Holy Hands
An Investigation of Ritual Gesture Use by Black and White Baptist Preachers in Durham, NC

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Preface

Recently many researchers have labored to put the linguistic body back together. Historically, linguistic study has focused on the sounds produced by the mouth, but more recently work has emphasized the importance of body language and gesture in the act of communication. Some even go so far as to posit that gesture preceded spoken language in the phylogeny of communication. Over time, the twin ideas that gesture is used to aid communicative acts and that such gestures are socially and culturally bound has become more and more acceptable.

This work attempts to see if and how gestural variance occurs by analyzing the ritual gestures of White and Black preachers in Durham, North Carolina region. It is known that the Baptist denomination, established around 1846, has a history of evangelical preachers and a strong Christian culture tied to it. It is also common to the social sciences that African American culture is distinct as juxtaposed to standard white culture, and this trend extends into the realm of religion as well. In the study of verbal language, ethnicity is seen as a cultural variable that influences language differentiation. The principal question for this study is if ethnicity correlates with a variance in the ritual gesture of preachers.

This particular work will focus on ritual gestures employed by Black and White preachers during the sermon. Ritual gestures are those movements associated with common Christian ceremonies such as communion and baptism and those acts taught in this particular denomination as having time-honored biblical value. The product of this study is the illumination of four outstanding points:
• Gestural studies done by psychologists and linguists over the last several decades have shown that verbal articulation and the gestures that accompany them form a continuum of convention.

• Ritual gestures inhabit a space in the human mind that lies between conscious and unconscious thought.

• Even though both Black and White Baptist preachers belong to a single religious tradition there are marked gestural differences.

• That these differences relay some sort of cultural information about church/sermon style and the social space of religion within the two ethnic groups.
Chapter 1
Verbal Language and Visual Gesture: a linguistic family reunion

I. Gesture Comes into View

Throughout the history of the field of linguistics the phenomenon of gesture has been largely ignored as an area of inquiry. At the beginning of the twentieth century Ferdinand de Saussure, the father of modern linguistics, mentions only in passing the importance of nonverbal communication. It is not difficult to understand why early researchers would have ignored gesture. After all, on face value, natural language seems to be primarily verbal. Thus as far as the primary linguistic levels of phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics were concerned, verbal cues were all that were needed. Therefore physical gestures had not become crucial to the study of natural, everyday language comprehension or performance in the beginning of the discipline.

However, the later evolution of linguistics introduced the importance of factors that are not necessarily restricted to one’s verbal utterances. In the last 30-40 years it has been psychologists such as David McNeil, Susan Goldin-Meadow, and Adam Kendon who have brought the connection between language and gesture forward. Furthermore some current theorists posit that gesture is involved in all linguistic levels. Two developments have contributed to the integration of the works of these psychologists into linguistics. The first is that signed languages, such as American Sign Language (ASL), have become accepted as true languages by the linguistic community. These languages capitalize on using the hands as a mode of communication as opposed to the vocal tract.
The second major development is the recognition of the importance of context for the
speech event. The inclusion of context lead to the inclusion of aspects of language
*external* to the verbal linguistic space. This “pragmatic” level of language analysis
initially sparked the scientific investigation of communicative gesture. Nancy Dray and
David McNeill, in their groundbreaking study *Gestures During Discourse* (1990), expound
upon this line of inquiry and posit that gestures used during discourse are markers of
actual thought processes of interlocutors in communicative acts. According to them
gesture is indeed a social artifact that carries and distributes communicable material
and this material is both interpreted and incorporated by interlocutors. Taken with the
fact that gesture is more flexible and capable of displaying information instantaneously,
gesture more accurately displays one’s instantaneous and flexible thought processes.
The study of gesture is now seen as a legitimate part of linguistic analysis.

II. Defining Communicative Gesture

Not just any gesture counts as communicative gesture. For example, if I am
discussing a recent episode of Family Guy with my best friend and a fly approaches me
and I swat at it with a wave of my hand, is this a communicative gesture? No!

Now consider that I am discussing a putrid smell and I wave my hand in the exact
same fashion, is that a gesture? Yes

The fundamental question is: how do we distinguish between a communicative
gesture used for discourse purposes and other movement?
Before answering this question a four-way distinction must be made between sign language, emblems, extraneous body movement, and communicative gesture. Sign languages are recognized as languages in their own right and the actions involved in these systems have meaning of their own and independent from any other language-including verbal ones. Emblems have a weaker language-gesture connection, these movements are culturally instilled and stand as utterances in and of themselves. Common American emblems include the “ok” hand shape, crossed fingers, and even the “come here” gesture. An emblem, as a sign language, does not require any verbal communication to convey its meaning in conversation. Understanding of an emblem does not require merely a text-book understanding of verbal language, but a certain level of functional linguistic competence. Extraneous body movements include gestures that do not express any linguistic information. Such gestures usually come in the form of physical reflexes and movement caused by or related to biological processes (i.e. burping, sneezing, etc.)

The most succinct definition of a communicative gesture is visible action that co-occurs with speech. However, as revealed by scenarios in the beginning of this section, that criterion alone is not enough. Therefore throughout time further factors were added in order to pick out these communicative actions. Adam Kendon considers the idea of gesture being visible action “when it is used as an utterance or as a part of an utterance,” and an utterance in his view can be any verbal or nonverbal action that is treated as “giving information” by the relevant interlocutors. Thus an utterance can be “any unit of activity that is treated by those co-present as a communicative ‘move’,
‘turn’, or ‘contribution’” (2004, 7). Susan Goldin-Meadow also adds into the definition of gesture that they are “constructed at the moment of speaking” (2003, 5) in order to distinguish them from emblems and sign languages. It is this definition that I feel most fully encompasses communicative gesture and how it should be distinguished.

Many gesture researchers have created their own schemas for classification of communicative gesture, but it seems that these differences rest mostly on the number of categories of gestures and not in the major characteristics included. In a sense the schemas differ primarily in the number of slices made in the gestural pie. To keep it simple, only mention of the four major categories of gesture defined by McNeill will be mentioned: iconic gestures, metaphoric gestures, deictic gestures, and beat gestures.

**Table 1. Schemes for classifying types of gestures**

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<td>Lexical gestures</td>
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<td>Pictographic gestures</td>
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<td>Deictic gestures</td>
<td>Metaphoric gestures</td>
<td>Ideographic gestures</td>
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<tr>
<td>Motor gestures</td>
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<td>Beats gestures</td>
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Goldin-Meadow pg 6

**Iconic:** These gestures convey concrete meaning in a relatively transparent manner. These gestures attempt to convey meaning by replicating the referent (i.e. some sort of motion, object, or shape). An example would be talking about opening a jar
of peanut butter and making a twisting hand motion at the same time. These gestures are highly dependent on the accompanying speech.

**Metaphoric:** Metaphoric gestures present abstract ideas as opposed to concrete objects. Goldin-Meadow offers the example of adults answering a written math problem of continuous change. She mentions that the gestures represent the method used for solving said problem. In this sense, the gesture does not represent a certain object contained in the problem (a bushel or a day) but the idea of change.

**Deictic:** this category is probably the easiest to explain. Gestures of the deictic kind are used to indicate “objects, people, and locations” (McNeill 1992, 18). For example pointing to a specific purse while saying “that’s my purse” is a deictic gesture. Interestingly though, deictic gestures do not have to point to objects that are visible at the time of the verbal utterance. Consider a conversation in which the speaker is talking about a past event and points to his left to reference the location of a character in their narrative, another pointing gesture in that area could be a deictic gesture referring to that same character. In this way, deictic gestures can employ a rather abstract quality.

**Beat:** Beat gestures literally note the beat of speech. They follow the rhythm of whatever is spoken however these gestures do not convey substantive (plot) information as the other categories of gesture do. They give information on the structure of the story-emphasizing what may be important.

Despite these different classifications, all forms of gesture do have common characteristics. The majority of these commonalities draw from the fact that speech and gesture are, two an extent, two opposing heads of the communication coin. For one,
since gestures do exist on the visual spectrum, they are primarily imagistic. They are also
global and synthetic in that each part of the gesture gains meaning form the gesture as a
whole. For example, imagine a person whose two fingers are “walking” across a table. If
the hand is understood as a person in a story being told then the fingers in question
represent feet. Yet, this representation of “finger feet” is dependent on and contingent
to the *entire* figure (i.e. the hand) representing a person. Gestures are also described as
automatic in that the gestural system does not have laws of grammar as verbal language
does allowing gesture to be more fluidly connected to actual thought. It then follows
that gestures are allowed to be idiosyncratic and unique to the gesturer. Most gestures
are affected by but not prescribed by societal pressures and thus can be tailor made by
the individual. Verbal communication, on the other hand, is a representation of thought
but one that has been tampered by the necessity for the form to fit certain norms.
Speech, then, is almost the complete opposite of gesture; it is analytic, ordered, linear,
and conventional. The most interesting thing about speech and gesture for the purpose
of my thesis is that speech is mainly a conscious event. Interlocutors are more conscious
of the words they use in a conversation than the gestures they make. It is as though on
the communicational spectrum, gesture and speech are on two wholly opposite ends.

Initially it may seem that gesture and speech are incompatible and pose a
problem for linguistic theory. However, most of linguistics is rooted in conflict. Saussure
himself describes language as a series of oppositions that are negotiated during the
speech act (competence v. performance, signified v. signifier, syntagmatic v.
paradigmatic, synchronic v. diachronic and social v. individual). In this view, true
language is bred from this push and pull of antagonistic pressures; the added tug of war between speech and gesture fits this mosaic.

III. The Phylogeny (Evolution in the Species) and Ontogeny (Development in the Individual) of Gesture

The study of language origins provides some insight and lends support to the idea of gestures as a communicative agent. Through the combined efforts of evolutionary study and primatology it has been found that the ability for gestural communication was available before verbal language ontogenetically and phylogenetically. Some of the phylogenetic study has concluded that:

- the fully developed vocal tract evolved at a much later period than fully evolved upper extremities;
- some primates are able to learn and use sign languages; and
- normal primate gestures are used in communication naturally and display iconicity.

The inter-species study of linguistic behavior begs the question of “what monkeys, apes, and hominids really do—how they structure and use their communicative behavior of all types—and not just whether they can communicate in the same way as humans” (King and Shanker cited in Armstrong 2008, 300). Taken together these studies do show evolutionary (Darwinian) evidence of iconic gestures being used to communicate meaning. Since primates are evolutionarily related to humans and are also social beings as humans, it is not hard to conclude that the ability to have linguistic behavior or
communication of some form existed before the evolution of human language. Even if primates do not have a fully matured language as we understand or the ability to fully incorporate human sign languages, they do exhibit linguistic ability—meaning the ability to manipulate the behavior of a conspecific. Therefore it is almost impossible for linguistic behavior to have evolved only when spoken language did. As it is imperative for primates as social creatures to communicate for the livelihood of their communities, some sort of linguistic behavior must exist. And this linguistic behavior is primarily found in the form of gesture and grunts.

Even more striking is the relationship between language and gesture found ontogenetically. Gesture acquires and maintains linguistic properties throughout the life cycle. Studies of babbling prove that from birth, gesture can acquire properties akin to spoken language. Babbling plays an integral role in ontogenetic language acquisition as it is a sign of the maturation of the brain and body to incorporate language. Laura Petitto and colleagues (1991) investigated the question of language solely developing with speech by asking whether babbling could occur in more than one mode (gestural or vocal). The study followed hearing babies of hearing parents and deaf babies of deaf parents longitudinally. The group defined an event as babbling if it was not a word, had systematic organization, and had phonetic and syllabic features common to the language in the respective modality. These criteria were applied for both the vocal and manual modalities of both groups of babies. Manual activity was then divided into two forms: manual babbling and gestures. The study found that both groups of babies gestured equally, however a higher percentage of the deaf babies’ manual activity was
babbling as opposed to their hearing counterparts (32-71% vs. 4-15%). The reverse situation was also true. This study in itself shows that in the period before a clear modality of language is chosen (i.e. before gesture evolves into a signed language), gesture can acquire and convey phonetic and syllabic linguistic properties for hearing babies. Aside from merely establishing that babbling occurs in this manual mode, the study also showed that the two forms of babbling developed synchronously into the respective forms of language. Petitto declares that “the deaf infants progressed through the stages of manual babbling similar to the stages of vocal babbling observed in hearing infants” (251). For example, at the 10 month marker both deaf babies who manually babbled and hearing babies who vocally babbled had progressed to the syllabic babbling stage, a key stage in language development. Hence, once a mode of language is chosen presumably by preference of babbling in one mode to another, the two modalities even evolve at a comparable rate.

Even beyond the highly malleable period of infancy, gesture further reflects cognitive development. A striking example is the case of the gesture mismatch in which a gesture displays information extraneous to or even contradictory to spoken language. For example, school-age children exhibit speech-gesture mismatches when solving certain types of math problems. Take for example the problem of the form “5 + 4 + 2 = _ + 2”. A child can say they solved the problem by adding all the numbers on the left hand side of the equation but in gesture show a grouping method (pointing at the 5 and 4 and then pointing at the 2’s on both sides). Educational research has proven that such contradictory gesture mismatches mean that the child is attempting to grasp the new
mathematical concept and that they would benefit from further instruction on the topic.

In fact, research experiments have proven that children who display this mismatch actually do have a higher propensity to understand the given concept after more instruction (Goldin-Meadow 2003, 39-54). This same study also found that most effective teachers do notice these mismatches in the children and appreciate them as indicators of the child’s thought patterns. It is as though gesture is conveying a thought, but a thought not fully understood enough to be incorporated into speech.

A similar effect occurs in the case of memory beyond childhood. Ruth Church, et. al. (2007) set up an experiment in which a story was told both with and without gesture and college age participants’ memory was evaluated. The only gesture used was of the mismatch form and all gestures in the video were instances of naturally occurring gesture. Each participant had half a video with gesture and half without and the participants were randomly assigned to have memory tested after a short or long period of time. Memory was assessed via a written test. The researchers found that in both the long term and short term cases, the section of the video with gesture was remembered more accurately. Along with that, these participants also included information provided via gesture that was not provided verbally into their written accounts of the test video (144-150).

Taken together these studies not only prove that gesture can convey linguistic meaning early on in development, but that this tendency is maintained throughout the lifespan. Also interestingly, this form of communication is used not only by the speaker as a marker of thought but is picked up by other interlocutors. The barrier between
gesture and spoken language is permeable! The mere fact that gestural information can be “read” and included in teachers’ assessments of students and even a layman’s memory of a videotaped event proves that in practice gesture and language are used to distribute information cooperatively—gesture and spoken language are both forms of communicating thought and thought can manifest itself in either modality in a rather unrestricted fashion.

Work such as this led to the idea that speech and gesture are cognitively “two aspects in the process of utterance” (Kendon 2004, 125) which are related synchronously in time. Gestural occurrences have three main phases that comprise the gesture phrase: preparation, stroke, and hold if applicable. Additionally, this entire phrase is uniquely organized so that:

the principle feature... is how what is distinguished as the stroke of the gesture phrase is performed in close temporal proximity to that part of the associated tone unit that expresses something that can be regarded as semantically coherent with it. The nucleus of the gesture phrase, that is the stroke and anything that may follow it, tends to be done in such a way that it is done at the same time, or nearly at the same time, as the word or word cluster that constitutes the nucleus, in a semantic sense, of the spoken phrase. (Kendon 2004, 124-125)

The fact that the two nuclei – the gestural and the verbal – occur in such tight conjunction suggests that the two modes are cognitively prepared in conjunction as well. In order for the nuclear stroke of a gesture to occur at the appropriate time, the gesture itself must be planned and organized cognitively at roughly the same time as the verbal phrase itself. It is as though the process of language itself seems to activate both verbal and gestural pathways at the same time.
McNeill takes this idea a step further with his theory of the Growth Point (GP). In his view, language is essentially amodal—any thought has the capability to be expressed by speech or gesture. The Growth Point then is equivalent to the linguistic decision point. It is the last moment in which language is indeed amodal. McNeill argues that at this point thoughts/language must “choose” which path to follow: visual or vocal. I say choose in quotation marks because it is not as though the language itself has volition, but rather that the speaker in some cognitive path must make a choice. Furthermore, this process of choosing pathways can occur multiple times during a speech act therefore speech and gesture are continuously synchronized and can even influence each other (explaining findings such as natural verbal halts being followed by gestural halts and depriving subjects of gesture impairing speech).

IV. From the Individual to the Cultural

Since communicative gestures are in some way influenced by speech processes, be they cognitive or performative, it follows that gesture would also be affected by linguistic factors known to alter this process. To begin with, gestures should be subject to societal pressures just as language is, and it seems that this idea is widely accepted. Consider the art of acting, since the practice has begun it has focused on creating a reenactment of natural life. Part of this simulation is largely based on the gestures and facial expressions used by the actors on stage and throughout the media of the stage, Broadway, television, and even the internet a good actor/actress is judged based on this criterion.
On a parallel note, it has also been folk knowledge that a person’s body
demeanor will reveal their true thoughts; consider the use of phrases such as “seeing
the truth in someone’s eyes”. One predominant researcher, Paul Ekman, has capitalized
on this idea and defined what he considers to be the main facial expressions of
emotions. This information has been used by police, FBI, businessman, and even
national protection agencies to determine if someone is indeed telling the truth. So it is
clear that not only are certain expressions and body movements expected by society per
occasion, but they are also common to the human community.

Two token examples reiterate the importance of society for gestures, but also
the extent to which society can alter a gesture. One is the case of cultural super-
saturation and the second is the cultural isolation. Emblems are gestures which have full
linguistic meaning in and of themselves independent of speech. However, these gestures
are not common to every culture. Think of the American peace sign (two fingers in a “V”
shape). Although it is commonly a friendly gesture, in certain cultures this hand shape is
an offensive, vulgar sign. In this case, culture has saturated the reading and using of
gesture to the point of lending gesture full language properties. On the other end of the
spectrum are feral children. These children are raised devoid of all contact with society.
One of the more dramatic and most documented cases is that of Genie. This child lived
twelve years of her life in severe isolation from the outside world and even from her
family. When she was found, her gestures and language were terribly underdeveloped:
almost at the level of the before mentioned babbling babies. In this case the lack of
societal input made it almost impossible for language and gesture to mature either independently or as a system (Curtiss et. al. 1975).

Evidently, cultural pressures can lead to the maturation of the gesture-language complex and lack of such input can result in complete lack of function. But could these pressures have even more subtle effects on the development of gesture. Özyürek and his associates investigated this matter in their 2008 study of Turkish-speaking and English-speaking groups. The study participants were of various ages (three, five, nine, and adult) and were presented with ten video clips showing motion in manner, that is, the way in which something moved, and path, that is, the direction it moved, and then they were asked to describe the video clips afterward. The participants gestured of their own volition, but the pattern was the factor of interest to the research team. For example, an English speaker can say “rolled down a hill” where the verb roll combines manner of motion with the path of motion. Turkish verbs do not combine these features, and thus a Turkish speaker must stay something equivalent to “going down a hill in a rolling manner”. At age three, children who spoke English and those who spoke Turkish described the videos with language that differentiated manner of motion and path of motion by clause. At this same age, manner and path were exhibited by two distinct gestures. At age five, however, English speaking children had begun to merge manner and path in verbal language and in gesture; and by age nine onwards this merger was complete: all descriptions of manner and path occurred in one verbal clause and one gesture. Turkish participants never exhibited this speech-gesture merger. Thus, the English speaker combines manner and path in gesture order to synchronize with the
verbal clause nucleus. However, the Turkish speaker has two verbal nuclei to follow – one for manner and one for path – and thus produces two gestures.

At the same time, culture can influence the propensity of a certain gesture to occur. Studies have shown that among both Italian and Italian-American groups a larger number of kinetographic and pictographic gestures are used when recounting stories (Graham and Argyle 1975, 65-66). Even more striking is the high propensity of Zinacantán children to point. As explained by Haviland (2000), the people of Zinacantán consider a baby’s pointing as a true act of communication and will interact with these gestures. At the same time, these babies use the pointing gesture significantly more than most other children because of the fact that they are usually bundled with only the hands free. It is as though the children use these gestures because it is their only recourse but at the same time they learn through experience through their culture that these gestures mean something. This apparent meaning then entices them to continue using the pointing gesture to attempt to communicate with other people in the environment. It is a case of a cultural feedback. But it is the culture that causes the change because at early infancy these children do not initially point at higher rate than other babies. Just as with the Turkish and English speaking children (Özyürek study) and even deaf and speaking babies (Petitto study), it is culture and experience that makes the difference. Zinacantán culture puts emphasis and meaning to pointing and thus pointing increases, Turkish children’s’ linguistic culture does not allow them to merge manner and path as opposed to English children who are expected to learn to do so, and deaf babies learn through their experiences that gesture has meaning and commence to
manually babble. But it is important to note that at some point in human development, language and gesture are on an equal level and it is culture and experience that provide the driving force for differentiation.

V. The Dual Nature of Linguistic Communication

Studies of communicative gesture prove that speech and the gestures that accompany it form a continuum of linguistic convention where a spoken language is wholly conventional and the gestures that accompany ones speech are highly idiosyncratic. Even this small review of notable findings and theories makes it clear that gestures do serve in a communicative capacity. Furthermore, these communicative gestures occur with speech in an intimate, time sensitive relationship with the nucleus and the nucleus of the verbal segment being synchronous. And even if the theory of the Growth Point of language is debatable, it is undeniable that the human capacity of language must at some point be tied to gesture. It can even be deduced that language, as a process, must at some point incorporate both verbal and kinetic modes with regards to both production and interpretation.

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<th>Table 2. Characteristics of Speech and Gesture</th>
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<tr>
<td>Linear</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conventional</td>
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<td>More conscious</td>
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Moreover, this communicative phenomenon is subject to change by way of environmental influences. Culture and environment can mature language to the point of gesture fully encompassing the full job of language as in American Sign Language, and, as displayed by feral children, the lack of such input can inhibit functional growth of the system. It seems that feral children offer a gestural parallel to the notion of the critical point for acquiring verbal language. In addition, environment adjusts gesture on a smaller scale by altering things such as proportion of gesture type, number of gestures, and even the informational load of a gesture. Not only is gesture a communicative artifact, it is malleable according to the requirements of the situation at hand. For the purposes of the present study, the most important distinction to note is that gesture falls at the unconscious end of the communicative spectrum, while speech falls at the conscious end.
Chapter 2
Culture, Religion, and the Baptist Faith

I. Introduction
The Baptist faith has very strong historical roots in both England and the United States of America. The faith has been established long enough to not only instill its own culture and characteristics, but also to become intertwined with the society at large. At the same time, this long history is not one sided. The histories of Black and White Baptists offer rooted footrests for both Black and White preaching traditions. And yet, allowing for this ethnic variation, these diverse Baptists are more alike within themselves than when compared to those of other denominations. The Baptist faith is also large. According to the American Religious Identity Survey (ARIS) conducted in 2001, Baptism is the largest Protestant denomination with approximately 33,830,000 Americans openly professing it (http://www.adherents.com/rel_USA.html).

Both of these factors—its cultural tradition and its size— are critical to the aims of this project. Baptism clearly occupies a cultural space within American society and has done so for quite some time. The presence of over 500 years of history for the denomination as an established faith allows for it to have grown and been influenced by some of the same cultural factors as the greater society—it embeds the denomination into American society. Such a history is also crucial to the development and dissemination of religious traditions and rituals that will have special meaning and be primarily conserved amongst fellow Baptist congregations the sections that follow will delineate (1) the relationship between religion and culture and (2) The history and distinguishing characteristics of the Baptist faith. However, one
may feel that a similarly prevalent cultural tie and interesting history exists for almost any other religious faith. So, what is it about the Baptist denomination that makes it so special?

II. Religion: a dynamic cultural artifact

As mentioned in the previous chapter, spoken language normally varies due to some cultural difference among speakers. These distinguishing factors can be as basic as age and as complicated as sexual preference, and all such factors are considered markers of a culture. After all, the term culture is commonly defined as a group of people with a set of shared beliefs and practices or more invasively as “the totality of behavior patterns that are passed between generations by learning, socially determined behavior learned by imitation and instruction” (Jakobson, 103). In that sense then, a culture- the linguistic driving force of spoken language variance- can be identified and separated by nuances in behavioral practices and beliefs.

This is where religion comes in. Religion in itself is a belief that is accompanied by ritualized practices to which groups of people ascribe their allegiance. Obviously, religion itself can be a major player in how cultures are demarcated and it has been used to serve as such a tool in disciplines across the social sciences. For instance, in cultural anthropology the description of small village culture includes information about the common or dominant faith. Religion is also a major player in foreign relations; most diplomats are taught about the religious beliefs of their foreign colleagues and how this might affect any communication or interaction. Even in a pragmatic sense, religion can be a deciding factor amongst people themselves. Think of the conflict between the Jewish people and their Palestinian neighbors. The root of their dilemma lies in the nuances of their respective faiths and what that faith dictates about the land in which they live.
And religion is not just a factor for smaller nations. Much of the primary enthusiasm for America lied in the hope of religious freedom for the pilgrims who made the trans-Atlantic trek. The important thing to note throughout all of this is that religious difference correlates intimately with cultural difference. This relation is so intimate in fact that religious-philosophical artifacts can drive the development of a culture, i.e. the Protestant influence on American law, and even cultural conflict. In the case of America, the nation was built predominately by Puritan pilgrims escaping religious persecution. These pilgrims and their ancestors, although they espoused upholding religious freedom, established the burgeoning nation with Puritan ideals in mind (McLoughlin and Bellah 26-27).

From a theological point of view, religion serves an even stronger cultural role—a religion can be a culture in and of itself. Theologists such as Andy Crouch benefit from an alternative definition of culture; one that denotes culture as a particular set of attitudes, beliefs, and customs that people hold. This is a very slight change from the previous definition of culture. In this view the focus of the word is not necessarily the people who hold such beliefs and are aggregated into cultures, but in the beliefs and traits that aggregate them.

In light of this new conceptualization of the term, religion is culture. Religion, at its root, is a shared set of principles and beliefs that are applied by their believers to life in general. These beliefs come along with practices and customs that, in conjunction with the aforementioned principles, distinguish each individual religion. Therefore, to the deep theologian, spreading a religion is furthering a culture. And to Christians who agree with Andy Crouch, it is the believer’s God-given duty to disseminate the teachings and principles of the faith—thereby creating and facilitating the growth of the culture of Christianity.
III. The Beginnings of the Baptist Denomination

The specific denomination of interest for this study is the Baptist denomination. The Baptist religion is rooted in Puritan ideals and began in England. However, when they first began the title for the denomination was “Anabaptist”. The name came about because of the followers’ distinctive rejection of childhood baptism. At the time, child baptism, which involved a religious official sprinkling water on the head of an infant, was a crucial primary step in one’s personal salvation. Anabaptists were unique in that they did not see such a baptism as valid. In their eyes baptism, and the covenant for protection and faith entailed in such an act, could only legitimately be performed on an adult who has voluntarily decided to enter into such a relationship with their Lord and Savior (Gaustad and Leonard 783-4).

However, the issue of baptism wasn’t what led the denomination to migrate from England; it was the Puritan nature of the denomination. The Puritan movement arose in resistance to the King of England nationalizing/institutionalizing religion and placing himself at the head of the church, which in this case is the Church of England. Participation was mandated by law for all citizens; and to reject the Church or the King as its pope was both heresy and a felony. Puritans refused to acknowledge the validity of such an institution on the basis that the government had no right to attempt to control the church or its believers. One of the English Baptist leaders at the time, Thomas Helwys, went so far as to pronounce that “the King is a mortal man and not God, therefore [he] hath no power over the immortal souls of his subjects, to make laws and ordinances for them, and to set spiritual lords over them” (quoted in Gaustad and Leonard 783).
This stance against the Church of England subjected Baptists and fellow Puritan denominations to severe religious and legal persecution. And it is for these beliefs that many of the followers wished to flee to America. It seemed as though religious freedom had finally been granted. But this was not to be so. In this land of freedom there arose a dominating denomination espoused by the Anglican Church that began enforcing its belief on the colonists. Followers of the denomination were stereotyped and persecuted. Some were even publicly humiliated and cast out of the community. For instance, Anne Hutchinson, who led a small Baptist contingency in the early 1600s, was denounced at a public worship service by Boston’s town elder. For the crimes of allowing members of her congregation to discuss their interpretations of scripture, salvation and the like, elder John Wilson announced from the pulpit: “I denounce you, Anne Hutchinson, in the house of God, as a woman of dangerous and heretical errors. I denounce you as a servant of Satan. I cast you out as a leper that you no more blaspheme, seduce, and lie. I do order the congregation to treat you as a heathen and publican!” (Armstrong and Armstrong 57) The Baptists were again not safe because many of their teachings and methods of preaching were deemed unacceptable by this new power.

Such condemnation did not quash the Baptist faith, but denunciation and expulsion did aid in the dissemination of believers throughout the nation. Therefore, by 1677 there was a strong Baptist hold in the southern and northern colonies. There was even an established Baptist church in Boston (Armstrong and Armstrong 69). Yet it is important to mention that these two sections—North and South—had already begun to diverge in their respective cultures. This division fit the national trend that the fledgling nation was comprised of two disparate northern and southern cultures throughout its growth. It is widely known that The
American North was more industrialized than the American South, and this in the long run led to a major divide. Such a divide also affected the religious communities, but one of the most pivotal deviations was sparked around the time of the Civil War. Northern and Southern Baptists, who at the time did have some sort of religious center, began discussing the propriety of various social states and a major area of contention was the peculiar institution of slavery. Northern Baptist leaders mostly held the position that slavery was incompatible with the faith, and those in the South refused to agree. At that point most of the southern members removed themselves from this conference that later became known as the Northern Baptist Conference (Gaustad and Leonard 784).

How could the members of this conference, the center for the Baptist denomination, secede and still claim to espouse the Baptist denomination? Because the center was never able to place itself as an autonomous governing body for the denomination! The Baptist tenet that faith is voluntary and a personal agreement between oneself and God instills a very firm democratic notion, one that may even be stronger than the political notion of democracy. For the denomination, the church becomes a sovereign entity. Each believer voluntarily chooses a church to ascribe to, a preacher/pastor to follow but they are not too concerned with any further governing body. The church is the governing body. So, when various Baptist conferences were created the participation of a congregation is completely voluntary, and this voluntary nature inhibits the conference or center from applying any sort of mandate for the ascribed congregations—they can always leave the conference. It is akin to why the American South claimed the ability to secede during the Civil War; they were sovereign. The only difference is
that Baptist congregations are still sovereign, and removing this feature may just shake the foundation of the denomination itself.

After the secession of the southern members from the Baptist center, and even a bit before that, Baptism in the South evolved on its own. Although the evolution of Baptism in the North and West are equally unique and interesting, it is the Southern history that is more relevant to this study. Please note that when the term *Southern Baptist* occurs, it simply means Baptist in the South. It does not refer to the distinctive subset of the denomination known as Southern Baptist.

**IV. Baptism in the South**

The Baptist denomination emerged in the South around 1610 has a history of evangelical preachers and a strong Christian culture tied to it (Hill 15). At this time its followers exalted the value of solely relying on the Bible to show mankind the truth and the importance of a devotion to God based on one’s personal experience. The Baptist tradition also places a large amount of importance on the local congregation, and it is this character of Southern Baptism that over time bred its many forms. Many theologians simplify the vast diversity of the Southern Baptist denomination into four subdivisions: the Charleston Tradition (arriving in the 1690s), the Sandy Creek (1750s), the Georgia (1840s), and the Tennessee (1850s) (Hill 16).

The Charleston Tradition is probably the subdivision most related to the Presbyterian denomination by organization and theology. Their founders had traveled down the coast from New Hampshire and Maine. These Baptists believed in a strong sense of congregational order and a sense of purpose, and thus, “their worship was planned and dignified” and “the clergy
would live up to high standards of preparedness and personal demeanor” (Hill 17). As for beliefs, those who followed the Charleston tradition found their ecclesiological roots in Particular Baptists or Calvinists (Leonard, 116). According to these teachings the only right and true authority aside from God was the Holy Scripture. However the emphasis on order kept any sort of dissent rather maintained.

The Sandy Creek Tradition was a polar opposite of the Charleston organization. Congregations of this division were described as zealots and rejecters of establishment. This sect, formally established in Greensboro, North Carolina in 1755, valued the “true-hearted, transformed individuals” who made up the church (Hill 18). These Separate Baptists were those who held firmly the importance of the Christian revival and sermons full of emotional content. The most important feature of the religion for these Baptists was the personal and intimate relationship between a person and God.

The third subdivision, the Georgia Tradition, was the major division of Baptism that controlled the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and was created along with it. The SBC itself was created in 1845 to build a strong cultural and theological center for southern Baptists and to establish a unified congregational system (Aldridge 37). However, due to the large amount of power allotted to the local congregation in the Southern Baptist mentality, the SBC had little power to enforce any rules and eventually dissolved in 1870 (Aldridge 38). The SBC was still not able to overcome the issue of congregational sovereignty that allowed for secession of the southern congregations previously. The after-effect of the SBC then was a new tradition, the Georgian, which valued regional service and cultural identity (Hill 18).
The fourth and final major wave was the Tennessee Tradition. The members of this subdivision have dubbed themselves the Landmark Baptists. These Baptists see “an unbroken succession from New Testament times to every subsequent present time through Baptist or quasi-Baptist people and beliefs” and posited that the only true church was that of their tradition, going so far as to even perceive other Baptist ecclesiologies as invalid – to them, others were merely religious gatherings (Hill 19). Only the Landmark Baptists were true and chosen. All other faiths, denominations, and sub denominations were blindly headed down the wrong path. This sentiment further fed the dynamic separation of Baptist congregations.

These four traditions still exist and have a fervent congregational base, but the majority of modern Southern Baptist churches have combined the qualities of these congregational practices. Since the founding of these four main ecclesiological varieties, the American South has also seen the introduction of Tidewater Baptists, Primitive Baptists, Fundamentalist Baptists, Philadelphia Baptists, and many more. Within each of these tradition-divided congregations, every church has its own unique spin on worship and praise, rituals, evangelizing, and most importantly, preaching.

V. The Basics of Baptism in the South

What makes a Baptist so Baptist? Or, to rephrase, what are some of the qualities of the Baptist faith that distinguish it from other Christian and even other Protestant faiths?

There are three main characteristics of the Baptist faith. A primary and somewhat obvious factor is their call for a voluntary adult water baptism and ensuing rejection of the validity of child baptism as a form of one’s salvation (p.c. Jennings). Adult water baptism was an
act performed by a believer to display their total obedience to the holy Trinity and their public un-coerced confession of the faith (Gaustad and Leonard 783).

The second characteristic, noted earlier, is the importance of the voluntary nature of religion. However, it wasn’t just a simple form of voluntarism. Baptist voluntarism, as precisely described in the Encyclopedia of Religion, is two sided in that:

- Members are expected choose their own church instead of being born into one and
- The agreement of a believer to work and worship with his/her fellows was a private agreement and could not be mandated by the state or any other man.

Embedded in Baptist voluntarism is a strong conviction of the individual, personal nature of religion. A person decides for himself or herself whether or not to accept the faith.

Furthermore, once this faith is accepted, the primary relationship that must be maintained is that between the believer and his savior not between the believer and the institution. A true Baptist has a unique voluntary and yetpivotally personal relationship with God that endows them salvation.

The Third and final distinctive feature of Baptism is the deep sense of evangelism of the believers. One of the key teachings for those who have already sought salvation is that their God-given duty is to spread the joy and teachings of the Gospel wherever possible. It is the newly enlightened man’s job or mission to spread the Word of God and bring more sheep into the Lords fold. In the Baptist community (and indeed many other religious communities) every saved man has the capacity to be a preacher. One need not a formal theological education or certain social/political standing to speak of the Lord’s teachings. Every man can spread the Word, every man can enlighten the lost, and every man can commune personally with God.
So, what are the characteristics of the Baptist church? This question is a bit harder to answer and is best confronted from another angle: determining what the expectations of the church and church officials are.

It has already been stated that the church is seen as a sovereign religious power. The church is expected to disseminate the knowledge of the Gospel and the Preacher is expected to guide this dissemination. This knowledge includes teachings on life, salvation, in what practices one should or should participate. The church is the place of the Lord, and the Preacher, when in service, is meant to be a messenger who leads his congregation by the light of God. In a sense, for the Baptist believer, the church and preacher are the highest entities of power as far as their religious life is concerned. And this power can still be diminished in that the primary goal of the faith is for one to enter into and mature a personal relationship with the Savior and live by that relationship.

Alongside that, the officials of the church are expected to be living testimonials of salvation (p.c. Jennings, p.c. Wallace). A preacher and his sermon comprise the central piece of the Baptist church gathering. In the preaching act, it is expected that the preacher be able to convey the joy and importance of salvation. His job is to connect with the audience and at the same time demonstrate with his position, words, and actions all aspects of being saved and looked over by the lord. He explains saved life, the comfort and power of being a child of the Lord, and the importance of following the faith.

VI. Homiletics

As expected, the ability to preach in the expected manner does not come naturally. It takes time, practice, and in most cases instruction. As religion evolved throughout time, so
have the methods of religious education. Presently, it is common for those who have received
the call to preach to attend a school of theology and/or seminary school to prepare them for
such a position. And at most theological and seminary schools, aspiring preachers are exposed
to the discipline of homiletics.

Homiletics is, quite basically, the study of preaching and in most cases comprises an
entire course of study for those aspiring to preach. The discipline is established to illuminate
the purpose and importance of preaching. Part of this education does include discussions on
how to effectively organize, prepare, and deliver a sermon. Such instruction includes factors
such as posture, diction, language style, and a rudimentary focus on basic gestures to be aware
of while behind the pulpit.

From the introduction to the concluding prayer, Western homiletic courses give each
student a guideline by which he or she should research, write, and properly perform a sermon
in the Christian church. Courses vary across the nation and it preacher’s even vary in their
application of homiletic themes. However, books such as those by R. E. O. White can illuminate
a large amount of information about the teachings of homiletics.

White’s *A Guide to Preaching: A Practical Primer of Homiletics* is divided into several
chapters to help a preacher prepare and give a sermon. Of these sections, three in particular
were most insightful: “The Ideal Sermon,” “The Technique,” and “Getting the Message Across.”
The opening statement of the “Ideal Sermon” chapter sums up the Western ideal of proper
preaching succinctly:

Plainly, the setting of preaching within Christian worship limits severely the
themes, the matter and the manner of preaching. *There is no freedom of speech
in a Christian pulpit*. On other occasions, the same man may talk about anything
he chooses; but his sermon can never be free from the constraint arising from
the holy occasion, the sacred tradition, the spiritual purpose, the Divine Audience, that attend its delivery. (12)

According to White, a preacher must stay within the boundaries of Western religious tradition. He should stand on a platform or behind a pulpit, speak in clear diction at a steady speed, allow no answering back or questions during his sermon, and use sermon notes as discretely as possible (12,13, 48). As for the sermon itself, White details “must have” basics that should be taken into consideration and used by the preacher to present his ideas clearly. The preacher must:

1. Draw attention to a religious truth and show its importance within the scriptures.
2. Clarify this truth for the entire congregation (all ages, races, and intelligence levels).
3. Illustrate the truth through scripture, literature, history, or daily life.
4. Make the truth memorable through metaphors, humor, imagination, paradox, or stories
5. Evoke a positive response from his listeners. (13-15)

After clarifying these suggestions, White goes on to mention the most important requirement of all is for the preacher to feel and display strong religious emotion. And yet, he warns that this display should not be an “overt demonstration”; instead, it should be inwardly intense and outwardly conservative (51). In doing so, the preacher’s message will refrain from being a dramatic spectacle and thus become applicable to and accepted by the audience.

Writing the sermon comes second to actually delivering it. As White explains, each preacher must develop his own variations on the accepted techniques while remaining true to the church’s tradition. The three-point sermon is effective, but two points or a concentration on one theme is also acceptable (90-91). Once a major topic and outline is chosen, the preacher must then feel comfortable in performing his sermon before an attentive audience. Hands, facial expressions, body positioning, and tone of voice are integral to a successful delivery.
According to White, it is best to forget one’s hands, vary one’s speech in order to make a point (slowness adds emphasis, while speed builds excitement), and essentially “behave always as you would in the ‘best’ houses you have ever visited” (146-147). With these rules, it is clear that a preacher is expected to control both his emotions and his nonverbal communication— not only as a sign of respect for the church, but also to prevent his actions from interfering with the message. Taking White’s work as exemplary, it is clear that homiletics, if not a dictating force in a preacher’s choice of movements and style, at least attempts to make students aware of all aspects of the act including gestural displays.

Yet still this education does not tell the preacher everything he or she needs to know about leading a congregation. Following one’s formal education, it is customary for a fledgling preacher to “sit under” an already established preacher or pastor (p.c. Jennings). During this time, one observes the church service and aids in the sermon preparation process. In this way, a new preacher can learn which techniques are most effective for issuing a message to the congregation. Such techniques include patterns of intonation, knowing when to alter one’s volume, knowing how to use silence, and the importance of certain gestures.

Both of these influences play a role in the retention of certain styles and gestures; especially regarding rituals and traditions within the church. Rituals or ritualized acts are customarily conserved throughout the ages, and this is certainly true in an institution as culturally and historically bound as the Baptist faith. These acts are not arbitrary, they hold significant meaning in the faith and are integral to most Protestant religion. However, the gestures that accompany these events, which I call ritual gestures, are not as highly prescribed. Ritual gestures are only conserved in part, not in whole, and are passed down via tradition or
experience but not with strict guidelines. Therefore, both the educationally enforced homiletics training and the personal observation afforded during the preaching “internship” encourage the retention of ritual gestures and the distinctions that may be present across ethnicities. This is essential to the study at hand. Any variance present in these gestures is not just a matter of a preacher’s personal conviction, but (because of their traditional nature) also echoes of established cultural differences amongst the ethnicities.

VII. Incorporating Religion and Gesture

The history of religion in the United States is indeed a long one, as is that of the Baptist faith in America. This time frame leads to two key byproducts: first the Baptist faith is able to establish a strong cultural force in America and second this encultured force is then able to provide grounding for conserved traditions. Due to the strong tradition and rich history of the Baptist faith, most of the ritual gestures are not only highly conserved, but also heavily practiced. These ritualized gestures, then, have reached such a level of autonomization through practice that they inhabit a cognitive space between conscious and unconscious thought. I claim that these gestures are conscious because through training in homiletics and by experience preachers learn to be aware of their body in general. They learn how to adjust their positioning in order to effectively communicate and maintain composure on the podium. Yet, although these men and women are aware of their relative positioning, they do not take heed of the specific gestures employed at any instance.
Figure 1. Family Tree of Judaic Religion

Image from webdevilaz.com
Chapter 3
Baptists in Black and White

I. The Ethnic Divide

No discussion of religion, the Baptist faith, or homiletic training is complete without noting the pivotal force created by African American believers. This is not to say that the two ethnicities do not share common characteristics, ideals, and teachings; only that there are some blatant variations. It is important to analyze how or why these differences have come about as well as enumerate the disparities.

Although it was not mentioned in the previous chapter, the African-American experience with the Baptist denomination, and indeed religion in general, differs a great deal from that of the denomination’s European forbearers. Much of that variation is deeply intertwined with the history of early African Americans in the era of slavery. In a way, the distinctive phenomenon that is the Black religious experience today is a product of the unique social structures created during and in the wake of slavery. Every faith in America is forced to deal with this staggering cultural artifact and every denomination as well.

II. Slavery and the Dissemination of the Baptist Faith

Particularly intricate is the relationship between Christianity and the peculiar institution of slavery. Enslaved men and women acclimated to many aspects to American culture—this includes the prominent social force of Protestant Christianity. Either by White involvement or by acquiring knowledge and experience about the society around them, an innumerable amount of slaves were converted to Christianity during the era of the peculiar institution. A major contributing factor to this
phenomenon was the Great Awakening (Leonard 2003, 263). The evangelical spirit of the movement led many participants to actively convert both Black freemen and slaves. Many of these men and women were converted, and once converted a vast majority of them came to adopt the teachings and philosophies of the Baptist denomination.

But why was the Baptist way so enticing? According to scholars such as Walter Pitts (quoted in Baptist Ways by Bill Leonard, 263) there were three key features of the denomination that were the main points of attraction: the mysticality of the doctrine, full body immersion, and the permissibility of autonomous unions. Church doctrines such as the Bible, or biblical tales and teachings were given the power to make every man a prophet. This magical or mystical feature was in line with the traditionally powerful influence of magical forces within African religions. Full body immersion served a like purpose; it was akin to African water right ceremonies. And finally, the fact that Baptist polity allowed churches to be formed and run absent permission or jurisdiction-- the sovereign/autonomous church idea mentioned earlier-- granted slaves the right to meet and worship even without permission form their respective masters or government officials. Therefore, the Awakening did not just introduce slaves to religion but encouraged them to maintain the faith a spread it to others even if there were repercussions. In a sense “the single most important outgrowth of the Great Awakening was that Blacks who had been converted at the revivals formed their own independent congregations, thereby beginning the political, social, and economic autonomy of the Afro-Baptist church” (Pitts as quoted in Leonard 2003, 264).
So, even the first Black Baptist “churches” had deviated from the mainstream out of necessity. They were not legally allowed to participate on the same level as White citizens, especially in the American south. This was primarily because slaves were not allowed to meet at all. Therefore all church meetings for the slave community had to be done in secret. Another product of this ecclesiastical seclusion is that the services of such meetings were drastically different from those in other Baptist churches. For instance, most slave were not allowed to learn to read so biblical lessons were not read and interpreted, but members and leaders would recount the biblical stories they were able to hear in conversation. However the majority of the service was spent singing praying, and dancing (Leonard 2003, 264). Through song, the members expressed their theology and dance was also a major tool in this expression. From the beginnings of the Black Baptist tradition, the body of members already served a distinguishable role in the Black church than in the White church.

III. A Distinct Black Baptist Culture Solidifies

The distinctions present in the Black Baptist church were not quashed by the introduction of Black members into primarily White institutions. It may have even fed to a further secession from mainstream White Baptist ways on the part of their Black counterparts. After a while, enough pressure had built in the Baptist community to allow for Black male slaves to become members of mainstream churches by the early 1800s (Fitts 1984, 25). However these men were members in name only. They were not allotted the same privileges and responsibilities as White members. One report in Virginia even went so far as to claim that “[t]he degraded state of the minds of these
slaves, rendered them totally incompetent to the task of judging [and] correctly respecting the business of the church” and that it was “argued and advised that although all members were entitled to the privilege,... none but free male members should exercise any authority in the church” (Fitts 1984, 25). Such sentiment disqualified many converted slaves from actually enjoying the full benefits of church membership and this sentiment permeated churches that may not have even formally declared such a position. The notion was born into the culture and could even lead to violence.

In a sense, opening up membership to slaves did as good a job as the Great Awakening to contribute to the livelihood of early Black churches. The evident discrimination made these makeshift services all the more attractive. There, slaves were able to have the authority to prophesy simply based on the fact that they had accepted God’s word. In some cases, these congregations were recognized by both plantation owners and churches alike; They were called “plantation missions” and given certificates that allowed them to meet and hold service (Fitts 1984, 36).

The Civil War era brought the issue of slavery to the forefront, but for the Black Baptist church organization this made no major wave. They had already chosen to be separate from White churches. The outcome of the war simply made it a bit easier for such institutions to be established. It was not illegal for the members to meet because they were not slaves. The discrimination that was entailed in the pre-Civil War and Civil War eras did foster a Separatist movement among Black Baptists at the time. They wished to be separate from not only government, but also oppressive religious organizations. Yet, they did not wish to disengage from the Black community (Fitts 1984)
and a second movement coincided with that of the Separatist during the war and lasted into periods thereafter: the Co-Operative movement. In this time many of the Black Baptist conventions, governing bodies of sorts, were founded and each convention claimed a God-given duty to the Black community.

IV. Features of the Black Baptist Church

Many more events have had an impact on the development and maintenance of Black American religion and the Black experience with the Baptist denomination. Yet, the foundation of the Black Baptist movement and its involvement in and construction in response to wider cultural issues is the root of the uniqueness of Black Baptists. Over time Black and White Baptists have worked to resolve many of the issues discussed in the previous section. They have come to worship together, hold service together, and even learn from each other. In light of all this, however, the Black Baptist church still maintains some distinctive characteristics.

One major feature is a strong emphasis on music and rhythm throughout the church gathering and worship service. As a matter of fact, most theologians accept that this emphasis on musicality is a common component of African American religion in general, one which echoes the people’s land of origination. Therefore song and dance are not only forms of emotional expression, but a sort of discursive display of one’s faith and worship. It’s a way to speak without speaking. And yet all of this, “the forms of music [sung] in ... praise of God, as well as the physicality of [their] praise 9hand
clapping, holy dancing, and lifting holy hands), are tied to ... African roots” (McKinney 2003, 56).

Actually, physical emotive expressions are a definitive factor of Black churches of many faiths with or without music. Lora-Ellen McKinney describes a few of the characteristic physical expressions encountered in the Black Baptist church Setting in her book Total Praise: An Orientation to Black Baptist Belief and Worship (2003):

- Getting happy: Also known as shouting, getting happy is a form of joyful dancing that may include arm waving, crying, calling upon God, proclaiming God’s goodness, or falling onto the floor in religious ecstasy.
- Hand clapping: Hand clapping often accompanies singing, acknowledges agreement with speakers, or thanks God for his goodness to us.
- Lifting holy hands: Believers often raise both hands toward heaven as a sign of respect and adoration of Christ...
- Standing to honor God: When moved by Scripture, sermons, or singing, African American worshipers may stand to honor God as a sign that they are moved by God’s word. (60-61)

The entire body is involved in the act of worship. Therefore the process of praising God is a completely holistic experience encompassing one’s soul, mind, and body.

The Black Baptist church also expects the Bible and their faith to be directly applicable to all life issues. God’s word is seen as the blueprint for how one should live an acceptable and fulfilling life. It is also a believer’s duty to display the benefits of living such a life to the world. The Black Baptist tradition translates these beliefs in many ways. For one, the church itself is seen as a sort of community center (McKinney 2003, 96-100). One of the institutions purposes is to identify injustices and problems in the community and address them in order to better everyone’s quality of life. Such
community outreach is expected not only of the church staff and leaders, but also of the members themselves (p.c. Jennings). The church also serves the needs of the members themselves offering not only spiritual and emotional support but also financial and legislative aid if possible. The church aims to help all men in the community and show them the light of the Christian path while at the same time attending to more specific concerns for its members. Basically the church and its members are to follow Christ’s example, even the example set for how to interact with the fellow man.

Another notable feature of the Black Baptist church is the expectation of audience participation. This works in two ways, the audience expects the service leader to engage them on a personal level with the story being given. Such an expectation can be upheld because of two major factors. For one the Baptist faith holds that the most important thing for salvation is maintenance of one’s personal relationship with God. Therefore, one is free to leave a congregation if said congregation does not meet their liking. Secondly, it is very common in Black Baptist churches for preachers and pastors to be chosen or voted on by the congregation they will prospectively serve (p.c. Jennings, McKinney 96-100). Preachers clearly and palpably feel this pressure at all times. Consider this circumstance: in my church at home there will be times where the preacher will say something like “ya’ll ain’t shouting as good as I’m preaching” to a certain side of the audience and then shift his gaze and attention to the other. Simply put, part of successful sermon delivery requires active member participation.

Granted the power endowed by these circumstances, the preacher himself holds a more important standing than pleasing the audience in the Black Baptist church. First
off consider that, in the Black church, the preaching event is the main event of a typical service. Organizationally, “everything in a service leads to or follows from the sermon” (p.c. Wallace). For example, the particular songs sung are chosen in most cases in anticipation of the sermon’s message and the invitational that occurs after the sermon draws from the main message. Secondly, the preacher’s capacity is that of a teacher and guide of the congregation. He (or she) is the one who disperses the Lord’s message in such a way that everyone can understand and, in doing so, relates this message to current times and issues.

V. Comparing and Contrasting Black and White Preaching

Given said distinctions in areas as basic as worship, church responsibilities and service organization, it seems more than reasonable that there will be unique characteristics of Black preaching. As noted in the previous chapter, a good deal about preaching is described by homiletic theory so I would like to answer this pressing question by investigating the similarities and differences of popular Black and White homiletic theory. Two homiletic guides written by well-respected members of each community, R.E.O. White and Henry H. Mitchell, in order to distinguish between the two races’ expectations for a preacher delivering a sermon in either a Black or White church. According to White a preacher must:

- Stand on a platform or behind a pulpit
- Speak in clear diction at a steady speed
- Allow no answering back or questions during his sermon
- Use sermon notes as discretely as possible (1973,12,13, 48).
- **Forget** one’s hands, vary one’s speech in order to make a point Draw attention to a religious truth and show its importance within the scriptures.
Following these rules will prevent the preacher’s message from being a dramatic spectacle and thus become applicable to and accepted by the audience. In sum, White’s book divulges the notion that a proper preacher should be conservative both emotionally and gesturally.

Henry H. Mitchell’s article on “African-American Preaching” is similar to R.E.O. White’s commentary in terms of sermon guidelines and suggestions, but it differs slightly in its descriptions of the “hybrid” sermon style of the Black church. According to his research, the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have seen a rise in the combination of “the best of Western education and the best of the Black pulpit tradition” as a result of the affirmation of minorities in Western seminary education (1997, 2). This recent acceptance has enabled Black students in particular to practice their training within their own culture and to also become its ideal preacher – “an artist, a raconteur, a person the Holy Spirit uses to make the Bible come alive” (1997, 3). But in being such an educated artist, he should also meet certain expectations.
Table 3. Comparison of Homiletic Theory

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<tr>
<th><strong>White Homiletic Theory (White)</strong></th>
<th><strong>Black Homiletic Theory (Mitchell)</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Draw attention to a religious truth and show its importance within the scriptures</td>
<td>1. Choose a behavioral text that indicates a truth and behavioral goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Clarify this truth for the entire congregation (all ages, races, and intelligence levels)</td>
<td>2. Choose a framework by which this truth will be recognized: narratives, character sketches, metaphors and similes, personal testimonies, and stream-of-consciousness</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Illustrate the truth through scripture, literature, history, or daily life</td>
<td>3. Make the behavioral goal into a question to introduce conflict into the sermon</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Make the truth memorable through metaphors, humor, imagination, paradox, or stories</td>
<td>4. Make the answer to the question “Yes.”</td>
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<td>5. Evoke a response from his listeners</td>
<td>5. Use detail to build up to the resolution of the problem</td>
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<td>6. End with celebration to etch the message into the hearer’s mind and heart</td>
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</tbody>
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Mitchell’s guide is almost the complete opposite to that offered by R.E.O. White for the White church. The second point in Mitchell’s guide provides a stark contrast to the homiletic guide of the White Baptist Church: for example, in the White church, the use of a “stream-of-consciousness” is strongly discouraged. Mitchell also declares that the sermon must elicit an excited and emotional celebration from the audience. Using the term “ecstatic reinforcement” to describe the moments of joyful shouting, singing, and dancing at the end of many sermons, Mitchell finds this type of call-and-response in the Black church to be at the heart of its theology and faith (1997, 2). Some preachers may use dialect while others may not. Many preach on realities of the times, such as drugs, single parenting, and sexual abuse, while their peers preach solely from the Bible.
(Sandidge 2001, 93). And many dance, bend, and throw their arms into the air throughout their sermons. The Black preacher does not worry about his actions detracting from the message, for in the Black church; actions and tone signalize the importance of the sermon at hand.

More importantly, Mitchell’s guide does not specifically mention gestures. They are maintained as an abstract, but a permissible abstract for the Black preacher. He is given liberty to move, even encouraged to do so, within the framework of the sermon. White, on the other hand mentions gestures enough to mandate that they not be used frequently. The White preacher is encouraged to forget his hands and not allow these movements to detract from the message. The strict rules regarding emotion also seem to stifle the ability for the preacher to engage in such physical emotive activities as explained in the previous section. Such activities are too overt.

VI. The Heart of the Matter

So both culturally and gesturally, Black Baptists show a great deal of independence from their White cohorts. These differences can be traced back to ancestral and cultural roots for both ethnicities. However, in present day these distinctions have been subtly noted within common stereotypes of the Black and White pulpit. As R.E.O. White explains, some outbursts against the White church have defined the sermon “as a monstrous monologue by a moron to mutes” (1973, 5). On a similarly negative note, the world of television uses “images of the Black pulpit... [to] make great humor and [to] get great audience response” (Mitchell 1997, 1). One sermon style is
ridiculed, while the other is mocked. Despite these critiques, both the Black and White preacher have maintained certain techniques in delivering sermons. For the Black preacher in particular, his cultural style is not only maintained, but expected by his congregation.

And although these stereotypes seems to allude to typical gestures found by way of commenting on each preacher’s style, no study has actually attempted to look solely at these gestures themselves. Granted the notion of gesture can include a great many body movements, I will only investigate those gestures that are ritualized and preserved. For one, these gestures are such that they are conserved throughout all Christian denominations. And yet this conservation also allows for variability. Ritual gestures exist in a realm above the abstract bottom-up gesture; however they are still not prescribed in a top-down manner. This allows for a lot of variation and, as chapter four will demonstrate, there are marked differences in ritual gestures between the two ethnicities of interest despite their belonging to a single religious tradition.
Chapter 4
Putting Theory Into Practice

I. Goal of the Study

So, how could such an array of theory—linguistic, religious, and ethnic—interact?

An earlier project of mine completed in the spring semester of 2009 has shown that there are significant differences in the gestures found amongst three Black and three White preachers of mega-churches. However, this could just be a coincidence. Could these gestural differences be found in a city like Durham? In churches that are not as large and have less of an emphasis on performance/entertainment? If there are still these differences in the type, quantity, and style of these gestures, I would claim that these differences have come about as a product of the variant cultural environments of the White and Black Baptist preaching experience. The key question then is what these differences could mean. For instance, could the variance signify a variance in the role of preaching and religion in each culture?

The current study investigates religious gestures as linguistic artifacts. As explained in Chapter 1, gestures are indeed linguistic entities and communicate information just as oral vocalization. Even though these gestures are influenced by cultural factors as is language, these religious ritual gestures are unique because they are inherently subconsciously controlled and yet are still partially attended to by preachers because of their public status. Information from homiletics theory and preachers themselves reveal the fact that gestures used within the act of preaching do reach some basal level of consciousness. Those behind the pulpit must be aware of their stance and body language in order to communicate with their congregation efficaciously.
In my previous study, I examined the differences in ritual gesture use amongst Black and White Baptist preachers in three southern states: Georgia, Mississippi, and North Carolina. I watched two online sermons from one Black and one White preacher in each state. In that case I found that gesture use varied by both number and type. The key findings of that study were as follows:

In terms of quantity, the Black Southern Baptist preachers outnumbered their White counterparts about 2:1 in ritual gesture with an overall average of 47.375 gestures per sermon as compared to 16.25 per sermon for the White preachers. Due to the stark contrast of the raw numbers of gestures used, it is easier to explain the differences in terms of percentages of a certain gesture as compared to the total number of ritual gesture made. In this modified comparison, it is seen that each ethnicity had varying “top three” gestures, and these were the ritual gestures with the three highest percentages per sermon.

![Figure 2: Overall Ritual Gestures-White Preacher—2009 Study](image)
In the case of the White preachers, the top three gestures used were presiding (29% of total gestures), proclaiming (22%), and observing (14%). However, the top three gestures overall for the Black preachers were proclaiming (34% of total gestures), observing (24%), and praising (23%). These top three gestures are shown in the data to have conserved their importance throughout each region, with the blatant ethnic distinction of praise gestures being nearly absent in the sermons of White preachers and gestures of presiding being nearly absent in the sermons of Black preachers. There are also a higher percentage of proclamation and observation gestures in the Black Southern Baptist church. Other notable discrepancies are the gestures used in the acts of reading the Bible and greeting. Thirteen percent of the White Southern Baptist preachers’ gestures were associated with reading of the Bible and 11% associated with greeting as compared to 3% and 2% respectively for the Black Southern Baptist preachers.
Although the results from the 2009 study are striking a lot more work needs to be done before this data can actually be seen as indicative of gestural trends. One issue in particular that must be addressed is the reproducibility of these results. The 2009 paper used preachers of mega-churches (those with very large attending bodies) that may affect the extravagance of the actions made by preachers. Therefore, an important change for the current study was the focus on the Durham, North Carolina; a smaller city with smaller scale church organizations. The present study is primarily a test of reproducibility for the above found gestural variance in a more ecologically valid situation. A secondary goal of the study is to investigate if these gestural differences correlate with differences in the religious culture of each ethnicity.

II. Methods

All churches used in the study were from the Durham area and found via random search on the Internet. Also, churches were matched by area in such a way that a church with a Black preacher had a White preacher counterpart not too far away and vice versa. This was done in an effort to match preachers by target area. In all, six churches were chosen, three with Black preachers and three with White preachers. The participating churches were First Baptist Church, Union Baptist Church, Yates Baptist Church, First Calvary, Grey Stone Baptist Church, and Northside Baptist Church. Within each ethnic classification, the three churches varied in church and congregation size. This helped with randomization of data. It was also helpful that the churches in corresponding areas tended to have similar church sizes as categorized within the list of churches by ethnicity. Another factor that acted as a control for the study was that the churches tended to have mostly homogenous ethnic composition.
Table 4: Ethnic “Neighbors” Shown Side-by-Side

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>White Preacher</th>
<th>Black Preacher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Baptist Church</td>
<td>Union Baptist Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grey Stone Baptist Church</td>
<td>Northside Baptist Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yates Baptist Church</td>
<td>First Calvary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Churches in Size Order

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>White Preacher</th>
<th>Black Preacher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Large</td>
<td>First Baptist Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Yates Baptist Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Grey stone Baptist Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Northside Baptist Church</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each church was contacted and agreed to participate by either allowing me to come watch and notate services or giving me copies of two previously recorded sermons. The majority of sermons used were previously recorded (some even recorded before the initiation of the study), however one church’s data was collected by me notating while attending a sermon and seated in the back of the room. I opted not to bring a video recorder as to limit the distraction to the preacher while in action. I did not want him to alter gestures due to the presence of a video recorder that attracted attention during service. All sermons used were given on Sundays, the customary day for church service in this region, and were given no earlier than June of 2009.

During analysis, both the quantitative and qualitative information about gestures was acquired. I took count of each category of gesture that occurred during the sermon and wrote down how the gesture was performed. There were quite a few constraints that were not followed in the previous study. These were implemented to ensure that data reflected purely ritual gestures that were to a degree less tainted by other artifacts (I emphasize to a degree because almost every gesture could serve multiple purposes in a sermon).
For one, only the time in a sermon was analyzed, a very important distinction and a difficult one to make at times. I did not include parts such as church announcements, praise and worship, baptisms, or altar call. These were rejected for a few reasons:

- They were not within the realm of the sermonic message itself: they were more like religious corollaries. This is not to say that such segments are unimportant just irrelevant to the study parameters.
- Not every church sermon was conducted with these corollary parts. Therefore, even though they may have been ritualized, it would have been unfair to include those few churches that did include those parts in their Sunday service.
- Oftentimes these segments were conducted either with a lead other than the preacher or even with the preacher absent.

Gestures were also rejected if they occurred within a narrative. When a preacher commenced to act out a story whether biblical, imagined, or historical the gesture moved from the realm of the ritual to that of performance. The goal of that segment became to preach through re-enacting, or acting, which could change the very nature of a subject’s normal gestural pattern.

Given all this, there was still plenty of gestural data that needed to be processed. For instance, what comprised a gesture and when did it stop? These were admittedly rather subjective cut-offs. For this work, a gesture was a movement or series of movements using any part of the body. Series of movements meant that something like successive arm swings would count as one gesture, it would not be counted in terms of revolutions. Therefore a gesture made with the hand counted as one whole gesture as did one with the entire arm. At the same
time, if a preacher performed a series of movements with no break or change in the gesture it counted as one entire gesture.

In the beginning of the study, 17 categories of ritual gesture were identified. However, the study only found that eight were used. Possible explanations for the absence of the other nine categories could be due to their association with rare scenarios not included in the study (see the above list; i.e. baptismal bathing, standing together, etc); or due to the fact that they simply did not occur in any of the instances observed (striking one’s breast). The eight categories of gesture that were included were greeting, praying, praising, invoking, proclaiming, observing, presiding, and reading of the Bible. These are defined in greater detail in the next section.

It is important to keep in mind that the phenomenon of gesturing is primarily abstract and free from conscious control. An interesting outgrowth of this notion is that gestures are holistic and not analytically syntactic as is language. For example, sentences whether spoken or written have to follow a culturally accepted logical order. Gesture, due to its visual nature, has the ability to convey an entire message in one motion or series of motions. For this reason, I decided to allow the ritual gestures produced to be categorically multimodal; a single gesture could count in more than one category. Consider this: a preacher points his finger outward with full extension while proclaiming the gospel and making special notice of the left side of the congregation. This would be both a proclamation gesture and an observation gesture and such a situation occurred multiple times within the study. Because I did not want to deny the flexible nature of gestural communication, I recorded data in a way that did not make belonging to one category an exclusive factor for being considered for another.
III. Description of Gestures

The study of ritual gesture was further complicated due to the fact that these gestures have not been studied in depth and thus are not strictly defined. Thankfully, two key sources attempted to tackle the task of identifying these integral gestures. From what Antonio Donghi in Actions and Words and Don Saliers in Body Language: eight basic gestures every worship leader should know have stressed, ritual gestures are those associated with ritualized religious events. These gestures usually do not have a prescribed type of movement in the Protestant church, but occur in activities that are highly conserved such as praising, invoking, blessing, and laying on of hands. The key to understanding the categorization lies in the understanding that movements in and of themselves were not sufficient for proper classification. Gestures gained meaning by the intent of the preacher as judged by the visual and verbal context of the situation in which they were used. Before introducing any findings, it is crucial to clarify these gesture categories.

GREETING: This particular category is best described in the article by Don Saliers. Although he focuses on the gestural traditions in the Catholic Church, he does stress that above all the act “communicat[es] the genuine sense of inclusion and hospitality” (1994, 19). While recording data, any gesture made in the act of welcoming the congregation fell in this category.

PRAYING: Praying was one of the simpler gestures to define. Prayer gestures were those made during a period in which the preacher was in conversation with God. The act affirms and activates a connection intentionally.
PRAISING: Even though prayer is described as a form of communication with God, it is not the only form. Praise is a form of communication that focuses more on giving thanks to the Lord. Many times prayer and praise are used interchangeably, however I chose to separate the two. My past research led me to believe that creating two categories from the one may provide for more insight during analysis.

INVOKING: Two realizations of invoking were considered. One in which invoking consisted of calling on and, in a sense, directing the Lord’s presence upon something or someone. Another realization was that of the preacher taking on the voice of the Lord as his or her own. In such an instance, one would proclaim the words/teachings of the Lord as though from the first person; God’s word was instantiated as their own word/thought.

PROCLAIMING: Antonio Donghi explains proclaiming as the “cry[ing] out to the world a sense of life” (1997, 27) which retranslates a “fundamental conviction” (1997, 29) of God’s teachings. Therefore, gestures in this category reflect instances in which the preacher transmits religious teachings. The major difference between proclaiming and the second instantiation of invoking is that proclamations are given in the third person (i.e. “The Lord says…”).

OBSERVING: While observing, a preacher directs overt attention to an audience (or part of the audience), event or sign. Most commonly this uses the eyes. Observing acts to “increase... the communion that exists” (Donghi 43) between the preacher and the subject of observation.

PRESIDING: The preacher as presider is the one who “stands before his brothers in the new exodus, in order to lead them to the Promised Land” (Donghi 86). Accordingly, a presiding
episode is one in which the preacher separates himself from the audience and positions himself
to lead and teach the congregation.

**READING OF THE BIBLE:** Simply put, it is an act of reading the word of God. This does not
include recitation from memory, but gestures performed while actually reading the Bible.

**IV. Results**

Quantitatively, Black Preachers outnumbered their White counterparts in the average
number of gestures used per sermon. Black preacher averaged approximately 25.5 gestures per
sermon and White preachers averaged approximately 15.5 gestures per sermon—a 1.5:1
gesture proportion for Black preachers as compared to White gestures. In this case it was again
more advantageous to view the percentages of gesture classes used.

![Figure 4: Average Gestures per Sermon, White Preacher](image)
This data again displayed a “top three” gesture preference that varied by ethnicity. For White preacher the top three gestures used were proclaiming (29%), presiding (33%) and reading of the Bible (16%). The top three gestures for Black preachers were proclaiming (38%), praising (14%), and observing (19%). An interesting thing to note is that even though proclaiming lands in both top three categories, the percentage of proclamation gestures by White preachers is still slightly smaller than that of Black preachers. Also, even though each church’s data was unique, they all tended to follow this trend of stress on the top three gestures with the exception of Greystone Baptist that had a high percentage of observation gestures.

Another trend akin to the previous study is the absence of praising gestures from the White preacher data. Not only did the Black preachers include praise gestures, they used a lot of them, so much so that it was one of the top three gestures mentioned above. These preachers’ data also included invoking which was absent from White preacher’s data. Also, a significantly larger percentage of gestures were used in the act of presiding amongst White
preachers as opposed to Black preachers (33% average for White preachers as opposed to 12% for Black preachers). Of course, every church is unique and it is interesting to see the gestural data of all 6 churches (it is attached in the appendix).

I was also interested in analyzing the size of gestures produced by the preachers. So I created three “sizes” of gestures and codified each gesture encountered. The smallest size occurred inside what I called the “body box”. The body box is the rectangle that encompasses the preacher’s self— it extends vertically from one’s head to one’s toes and horizontally from shoulder to shoulder. An additional requirement for gestures that existed within the body box was that the limbs creating them not extend past one-quarter of their full length. The medium size I nicknamed the podium space. It literally comprised of gestures whose originating limbs were extended over one-quarter length but not beyond one-half length. The largest size consisted of gestures in which limbs were extended over 50% of their capable length. I counted how many gestures were in each category by ethnicity and analyzed the percentages of total gestures included in each category.
As denoted by the figure, the majority of gestures produced by White preachers existed within the body box (58%). The percentages of gestures by size decreased as the categories got larger with a stark drop off in the largest category. Only 5% of gestures by White preachers extended over half of the limb. The data for Black preachers was pretty much the inverse. However, this data did not have a stark drop off in the small gesture category. There was a smoother decrease in the prominence of gestures by size category as it moved from smallest to larges.

What I found most interesting is the vast differences in the body box and large categories. White preachers did create substantially more gestures within their body frame and substantially less in the larger area around them. This isn’t really surprising information in and of itself but it does hint at a bit of truth to the White preacher/Black preacher stereotype concerning emotion. Maybe this idea of the bland White preacher is an extension of the smaller space in which these preachers gesture and, for that matter, the notion of the overly emotional Black preacher may come from the large space their movements occupy.
The only time Black preachers strayed from their typical wide gesture was during prayer and reading of the Bible. Usually the Black preachers would not make large movements (or any movement at all) and they might change their facial expression, but overall their eyes were lowered and heads bowed and they stood still during prayer. Their White counterparts were full of movement at this time, for they would close their eyes, bow their heads, and then move their hands widely while keeping their elbows at their sides. As for reading of the Bible, Black preachers stayed behind the pulpit and stood still, while once again their White peers were more mobile – some mobile enough that they held the Bible in hand while walking. The only notable feature of Black preachers at this time was their tendency to paraphrase the scripture while reading. This happened a few times and was particularly important because it occurred when the preacher recited the passage to his audience for the first time while looking directly at the text. Although it is a non-gestural occurrence, paraphrasing never occurred in the first recitation of scripture for the White preachers.

V. The Narrative Structure Behind the Stereotypes: Aesop’s Fables vs. Cliff’s Notes

As expected, the ritual gestures did differentiate with ethnicity in terms of quality and quantity. The preachers did contrast both in the number of ritual gestures used -- Black Baptist preachers used 50% more gestures than White Baptist preachers-- and in the predominant “top three” gestures used. I feel that even more can be said of the relative presence/absence of invoking and praising gestures with further study. It could be that the Black church historically stressed the importance of individual strength and that God’s will would free them from racist circumstances and this has influenced the presence of emotional artifacts. Or it could be that
the White Baptist church has a closer tie to previous Pentecostal sects and thus values the intellectual and spiritual power of the preacher and discourages the exhibition of personal emotion by said person. Due to the relatively small sample size it is hard to substantiate such general claims, but this data does show a notable trend. In the future the analysis of either a greater number of preachers or sermons or both would be beneficial.

More tangibly, these results explain why certain stereotypes/stigmas do exist about the Black and White Baptist church. The high density and wider use of ritual gesture can explain why the Black preacher is seen as more emotional. To a certain degree, the use and predominance of praise and the large occupation of space of these gestures show that emotion is indeed a publicly performed act by the Black preacher and is part and parcel with his sermon. Meanwhile the lack of tonal inflection and smaller area of ritual gestures by the White Baptist preacher elucidates the metaphor of his sermon being “a monstrous monologue by a moron to mutes” (White 5).

Aside from all of this, it does seem that the gestural differences can at least be partly explained by the differences in preacher style. It struck me that the White preachers relied more on narratives during sermons and would enact biblical messages through telling a story. This story could either be one of contemporary news, historical data, personal history, or even re-enactment of a biblical scene. But narratives were the primary method of message transmission. It was as though the audience was expected to draw out the message through their own understanding of the events. One was to be given certain examples and tidbits of advice and use that to infer the message or appropriate response to a problem. This could
facilitate more use of things like reading of the Bible and presiding because the congregation is being taught religious values much the same as one is taught to read critically in a language arts class. In a sense the narrative structure of the sermon by the White preacher is akin to one of Aesop’s fables.

On the other hand the primary means of message transmission for the Black preachers was candid communication. Biblical stories were presented, as were personal stories, historical stories and the like, but the meat of the sermon was delivered mostly by direct statement – not necessarily direct statement of what was the right answer for a particular circumstance, but a direct statement of the core principles of the faith/sermon. And these core principles were emphasized and repeated throughout the sermon. Black preachers embodied their sermons in Cliff’s Notes form, stressing the key concepts of a verbal outline of sorts. In this case, the congregation is given the tools to keep in mind via overtly expressed fundamental axioms and equipped to solve problems independently. This type of atmosphere may encourage more use of proclamation.

These differences in sermon style may also apply to the conceptualization and cultural space of religion as understood within the two ethnic groups. Inference is a very personal process and one that allots for a great deal of creativity. It may be that the White preacher’s emphasis on allowing the congregation to infer meaning from religious passages allows for more variability on the conceptualization or definition of religiousness personally and culturally. It could also foster the communal idea that religion, at its heart, is a personal affair.
Contrastingly, the Black preacher’s dictation of religious tenets may close in this cultural space while at the same time pushing that space to a more public sphere.

VI. Future Directions

In review of this study’s information and limitations, I have noted a few areas that could stand to be revised if such an analysis was to ever be repeated. Primarily, the type of data that was chosen restricted the possible analysis of gestures. It would be useful for any future research to compile information on the backgrounds of the analyzed preachers. Background should include the preacher’s theological education and also his personal religious history and experience preaching. This could account for any influence of their personal interaction with church and religion prior to theological instruction (i.e., the major ethnicity of members of their “home church,” how did their preacher behave, etc.). This could investigate if indeed gestural practices are inherited and if so, at what stage this may occur. It would also be beneficial for any further studies to employ a team of gesture codifiers in order to avoid undue subjectivity. At my current level I was unable to do this but I did make all efforts to remain as objective as possible and define my parameters clearly.

Aside from all of this, the study does demonstrate a glaring gestural demarcation amongst White and Black Baptist preachers. It is paramount to note that previous research and data concerning this topic is non-existent. It is a new field of interest for many disciplines, with linguistics being only one of the investigating fields. Equally critical is that these proposed categories are extremely porous. For example, many praise gestures actually did occur in the act of praying. Ritual gestures were also prevalent in instances of performance that were not
analyzed at this time. It would be interesting to look at the effects of performance on ritual gestures, but that is a stage above and beyond what I am attempting to do now.

This work has combined the questions of many disciplines throughout decades or maybe even longer. Examinations such as these are useful tools in explaining the roots of certain ethnic stereotypes and eradicating them. In delving further into this academic “gray area,” insight can be gained by many spheres of society – especially for theological intellectuals.

Concerning homiletic education, this information could help prepare preachers for the expectations of their congregations and help them understand the preaching styles of their peers. It could also assist professors of homiletics in coming to a better understanding of these ethnic variations and thus enable them to hone these skills in their students. Moreover, future studies of this type could address gestural distinctions in other denominations and other religions. Possible questions could include if these denomination/religions exhibit distinctive types and quantities of gestures; if there are gestures that are conserved across denominations/religions; and even if there are gestures that are novel by (physical) movement but share meaning across these lines. Another interesting extension would be the inclusion of female preachers to identify gender variations in religious gestures and even the analysis of preachers of mixed congregations. But for now, I hope that this small contribution to this multidisciplinary question can help guide and inspire future research of more holy men and their holy hands!
Figure 7. Greystone Baptist Average Gestures

Figure 8. Union Baptist Average Gestures
Figure 9. First Baptist Average Gestures

First Baptist

- 1; 8%
- 3; 25%
- 4; 34%
- 4; 33%

Figure 10. First Calvary Average Gestures

First Calvary

- 2; 9%
- 2; 8%
- 2; 9%
- 2; 9%
- 1; 4%
- 12; 52%

- greeting
- praying
- praising
- invoking
- proclaiming
- observing
- presiding
- reading of the Bible
Figure 11. Northside Baptist Average Gestures

Northside Baptist

- Greeting: 9; 41%
- Praying: 2; 9%
- Praising: 2; 9%
- Invoking: 1; 5%
- Proclaiming: 2; 9%
- Observing: 5; 23%
- Presiding: 2; 9%
- Reading of the Bible: 1; 6%

Figure 12. Yates Baptist Average Gestures

Yates Baptist

- Greeting: 5; 28%
- Praying: 2; 11%
- Praising: 2; 11%
- Invoking: 8; 44%
- Proclaiming: 2; 11%
- Observing: 1; 6%
- Presiding: 9; 41%
- Reading of the Bible
References


