

**REIMAGINING AND RECLAIMING A BETTER FUTURE  
FOR  
BLACK BAPTIST WOMANIST PREACHERS**

By

Deborah G. McBride

Duke Divinity School  
Duke University

Date: Dec. 4, , 2023

Approved:

*Luke A. Powery*

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Dr. Luke A. Powery, Supervisor

*Amy Nyland*

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Dr. Amy Nyland, Second Reader

*Will Willimon*

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William H. Willimon, DMin. Program Director

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of  
Ministry in the Divinity School of Duke  
University

2023

ABSTRACT

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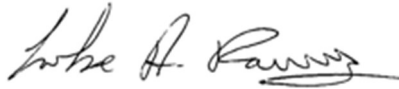
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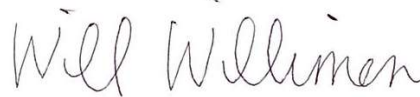
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## ABSTRACT

Many Black women in Black Baptist traditional churches do not have the opportunity to exercise their spiritual callings to preach in the pulpit, nor do they receive adequate training to preach in alternative settings such as public platforms or online venues. Firstly, this thesis pays critical attention to why Black Baptist womanist preachers must embrace the power of the imagination – the God-given faculty - which forms and uses images to awaken us in answering our calling and spiritual gifts, bringing us closer to Christ. A holy and prophetic imagination from the Word of God gives us proper perception and perspective for preaching biblical truth. Secondly, this thesis presents a brief overview of the historical influence of the Black Church and the Black theological movement focusing on dignity, cultural identity, and political justice against racism. The focus on Black people’s struggles, predominately advocated by Black men in the pulpit or public sphere, and then forgetting to train and prepare women as Church leaders, stifles their imaginations and voices to preach. Thirdly, this thesis examines the impact of the courageous Black womanist preachers during the nineteenth century, breaking all pulpit barriers to preach wherever the Holy Spirit led them. Fourthly, this thesis discusses the inspiration of Black scholarly womanist preachers emerging from the civil rights and Black power movements of the twentieth century. These brave women impact today’s struggling Black Baptist womanist preachers to keep studying and preaching faithfully in every non-traditional setting. Fifthly, this thesis shows how a parachurch entity in this twenty-first century can fill the gap in preparing enthusiastic Black womanist preachers for preaching opportunities, whether in the pulpit or on alternative platforms. The investment of a parachurch entity, such as D.G. McBride Ministries, Inc., offers virtual space for developing laywomen and young leaders to build on their preaching craft to serve Jesus Christ.

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this thesis work to Pastor Diane George, an excellent and energetic Woman of God I have been privileged to know for over 50 years. Pastor George saw my calling as a womanist preacher in my teenage years when I confidently asked her about the roles of Black women in church while observing the leadership roles held by Black men. By the wisdom of God, Pastor George did not give me much information but gave me adequate space and time to follow the Holy Spirit wherever led in my academic and spiritual journey of faith and formation. Today, I still desire her presence as I sit comfortably at her feet for conversation, counseling, care, and even to cry when the challenges of growing as a womanist preacher are too much for me to handle. After my mother's decease, Pastor George's hands would wipe away my tears, and she never gave up on me because I had been chosen and cherished by the Holy Spirit for a specific task. Well, Pastor George and I agree that one of the tasks of the Holy Spirit is writing this thesis. I adore and am so grateful for the teaching and time Pastor George has afforded me in this season of my life's pastoral and preaching development.

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## INTRODUCTION

Black<sup>1</sup> women have played integral roles in the family, society, religion, government, and other aspects of human civilization from the past to the present. Mighty Black women have worked rigorously to shape laws in the socio-political sphere and played critical roles in the democratic processes of peace, equality, and human rights. For example, Black women, such as Shirley Chisholm, a New York Democrat, became the first Black woman to serve in Congress in 1968 and remained in the House of Representatives until 1982. In 1983, Lelia Foley-Davis was the elected mayor of Taft, Oklahoma, making her the nation's first elected Black woman mayor. Carol Moseley Braun, an Illinois Democrat, became the first Black woman elected to the U.S. Senate in 1992. She was also the first Black woman to win a major party Senate nomination. Condoleezza Rice became the first Black woman to hold the post of National Security Advisor (formally known as Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs) in 2001. President George W. Bush appointed her to that leadership seat.<sup>2</sup> Unforgettable is First Lady Michelle Obama, a Black woman married to the first Black President of the United States of America, Barack Obama, served two terms from January 20, 2009, to January 20, 2017. First Lady Michelle Obama set a trajectory for all women to reimagine and reclaim a better future by being, believing in, and becoming the best female version created by God.

My reflections on the Black women in our church made me think of how the above women stood firm in their callings and cultivated their gifts, abilities, talents, and commitments to serve, even if that calling was in a political sector. This thesis centers on why Black women in the Black

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<sup>1</sup>The word “Black” with a capital “B” is used throughout the thesis in honor of the Black Power movement contributing to the robust cultural identity, self-determination, and efficacy of all Black people – churched or unchurchd.

<sup>2</sup>The brief biographies of Shirley Chisholm, Lelia Foley-Davis, Carol Mosely Braun, and Condoleezza Rice come from “Milestones for Women in American Politics - CAWP.” <https://cawp.rutgers.edu/facts/milestones-women-american-politics>



Baptist congregations governed by a biblical and Black theological framework of faith, worship, and practice are not developing in their callings to preach in commitment to serving the Lord Jesus Christ. A calling is an inner impulse, an innate passion, or a pull toward something we feel uniquely qualified to do. Some of us act out “God’s calling,” like becoming a pastor, preacher, teacher, evangelist, or missionary, while others pursue professional callings, like becoming a doctor, politician, or educator. In every situation, we experience a solid inclination to use our talents to find meaning in life and make an impact on others.

Almighty God endorses my calling to preach, concentrating on Black women encountering troubles, traumas, and tragedies from various circumstances impacting a relationship of trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for healing and deliverance. My call is also a profound and unshakable conviction to work alongside church leadership and train other women preachers despite insurmountable barriers. Unfortunately, most Black Baptist womanist preachers at my local church (including this writer) do not exercise callings to preach in the pulpit nor receive training or financial support from their local churches to preach in alternative settings such as public platforms or online venues. The Black theological framework of faith, worship, and practice is discussed more fully in Chapter 2 – Influences of the Black Church.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the centuries of prohibitions against women teaching in the public assembly, many women throughout Christianity have preached, claiming authority for themselves

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<sup>3</sup>Although “African-American” and “Black” are often synonymous terms used in verbal discourses, this thesis identifies the radical difference between the two. The term “Black” in classifying the Church refers to the Baptist context of analysis and collectively to the many autonomous denominations of the African-American Christian Churches. The term African-American advanced in the 1980s to give Americans of African descent an equivalent identification, such as German-American or Italian-American. The phrase peaked in popularity during the 1990s and 2000s. Today, the perception carries self-conscious political correctness that is unnecessary in informal contexts. In everyday speech and writing, Black is often preferred and is rarely considered offensive. Colored, an old term for African-American people, is now regarded as abusive, and Negro has fallen out of favor among younger Black Americans.

through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and finding alternative routes for expression such as writing, teaching, and singing. The recurring presence of women's preaching attests to the continuing struggle within Christianity over problems of authority and the indomitable spirit of women's voices. Chapter 3 of this thesis explores the diverse voices of Black womanist preachers who claimed the power to preach, teach, and prophesy wherever the Holy Spirit led them. Some women moved away from seeking pulpit assignments to itinerant missions, while many religiously motivated Black women felt the Holy Spirit called them to teach. Chapter 3 also analyzes how the vocation of education attracted numerous Black women because the educational needs of the Black community were significant, especially after the Civil War. This Chapter will focus on the contributions of Nannie Helen Burroughs and Virginia Walker Broughton in the domain of Black Baptist women in educational endeavors to enhance the knowledge of people in Christian communities during the late nineteenth century.

The Black women's commitment to the Black Baptist church has not always been a safeguard against experiencing many intersecting places of oppression within their places of worship. Many Black Baptist churches promote a patriarchal ideology of male headship for the church and the home,<sup>4</sup> which requires Black women to be loyal to the men in their lives at the potential cost of their livelihoods and callings to preach. This demand for Black women to subordinate their dreams and desires to the men in their lives causes extreme conflict for women often perceived as strong, resilient, and in egalitarian partnerships with other people. Both historical and contemporary evidence underscores the fact that Black churches could scarcely have survived without the active support of Black women. Still, despite their importance in the church's

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<sup>4</sup>Sandra L. Barnes. 2006. "Whosoever Will Let Her Come: Social Activism and Gender Inclusivity in the Black Church." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 45(3):371-87, 2006. Retrieved March 6, 2022. (<http://doi.wiley.com/10.1111/j.1468-5906.2006.00312.x>)

life, the offices of preachers and pastors of churches in the historic Black churches remain a male preserve and are not generally available to women. There are exceptions, and these will focus on Black women as preachers, past and present because this issue continues to be controversial for the Black church today. An overview of some examples of Black preaching women and their struggles is essential to achieve recognition and official status with Black churches.

The roles of most women in the Black Baptist churches, however, are evangelists, Sunday school teachers, choir directors, singers, musicians, nurses, ushers, custodians, caterers or hostesses for church events and dinners, administrative assistants, secretaries, or clerks, counselors, recreation leaders, and directors of the summer vacation bible schools. Despite their importance in the church's life by assuming the above tasks, the leadership offices of pulpit preaching, and pastoral authority remain preserved for the men and are not generally available to women. Because this issue continues to be a controversial subject for the Black Baptist church and because my research is concerned with Black Baptist womanist preachers<sup>5</sup> reimagining and reclaiming a better future for preaching, I will analyze and address the following:

- The Imagination: Why is the Word of God the essential source for ascertaining a proper perception of a renewed imagination and discovering the divine perspective of preaching regardless of gender?
- The Influence: How the Black Church and its theology on Black dignity, cultural identity, and political justice against societal racism, unfortunately, caused many male church leaders to forget about women as potential pulpit speakers and leaders in their local contexts, thus stifling their imaginations as clergywomen and their

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<sup>5</sup> Please note that the term Black Baptist womanist preachers (i.e., a contextual emphasis) and Black womanist preachers (i.e., a broader depiction) are used interchangeably throughout this thesis at the discretion of the writer without posing any confusion to readers.

voices to preach?

- The Inspiration: How have some Black womanist preachers boldly broken barriers of pulpit preaching and followed the Holy Spirit wherever led to preach in the nineteenth century?
- The Intention: How have some Black scholarly womanist preachers from the twentieth century (i.e., civil rights era and Black power movements) stood courageous to preach to women of color in non-traditional arenas and propagate the realities of everyday life, particularly for Black women for the motivation of women preaching today?
- The Investment: Why should our local church partner with a parachurch entity, like D.G. McBride Ministries, Inc., to train and prepare the called Black womanist preachers to preach on alternative online venues or other platforms in obedience to the Great Commission of Jesus Christ?
- The Implementation: How a blueprint of seven building approaches<sup>6</sup> in a virtual setting will develop the called Black Baptist womanist preachers at our local church and any other church in their ministerial gifts and talents, dialogue with different types of listening audiences, and gain the techniques of preaching wherever the Spirit leads them to preach?

As Black women became more literate and biblically informed, they discovered some Scriptures that affirmed women's call to preaching. This controversial subject of male and female roles in the church necessitates a discussion from the standpoint of God's eternal Word and the

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<sup>6</sup>The seven-fold blueprint to building today's womanist preachers to prepare for preaching on alternative platforms will focus on (i) character of care; (ii) compelling courage; (iii) complete confidence; (iv) composed competence; (v) Christian content; (vi) clear communication; and (vii) community, congregational and cross-cultural connections.

poignant history of the Black church as it relates to embracing a prophetic imagination of God. Walter Brueggemann believes a prophetic imagination helps identify and articulate the problem and then imagine and pursue a more emancipatory future. A prophetic vision from God ends in hope and gratitude for the surprising gift of an emancipated future. This thesis maintains that Black Baptist womanist preachers need to reimagine and reclaim a better future of preaching.

I agree with Nelson Mandela, the first Black president of South Africa from 1994 to 1999, positing there is no freedom when there is no emancipation of women from all forms of oppression. Our endeavors must be about the woman's liberation, the emancipation of the man, and the child's liberty. For Black women, liberation and emancipation involve encouraging their calling, growth, and development. Scriptures also admonish us to ensure we nurture ourselves, being careful not to succumb to the temptation of wrong things. We must also encourage ourselves and others through the Word of God and the love of God. Then, we will find a deeper appreciation and experience of what it means to be a woman, or a man created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27) and a unity of purpose among those who share God's vision of a redemptive society through the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ.

Based on my observations in the church, excluding women from pulpit preaching sends a harmful message to our younger girls. In conversation with some younger girls, they admit exploring the ways of unreligious women who hold the spotlight in the fashion and entertainment worlds as formulas to fit in and practice the Christian life. Why? Because they have no examples in the church where powerful women stand in prominent positions exercising their call to preach with the men from the pulpit. Thus, image, style, and designer clothing grab their attention over developing into faithful and robust women of God. When our daughters are valued as much as our sons and girls share equal opportunities with boys, they grow as women possessing freedom, well-

being, and self-determination not controlled by their father, husband, or another male. We can often witness changes within deeply patriarchal institutions traditionally supporting male dominance and female subordination when women become empowered.

The time of reimagining and reclaiming our calling as Black Baptist womanist preachers is now. We must remember who we are, why we are here, and what qualities and acts of service we can offer humanity that will assist us in healing ourselves and our world. We must remember that we give birth to the end through becoming visionaries and through the spiritual discipline of dreaming and fulfilling our call to preach with the proper perception and perspective from the Word of God. If we successfully embrace a future that nurtures all life forms, women can no longer absolve themselves from accepting the truth.

Black women's experiences in the U.S. and those of African descent have been routinely distorted within or excluded from what counts as knowledge. Patricia Hill Collins states: "The Black feminist thought's core themes are work, family, sexual politics, motherhood, and political activism. The themes rely on paradigms emphasizing the importance of intersecting oppressions in shaping the matrix of domination."<sup>7</sup> When a woman's consciousness concerning how she understands her simple life changes, she is empowered. Such consciousness may stimulate embarking on personal freedom, even if it exits primarily in the mind or on a similar journey with other women. Unless women envision and dream of a future that supports the forthcoming generations' right to experience life abundantly, that reality will not manifest.

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<sup>7</sup> Patricia Hill Collins. *Black Feminist Thought*. (New York: Routledge, 1990), 268.

## DEFINITIONS

**Black Baptist:** The Baptist denominations where Black women struggle the most for pulpit preaching opportunities or the quest for full ordination into the Christian ministry are the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc., National Baptist Convention of America, UNINC, and Progressive National Baptist Convention. The local Baptist church on which this thesis focuses is a professed missionary Baptist denomination.

**Black Womanist.** For this thesis, the description of “womanist” comes from Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist Alice Walker’s collection of essays, *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens*,<sup>8</sup> meaning:

1. A Black womanist is a Black feminist or feminist of color possessing the characteristics of an outrageous, audacious, courageous, or willful behavior woman desiring to know more in greater depth than is considered “good” for one. The Black womanist is responsible, in charge, and earnest about her life and others.
2. A Black womanist is committed to the survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female.
3. A Black womanist loves music, dance, and the movements of the Holy Spirit. She loves to struggle with Black people. She loves herself as a Black woman regardless. According to Walker, the word “regardless” reveals that self-love is essential and persists despite everything else. Walker also suggests that self-love stands at the heart of the womanist project and functions as a prerequisite for the other kinds of humanist and spiritual love the womanist embodies as reality.

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<sup>8</sup> Alice Walker, *In Search of our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose*. (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1983).

4. A Black womanist is to a white feminist as purple to lavender. In Walker’s symbolic use of color, she distinctly extols womanism and sets it apart by comparing it to the more vital shade of purple, the royal flush for Black women. Feminism thus pales in comparison by being associated with the weaker color of lavender which relates more to white women than women of color.

**Black Womanist Theology:** Black Womanist theology is a religious conceptual framework that reconsiders and revises the traditions, practices, Scriptures, and biblical interpretation with a unique lens to empower and liberate African American women in America. Black Womanist theology gives voice to an understanding of the Christian faith by addressing Black women’s identities of race and gender. It adds the insight that class is a third critical identity requiring incorporation for one to have an adequate understanding of the workings of society. Although used throughout the thesis, Chapter 4 - The Intention – Academic Black Womanist Preachers Responding to the Call to Preach in the Twentieth Century discusses this term in more detail.<sup>9</sup>

## **CHAPTER ONE – THE IMAGINATION: A PROPER PERCEPTION AND PERSPECTIVE FOR THE PREACHING BLACK DAUGHTERS OF INFINITE IMAGINATION.**

What is our understanding of the word “imagination?” How is this word defined? What is its function and place within the human experience? In answering these questions, I will examine the etymological definition of “imagination” and then present my research from an ontological perspective to determine its meaning for this thesis.

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<sup>9</sup>“Black Baptist Womanist Preacher, “Black Womanist Preacher,” and “Womanist Preacher” are used interchangeably throughout the thesis, for there is no monolithic Black Church. The simplified idea of the Black Baptist Church in this thesis refers to the traditional group of the seven major historical Black denominations in the Methodist, Baptist, and Pentecostal traditions not listed in this thesis.



The word “imagination” derives from the Latin word *imaginari* (i.e., to form an image or likeness of, to be a representative of); *aemulus* (i.e., to emulate), and “*imitari*” (i.e., to imitate, picture oneself as, copy, portray, or imitate). Imagination also means to “think, design, contrive, devise purposely in the mind, to mentally frame anything of splendor, or whatever makes one remarkable or worthy of respect.”<sup>10</sup> Since all human imagination reflects and participates in the divine image of God, we will focus more on the ontological aspect of this word in keeping with the framework of this thesis.

A proper perception and perspective of the Christian imagination has to do with origin. The origin comes from the Triune God. The Scriptures state, “So God created humans in His image, in the image of God, He created them; male and female God created them” (Gen. 1:27, NRSV). The imagination is part of the image of God in us. In the first chapter of Genesis, God, as the sovereign Creator, calls his people to a special relationship entailing intimate worship. In forming or fashioning humans in the image of God’ image, it suggests to us the work of an artist, like a potter shaping an earthen vessel from clay for personal pleasure and a purpose. God formed humans from clay (Gen. 2:7) for His ultimate pleasure (Rev. 4:11) and our humble and obedient service (Eph. 2:10; Col. 1:16). We, as humans, are “earthy” (1 Cor. 15:47) despite subsequent dreams, visions, imaginations, and callings to be like God. We cannot be like God without God “in-breathing” (Gen. 2:7; Job 33:4), the energy of life that transforms humans into “living beings” (Gen. 2:7) with a capacity for loving and serving a holy and infinite God. With this unique creation in mind, we see the significance of the Fall. Sin damages the image of God in us, impacting the use of holy imagination. Since the Fall, regeneration by the “in-breathing” of the Holy Spirit is

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<sup>10</sup> William Wilson, *New Wilson’s Old Testament Word Studies* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, a division of Kregel, Inc., 1987), 225-226.

essential for us to enjoy fellowship with God. Since God made us, He knows what is best for us and has given us His Word as our guidebook for life.

The great poet and writer on imagination, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, says in *Biographia Literaria*:

The primary imagination I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act in the infinite “I AM.”<sup>11</sup>

The imagination, as part of the image of God in us, allows us to grasp the whole meaning of what we perceive as holy and true. The beauty of the imagination as a truth-bearing faculty also allows constant streams of data from God to flow supernaturally into our minds enabling us to look in the infinite and invisible face of our beloved – the Lord Jesus Christ - by faith and truth.

Secondly, the mystery of the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ also makes the imagination of possibilities more meaningful. The coming of Jesus is not just God entering into human history to save us from our sins. The incarnation of Christ is the union of divine and human action to heal the tragic rupture in our ways of thinking and knowing the truth. Christians must “have a renewal of the spirit of our minds, and clothe ourselves with the new self, created according to the **likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness**” (Eph. 4:23-24) by the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. In *Lifting the Veil*, Malcolm M. Guite utters the uniqueness of Christ’s reaching in and through profoundly, redeeming, and renewing the human imagination with eternal love so we can look on God in exquisite, exuberant love:

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<sup>11</sup>Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983), Vol. 1, 304-305.

When Jesus Christ first proclaimed the Kingdom of God, He appealed to our imagination. Jesus made that appeal through parables, the paradoxes of the Gospel, His miracles, and those moments when the heavens opened, and the ordinary was transfigured and seen in an utterly new light. We glimpse more than we can yet understand. Our imagination apprehends more than our reason comprehends.”<sup>12</sup>

Thirdly, the “in-breathing” of the Holy Spirit (Gen. 2:7; Job 33:4; John 20:22) awakens the minds and cleanses the vision of a new generation of preachers – both male and female, bringing us closer to Christ by answering our calling to Christ-like leadership for others. The Bible imagines an alternate world where divine sovereign grace, reconciliation, inclusion, peace, and justice reign. Images generated by the preacher’s imagination through their engagement with the Word of God are not simply creative fabrications - they are Spirit-generated. Linda L. Belleville takes on the controversial subject of women’s call to preaching in the pulpit and pastoring by giving an egalitarian approach (i.e., a theological view of gender and spiritual equality in Christ). She argues that women, just like men, are gifted and empowered by the Holy Spirit to engage in Christ-like leadership. The Holy Spirit empowers and produces anointed pastors, preachers, and teachers in the building of the Church of Jesus Christ (i.e., 1 Cor. 12:11; Rom. 1:6-8; Gal. 3:28; and Eph. 4:8-13) not the traditions of church. Theologian Bellville finds similar examples of female leadership in the New Testament, including apostles, prophets, evangelists, deacons, worship leaders, and ministering widows. Even if some of these overlaps, the range of women’s ministries throughout Scripture is impressive.

The paramount Scripture for a women’s ministry is: “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). This statement by the Apostle Paul serves as the egalitarian foundation,

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<sup>12</sup>Malcolm Guite, *Lifting the Veil – Imagination and the Kingdom of God* (Baltimore: Square Halo Books, Inc., 2021), 27.

framework, and format for all women preachers to rightfully reclaim their stance with their male counterparts and preach the Gospel wherever God leads. The complementarian or traditional view challenges the egalitarian position. The complementarian perspective maintains that men and women are distinct, but each has specific functions divinely appointed by God for the home and the Church, supported by 1 Tim. 2:11-12. Theologian Bellville’s literature is a valuable resource for researching the biblical, theological, and practical emphases of leadership posed by scholars or others on gender inequities.

My reading of the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church during academic studies at Loyola University-Chicago resonates with my understanding of imagination and the Triune God. The Compendium says, “God is genuinely distinct and Triune. Because God is an infinite communion of love, God’s gratuitous love for humanity reveals the proper perception and perspective of holy imagination.”<sup>13</sup> This truth ties in beautifully with my argument in the rise of Black womanist preachers’ reimagining a better future for the love of preaching, regardless of pulpit barriers and obstacles. The foundational pillar in both the Catholic and Baptist theologies (and all other Christian denominations) is the law of love – God’s law of love, for God first loved us and sent the second person of the Trinity – Jesus Christ, to save us from our sins (1 John 4:19).

Reflective of the image and likeness of our God, God creates humanity to live in a loving community with others and with God. God did not create humans to live as solitary beings but to exist and thrive as social beings. Social life, therefore, is not exterior to humanity: humans can only grow and realize their vocations in relation to others. Love grows through love, and, the commandment of love for God and love for one’s neighbor become inseparable. Pope Benedict

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<sup>13</sup>*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church: Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace*. Libreria Editrice Vaticana. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. (Washington: January 2005 (first printing); January 2014 (seventh printing)), 31.

XVI states in the encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, “Love grows through love and the commandment of love for God and love for one’s neighbor is a freely-bestowed experience of love from within, a love that by its very nature shares in the lives of others.”<sup>14</sup> Love of one’s neighbor is a fundamental responsibility of each member of the Church and is also a responsibility for the entire ecclesial community – local and universal. Because of the transforming love of God, we can discover a new path wherein life and love must move towards sacrifice and the materialization of good works by using the divine imagination that creates all possibilities inclusive of our callings. The poignant thoughts of the Pope Benedict XVI reaffirm my service of the love of preaching and my commitment to helping other Black Baptist womanist preachers acquire the knowledge and skills to preach in alternative settings other than seeking the pulpit to help transform society into a place where matters of social justice can exist for everyone.

Lastly, in *Trinity and Society*, Leonardo Boff defines the Trinity as “the permanent interpenetration, the eternal co-relatedness, the self-surrender of each person to the others. This quality of the divine nature becomes the origin and continuous power of liberated life together.”<sup>15</sup> Boff also uses divine communion to argue for centrality and the necessity of justice worldwide. The equality of religious persons reveals the equality of all human persons. This equality is not sameness; the divine persons are truly distinguishable, like humans who are also equal but different in persons and personalities. The community and social relationship of the Trinity according to Boff is “unity and diversity shade into communion in God, springing from God’s association with what is not-God but what comes through communion and perichoresis to share in the mystery of

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<sup>14</sup>Pope Benedict XVI. *Deus Caritas Est*. Encyclical Letter of the Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI to the Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, Men and Women Religious, all the Lay Faithful on Christian Love. December 25, 2005. Assessed: June 6, 2018, 18. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20051225\\_deus-caritas-est.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est.html).

<sup>15</sup>Leonardo Boff. *Trinity and Society*, trans. Paul Bums (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988), 98.

the Trinity.”<sup>16</sup> Communion is the theological tool that can hold together two claims that are logically opposed to the human mind. The love of God is so great among the three divine persons; they are one. Their unity exists through their love. The liberating and gracious love that is God is what Christ fully reveals through his historical life, death, and resurrection. Love characterizes the divine and brings unity to variety. Communion is the theological tool which can hold together two claims which, to the human mind, are logically opposed. Trinitarian theology of God intends to demonstrate God’s liberating love and is now the responsibility of Christians to respond to this love through the liberation of others.

When the soul feels God’s presence, individuals grasp the divine essence, heightening the awareness of options and possibilities. This built-in sense of the Creator gives oppressed people ultimate meaning and the ability to imagine a new life and transform circumstances. The Trinitarian love of God is how I remain faithful in equipping Black Baptist womanist preachers to make this world a better place where social justice can exist despite the many obstacles we face. With the required spiritual and academic knowledge, skills, and behavior to make this context better, we can enter society to promote total equality and justice as women in the church and community.

The Trinitarian theology of God also intends to demonstrate God’s liberating love. Christians now must respond to this love by looking at their local contexts or churches - the denomination or faith practices, structures of leadership, liturgies, and the core of worship styles in the spirit of unity, diversity, equality, and freedom. Because this thesis focuses on traditionally structured Black Baptist churches, how does the conservative male leadership define liberation? Does their concept of liberation include supporting and training women to develop their callings for pulpit preaching? What is the Black Baptist womanist preachers’ source of survival in a society where they experience either the combined or independent effects of racism, sexism, classism, or

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

oppression, internally and externally? Are these women “free” according to the liberating love of God? How have the Black Baptist churches protected, provided for, and prepared their womanist preachers for preaching? To ascertain answers to these pertinent inquiries, let us now examine Chapter 2: Influence and Inspiration of Hope - The Black Church, Experiences, and Theology.

## **CHAPTER TWO: INFLUENCE AND INSPIRATION OF HOPE – THE BLACK CHURCH, EXPERIENCES, AND THEOLOGY.**

Although the Black religious experience is diverse and the social forms of spiritual life, practice, and survival vary greatly, the Black church has been the most visible religious institution in the Black culture, controlled from within the Black community. Theologian Lerone Bennet, Jr. attests to this reality saying: “For Black people, religion is life, and the climax of life is death.”<sup>17</sup> Every event in the lives of religious Black people has significance and took root in the soil of Black American life. Black theology has reflected the struggles of Black people, and there is a stable relationship between Black theology in the twenty-first century and Black theology in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. That relation is the continual impact of the Christian faith from the perspective of an oppressed Black community in the United States. The oppressed Black communities in the United States spanned from the inception of slavery, Jim Crow era, civil rights movement, and other injustices by white supremacists who used violence and intimidation to maintain the racial hierarchy.

Scholars say Black churches of the 19th and 20th centuries played essential roles outside the sphere of religion in Black society. When Black people could not access various public amenities, many Black churches offered job-training programs, insurance cooperatives, libraries, and athletic clubs. These were the only programs or places Black people could take public or semi-public leadership positions. Men gained prominence as pastors, while women often led church

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<sup>17</sup>Lerone Bennett, Jr. *Before the Mayflower – A History of Black America*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1962), 25.

committees and organizations that provided social services locally or advocated for other causes requiring immediate action or justice (further discussed in Chapter 3). Women were unpermitted to preach until 1884 when the AME church allowed them to become licensed preachers. Nannie Helen Burroughs and other Baptist women established the Woman's Convention in 1900 to address gender inequality with the National Baptist Convention. The Women's Convention is now known as the Woman's Auxiliary of the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. Today, the Black church still plays a central role in Black people's social, political, economic, and spiritual lives because of the influential and inspirational voice that Black lives matter to a people created to have pride, dignity, and honor. The Black church today is still a social institution where Black people could exercise leadership, autonomy, and power.

Black theology seeks to relate biblical revelation to the situations of Black people in America. Black theology cannot speak of God and God's involvement in contemporary America without identifying God's presence with the events of liberation in the Black community. James H. Cone, widely recognized as the founder of Black liberation theology, says:

Black theology is a religion of liberation. The function of theology is to analyze the meaning of that liberation for the oppressed community so they can know that their struggle is consistent with the gospel of Jesus Christ. In a society where [people] are oppressed because they are Black, Christian theology must become a Black theology.<sup>18</sup>

The Black church concentrates a lot of attention upon Jesus who acts decisively and speaks with direct authority and power. The gospel stories about Jesus are linked back to quite definite events of the Greco-Roman world and to the life of the present-day community. However, in the

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<sup>18</sup>James H. Cone. *A Black Theology of Liberation*. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1986 and 1990), p. 11.



final analysis, Cone believes it is not the historical Jesus who occupies the central place, but the divine power that holds sway over Jesus as the Word Incarnate.

The Black church (led primarily by male preachers) lived an unwavering sense of destiny that enabled Black people to survive the most inhuman form of chattel slavery the world has ever known, followed by a century of Jim Crow racism. That destiny is liberation, and the Gospel of Jesus Christ explains God's liberating activities in the world face-to-face in the oppressed community needing release from oppression. Thus, the central theme in the Black church governing worship and community life (including our local church) is liberation and life. As the invisible, underground religion of the Black churches merged into more autonomous and visible Black churches of Baptist and Methodist tradition, formerly enslaved people in church leadership often accepted the rules, beliefs, hierarchy, and patriarchal conventions of their white counterparts. The history of exclusion and denigration of Black males of masculine identity and power in American society complicated their ability to fulfill expected economic and political roles. Thus, the role of the Black preacher or pastor was the only place the men called by God to preach could call their own religious space and then obtain respect from the laity and listeners.

The Black preacher and preaching held the highest esteem in the Black church community. Preaching is one of the principal instruments used by Black male leaders to communicate the Word of God. Preaching is also an effective tool for spiritual conversion, faith-building, Christian development, community outreach, and to encounter Jesus. They preached what they knew about the progression from patriarchs to priests to prophets to Jesus to Paul and testified to what they had seen, exalting the Word of God above all other authorities. The Black preacher sought close, empathetic, communal identification with the congregation. Holding forth in the pulpit on Sundays and through the week as one of God's earthly representatives, the preacher was the dominant,

influential spokesperson for the community. The Black preacher served as the arbiter of intellectual/moral life and the principal interpreter of canonized sacred writings.

Black preachers bring a unique cultural narrative and theological enterprise of inherited African motifs to their respective congregations. Those motifs are a bold homiletical voice as a poetic and prophetic witness. The power of the Black church is catching the spirit of Blackness and loving it. Black preachers speaking of God’s love and the congregation responding “Amen” is an enthralling experience. Also, helping the congregation trust God is the responsibility of that preacher in storytelling, laments, blues, and promoting a celebration of life in the darkest of hours. Another religious root – spirit possession – thrives in the shouting and ecstasy complex of many Black churches. The Black church is an important place for Black Christians to see themselves in the story of God, to see that their struggles, pain, experiences all resonating within the story of God’s people from the perspective they understand best.

The image below depicts a worship genre in the Black church reflecting the traditional African descent through music, movement, and ecstatic praise unimaginable without knowing what it means to be a suffering people embracing liberation.



African American Church Art Print/Angels  
By Sarah Jenkins,  
Postermania West, Ebay.com

The image also demonstrates that worship in the Black church reflects an openness, a freestyle, and a closer relationship to life, expressed in unison by the congregation, in which the sacred and secular come together to affirm God's wholeness and lordship over all of life. The angels in the photo minister to the saints as they praise and worship God amidst difficulties and hardship, providing comfort as they hold on to hope and the promises of God for deliverance. The Greek word for ministering refers to being in service to others. As servants, angels serve believers, which reflects the idea of someone waiting at a table in the original Greek. The author of Hebrews refers to angels as ministers or servants to those who have trusted in Jesus for salvation, and the context of Hebrews 1 specifically contrasts the service of angels with the more excellent work of Jesus since Jesus is superior to angels (Heb. 1:5-14).

As this photo depicts, God sent the Spirit to make the human body dance in joy. God also sent the Spirit to speak through true believers and affirm decisions in moments of crisis. It is God, and only God, who can confirm and redeem lost souls. The Spirit moves in sacred rhythms: people swaying, singing, clapping, and keeping time with tambourines and sanctioned instruments. The sanctified souls move through the church, praying to and praising God with their palms raised, and manifest Spirit by emptying their consciousness. Those filled with the Spirit speak the heavenly language of Spirit, putting into vocal forms the ineffable praise due to the Spirit. The construction of communion with the Spirit through the rhythms of words and music, movement, and prayer are distinctive elements and influences of the Black church experience. The spirituality of the Black church is perhaps best understood when this proper orientation of freedom reflects the general quest for the liberation of oppressed or suffering Black people.

Like the African genre and genius of worship in which the Black church finds its roots, worshippers also celebrate the grace and mercy of God for survival, reflected in explicit

emotionalism in the worship experience. The lifestyles of people on the edge of human existence reflect their joy in the presence of the Divine and with other devoted worshippers. Such a tradition encourages responses of spontaneity and improvisation and urges the worshippers to turn loose into the hands of the eternal here and now, where love, labor, and life intertwine as part of the reality of God's creation. William B. McClain makes this poignant statement concerning the genius of the Black church:

The genius of the Black church cannot be created or approximated, not even by the avant-garde "happenings" and programmed spontaneity of the "hip" white churches. Such worship experiences reflect liturgy and theology arising from the happenings of a people living on the cutting edge. In the Black church, the soul of worship is the Black traditions. Worship is a creative, spiritual encounter, not slavishly followed or a ritual rehearsed.<sup>19</sup>

Again, the genius of the Black church brought Black people – male and female - through the torture chamber of the past two centuries with a gospel interpretation that does not dichotomize the social-religious, soul-body, priestly-prophetic categories. It declares that God's humanizing activity in the world is tearing down old systems that dehumanize and enslave and build new structures and situations to make the ordering of life more just, peaceful, and human. The Black church is responsive to the needs of the dispossessed, disinherited, and powerless and supposedly makes itself accountable under God for all it exists to serve. In equipping the saints for in-house or missionary services, the church's responsibility did not always include preparing many Black preaching women for works of service. Like my experience in the traditional Black Baptist church, us anointed preaching women just sat in the pews, only imagining a chance to preach in the pulpit. The Black church, unfortunately, focused more on the social liberations from racism, white supremacy, or police brutality of the Black males rather than the oppressive spirits of women not

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<sup>19</sup>William B. McClain, "The Genius of the Black Church," *Christianity and Crisis*, XXX, No. 18, November 2 and 16, 1970, pp. 250-252.

fulfilling their call to preach. The Black church influences every chapter of the Black people's story and continues to animate Black identity today, both for believers and nonbelievers. In that sense, as Henry Louis Gates says: "The Black church functions on several levels as a spiritual center, place of worship, social center, and cultural repository."<sup>20</sup> In the Black church, there is a living treasure of the sacred Black cultural history and practice. The Black church preserves and reinvents the lives of father and mother saints each Sunday through verbal testimonies or moments of quiet reflections. However, a problem still exists with all the affirmations of Black pride and power, struggle, strength, faith, and fortitude comprising the characteristics of the Black church. Many Black churches (including our local church) never addressed or affirmed the gender politics of Black womanist preachers. For nearly 200 years, Black women have stepped forward with much courage and conviction (see Chapter 3) to proclaim a divine calling into the Christian preaching ministry. As women increasingly demonstrated their effectiveness as preachers, they were allowed to assume the office of an evangelist, a traveling preacher with no specific church assignment. However, many are still barred from ordination and leading a congregation in which the central task of leadership is pulpit preaching.

Today, the conservative Black Baptist churches must practice empowering women to preach. It must also recognize and defend its historical claim that faith is empowerment and that the degradation or despair of anyone, especially women, is not the product of true faith. The deficiencies of educational programs in the Black churches aiming to address the growing lack of self-esteem among women and young people are constant. The low percentage of professionally trained Black people in ministry – male and female – requires significant modifications. As mentioned in Chapter 1, being created in the image of God means that within everyone there is the

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<sup>20</sup> Henry Louis Gates Jr. *The Black Church*. Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

presence and power of the divine. Only in the concreteness of God's revealed love does each person recognize their worth, purpose and power. When the soul feels God's presence, individuals are grasped by the divine essence, which heightens awareness of an infinite imagination, recognizing options, opportunities, and possibilities. The spiritual consciousness of our Creator God by the mind and in the world provides the oppressed with ultimate meaning and the ability to transform circumstances.

There are many writings about the importance of the Black church in the social and political lives of Black people. However, fewer writings exist about Black women's significance in the church's life. Black Baptist churchmen recognized the importance of women's active support for the denomination's racial self-help and self-reliance efforts. Yet, male-biased traditions and rules of etiquette sought to mute women's voices and accentuate their subordinate status in relation to men. Thus, tainted by the values of the larger American society, the Black church sought to provide men with full human rights while offering women a separate and unequal status. Both historical and contemporary evidence underscores the fact that Black churches could scarcely have survived without the active support of Black women. Despite their importance in the church's life, the offices of preachers and pastors in the Black churches remain a male preserve and are not generally available to women.

As we bring closure to this Chapter, let us contemplate the following questions? What are the Black Baptist womanist preachers' sources of survival in the realm of preaching when they encounter either combined or independent effects of racism, sexism, classism, or oppression? Are Black Baptist womanist preachers free from oppressive male dominance when they do not have opportunities to preach in the pulpit according to the liberating love of God indicated in the Scriptures? In what ways, if any, have the Black Baptist churches protected, provided for, and

prepared their womanist preachers for preaching? Currently, the only thing sustaining Black Baptist womanist preachers is the confidence in their calling, holy imaginations, and the instinct of hope for deliverance and freedom to wait on God's kairos time to go wherever the Spirit leads to preachers. Kelley Brown Douglas says a kairos time is a right or opportune time. It is a decisive moment in history that has had a far-reaching impact because God is fully present, disturbing everyday things and providing an opening to a new future - God's future. Kairos time is, therefore, a time pregnant with infinite possibilities for new life. It is a time bursting forth with God's call to a new way of living. It is when God calls us to a new relationship with our history, ourselves, one another, and even with God. God calls a new vision of renewing and restoring people's values and inner worthiness. For this thesis, God's call is for Black Baptist womanist preachers to take courage and reimagine a better future of preaching to audiences on alternative virtual settings, and not only seek pulpit opportunities.

The next chapter will focus on the courageous Black womanist preachers during American slavery. They broke through the barriers of pulpit preaching, responded to the preaching call, and followed the guidance of the Holy Spirit to preach in non-conventional settings..

### **CHAPTER THREE: THE INSPIRATION - NINETEENTH-CENTURY COURAGEOUS BLACK WOMANIST<sup>21</sup> PREACHERS RESPONDING TO THE CALL TO PREACH BY THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.**

*I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous;  
do not be frightened or dismayed,  
for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.  
(Joshua 1:9)*

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<sup>21</sup>Emilie Townes asserts In *Women's Theology* that labeling Black women from the nineteenth century as "womanists" is inaccurate. However, scholars have used "feminist" to describe many nineteenth-century women, though this term does not exist in this section. The women used in this thesis for this era would have named themselves "womanists" had they been familiar with the term.

What does it mean to be strong and courageous? To be brave and resilient means to have a spirit of boldness, fearlessness, daring, and a stubborn mindset to act with undaunted courage in all adversities. To be strong and courageous does not omit God's struggle with the called ones for a particular task through visions, dreams, and mystical experiences. Often the efforts are of the most harrowing sort before bowing to the inevitable call of God's purposes. Once convinced of their destinies to fulfill God's will, the called can defend themselves against hostility and censure with appeals to biblical precedents because ultimate strength and courage to fulfill God's purposes come from the Spirit of the Lord.

This section of the thesis briefly analyzes the religiosity, bravery, and strength of six Black womanist preachers of the nineteenth century who gained notoriety for their spiritual awakenings, transformation, and unstoppable ministries. By following the Holy Spirit wherever led to preach with great sacrifice and risk, the virtuous women to celebrate are:

1. Jarena Lee
2. Zilpha Elaw
3. Sojourner Truth
4. Amanda Berry Smith
5. Virginia Walker Broughton
6. Nannie Helen Burroughs<sup>22</sup>

**Jarena Lee – (1783-1836) – African Method Episcopal (AME Methodist).**

The autobiography of Jarena Lee, entitled *Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee, a Coloured Lady*, is the first official argument of a Black woman challenging the Church about the

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<sup>22</sup>Unless otherwise specified, autobiographical references of the above Black womanist preachers come from the literature of Nathan Aeseng, *African American Religious Leaders*. (New York: Facts of File, Inc., 2003).

The term "Black Womanist Preachers" substitutes "Black Baptist Womanist Preachers" in this section to encompass those called women above by the Holy Spirit from distinct Christian denominations.



traditional female roles in free and enslaved states among white and Black people. Having a conviction by the Holy Spirit of her call to preach, Jarena Lee committed to ministry and wrote of it as a supremely fulfilling experience, even though she was at odds with men inside and outside the church. Lee's autobiography offers us the earliest and most detailed firsthand information on how resistance to women and pulpit preaching began to manifest.

On February 11, 1783, Jarena Lee was born in Cape May, New Jersey, as a free person to emancipated parents. Because of the severe financial stress encountered by her family, at 12 years old, Lee's father hired her as a domestic servant in homes near the Philadelphia border. In 1804, she converted to Christianity at 21 after a lengthy period of distress concerning her soul's destiny. Lee had several visions and ecstatic religious experiences, leading her to respond to the call to preach at 24. In *Sisters of the Spirit*, William Andrews writes about Lee affirming this encounter by the indwelling power and leading of the Holy Spirit:

I distinctly heard, and most certainly understood, which is said to me: "Go preach the Gospel!" When Lee responded aloud, "No one will believe me." Again, I listened, and again the same voice said to me, "Preach the Gospel; I will put my words in your mouth and will turn your enemies to become your friends."<sup>23</sup>

In obedience to the Holy Spirit in 1809, she approached the pastor of the newly established Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia, Richard Allen, and sought a license to preach. Although Allen could see women leading prayer meetings, he drew the theological line against female preaching and denied her a permit. Believing God called her to preach, she proceeded in her calling without the official authority of the church.

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<sup>23</sup>William L. Andrews. *Sisters of the Spirit – Religion in North America*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 35.

In 1811, she married an AME clergyman named Rev. Joseph Lee. Approximately one year after the official establishment of the AME Church as a connectional denomination in 1816, Lee again sought the newly elected Bishop Allen's permission for her activities to preach the Gospel in the pulpit and on alternative public platforms. Allen stated that the polity of the Methodist Church at that time did not include female preachers. To increase ecclesial membership, he did permit her to hold prayer meetings to exhort and encourage people if she was no threat to the church leadership. Lee began expounding on the Scriptures at meetings held at her home and later became an itinerant preacher, traveling throughout the Middle Atlantic and northeastern states, giving hundreds of sermons each year to Black and white audiences. Lee's career followed a pattern: a few exceptional women became preachers to the denominations most accepting of women's public speaking. She never received a license as a preacher, and none of the men in leadership could deny the power of her spiritual anointing by the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, in her autobiography, she wrote these powerful words for our reading, reflection, and preaching with indelible courage.

If a man may preach because the Savior died for him, why not the woman, seeing he died for her also? Is he not a whole Savior, instead of a half one, as those who hold it wrong for a woman to preach, would seem to make it appear?<sup>24</sup>

Lee's spirituality not only brought others to God, but another unprecedented step occurred for an African American woman of her time. She wrote and published an autobiography. We are most thankful for the insight contained in Lee's writing, offering us the earliest and most detailed account of the Holy Spirit's empowering of women to preach so contemporary preachers may have the courage to go forward and fulfill their calling to preach.

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 36.

### **Zilpha Elaw (1790-Unknown) – AME Methodist.**

Zilpha Elaw is another courageous Black womanist preacher, for, without her detailed memoir, we would not have the privilege of knowing this phenomenal preacher of God. Zilpha's writings provide much insight into the life of one of the first Black missionaries or itinerate preachers due to restricted pulpit preaching for women. Her memoir also helps us better understand how contemporary women's preaching can illuminate the past and, at the same time, how studying the historical ministries of Black womanist preachers can reinforce women's claims to the right to preach in the present.

Born free in the vicinity of Philadelphia around 1790, Zilpha Elaw's parents brought her up in a religious home. When she was 12, her mother died, giving birth to her 22nd child. From that incident, her father hired her out to a Quaker home. Her father died within two years, but she stayed with the Quakers until age 18. During her years with the Quakers, she attended their religious meetings but was uninfluenced by their teachings or faith. However, captivated by the words of traveling Methodist preachers, she converted to the Methodist faith and grew closer to God.

In 1810, she married Joseph Elaw, a respectable man but a non-Christian. She moved from the Philadelphia area to Burlington, New Jersey, where Elaw immersed and flourished in her religious practices. In 1817, Zilpha attended her first camp revival meeting, where she fell into an ecstatic trance. In *Daughters of Thunder*, Bettye Collier-Thomas asserts: In that vision, she saw Jesus and was informed by an angel to "tell Zilpha that she must preach the gospel."<sup>25</sup> Having a divine commission to preach, Elaw put aside all concerns for her husband, family, and friends and immersed in her calling, following the Holy Spirit wherever the mission of preaching led her.

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<sup>25</sup>Bettye Collier-Thomas. *Daughters of Thunder*. (San Francisco: Jossey- Bass, Inc., 1998), 46.

However, she left her daughter in relatives' care to pursue the preaching ministry despite pulpit restrictions for women and a lack of support from any denomination or supervisory board. What courage – what tenacity - what commitment, what faith Elaw brings to contemporary readers of the call to preach regardless of the cost – financial or social - or the brutal confrontations she encountered by disapproving male ministers.

Zilpha began her work in Philadelphia. In 1828, she showed unprecedented courage by carrying her message to slave states. She preached in Maryland and Virginia for nearly two years, running the constant risk of being arrested or kidnapped and sold into slavery. She then returned to New England and the Middle Atlantic states until 1840, when she felt compelled to take her mission to England. She spent the next five years preaching more than 1,000 sermons in central England. In *African-American Religious Leaders*, Nathan Aeseng asserts: “Zilpha wrote thousands of privations, hardships, target fires, vexatious anxiety, and deep afflictions, to which her previous life was an utter stranger.”<sup>26</sup> Most discouraging was the prejudice she encountered, not because of race, but because of gender. Yet, she thanked God for a successful ministry, which she described in her book *Memoirs of the Life, Religious Experience, Ministry, Travels, and Labors of Mrs. Zilpha Elaw, An American Female of Color*, published in London in 1846. She returned to the United States upon writing this valuable autobiography as a religious leader and pioneer of women preachers. She fulfilled her calling and followed the Holy Spirit's direction to preach for our contemporary inspiration of being a courageous Black womanist preacher.

### **Sojourner Truth (1797-1883) AME Methodist.**

Although she could neither read nor write, Sojourner Truth was her generation's most highly regarded and widely quoted Black womanist preacher. Born Isabella Baumfree, an enslaved person

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<sup>26</sup>Nathan Aaseng, 61.

in Ulster County, New York, she took the name “Sojourner Truth” in June 1843 after one of her many religious visions. Nell Irvin Painter states, in *Sojourner Truth – A Life, A Symbol*, “a sojourner is an itinerant preacher who is never at home.”<sup>27</sup> Proclaiming the “truth” was Sojourner Truth’s mission, for it is what Christian preachers have a calling to do, i.e., to impart the whole truth about Jesus and refrain from sin. The Spirit of Truth was the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit conceived in the Gospel of John, who, sent by God the Father and Jesus the Son, comes to convince people of sin and judgment (John 16:7-16). When the Spirit calls, she must go. She was taking that last name, designating her role as God’s preacher. The name, Sojourner Truth, also reflected her Methodist calling to preach abolition on the itinerant circuit. Painter elaborates further on the meaning of Sojourner Truth:

While “Truth” raises various issues regarding knowledge, representation, and communication, Isabella’s new first name, “Sojourner,” speaks to impermanence. “Sojourner” conveys more than itinerancy, for it imparts the image of a person in a home, with connotations of a temporary stay.<sup>28</sup>

Convinced by the imminent return of Jesus, Truth moved quickly to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Painter also states, “A sojourn does not have long to stay here.”<sup>29</sup> This explanation by Painter of Truth’s urgent task to preach sheds tremendous light on the Negro spiritual, “Steal Away to Jesus,” ending with the line: “I ain’t got long to stay here.” Thus, her initial mission is a pilgrimage – telling people to come to Jesus while there is still time. The self-proclaimed pilgrim of God was illiterate but a powerful orator combined with religious zeal and abolitionist fervor to move several people to change.

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<sup>27</sup> Nell Irvin Painter. *Sojourner Truth – A Life, A Symbol*. (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996), 74.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 74-75.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 76.

Although Truth, like Harriet Tubman, was a member of the Zion Church in New York, her mystical personality did not conform to any church structure. She was a heroine who broke through every barrier of pulpit preaching and attained unstoppable progress in itinerant preaching. Truth's powerful and eloquent voice was articulate and impressive in the abolition of slavery and women's rights. Although she was not always invited to the pulpit in an organized church environment to present her arguments, she had the Holy Spirit and Scriptures to support her viewpoints on public platforms. Truth was able to move beyond this personal injustice to advocate justice for Black women, both enslaved and free. With every speech, hymn, and interview, she demonstrated faith in a God who showed her the way out of oppression. Her life was her faith, and her faith was her life. Truth was her generation's most highly regarded and widely quoted Black woman. In 1864, she became the first Black woman to visit President Abraham Lincoln.

Though Truth preached on many occasions about the vengeance that would beset white people, she could love them as a womanist would. Truth's change of heart reflects the womanist theology precisely in her ecumenical and all-embracing love for humanity. As a spiritual woman who witnessed God's (and Jesus') salvific and reconciling love, she was obligated to love those around her. Love made it possible to work with the predominately white abolitionists and women's rights advocates. They helped her and called on her authority as a witness to the need for African Americans' and women's rights.

For Truth, the freedom movement was the secular counterpart of spiritual salvation. Among the fine orators for abolitionism, she was one of the few who could match the wit, eloquence, and power of Frederick Douglass to change the mood and direction of a meeting. Painter states: "When Douglass, a licensed deacon at the Zion Church, concluded a despairing speech that Black Americans would never gain justice from white Americans, Sojourner Truth stood up and stunned

both the meeting and the deacon by asking: ‘Frederick, is God dead?’<sup>30</sup> Truth and Douglass, one of the most prominent male advocates for feminists of his time, also provided the link between abolitionism and the women’s suffrage movement, standing in partnership with Truth. In popular demand as a suffrage speaker, Truth’s brief but classic speech, “Ain’t I A Woman?” came to fruition criticizing the views of white women for neglecting the plight of Black women.

Painter invites us to celebrate and embrace the mystical power of the Holy Spirit moving – again and again – Black women, in magnificent ways, on the pathway of preaching:

Pentecostal that she was, Truth would have explained that the force that brought her from the soul murder of slavery into the authority of public advocacy was the power of the Holy Spirit. Her ability to call upon a supernatural power gave her a resource claimed by millions of Black women. Without a doubt, it was Truth’s religious faith that transformed her from Isabella, a domestic servant, into Sojourner Truth, a hero for three centuries – at least.<sup>31</sup>

Sojourner Truth is a symbol of a spiritual leader and icon of true Black womanhood, a stance she possessed from an embodied perspective and from which she expressed her and other Black women’s truth. She was, in effect, the author of life (evidenced by Painter’s literature and Truth’s autobiography) and a sense-maker of her own experience. In essence, in the context of her Spirit-filled preaching and activism encompassing race, class, and gender, she spoke from a womanist-centered perspective and articulated a Black womanist viewpoint. Truth teaches Black women they may listen to the Spirit within themselves and utilize their creativity, intellect, and talents to find their voice. For Sojourner Truth, the spiritual life is not a myth or a theory – she lived it.

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<sup>30</sup>Painter, 160.

<sup>31</sup>Painter, 4.

### **Amanda Berry Smith (1837-1915) – Pentecostal.**

Amanda Berry Smith, an influential Black preaching woman of the late nineteenth century who won international acclaim as a leader in the Holiness movement, was born in Long Green, Maryland, on January 23, 1837. Although born into slavery, her father saved enough money to buy the family's freedom. Smith knew very little about the experience of slavery, for she was very young when the transaction occurred. In 1854, she married an ordained deacon at the historic Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia named James Henry, who was 20 years older than her. Upon her husband's decease in 1869, she began conducting revivals primarily at Black churches in New York and New Jersey. Smith met significant resistance from Black male preachers who felt that a woman should not preach (i.e., in the pulpit) or engage in any public ceremonial church rites. While attending a Brooklyn revival in 1870, she had a vision with the compelling voice of the Holy Spirit to preach. Smith was later called upon by a minister to give a sermon before a standing-room-only crowd at a church revival. By leaning on the Lord for wisdom and strength to effectively provide that sermon, she discovered that her astonishing voice in singing and passionate preaching moved the listeners in a way they had never previously experienced. This encounter confirmed her calling to preach.

At the beginning of her preaching career, Smith showed no concern about being ordained. She maintained in her autobiography that God ordained her mission, and she was only responding to the call. Bettye Collier-Thomas states: "Smith wrote that God knew that the thought of ordination had never entered her mind, for she received ordination from God, who said, 'Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you and ordained you that you might go and bring forth fruit and that your fruit might remain.'"<sup>32</sup> Smith was another AME preaching woman who finally chose an

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<sup>32</sup> Bettye Collier-Thomas, 51.



alternative path in dealing with her denomination's unsuccessful attempts to include women in its ordained ministry. Smith joined the Holiness movement during the second half of the nineteenth century and became known as one of the great Holiness preachers.

Between 1871 and 1878, she frequently preached at camp meetings and had little ties with the Methodist denomination. The Holiness movement soon became interdenominational and independent and later became linked with Pentecostalism. In the 1890s, Smith became quite popular among white feminist reformers in the women's rights and suffrage movements, who frequently invited her to sing at their meetings. The white feminist reformers valued her charisma and spirituality and used her presence to symbolize liberality. Unlike many of the noted educated and sophisticated Black feminist reformers of the time, with whom those white women felt discomfort, Smith's uneducated and egalitarian nature of the Holiness movement in that we are all one in Christ Jesus, despite racism, sexism, classism, etc., stirred the hearts of her white women listeners. As she sang during revivals and meetings, she helped build the self-esteem and courage of several white female missionaries to embark on preaching. Smith's experiences in Holiness helped her remove an inferiority complex toward white people and fears of discrimination.

As a gifted singer, preacher, evangelist, and missionary, Smith helped to pave the way for hundreds of Black women who also felt the call to preach. Such women built independent "sanctified" storefront churches during the massive urban migrations of the twentieth century. Smith's unusual missionary experience led her to preach in England and serve for two years in India and eight years in Liberia. Smith's story is essentially that of a humble Black washerwoman who became an internationally famous preacher and missionary for following the Spirit's leading wherever to preach. At the end of her life, she worked with Black orphans

and established the Amanda Smith Industrial Orphan Home for Black children in Harvey, Illinois, in 1899. As an international Holiness evangelist and social reformer, Smith established an accepted role for women in the AME Church and helped expand women's roles in the Methodist Church. Admirers of Smith hailed her contributions and expressive skills as superior to those of the revered leader and antislavery activist Frederick Douglass.

From a historical overview, other nineteenth-century religious women chose far more sublimated paths to ministering to the needs of people by participating in secular activities such as abolitionism, women's rights, the anti-lynching campaign, and teaching and education. Many of those community services and political activities stemmed from a concern to uplift the Black race deeply rooted in religious motivation. And, if women could not secure the roles of pulpit preaching, many motivated Black womanist preachers broke pulpit barriers by answering the call to preach and teach in the vocation of public education.

The vocation of education attracted numerous Black women because the educational needs of the Black community were significant, especially after the Civil War when thousands of formerly enslaved people crammed the churches, often doubling as schoolhouses. Teaching was also attractive because it was considered a proper female occupation by the larger society, and in the Black community, teachers were highly respected. The Black woman, as an educator, attended Sunday services at local churches, where she often spoke to cultivate interest in the Black community's overall welfare. Black church women were crusaders in developing various social service improvement leagues and aid societies. They sponsored fund-raising fairs, concerts, and all forms of social entertainment to correct some of the inequities in the overcrowded and overstaffed educational facilities in the Black community.

This thesis will now examine two dedicated and brilliant Black Baptist womanist

preachers in the domain of public education who substantially reduced illiteracy among Black people. The women are Nannie Helen Burroughs and Virginia Walker Broughton.

**Nannie Helen Burroughs (1878–1961) – Baptist.**

National Baptist Nannie Burroughs, a notable leader, administrator, and pioneer womanist preacher provided many academic opportunities for Black women in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Born on May 2, 1879, as a Baptist preacher's child to John and Jennie Burroughs, in Orange, Virginia. She decided to follow her father's footsteps as a preacher in the pulpit. Within Baptist orthodoxy, it was common for women to discover ways to exercise their vision and voice by utilizing alternatives to preaching by moving their religious callings to the public sector of education. Her prophetic inspiration was evident as a recipient of instruction via public education and then passing those educational instructions to others for their learning, development, and growth. She is renowned for finding an influential school for the highest development of Christian womanhood.

Upon the death of her sibling and father, Burroughs and her mother moved to Washington, D.C., where her educational endeavors began to flourish. Nannie graduated with honors in 1896 from M Street High School (later Dunbar High School) in Washington, D.C, and organized the Harriet Beecher Stowe Literary Society. Her goal was to teach in the Washington school system. Despite her apparent abilities and achievements, she could not gain employment. The administration's reputation for hiring lighter-skinned Blacks may have been the cause of her failure, so she dreamed of settling the injustice by opening a school.

After spending a year in Philadelphia as an editorial assistant, Burroughs applied for a government job as a clerk in Washington. Although receiving a high score on the civil service exam, there were no openings for Black women. Burroughs later relocated to Louisville, Kentucky,

as a secretary for the Foreign Mission Board of the National Baptist Convention. As a charismatic and convincing speaker, she made an impression on the members of the National Baptist Convention.

From 1865 until the Depression, Burroughs was active in Republican politics, even though many Blacks switched allegiance during the New Deal era. In 1900, Burroughs launched her famous career in religious leadership with a speech to the National Baptist Convention in Richmond, Virginia, entitled: “How the Sisters Are Hindered from Helping” regarding race and gender divisions within the Black church. She served as a corresponding secretary for the Woman’s Convention, Auxiliary to the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. The Black Baptist convention movement served as a critical mediating function of uniting women with men in the struggle for racial self-determination while simultaneously creating a separate gender-based community reflective and supportive of women’s equality. Black Baptist women became increasingly convinced that a national arena of their own would best advance both themselves and their people. Historian Evelyn Higginbotham says: “Perceived in this arena was always within the context of a larger male-female community, namely, within a Black denomination. Thus, women’s demands for participatory equality remained dependent upon the approval of men.”<sup>33</sup> Black Baptist women had the success of male approval on many activities only to see it rescinded. Yes, the Black church, the preeminent site of supposed racial solidarity and self-determination, proved to be a site of gender division and conflict.

Burroughs also helped to influence women to provide political support for issues like suffrage for Blacks and women, the antilynching campaign, temperance, decent housing, more excellent employment opportunities for Black women, and labor laws to protect women and

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<sup>33</sup>Higginbotham, 153.

children. In 1909, Burroughs founded the National School for Women and Girls in Washington, DC, whose curriculum combines both aspects of the DuBois versus Washington debate, liberal arts, and training in the skills of household and domestic services. Although men gave no support to this educational endeavor, women believed in Burroughs' proposal and provided the funds and encouragement – as was the pattern in academic matters. Burroughs also served as the editor of the *Christian Banner* and was a prolific writer and lecturer on religious topics.

**Virginia Walker Broughton (1856–1934) – Baptist.**

Virginia Walker Broughton served as a missionary in the South and presented creative ways of overcoming opposition to educated women's leadership in church matters.

Born Virginia E. Walker in 1856 and the daughter of a slave father named Nelson Walker, her father worked tirelessly for his family's freedom. Virginia Walker spent most of her childhood in Nashville, Tennessee. According to the literature of Nathan Aaseng, he states: "Walker was a brilliant student who entered Fisk University, a newly launched school with a curriculum spanning vastly in 1866. Walker spent ten years at the school and, in 1875, was one of four in its first graduating class and the first Black woman to graduate from college."<sup>34</sup> Walker's teaching experience began in a segregated Black school in Memphis, Tennessee, for twelve years. Known as a woman who did not tolerate gender discrimination, she protested when the naming of a male assistant principal at Kortrecht Grammar School who had less experience in the assignment. Upon her successful protest she received a position of leadership, offering a high school curriculum for the Black students in the City of Memphis. She married John Broughton, a Republican lawyer who later won an election as a state representative. According to historical records, the couple had five

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<sup>34</sup>Nathan Aaseng, 24.

children.

In 1882, Broughton met Joanna Moore, a Caucasian missionary respected by Blacks for her all-encompassing views on racial equality. She later became a member of one of Moore's "Bible bands," a group of women who met daily to study the Bible. Her proficiency in the dynamics of Bible study directed the American Baptist Missionary Society to sponsor her as a missionary in the South. Broughton initially declined the offer because of the security and satisfaction of a teaching career. However, the death of her mother, the experience of extensive grief, and a severe personal illness changed her priorities.

When Broughton regained her health, she accepted the challenge and worked full-time, traveling through Arkansas, Mississippi, Missouri, and Tennessee. A woman maintaining strong views and considering those in disagreement with her is in partnership with the devil, delved vigorously into her work while neglecting her family. When confronted with the Bible bands by her husband, Nathan Aeseng states Virginia as replying, "I belong to God first, and you are next; so, you must settle it."<sup>35</sup> He later came to support her work entirely. The Bible bands were a particularly effective way of providing women with a religious education while defusing growing white opposition to traditional schools for Black. Although some bands dissolved due to male opposition, most survived.

Broughton also garnered support for the How Institute, a Memphis school for Blacks that included a Bible training class for women. During the 1890s, she taught Bible study and trained women preachers at the school, attaining status as a profound biblical expositor. Her strength in the community was evident when she became the first Black woman appointed to the Associated Charities of Memphis to assist in flood relief. Broughton's success was also in finding ways to

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 25.

provide education for religious leadership and training for Black womanist preachers prohibited from pulpit preaching, considered mainly “a male privilege.” Additionally, she worked actively for the significant inclusion of women in the church. In 1900, she assisted in the organization of a different state convention for Black Baptist women, gaining the honor that the Women’s Convention became an official body of the National Baptist Convention.

The complete history of Black preaching women among the Baptists is undocumented and difficult to trace because the independent church polity of the Baptists ensures the autonomy of each congregation in matters of faith and practice. While there is no specific policy against women and pulpit preaching or the ordination of women in any Black Baptist denomination, the general climate has not supported women preaching and pastoring churches. However, in recent years, a small minority of Black clergypersons have sponsored women candidates for ordination in their associations. The Baptist principle of autonomy is the church’s independence, and any denominational authority cannot challenge the leading pastor.

Although this Chapter is not a comprehensive history of Black women’s preaching, it does take the first step toward creating a fuller view by illustrating both the historical persistence of Black women’s voices and the consistency of the strategies used against them. It challenges the narrow definition of preaching that has constricted the study of Black women’s voices and explores alternative routes for expression, such as prophecy, exhorting, and teaching. Baptist women, however, were influential then and still now in finding ways to minister within the Baptist circles, predominately in the realm of education, as previously stated. Teaching was a promising profession for some women, and the occupation accompanied a sense of ministry for many others.

Let us now examine Chapter 4, which discusses the intent of the academic (i.e., educated) Black womanist preachers led by the Holy Spirit to preach and represent the Black Womanist Theological Movement of the twentieth century.

#### **CHAPTER 4 - THE INTENTION – ACADEMIC BLACK WOMANIST PREACHERS RESPONDING TO THE CALL TO PREACH IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY<sup>36</sup>**

Rev. Dr. Susan D. Johnson-Cook	(1957-Present) - Baptist
Rev. Dr. Cheryl Townsend-Gilkes	(1947-Present) - Baptist
Rev. Dr. Prathia L.A. Hall	(1940-Present) - Baptist
Rev. Dr. Katie Cannon	(1950-2018) - Presbyterian
Rev. Dr. Delores Williams	(1937-Present) - Presbyterian

Is it trustworthy to say the Holy Spirit moves powerfully among God’s leading ladies to have both a profound and prophetic preaching ministry and a professional academic career? Absolutely! As written in the Scriptures: “For it is God who works in us believers (i.e., male and female) both to will and to act to fulfill God’s good purposes” (Phil. 2:13). Throughout history, we have preponderant evidence of God uniquely working through a plethora of believers. The Black womanist preachers at my local church and other religious contexts who desire to reimagine a better future of preaching and possessing the necessary tools to effectuate the task (later discussed) is the will of God’s divine pleasure for the church. Living in God’s righteousness and justice also promotes collective intentionality in fulfilling God’s desires. Toni C. King, in *Black Womanist Leadership*, defines a cooperative and collaborative preacher leader as “one who believes in the possibilities, strength, and wisdom of a group.”<sup>37</sup> In our application of this definition in the Black church, we draw on King further elaborating:

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<sup>36</sup>These women are renowned speakers, leaders, activists, and womanist theologians using the pulpits to raise the consciousness of female womanist preachers and articulate the plight against marginalized but called and anointed women preachers of God. The term “Black Womanist Preachers” in this section substitutes “Black Baptist Womanist Preachers” to encompass those called Black women above by the Holy Spirit from distinct Christian denominations.

<sup>37</sup>Black Womanist Leadership – Tracing the Motherline. Edited by Toni C. King and S. Alease Ferguson. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011. p. 87



The leaders of the church must contribute to a group's development and wholeness by assisting the group in valuing and drawing upon the talents of all its members (i.e., male and female) to achieve an overarching vision that contributes to the group and the larger society.<sup>38</sup>

As this thesis will later discuss and in conjunction with King's statement above, communal theology offers a dynamic way forward for Black churches and grassroots organizations to work together harmoniously and develop women preachers to help change and create a just world. A communal theology intends to lift and draw out of the community the life force of each member's gifts and vigorous growth in ways that will benefit both the individual and the group.

My review of the literature chosen about the twentieth-century Black womanist preachers above was a magnificent reading journey. My constant rejoicing in the Holy Spirit is, and will always be, the third protagonist of the Triune God, equipping and empowering women preachers for preaching assignments. Yes, the Spirit of God led these twentieth-century preaching women to the institutions of academia and then, with divergent voices, returned to their local contexts or alternative platforms to preach every facet of hope and deliverance from the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I can only imagine the joy of these respective audiences listening to and receiving from these Black womanist preachers "the call and response" of the nature of sin and salvation, sisterhood, solidarity, and sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit for all women - churched or unchurched. The truth of uplifting oppressed women in their value, significance, and worth to our Creator God and those in their religious context is most inspiring as I author this thesis and continue to develop in the ministry of Christ-like preaching.

The above Black womanist preachers share the same emphasis in their writings, focusing on racism, sexism, misogyny, and economic exploitation during and after American slavery and

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

how these elements impact the church and society. Of the unique writing styles of each, I can say all the authors are self-determined, sassy, survivalists, mentally and emotionally strong, lovers of women's experiences, and lovers as caregivers to everyone in the Black community. Below are their brief biographies<sup>39</sup> to help contemporary Black womanist preachers "keep hope alive" and walk boldly on the path of preaching prepared by the Holy Spirit. By reimagining a better future and considering how preaching in alternative places and platforms influences the praxis of preaching for long-term discipleship and leadership of Christian ministry, I present the following women. Again, womanism is a liberation methodology rooted in the experiences of Black women, affirming the equal humanity of all people, with a concern to oppose every form of oppression, including racism, sexism, classism, etc.

**Rev. Dr. Suzan D. Johnson-Cook**

Dr. Suzan D. Johnson Cook is a trailblazer for Black womanist preachers. She was the first Black woman elected as the senior pastor of an American Baptist Church named Mariner's Temple Baptist Church in New York City in 1983. She served there for thirteen years, and the membership increased from fifteen to more than five thousand.

Cook also became the first woman elected as an officer of the historic Hampton Ministers' Conference, the country's largest gathering of Black clergy. She was the first woman named to be a chaplain of the New York City police department. Cook is also the only woman named in the Baylor University survey of the most influential preachers in the English-speaking world. As a result of that designation, she is one of an elite group of preachers featured in a video series released by the Odyssey Television Network.

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<sup>39</sup>Some biographical language of the Black Womanist Preachers in this section is extracted and edited from the Encyclopedia of African American Christian Heritage prepared by Marvin A. McMickle.

Cook was born in the Bronx, New York, in 1957. She received a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Emerson College in Boston, a Master of Arts from Columbia Teachers College, and a Master of Divinity from Union Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio. Cook was involved with Presbyterian and Baptist churches in New York City. As a result of her Presbyterian connection, Katie Cannon, a Presbyterian minister, and theologian (discussed later in this section), greatly inspired her decision to pursue a career in preaching. Marvin A. McMickle writes eloquently about her call to preaching:

I make no apologies for being a woman. And I make no apologies for being a woman in ministry. If God did not want me to be a minister, he would not have called me. If he did not want me to preach, he would not have shut this fire up in my bones. If I could not preach, I believe I would spontaneously combust. I even preach in my dreams. That is one of the ways I knew God was calling me into the ministry in my early twenties; I would be sound asleep and wake up on preaching.<sup>40</sup>

Does the above affirmation of Cook read like she is an argumentative, angry, agitated, aggressive, or annoyed Black woman called to preach? No. Cook's affirmative stance is a prophetic, profound, and provocative statement of her calling. Such confirmative posture moves us to celebrate women's stories as experiences of faith while seeking to fulfill their God-given callings into ministry, whatever form the ministry may be, by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Women instinctively sought to serve in the church with faithful enthusiasm and unswerving commitment to God and His people. However, they eventually moved into alternative spaces to exercise their calling and develop gifts and abilities. God calls for women willing to lead the church with powerful and transformative preaching into the next generation.

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<sup>40</sup>Marvin A. McMickle. *Encyclopedia of African American Christian Heritage*. Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2002.

### **Rev. Dr. Cheryl Townsend-Gilkes**

My choice of honoring Rev. Dr. Cheryl Townsend-Gilkes in this thesis is her impressive career as a professional Black Baptist Womanist preacher. From 1978-1987, Gilkes served as the Assistant Professor of Sociology at Boston University in Boston, Massachusetts. She also serves as the Professor of African American Studies and Sociology at Colby College, Waterville, Maine, from 1987 to the present. Gilkes is an ordained Baptist minister at the Union Baptist Church in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and the Assistant Pastor for Special Projects. From 1982 and continuing to date, she has served as a parliamentarian and member of the Board of Directors for the United Baptist Convention of Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and New Hampshire.

In her book, *If It Wasn't For the Women: Black Women's Experience and Womanist Culture in the Church*, Gilkes compiles essays examining women's roles in their churches and communities. She typesets those responses in society according to the functions of women. Gilkes also looks at the compilation of essays how Black women's experiences from the consciousness and culture of the Black life and discusses some of the conflicts or crises associated with the encounters. Gilkes further analyzes the paradigm shift of womanist preachers in the church, whether it be Roman, Grecian, African, Eurocentric, or African American denominations. She uses theological, biblical, and ancient data to discuss the support and sorrows of womanist preachers objectively. Though not exhaustive, she intends to touch on issues and leave an oral record of essays for us contemporary "daughters of thunder" preachers. This book is an excellent resource of study and a ministerial tool I find helpful in conveying the troubles and triumphs of Black Baptist womanist preachers and is both relatable and inspiring to contemporary preachers. I will use it as a required reading in the Implementation section of this thesis.

### **Rev. Dr. Prathia L.A. Hall**

In 1997, when Ebony Magazine offered its first list of the outstanding Black women preachers in the country, the first name on the list was Prathia Hall. Not only has Hall been among the best preachers in the country, male or female, but also an outspoken advocate of the right of women to stand in the pulpit of Black Baptist churches and preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1940, Hall graduated from Temple University. She earned a Master of Divinity in 1984 and a Doctor of Philosophy from Princeton Theological Seminary in 1997. Hall served as pastor of Mt. Sharon Baptist Church of Philadelphia from 1978 to 2000, maintaining a full preaching and teaching schedule across the country. In addition, Hall was the Black studies program dean and a lecturer at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio. She also taught at the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) in Atlanta, Georgia. In 2000, she was appointed the Martin Luther King, Jr. Associate Professor of Social Ethics at Boston University.

As an ordained Black Baptist womanist preacher, she served on the denomination's advisory council on the Women in Ministry project and is actively involved in the Progressive National Baptist Convention program committee. She is an avid proponent of womanist theology, which reflects upon the implications of biblical faith from the unique perspective of Black women, unlike the feminist perspective, which is perceived to be sensitive to issues of gender but not to matters of race and racism.

Hall's commitment to a womanist theology is apparent in her preaching and public addresses. In a 1996 article in *Sojourners*, Hall commented favorably upon the Million Man March. She also offered the poignant insight: "I must make it abundantly clear that while as a Black woman, I could understand and support the March of Men on October 16, the survival and

liberation of our community require the equal partnership of Black men and women in the family, church, and community. There is no place in our forward movement for the misogyny often demonstrated by some march organizers.”<sup>41</sup> The dissertation of Hall at Princeton also helped her spell out her womanist perspective on theology. In an interview with *Inspire*, she spoke about her sense of call and vocation:

Like the Prophet Jeremiah, I always had a sense that my life was not mine to do with as I please. My earliest memories have some spiritual character. I have always been aware of God’s presence in my life, and I knew that would have something to do with how I would live my life as a preacher.<sup>42</sup>

Like most, if not all, Black women of her time and those who preceded her and called to preach, she confronted the interlocking oppressions of race, call, and gender. Hall maintains that both the Black feminist standpoint theory and womanist theology highlight the importance of recognizing these oppressions but not succumbing to their deleterious effects. Rather, the Black woman is empowered by her experience and draws courage from her relationship with Christ/God.

Women in the Black church have responded with creative attempts at theological analyses and reflections in the womanist theological direction. The overall message of Black womanism is that the study of issues of race and class in the Black church and community can no longer ignore the oppression of sexism. Hall asserts that Black clergy and church leaders should recognize that the existence and survival of Black churches are overwhelmingly indebted to the efforts and contributions of the women in the pews. When these laywomen take up the issue of sexual discrimination in the Black church, far-reaching changes will occur.

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<sup>41</sup>Prathia L.A. Hall, “Transcendent Power - A Black Woman’s Perspective on the Million Man March.” *Sojourners*, January-February 1996. Retrieved November 5, 2022.

<sup>42</sup>Prathia L.A. Hall. “A Lifetime of Speaking Out.” *Inspire*, 1998. Retrieved November 5, 2022.

The two Black scholarly womanist preachers bringing closure to this section are Dr. Katie Cannon and Dr. Delores Williams. Both preachers highly emphasize the spiritual aspects of love and empowerment in women's lives for a holistic local church and community. For this thesis, Cannon will concentrate on the ethics of love and empowerment, and Williams will focus on love and epistemology. Spirituality highlights the singularity of the Black women's experience and their relationship to God, mainly as it reflects on their survival of oppression. Women's lives also create a Womanist theology as a critical reflection upon the women's place in the world that God has created and takes seriously Black women's experiences made in the image of God.

### **Rev. Dr. Katie Cannon**

Katie Cannon was born in 1950, raised in Kannapolis, North Carolina, and had close encounters with Jim Crow oppressive laws of the South, where racial segregation was the norm of her everyday life. In 1974, despite her adverse childhood and early adulthood experiences, Cannon was the first Black woman ordained into the United Presbyterian Church of the USA ministry. In 1983, she became the first Black woman to earn a Doctor of Philosophy degree from the Union Theological Seminary in New York City. The award of her degree also concentrated on Christian ethics.

Womanism, for Cannon, reflects upon the issues of oppression while using the experience of Black women as the point of departure. Womanism is also a social and political construct seeking to critique traditional feminism, pointing out how the dual struggles of being Black and female and being Black, female, and poor in America have no concern by feminist thinkers. The feminist thinkers' Cannon references are those scholarly women reflecting on feminist issues from the position of white privilege. Thus, to Cannon, womanist theology offers a sharp critique of racism within the ranks of feminism and an equally strong analysis of sexism within the Black

church, Black theology, and the Civil Rights Movement.

In her work *Black Womanist Ethics*, Cannon suggests that love, community, and justice deeply intertwine African American ethics. Impressive is Cannon examined the literary works of two prominent Black male theorists, theologians, and prophetic preachers we are most familiar with - Howard Thurman and Martin Luther King, Jr. Regarding these religious leaders, Cannon states: "I have selected Howard Thurman and Martin Luther King, Jr. as the two theologians whose work provides the most relevant theological resources for deepening the moral wisdom of love in the Black community."<sup>43</sup> Yes, I can concur many Black women in my religious context and personal relationships have drawn extraordinary strength from the propagation of their voices (i.e., oral or the element of reading) on the virtue of love (correlating beautifully with the principles of spiritual love emanating from the Triune God as indicated in Chapter 1).

According to Thurman, "The religion of Jesus makes the love-ethic central. The ethics of love is the basis of community, and community is the arena for moral agency."<sup>44</sup> Only love of self, love between individuals, and love of God can shape, empower, and sustain social change. Martin Luther King, Jr. gives greater significance in his ethics to the relationship of love and justice, suggesting that love is active, dynamic, and determined and generates the motive and drive for justice. For Thurman and King, everything moves toward community and the expression of love within the community context, whether the community context is the church, socio-political platforms, or otherwise.

Empowerment is another vital tenet of Black Womanist ethics. Cannon believes the center of Black woman's activism reflects a belief that teaching people to be self-reliant fosters more

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<sup>43</sup>Katie G. Cannon. *Black Womanist Ethics*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1988.

<sup>44</sup>Howard Thurm. *Jesus and the Disinherited*. Boston, Beacon Press, 1976.



empowerment than teaching them how to follow. Personal empowerment comes from self-definition and self-knowledge as a sphere of freedom. Individual empowerment is also independent of the definitions set by the power structures. Producing what one wants to create about oneself is a form of independence for Black women as a collective: emancipation, liberation, or empowerment as a group rest on two interrelated goals. One of the goals is self-definition, or the power to name one's reality. Not being constrained by the descriptions placed upon one is a step toward personal liberation and, potentially, group liberation. The ability of Black women to define themselves individually can draw us together as a group and contribute to a common goal of freedom and empowerment.

**Rev. Dr. Delores Williams.**

From all the literature I have read on Black womanism, Dr. Delores Williams presents the most profound argument of a womanist theology, especially from the womanist essence of love. She draws her womanist theology of love from the influential position of the African American and Pulitzer Prize winner Alice Walker. Walker defines a womanist as a “Black feminist or feminist of color (see the section of Definitions) committed to the survival and wholeness of an entire people, male and female.”<sup>45</sup> Williams uses that description to bring more clarity to the purpose of womanism for contemporary Black womanist preachers. Williams purports that a womanist theology is a spiritual movement of love. The branch of womanism concerned with spirituality and love developed into a womanist theology, gaining significance during the first decade of the 21st century.

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<sup>45</sup>Walker, Alice, *In Search of our Mother's Garden: Womanist Prose* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983).

Womanist theology is a sacred space for Black women to reconsider and reconstruct the practices, traditions, and biblical interpretations of Black women, specifically through the lens of Jesus Christ, empowerment, and liberation. In addition to understanding a womanist theology as a sacred role of spirituality in Black women's lives and relationships to God, it is also a critical reflection upon the women's place in the world that God has created and takes seriously Black women's experiences made in the image of God. For Williams, womanist theology attempts to help Black women see, affirm, and have confidence in their experience and faith's importance in determining the Christian religion's character in the Black community.

Williams believes oppression is not simply an understanding of the mind – the body feels the weight of the pressure in many ways. Headaches, fatigue, loss of appetite, lack of sleep, motivation or vigor are only a few physical effects of one dealing with oppression. Also, because oppression is constantly changing, different aspects of the woman's self-definition intermingle and becomes more salient. For example, the woman's gender may be more prominent when she becomes a mother but less significant when she seeks the pulpit to preach. A disdaining of the Black women's race when she looks for employment, endeavors to buy a house in a white neighborhood, or seeks credit opportunities, but not when she chooses to marry a Black man; however, in all these elements creating oppression, the women's position within intersecting oppression shifts.

In *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*, Williams asserts, "Womanist theology can speak of God in a well-developed theology of the Spirit, and it is thus God-talk. Womanist theology is also a prophetic voice reminding Black churches of their mission

to seek justice and a voice for their people.”<sup>46</sup> The fact that Womanist theologians speak of God and God speaking to them indicates this theological approach’s rhetorical nature as prophetic. This prophetic posture is necessary because Black women are the overwhelming majority in their congregations. Many Black female theologians have incorporated this disproportionate concern of membership in the interweaving of womanism and spirituality. Black womanist theologians have also questioned the subordination of women especially in the Black church, especially in prominent female membership status, and assume a leadership role in reconstructing knowledge about women. Thus, Black women who have experienced enslavement, segregation, and discrimination must know that their oppression does not originate from a personal defect. Those opposing positions emanate from the spiritual ruthlessness of a male-oriented society to stimulate change.

The Black womanist theological consciousness maintained by Williams is women having the determination to love themselves regardless of circumstances and uphold positive self-definition. Love of self translates into a warning for Black women to avoid self-destructive hearsay and to undergo excessive burdens in community building and maintenance work. Williams suggests that women can avoid this snare by linking with the communities of other women concerned about women’s rights and well-being. The Womanist consciousness directs Black women away from antagonistic divisions prohibiting community building among women. The intimations about community provided by Walker and supported by Williams suggest no genuine community building is possible when there is male exclusion. When Black women’s self-love, culture, and love for each other are not affirmed by their male counterparts and not considered vital

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<sup>46</sup>Delores Williams. *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993.

for the community's self-understanding, growth will stagnate.

Womanist theology can and must teach the church how God reveals prophetic words and actions for women in Christian living. In all matters of preaching, the foundation and framework of the prophetic message of God are always from the character of authentic love. Again, men and women working in harmonious love is the key to community building, sustenance, and growth that constantly opens the door of life to connect people with people in every facet of interactions, particularly in the Black church.

My deep reflections on the Black women at our church made me think of how the above womanist preachers in Chapters 3 and 4 stood firm in their callings and cultivated their gifts, talents, abilities, and commitments to serve others, even if their callings to preach were antagonistic to some and life-threatening to others in specific religious settings. Many women in our traditional Black Baptist denomination have formal education in other fields of practice, as Chapter 4 depicts the Holy Spirit leading womanist preachers to develop and serve in the alternative realm of academics. However, many of the women at our church may not discern if the Holy Spirit is leading them to reimagine a better future in serving Christ Jesus in a different capacity and cannot hear the spiritual calling to preach. These women can only bring to fruition what they know in their current commitments to the Lord Jesus Christ. But what if the Holy Spirit is calling for more (and I must say it is part of the transformative work in Christ according to the Scriptures at 2 Cor. 3:18 and 5:17), and these ladies need a called and spiritual anointed Black Baptist womanist preacher and leader to influence them with similar female characteristics of God's grace, a professional demeanor, and educational lens about being a woman independent of the local male pastor's personality to guide them?

As a lifelong Baptist, I am committed to remaining Baptist to speak prophetically as an

insider, by the leading of the Holy Spirit, against the church's prejudices in preparing Black Baptist womanist preachers to preach. Also, as a Black Baptist womanist preacher, I am responsible for standing against racism, sexism, classism, and any other "isms" that put women down or disturb the potentiality of God's great women coming to the forefront. The Holy Spirit did not call and lead me to where I am today in a preaching ministry, and I chose not to assist in the liberation of other preaching women. That would be disobedience to the Holy Spirit!

The liberation of our in-house oppressed Black Baptist womanist preachers and working with local churches to fill the gap in preparing them for alternative preaching opportunities is a relationship with a parachurch entity like D.G. McBride, Ministries, Inc., of which Rev. Dr. Deborah G. McBride is the founder and creative agent. By linking with these Black Baptist womanist preachers in a different setting of a parachurch organization but still maintaining an intimate relationship with them at the local church in the women's ministry, is where these ladies can have the liberty to train and develop their unique preaching gifts without interference, disruption, or micromanagement of other church authorities. Rooted in the freedom of Christ (John 8:36; 2 Cor. 3:17; Gal. 5:1, 13; Eph. 3:12), my prophetic leadership is to press upon Black churches to persist in their historical purpose of mediating the struggles of the people for freedom and liberation, specifically uprooting oppressive forces within Black churches and communities.

## PART II – THE PARACHURCH ENTITY

### CHAPTER 5 – THE IDENTITY, INTERCESSION, AND INVESTMENT OF THE PARACHURCH ENTITY PREPARING CONTEMPORARY WOMANIST PREACHERS.

A. Identity. The concept of a parachurch ministry interceding for and investing in women is a lovely endeavor, for in this section, it is all about assisting, not dividing, our local church. Walking with the people of God as we purpose to change the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit is the joy of serving as a womanist preacher and contemporary prophetess in a parachurch capacity. The simple definition of a prophetess I am using in this section to describe my leadership identity is a female called by God (Hebrew term *nevi'ah for prophetess*) to engage in the proclamation of the Word of God and perform duties as an intermediary of the Spirit to individuals or communities of the loving grace and will of God. The declaration of the divine Word of God is the dominant component of prophetic activity. I understand that failure to communicate God's authoritative words and thereby choosing to speak my own words from vain glory or representing an entity not in a relationship with God can result in serious ramifications – even death as a judgment of misrepresenting God. For this cause of being a spokeswoman of God, it is best to examine the identity of *pará* in my parachurch entity before discussing organizational interests in the developmental growth of the Black Baptist womanist preachers reimagining and reclaiming a better future of preaching in alternative settings.

In Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, the Greek etymology of *pará* (#3844) is a prepositional phrase that “introduces someone (or something) in a close relationship, to be next to or beside another, to be nearby - side-by-side, to provide something extra, or remain alongside in the presence of others.”<sup>47</sup> Biblical scholars like myself are thankful to have a resource like the

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<sup>47</sup>*Para*. Strong's Concordance Online. Retrieved 2/26/23. Strong's Greek: 3844. παρά (para) (biblehub.com).

Strong's Concordance assigning each English word in the Bible a number corresponding to the original text in Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek terminology. For example, the number given for *pará* is #3844 and is called the "Strong's number." The scholar or Bible student can then look up that number and find the Hebrew or Greek words translated as *pará*, along with other passages using those same Hebrew or Greek words. (There might be several words in the original language that has a translation by a single English word; moreover, one word in the original language may have transliteration by several English words in different contexts. The info in *Strong's* assists in that organization.) The numbers utilized in *Strong's* are both relevant and reliable that, even today, many organized biblical reference books refer to Strong's numerical system of words.

The theological description of *pará* in words such as *parable* and *parabola* is outstanding as they derive from the Greek nuance of "placing beside."<sup>48</sup> It also signifies to "throw or to lay beside another with a view to comparison."<sup>49</sup> The parabolic teachings of Jesus Christ fall under this category, for most of his teachings frequently conveyed truths by taking narratives drawn from nature or human circumstances, the object of which is to set forth a spiritual lesson connected with the subject of the Kingdom of God. The Greeks had a technical meaning for parables, parabolas, hyperboles, and ellipses in the mathematical sense (as particular geometric shapes) and rhetoric with special rhetorical devices. The actual derivation of the term *parabola* refers to a mathematical definition but is too involved in providing a comprehensive discussion in this chapter.

A significant amount of *pará* prefixes generally go right back to their origins in Greek. In that language, the prefix had a few related meanings, with good summaries by the idea of

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

“counterpart.” Also, Strong’s transliteration of *pará* is a sense of “moving or going beyond.”<sup>50</sup> In many congregations, this variation of meaning “to go beyond” may carry negative connotations. Some communities will agree that the immediate context for believers to assemble for the Christian life and developmental growth appointed by Christ Jesus is the church, not to be alongside parachurch entities. However, Strong helps us understand by taking “alongside” also to mean “auxiliary,” we learn the prefix meanings of “paralegal, paramedic, paramilitary, and parachurch.”

Interesting to note that the people associated with the above groups are quite different from the standard assemblies or professions but can perform some of the same functions. “Para” in paralegal is an assistant who works with a legal firm’s licensed legal attorney or partner. However, the paralegal is certified to function in specific legal assignments but should never usurp authority over the lead attorney, although they can provide legal information. “Para” in paramedics is the associate practitioner assigned to work with and only administers medicine with the authority of the senior medical practitioner. However, they may still have the medical knowledge to help needy patients. “Para” in paramilitary is the person assigned to work under the control of the military personnel in charge, not to work or give orders without the express approval of the military leaders. “Para” in parachurch works with the local church and comes alongside it only to provide services they cannot fulfill alone, not to undermine or disrespect the organized structure of the church.

The most exciting expression of the term *pará* is the Greek word *Paraclete*, which comes from the Greek word *Parakletos* as the Holy Spirit meaning the “Comforter” or “Counselor” or “one called to the side of another” in John 14:16, 26; 15:26; and 16:7.<sup>51</sup> It is proper to pause for a

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<sup>50</sup>*Para*. Strong’s Concordance Online.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid*.



moment to reflect and rejoice on these words of Jesus encouraging all believers of the Trinitarian love of our Holy God:

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees nor knows God, and you know God because he abides with you and will be in you (John 14:16-17).

The emphasis of the *Paraclete*, or *Advocate*, above, is not one of the ordinary kinds – that takes up a client’s cause, good or bad, and makes the best of it. The *Paraclete* is the Spirit of Truth - the Holy Spirit of God – and functions as the believer’s teacher, guide, director, helper, intercessor, pleader, witness, and a reminder of what Jesus has said during his earthly ministry (John 14:26) applicable to all disciples – for all time. In all these things, the *Paraclete* is the legal helper and holy friend who does whatever is necessary for our best interests in discharging ministerial duties in the name of Jesus Christ. To the glory of God, no translation – Greek, Latin, or English – can fully capture the complexity, diversity, and yet unimaginable beauty of the Paraclete’s functions.

B. Intercessor/Intercession. The Greek etymology of *intercessor/intercession* in Strong’s is *hyperentygánō* (#5241).<sup>52</sup> This compound word comes from #5288 (i.e., *hypér*, “for benefit”) and #1793 (i.e., *entygánō*, “come in line with; entreat; bending over to intercede; confer a benefit”).<sup>53</sup> The word *hyperentygánō* is used only in Romans 8:26-27, providing me with a framework for structuring the purpose of my parachurch ministry. In these verses, *hyperentygánō* refers to the Holy Spirit interceding in every aspect of the believers’ lives to “come in line with” the Lord’s eternal purposes by prayer, religious practices, and performances

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<sup>52</sup>*Intercession*. Strongs Concordance Online. Retrieved 2/26/23. [Strong's Greek: 5241. ὑπερευτυγάνω \(huperentugchanó\) \(biblehub.com\)](https://www.biblehub.com/greek/5241.htm).

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

emanating from faith, hope, and love. The content of these intercessions goes beyond human language and includes bringing sacred mysteries into our daily walk with Christ. To come in line with the Lord’s eternal purpose in this chapter is to recognize parachurch representation is not only an “arm” supporting and interceding for the church. But it is also held in trust, partnership, and accountability of the local churches it serves in teaching within the framework of biblical/Christian theology and honoring denominational worship preferences.

D.G. McBride is not only an “arm” serving as an intercessor for the local church in prayer, participation, and partnership but is also accountable to the church in Gospel proclamation and training womanist preachers.

Below is a juxtaposition of *para* and *intercession* with striking similarities, substantiating that the Holy Spirit is the agent of God calling D.G. McBride Ministries, Inc. to come to existence, serve, and bless the members of the Church of Jesus Christ, particularly the women of God.

<b><i>PARA</i></b>	<b><i>INTER-CESSION</i></b>
<p>To be next to or beside another; to be nearby – side by side; to place besides as a counterpart; to come or remain alongside another for an intended purpose.</p>	<p>To go, come or be between two entities in the sense of pleading on behalf of another; to cover, clothe, adorn, intervene, supplicate in prayer or practice. The prefix “inter” above means to enter between, among, or beside another with a mutual desire to come and stay close together.</p>
	

The biblical narrative providing an outstanding illustration of my functioning as an intercessor for our church comes from Exodus 17:12-14. Aaron and Hur brought a stone for Moses to sit on when his arms became tired. They also stood beside him – ready and eager to hold up Moses’ until the sun went down. In that way, Joshua was successful in defeating the Amalekites.

Interestingly, this story paints the picture of the struggles and needs of an intercessor to stand and stay beside and assist the appointed and anointed leader of the Israelites for the people in a covenant relationship with God.

At Rephidim, the Lord gave the Israelites a military victory. The Amalekites were nomads south of Canaan (1 Sam. 15:7; 27:8) and descendants of Esau through Eliphaz (Gen. 36:12). They attempted to dislodge the Israelites from this pleasant oasis and to secure their territory from intrusion. In this crisis, Moses called on Joshua. Although Joshua entered the battle zealously, the victory confirmed the demonstration of God's power. Moses' holding the staff of God above his head with both hands symbolizes Israel's total dependence on the power of God (Ex. 4:29). When Moses lowered his hands, the enemy began to win the fight; however, with the assistance of Aaron and Hur lifting the arms of Moses (i.e., symbolic as the intercessors also depending on God with Moses), Moses' hands remained uplifted, securing an incredible victory for the Israelite army.

On the day of his death, Moses did not lose his natural strength (Deut. 34:7), so it was not a physical cause that Moses got weary in holding up the rod of God. Faithful intercession is a demanding activity – an absolute need for the power of the Holy Spirit for endurance, effectiveness, and victory. Focusing our attention on God and “praying without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17) can weary us as much as strenuous work by our human efforts. We must always labor fervently in our prayers (Col. 4:12) and not just casually mention our requests to the Lord. Joshua could not have succeeded without Moses, but Moses could not have prevailed without the support of Aaron and Hur. All Christians can be like Aaron and Hur and help hold their hands as they obey God. God is looking for people who will share in the battle and the victory because they continue steadfastly in prayer (Rom. 12:12; Isa. 59:16).

There is also a reminder here that our Redeeming Lord God, Jesus Christ, ever lives in heaven to make *intercession* for us as we fight the battles of life. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit within us also *intercedes* for us. It guides us in our *intercessory* praying (Rom. 8:26-27), as noted above by the meaning of *hyperentygxánō*, and used only in this pericope of Scriptures. God promises victory to those who will pray and wield the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17-18) in intercessory prayer, partnership, and faith practices by obedience to the Word of God.

C. Investor/Investment. My understanding of investing in an individual is to take the current resources of the investor and either give or link them to another person's life for a profitable return. Not only is this a fruitful prospect for the investor, but it also allows the investee to see themselves differently in the capacity of blossoming to enjoy a better life of freedom and flourishing. Whether the investments are time, talents, or treasures, from a Christological perspective, God's people should experience wholesome living together – a life of faithfulness, love, practices, and sharing of resources, regardless of church, community, or contextual differences. The differences of others in cultural communication should not mean pending division, danger, or destruction in relationships; the difference is just different modes of being and expressions to find joint fellowship with others. Investing in other people is selfless love, and we preachers display self-love when we willingly bring together the inter-disciplines of the prophetic and professional facets of ministering without distorting the Gospel message. Getting these facets of ministry to merge magnificently, particularly in a women's assembly with the assistance of a parachurch instructor, requires continual education and training with humility and meekness, which we will discuss further in Chapter 6.

However, we have many examples of this qualitative type of ministry of the Black womanist preachers in Chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis and the Bible. Biblical models preaching

with this merging grace of the prophetic and professional postures of ministry were Deborah, Moses, the Apostle Paul, and Jesus of Nazareth. Evident in their preaching range, prophetic and priestly postures having a tremendous impact on society, we learn of this grace in operation. All of them had a special calling from God, were well-educated, and moved out into public ministry confidently, bringing spiritual and practical instructions to a people in need of salvation. D.G. McBride Ministries, Inc. plans to do the same by integrating the prophetic and professional principles of grace in the Holy Spirit. The approach of merging the above principles is slightly different from serving in the women's ministry at the church. But still, in a close capacity, I will continue to lavish my gifts of theological learnings, growth from my spiritual journey, and knowledge from my academic career into their lives more freely for better development and preaching opportunities to the glory of God.

In Strong's Concordance, the Greek etymology of "invest" is *periballo*.<sup>54</sup> This word means to "cover by throwing beautiful clothing all around; to place a garment of glory around a person to affirm the array (i.e., to set in order), to adorn with clothing representing authority, honor, and splendor (i.e., to officiate with glory)."<sup>55</sup> The exact words: "cover, clothe, and adorn" are also in the Greek meaning of "intercession" shedding more light to the identity of my parachurch ministry. The function of clothing is multiple: clothing can protect, conceal, display, or represent a person's current state and symbolize moral and spiritual qualities. For this thesis, clothing, or investing, embodies moral and spiritual qualities. Morally, it speaks to the women's worth, honor, and value in the presence of God and others. Spiritually, it coincides with the calling to preach, inflaming the imagination to soar into a higher spiritual dimension of exploration and discovery

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<sup>54</sup>*Invest*. Strong's Concordance Online. Retrieved 3/28/23. [Strong's Greek: 4016. περιβάλλω \(periballó\)](https://www.biblehub.com/greek/4016.htm) ([biblehub.com](https://www.biblehub.com)).

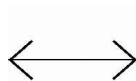
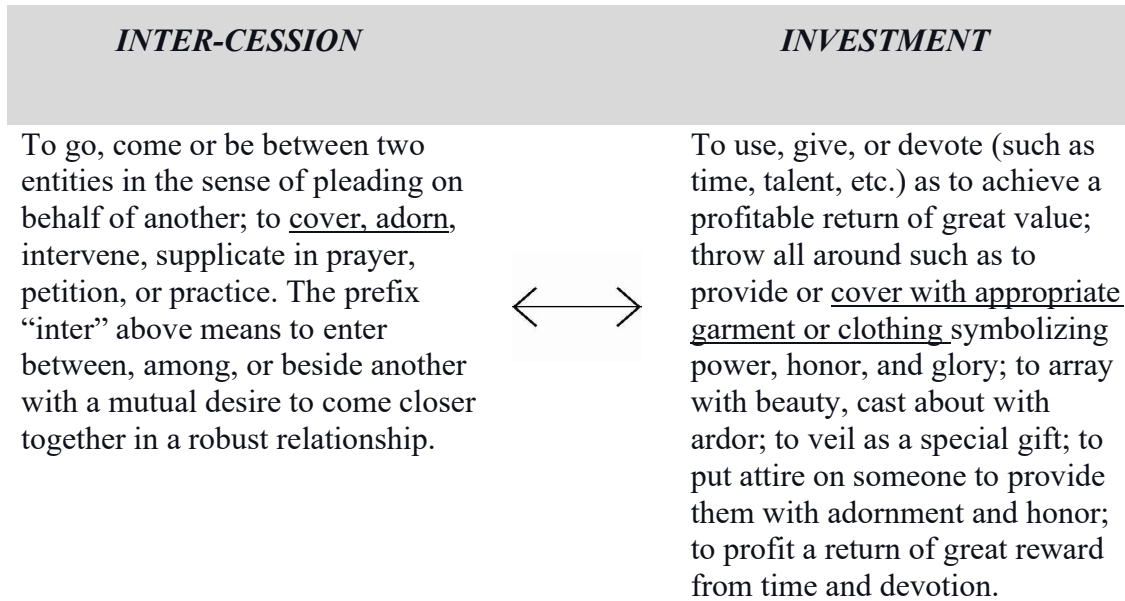
<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

of new meanings of what it means to have a calling from God with expressions of God's glorious and transcendent grace.

Dazzling garments are a leading feature of the portrayal of transcendent or heavenly beings in the Scriptures. Yes, in the Scriptures, we find a magnificent mingling of the familiar or unfamiliar or the raising of something commonplace to a realm beyond the earthly. The most famous instance was Jesus' transfiguration by the Spirit when his clothes became dazzling white (Matt. 17:2; Mk. 9:3; Lk. 9:9). Jesus' clothing, in this context, was a symbol of power, honor, and glory. Similarly, the "Ancient One" on the throne of David's apocalyptic vision wears clothing that is "white as snow" (Dan. 7:9). Angels, too, are portrayed as wearing "dazzling clothes" (Lk. 24:4; Acts 10:30) or "clothing white as snow" (Matt. 28:3). The image of clothing in the Scriptures state God as "wrapped in light as with a garment" (Psa. 104:2) and "clothed" with "honor and majesty" (Psa. 104:1). The redeemed saints in heaven are garbed in glorious white robes (Rev. 3:4-5; 4:4; 7:9, 13; 15:6; 19:14).

Thus, by these glistening metaphorical phrases of attire and their conceptual imageries illuminating my ministry, I envision every Black womanist preacher as an image-bearer of God and wrapped with the majesty of the Spirit, anointing their call and capacity to develop as preachers. To this poetic imagination, each woman wears outer garments expressing honor, wealth, and public respect. Inwardly, each woman wears the garments of praise, reflecting the integrity of Spirit in mind and character. All these ways of showing honor elevate the person that is honored. What womanist preacher will not take more pride in themselves when observed in this regard, and such celebration is linked with the honorable service of someone like me, Deborah G. McBride, subjecting my priorities to their interests by leading of the Holy Spirit?

The diagram below illustrates the connection between intercession and investment from the Greek etymological meanings above, providing more structure to my parachurch ministry. After examining the illustration, notice the chain of God’s grace linking D.G. McBride Ministries, Inc. with the arms and accountability of her local church and any other church in preparing God’s chosen womanist preachers to preach.



**THE CHAIN OF GOD’S GRACE  
LINKING D.G. MCBRIDE MINISTRIES, INC.  
WITH THE ARMS OF THE LOCAL CHURCH  
(A LABOR OF LOVE)**

***PARACHURCH***  
**(Institution  
and Influencer  
of Love)**



***PROPHETICAL***  
**(Intermediary  
and Intercessor  
of Love)**



***PROFESSIONAL***  
**(Investor  
and Inspirer  
of Love)**

The virtue of love, interwoven throughout this thesis and this section, has strongly emphasized the ethics of passion for my parachurch ministry. Sometimes the word love is used as a synonym for honor. Apostle Paul tells the Romans to “love one another with mutual affection” (Rom. 12:10). The labor of my self-love and honor now enters the divine struggle of integrity and justice by helping Black womanist preachers claim, embrace, and have the readiness to restore the woundedness of their female hearts. Answering the Spirit’s call to preach wherever lead is for ordering the self, transcending it, and moving beyond the limitations by embracing self-love. Self-love intertwined with the Spirit’s love is the only fountain where passion can pour out of the human heart like an effervescent river in all people-contexts of integrating the prophetic message of love with the professional ministry of love, as mentioned in Chapters 3 and 4. A shared commitment to reclaim self-love, self-respect, and self-determination is the key to breaking every barrier of pulpit preaching and women reimagining entering into the vast fields of preaching on social media platforms.

The blueprint for guiding Black womanist preachers (and any other womanist preacher regardless of ethnicity) to prepare and preach the Word of God, with the assistance of a parachurch coach in the training process,<sup>56</sup> is in the final section, Chapter 6, of this thesis.



## PART III - METHODOLOGY OF THE PARACHURCH ENTITY

### CHAPTER 6: THE IMPLEMENTATION – THE BLUEPRINT OF D.G. MCBRIDE MINISTRIES, INC. PREPARING BLACK BAPTIST WOMANIST PREACHERS FOR PREACHING ON DIGITAL, LIVE, OR OTHER RELIGIOUS PLATFORMS.



The blueprint of D.G. McBride Ministries Inc. for the Black Baptist Womanist Preachers at my local church and other church environments desiring to implement a program for women to preach on digital, live, or other alternative religious platforms is as follows. [Please note that (i) all sessions will begin with a scriptural emphasis followed by prayer, and (ii) all meetings will have an open-ended agenda without offering any prepared questions to facilitate conversations. These sessions emphasize grooming and guiding the womanist preacher for works of service, not a time of lecturing for listening purposes only.]

#### I. Preliminary Presentation on Vocation and Calling (Week 1).

“I, therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:1-4).

A. Vocation. When Christians ask about a vocation (or calling), they seek the answer, “Is God calling me to a particular profession or work?” The question is significant because our work is essential to God, and it is vital to pray and wait patiently for an answer about where the

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<sup>56</sup>The seven principles to building today’s womanist preachers to empower tomorrow’s female preachers will focus on (i) character; (ii) courage; (iii) content; (iv) communication; (v) competence and confidence; (vi) cultural; and (vii) contextual elements of evangelical, prophetic, and priestly preaching.

Holy Spirit is calling, leading, and positioning us to work. In the Bible, we are all aware God calls people - at least some - to specific tasks, just like each participating lady in this program has a calling by the Holy Spirit to preach the Word of God to both saved and unsaved people beyond the pulpit. Although the Bible seldom uses the word “call” to describe God’s guidance to jobs, occupations, or tasks, these occurrences correspond to what we usually mean by a vocational calling. So, as a preliminary answer, we can say “yes,” God does lead people to jobs, occupations, and various types of work.

In this thesis, the sense of vocation is very different from current uses of the word, which has become synonymous with careers or technical pursuits (e.g., vocational school or vocational counseling). Vocation has a religious meaning, integrates multiple spheres of life, including and transcending paid work or employment, and has theological roots in the doctrines of providence and incarnation. It is also related to meaningful work – work we are created for or called to do with our Christian lives. Each person has a specific purpose to fulfill for God. So, such fulfillment and satisfaction in being, doing, and having faith in God binds us to our eternal identity and destiny. Of course, life’s eternal identity and destiny is to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, not the initial task or vocation.

B. Calling. The imagery of the call focuses on two people in the transaction for effectiveness. The Triune God makes the call to humanity by the Holy Spirit through saving faith in Jesus Christ, and then humanity responds to the call. In keeping with the distinct levels of God and humanity, God’s call is something a person must obey. The calling and response motif for undertaking creative works has not changed from the Old Testament saints to the New Testament apostles and disciples of Jesus Christ. The biblical theme of calling presupposes the Christian life is a microcosm of God’s plan to work through and restore humanity, which we call the “theology

of works.” Creative works and miraculous manifestations ordained of God emanate from preaching the Gospel, evangelistic campaigns, public proclamation, online communications, leadership in pastoral roles, social uplift and empowerment, and other religious platforms of suffering people in need of faith, hope, and the love of God.

In preparation for our discussion next week, I invite you to take a biblical-historical journey to the beginning of God’s calling of creative works by reading Genesis, Chapters 1-4. The term Genesis is a translation of the Greek word “origins” and is significant for detailing the unique divine-human relationship. These relationships are through God’s covenant or agreement with humanity or specific individuals. These covenants are the covenant of works with Adam (Gen. 2:15-17); a covenant of grace with Noah (Gen. 9:8-17); and a covenant of faith with Abraham (Gen. 15:9-1, 17) and the subsequent patriarchs, Isaac and Jacob. Promises, fulfillment, obligations, rewards for obedience, and punishments for disobedience accompany the covenants.

Also, in anticipation of our meeting next week, please download and read Parts One – Four of Walter Brueggemann’s creative rendition of *Genesis (Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching)*. Retrieve this commentary from *Internet Archive* (<https://archive.org>), a digital library of free and borrowable books, movies, music, and more. Upon reading the above, our meeting will comprise your examinations and interpretations of Brueggemann’s literary piece of the callings of God to specific people in Genesis. Be ready for a life-changing conversation.

II. **Counseling – Birthing the Prophetical Call of Preaching** (Week 2).

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and earth” (Gen. 1:1).

“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Eph. 2:10).

**Session 2a - Covenant of Creative Works.** From the Brueggemann commentary noted above, you can recall he displays Genesis as a biblical revelation of the Infinite and Sovereign God. God is always the protagonist who makes the redemptive call and oversees every aspect of the callings as they unfold as Sustainer and Guide of humanity. Bringing the Genesis writings close to the faith and ministry of the Church of Jesus Christ, Brueggemann explores what happens when the texts in Genesis link with our covenant of faith and creative works in Jesus Christ. Brueggemann’s presentation makes a responsible relationship with the canon of the Church, insisting on an unquestionable linkage of the love and glory of God for redeeming humanity, beautifully threading together the Old and New Testaments of the Bible.

Because I consider this commentary a creative literary masterpiece of Brueggemann, no questions beforehand are necessary to facilitate our conversation. Your questions, comments, interpretations, and understanding of these readings are paramount. Just be ready for a profound discussion of Brueggemann linking the prophetical calls of God in two distinct testaments of the Bible for the life and faith of the Church of Jesus Christ below.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Old Testament Callings of God in Genesis</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>New Testament Callings of God for the Church</b></p>
<p>Gen. 1:1 – 11:29 – <u>Sovereign Call of God</u> (i.e., focusing on the narratives of creation, the garden, Cain and Abel, the flood, and the tower). Will God bring his creation to the unity he intends?</p>	<p>Eph. 1:9-10 - He has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in God, things in heaven and things on earth.</p>

Old Testament Callings of God in Genesis	New Testament Callings of God for the Church
Gen. 11:30 – 25:18 – <u>Embraced Call of God</u> (i.e., matters relating to Abraham). Will Abraham live by faith?	Heb. 11:8 - By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going.
Gen. 25:19 – 36:43 – <u>Conflicted Call of God</u> (i.e., narrative of Jacob). Will the younger rule the older?	1 Cor. 11:27-29 - Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. Examine yourselves, and only then eat the bread and drink from the cup. For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves.
Gen. 37:1 – 50:26 – <u>The Hidden Call of God</u> (i.e., story of Joseph). Will the dreamer keep his dream again?	Rom 8:28-30 - We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family.

**Session 2b** – Cultivating a Prophetic Imagination (Week 3). [For purposes of discussion, please purchase: Walter Brueggemann’s, *The Prophetic Imagination*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. 2018.]

“So, I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours” (Mark 11:24).

“The testimony of Jesus Christ is the spirit of prophecy” (Rev. 19:10).

This session will examine the emphatic argument of Walter Brueggemann in *Prophetic Imagination* concerning the role of imagination and faith in response to the political and cultural powers that dominate our consciousness and actions. This book also surveys the more profound part of the prophetic voices in the preaching, leadership, movement, and teaching of the key characters in the biblical stories of Moses, Jeremiah, and Jesus for a profound understanding and

emulation in practice.

Prophetic imagination is more than an intellectual or spiritual exercise without interacting with the living realities of oppression and numbness, despair, grief, hope, and energy. Brueggemann calls us to dream again and reimagine faith communities as different centers of compassion, mercy, and vision. Brueggemann posits: “It is the vocation of the prophet to keep alive the ministry of the imagination, to keep on conjuring and proposing future alternatives to the single one the king wants to urge as the only unthinkable one.”<sup>57</sup> Using the Hebrew prophets and their biblical narratives as mentors and models of using the imagination, as well as preaching and teaching biblical sources of inspiration, we as womanist preachers can speak out more enthusiastic and act with prophetic vision. Prophetic vision will insist on seeing, feeling, and responding differently to the people and society around us. With prophetic imagination, we will also seek to build communities where this imagination is communal, nurtured, and practiced in ways that change society and culture.

A picture speaks a thousand words. Look at my floral display, which I imagined firstly to be a vibrant and voluminous decor by applying the divine principles of the covenant of works. Consider the results, ladies. Now, imagine each floral bloom as hungry human souls responding eagerly with the same vivacity of life as you preach the Word of God by the prophetic anointing of the Holy Spirit. If you can only imagine and believe— all things are possible.

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<sup>57</sup> Walter Brueggemann. *The Prophetic Imagination*. (Fortress Press. Kindle Edition), 40.



III. **Sessions 3-9 – Coaching: Building the Professional Characteristics of Preaching for Digital or Other Live Platforms** (6 weeks).

The following sessions comprise the seven-building approaches for building today's Black Baptist Womanist Preachers desiring to preach on digital or other live platforms, thereby bypassing the need to preach in ecclesial pulpits. Sessions 3-5 will focus on the prophetic and personal development of Black Baptist Womanist Preachers for preaching using specific chapters of reputable scholars' published works as our guide for discussion. Session 6 will examine the concept of creative competence - the intermediate stage between developing the prophetic and personal life of the Black Baptist Womanist Preacher before linking the sessions to professional preaching preparation. As the opening Scripture for this meeting states, competence is a work of the Holy Spirit in the preacher's life. It is best realized and developed under the tutelage of another Spirit-filled instructor. Sessions 7-9 link the Black Baptist Womanist Preacher's prophetic, personal, and professional capacities to further engage in powerful public preaching wherever the Holy Spirit leads.

The literature governing our 7-week meeting listed below is for you to purchase for reading, reference, and keep in your respective libraries. However, if you cannot buy any or all the books, PDF formats of the selected chapter readings of each are available upon request.

**Session 3 – Character of Care (Week 4).**

“Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, just as it is well with your soul” (3 John:1).

[The literature for our discussion is by Marita Golden, *The Strong Black Woman – How a Myth Endangers the Physical and Mental Health of Black Women*. Coral Gables: Mango Publishing Group, 2021.]

Marita Golden shares her story of the mask she wore for years as a super-heroine until she faced a debilitating health concern. She also argues that Black women today conceal pain, pressures, and the potential demise of good health by carrying the torch, “I am a strong Black woman,” behind a veil of deception. Golden’s literature is essential to begin our blueprint on building pillars for the Black Baptist womanist preachers who do not fully understand it is not taboo to care firstly about you. Golden’s journey of throwing off the disguise and allowing vulnerability to come center stage helps us reimagine a new vision of Black women who are indeed strong and more resilient than what the myth projects to society. To facilitate our conversations, I selected:

Chapter 3 – Through the Fire.

Chapter 4 – The Reimagined History of My Heart: of Harriet, of Rosa, of Fannie Lou., of Patrisse.

Chapter 5 – The Story of My Body.

Chapter 7 – Fear Loathing Love: Our Bodies Inside Out.



Let us talk more about these chapters and the impact each can have on the preparation and presentation of preaching.

**Session 4 – Contagious Courage (Week 5).**

“Be strong and courageous; for you shall put this people in possession of the land that I swore to their ancestors to give them” (Joshua 1:6).

“For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline” (2 Tim. 1:7).

[The literature for this week’s discussion is by Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly*. New York: Penguin Random House, 2012.]

Brené Brown’s thought-provoking literature moves us to embrace the nature and meaning of vulnerability, especially from moments of recounting misery and shame in our lives. Liberation is the word resonating from the two chapters comprising our reading regardless of theological perspectives, philosophical perceptions, and existential experiences. Although the pursuit of liberation is different for us depending on circumstances, contexts, or cultures, the truth of freedom is universal in that everyone desires release from everything and anything that causes bondage or enslavement to flourish in human life. Let us talk more about vulnerability that leads to holistic liberation and the newness of life demonstrative of contagious courage to inspire others upon reading and reflecting on

Chapter 2 – Debunking the Vulnerability Myths.

Chapter 4 – The Vulnerability Armory.

**Session 5 – Complete Confidence (Week 6).**

“Do not, therefore, abandon that confidence of yours; it brings a great reward.  
For you need endurance, so that when you have done the will of God,  
you may receive what was promised” (Heb. 10:35-36).

[The literature governing this discussion is by Jeanne Porter King. *Influence Starts with “I” – A Woman’s Guide for Unleashing the Power of Leading from Within and Effecting Change Around You*. Eugene: Resource Publications, 2019.]

To know that the power of influence rests within each of us, we must have a firm understanding of self-esteem. King’s book helps us understand self-esteem as the core personal belief we develop about ourselves over the years. We receive many of these core beliefs from messages directed at us, individually and collectively, as Black women. We are not always conscious of taking in negative statements, but if we repetitively hear the same poor message about us, we internalize them, and they become our beliefs. We unconsciously store these beliefs away until a situation or event pushes that hidden message into our current reality. The most formidable challenge we will ever face as Black women will be holding onto the “me” in our individuality. The negative messages and expectations from our families, friends, and mainstream society do not go away when we feel good about ourselves. When things get tough, it is as if we turn up the volume on every negative news, we have ever heard about ourselves.

What are we prepared to do to unleash our power to influence others to take back their lives by preaching the Word of God? Ladies, let us talk more about this after reading:

Chapter 2 - See Yourself as a Leader.

Chapter 3 - Lead from Within.

Chapter 5 - Boost your Confidence.

**Session 6 – Creative Competence (Week 7).**

“Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of the new covenant, not of letter but of Spirit, for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Cor. 3:5-6).

It is a trustworthy saying that knowledge is power. In applying this adage to the concept of competent preachers, knowledge is not only a powerful and liberating source of light shining inwardly to discover the identity of self and areas requiring change. Knowledge must also penetrate outwardly and dispel the darkness of ignorance and indifference, recognizing the multiple issues of a diverse society needing more professional multicultural preachers led by the Holy Spirit. Thus, our meeting on creative competency will commence with open dialogue on spirituality, community, diversity, multicultural social work frameworks, and social justice as instrumental to the intellectual development of preaching. This intellectual work is indeed a work of the Holy Spirit as indicated in the Scripture above, and “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind” (Luke 10:27). However, we must do our part as preachers by studying, researching, analyzing, and preparing to preach. The greater the preacher’s depth of knowledge of one cultural group and the more knowledge of many groups, the more likely the preacher will be effective in the proclamation of the Word of God.

Ladies, can we talk more about this concept of competence? There is no published literature to post to facilitate our discussions. I am more interested in an open-ended discussion sharing our experiences, understandings, and questions than posting literature to read, reflect, and review. The goal for each womanist preacher in this program is to carry out the calling and prepare for preaching.

**Session 7 – Compelling Content (Week 8).**

Proclaim [preach] the message;  
be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable;  
convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience (2 Tim. 4:2).

[The literature facilitating our discussion is Kelly Brown Douglas, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2015. Will Willimon, *Leading With The Sermon – Preaching as Leadership*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2020.

The selected reading from Douglas’ literature is significant for our meeting because it helps preachers and church leaders think more theologically about race and racism, understand and analyze racial inequities and injustice, and reflect more profoundly on our racial identity, citizenship, and discipleship. This reading also helps preachers and church leaders understand the tragic consequences of the “stand-your-ground culture” that Douglas argues for the Black bodies and all bodies in our culture. In speaking truth to power, the prophetic ministry draws people to a righteous moral memory of the past and how we must make it right. Christ-like preaching and leadership challenge all Christians to identify with the crucified classes of people in their contexts and actively protest any injustice.

Douglas also posits that waiting on the Kairos moment of God’s justice in all social wrongs and evils produces unwavering courage in preachers and Christian leaders to address social and systemic evils without recourse. What are your viewpoints on the theological meaning of Kairos from this reading in chronological time? Is it possible to measure time in these distinctive periods as we know it? After reading Chapter 6 – Prophetic Testimony: The Time of God (comprising eight subsections), let us discuss it.

The section from Willimon’s book - *Leading With The Sermon – Preaching as Leadership* to read is Chapter 7 – “Preaching is Leading.” This chapter provides sound doctrinal knowledge

that the essence of preaching biblical messages is indeed leading people with a sermon. Preaching is a divine tool of the Holy Spirit for calling, convicting, and converting unchurched sinners to salvation and people comprising the church forward in spiritual formation through the work of sanctification. Preaching that leads people and leads by preaching to people effectuates a life of faith, freedom, and fulfillment in knowing and loving the Triune God.

**Session 8 – Clear Communication (Week 9).**

“Preach the Word;  
be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable;  
convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching”  
(2 Tim. 4:2).

[The literature highlighting this week's discussion is Cheryl Townsend Gilkes', *If It Wasn't For the Women: Black Women's Experience and Womanist Culture in the Church and Community*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 2001.]

Although there is a plethora of published literature and online data on the mechanics/dynamics of clear communication in preaching, I decided to focus on communication differently in this session. The emphasis on communication is not how you preach but to whom you preach, i.e., how you interact with the Black community. Dr. Gilkes' literature focuses on Black women working intentionally, religiously, and tirelessly in the church and community without support. In her narrative of many spiritual women, we can learn the divine connections Black women made from a historical perspective juxtaposed with an outstanding biblical point of view. We also can appreciate Gilkes' philosophy that the practice of clear communication is in the local context (i.e., our figurative Jerusalem) before it can impact abroad (i.e., the literal uttermost parts of the world). Can we talk more about this ideology upon reading:

Chapter 1 – If It Wasn't for the Women – Community Work and Social Change.

Chapter 2 – Exploring the Community Connection.

Chapter 6 – The Politics of Silence.

Chapter 11 – Ministry to Women.

**Session 9 – Community, Congregational and Cross-Cultural Connections (Week 10).**

[The literature closing our discussions is Donna Hicks, *Leading With Dignity – How to Create a Culture That Brings Out the Best in People*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 2001.

“Adorn yourself with eminence and dignity.  
And clothe yourselves with honor and majesty” (Job 40:10).

We are born into a web of relationships and spend most of our lives creating, sustaining, and ending them. Connections that help us live happier, healthier, and longer lives require real work and effective communication in the community, congregation, and cross-cultural contexts. As our first session focuses on the character of care for womanist preachers, the finality of our program emphasizes the consistency of care for people – i.e., the glory of human dignity. In Donna Hicks's book, she invites us to create a cultural consciousness that celebrates the attribute of grace as a fountain of power residing in each of us (it is part of our creation characteristic from God), for it enables us to develop beneficial connections with others and create positive changes in our relationships. How do we preach more on the facets of dignity upon reading:

Chapter 1 – How to Honor Dignity.

Chapter 2 – How to Avoid Violating Dignity.

Chapter 3 – Dignity's Depth and Breadth.

Chapter 18 – Normalize Dignity Learning and Practice.

By deliberately focusing on care and courage, confidence and competence, content and communication, and community, congregational, and cross-cultural connections, churches can become healthier, harmonious, more inclusive, and engaged in making disciples of Jesus Christ. We complete this blueprint by offering these three vital components of building relationships in the digital world or on platforms with live audiences:

1. Investment. As discussed previously, investments are about giving time, energy, and focus to build and sustain relationships – culturally and cross-culturally.
2. Commitment. We believe in the relationship’s future because of our continued investment in connections.
3. Trust. Trust is built by each of us being dependable and keeping our promises to value and respect everyone’s great worth because of their creation in the image of God.

## CONCLUSION

The Scriptures state, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of us are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). Such truth is the bedrock of the Christian faith and theology of love, liberation, and good life together. However, in the traditional Black Baptist church, the doctrine and practice create tension for many Black Baptist Womanist Preachers. Some young women considering preaching and ministerial careers in the traditional Black Baptist settings determined the gap was too wide for them to bridge. These women have chosen to leave the Baptist denomination for other denominations more hospitable to ministering to women. Consequently, many conservative Black Baptist churches have lost some of their brightest and best-educated young women. The Baptist denomination that nurtured, reared, and invested significantly in these ladies’ spiritual development had difficulty finding a place in its theology for women to exercise their preaching gifts from the pulpit.

This thesis serves as a way of escaping and not running away from the problem of pulpit restrictions for women to preach in anger, anxiety, apprehension, or even annoyance because the gap is too wide to bridge. The way of escape is by following the Holy Spirit, which empowers Black Baptist Womanist Preachers to reimagine and reclaim a new future of preaching in this vast virtual and technological world. The Holy Spirit makes way for the bestowal of gifts to people despite gender, race, or economic status. Yet, church leaders have much work to accomplish in training their women preachers to preach. God’s Holy Spirit chooses and appoints prophetic messengers in the Old and New Testaments and likewise abides in every disciple of Jesus Christ who chooses and anoints with impartiality the same delight because God allows all believers to participate in gifts of the Spirit.



Chapter 1 begins with the imagination – the power of the mind for thinking, remembering, creating, and dreaming. Imagination comes from the Latin verb *imaginari*, meaning to “picture oneself.” The imagination is part of the image of God in us or the Creator’s sovereign gene, enabling us to tap into God’s genius, genuineness, and generosity as co-creators of God on earth. The mystery of the incarnation of Jesus Christ makes imaginative arts and actions possible and meaningful. The renewal of our imaginations in Christ Jesus also enables us to see, say, and secure whatever is desired in the supernatural before it manifests in the natural. Desiring an excellent life requires imaginatively entering life’s possibilities to recognize their opportunities for action and a good life. The Trinitarian structure of the Spirit’s baptism is the order mediated by the Spirit between the Father and the Son to the believer to see and believe in the impossible. The link between the Spirit’s baptism and koinonia in the believer’s life and the church is a forging of divine love.

Chapter 2 highlights Black male leaders serving as the vanguard for the Black church and community due to its priestly and prophetic functions of Christ-like leadership and social justice advocacy. The autonomy and freedom of appointing leadership at the local levels also allow many Black Baptist leaders to determine women’s roles in building the membership. Unfortunately, as we discussed, some traditional Black Baptist contexts embrace the complementarian view of gender roles, excluding anointed women’s opportunities to preach in the pulpit. Those churches deny a fellowship from the Holy Spirit’s work of love for other members of God’s family, which is a harmonious reality and the basis for spiritual love and unity (Eph. 2:1-2).

Chapter 3 examines the Holy Spirit leading Black womanist preachers in itinerant preaching opportunities in the 19th century regardless of educational accomplishments, social popularities, or personal and family agendas. The Black women whose narratives are

unearthed in this Chapter by their courageous preaching and visionary statures to fight for equal rights, liberty, and justice for all humanity are impeccable. I reflect on the bravery of Amanda Berry Smith, a renowned evangelist, and Christian worker in her own right, traveling as far as India to do the work God gave her. Yet, she was an American ex-slave, a Black facing racism, a woman, poor, and one who had completed less than three months of formal education. She depended on the Holy Spirit and had a hunger to be holy and valuable. All effective leadership and preaching in the church begin at the point of the Holy Spirit's gifting and empowerment. We must attend to the Spirit. From there, God's power can work in us. Preaching has little to do with our achievements and nothing to do with our gender. Useable people need only to surrender to God, and men and women can choose that path, which is a poignant path of love.

Chapter 4 emphasizes the Holy Spirit again, moving Black womanist preachers in the 20th century to the field of academics. During the decade of the 1980s, the Holy Spirit empowered and led more and more college-educated Black women to address the issues of differential gender expectations in a growing Black feminist movement. Women in the Black churches have responded with creative attempts at theological analysis and reflection in their sermons of the womanist theological movement. The overall message of Black feminism or womanism is that the analysis of issues of race and class in the Black community can no longer ignore the oppression of sexism. Furthermore, Black clergy and church leaders must recognize that the existence and survival of Black churches are overwhelmingly indebted to the efforts and contributions of the women of academics now still sitting in the pews. When these laywomen take up the issue of sexual discrimination in the Black church and preach the inclusive Gospel of truth, far-reaching changes will occur.

From the 1st-Century church to the contemporary church, patriarchalism, chauvinism, and concealed bias behaviors in Black women's presence about pulpit preaching still exist. This reality brings us to Chapter 5. Who dares to confront such injustice today with a holy, harmonious solution? D.G. McBride Ministries, Inc. emerges at the forefront to bridge the gap between conservative Black Baptist churches and Black Baptist Womanist preachers. This entity intends to bring harmony between the parties by serving as the intercessor and investor of by the Holy Spirit to train the Black Baptist Womanist preachers to exercise their callings of preaching in alternative spaces.

Chapter 6 brings the finale of the thesis – The Blueprint of D.G. McBride Ministries, Inc. Preparing Black Baptist Womanist Preachers for Preaching on Digital, Live, or Other Religious Platforms. The seven pillars in this blueprint encapsulate the essential aspects of effective preaching for women and improve the culture of Black Baptist Womanist preachers in our local context and churches abroad. By deliberately focusing on each of these areas – care and courage, confidence and competence, content and communication, and contextual, congregational, and cross-cultural connections, churches can become healthier, more inclusive, and more engaged in making disciples of Jesus Christ.

Excluding women from pulpit preaching or any other leadership role in the church sends a harmful message, especially to younger girls who devalue their inherent humanity and worth in our current society, where patriarchalism or male chauvinism are prominent behaviors. When daughters are valued as much as sons, and girls share equal opportunities with boys, they develop as women possessing freedom of well-being and self-determination not controlled by their father, husband, or another male. We can often witness changes in institutions with empowered women.

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## BIOGRAPHY

### DEBORAH G. MCBRIDE

Rev. Deborah G. McBride is a skilled biblical scholar, Christian theologian, womanist preacher, change practitioner, spiritual coach, counselor, and mentor for various religious needs for more than 15 years. Under the tutelage of the late Bishop J. Hunter, she received competent ministerial training culminating in ordination and certification as a licensed clergywoman in the State of Indiana in 2003. Recently retiring from transactional law as a professional real estate and corporate paralegal in 2008, she now dedicates herself to creating a global women's ministry, training women preachers, and engaging in interpersonal and organizational communications. Ministerial and professional competencies are:

- Biblical exegesis, interpretations, and practical life studies for the Christian faith and spiritual growth
- Women's gender affairs with biblical/theological lens for imparting love politics and faithful living practices
- Ethnic identity, relational, and spiritual development
- Diversity, equity, and multicultural adult education
- Teen ministry and empowerment

Rev. McBride is also the Founder and Creative Agent of D.G. McBride Ministries, Inc., a new ministry possessing the vision, voice, and vitality to escort ladies on a virtual adventure of becoming the best version of divine womanhood. In examining the concept of time, Rev. McBride highlights the past, present, and future for ladies to live out their legacies now, for we are all intertwined in a web of womanhood regardless of religion, race, ethnicity, social and economic strata, etc. by the gift of God's infinite grace and imagination.



Rev. McBride is a former chaplain of Skyword Ministries, having chapel services at the Chicago-Midway and O'Hare Airports, responsible for the women's gender concerns of faith, practice, and social justice (2007-2014). International studies and cross-cultural pilgrimages were in Israel (i.e., Orthodox Jewish studies in the Northern and Southern kingdoms); Protestant education in Frankfurt, Germany; and Roman Catholic and Muslim studies in Rome, Italy.

Rev. McBride's academic training is from The Moody Bible Institute-Chicago, achieving high honors in the Bachelor of Science in Biblical Studies program (2015) and high accreditation at the Loyola University-Institute of Pastoral Studies (Chicago), attaining a Master of Arts in Social Justice (2018). She is currently completing a Doctor of Ministry, with anticipated graduation in 2023, concentrating on Christ-like leadership, spiritual and social justice, womanist preaching, and other women's gender ministries. She formerly served as a secondary educator for the Merrillville School Corporation at Merrillville High School for approximately ten years.

In partnership with Dr. Rodney C. Griffin, Senior Pastor, and the Greater Grace Church, Merrillville, Indiana, she continues to commit to membership and services on the ministerial staff. Lady McBride lives in Merrillville, Indiana, and is engaged to a handsome and holy man of God from Kingston, Jamaica.