes: God is present and active in human affairs and intervenes in our behalf; spiritual renewal and moral wholeness are available to us all; genuine community is a realizable goal for the human family; eternity moves through time, and immortality is an ever-present potential. We have already passed from death unto life when we love. Proctor advocates the dialectical method in conjunction with these four themes. If the preacher will preach on these four core themes using the dialectical method, then the congregation will both hear and respond. The dialectical method advocated by Proctor is one he learned at Crozier Seminary (preceding Martin Luther King, Jr.).

_____. *Preaching About Crisis in the Community*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1988.

Proctor begins by changing the perception of community in crisis from a negative understanding to an understanding that community is "holy ground." When the preacher addresses good news to real concerns, then the ground at that point becomes consecrated. Proctor helps to clarify the context of community as they struggle in today's society. He develops the issues of morality, disobedience, relationships, poverty, education, family, abundance, the oppressed, and the outcasts. Proctor lays a theological foundation for our understanding of God, human worth, community, and the liberating gospel, as essential for the healing of crisis.

Proctor's final chapter develops the dialectical method of preaching. To meet the various crisis situations in the congregation, the preacher must begin where they are. Every sermon needs a theme or proposition. This proposition comes from both experience and the Word of God. Yet this "ideal" that the preacher desires to communicate must be examined in relationship with the "real" of people's lives (antithesis). A relevant question is asked to reconcile the real and the ideal. The message, the resolution, the answer to the relevant question is the synthesis. This answer may be presented in two to six points. Each point needs to be developed from several perspectives to bring clarity. The preacher may develop these points from the biblical record, history, literature, and experience, but will always contain the good news. There is no need for a conclusion for by the time you have stated your case, resolution should have occurred. Many of Proctor's chapters are set-up following this same dialectic methodology.

Rosenberg, Bruce A. *The Art of the American Folk Preacher*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1970.

Rosenberg explores the compositional devices used in black preaching that are similar to those found in ancient and medieval epics. He describes the nature of his research in chapter one. Succeeding chapters discuss sermon content and structure, the nature of the chanted sermon (timing, rhythm, verbal composition, and the function of formulas). He describes the interplay between the preacher and the congregation as a major factor in the sermon's composition. Rosenberg describes the art of composing

spontaneously the language necessary for folk preaching is a merging of talent and a shared language with the biblical narrative.

Sanders, Cheryl J. "God's Trombones: Voices in African American Folk Preaching." Callen, Barry L. *Sharing Heaven's Music: The Heart of Christian Preaching: Essays in Honor of James Earl Massey*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995.

Sanders begins by reviewing the rise of the black church, black preaching, and their oral tradition. She identifies seven different types of transcripts among black preachers: poetic, literary, musical, structural, hermeneutical, ethical, and political. The poetic and literary types recognize preacher as artist and is rooted in a living oral tradition of the black church.

Sanders describes the preaching of Massey under five identifying marks: 1. Functional (to liberate and sustain the congregation); 2. Festive (an invitation to joy); 3. Communal; 4. Radical (rooted in the personal life and vital response of the congregation); and 5. Climax (expressed in the hearer). She notes how difficult it is to analyze written and edited sermons. The printed sermon loses the qualities of the oral event. How do you reproduce the oral word in a written form?

Simmons, Martha J. *Preaching on the Brink: The Future of Homiletics*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1996.

Taylor, Gardner C. *How Shall They Preach*. Elgin, IL: Progressive Baptist Publishing House, 1977.

_____. "The Sweet Tortures of Sunday Morning." In *Changing Lives Through Preaching and Worship*. Edited by Marshall Shelly. Nashville: Moorings, 1995.

Taylor discusses preaching auto-biographically under the categories: preaching as journey (know your destination); spiritual life of the preacher; and application. He concentrates on delivery. Taylor states, "start low, go slow, get high, strike fire, retire." Openings should be three minutes in order to garner interest. The preacher must work on the chemistry between the pulpit and the pew so the preacher can get emotionally close with the congregation.

Thomas, Frank A. *Introduction to the Practice of African American Preaching*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2016.

_____. *They Like to Never Quit Praisin' God*. Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2013.

Wilson, Paul Scott. *A Concise History of Preaching*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992.

Wilson's last chapter is about Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968). After reviewing King's biography, Wilson summarizes King's preaching. King had a cognitive purpose which was produced by a controlling idea and the need to demonstrate the truth of that idea in the sermon. Yet, King complemented this cognitive purpose with an emotive purpose. King desired to affect lives. Material was chosen according to its emotional logic.

Sermons were also constructed to take into account musical features common to the black pulpit. Many of King's rhythms and rhyming patterns were imprinted upon him from childhood. He followed the stylistic features of ancient rhetoric. He would begin with a low style and move to the grand style. King would reach a climax of celebration, hope, and victory. Although not an integral part of the congregation in Montgomery, King relied upon the call and response of the congregation. King understood preaching as a communal event. Furthermore, King's sermons were filled with set-pieces. These familiar pieces were used over and over again in various situations. Much of his preaching were ideas borrowed from others. Truth is a communal possession. Ideas and sermons belong to the community. King was a master of vivid details, powerful images, and symbols. Finally, Wilson notes how Scripture is read through the lens of liberation.