LIBERTY UNIVERSITY BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY AFRICAN AMERICAN CHURCH: INTRODUCING SEVEN KEY SOLUTIONS PROMOTING HIGHER EDUCATION

A Thesis Project Submitted to Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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ABSTRACT

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Jacqueline B. Montague

Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014

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Despite the fact that education builds knowledge, higher learning through Seminary is preached from many African American pulpits as having little merit. The author’s hope is to channel broader understanding on how the seminary experience can make a difference in accomplishing the assignment commissioned by Jesus to a postmodern society. To achieve this goal, the author divulges the importance and necessity of seminary studies from a semiotic approach. Research includes a study of the hermeneutic circle and its three parts: text, messenger, and listeners; collected data from culture analyses and statistical reports to comprise three pastoral interviews. The objective is to set enslaved convictions free by introducing seven key solutions promoting higher learning, illuminating the vital link between knowledge and hermeneutics for the twenty-first century church.

Abstract length: 126 words.
DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to David, Sophi, Nicholas, and Bella with a special thanks to all the great-grandparents, grandparents, and parents that paved the way for their generation to flourish.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

With each epoch, the landscape of church ethos is restructured by new thinkers. Entering into postmodernism has been no different. A paradigm shift in Christian thinkers has all but jettisoned the basilicas’ concrete school of thought on truth. One scholar earmarks it this way, “…even when the truth you’re standing for is quite obvious, you are typically met with clichés like ‘the truth is relative,’ ‘it depends on how you look at it,’ or ‘no one has copyright on the truth.”¹ That mentality portrays the thought of Fredrick Schleiermacher as it mimics the present,

My ultimate purpose has been to exhibit and establish, in the present storm of philosophical opinions, the independence of religion from every metaphysics. It never occurred to me that my religion was in conflict with Christianity in the name of a particular philosophical conception. . . On the contrary I am convinced that I truly have the religion which I should proclaim—even if I have quite a different philosophy from most of my listeners.²

What impact does this thinking have on the church? Is there hope for the church? Seven decades ago Dietrich Bonhoeffer asked the question “Are we still of any use?”³ These questions challenges every generation of faith communities to weigh age-old practices that siphons cementing ancient truths to current mindsets. Solomon writes in Ecclesiastes that there is nothing

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¹Andrew Cohen, “What Do I Stand For? The Postmodern Predicament,” Big Think, Part 3 (June 2013), (accessed November 21 2013). This quote stemmed from a conversation between Andrew Cohen & Ole Vadum Pahl in an ongoing blog.

²Martin Redeker, Schleiermacher: Life and Thought, Trans. John Wallhausser (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1973), 63. Mimicking the younger generation of today, Schleiermacher language at the time was said to have been provocative to the older generation of his time.

³Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison (New York, NY: Touch Stone, 1997), 16. (accessed November 20, 2013). Bonhoeffer’s famous quote that challenges each generation: “We have been silent witnesses of evil deeds; we have been drenched by many storms; we have learnt the arts of equivocation and pretense; experience has made us suspicious of others and kept us from being truthful and open; intolerable conflicts have worn us down and even made us cynical. Are we still of any use? What we shall need is not geniuses, or cynics, or misanthropes, or clever tacticians, but plain, honest, and straightforward men. Will our inward power of resistance be strong enough, and our honesty with ourselves remorseless enough, for us to find our way back to simplicity and straightforwardness?”
new under the sun; nevertheless, a shift in time causes for transformation in methodology to communicate aged material to the newness of age.

This research is designed to irradiate the validity of higher biblical learning as the gateway for today’s disciples seeking certainty in the ecclesia message as society metamorphoses its thoughts toward an epoch of unbelief. It is a challenge aimed at forerunners to launch self-evaluations in lieu of interpreting, preaching, and teaching biblically and authentically that the fruition of the Great Commission lives regardless of changing times.

Statement of the Problem

The argument that an educated pulpit is vital for the twenty-first century church falls flat in many African American churches. The message baying seminary is not an indispensable factor in obtaining understanding to interpret, preach, or teach the gospel. Theological studies are viewed by many as a hindrance to gaining acumen sedentary at the feet of Jesus. Recently in a Sunday school class, the axiom that “God did not call Duke, Shaw, Southeastern, or the likes to bestow understanding of the Word—He called the disciple!” was averred. The lecturer went on to say, “If you are called by God, wisdom flows directly to you; therefore, an intermediary is not needed.” The problem foreseen is the lack of biblical training in this postmodern age breeds a formula for catastrophe in the overall schema of obedience to the great commission. Biblical hermeneutics is obligatory if the great commission is still to hold the same authority as when Jesus spoke the command. Therefore, denouncing biblical education is problematic for a changing world. John Frame’s augment for seminary undergirds this thesis project:

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4 Ecclesiastes 1:9c KJV
5 Matthew 28:20 NRSV
6 Matthew 28:19-20a KJV
Certainly the apostles had learned from Jesus, during the forty days, how to read and teach the Bible. Seminary is something like those three years and those forty days. In many ways, of course, it is different. Jesus didn’t need to teach his disciples how to read Hebrew and Greek. He didn’t need to teach them post-canonical church history, because at the time there wasn’t any. Nor, most likely, did he give reading and writing assignments. He knew their hearts, so he knew how much they had learned. And although he didn’t give letter grades, he regularly evaluated their progress, often negatively . . . So even with tuition and exams and papers, the essence of seminary will be sitting at the feet of Jesus. We learn from him as he teaches us through his brothers and sisters.⁷

Honoring the rule that principles do not change, methods do, minsters are challenged to craft innovative ways of drawing new thinkers to leverage followers.⁸ Studies reveal that methodology of pedagogy hinges on experience, culture, and conviction.⁹ A look into the cycle of seasons that society has channeled through reveals how old is made new through the wisdom of transformation. Using the hermeneutic circle, this project exposes the many shades of tutelage for the twenty-first century African American church.

**Statement of Limitations**

Time and limits placed on this study does not allow for an extensive diverse investigation. Limitations of diversity and tenets do not echo that divergences do not occur in other cultures, states, or nations. The culture ethnicity of the author limits this thesis to the Black church. The focus will be from the observation of Southern Baptist African American churches of North Carolina. Some questions to be answered are: Why would African Americans denounce any form of education when there is a colossal academic gap between Black students and their

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⁸Quoted by Dr. Elmer Town “Methods are many, Principles are few, Methods may change, Principles never do.” Class Notes. EVAN 851 21st Century Tool and Techniques-Spring 2012. Liberty University, Lynchburg Va.

white counter-parts? What effects does postmodernism have on biblical interpretation? What is the seminary’s role? Are Christian universities responsible for offering a well-rounded curriculum to include diverse courses and literature that reflects different cultural groups? For these questions to be answered, a transitory study of African Americans as a people and as Christians will be included in this project.

**Theoretical Basis for the Project**

The basis for this project is extracted from the knowledge and understanding of biblical principles on making disciples and the tenets recorded in the Scriptures for executing the ultimate mission “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.”\(^{10}\) Other scriptures that support this onus are: “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation,”\(^ {11}\) “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people,”\(^ {12}\) “and what you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well.”\(^ {13}\) The charge is that of witnessing and teaching to edify the body. The Bible speaks of gifts given for teaching and witnessing:

> And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Til we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together

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\(^{10}\)Matthew 28:19  
\(^{11}\)Mark 16:15  
\(^{12}\)Mark 1:17  
\(^{13}\)2 Timothy 2:2
and compacted by that every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the
measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. 14

Instructions given to the elect that succors the basis for this project, “Study to shew
thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word
of truth.”15 Followed by “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own
insight,” 16 “But be transformed by the renewing of your minds.”17 Moreover, “Lead a life
worthy of the calling to which you have been called.”18

For the being that sits at the feet of Jesus, the Scripture say, “Ye are a chooses generation,
a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him
who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light,”19 “Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light to my path.”20 Besides, “One who rules over people justly, ruling in the fear of God,
is like the light of morning,”21 “You are the light of the world;”22 therefore, “let your light shine
before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”23

14 Ephesians 4:11-16 KJV
15 2 Timothy 2:15 KJV
16 Proverbs 3:5
17 Romans 12:2b
18 Ephesians 4:1b
19 1 Peter 2:9
20 Psalm 119:105
21 2 Samuel 23:3c-4a
22 Matthew 5:14a
23 Matthew 5:16
Statement of Methodology

This project is designed to illuminate the methodological benefits of higher learning in the province of text, message, and hearers for the twenty-first century African American church. With a focus on truth and method, the methodology uses fulcrums on the hermeneutic cycle. The hermeneutic circle, work of Hans-Georg Gadamer, is used to provide understanding of the relationship between biblical text, the interpreter, and the audience. Moreover, the study of the circle discloses the effects of the messenger, key to what is heard, understood and applied, on unlocking vis-a-vis principles echoing the ancient Scripture for reaping the postmodern harvest.

This proposal begins with an introduction that provides a periscopic look into the demise of speaking against seeking advanced education in a time when the listeners are listening with an educated ear. The introduction addresses the problematic fact that, although the biblical message remains the same synchronously, churches today are struggling with steep declines in discipleship. Why? It also speaks of limitations, which includes data that cannot be addressed or are not part of this project. The theoretical basis for the project is also included in the introduction. It offers biblical references and support. Likewise, the methodology described for this work is also contained within. The introduction concludes with an assessment of the main sources used, such as books and internet articles. Largely, the introduction provides a brief synopsis of the project as a whole.

The second chapter focuses on the concept of biblical interpretation. This chapter is a primer depicting the origin and work of the hermeneutic circle. The hermeneutic circle is used as a model to irradiate movement of conversation between text, preacher, and listeners. The focus is on extracting meaning from Scripture, cemented on experience using imagery linking ancient and new by means of a globular approach. It discusses the ideological aspects of the three parts
involved in the cycle: text, messenger, and hearer. The circle brings the voices of ancient and new front and center collectively countering err on behalf of the interpreter by bridging ancient writing with postmodern thinkers. A microscopic look into core principles that holds the church/hermeneutic circle together along with evolving methods are also included in this chapter. The method being the means by which the core values: worship, ministry, mission, discipleship, and fellowship are channeled to carry out its purpose for the church of Christ. Whereas chapter two looks at the components that form the circle, chapters three through five focus on individual parts that make up the group.

Chapter three discusses twenty-first century listeners. The author narrates the background miens of the African American church. She gives an overview of how culture influences the hermeneutic circle. Postmodernism is investigated as it relates to culture and proclamation of interpretation. The chapter examines culture analysis, statistical reports, and pastoral philosophies of twenty-first century African American church experiences. The chapter also reveals an overall decline in church attendance with emphasis on means for strengthening the body, followed by seven key solutions for promoting higher learning.²⁴

Too often society lacks the kind of love that induces change. On the brink of declining churches and denouncing of faith, God is calling for His chosen people to shake up society with the power of being, love, embracing an attitude of humility opposed to pride, a gentle spirit rather than one of aggressiveness and a spirit of patience that will tolerate each other’s irritating peculiarities. In this fourth chapter the messenger is painted as the catalyst for transmitting an age-old message to a new-age congregation. Self-examination is stressed the as key factor in understanding motive behind ones behavior. Therefore, the chapter covers several areas

augmenting self-assessment. A clear message that changes must take place from the inside out booms throughout. Getting to know oneself require being knowledgeable of personal character traits. The DISC model is used as a tool to help readers discover and measure dispositions using four areas of temperament depicting human behavior. Additionally, this chapter reviews three levels of listening skills identified as essential traits allied to ‘being’ as a change agent: Level one speaks of empathetic listening where the listener is tuned in to the speaker’s mood. For level two, the listener is hearing but not listening. In other words, listening but not engaging. And lastly, level three listeners’ listens in spurts, tuning in and out getting fragments of information.

Listening skills are learned behaviors that are essential in the art of communication: non-verbal, as well as verbal. Twenty-first century listeners listen to non-verbal behaviors more than verbal proclamation. Hence, it is imperative that preachers live a lifestyle that emulates what they preach. A basis fact is noted: boundaries need to be set so that margin, the space between our load and our limits, is not siphoned at the cost of spiritual drought. Reaching overarching purposes require understanding the task before the elected being. For the twenty-first century church, the role of preacher cannot be one of fame. It must be one of humility, wearing the love of Christ that others will want to follow. A colorful sketch into the life of Fannie Lou Hamer is put on display mirroring the movement of one reflecting rays of light for generations to come. Overall, this chapter summarizes authenticating evidence that supports and validates the messenger as the catalyst that transcends society’s thoughts on the ecclesia message.

Chapter five evaluates the influence of seminary on the hermeneutics of biblical text and “being.” The author discusses responsibilities for the twenty-first century church illuminating

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courses that challenge students to view Scripture outside of one’s primary understanding. Moreover, a synopsis of the author’s seminary experiences is present within this section.

**Literature Review**

**Books**

Countless books were used as resources for this project. The *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning* was instrumental in defining hermeneutics. Kaiser and Silva introduce numerous groundbreaking concepts used in interpreting text.\(^\text{26}\) Three key figures were presented as influential in the hermeneutical philosophy, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, and E. D. Hirsch Jr. The different views offer supportive credence for this project.

*Truth and Method*\(^\text{27}\) was the next book sought to help gain an understanding of the hermeneutic circle. This book discloses the origin, development, and undertone of the hermeneutic fundamentals. The book is compacted with a wealth of information as it dissects language to provide clarity on knowledge and truth.

Another book that was helpful in understanding hermeneutics in relations to culture, traditions, religion, and being was *Hermeneutics at the Crossroads*. This book presents a vast number of schools of thought on principles of interpretation. The different voices and analogies add value to the project by unfolding the different concepts of hermeneutics.

The *Responsibility of Hermeneutics* takes a heterogeneous approach. It focuses on the action of the author and reader in congruence with the text. The space given to figures from the past to share their habits of reading and interpreting was helpful in cementing the validity of the hermeneutic circle. A variety of interpreting models are observed along with their practicalities.

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A study of *The Message*, a twenty-first century Bible, proved to be an important example of interpretation. It is written in contemporary English for people of today. Peterson’s book reads like a novel, which has the potential to draw in readers that find interpreting old English to be nuisance. This book was used as a cross reference.

The *Handbook of Denominations in the United States*\(^\text{28}\) served as a reference for researching the history of Baptist churches. The book offers a preview of Baptist doctrine and polity. Additionally, a small section focuses on Black Baptist and their mission. Overall the survey of this book helps guide the project.

From a theological standpoint, *Empowerment Ethics: For a Liberated People* discusses the plight of African Americans and their future. She relates what was and what is that forms the foundation of African American trends. The ethical aspect of the book was helpful in accepting the biblical truths which prod movements that empower the oppressed.

*The Black Church in the African American Experience*\(^\text{29}\) was a useful resource for addressing the mood of the Black church. The book also gives a preview of the antiphon from the community at large to the Black church. This book opens the window for examining thoughts and actions from the lens of African Americans Christians.

*The Black Religious Experience: Conversations on Double Consciousness and the Work of Grant Shockley*\(^\text{30}\) speaks to the ‘why’ of African Americans attitudes. In other words it depicts the reality of African Americans living in two worlds in one mind. The book brings clarity to the enquiries this project seeks; an asset when looking at education versus African Americans.


Being Black Teaching Black: Politics and Pedagogy in Religious Studies contributed insightful data for the project concerning the plight that encumber African Americans in theological studies. A collaboration of voices comes together in an effort to illumine the discourse of teaching on a level thought to have belonged to another race. The wealth of information gained from this book adds richness to this assignment.

Pedagogy of the Oppressed offers an observation of past pains to understand the imminence of teaching the realm of change. His thoughts on postmodernism, oppression, and education in a class-based society sound the alarm for further investigation. The book is an abridged philosophy that impacts the thought of this project.

From Beyond Metaphysics? The Hermeneutic Circle in Contemporary Continental Philosophy clinches the vivacity of being. This book seals the warrant that being plays in the cycle of the hermeneutic circle. It is helpful for the project because it is believed that being is the guiding post that rotates the cycle.

Perimeters of light focus on boundaries of Christianity. The further Christians’ practices or methods move from the will of God the darker life becomes. The text uses a fictitious parable to elucidate how Christians taking the light into a dark world has the potential of lighting the space with sharp light, shadow light, or a mire glow. The authors speak of two boundaries that many holding the torch find themselves at the threshold: edge of error (moving away from God’s word) and edge of culture (stuck on how things have always being done). To keep the light burning principles must never be comprised; yet, approaches need to evolve with each generation, culture, and epoch.

Black Church Life-Styles interprets the Black Christian experience from slavery to the mid-1980s. McCall and six co-writers bring to life the music, preaching, teaching, and origin of
sharing the gospel rhythmically. Each author gives an account as a witness to a movement that has survived some turbulent times. The text offers a rich history that bleeds over in today’s pulpits. This book is useful because it uses many voices to expand the latitude of knowledge in a variety of area; such as, preaching, music, and explanations of why “Black churches” worship experience is vastly different than that of “White churches.”

*Eat This Book* provides insight on the cycle of reading, internalizing, and witnessing through being. It is a reminder that one’s “walks” and not so much “talk” testify to the reading, understanding, and digesting the Word of God. All three tenets of the hermeneutic circle are revealed in this powerful yet simply voiced transcript.

Postmodern listeners are illuminated in *Preaching to a Postmodern World*. The book focuses on innovative ways of spreading the good news to new thinkers: bridging old and new. It points to the clergy as catalyst for earmarking truth.

**Thesis, Journals, Magazine and Internet Articles**

“Will Our Churches Still Be Churches in the Twenty-first Century” gave this project vital information about the plight of the twenty-first century church. The journal article feature glitches in the church. Inglis’ offers an analysis of how culture variation changes church.

“Learning at Jesus’ Feet: A Case for Seminary Training was vivacious to this project because it backed up the theory that one can study under Jesus at the seminary. It supports the argument that clergy attending seminary is important for the church and offers. For this thesis, the article mimics the Martha versus Mary spirit.\(^{31}\)

\(^{31}\)Luke 10:39-40
The next article asks the question that many churches are questioning, “Is Seminary Education Always Necessary for Pastoral Ministry?” It is a question that the author uses to probe the minds of those leading twenty-first century churches. The article was instrumental for this project because it offers support for the thesis.

Statistics for the thesis were gathered from statista.com. The site offers a vast amount of information for learning where religious groups are in lieu of education. That information is vital for this project because it is based on religion and education, or lack of.

The same can be said for the Barna Group. This site looks at general trends, such as religious behaviour and beliefs. Also helpful was the statistics on generational trends, gender differences, racial and ethnical differences, and regional faith.

Verses

As previously stated, the basis for this project is extracted from the thoughts and understanding of biblical principles on making disciples and the tenets recorded in Scripture for implementing the ultimate mission “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations. The Scripture references below plays a vital role in presenting the soundness in seeking higher biblical learning for fulfilling the assignment given by Christ in an age of unbelief. These Scriptures add great support to this thesis project by providing the tenets for executing the plan.

Matthew 28:19-20 speaks to the spirit of this thesis. The Kings James Version says, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and

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of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and low, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” These verses are significant because, for the Great Commission to be fulfilled today there must be catalysts channeling the mission. In this postmodern era of unbelief and declining churches, it is imperative that teachers are well schooled on what they are teaching in order to make disciples of all nations. In other words, Matthew 28:19-20 serves as the blueprint depicting the Christian purpose and why higher learning is important.

The epistle 2 Timothy 2:15 KJV, “Study to shew theysefl approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth, provides soundness to the reasoning behind seeking higher biblical learning. It supports the core thinking that spurs this project. That the more knowledgeable one become, the more likely they are to emulate the life of Christ standing on the Word. Moreover, 2 Timothy 3:16 confirms why continue studying is vital for the body of Christ. Timothy writes, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” The Scripture adds strength to the thesis because it illuminates how Scriptures should be handled for interpretation.

In Ephesians 4:11-16, the Apostle Paul highlights the gifts given to the church and their purpose. In the same way, this project speaks to the gifted. The chosen text provides this work with a firmness to stand on when speaking of studying, knowing, and decreeing for enriching the body. Therefore, the Scripture is important for the project because it undergirds the philosophy: sitting at the feet of Jesus edifies the body.

John’s apocalypse in Revelation 10:9-10 provide support for this project by showing how one is to meditate on the Word of God. This Scripture guides the thought of ingesting the Word
in order to fully understand its interpretation. It helps explain the implication of witnessing with ones being by becoming what was ingested through reading God’s Word. It is important to this project because it supports the notion of teaching disciples non-verbally as well as verbally by studying.

The King James Version of 1 Peter 9 says, “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” This verse is supportive because it depicts a people, such as African Americans, who has gone through trials and came out to a wealthy place. Its role in validating God’s will and how God’s plan will prevail is essential for this thesis project. Psalm 66:10-12 shares that thought as well. It, too, is important for this writing. It teaches that what happened yesterday is gone so praises can go up for what God is doing today.

2 Samuel 23:3c-4a supports the methodology of the messenger being the catalyst that moves the hermeneutic circle. This verse is influential in revealing the onuses of the herald. This is important because the Scripture elucidate the role of those elected to rule over others.

Ephesians 4:1 is used to support to the thought of walking worthy in ones calling. It supports this projects’ thesis of witnessing with ones’ being as opposed to ones’ talk. This text laid the foundation that cements the ideal of being the light in the midst of darkness.

1 Thessalonians 3:12 speaks volume to having the kind of love that splashes on all that come in contact. It is in essence what this thesis project is about; emulating the life of Christ by having the love of Christ that others will want to become followers of Christ. One must have faith. This kind of faith requires some knowledge of what the Scriptures says. For this project, 1
Thessalonians 3:12 epitomizes the potentials the church has for exponential growth when true love comes from those professing to be followers of Christ.

Special Terminology

**Post-Modernism** – “A world view emerging in the late-20\(^{th}\) century which questions the beliefs of modernism and is characterized by distrust of reason and its ability to achieve full understanding, disbelief in objectivity as a possible stance with which to achieve understanding, disbelief in the possibility of a comprehensive explanation of anything in life, and loss of faith in the notion of inevitable progress.”\(^{35}\)

**Hermeneutics** – “A Latinized version of the Greek *hermeneutic* has been part of common language from the beginning of the 17\(^{th}\) century. Nevertheless, its history stretches back to ancient philosophy. Addressing the understanding of religious intuitions, Plato used this term in a number of dialogues, contrasting hermeneutic knowledge to that of *sophia*. Religious knowledge is a knowledge of what has been revealed or said and does not, like *sophia*, involve knowledge of the truth-value of the utterance. Aristotle carried this use of the term a step further, naming his work on logic and semantics *Peri hermeneias*, which was later rendered as *De interpretatione*. Only with the Stoics, and their reflections on the interpretation of myth, do we encounter something like a methodological awareness of the problems of textual understanding.”\(^{36}\) A humbler definition is simply “the study of principles and methods of interpretation. The term is sometimes used to emphasize the present relevance of the text. (The form *hermeneutic* often refers to a specific theological perspective that may guide one’s

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\(^{35}\)James W. Voelz, *What Does This Mean?* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2003).

interpretation.) The phrase *general hermeneutics* refers to principles that are applicable to the interpretation of any text; *special hermeneutics* deals with issues that are distinctive to a particular text or group or related texts. Moreover, “For both Jews and Christians throughout their histories, the primary purpose of hermeneutics, and of the exegetical methods employed in interpretation, has been to discover the truths and values of the Bible.”

The *Hermeneutic Circle*:

A central idea in previous hermeneutic thinking, and that had been viewed in terms of the interpretative interdependence, within any meaningful structure, between the parts of that structure and the whole, was transformed by Heidegger, so that it was now seen as expressing the way in which all understanding was ‘always already’ given over to that which is to be understood (to ‘the things themselves’—‘die Sachen selbst’).

*Hermeneut* – For this project Hermeneut is used interchangeable with the terms interpreter and exegete.

For this project the term *Prism*—a transparent polygonal solid object with flat faces and a usually triangular cross section, used for separating white light into a spectrum of colors. Body that is bounded in part by two nonparallel plane faces and is used to refract or disperse a beam of light. For this project it refers to the student/scholar taking in information, processing it, and then disperses their beam of light on others for uplifting.

*Nations* and *generations* will be used interchangeable. Although they have different definition, for the purpose of this project, they will be used to reflect people and culture of postmodernity.

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Several Bible translations are used throughout this project.\textsuperscript{40} The HarperCollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) is completely revised and updated by sixty biblical scholars. It includes the English translation that many agree is most closely in accuracy. The English Standard Version (ESV) is a word-for-word translation that expounds on intensity and splendor of the original Bible words. The New King James (NKJV) mirrors the King James using words for the contemporary audience. It is not a redo of the KJV but an enhancement; a continuation. The King James Version (KJV) sprung from the Reformation of the sixteen century and was the first translation from Hebrew and Greek language. The King James Version uses language that is not relevant for today’s readers. For instance, using phrases like, “\textit{What doth it profit,}” and “\textit{Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith;}” plus, ‘\textit{But wilt thou know, O vain man.}’ The New International Version (NIV) is a new translation of the holy Bible in contemporary English.

\textsuperscript{40} Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version.
CHAPTER II

HERMENEUTIC CIRCLE

The root of each period in life feeds off the period before it. It goes back to an old saying that says, “To know where you are going you must know where you’ve been.” The art of biblical interpretation is no different. Most interpretations are primed through the lens of preconceived doctrines. From that thought, the hermeneutic circle was birthed. This chapter examines the origin of the hermeneutic circle and the mechanical movements, dialogue that keeps the rotation circumnavigating. Also covered in this chapter is the rationale for using this method, exegesis for extracting truth, hermeneutics for interpreting meaning, and the linking of two worlds through communication, in consort with core biblical principles versus fluctuating methods vouchsafing each paradigm shift of every age and potential prejudices due to preconceived biases. Moreover, an ephemeral cross-examination of schemes is echoed throughout the orbicular conversation.

Origin

The hermeneutical circle was erected from the thoughts of German philosopher Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher Documented as the “Father of Modern Protestantism,”¹ his theory of interpretation focuses more on the “process of understanding than on analysis of the text itself.”² The concept was later enlarged by Martin Heidegger.³ Heidegger argues that no one comes to the task of interpretation absent of preconceived (Vorverstandis) biases within the foci of the text. A student of Heidegger, Georg Hans Gadamer, advances the study, focusing on existential truth in the method. He formulates a theory that adds a vice to biblical criticism,


³Soulen and Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, 73.
averring, “We understand a text when we understand it to make a true claim about something that is an issue for us in our own time and place.”

His thinking is grounded on a circular process of interpretation. Gadamer, consequently, is best known for his hermeneutic philosophy put forward in his Wahrheit and Methode Truth and Method. There have been several schools of thought on the meaning of interpretation. Wilhelm Dilthey describes the goal of interpretation as “to feel the states of mind of others.” Schleiermacher avows, “Every act of understanding is the reverse side of an act of speaking, and one must grasp the thinking that underlies a given statement.” Paul Ricoeur says much of the same when he describes interpretation as “sympathetic re-enactment in imagination” or “re-enactment in sympathetic imagination.” He goes on to explain, when we read Corinthians, “…normally we read and interpret this text not to learn what it was like to be Paul but to learn what Paul had to say on a variety of topics and what God has to say to us today through what Paul wrote.”

Gadamer coins this thinking as fusing thoughts across horizons, “Horizontverschmelzung where the scholar finds ways that the text's history articulates with their own background.” This scholarship’s back and forth conversation between reader and text and between reader and culture is termed the “hermeneutic circle.” This hermeneutic circle, the mechanical work of back and forth conversation sculpting a circular pattern between entities, bridges understanding of the text. Connections are made when slices of

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4Soulen and Soulen, Handbook of Biblical Criticism, 75.


6Ibid., 30.

7Ibid., 31.

8Ibid.


information move one from a state of disequilibrium of understanding to assimilating information and returning to a state of equilibrium.\textsuperscript{11} To instill clarity, Roger Lundin offers readers insight on the flow of the circle. Paraphrasing, he elucidates in \textit{The Responsibility of Hermeneutics} that the interpreter, through the exegetical work, find that expectations of preconceived notions where met or challenged.”\textsuperscript{12} For the interpreter to reach his conclusion, he must join the plot of the biblical text. In this way, the text lives, revealing tone, mood, and the original authors’ meaning. This process is what Gadamer calls fusion of horizons; where the two worlds blend through merging understanding of the things going on or said.\textsuperscript{13} Then, “The reader expands the horizon of the text by appropriating it in a particular historical situation; this is accomplished by asking of the text questions which “always bring out the undetermined possibilities of a thing.”\textsuperscript{14} As the circle rotate, Lundin explains the query of the text, “The text in turn questions its reader by challenging and enlarging the anticipatory structures they have brought to it; as they encounter alien elements questioning them through the text, they are forced to revise their assumptions. And out of this process comes the fusion of horizons.”\textsuperscript{15}

Others voices their position on this subject. Yale University’s Professor Paul Fry proposes, the reader comes to text processing what is already known of the text, gasping in parts anticipating

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item\textsuperscript{13}Ibid.
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what the whole might be.\textsuperscript{16} James I. Packer would argue that the hermeneutic process is more accurately spiral than circular. He writes,

If we would understand the parts, our wisest course is to know the whole—or at any rate, those parts of the whole which tell us in plain prose the writer’s central ideas. These give us the keys to all his work. Once we can see the main outlines of his thought and have grasped his general point of view, we are able to see the meaning of everything else—the point of his poems and the moral of his stories, and how the puzzling passages fit in with the rest.\textsuperscript{17}

Packer computes that the spiral movement goes through the motions of preunderstanding, recognition, exegesis, and application. Jean Piaget offers another approach. In his argument on cognitive development, Piaget exposed the innate ability of acquiring wisdom, also known as the theory of schema. Likewise, this theory is based on the “building blocks of knowledge.”\textsuperscript{18} The fact that his studies were focused on the behavior of children reveals the simplicity of moving from one stage to another, or grasping parts to form a whole, also, called an equilibrium, assimilation, and accommodation process. Ancillary exploration publicized the rationale behind the thought, “Gadamer reconceptualized the hermeneutic circle as an iterative process through which a new understanding of a whole reality is developed by means of exploring the detail of existence.”\textsuperscript{19}


\textsuperscript{17} Johnson, Expository Hermeneutic, 75.

\textsuperscript{18}Saul McLeod, “Jean Piaget,” Simply Psychology (accessed February 15, 2014) “Piaget emphasized the importance of schemas in cognitive development, and described how they were developed or acquired. A schema can be defined as a set of linked mental representations of the world, which we use both to understand and to respond to situations. The assumption is that we store these mental representations and apply them when needed.”

Rationale

Peering into the church, from Gadamer’s philosophy, three components of the hermeneutic circle makes up the physical ecclesiastical biosphere: the text, the preacher, and the listener fusing the dialogue of ancient texts to a new world. As is palpable, without the text, there is nothing to preach. Without the preacher, the text would be just another form of literary work. Without the listeners, there would be no one to hear. Consequently, ambassadors for Christ fizzers and disciples are not made. Therefore, each constituent plays a significant role in the exegesis of the text. Each becomes engrossed in the interpretation which speaks volumes of the circle. Gadamer viewed understanding as “linguistically mediated, through conversations with others in which reality is explored and an agreement is reached that represents a new understanding.”

Biblical Text

Evolutions of biblical translations have materialized since versions of the Bible read today were oral texts. Translations have given way to contemporary readings causing a change in syntax, phraseologies, semantic, and more to bridge yesterday with today. However, the Bible does not change, old and ancient as it is, and transformation of diction has not created a weakness. The biblical text continues to speak volume with the authority to galvanize. It joins the conversation of the circle when the hermeneut, as mediator, become engaged with the script at hand, e.g., the manifestation of Daniel in the lion’s den comes to life when the reader joins the plot, building on preconceived knowledge, creating a scene for lives to merge across the horizons. Unlike the critical historical method, identifying literary sources and social setting ascertaining the text’s primitive or original meaning in its original historical context,” Gadamer

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21Daniel 6:16-23.
axes on the conversational message, “…no manner of hurt was found upon him because he believed in his God.” This process refers to God’s penetration of the ancient author and contemporary reader simultaneously. Be conveyed from the divine penetrating author and reader simultaneously. In an age of copiousness, multitudes of Bible translations have condensed the language barriers for interpreting sacred text. Yet, reading with discernment continues to require a perpetual analysis to understand what is being read, inherent, and clenched. What does that look like within the circle?

Exegesis

Scholastically the text is made plain through the exegete. With respect to the text, the exegete encounters the text through exegesis. The Word of God is entrenched in the bowels of the exegete through the intimate relationship. Moreover, the text speaks through the journey of hermeneutics. Interestingly enough, the definition of the hermeneutic circle mirrors the exegetical method. In other words, existential being becomes light for others to witness. In his dissertation on the subject, Theodore Frank Peters, Jr. penned this analysis, “In biblical interpretation and classical philological hermeneutics, the circle represents the whole-part dialectic involved in interpreting the meaning of a text.” Additionally, another voice reiterates what has already been admitted, “We understand only by constant reference to what we have

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23 Ibid.


25 Matt. 5:14-16.

already understood, namely, our past and anticipated experience. People have a "historically-effected" consciousness (wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein) and that they are embedded in the particular history and culture that shaped them." Peters furthers his acumen avowing, “The hermeneutical imperative for Heidegger, and subsequently for Gadamer, is to take a stand over against methods and methodology, asserting that the laying down of a method is just a way of reducing the impact of the being one is encountering.” The circle warrants a verstehen attitude allowing understanding through the hermeneutical ability to enter into the shoes of another. In other words, using intuition and experiences to interpret a biblical writings and proclaiming it through images. The exegete, no longer a spectator reasoning the author’s intent, becomes a participant partaking in the same human nature of the prehistoric while in the present. However, the circle is not without flaws. As with any relationship, tautness is probable. What happens when the conversation goes wrong? Author of Reading & Preaching the Bible, Walter Vogels, let it be known that, “Any relationship involving several partners can easily cause friction.” With this in mind, he enlightens the hemeneut on the mêlée within the circle:

Preachers and listeners sometimes agree that the text is the common enemy; they consider the biblical text to be outdated and irrelevant to the present situation, or the passage from the lectionary to be badly chosen. The listeners often accuse the preacher of living in another world, of speaking a language they do not understand, of not being authentic, of not practicing what he preaches, of not preparing his homilies properly. The preacher for his part is inclined to complain about his audience: how is he supposed to speak meaningfully and adequately to old and young alike, intellectuals and simple people, conservatives and liberals, interested individuals and those who come simply to fulfill their Sunday obligation? He grumbles that he has to address himself to people who prefer to sit scattered throughout the church, instead of grouped together as a community. And last, but not least, if the text could speak, it too would have reason to complain of the abuse and disrespect it is subjected to in the homily.  

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30Vogels, Reading & Preaching The Bible, 17.
31Ibid.,
Dialogue in the circle can adversely become tainted when the exegete’s own interpretation and bias becomes the gospel.32 The spoken text (homily) for many has caused serious problems in the twenty-first century church. Listeners have declined to hear, and sequentially, discipleship is down, resulting in the deterioration of faith that Jesus is real. Vogels’ observations reveal a crucial point: the hermeneutic circle, along with other formulas of interpretation, is a method of interpretation, not the method, but, a method.33 For this reason Gadamer counsels as he quotes Heidegger, “In our interpretation, we have understood that our first, last and constant task is never to allow our fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception to be presented to us by fancies and popular conceptions but rather to make the scientific theme secure by working out the fore-structures in terms of things themselves.”34 The treasure is, regardless of the method used, the exegesis protects the text by crafting a barrier against potential abuse.

Scripture was written for gaining wisdom and understanding from a higher power. The biblical text is the guidepost to developing a relationship with God. It demands a move from doing to being, fulfilling purpose at the feet of Jesus. The relationship centers on the conversation of reading God’s Word, meditating on the Word, praying for understanding of the Word, and heeding the Word. It must become a lifestyle for the mediator if it is to impact the listeners of the present day. A common practice for many is to read the Bible in pieces.

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32The practiced of eisegesis…according to the dictionary (mobile app), “an interpretation, especially of Scripture that expresses the interpreter’s own ideas, bias, or the like, rather than the meaning of the text.” In other words, reading more into the text than what is there.

33Vogels, Reading & Preaching The Bible, 33.

memorizing favorite verses, without grasping the whole picture. This mythology does not allow for deep saturation of Christ’s life to enter the soul.\textsuperscript{35} Meditating on a few passages of Scripture leaves hollow purloins. Wisdom and understanding follows processing the whole concept of the biblical message. Daily Bible reading in conjunction with prayer and meditation is the ingredient to becoming that image of one walking with Christ. According to Rick Warren, “Another word for biblical meditation is ‘rumination.’”\textsuperscript{36} Rumination is what a cow does when it chew its cud. Scriptural mediation is reading a passage over and over again, then thinking about it and concentrating on it in different ways until you have digested its meaning.\textsuperscript{37} Once the text is ingested, an amalgamating of two worlds, the conversation moving within the circle continues with the mediator or exegete regurgitating the inspired word to those who will hear. For those to hear, understand, and receive, the preacher must follow three essential steps in crafting a meaningful effective message. First, he must exegesis the text to know what the text says. Second, he must explore the hermeneutic of what the text means now. Finally, he must share with the hearers through witnessing. Of the three steps, two have been discussed in the previous sections. Subsequently, the next segment takes a look at being a witness within the circle.

\textbf{Messenger}

The conversation now oscillates between the hermeneut or reader and the text and reader or preacher and the listeners. More will be said concerning the preacher in chapter four. For the present, the purpose is to observe the cognizance of the preachers’ role in the scheme of how two worlds interact to produce meaning. The methodological conversation between text and

\textsuperscript{35}Genesis 1:26a


\textsuperscript{37}Ibid.
hermeneutist takes place during the hermeneutist’s time spent reading and digesting the inspired Word. At this point the mediator takes the role of preacher.38 Attention should be given to W. Randolph Tate’s question, “What happens when we read?” Inferring the datum, “The reader…is the person who must make key decisions about what the text says.” 39 Tate shares an allegorical excerpt of Robert Morgan and John Barton that speaks to the movement of what is heard and received through the communication of the reader. They imply that the sure way to bring the text to life is through the personality of the reader.40 The reader, fusing with the original author, consumes the message and makes it live by communicating it to an audience. Without human consumption of the text, it becomes just another script written in a book. Tate reiterates, “But it is the source that gives the wire its potential for illumination or destruction.” Does that mean there are potential barriers that stand between the human personality and the Holy Spirit? That said, what are the liabilities of the reader as the circle rotates from text to the hullabaloo of the message? As the transmitter carrying the message from the text to the listeners, the preacher is expected to be the source of light. How so? The gospel of Matthew says, “You are the light of the world. . .Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”41 Again, how so? It takes ingesting and imitating the inspired word of God. A popular song by Richard Smallwood encourages its listeners to: “Come on in where the

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38Vines and Shaddix, Power in the Pulpit, 27. “Oral communication of biblical truth by the Holy Spirit through a human personality to a given audience with the intent of enabling a positive response.”


41Matthew 5:14-16 NKJV.
table is spread and the feast of the Lord is going on” insinuating feasting on the word of God.\textsuperscript{42} Scripturally, John’s apocalypse in Revelation embodies the analogy of ingesting the text and how sacred text is to be handled. It is written, “So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll; and he said to me, ‘Take it, and eat; it will be bitter to your stomach, but sweet as honey in your mouth.’ So I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it; it was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter.”\textsuperscript{43}

Moreover, Eugene Peterson drafted \textit{Eat This Book} signaling readers to digest what has been inspirationally scripted allowing a transformation to occur synchronously.\textsuperscript{44} On the above Scripture, he states, “This book makes us participants in the world of God’s being and action; but we don’t participate on our own terms. We don’t get to make up the plot or decide what character we will be. This book has generative power; things happen to us as we let the text call forth, stimulate, rebuke, and prune us. We don’t end up the same.”\textsuperscript{45} Now, like Ezekiel and John, the preacher finds himself meditating on the Word. Likewise, Peterson tell readers that cherishing the intelligence of knowing what Scripture means yet, not living what one know does little for edifying the body of Christ. He states that, “Reading is an immense gift, but only if the words are assimilated, taken into the soul—eaten, chewed, gnawed, and received in unhurried delight.”\textsuperscript{46} His point is, become what is read. Allow the inspired Word of God to take hold of the


\textsuperscript{43}Revelation 10:9-10.

\textsuperscript{44}Eugene H. Peterson, \textit{Eat This Book: A conversation in the art of spiritual reading} (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2006).

\textsuperscript{45}Peterson, \textit{Eat This Book}, 66.

\textsuperscript{46}Ibid.
soul procreating wisdom, discernment, and understanding. To make it plain, John conveys his plight in Revelation, “Take it, and eat; it will be bitter to your stomach, but sweet as honey in your mouth. ‘So I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it; it was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter.’ Then they said to me, ‘You must prophesy again about many peoples and nations and languages and kings.’” In other words, digest the word of God, taste its sweetness, understand the discomfort of its truths and allow the Holy Spirit within to draw men to Christ fulfilling the Great Commission. Another example of the conversation between text and moderator is exemplified in Ezekiel’s bout with God’s Word, “He said to me: O mortal, stand up on your feet, and I will speak with you. And when he spoke to me, a spirit entered into me and set me on my feet; and I heard him speaking to me.” The apostle Paul laid it out to be ingested through rumination, “... Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love.” The task before the elected prism of being for the twenty-first century Christian is not one of fame, it is one of humility.

The *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* defines being as, “The most basic characteristic or property of all things that exists, their reality, essences or “whatness.” The importance of that being becomes existential when merged with the power of a higher being.

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48 Revelation 10:9b-11.

49 Matthew 28:19.


51 Ephesians 4:1b-2 KJV.


53 Ibid
Schleiermacher contends that, “Individuality being is not merely particular existence, limited finite particularity.”

It is a symbol of divine intervention. Continuing his thought he writes, “Accordingly it is impossible to attain the salvation of communion with God by way of metaphysical speculation. God is not a universal idea. One can only experience the reality of God through the manifestation of his reality in concrete life and to the individual.”

In other words, an action must take place. Redeker express it as, “The self is unrestrained action and creative spirit. In the individual, multiplicity is brought together into a single living unity and in this wholeness and unity one sees the reflection of the divine wholeness and unity.”

Of the same quintessence, weighing the theology of John Macquarrie and Martin Heidegger, Eugene Thomas Long writes of Heidegger’s contrast between being and existence. Heidegger uses Vorhandenheit to describe being, “present at hand,” which simply means as in an object or of supernatural. On the other hand, Exitenz is used to describe being that relates to humankind. To better explain, Long penned, “Being is that which is an issue for every such entity. Human existence, understood in this way, is held to be disclosed to itself as unfinished, never complete in its being.”

A memo from Soren Kierkegaard would read, “By coming in relationship with an external Power, the individual acknowledges higher obligations than those of the community and

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54 Redeker, Schleiermacher, 55.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid., 56.
visible authorities.” His thinking is God is at the center of ones being moving one to higher ground. Whereas, Gadamer introduces, “What man needs is not only a persistent asking of ultimate questions, but the sense of what is feasible, what is possible, what is correct, here and now. The philosopher, of all people, must, I think, be aware of the tension between what he claims to achieve and the reality in which he finds himself.”

Achieving the ultimate purpose on the Christian journey requires discipline. The biblical canvas expresses numerous tomes vis-à-vis self-restraint with vibrant aphorisms, e.g., “And God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.” In the book of Job, Elihu proclaims, “He openeth also their ear to discipline, and commandeth that they return from iniquity.” Using today’s language, the New International versus reads, “He make them listen to correction and commands them to repent of their evil.” And, “Let the word of Christ dwell in your richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” One commentator interpret the latter text as, “Being filled with the Spirit and being filled with God’s word are both requisite for living joyful, useful, fruitful lives. We shall not be filled with the Spirit unless we are saturated with God’s word; and the study of God’s word will not be effective unless we yield up our inmost being to the control of the Holy

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59 Gadamer, Truth and Method, xxiii.

60 Colossians 3:12

61 Job 36:10 KJV

62 Job 36:10 NIV.

63 Colossians 3:16 NKJV.
He then asks the question, “Can we not therefore conclude that to be filled with the Spirit means to be filled with God’s word?” It means understanding that Scripture is a diet that requires daily feasting. Feasting on the Word of God, means commune with Him daily by reading, mediating, and then living as if He resides with one through every breath. Digesting the Word of God creates a luminous being by becoming what is absorbed through written Scriptures. A radiation of light radiating off ones being affecting all that come in contact with them, representing the Savior with an attitude of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance.

The Gospels recount Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. There are many parallels in their stories. Yet, with fine scrutiny, the differences are overwhelming. The most noticeable difference can be found in their witness through being: that a tax collector can become humble enough to follow Jesus or a physician would credit healing to the Holy Spirit instead of science. Schleiermacher would argue, “Understanding an author is more than understanding his words.” The point is the preacher can tell the story but if he cannot connect with the scene, his message falls flat. This requires the preacher to know the people as well as the message, meaning, he must exegete both the Scripture and current audience. As it stands, the audience in question for this

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66 “And may the Master pour on the love so it fills your lives and splashes over on everyone around you, just as it does from us to you. May you be infused with strength and purity, filled with confidence in the presence of God our Father when our Master Jesus arrives with all his followers” 1 Thess. 3:12-13 Message Bible.

67 Galatians 5:22-23.

68 Roy Howard, *Three faces of Hermeneutics: An Introduction to Current Theories of Understanding* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982). According to Howard, Schleiermacher considered this as being on a “divinatory” or “psychological” level. Meaning one must “understand the spirit which initiated and controlled the writing, and for whose representation the writing exists,”9.
project is African American Baptist. Chapter three will focus on the African American community. For now, a look into the Baptist conviction is in order. It has been written that, “The Baptist comprises one of the largest and most diverse groupings of Christians in the United States. Technically, there are no such things as Baptist denominations, because Baptists are strongly congregational in polity: Each local congregation is independent of the other.” Baptist doctrine is based on eighteen Articles of Faith. Baptist are known for their belief that Scripture is inspirational written with God being the ultimate author. That there is only one true God and Baptism means being fully immersed in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Moreover, communion is served by ordained ministers or deacons to those who are baptized believers.

Sadly, Baptists are thought to be theologically illiterate. James Wm. McClendon, Jr. explains the said poverty of Baptist theology: “These communities have been preoccupied with the harsh struggle to survive and have not had the leisure for theological reflection.”

McClendon calligraphies some important observation concerning obstacles that led to the Baptist struggles, such as the revival awakening that left a colophon upon their piety. Another issue was the struggle over Scripture, about which he writes, “From the later nineteenth century to the present, a second dilemma, almost unrelated to the first, appeared and dominated other (and once again, Baptists’) intellectual energies.” He also states that, “In this struggle, Modernist of

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73 Ibid., 25.
unbelief—each being at least partially right in its harsh judgment of the other, which neither seemed able to find a standpoint above the battle from which to see what stake Christians had in the outcome of the struggle.”

All is not lost, McClendon adds, “Nevertheless, authentic Baptist convictions lives.” Baptists have followed the same path as most societal entities with their ongoing periods of droughts, unbelief, and decline. Yet, Baptists continue to leave great imprints on the masses. A robust word from McClendon that ends with a question echoed throughout this thesis, “Recovering what has been lost is not the only goal here, nor is it the main one. However it may have been previously, ethics is what we have now, and Christian ethics is our concern. Its real question is, How must the church live to be the church?” Consequently, the twenty-first century church places the preacher under the microscope to determine reliability of what he preaches. From the pen of Vines and Shaddix, “The preacher must not only spend time preparing the message, but he also must prepare himself; the contemporary preacher must give attention to the issues of character and integrity, intellectual development, physical fitness, and study habits.” In other words, the theology of the Baptist church is broadcasted through the ethic of its witness. This warrants a new streak of probing. Are Christian ethics visible in churches today? What does the world see when they see the carrier of God’s message? Numerous pragmatic ripostes can answer this query; however, accommodators of postmodernism are a more favorable retort. This

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74 McClendon, Ethics, 25.
75 Ibid.
76 Ibid., 46.
77 Vines and Shaddix, Power in the Pulpit, 73.
thinking is modeled in a popular reality series “Preachers of LA.” A. Adam addresses this concern with philosophies from a variety of scholars in order to offer examples of what happens when interpreters whose conversations have been diseased with accents of postmodern thinking approach the text: “…human freedom has both constructive and dangerous consequences, and neither God nor human beings have quite figured out how to deal with its dual potentials.” The question stemming from his logic is does our exegesis, especially in the postmodern readings, get a little too clever at times? For the doubtful, the preacher preaches, “The differences and the conflicts between human beings have not disappeared in the new [world]; we will still challenge each other. Each of us will still need to hear the word of God in the accusation of the brother and sister who suffers from the conditions which make us comfortable and secure.” A positive note for the church is transformation has taken place among conflict due to Christian believers’ gift of fearing not and taking a stand.” Taking a stand and standing on the Word of God also means having right standing in the name of the Lord.

A message from the apostle Paul is in order: “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.” Witnessing through being speaks volumes of the

80 Adam, Postmodern Interpretations of the Bible, 187
83 Ephesians 4:1-3.
preacher. Ethical practices are just as vital to the twenty-first century church as it was to the first church. The same instructions Paul gave to the latter church applies to the former.

**Listeners**

Children around the world sing the song, “Yes, Jesus loves me! This I know because the Bible tells me so.” How do they know the Bible tells them so without an interpreter? In the book of Acts, Philip asks an Ethiopian a similar question. The apostle Luke coins the analysis with Philip and the Ethiopian,

Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch . . . He had come to Jerusalem to worship . . . seating in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over to this chariot and join it.” So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, “Do you understand what you are reading? He replied, “How can I, unless someone guides me? How can one absorb what one does not understand? The apostle Luke elucidates this probe in the above scripture with Philip and the Ethiopian. From the view of the hermeneutic circle: Isaiah is being read, yet, not understood by an Ethiopian eunuch; God’s messenger is sent to elaborate on the Scripture and the present hearer receives, understands, and seeks God for himself. Later Luke explains the Ethiopians baptism. In other words, because of the mediator God’s word is not returned void. Moreover, “[In the same way, you who are younger must accept the authority of the elders. And all of you must clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another, for God opposed the proud, but gives grace to the humble”

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85 Acts 8:29b-31a.

86 Isaiah 55:11.

87 1 Peter 5:5.
created humankind to fulfill a purpose. In such a time as this, the mediator’s voice—verbal and non-verbal—needs to become even more consecrated in its witness as it transmits to the listeners’ ear. Who are the children sliding from the pews presently needing guidance? The twenty-first century church is made up of a new kind of listener. Graham Johnston shares a few tenets branding the postmodern audience: Such as, “The former sources for answers on how to conduct one’s life, like family and society, are obsolete.”\footnote{Johnson, \textit{Preaching to a Postmodern World}, 23.} Plus, “Each person becomes his or her own authority interpreting life and in deterring what’s the right path.”\footnote{Ibid.} And, “Complete openness to possibilities is applauded, and the attitude prevails that only stupidity or arrogance would cause one to eliminate options based on someone else’s prescribed standard.”\footnote{Johnson, \textit{Preaching to a Postmodern World}, 23.} Lastly, he states, “Relationships are essential, and the pursuit of meaningful relationships is a worthy goal, perhaps even the highest goal.”\footnote{Ibid.} More will be said concerning listeners in the next chapter.

Now that the listeners have heard, whether they have believed or not, the conversation goes back to the text for confirmation. Some will search to prove the messenger was wrong in his interpretation. Other will search because they believe and want more of what they heard. The following quote, erected from the dissertation of Theodore Peters, supports the thoughts of this chapter, “Methods tend to silence the speaking of Being because they lead us to listen to only what we want to hear. The phenomenon is thus distorted by the desires and aims of the hearer and every disclosure takes on the character of a forced confession, a surrender to the will-to-power of modern man.”\footnote{Peters, "Method and Truth,” 17-18.}
Over the centuries churches have gone through many changes. Largely, a paradigm shift happens because each generation spews new thinkers. Change is a way of keeping the church growing. Problems with change enter the church when core values are abandoned for the sake of a new method. It is imperative for leaders to understand method evolves with time, but principles never change. It goes back to the saying, methods are many, principles are few, methods may change, but principles never do. Principles are core values that remains regardless of the method used in the church, eternal truth taught in the Bible (timeless truths). Five core principles that the foundation of the church is built on are: worship, ministry, mission, discipleship, and fellowship. These principles are never to be forsaken because they are the grout that cements the ecclesia message.

Methods are the means by which the core values are used to carry out the program. An application of an evangelistic principle to a particular culture is effective for a particular length of time, but probably not forever. It is wise to understand that the evolution of methods that worked yesterday is obsolete today because when people or the time shift, certain methods lose their effectiveness. Following is a timeline of some methods that have worked, stepping stones that helped grow church in their time, yet, no longer are viewed as appropriate: The Brush Arbor meetings of the 1800s where street preaching was effective. Door-to-door evangelism was popular between 1900 and 1950. From 1960 to 1975, the Sunday School Bus evangelism created a lot of growth. And then, there was the Church Growth Movement, peaking between 1960 and 1990, using all means to reach the unchurched. Television played a major role in evangelism.

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93 Books\Why Not One Million People in One Church\EDITED TOWNS.MULLINS 9.29.11\SECTION II\04 Core Values necessary to build a one million person churchn-EDITS.docx. Class Notes: DSMN 997 Spring 2012.

94 Ibid., Class notes.
during this time period. These movements were characterized by three elements. First, all movements were reaching lost people, winning them to Christ and getting them to church. Next, church planting denominations grew not by growing existing churches but by planting new churches to reach new converts to Christ. And then, applying scientific research methods to discover, articulate & communicate the New Testament principles that produced growing churches. Church growth was on the rise for approximately twenty years. From that twenty year span, mega churches were born. The theory of reaching as many people as possible through various means took effect. It has been said that those who fell in love with the results of the church growth also fell in love with the methods they used; in other words they did not change with the times. That speaks of where the church is today, mainly because principles have been lost in the realm of postmodernism. Some of the arguments for today’s decline in the pews are the mentality that grand mamma’s church practices are out dated creating a decline of young believers. More disciples are attending online churches; plus, new methods used to create growth do not match the culture of the church. Nevertheless, channels that power church movement, text, preacher, and listeners, still stand in the midst of societal chaos. The rationalization behind the postmodernists’ flight from the church can be explained in Unchristian: What a New Generation really Think About Christianity ...And Why it Matters. Those authors, “attributes the exodus of young people against the churches’ supposed indifference to the suffering and struggles of the Blacks, the poor and other oppressed groups.” At the same time, Kinnaman and Lyons believes, “The church that is supposed to look out for the less fortunate was not practicing

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95 Books\Why Not One Million People in One Church\EDITED TOWNS.MULLINS 9.29.11\SECTION II\04 Core Values necessary to build a one million person church-EDITS.docx. Class Notes: DSMN 997 springs 2012.

what it preached and the young people saw this happen and ended up leaving the church.”

Robert James Kauffelt offers solutions to thwarting the nuance that is abating the church pews. He writes in his Doctor of Ministry Thesis project, “The solution to the problem is simple: Live the word as well as read it; get people out of their comfort zones and abandon age old traditions; become doers of the Word; and leaders must lead by example.”

To draw the younger generation, the church must present itself as the bride of Jesus Christ; in other words, being faithful to the living God, digesting the Word, meditating on the Word, and living faithfully according to the Word of God.

This author believes and supports the theory that higher biblical learning is the key to fully understanding what it is for the church to be the bride of Christ. As more and more young people seek higher education, so should the pulpit.

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97 Ibid.

CHAPTER III

ANALYSES, STATISTICS, INTERVIEWS, AND SEVEN KEY SOLUTIONS

PROMOTING HIGHER LEARNING

In 1859, Charles Dickens wrote about a time that resembles the plight of the present age. He wrote in a *Tale of Two Cities*,

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to heaven, we were all going direct the other way - in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.1

Similarly, the church living in the abundances of the twenty-first century also reaps vintages of rewards and challenges. Technology is titivating how we worship. With internet church and churches streaming live services, many have the option of attending church without leaving home. Knowledge is abounding and comes at one’s fingertip.2 So much so, that at times the voice of God is debarred. Research reveals a contrast between spirituality and religious practice as many retreat from becoming adherents of organized institutions.3 Meanwhile, the cycle in which the church spews: text, preacher, listeners, remains constant.4 The question becomes, if the main components are in place, why a decline in followers instead of a draw in


2George Barna, “New Statistics on Church Attendance and Avoidance,” Barna Group,” October 22, 2013, (accessed November 12, 2013). Reports the plight of the new age, “Twitter, Facebook, eBooks, news feeds, mobile apps are all information sources that didn’t exist just a few years ago, and they are changing the way the modern consumer processes information. These digital mediums have introduced to reading and to information a whole new level of scrolling, skimming and synopsizing.”


4For this project, this term is also called flock, hearers, sheep, congregation, and the postmodern twenty-first century church.
making disciples? Perhaps the text rests in the canon and has not penetrated the soul of the messenger. Perhaps messengers embark on preaching coquettishly appeasing to a world-view, serving or giving to gain with disregard for a Jesus view, grace is free. Perhaps the audience is listening with an ossified heart. A sundry analysis interpreting all the crucial issues piercing today’s churches requires a more exhaustive research. Time and space for this study limits such exploration. Therefore, for the present, this exegetical probe focuses on the African American Southern Baptist community’s analytical thinking within the hermeneutic circle. From the analytical reports, semiotic approaches in interpretations, and pastoral interviews, seven key solutions for promoting higher education for the African American church are enumerated.

**Culture and Statistical Analyses**

Disciples from a Southern Baptist African American church took a trip to Baltimore, Maryland to tour the National Great Blacks in Wax Museum. During the tour, they were able to take a peep inside a slave ship. The mawkishness of what took place in those close quarters enveloped the room: thousands of men, women, and children; chained, mangled, dying ~ the sick and the dead packed in the bottom of that ship like sardines. The disciples got a glimpse of slaves trying to escape, slaves being hunted, slaves being beating. For a brief moment, they stepped back in time. Today, many still carry the pain of their ancestors, four hundred years of pain. The question is still being asked, “Why did God allow this to go on for approximately 258 years?” On another floor, the clock was rewound back to segregation; the power of hate was capture and frozen in time. The discrimination, the lynching; it was so real that many could not finish the tour.

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Studies show that many who are sitting in the pews today are of those still carrying the pains of yesterday. According to a recent pew report, 75% of members of the predominance black church are over the age of thirty. Of the seventy-five percent, 36% are of the Buster generation—those among the thirty to forty-nine age groups. 24% falls into the Baby Boomer category, aging fifty to sixty-four. And Elders ranging from sixty-five plus make up 15%. These numbers are significant because most over the age of thirty hold on tightly to the views and pains of yesterday. Whereas, the Mosaics, those under thirty, views life somewhat differently than their parents and grandparents. They are creating a stir in society, as well as in the church, where they are challenging the minds of yesterday. A mien into the 2008 presidential election reveals how it was the young minds that cracked the ceiling that change the face of the United States president: “Voters in the 18 to 24 age group broke 68 percent for Obama to 30 percent for John McCain, according to the exit polling. Those in the 25 to 29 age bracket went 69 percent to 29 percent in Obama's favor. The only age group where McCain prevailed was 65 and over, and that by just a 10-percentage-point margin, 54 percent to 44 percent, the exit polls showed.” Although great strides have been made today, such as having an African American president, many would say that we have not come far enough.

Portrayers of the above thought can be found in the sermon “We Who Bear Witness” preached February 2014. The sermon speaks volumes to the plight of the African American community. It paints a portrait of a broken system that continues to plague Americans’ blacks.

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Slavery ended, segregation ended, yet, older blacks cogitate oppression as still existing and active today. Therefore, their only hope is to believe in the One who can bring about deliverance.\(^9\) When it comes to trusting systematic institutions, statistics show this age group favoring church over government and education. Barna reports that 41% of Elders (65-plus) and Baby Boomers (50-64) trust in the ecclesia institution; whereas only 34% of Gen-X (30-49) and 30% of Millennials (18-29) share in that trust.\(^10\) Moreover, research from a pew study echoes another scenario:

Major differences are also apparent in the proportion of each age group that has no formal religious affiliation. Adults under age 30 are more than three times as likely as those age 70 and older to be unaffiliated with any particular religion (25% vs. 8%). The younger group is also more likely than the adult population as a whole to be atheist or agnostic (7% vs. 4%). It is important to note, however, that more than a third (35%) of young adults who have no particular religious affiliation are in the “religious unaffiliated” category, that is, they say that religion is somewhat important or very important in their lives.\(^11\)

On another note, Millennials places higher values on academes, with 32% trusting compared to 15% for Gen-X, 8% for Baby Boomers, and Elders at 9%.\(^12\) The young, believing with every right that they stand at the same height as their white counter parts, dismisses the idea that they are in bondage. Although, according to John Thornhill, it is not enough. He writes, “For all its drive and apparent success, however, our western culture is now suffering a crisis of self-

\(^9\)“For he delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those who have no helper. He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy. From oppression and violence he redeems their life; and precious is their blood in his sight” Psalm 72:12-14.

\(^10\)Gen-X & Millenials is used interchangeable with Mosaics & Buster in referencing to the younger generations.


confidence.”

Still, the under thirty crowd sees a world of acceptance; a world that is blind to pigment of skin; a world where one does not have to live in fear of being different; and most importantly, a world where higher education grants jobs of choice. This thinking has not reached primogenital black congregations in the same way. Although a majority of older disciples may lack higher education, many encourage the younger generation to pursue the journey. Sadly, the educational gap continues to grow among African Americans in comparison to other races. Figures depicting historically black churches’ levels of education expose two facts. First, the listeners in African American places of worship are made up of older congregates. Secondly, postmodern thinkers find little solace in the church, creating a great disintegration. Subsequently a recent Gallup poll states, “Blacks are more religious than any other race or ethnic group in America.” One would have to ask: does lack of education or out-of-the-box thinking among the majority play a role in the loss of Mosaics? Could it be in the interpretation of Thus saith the Lord? Would advance training among minister make a difference? If so, why are not more striving for seminary? Thomas Hoyt, Jr. shines light on the latter question: “Black biblical

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14 Religious Landscape Survey, “Portraits,” Pew Research: Religion & Public Life Project, (accessed March 1, 2014). “Fifty-nine percent have a high school diploma or less, with forty percent being graduates and nineteen percent with no high school diploma; twenty-five percent have some college, eleven percent college graduates, and five percent post graduate.”


16 An expression used within some Black community when speaking negatively of someone’s interpretation of Scripture.

17 Barbara G. Wheeler and Anthony T. Ruger, “Sobering Figures Point to Overall Enrollment Decline,” Truth Journal, 2013 (accessed March 22, 2014. According to the article, “Barbara G. Wheeler is director of the Pathways to Seminary project. Anthony T. Ruger is interim co-director of the Auburn Center for the Study of Theological Education, under whose auspices the project was conducted. Data for this article were supplied by the Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools from annual report forms completed by member schools.”
interpreters have developed their own unique interpretive tradition based on ancient, recent, and contemporary scholarship.”

Hoyt continues, “The preacher is especially called upon to use imagination interpreting Scripture, for the congregation, Scripture come to life through the images used by the preacher.”

For this reason the hermeneutic circle, without relying on seminary, works for African Americans ministers. It works because African Americans, unlike their white colleagues, see themselves in the events of the biblical story. They connect to their plight of slavery, oppression, calling on the Lord for deliverance. A vis-à-vis with the Mosaics have proven that because of their affluences, they are not connecting in the same way as Busters, Baby Boomers, and Elders; therefore, their need to rely on God’s sovereignty lacks relevance. An example of the ancient thought is highlighted in *The Negro Church in America* where E. Franklin Frazier illuminates the beginning of the African [American] experience translating biblical knowledge on foreign soil.

Selected parts of the Bible, such as the Lord’s Prayer and the Ten Commandments, were used by the masters for the religious instruction of slaves. In addition, stories from the Bible were told in simple language to the slaves. The slaves became familiar with the well-known biblical characters and their role in the drama of salvation as it was presented to the Negro. Through the medium of the Negro preacher the stories in the Bible were dramatized for the Negro and many characters and incidents were interpreted in terms of the Negro’s experiences.

There are critics who dispute such an elementary approach. There are also those that support such basic teachings, which is epitomized in Benjamin Jowett’s famous 1854 essay

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19 Hoyt, *Stony the Road*, 35.


21 American in brackets following African speaks to African ancestors and Blacks born and raised in America; today, many blacks do not consider themselves to be Africans.
quoted by Stanley Hauerwas. The quote reads, “Scripture has one meaning, the meaning which it had in the mind of the Prophet or Evangelist who first uttered or wrote, to the hearers or readers who first received it.”

22 Hauerwas provides an ephemeral account of what that quote entails: Jowett did not foresee great difficulties in the way of getting to the meaning which was in the mind of the author. Obviously interpretation requires imagination, the ability to put oneself in an alien situation, the knowledge of a language, and the history of an ancient people.”

23 This is a testament for the Black church where imagery overrules a more critical analysis of interpreting biblical text. It has been said that, “Black theology has been instructive at the point of letting us know that any religious education program that might be constructed must grow out of the center around the experiences, relationships, and situational dilemmas that black people face in their day-to-day struggle to survive, develop, and progress in an often hostile, uncaring, majority-dominated society.”

24 This is also seen in a more contemporary scholarship with Hoyt’s philosophy, “Scripture is more than a body of abstract thought and generalizations. It is usually very concrete, especially in the narrative parts. There are many images and a rich deposit of symbolic language. These are not grasped with only the intellect but also with the imagination.”

25 To relate the history in the Scripture to one’s own time, one needs to use his or her imagination while also providing a basis to relate present experience to the text of Scripture. To use the imagination means that one must allow the verbal images of the text to evoke mental

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22 Stanley Hauerwas, Unleashing the Scripture: Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993), 33.

23 Hauerwas, Unleashing the Scripture, 33.


25 Ibid.
images in the interpreter and the hearer. The black preacher was and is a master of this use of Scripture.\textsuperscript{26}

Again, the purpose for this thesis stems from the belvedere; although the biblical message remains the same synchronously churches today are struggling with steep declines in discipleship. Why? The author’s hope is to channel broader thoughts on how seminary experience can make a difference in accomplishing the assignment commissioned by Jesus to a postmodern society. The research is designed to expose the validity of higher learning as the gateway for today’s disciples seeking certainty in the ecclesia messages as society metamorphoses its thoughts toward an epoch of unbelief. It is a challenge aimed at forerunners to launch self-evaluations in lieu of interpreting, preaching, and teaching biblically and authentically that fulfillment of the Great Commission lives regardless of changing times.

\textbf{Pastoral Interview}

To gain perspicacity from forerunners leading the flock, three senior pastors of various age groups, degrees, church sizes, and longevity participated in the discussion on the malady of the church and its future. Interviews, gauging approximately sixty minutes, were held separately. Pastors were asked to voice their thought concerning where the church is, why the church is where it is, and how to move the church from where it is; in other words, what plans are in place for church growth? Results of the interviews are as follow: The question was asked, “Have you seen a decline in membership? If so, what are your thoughts why members may be leaving?” Pastor A answered, “Yes. The decline I believe goes back to an earlier answer that, we as leaders are not preaching like we believe what we preach. And if we do believe, we don’t live it.”

\textsuperscript{26}Foster and Smith, \textit{Black Religious Experience Conversations on double consciousness and the work of Grant Shockley}, 34.
Participant B voiced, “We have seen a small decline. I do believe most of ours have been from members going to other churches.” When asked, “What do you think is the overall reason behind those moving?” the reply was, “The divorce factor is one. When there is a divorce, either one or the other leaves or neither remains. We have seen some of the younger folks leave. Also, new livelier churches popping up in the area are attracting members of established traditional churches. The same with new pastors, naturally they are going to attract. It goes with the territory.” Moreover, he muses, “You learn your phases. You go through and you prepare. It gives you a chance to go back and refine some things. And the good part about being in this area, even though, you can’t dismiss the recession because we have had a good number of people who had to relocate because of lost jobs, we have not lost more than 10%.” Participant C’s rejoinder to the question, “I am aware of a decline. I’ve talked to several pastors in the area and they have also noticed a decline. I think, here is my personal belief, I think for many, church is not perceived relevant, um, to the needs that people have. In other words, what they are looking for they are not finding. People are looking for something; yet, they don’t know quite what they are looking for but they know it’s not in a traditional church.” As the interview went continued, the question arrived, “What’s your position on churches that offers multiple services without offering Sunday school; where people are put in age appropriate classes so the scripture can be broken down to meet everyone’s need?” Pastor C states, “They are not concerned about the education portion. They are concerned with growing the church where they can become huge mega churches. It’s a cycle.”

The next question for the participants was, “What are your views toward postmodernism? Similar to the first question, the answers were thought provoking yet different in scope. Pastor A responded with, “In this day and time, we have a much smarter young people, as they say smart
phone, we have a smart phone generation. We have to be able to deal with that.” He also believes the unbelief in our changing world stems from a wiser generation. He voices, “This is a smart generation, an internet generation. I believe you can go to the internet to catch the youth. But I also believe that personal contact, um, talking face to face is better. I can say anything on internet, but can I really walk it? For example, um, with the young adults watching and reading…I can say ‘I love you on Facebook’ but then in person, I’m cutting up, I’m hating and all that stuff. It can have a negative effect.”

When asked, pastor B said, “Even though the young adults, postmodernity thinkers, have a mistrust of the church, I say, get the parents in and the young will come. Zoom in on parents and their children will follow. We just hired another minister of youth with an earned doctorate, very energetic, who’s putting some of our resources into, um, an organized ministry with the young in mind.” He continues his thought on attracting parents, “If you get the parents, if I zoom in and reach fathers and mothers, the children are going to come. If I get the children, fathers and mothers may come. I’ve heard, ‘if you win the mother, you have a good chance of the children coming, but if you win the father chances of the mother and children coming are even greater.’”

Pastor C’s reaction to the question about postmodernity is,

It’s about change. There’s—and this is very relevant when I think about it; when I was in leadership training last week, um, the speaker talked about “grow, change, or die.” It’s a pattern. Grow, change, or die. You know, if you don’t change, you don’t grow, if you don’t grow, you’re going to die. I made that analogy to the church. The church can’t continue doing the same thing, ok, and expect to live. If no one is talking about how we can grow, if now one is talking about how we can change the stuff we have been doing for years, the younger thinkers move on. There is always opposition; so what happens is, some churches are dying and the death is manifested in different ways. I am studying organizational behavior and one of the things I am learning is that organizations that move are those that change. They don’t get locked in where they are.

Participants were asked, “How would you describe the relationship between the biblical text, message, and what is heard?” And, “Do you see a connection between the messenger and
postmodernity’s’ unbelief?” Answers to these queries conveyed another variance. Participant A said, “It’s simple. It’s about the visual. When you say, I prayed to the Lord, yet, even though He did not come when I when I thought, but when He came, it was right on time, situations turns around with the quick of an eye.” He finished the answering with, “The connection is you got to believe what you are preaching. If the messenger doesn’t believe what he is preaching, the people are not going to believe.” Participant B replied, “I think, for instance, with the text, “God should supply,” and you talk about the exegesis of it, that’s when I look at the context and find out who the author is writing to, how he is responding to the peoples’ actions.” As for postmodernity, Participant B said, “Sometimes we’re reluctant to speak, to teach, even as a pastor. We’re reluctant because, we don’t want to be looked upon negatively. We don’t want to have our position in jeopardy. On top of that we don’t want to lose members. It’s about being in the twenty-first century but not allowing the twenty-first century to change the flow of church. Lastly, Participant C says, “There are two parts to that. One, there is an attempt to choose a message where the spirit of the Lord has spoken to you that you take a strong belief in what the spirit is speaking and resonate with what God has placed in your heart for the body to hear.” His second point is, “Secondly, you have to understand you have a diversity of members. There is a diversity of needs, a diversity of interest, and a diversity of spiritual maturity. So what you have to do is be led by the spirit and try to speak to what it leads you to speak.”

Studies have shown that basilicas do not hold the same authority they did a few decades ago. Therefore, the participants were asked, “How can the church regain trust?” And, “What do you think needs to be done to draw more disciples to Christ?” Thoughts expressed from Participant A are, “To regain the church, two things are needed. First, we have to do fellowship.” And secondly, “We cannot be faked about anything. The traditional church had the power of its
time. Nothing else would do, it was tradition. And now we have to come with a new fellowship. As far as what need to be done to draw more disciples; I am not going to say my method is the right method, but what is helping my church is me teaching that we must live what we preach.”

The question was repeated for the next participant, He tackles the query blatantly with, “I try to lead our folks in reality. I do not teach that we are better than everyone else. And so, we come in knowing we are all sinners saved by grace. And, if I don’t know the answer, I don’t try to makeup an answer. I believe when you can be straight up with people, they appreciate us much more.” Continuing, he say, “Sometimes you have young Christians or the world having greater expectations of the church than they should, forgetting the church is for the sick. Even Jesus’ handpicked twelve had issues. The church still have those issues today. I tell them we are vessels and have a treasure, not in self, but in the Gospel. Participant C’s philosophy on this matter, “Here’s what I think really needs to be done, we need to get back to the tenet where Jesus gave his commandment, go ye therefore, the church is going to have to do more evangelism and outreach. Disciples have to understand that they have a mandate, not just to come to church and sit, but to evangelize. I believe more conversations need to be held on the strategy of outreach and growth.”

The last questions asked of the participants pertaining to associates ministers were, “What training do you currently have in place for associate minister? What are your thoughts on seminary and do you believe ministers should have some seminary experience prior to ordination?” Participant A stated that he had four associates currently serving under him. He enunciated that while they attend seminary, as of today none have earned a degree. He believes seminary is a benefit and is needed because, “I tell my ministers, I am not preparing you for today, I’m preparing you for tomorrow. I really believe seminary is necessary because of the
smart generation. So, yes, I believe some seminary training should be required prior to ordination.” There are between thirty to thirty-five associates serving participant B’s church. Approximately fifteen hold seminary or other degrees with three holding a doctorate. As far as training, pastor B said, “We don’t have training courses here, but we encourage associates to go to school. Plus, we offer them some tuition. I see it as a definite benefit. It’s a prerequisite for ministers to be in school prior to being able to preach here. You don’t get ordained here unless you have either being called to a ministry like pastor or chaplain or you have finished your degree. According to participant C, nineteen associates’ ministers are abetting his ministry. There is some biblical training but nothing formal in place. He puts great emphasis on associates participating in the Baptist Association training. He states, “There are workshops available but I don’t think many take advantage of them.” Thus far, only two have seminary degrees.” About this, he says, “I am trying to prepare ministers to know other aspects of what ministry is beyond the teaching.” To answer whether it’s a benefit for ministers to attend seminary, he answered, “Seminary training is a benefit but I don’t see seminary training to be a testament to the effectiveness of a minister for ordination purposes. Here are the things I think are important for ordination, for one, there have to be a demonstration of ability to teach. And two, you have been called to a ministry or to pastor. Concluding this section, a message from William H. Myers on the topic of furthering education for the African American church is warrant,

We must inquire into the history of this wider Canonical perspective in our community, clearly articulating how and why it developed, how it functioned and how the intricate dynamics and relationships between these various sources helped to give shape to each other, to our hermeneutical methodology, as well as to our self-understanding as African Americans. I am convinced that the results of this kind of inquiring will reflect both our uniqueness as well as a broadening and deepening of the canonical perspective and interpretative methodology.”

Solution #1: Recover the Hurt

It was noted in the cultural analysis that seventy-five percent of church goers are over thirty. As a result 75% is holding on to yesterday’s pain. A major plague stifling African American’s moves toward higher learning is holding on to the pains and anguish of slavery and segregation. It is time to recover, forgive, and embrace where life is today.28 Today’s ministers are presented with many challenges today that require assistance from licensed counselors.

Sitting in the pews are hurting people. On a given Sunday, the pews house broken spirits due to sorrow of the heart: chronic feelings that there is never enough time, stressed out disciples, sex addicts, broken marriages, anxiety disorders, clinical disorders, obsessive compulsiveness, alcoholism, drug abusers, and gambles to name a few.29 The preacher must become a counselor. To deal with the array of issues embracing the sanctuary, the preacher is forced to see the elephant in the room. Many believe that the church has a responsibility to counter the epidemics pouncing on many Christians. Due to the nature of the most contents, churches tend to be silent. Churches refusing to see become neutralized; one cannot treat what one cannot see. Churches must find a way to address the plagues that the congregation is facing today. It begins with finding the voice to bring awareness and then offers workshops and programs to tackle the evilness. The lesson just may have to come from the pulpit in lieu of a sermon. Before the pulpit can tackle raw issues, training in counseling can potentially be the difference of success or failure. In “Clinical Diagnosis and Treatment Planning,” a chapter in Competent Christian Counseling, Miriam Stark Parent and Tim Clinton advise,

While lack of diagnostic training, professional turf disputes, or theoretical bias may tempt us to bypass diagnostic assessment, we no longer have that luxury. Even pastors who counsel is increasingly called upon to articulate and define the specific issues of concern

28Philippians 4:11-13
29 Class handout, 3 March 2012
they are facing in counseling . . . It is a challenge to be a good diagnostician. It requires understanding, knowledge, and, more than anything, wisdom and discernment. Whether we use clinical terminology or pastoral judgment, it is crucial that we clearly and concisely determine the concerns of our counselees.\footnote{Mariam Stark Parent and Tim Clinton, “Clinical Diagnosis And Treatment Planning: Uses and Limits of the DSM System,” in \textit{Competent Christian Counseling: Foundation and Practice of Compassionate Soul Care}, Dr. Timothy Clinton and Dr. George Ohlschlager, Vol. 1 (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2002), 326-327.}

When a therapeutic contact is created, a place for people revealing themselves is created, a safe place. According to Proverbs, “Where there is no counsel, people fall: But in the multitude of counselors there is safety.”\footnote{Proverbs 11:14.} The seminarian experience for the preacher reaps growth for the community.

**Solution #2: Accept God’s Plan**

Time and time again believers read in the Scriptures about people who go through what is called devastating trials and tribulations realize in the end that God was in control all the time. One of these examples is Joseph.\footnote{Genesis 37:12-36.} Out of jealousy his brothers sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver, as a slave in Egypt, and later, he is wronged by his masters’ wife and is imprisoned. As the story unfolds, it is clear that the Lord is with Joseph. Being able to interpret dreams, Joseph rose to power. He became governor of the land. God allowed Joseph to go through the fire and the water of life, yet he brought him out into a wealthy place where his family eventually had to follow for survivor. Joseph was able to forgive his brothers because, although their actions were meant for evil, God meant it for good. God had a plan. In the book of James, believers are told to count it all joy when faced with trials of any kind.\footnote{James 1:2.} The books of Exodus through Deuteronomy reveal God’s plan. They speak of growth and strength of the
Israelites, the Egyptians’ fear of losing power, the enslavement of the Israelites and God’s delivery of them out of the hands of the Egyptians, and the wandering years. It can be quite painful reading stories of slaves making bricks without straw or all the plagues it took before Pharaoh let the people go, and once he did, the Israelites wandering in the wilderness for forty years. Yet, in the end, one must count it all joy, realizing God was in control throughout their journey.

Many African Americans find themselves still asking the question, “Why did God allow slavery of blacks to go on for approximately 258?” Not to mention segregation and the many hardships African Americans have faced and are still facing since slavery ended. Through segregation, He clustered them together that they would become strong—equipping the predestine; true unity bands people together so that they can conquer the ills of life. Sadly, today, many blacks segregate themselves out of anger blaming their white counterparts. According to James’ epistle, it should be counted as pure joy. God uprooted African and planted them in a new land. With time, prayer, and faith, He delivered them. Although it was meant for evil, God meant it for good. In order for [African] Americans to be in this land today, slavery and segregation had to be. The path was cleared for the African’s journey to freedom in a land of milk and honey by trusting God through blood, sweat, and tears.34

As they fought for their rights during the civil rights era, Blacks banded together led by the Holy Spirit for change. Martin Luther King, Jr. was in the fore-front of the African American churches. Victory could not have been won without the backing of faith-based institutions. The churches came together for a cause. The church and God was the strength that held the people up. Together they were able to move mountains. God equipped African Americans with a voice to speak against hatred, with the knowledge to read and write, with the right to vote. They were

34Exodus 3:7-8.
taught that reading and writing is the first step in ensuring ones voice is heard. For ones voice to be heard, one must cast the vote. Many African Americans failed to vote in the 2010 election. Their voices were not heard. Thoughts should be “We have come too far to lose the fight now; God has equipped us to continue pressing forward.” African Americans must use their voices, their knowledge, and their vote for a stronger, more knowledgeable community. They must use what God has placed within them so the true voice of the American people can be heard. Allowing a small voice to back track progress is not an option. The bottom line is God equips believers for every task that he assigns. God is calling on His people to take a stand. He is calling them to remember what He did for their ancestors; He is calling His chosen to trust that He has equipped them to continue the journey. It is time for all Americans to become better educated that they will have a voice in the decision making of their city, their state, and most important, their country. The church plays a vital role. It is time for pastors, ministers, deacons, trustees, to speak life into higher learning.

Solution #3: Break the Cycle

From the pen of Gene Edward Veith, Jr., “Every age has its greatness and its follies, its possibilities and its temptations, but these are always different from age to age. To embrace the opportunities and to avoid the traps, Christians should be in continual process of understanding the present time.” Statistical analyses in this research reveal an alarming plight for African Americans. The educational gap continues to grow among them and their peers. At the same time, many older Blacks continue to be distrustful of the academic institutions. Presently, the over-thirty group trusts ecclesia institutions over academia, with 32% trusting compared to 15%

for Gen-X, 8% for Baby Boomers, and Elders at 9%. Because more trust in the church, the church should feel mandated to break the cycle. Walter Wilson shares a popular argument, “Continue to do the same old thing, and you’ll get the same old results. Try to see the future. We are moving into a world that requires that we do things very differently. The unchurched will remain unchurched. Don’t expect them to show up at your door. Create a network that reaches out to their world, and ask God to begin touching their lives. He will.”

To break the cycle, the church must speak life into the dryness of education resting in the pews; it must break the cycle for the next generation. The ecclesiastical body must help put teachers in the classrooms, they must help put leaders in government, and they must help edify the body by getting wisdom at the feet of Jesus through higher learning.

Solution #4: Raise the Bar

During the pastoral interviews for this project, the participants were asked, “What training do you currently have in place for an associate minister?” And, “What are your thoughts on seminary?” Plus, “Do you believe ministers should have some seminary experience prior to ordination?” Their answers sparked this fourth solution of raising the bar. Of the three participants, two believe seminary should be a prerequisite to ordination. From this study, a third is not required to seek higher biblical learning. What needs to be done? It is time for the African American church to raise the bar. If seminary is not required to preach, it should be required to teach. Schools only hire candidates with an educational background. One must be a part of the

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38 Ezekiel 37:1-14.

39 Proverbs 3:4-6.
system to have a voice in leveraging the gap. Churches should prepare themselves. At a time where books are being written that ask such questions as, “What is the purpose of church? Really? Why should I invest myself in something I’m not sure does any good?” Churches are challenged to craft innovative ways of drawing new thinkers to leverage followers of Christ. Consequently, there is a critical need for teaching those who teach in the twenty-first century church. When Jesus commanded His followers to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” He did not leave them with a manual on how to get the job done; therefore, how does one educate oneself in what he does not understand? For this purpose Paul stresses, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” What better way of studying to show approval than sitting at the feet of Jesus from today’s desk?

A lesson in Christian education teaches that ministers must learn to speak to all people. In the end, denominations will have no voice; it will all come down to having faith that Christ is who He say He is, even if, that faith is the size of a mustard seed, regardless of how one chooses to worship. “The gospel is for the whole human race in all of its diversity that through the word preached by the apostles the Holy Spirit communicates faith to people of every language and culture.” On the issue of intergenerational Christians, time is repeating itself. There are many denominations that profess to be disciples of Jesus Christ. To name a few, there is the Baptist,

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41 2 Timothy 2:15.


43 Rom. 2:11; James 4:11-12.


the Methodist, the Presbyterian, the Catholics, etc. Joy can be found in knowing that there are just as many followers of Christ now as there was when He walked among the earth. Yet, at the same time, it is disturbing that Christians look at ones’ denomination and immediately think the others’ doctrine is wrong. According to Robert W. Pazmino, the responsibility of the hearers include listening to God’s Word, then, responding to what is heard by sharing the message, and worship God for the transformation that takes place when He is in the midst.46

As for adult education, there are a variety of approaches that will make one more effective in realizing that there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and father of all. Overall, Christian leaders must take heed to Paul’s instructions to, “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth,” and raise the bar.47

**Solution #5: Believe**

Clergy must believe in Scripture. He must believe in his message. He must believe that God will provide. From the interviews, question five, “Do you see a connection between the messenger, the church, and postmodernity’s unbelief?” sparks this recourse of believing. The riposte Participant A contributed was, “If the messengers don’t believe what he is preaching, the people are not going to believe.” Participant B identified a problematic issue for the church, he states, “Sometimes we’re reluctant to speak, to teach, even as a pastor. We’re reluctant because, we don’t want to be looked upon negatively. Ok; or, we don’t want to have our position in jeopardy. On top of that we don’t want to lose members.” The third participant’s, pastor C, comment was, “When it comes to a connection between the messenger and postmodernity’s


472 Timothy 2:15 KJV.
unbelief, I think unbelievers see organize religion in a way that binds, in a way that is 
judgmental, and in a way that is too traditional minded.” Those answers reveal that a change is in 
order. Tradition may need a supplement of new philosophies. Opposers often use the Scripture, 
“For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ” as 
a backdrop to condemn seminary.48 In other words, the adversary uses the divine as the recourse for 
not promoting former theological training. Why? Fear of the unknown and past pain 
cannonballs a spirit of distrust. The belief is that the educated comes home speaking a different 
language. Carter G. Woodson writes about his inquiry concerning a once popular preacher, “He 
is here, they said, but he is not preaching now. He went off to school, and when he came back the 
people could not understand what he was talking about. Then he began to find fault with the 
people because they would not come to church. He called them fogy, because they did not 
appreciate his new style of preaching and the things he talked about.”49 The problem, from the 
African American perspective, stems from believing that doctrine taught is not that of an African 
American philosophy. Woodson inscribes a thought, “The so-called modern education, with all 
its defects, however, does others so much more good than it does the Negro, because it has been 
worked out in conformity to the needs of those who have enslaved and oppressed weaker 
peoples.”50 He offers an example, “The philosophy and ethics resulting from our educational 
system have justified slavery, peonage, segregation, and lynching. The oppression has the right 
to exploit, to handicap, and to kill the oppressed.”51

48Galatians 1:12.


50Ibid., Preface.

51Woodson, The Mis-Education of The Negro, Preface.
It is time to believe, believe in the message.\textsuperscript{52} If higher learning is refused, the church will become stagnated and the people will continue to fall short. A lack of trust in the institution should be a strong motive to get understanding. Promoting security that African Americans are represented in the academic spectrum, should cause more to become educated; that they may become part of the institution’s faculty. It starts with believing that education is important for change. Moreover, conversations on behalf of higher education are working their way into the African American community by way of social media, e.g., Facebook.

\textbf{Solution \#6: Emulate the Life of Christ}

This solution was formulated from the results of interview question seventeen “How can the church regain trust?” Responses were, “To regain the church, two things are needed. First, we have to do fellowship and the second thing we can’t be fake about anything.” And, “You know, I think, when you can, um, be straight up with people, they would appreciate us much more.” Plus, “I think we need to get back to the tenet where Jesus gave his commandment, go ye therefore, the church is going to have to do more evangelism and outreach.”

Another question that has been asked during this research is, “Is it too late for the church?” According to Scripture Jesus says, “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them,” proving, it only takes two to have church.\textsuperscript{53} There will always be two or more followers, so the answer is “No,” it is not too late for the church; the church lives. However, a new model of church is on the increase. Today’s slippery slope of church pews gives rise to the plight of postmodernism. Yet, the decline does not account for the many disciples attending diverse facsimiles of church, such as internet church. In this

\textsuperscript{52}\textit{Psalms 66:10-12.}

\textsuperscript{53}\textit{Matthew 18:20.}
postmodern world, those sitting in the pews or logging on to attend cyber church view church 
and its meaning under new guidelines. During one interview, the participant responded to 
postmodernism with, “We have a much smarter young people, as they say smart phone, we have 
a smart phone generation.” Highlighting thought for abating churches, he shares, “You can go to 
the internet to catch the youth, but I believe that personal contact, talking face to face is better. I 
can say anything on internet, but can I really walk it?” In other words, the church must emulate 
the life of Christ to strengthen their values since the decline, more often than not, stems from 
unbelief more than failed Scripture interpretations. On a positive note, listeners in seminaries are 
embracing the philosophical world of “using every mean at every time to reach every person at 
every place.” Media have given “church” a new meaning. Len Wilson captured this thought,

This shift is not to be mourned. The rules simply changed. Our job, as messengers of the 
gospel, is to speak in whatever language the culture is speaking. If Renaissance history is 
any barometer, we are about to ride a wave of explosive creativity, as this new medium 
grows out of prepubescent awkwardness and becomes fully assimilated into the lives of 
those with truth to speak, with media that forces the receivers out of their state of 
indifference. 54

The volume is turned up on merging Christians followers committed to serving one God. 
The body of Christ is meant to be diverse. 55 Although there is diversity among tongues, believers 
speak the same language. Jesus Christ is Lord. God gave mankind his breath; therefore, no 
matter the nationality, denomination, or preferred church, each is created in the image of God; 
which means all are accepted. Therefore; when Christian come across someone who may be of 
another religion, the focus should be on the ultimate being and not the difference of polity, 
doctrine, or denomination. Jesus said, “On this rock I will build my church, not my


55 1 Corinthian 12:27.
It is up to the church to educate that the living temple needs to move away from the building at times to connect to all God’s children. It is acceptable to bring a mix together. The internet is making this transition happen at warp speed. It comes down to loving people, fellowshipping to make a difference, modeling the mind of Christ, a humble spirit emulating the life of Christ.

Solution #7: Get Understanding

Christian educators preaching the gospel, those appointed to the churches, should work to close the educational gap of God’s people by being the example. Stemming from interview question nine, “Share your thoughts on the benefits or hindrance of seminary,” several factors were identified prompting this solution. First, the interviewee’s answer, “I tell my ministers, I am not preparing you for today, I’m preparing you for tomorrow.” Another factor was participant B’s strong favor of seminary; believing, “You don’t get ordained here unless you have either being called to a ministry like pastor or chaplain or you have finished your degree.” From participant C, “Seminary training is a benefit. I think perhaps, I can do a better job of encouraging ministers to further their understandings of Scripture so they can increase their knowledge of the biblical text, understand the diversity in passages, and learn different models and methods of delivering it.”

Leaving the clan to attend seminary gives ministers a new perspective on the present world and the ancient world of the Bible that many only know through gurus within an academic institution. Fledgling congregates are more knowledgeable and their distrustfulness of leaders is

56 Matt 16:18.


growing exponentially in numbers. In 2007, Aubrey Malphurs reports that, “Whereas Gallup found that 67 percent of the populace had confidence in the clergy in 1985 that figure dropped 13 percentage points to 54 percent between 1992 and 1995.”59 The years since have not recuperated gains made during prior eras. With answers to religious questions being answered by Google, the physical church is losing strength in being the answer. The trending question now becomes, “Which God is real?”60

The preacher attending seminary is setting the bar for others to follow. Where does this leave the clergy? Malphurs claims, “Many are attempting to lead struggling churches” while frantically looking for innovated ways to implement change.”61 Change is inevitable for growth. Yet, change creates fear for many; therefore, careful planning is imperative for change to succeed. Some reasons change doesn’t succeed, according to A Practical Guide for Successful Church Change are: “It lacks a clear vision or communication is weak, failure to adequately assess readiness, failure to include opposing perspectives, and the change process is too complex.”62 For the Black church, where 75% of disciples are among the over thirty age group, change does not come easy.63 Yet, it is unavoidable for survivors. Failure to assess readiness for change is another issue that will cause change to fail. As noted above, there are some generations or long time members that need more time to accept the risks of some changes. When a new

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60 Ibid.

61 Ibid., 164.


pastor or leader comes on the scene, they must assess the readiness prior to changing current milieus (e.g., requiring present ministers to attend seminary prior to moving forward in the ministry). When change comes to fast, members are more likely to vote against it. Members usually fall in three categories of readiness. In stage one, readiness for change is zero. In stage two, as long as the hype for change is ostensible, members are somewhat open to it. In other words, they are not all for it, but will go along with it as long as it’s kept visible. In stage three, members are more open-minded to it and ready for change.

Coutta points to another obstacle that gets in the way of change, which is failure to include opposing perspectives. Some members who oppose a shift do so because of their convictions that things should be one way or another. More than likely, if they are included in the changes, the chances of them moving toward the change become positive. Including the opposing perspectives gives them a chance to gain a better understanding of the change and why the shift is needed. On the other hand, when change is so complex that members can’t grasp the vision or the logic, they will pull out the stops. Some churches may present too many changes at one time which have the potentials to confuse; therefore, change is not accepted. The key is time and education; spacing out some changes and educating the congregation may lead to successful change. When the vision is not clear or it has not being communicated to the masses effectively, God’s plan may come off as cloudy and undesirable. Coutta states in his book, “God informs us of His will and church leaders must develop a vision that aligns with it.”  

A problem develops when church leaders fail to irradiate the vision in a way that the end result is visible. If it cannot be pictured because of poor communication, the change will most likely fail.

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64 Coutta, A Practical Guide for Successful Church Change, 25.
In *A New Hearing*, Charles Rice lectures, “If the Word is to become flesh in the event of preaching, a new approach to Scripture is necessary.” A course in preaching is not a prerequisite for the mediator today; however, it has its rewards. To this claim, Randy Frame adds,

To claim that God cannot call and use someone who has not earned a seminary degree not only smacks of elitism, but it is also in conflict with the way God has worked through history and continues to work today. On the other hand, no one can deny that the preparation for ministry offered at theological seminaries has supported in immeasurable ways the mission of local churches and of the church in general.

From that same article, David K. Clark writes, “Seminary education helps future pastors move beyond a naïve hermeneutic in which Scripture is viewed as a grouping of individual oracles spoken directly to the church today.” E.g., homiletics scholars nurture philosophical and psychological influences that motivate more powerful inspiring sermons. Likewise, “Growth and Development of the Contemporary Minister” build character in the cycle of strengthening scholars to narrate old religion to a new world.

A preacher choosing not to enter into the world of cyberspace, digital flux, handheld computers, or the cell phones phenomenon, creates a death sentence for the ancient church living in present times. Aubrey Malphurs fills in the blanks, “Postmodernism has challenged modernism as the prevalent worldview, and many young people feel that hope for the future lies more with the poets and artists than the scientists and educators.” Postmodern thinker thinks electronically creating an emergency requisite for mediators to learn basic technology skills. Because technology is forever changing, there will always be challenges and problems. For the

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67 Ibid.

religious educator, it is imperative that one stay informed of new concepts, techniques, and upgrades, such as windows, iPhones, etc. that will allow believers to achieve the mission of Christ while living in the twenty-first century. When it comes to religious education, technology has its challenges. Seved Mahdi Sajjadi writes, “With advances in information technology, the velocity of information production on the global level has expanded as well. This acceleration has led to the delegitimizing of knowledge, the equating of information with knowledge, and the giving of predominance to information rather than knowledge.”

Messages from Cain Hope Felder summarize core principles that undergird this thesis pertaining to staying abreast to current trends. He states, “A transition from one epoch to the next . . . the postmodern era is an opportunity for orthodox, classical Christianity to make a comeback.” Moreover, “The failure of modernism means that the old secular critiques of supernatural Christianity have lost their force. Conservative Christianity has a new credibility in the post-modern world. He is right. Postmodern Christians can proclaim the gospel, their culture with a new force of urgency.”


71 Ibid.
CHAPTER IV
BEING THE LIGHT

In his book *Self-Care: A Theology of Personal Empowerment and Spiritual Healing*, Ray Anderson teaches his readers the importance of engrossing in self-examination. The lesson communicated is, human behaviors tend to be driven by forces that may not be understood without the execution of a full solipsism. For example, in the following Scripture, to gain an understanding of God’s plan, Isaiah has to perform a full examination of self prior to being able to understand the divine intervention moving on his behalf.

Then said I, Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts . . . And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me. And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with the heart, and convert, and be healed.

Just like Isaiah, ministers today must look within self for purpose. Accepting the call in the ministry of ministers does not come without cost. Luke writes, “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, even life itself, cannot be my disciples.” To expound on this scripture, Dietrich Bonhoeffer says, “Through the call of Jesus men become individuals, it is no choice of their own that makes them individuals: it is Christ who makes them individuals by calling them. Every man is called separately, and must

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2Isaiah 6:5, 7-10 KJV.

31 Corinthians 11:28 KJV.

follow alone.”\(^5\) This chapter highlights the effects the messenger’s life has on the hermeneutic circle as the catalyst of change.

**Self-Examination**

The pursuit to know who one is and what the ultimate purpose for life is may take someone through mountains and valleys on foreign land. \(^6\) Anderson makes a vital point taken from psychologist Larry Crabb, “Change must take place from the inside out.”\(^7\) Sometimes one must look deeply within to uncover what God planted during creation. As an apprentice of the highest, witnessing to a postmodern society of unbelievers, the ultimate purpose is to be an ambassador walking in His image making disciples of all nations and baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.\(^8\)

It is imperative that the preacher come to the biblical text able to lay aside biases, prejudices and pre-understandings in order to mediate between the ancient text and twenty-first century listeners. Walter Vogels reiterates the role the mediator plays in the circle, “The preacher has to approach the text with the greatest respect through exegesis. The text then has to speak to him in the process of hermeneutics. Finally he has to share with listeners in an act of communications.”\(^9\) For the preacher to reach that goal, a true self-evaluation is in order. A comprehensive examination of ones’ being involves getting to know oneself, asking questions such as, “Why do one do what one does?” And, “Why does one react the way they do to some people? What causes them anger? What give them happiness?” Dr. Mels Carbonell shares a


\(^6\) Genesis 12:1.

\(^7\) Anderson, *Self-Care*, 8.

\(^8\) Matthew 28:19; Ephesians 6:20 KJV.

\(^9\) Vogels, *Reading and Preaching the Bible*, 19.
periscopic assessment of the science behind human behavior.\textsuperscript{10} He uses the DISC personality model, Uniquely You, to aid individuals and groups in discovering their “giftness.”\textsuperscript{11} From the model, the minister is able to recognize character traits from two approaches: what one see in self and what others see. The formula measures disposition using four areas of temperament, “Active/Task-oriented, dominating; Active/People-oriented, inspiring; Passive/People-oriented, steady; and Passive/Task-oriented, cautious.\textsuperscript{12} Whether dominating, inspiring, steady, or cautious, the DISC prototype reflects predictable patterns of demeanor. The mythoi depict many variances of communication styles that arise from the many formulas created. Each configuration adds to the puzzle of why “I/they behave the way I/they do (e.g., “D/I/C” or “D/C/I” or “I/D/C” or I/C/D” or “C/D/I” or “C/I/D;” Graph 1 “This is expected of me!” says, “you think people expect you to be determined, inspiring, and contemplating. Graph 2 “This is me” says, you are dominant, inspiring, and cautious).”\textsuperscript{13} The DISC model is beneficial in the self-evaluations process because the results give acuities on how others see the minister and how they see themselves. It also reveals feelings and thoughts; such as, “One thinking people expect them to feel their need for assurance and confidence.”\textsuperscript{14} On the other hand, “One is over confidence due to feeling good about self.”\textsuperscript{15} DISC also summarizes areas of vision and passion, following styles, what one respond best to, how one handle conflict, strengths and uniquenesses, and one’s relating style. It brings into awareness overuses and abuses, for instance, “One tends to overuse

\textsuperscript{10}Mels Carbonell, \textit{How to Solve the People Puzzle: Understanding Personality Patterns} (Blue Ridge, GA: Uniquely You Resources, 2008), 14.

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., 85 and 179.

\textsuperscript{14}Carbonell, \textit{How to Solve the People Puzzle}, 86.

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., 180.
determination and articulation to persuade people to do what they have researched.”

Plus, “You sometimes overuse your drives to work hard and talk.” The charting of the DISC model is not etched in stone because, as stated earlier, many formulas of behavior can evolve. Yet, the concept is copiously thought provoking and engaging in the evaluation process.

In a counseling class taught by Dr. Ron Hawkins at Liberty University, students were instructed to write about their ultimate purpose for life. In other words, he was asking the scholars to perform self-examinations. Dr. Hawkins taught that, “Understanding authority leads to truth as testified and communicated through Jesus Christ followed by resources where wisdom/truth is found.” It is about the called listening to the thirst God created within. Who are the listeners? What do they hear? How do they react to what is heard? Agreeing with Madelyn Burley-Allen, far too many lack the skill of listening. The epistle of James counsels the creation of human-kind by the word of God, “You must understand this, my beloved, let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger.”

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16 Carbonell, How to Solve the People Puzzle, 88.

17 Ibid., 182.


21 James 1:19. According to the HarperCollins Study Bible, these were probably “’the twelve tribes in the Dispersion’ (1:1), i.e., Jews scattered outside Palestine. Most likely this is symbolic language for the Christian community and signifies both its indebtedness to Israel and its members’ need to return from spiritual ‘wandering’ (5:19-20).” See, Attridge, Harold W. ed., The HarperCollins Study Bible, Revised Edition (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2006), 2054.
Quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger are three traits related to being as light transmitting vibrancy to what is heard. The ability to understand what is being said verbally or non-verbally requires the skill of taking in what is being communicated then responding appropriately. In her writing, Burley-Allen speaks of three levels of listening: “Empathetic listening, the listener is turned in and is empathic to the talker’s feelings; the second level is hearing but not engaging for understanding; and the third level is listening in spurts tuning in and out catching fragment of information.” The message elucidates the essentiality of knowing one’s level of listening because there is power in effective listening, affecting relationships, self-awareness, professional development and success; concomitantly, ineffective listening has the power to rescind. From the lecture taught by Hawkins, it was understood that, “Behaviors are usually categorized as nurture or nature. Some behaviors can fit in either category; however listening is not one of them. Listening with efficiency is not innate; it happens to be a learned behavior.” Burley-Allen points out that, “positive/negative strokes during childhood affect listening skill in adulthood provoking readers to visit childhood experiences to uncover sources behind their listening pattern.” Within the hermeneutic circle, to hear the voices of the text and the voices of present listeners, the mediator’s listening skills must be at its highest. Listening aids in hearing the vision, “Then the Lord answered me and said: Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it. For there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of

\[22\text{Matthew 5:14 } “You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. For this research, prism of light is used to describe existential beings. For more information on prism, see, Color Vision & Art, “Newton and the Color Spectrum,” Web Exhibits, (accessed 28 June 2013).}\]

\[23\text{Burley-Allen, Listening, 14.}\]

\[24\text{Hawkins, Class Lecture 1-23-2013.}\]

\[25\text{Burley-Allen, Listening, 22.}\]
the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay, Look at the proud? Their spirit is not right in them, but the righteous live by their faith.  

From the pen of George Barna, it is written that “The power of vision is to create the future.” He also writes, “. . . before you can emerge victorious from the various battlefields on which ministry takes place, you must have a concrete and accurate comprehension of who you are, how you have been gifted and the nature of your heart. Without such insight, the chances of your being able to comprehend fully the scope and detail of His vision are slight.”

A Ray of Light

Does the church have a future? Did the vision fall by the way side? Is the church failing in its mission to draw more souls to Christ? To become deeply woven in the work edifying the body, Christian leaders have a mandate to be models for those seeking God. Aiding as a template, the epistle of Ephesians denotes the blueprint for the archetypal references for Christian living. It is a complete manual epitomizing the rubric for walking in the likeness of Christ, such as, Christians are to have an attitude of humility as opposed to arrogance, a gentle spirit rather than one of belligerence and callousness, and a spirit of patience that will tolerate each other’s nauseating idiosyncrasies.

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26 Habakkuk 2:2-4.


28 Ibid.


30a “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some evangelists; and some, pastor and teachers” Ephesians 4:11 KJV.
Open and honest communication is essential for drawing the younger generation. The volume in the twenty-first century church has been raised through the actions of younger believers. Discerning the cry of the populaces requires listening to what is not said. Methods used yesterday to draw disciples do not work in the same way today. There is a downsize of discerning what others need in their day-by-day lives and vexing to provide it, potentially, it can siphon peripheries of prism, causing behaviors far from mirroring how Jesus listens to those who pause to seek him. The strategy to help listeners follow their predestined path on the journey with God is communication, non-verbal as well as verbal. The objective is to speak love to build souls.\textsuperscript{31} The goal is to strive to be an example that others would want to follow. As mentioned previously, a change must take place from the inside out. Listeners are observing and needing the mediator to emulate what is being decreed. The knowledge proposed reaches deep within relationships as well as life in general. Larry Crabb’s book \textit{Connecting: Healing for ourselves and our relationships} offers new ways to assess relationships.\textsuperscript{32} The most important concept to gain from Crabb is that if one’s connection with God is broken, connecting to anyone else will fail. Perspicacity is in order. Twenty-first century thinkers are quick to roar “hypocrite” when actions devalue homilies. Matthew booms warning, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.”\textsuperscript{33} Today’s young people are caught up on what they see more than what they hear causing a slippery slope among the pews. A disaster in the making! Again, if connection to God is broken, connecting to anyone else will fail. Unfortunately false prophets will remain with the church.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{31}Thessalonian 3:12.


\textsuperscript{33}Matthew 7:15.
The first few lines in the introduction of *Perimeters of Light: Biblical Boundaries for the Emerging Church* written by Elmer Towns and Ed Stetzer illuminate thoughts woven through this thesis, “Every culture and every age presents a challenge for each community of faith. What is acceptable? What is scriptural?” With Towns and Stetzer’s philosophy in mind, a prayer that should constantly be on the tongue of every Christian, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” A psalm to be prayed believing what God finds will be good, and if it is not, He will fix it. It is one thing to ask God to search one’s heart, but for one to honestly search their own, can be very difficult. Many do not desire to see their true self; it can be fearsome. Dr. Ken Nichols points out that fear can become a positive and powerful opportunity for cultivating a dynamic faith. The goal is to deal with fear through spiritual faith and embrace the true self. Henceforward, it is imperative for Christians to not only learn to listen to self but to also listen to others. A time of unrushed meditations is essential for a healthy ministry.

**Fannie Lou Hamer**

Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.” To cast light on a true being walking in the light emulating the life of Christ, the remaining of this chapter discusses the life of Fannie Lou Hamer as it is portrayed in Kay Mills book *This little*

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34 2 Peter 2:1


38 Isaiah 43:1-3.

39 Genesis 1:26a.
Hamer let her light shine through her voice, her presence, and the movement of her day. Due to the dehumanization of the Black race of Hamer’s era, the one surviving tool was the notion that God the creator created all in the same light. This notion was the strength that drove the civil rights movement, the feminist movement, etc. Kay Mills carves a portrait of how the strength of Blacks in the south came from above while they suffered at the hands of Whites. During that time, Blacks had no reward in life because their White landowners got whatever profit there was for them. For the most part, all they had was their faith as they trudged through the fields singing out to God to carry them along until they could rest on some distant shore. Songs of deliverance spoke volumes that conquered fears and inspired actions that strengthened the Black people walking in the image of Christ. Another way Backs were able to endure such hardship for so long was to envision themselves as those persons in the Scriptures; an act classified as the hermeneutical method of picture thinking. This is what the people on those plantations down in Mississippi did. They continued to hope for the end days with Jesus; putting their hope in the unseen. From that, McClendon embody the doctrine of creation, “… if we hope for something we do not yet see, then we look forward to it eagerly and with patience.” Confirming the though, James Evans states, “Hope is central to the Christian faith; although, it is often the final topic to address in systematic theology, it would be a mistake to consider hope as an addendum.” Evans also writes, “… whatever a person is or is to become is completely programmed in her or his genetic makeup. Whether it was hope for tomorrow or the genetic

40Nichols, Class Handout, spring 2013.
41Romans 8:17b-25.
42McClendon, Ethics, 81.
43James H. Evans, We Have Been Believers (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 141.
44Ibid., 104.
makeup, Hamer’s theological reasoning took her through a health altering beating, loss of job, jail, and constant harassment. Hamer was quoted saying, “Although we’ve suffered greatly, I feel that we have not suffered in vain. I am determined to become a first-class citizen.” In one of her later speeches, Hamer reiterated a stand she took earlier in the movement, “that whether he’s white as a sheet or black as a skillet, out of one blood God made all nations.” God’s creation is what Hamer stood for. It was not just for Blacks, women, Mississippians, or the poor; she spoke on behalf of all God’s children that were being wronged. It was written that Hamer was about justice. Mills writes of the praise given by Wes Watkins, “She was not just about Black. She was about justice wherever it came down, and she was able to voice it that way, that it was a matter of justice.”

McClendon presents creation as it is viewed today by theologians and scholars alike, science or a myth. Evans refers to James Cone’s theory on his argument that freedom is the essence of the human being. He goes on to say, “This freedom is essential to humanity because it is the image of God pressed upon the human beings in the moment of creation. When God set out to make humanity in God’s own image, freedom became the guiding principle in human existence.”

Hamer was arrested at Winona, Mississippi in June 1963. While sitting in jail, she was visited by the jailer’s wife. Because the jailer’s wife confessed to being Christian, Hamer told her to read two passages in the Bible that says, “Though hatred is covered with guile, the enemy’s wickedness will be exposed in the assemble. Whosoever digs a pit will fall into it, and a stone will come back on the one who starts it rolling.” And, “From one ancestor he made all

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46 Mills, *This Little Light of Mine*, 233.

47 Evans, *We Have Been Believers*, 110.

48 Proverbs 26:26-27.
nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the palaces were they would live.”49 The point is Hamer did not hit back with violence, she hit back with the Word of God. The dictionary defines the work of Christ as, “That which Jesus Christ did during his earthly life and ministry. Theologically the term refers to his death and resurrection, which bring salvation.”50 A reflection on the life of Fannie Lou Hamer emulates the work of Christ because she employed some of the same characteristics as Him. She fought for voting rights. She was selfless, driven by a higher power for those of less fortune.

McClendon’s overview of the Greek Christian thought on atonement mirrors how God was working through Hamer as she gave her life for the cause. He pens, “Though God could have liberated humanity by force majeure, it befitted Christ as God to act reasonably, and so ‘reasonably redeeming us with his blood [he] gave himself as a ransom,’ buying back his own possessions rather than destroying created nature by use of violent means.”51 Hamer was just that kind of person; she laid down her life for her fellow brothers and sisters all in the name of love. She often quoted, “One of the most important lessons she was taught was that, hating made one as weak as those filled with hatred.”52 Evans puts another spin on the term the work of Christ. He adds, “The faith had not yet been codified into a set of rules, practices, and behaviors that rigidly defined the work of Christ. The faith had not yet been reduced to a cult of personality, limited to an exclusive preoccupation with the person of Christ. The community was concerned about the


50 McKim, Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms, 305.

51 McClendon, Ethics, 201.

52 Mills, This Little Light of Mine, 17.
“the way” of Christ and its demands for an interpersonal, relational, liberated, and loving witness in the world.” It is about practicing what one preaches.

Christ’s work is seen through Hamer’s works. The faith that Hamer portrayed in her endeavors points to her witness as a relational, liberated, and loving Christian. Her works demonstrate the relationship she shared with Christ. The mission of the Christian community inside Sunflower County of Mississippi during the early 50s, 60s, and 70s was liberating blacks from their status as second-class citizens. Out of the black church, a movement began, which is known as the civil rights movement. It was in the church that Blacks could come together without alarming Whites about their mission. The theological aspect of this mission was God the truth that created us all in [His] image; therefore, it was time to fight for what God had already given: freedom. James Cones depicts freedom as the essence of the human being.

According to McClendon, depending on whether you practiced Protestant, Catholic, or Baptist faith, Fannie Lou Hamer’s verve would have a different meaning. It is illuminated throughout Hamer’s mission that it was a community and cultural affair, which was bound by the Spirit of God; however, both Protestant and Catholic faiths omit the gift of the spirit. Therefore, this observation is limited to the doctrine of the church within Hamer’s life to that of the Baptist faith. McClendon classifies the Baptist church as, “. . . local, Spirit-filled, mission-oriented, where discipleship is always shaped by a practice of discernment.” There is also the concept of “this is that” and “then is now.” In other words the church is seen as the church in the New Testament. These traits of the Baptist church are elucidated over and over in This Little Light of Mine. Just like the Israelites, Blacks in Sunflower County suffered, at the hands of a master

53 Evans, We Have Been Believers, 97.
54 Ibid., 110.
55 McClendon, Ethics, 343.
called segregation. Hamer became one of the deliberators of her time in as Moses was for the Israelites. As Hamer went from speech to speech, from meeting to meeting, from the SNCC to the MFDP, from Ruleville to Washington, the Exodus stories were invariable reminders that God was in charge, and a change was coming. Evans points out that, “The church is sometimes described as the continuation of the ancient assembly of God, or the ‘new Israel.’”\textsuperscript{56} To illustrate how Hamer became what Evans calls the elect, Mills write about her luminous presence, her smartness, and how, as a Black southern sharecropper, she represented the, “Soul of the poor people whom the movement wanted to represent.”\textsuperscript{57} Mills also writes of the movement, “As disfranchised people were starting to assert themselves, [Hamer] stepped forward, voicing her own concerns and those of her neighbors. Her actions said, ‘you are the light, let it shine and the people will know you, and they will follow you, if you show the way, they will go, with or without you.’\textsuperscript{58}

The faith that Hamer practiced contributed to the end results of the change that slowly swept across Sunflower County; those concepts of practice have been compared to a game called “game theory.” For a game to exist, it requires means and rules. Rules define the means, how the game is to be played. Means introduces efficiency, practice is affected by inefficiencies. Means define the practice. The end is like the good people are pursuing [Be the church; the Body of Christ; a cooperative practice.\textsuperscript{59} Systematically speaking, Hamer’s life exemplified the creation, the work of Christ, and the church theologically through the struggle of one woman’s fight for a

\textsuperscript{56} Evan, \textit{We Have Been Believers}, 134.

\textsuperscript{57} Mills, \textit{This Little Light of Mine}, 42/43.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{59} Mike Broadway, \textit{Systematic Theology}, Shaw University Divinity School, Raleigh, NC, Class Notes 22 January 2009.
voice in America. In lieu of creation, her being gives a glimpse of different variants of God’s vision. At the same time, although distorted, court records for this time period have the potentials to be fabricated; this person paints the reality of what one went through paving the way for generations to follow. Hamer set out on a mission. This mission could not go forward without a strong relationship with Christ and the help of the church community. As a whole, intimate relationship with God does not keep one from falling short at the end of the day; most of her life Hamer counted and depended on God. The strength she pulled from God only enhanced what she received from those that rallied with her in the cause, people like Ella Baker, Harry Belafonte, Hodding Carter III, Shirley Chisholm, Charles and Medgar Evers, and Rev. Edwin King. Doing what is right sometimes comes with a multitude of fear. However, with God on ones’ side, everything is possible; “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”\textsuperscript{60} Plus, when judging people for positions, what should qualify them? That is what Hamer addressing as she worked to rid segregation by having a voice to vote. Those in the power seat clearly thought it was the color of one’s skin. It is written in the book of 1 Samuel, twice, where looks are thought to matter in selecting a king.\textsuperscript{61} The Lord clearly makes it known that a person should not be judged by what is seen on the outside, for it is the heart that makes the person. David did not meet the expectation of what the picture of a king should look like. However, he had in his heart what God’s picture of a king should be. So many times Hamer wondered where was the faith of those that felt they had to hold people down in order to stay on top. How often is the question, “If one says they are Christian, how come they do the things that they do?” asked. The point to

\textsuperscript{60}Philippians 4:13.

\textsuperscript{61}1 Samuel 9:2; 16:6.
remember is God rein and is always present in the situation. He will equip the elected with what they need to continue on the journey.

The postmodern church continues to be in the same place as Fannie Lou Hamer was when she tried to vote or just to put her name on the ballot, and where Israel was when David was sought out to be anointed as king. Although God strongly stated how one should be judged when filling a position, it remains the outward appearances that win the position. Church leaders tend to focus on how well one dresses, how much money one appears to have, and ones’ social class when looking for leaders. This practice puts a lot of people in positions that do not have the heart to do the work of the Lord. In the epistle of Timothy, he explains the experiences churches will face if they continue on this path. The biblical text says, “For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God” As written in the book, “Christianity should be about being concerned about your fellow man, not building a million-dollar church while people are starving right around the corner.”

Just like a pearl that is ruddy, gritty, and dirty when first found, David and some today are just that way, as was Hamer. A blessing that Christians should forever remember is “God makes everything beautiful in its time.” When judging, leaders need to see what God sees, the heart. The life story of Hamer confirms that when God is in the mist, lives will change. From

62 Hebrews 13:5.
63 2 Timothy 3:2-4.
64 Mills, *This Little Light of Mine*, 17-18.
65 Ecclesiastes 3:11.
August 1962 to her death in 1978, Hamer convened around a circle of citizens (those who classified themselves as citizens and the ones that were treated like second-class citizens) to bring about change to a nation. And lastly, this story turns to systematic theology as it relates to a life that Christians can relate too. It is one that inspires Christians to take a stand on an issue, knowing faith moves stumbling blocks with God on their side.

Dr. Richard Swenson shares a diagnosis and a prescription for Christians walking in the light, “Discerning Christians have long known that God is not impressed with our wealth education, or power. Nevertheless, we have labored eagerly in those fields. What if, instead, we were to begin measuring our progress not by our wealth but by our virtue; not by our education but by our humility; and not by our power but by our meekness?”\(^66\) In likeness, “And humility goes before honor.”\(^67\) The apostle Paul teaches, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves”\(^68\) And, “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.”\(^69\) In other words, the Christian is to be the love that makes a different. In all humbleness, the existent being serves as the catalyst that keeps the cycle moving in the realm of Christianity.

**Communication**

In the midst of bedlam, much wealth, and depreciating wisdom sits the church. Churches, competing with society, are pushing for prosperity at the same rate as sacrilegious groups, often

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\(^67\) Proverbs 15:33b.

\(^68\) Philippians 2:3. 5.

\(^69\) Ibid., 2:5.
leaving out the purpose for their existence: Christ. An article that appeared in *The Briefing*\(^7\) states, “Today’s culture is becoming increasingly ignorant of even the basic facts about Jesus, and evangelism will need to involve more long-term teaching and exposure to the Bible’s message before people are in a position to put their faith in Christ;” What does that look like? John H. Thomas speaks of what Bonhoeffer calls “active helpfulness.”\(^7\) Quoting Bonhoeffer, he writes, “We must be ready to allow ourselves to be interrupted by God, who will thwart our plans and frustrate our ways time and again, even, daily, by sending people across our path with their demands and requests.”\(^2\) Bonhoeffer also writes, “We can, then, pass them by, preoccupied with our more important daily tasks, just as the priest, perhaps reading the Bible, passed by the man who had fallen among robbers.”\(^3\) Furthermore, “When we do that, we pass by the visible sign of the cross raised in our lives to show us that God’s way, and not our own, is what counts.”\(^4\) Eric Scalise sums it up with this thought, “We were created with limits but we live in a fast paced, push button, instant society.”\(^5\) In lieu of innovation contrasted with periphery, Scalise stresses, “Making room for margin by taking time to converse with Christ eliminates burnout, stress & compassion fatigue.”\(^6\) Today life moves at a rate of a speeding bullet or lightening flashing through the sky. There is so much to see, so much to do, so much to gain and so little time for quiet moments with God. Swenson, author of *Margin*, paints a picture of a postmodern society at its flutiness. An excerpt from his opus reads, “Our technology is
71Thomas, “Are We Still of Any Use?” 20.
72Ibid.
73Thomas, “Are We Still of Any Use?” 20.
74Ibid.
celebrated, our medicine awe-inspiring, our universities prestigious, and our research of consistent Nobel-Prize quality. Knowledge of our language is desired the world over. Our freedoms set a standard for other nations to compare themselves to.”

Looking at the plight of today: hand held devices, such as cell phones, iPods, or iPads in possession at all times taking away feelings of ever being alone, Swenson’s diagnoses cannot be taken lightly. Walk into a public bathroom and there one finds people on the phone. Dining out and a third of diners are texting, taking pictures, talking, or Googling from their devices. In church, many use electronic devices to locate Scripture. However, even more uses that same device to text, tweet, Facebook, or search the internet during service. With the velocity of communication, time with God grows smaller and smaller. Margin’s author notes that the abundance of the twenty-first century hinders many from possessing characteristics of Christ due to emotional, physical, financial, and time overload. He quotes French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss: “History is something that happens to people; what happens is always different from what people would rather have done, we have made great progress, for which we also have paid a price.” The doctor gives a synopsis of how allowing God to lead is the medication for a spiritual awakening. He offers a dose of God as a prescription, “Wisdom is almost always slow, wait for clearness, the more important the decision, the longer the time you should take to make it. If life’s pace pushes you, push back. Take as much time and prayer as you need for clearness to develop. And wait for your decision to be affirmed by peace.”

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77 Swenson, Margins, 24.

78 Ibid.

79 Ibid., 205.

80 Swenson, Margin 127.
Leadership comes in various forms. Leading in the twenty-first century is a task of its own. At the end of the day, quoting Joseph Stowell, “A key question for the shepherd, then, is ‘How can I position my life and ministry to break down the encasements that surround hearts and minds, capture their attention, and effectively lead them to personal growth and communal development?’” During a class lecture, Towns stated, “Knowledge without application is a waste.” Setting the bar means practicing seeing others’ strengths, modeling self-esteem, and reflecting God’s image.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

God called Abraham to move.¹ He moved. God directed Moses to lead.² Moses lead. God instructed Samuel to go.³ Samuel went. The Lord asked the question, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?”⁴ Isaiah answered, “Here am I; send me!”⁵ The Bible gives us many examples where God moved people out of their comfort zones so that He could use them for the fulfillment of the Scripture. In the same way, this author was called out of the comfort of indigenous teaching for ecclesia training. The purpose is, “So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed.”⁶ For nations to receive what God has for them, someone must be willing to step out of the box for the benefit of the whole, in the same fashion that Jesus gave his life to save the world. Moreover, the message also warrants, “First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”⁷

Many questions asked throughout this thesis have been answered. This chapter takes a look at “why” go to seminary in a culture where experiences outweigh theological insight. The riposte to that is disciples today live in a changing world. So what? Lack of training is a setup for failure. How so? Congregations are led to separate the message from the messenger. Why? The

¹Genesis 12:1.
²Exodus 3:16.
³1 Samuel 16:1.
⁴Isaiah 6:8a.
⁵Ibid., 6:8b.
⁶2 Peter 1:19a.
⁷Ibid., 1:20.
gifted has forgotten their calling and not living according to the Word of God.\footnote{Jaweed Kaleem, “Americans Have Lost Faith In Religious Leaders And Church Attendance, New Book Says,” *Huff Post Religion*, (access 25 October 2013). Also see, Ephesians 4:11} Plus, wealth supersedes principle. Similarly, the intelligence of twenty-first century thinkers has outdated the beliefs of yesterday. “Do as I say, not as I do” may have worked in the past, but today it is scattering the nascent. By the same token, the intelligence of twenty-first thinkers has outdated the beliefs of yesterday. For that reason, the remainder of this chapter is devoted to illuminating quintessential benefits of seminary for the new-age church. Within the hermeneutic circle, interpretation is extract from experiences of the original biblical author and the present day messenger. It is then explain through imagery to postmodern listeners with a hope for change. A call to seminary usually follows aspirations to cement the science of interpretation, discover the ministers’ vocational path for the Christian journey, and to synchronize the art of delivering the message.

**Seminary and Hermeneutics**

Since most people take the Bible at its word, the messenger must be able to confirm the validity of the scriptural passage. Haddon W. Robinson writes, “While competence requires that we understand how the biblical writers established validity, it also demands that we wrestle with listeners’ questions such as, ‘Is that true?’ and ‘Can I really believe that?’”\footnote{Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 82.} He mimics a previous theory of this project, “In a past generation, perhaps, we might have counted on a sense of guilt lying on the fringes of a congregation’s thought. Today we can count on an attitude of questioning and doubt.”\footnote{Ibid.} Moreover, Robinson emphasizes, “A statement is not true because it
is in the Bible, it is in the Bible because it is true.”¹¹ He also points out that the Bible is an intensely practical book because it was written not only to be understood, but to be obeyed.¹² In other words, believers are more apt to use it if they understand it. Interpretation of Scripture usually pivots on tradition, experiences, and reason. With that thought, one must look at the larger picture. Timothy’s epistle uncovers the simplicity in the mystery of how Scripture should be handled, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”¹³ Robinson, in his defense, is just restates what is already there in the text. E.g., Profitable for doctrine meaning right for teaching; Reproof meaning a reproving, a rebuke; Correction meaning to exegete; and for instruction, meaning to give something that can be lived. In other words, taking ancient biblical text and communicating it to a contemporary audience.¹⁴ This process is learning what the Scripture passage says through extensive exegetical work labeled hermeneutics. In the introduction of Biblical Interpretation, Tate clarifies the difference and uses of hermeneutics, interpretations and the relationship to the exegeses’ of Scripture. He explains, “Hermeneutic in the broad sense is bipolar: exegesis and interpretation. Exegesis is the process of examining a text to ascertain what its first readers would have understood it to mean. The varied set of activities which the hermeneut performs upon a text in order to make meaningful inferences is exegesis,”¹⁵ whereas, interpretation is taking the understood text and proclaiming the findings to readers and listeners

¹¹Roberson, Biblical Preaching, 82.
¹²Ibid, 86.
¹³2 Timothy 3:16.
¹⁴Ibid.
¹⁵Tate, Biblical Interpretation, 1.
of the day.\textsuperscript{16} Tate’s explanation of the hermeneutist’ role is, “Thus, the transformation of these inferences into applications or significance for the hermeneut’s world is interpretation. Combine exegesis and interpretation with an examination of the hermeneut’s presuppositional repertoire and we may speak of hermeneutics.”\textsuperscript{17}

As the catalyst inspiring change, the messenger, attending seminary acquires a variety of cross-referencing techniques that assists with understanding the original meaning of biblical text. Such as, an analysis of Bible literature: Prose, Poetry, Historical Narrative, Wisdom, Apocalyptic, Prophetic and Parables. An investigation may also include, searching historical, theological, logical, and psychological connections between the passage and its immediate context.\textsuperscript{18} Like the hermeneutic circle, the student continues to flow back and forth from ancient text to present day. What difference does it make? To answer this question, one would argue that it enhances the congregation chances for applying the information to everyday life.

**Seminary Experience**

Many students come to seminary with convictions embedded in the heart. The seminary does not practice expunging prior beliefs. The knowledge gained through former studies enhances the Christian experience by challenging the seminarian to think on a prodigious scale. Introduction to the Bible from a scholarly stance bayonets knowledge to a new level. Students partake in the art of dissecting each of the sixty-six books. Significant to the scholar’s cognizance is that academics inculcates students how to read the bible not necessarily how to apply the Bible. Therefore, it is important to note a word from Michael Brown: “An academic

\textsuperscript{16}Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 1.

\textsuperscript{17}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{18}Vines and Shaddix, *Power In The Pulpit*, 109.
understanding of the Bible is not necessary to be a good Christian. While an academic understanding of the Bible can assist people in their faith journeys, scriptural acumen is no guarantee that living a properly Christian life will result.”

Basic content, structure, and themes are the fundamental guideposts. Christian education plays an important role in the African American church. Theoretically speaking, it is believed to be the instructions and trainings in God’s truths, led by faith and enhanced through formal (schooling /socialization) and/or informal (cultural/expériences) intelligence. The latter ranks higher in most black churches in the south. For this reason, seminaries must put great emphasis, if not more, on the preparation of the student minister than on church history and the exegesis of text. Robert W. Pazmino provides helpful insights in his description of education on the seminarian by maintaining, “Education should have an impact upon people’s lives and should enable them to grapple with the practical consequences of those truths studied or discerned.” He also argues, “Therefore, the appeal to a strictly theoretical or academic agenda that addresses the mind divorced from affections and actions cannot claim to be faithful to the biblical tradition. Questions of character, ethics, and lifestyle are appropriate, along with how truth and commitment relate to all areas of life.

It has been establish that the hermeneutic circle works for African American cultures because experiences play a large role in interpreting the Scriptures. Thus, seminary can pose some stress due to the non-bias standing of learning to extract fact without relying on dispositions. This author attests to the notion that culture clashes with reading and interpreting

20Romans 5:2-5 KJV.
22Ibid.
biblical text from a scholarly position. Prior to seminary, Scripture readings were mainly for help or hope. Following seminary, a more concise knowledge of how the books come together as a whole fuels reading. The latter readings assist with interpretation and proclamation. Learning other methods, such as synchronic, rhetorical criticism, diachronic, or historical criticism should not overshadow the wisdom from the existential method. Successively through the existential method, one is able to use what God has placed inside, knowledge of Christ and experiences of life, for educating on a privileged level, raising to develop a deeper understanding of what is stored in heaven. From a cultural perspective, this understanding, better known as “getting wisdom,” allow for unintentional misrepresentation.23 The writing of Wayne E. Ward on the role of historical study confirms the benefit of seminary as it reflects on the text, “To re-create the biblical events with clarity and power it is necessary to study the history, the culture and the circumstances until one can actually become a kind of “contemporary” with the biblical people.”24 It is imperative that the hermeneutist form a personal relationship with the biblical author and audience to get a feel for their life. Ward stresses, “Faith scholars have unearthed the culture, the language, the customs, and simplest artifacts of daily life. Events which were hazy become very clear in the light of these historical discoveries.”25

Virginia Samuel Cetuk forecasts an expected transformation from the seminary experience, “In theological education, you will find your self-understanding dramatically altered through the seminary experience, and you may at times feel as if you are limping along after you encounter God in a new way.”26 She explains her reasoning is based on the idea that “Jacob’s all-

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23Proverbs 2:2-6; 4:7; 8:9-10.
25Ibid.
26Cetuk, What To Expect In Seminary, 33.
night match with the angel dramatically exemplifies how people are affected when they dare to touch holy things.\textsuperscript{27} Jacobs name was changed, and he limped after the encounter."\textsuperscript{28} Perspective students entering seminary, according to Cetuk, must expect a change to take place. The author can attest to having a completely new perspective on the content of the Bible: not just what it can do for the soul but how it comes together. Classes such as, the Old and New Testaments, Christian Ethics and Systematic Theologies, Comparative Religion, and Christian Education to name a few, causes transformation of the mindset. A closer walk with Christ takes place during the walk through the corridors of the Scriptures. Mindsets are pushed to new levels of theological insights, equipping students with the capacity for critical and constructive theological reflection regarding the content and processes of educational ministry. From a broader stance, understanding of other religions externally of one’s own is imperative for baptizing all nations.\textsuperscript{29} Comparative religion educates in awareness of scriptural, historical, and theological traditions of diverse beliefs. It is worthy to understand the evolitional heterogeneous denominations of faith communities. Robert Pollock presents a simple overview, “Christianity arose out of Judaism and rapidly developed as a faith with a separate identity, based on the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, referred to as the Christ.”\textsuperscript{30} Many denominations, evolving from disparity within mainstream Christianity, have created a worldview of different. Pollock points out, “Most, however, agree on the basic tenets of the faith. The story about Jesus Christ’s ministry and an early history of

\textsuperscript{27} Genesis 32:24-32.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.,

\textsuperscript{29} Matthew 28:19.

Christianity are contained in the New Testament of the Holy Bible.”

It is of great importance for one to know that, most on the journey of Christianity agree on the straightforward beliefs that Jesus Christ is Lord. Education, especially Christian education, produces growth. In order for the church to grow, pastors and leaders must continue to grow in the ministry. As the conversation turns to the seminarian, Vines and Shaddix wrote a word of advice for pastors and leaders launched into postmodernism,

Formal education is a wonderful opportunity for you to hone the gifts God has given you. You will benefit from a broad, general education. Comprehensive studies in the arts and sciences will prove invaluable. Study psychology, history, biology, and sociology. Remember that all truth is God’s truth, even though it may not be that which He ordained to be a part of the sanctifying words of Scripture . . . It will provide you with a wonderful intellectual and cultural background for preaching and will provide invaluable in years to come. Academic training will provide a storehouse of useful information for preaching.

**Responsibility of Seminary**

Younger hearers of the biblical message are listening with an educated ear. At the same time, they are not very trusting of Christian leaders perceived as “unintelligible.” One educator noted, “Thinking without roots will bear flowers but no fruits.” Drawing on the foundation of tradition is indispensable; however, new methods of delivery must be invented. Twenty-first century thinkers are looking for leaders to lead them a step above where they are. Moving out of one’s comfort zone into a world of diverse classrooms and instruction is essential for the twenty-first century church. To reach the full potential of tutelage through being, the preacher must sit at the feet of Jesus. Many will see sitting at the feet of Jesus as sitting in the church. When discussing the church, one must look at what were the intentions for the church, what the church became, who belong to the church, and where the church stands now at this present time.

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problem for many church goers today are they still do not know what the church look like. Whether in the ecclesia building with a temple or a building on university campus, when believers come together, church is in progress. Jesus gave a commission of what church should look like. Church is the community of those who profess faith in Jesus Christ. In the New Testament, it is used in a limited sense for local communities and in a universal sense for all believers. Church has been used for many things; some good and some bad. Slavery was started and ended with the church. Miss-quoting the Bible was common in the early days; however it was those same words that cause some to question the opinion of those who set the standards. During the better days of post slavery, Blacks gained power and strength from the church. Many movements began in the church; such as civil rights and human rights. However, now there is a new way, a new look, a new time, and a new revelation. The black church of yesteryear is ever transforming into a new Black spirituality. But the new spirituality like the old is a growing, transforming, teaching thing. It is evolving, seeking its truth, like the old spirit, in the heavens of hope. This new church promises are in the rising of higher educational.

Education is the key for a stronger society! In order for the church to continue representing the bride of Christ, being, not doing or talking, should rank high and be placed above material advantages. Jesus said to an overacting raging sea, “Peace, be still.”\textsuperscript{33} It is time to be still and listen. Seminaries serve as quiet places of learning. For Christians, it is pruning what they know and being open to new concepts gained by seeking a better understanding of Christianity. Faith seeking understandings, along with the critical reflection on God’s revelation, are phrases that have been used to describe Christian doctrine. E.g., systematic theology is defined as a way to present theological thinking and practice in an orderly and coherent way. In other words, it is a method of studying from the beginning to the end of time, from God to

\textsuperscript{33}Mark 4:39.
eschatology: such a, God, creation, humanity and sin, Christ, salvation and so on. From seminary one can expect transformation to occur. It may be a change that may cause wrinkles in the community; however, the love of Christ will level the path for the journey to continue. Modern technology is spearheading learning for the hearers in the pews. Another push for seminary follows, “While some of the basic abilities for the tasks required for pastoral ministry may be innate, deeper theological and biblical understanding needs to be learned, and the practical skills for ministry need to be honed if the Lord’s work is to be as effective as possible.”34 As such, “We give God our best when personal faith and innate abilities are combined with serious study and comprehensive preparation for ministry.”35

The need for targeting higher learning in the pulpit is vivid when placed against a growing educational challenging society. It is time for the church to revisit its purpose. That it may know that growing with the times is essential. As have been stated before, rewriting methods do not change principles. At the same time, seminaries must consider making modifications to their programs and literature to reflect the twenty-first century student. As more and more schools utilize online classes, the seminaries have a responsibility to offer student a variety of courses with a diverse pool of instructors teaching the same course. However, it can be a great hindrance when there is language barrier between student and teacher. Many times, the culture language gets in the way more than the spoken language. Yet, there is a great positive in online classes. The look of university students has change. Many are older, and attend school as well as hold a full time job while taking care of a family. Therefore, the plus of the online class is the scholar set their pace to follow. A lack of online classes and not enough instructors teaching


35 Ibid.
the same courses causes for biasness among students and teachers. At the same time, having more online classes eliminates time conflicts with certain classes.

Responding to the faces enrolled does not mean cater to every individual group but take into consideration the diversity that attends. E.g., an African American, or any other student, would have the option of taking classes in African American studies using materials that reflect the culture. That example leads to the underline theory of this project. The more African Americans or people of this postmodern society, which seek higher learning, give way to a more diverse instructional pool. In other words, those seeking higher learning becomes part of those teaching. The goal is to educate for a better society fulfilling the ultimate purpose of, “…making disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.”

Personal Experience

To conclude this paper, a synopsis of the author’s personal seminarian experience brings this writing to a close. The seminarian experience can be one of great rewards. At the same time, it can be one of great frustration. For the former, more and more schools are utilizing online classes allowing students to attend school from any location. Whereas, the latter, a lack of face-to-face classroom settings have the potential to create disconnect among peers. Preparing this thesis brings about a reflection for this author. As she continues seeking meaning for been led to seminary, she is reminded of what has been gained. For instance, the readings and discussions in Pastoral Counseling uncovered an empathy the author did not know existed within her being. It made for a positive experience while interning as a hospital chaplain. During Spiritual Integration, the author accepted her calling in the ministry. That class gave the author the tools to

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36 Matthew 28:19-20a.
foresee, understand, and except the calling to do God’s will. A semester of Spiritual Formation assisted in the biographer finding her path and being loyal to it. Homiletics brought out the preacher in the student. Learning to exegesis the text was vital to the many speaking engagements that followed being license to preach. Old Testament Survey I & II took reading and studying to a new level. Learning with the mind and not the heart takes practice; not that the heart is asleep during the exegesis of the text, but, one must study Scripture with a non-bias spirit.

There were some semesters, the biographer wanted to quit. There were also many semesters the author did not want to see come to an end. Being an African American, the author was shock find the African American history class to be the most difficult. The culture shock of stepping into, appears, a man’s world, the author work to make sense of this new culture. Although a distance memory for many, women in ministry continue to be hard to accept for some. However, Black women are assuming new roles in the church. Portrayed as the cement that holds the church, women roles are changing. Now they are refining themselves and the church in a new light. Black women were among the founders of the first Black mega churches. This moving energy in the wake of women reveals how they are moving forward in leading the force behind spirituality; however, like all change, it takes time. Another culture shock was, not knowing all one could know about one own history, sadly, the late baby boomer generation received little teachings on the Black culture during the early school years. Although rewarding, the author was on foreign ground at her Historical Black University. Midway through one semester the author started seeking out another school due to lack of class options in history. Upon researching other divinity schools in the area, the author realized the best way to get the best out of an African American history class is to be taught by an African American using
literature written by African Americans. The author endured and continues on the course that God has ordained.

The Liberty experience was quite different from the previous school. Some vast differences are, class time equated to forty hours over a sixteen week period while attending grad school. Post graduate at Liberty, the forty hours are condensed into a one week, eight hour days. The latter school was two hours away. The author, for the first time, spent the week away each semester, learning at Jesus’ feet. Whereas travel time for the former campus, is approximately twenty minutes from the author’s home. The biggest difference is the fact that one is a historical Black institution and the other predominant White. The author was a minority on each campus. For the Liberty, the obvious in present; however, in the other, men ranked higher.

The most important class the author had the opportunity to take was The Development and Growth of the Contemporary Minister. It is all about self-assessment. Clergy will do well to take heed to practicing self-examinations. As ministers, they have a duty to be a model for those seeking God. The hardest part about self-assessments is accepting what is revealed. Because it is easier to hold on the bad, most, reframe from viewing themselves in the mirror of their heart. Instead of hiding from themselves, they should pray David’s prayer, “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart, and be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.”

Many factors on this journey of life went into crafting the author’s personality. Peter Scazzero share a thought, “Numerous external forces may shape a person, but the family that one have grown up in is the primary and, except in rare instances, the most powerful system that will shape and influence who one is.”

Negative strokes during the authors’ early years played a

Psalm 19:14.

38 Peter L. Scazzero and Bird Warren. The Emotionally Healthy Church: A Strategy for Discipleship that actually Changes Lives (Grand Rapid, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 90.
vital part in the author’s need to take care of self. At the same time, warm pats during the latter years contribute heavily in the making of who the author is today. The class at Liberty University contributed greatly in the author’s sagacity of self. Self-assessment is a tool that ministers should keep in their toolbox of how to become a better minister moving among the hermeneutic circle of text, messenger, and listeners.
APPENDIX A

DRAFT COPIES OF RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

Consent Form

_Biblical Hermeneutics for the 21st Century Church: The Pigment of Tutelage through the Prism of Being_

Liberty University
Academic department: Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary

You are invited to participate in a research study evaluating the impact of seminary on exegeses, interpreting, and communicating biblical truth. You were selected as a possible participant because of your pastoral leadership in the community. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Minister Jacqueline B. Montague

**Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is: Although the biblical message remains the same synchronously churches today are struggling with steep declines in discipleship—why? The author’s hope is to channel broader thoughts on how seminary experience can make a difference in accomplishing the assignment commissioned by Jesus to a postmodern society. This research is designed to expose the validity of higher biblical learning as the gateway for today’s disciples seeking certainty in the ecclesia message as society metamorphoses its thoughts toward an epoch of unbelief. It is a challenge aimed at forerunners to launch self-evaluations in lieu of interpreting, preaching, and teaching biblically and authentically that fulfilment of the great commission lives regardless of changing times.

**Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

Complete this consent form.
Agree to a thirty to sixty minute interview.
Answer a series of questions relating to seminary, interpretation, witnessing, and the hermeneutic circle—text, preacher, and listeners. The focus will be on gaining perspective on postmodern congregations, interpretation and seminary studies.

**Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:**

The study has minimal risks: The risks involved in this study are no more than the participant would encounter in everyday life; such as, differencing of opinions, belief, or theory.

The benefits to participants and society are: a greater awareness on how seminary studies can be beneficial for training associates in reading, interpreting, and teaching biblical principles.
Compensation:

There will be no monetary compensation for this study. The gain will be satisfying the call and teaching others to fulfill the great commission.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Names and church affiliations will not be used in final project. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data will be kept on a flash drive for approximately one year after the completing of the research project.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Jacqueline B. Montague. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at 919-523-5818/919-295-4484, jmontague3@liberty.edu, and rod1jac@yahoo.com. Advisor: Charlie Nathan Davidson. He can be reached at cdavidson@liberty.edu or 434-851-2424. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ I agree to be audio recorded during the interview.
☐ I prefer not to be audio recorded during the interview.

Signature: ________________________________________ Date: ________________

Signature of Investigator: Jacqueline B. Montague Date: 1-23-14

IRB Code Numbers: 1771.012314

IRB Expiration Date: 01/23/15
Interview Questions

**Personal**
What position do you hold at your present place of worship?
How long have you been in that position?
Do you hold a seminary or religious degree?
How would you describe the relationship between the text, message, and what is heard?
Do you see a connection between the messenger/church and postmodernity’s unbelief?

**Associates**
How many associate ministers are currently serving at your church?
What training is currently in place for associates?
How many of them hold seminary or religious degrees?
Share your thoughts on the benefits or hindrance of seminary.
Do you believe ministers should have some seminary experience prior to ordination? Explain.

**Congregation**
What is the size of the congregation?
Have you seen a decline in membership? If so, what are your thoughts on why members may be leaving?
Why do you think overall discipleship is dwindling?
What are your views toward postmodernism?
Do you believe the congregation hears something other than what is communicated through your message? What?

**Methodology**
What do you think needs to be done to draw more disciples to Christ?
Studies have shown that church does not hold the same authority it did a few decades ago. How can the church regain trust?
What plans do you have in place to draw in 21st century thinkers?

Draft Email Letter

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am doing a research for my doctoral theses project. You are invited to participate in this research study evaluating the impact of seminary on exegeses, interpreting, and communicating biblical truth. You were selected as a possible participant because of your pastoral leadership in the community. You will be asked to complete a consent form and agree to a sixty minute interview. If you would like to contribute to the research please reply back soon.

Thank you.
Timeline for Completion

**Chapter 1** Introduction: completed and mailed to reader by December 20, 2013.

**Chapter 2 the** Hermeneutic Circle: completed and mailed to reader by January 24, 2014.

**Chapter 3** African American on Education completed and mailed to reader by February 21, 2014.

**Chapter 4** Culture Analysis, Statistical Reports, and Pastoral Interview Contributions: Completed and mailed to reader by March 14, 2014.

**Chapter 5** Conclusion: Prism of Being: completed and mailed to reader by April 8, 2014.

**ORAL Defense** by April 10, 2014.
APPENDIX B

SEVEN SERMON OUTLINES FOR KEY SOLUTIONS

Solution #1: Recover the Hurt

Trusting God

Text: 1 Samuel 16:1-13

Antithesis: Samuel permits fear to override his knowledge that God will see him through. Though certain it is the LORD speaking, Samuel still questions his safety. His argument is legitimate being that Saul has become jealous and violent since his rejection. Just like Samuel, we walk with God; we talk with God, yet we still let fear hinder our actions. It is ironic that Samuel was chosen at a very early age to walk and talk with the LORD; yet, he still showed doubt when the LORD spoke and gave him orders (e.g. If Saul hears of it, he will kill me). Doubt allowed him to question God’s request.

Thesis: However, it is the LORD Samuel is talking to; who better to trust for protection? Samuel doubted his faith, yet, he remains under God’s influence as he continues to do the LORD’S work (e.g. Samuel did what the LORD commanded, and came to Bethlehem). The LORD did not walk away from Samuel’s moment of weakness; he continued to use him. God makes a way for Samuel to make the trip without alarming Saul.

Relevant Question: How do I continue to believe when the outcome doesn’t look promising?

Synthesis: Look at a larger picture than the obvious, such as God does not see as man see. Man judges the outside; God sees what’s on the inside.

God will make a way. God gave Samuel an alibi to complete his mission. The LORD said, “Take a heifer with you and say, ‘I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.’” This gave Samuel an excuse to go to Bethlehem without fearing death.

God will give you what you need. Endowed with everything needed for a sacrifice, also, brought less attention to Samuel since the anointing of David takes place privately. Inviting Jesse and his sons to the sacrifice leaves no hint of what is about to happen other than a sacrifice to the LORD. Plus, it provides the opportunity for Samuel to inquire about the sons of Jesse’s without alerting Jesse or others on the main purpose of his visit.

God does not see as man sees. God does not look at outward appearance; he looks at the heart. In the previous chapters, the king was thought to have been chosen because of his outward appearance (1 Sam. 9:2). When Samuel came upon the sons of Jesse, he immediately assumed the most handsome was the chosen. Seven sons pass by Samuel and seven times the LORD denied. Continuing the search, Samuel asked about any more sons. The youngest was tending the sheep. Ruddy, yet handsome, David was brought before Samuel. Samuel anoints David.
Solution #2: Accept God’s Plan

Count It All Joy

Text: James 1:2-4

Antithesis: Time and time again we read in the Scriptures about people who go through what we call devastating trials and tribulations, realizing in the end that God was in control all the time. Take Joseph (Genesis 37:12-36); out of jealousy his brothers sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver. As a slave in Egypt, he is wronged by his masters’ wife and is imprisoned.

Thesis: God had a plan. Joseph was able to forgive his brothers because, although their actions were meant for evil, God meant it for good. As the story unfolds, the Lord is with Joseph. Being able to interpret dreams Joseph rose to power. He becomes governor of the land. God allowed Joseph to go through the fire and the water of life, yet he brought him out into a wealthy place—where his family eventually followed for survivor.

Relevant Question: Many African Americans find themselves still asking the question, “Why did God allow slavery of blacks to go on for 258 years or so?” Not to mention segregation and the many hardship African Americans have faced and are still facing since slavery ended.

Synthesis: In the book of James believers are told to “count it all joy” when faced with trials of any kind (1:2). The books of Exodus through Deuteronomy reveal God’s plan. It speaks of growth and strength of the Israelites, the Egyptians’ fear of losing power, the enslavement of the Israelites and God delivering them out of the hands of the Egyptians, and the wandering years. It can be quite painful reading stories of slaves making bricks without straw or all the plagues it took before Pharaoh let the people go, and once he did, them wondering in the wilderness for forty years. Yet, in the end, one must count it all joy, realizing God is in control throughout the journey.

It’s time to let go. God has equipped you to move into a wealthy place. (Psalms 66:10-12).

God is there every step of the way (Hebrew 13:5).

Partake of the fruit that soothes the pains of life (Galatians 5:22-24).
Solution #3: Break the Cycle

Faith of a Mustard Seed

Text: Ruth 1:19-22

Antithesis: Due to the customs of their time, the women in the book of Ruth were facing an uncertain future. This was an era where a woman’s security was in her husband. Losing their husbands was a guaranteed life of poverty and hardship.

Thesis: However, faith of a mustard seed can move mountains (Matthew 13:31-32). Ruth never lost faith.

Relevant Question: What does this mean for women and minorities today?

Synthesis: Just when it looks like things are going in your favor, all hell breaks loose! As women, mothers, daughters, sisters, friends, we go through some shaking, some beating, and some pressings in life. Whether it’s the children, the husbands, health, the jobs or lack of, life has a way of sending one on a journey that was not in her script. The book of Ruth gives a brief synopsis of the life of two very ordinary women trying to make it through life without husbands—not so uncommon in the African American community where many women are raising families alone. A recent Pew report found that, “A record 40% of all households with children under the age of 18 include mothers who are either the sole or primary source of income for the family, according to a new Pew Research Center analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau.” In addition, another communiqué reveals, “Black and Latina women face particularly high rates of poverty. Over a quarter of black women and nearly a quarter of Latina women are poor. Black and Latina women are at least twice as likely as white women to be living in poverty.”

Faith is power. Ruth’s witness of the love relationship that Naomi has with her God makes her want that same love. Her faith becomes her strength to overcome all obstacles. With God, you can be an overcomer.

God is in the midst. God is seen moving on their behalf even when it looks like He is invisible. Although the ladies are going through a “shakeup,” you can see how God is orchestrating their path as they move from one stage to another.

Know that God can bring change. Ruth did not set her eyes on Naomi, she set them on God. Know that God can and God will. Faith the size of a mustard seed can move mountains.


40 Ibid.
Solution #4: Raise the Bar

Can You See the Vision?

Text: Habakkuk 2:1-4

Antithesis: From a very early age, we begin to write our script in life. At age five, we may decide that we want to be a super hero, by age ten, a rock star. In our teenage years, we may start thinking about what college to attend, whether we want to marry; even how many children we would like to have. However, by the time we reach our twenties, we realize the script we started with have changed, several times. Our plans are not foolproof. They’re not foolproof because we’re not in control of some of the major crises that come our way. We can’t always control our children having children before we’re ready. We can’t always control some illnesses. We have no control over those who chooses to persecute us. When we see evil, pain, and suffering in the world and, especially in our lives, we ask, “Why? Why God, why must it be this way?”

Thesis: This was Habakkuk’s plight. He had no control over what was going on around him. Evil was all around. Judah was sinning left and right. So, he went directly to God and asked why. What he really wanted to know was, what are you going to do about this? Have you ever found yourself there, asking, “So, what are you going to do about this God? What’s impressive about Habakkuk is he has no problem asking God why. Many of us are afraid to ask “why” because it makes us appear doubtful. But, honest doubt may be a more acceptable religious attitude than superficial belief.

Relevant Question: You may be asking God, must I go through this? Will I really come out on top?

Synthesis: You must wait for it. It may take a little time, but you must wait. God said “wait” because it’s coming. God time is not our time. It may get to the point sometimes where you feel like God has forgotten about you. Set your mind on high. See the vision.

Have faith. Having faith doesn’t mean you will not have some doubts. Habakkuk had doubts. Everyone has them, even believers. Habakkuk didn’t silence his doubting or questions, and neither should we. Habakkuk humbly asked God, and God answered. When we have questions and doubts, we should bring them to God, and He will answer. We must be willing, however, to accept the answers He gives. That’s having faith.

Write the vision. God will make a way for it to come to pass. The just shall live by his faith. Those living in the will of God shall live. We must hold tight and run with the vision. We must trust God’s script that regardless of what we are going through He has the last word. We don’t have control over time, place, or circumstance. What we do have control over is whose script we choose to follow—ours or God’s. Today, choose God.
Solution #5: Believe

A Peculiar People

Text: 1 Peter 2:2-10

Introduction: Church folks have been known as some peculiar people. Just know, even when it’s said in a negative tone, God means it for good. As the letter is re-read, imagine Peter standing in front of the congregation reminding them of who they are. He writes, “You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people” (1 Peter 2:9a [KJV]). You know the Word. You have tasted God’s goodness.

Antithesis: The problem here with the congregation is even though they believe what Peter is saying, often times they are blinded by their circumstances, their issues of life. Okay, maybe it’s not here in this congregation, but truth being told, sometimes disciples can be so overwhelmed with their issues they forget about the stone that is holding them up. They allow the enemy to come in like a flood. Many of you can contest to that, sometimes you are your own worst enemies. When God calls you and tell you that you have been chosen, you are a peculiar people, yet, you think of all the reasons why you couldn’t possibly be chosen by Christ.

Thesis: Just know, we serve an awesome God who sits high and looks low (Psalm 138:6). The peculiar people God is calling are not just the people sitting in high places (Psalm 113: 4-6). He is not just calling the most fluent in speech (Exodus 4:10). He is not just calling the rich, the proper, and the dignified (Matthew 19:23). He is calling you right where you are (Romans 8:30).

Relevant Question:

Some may still be asking, how can God use me with all my issues?

Synthesis: Picture this, a mountain on you left and a mountain on your right and you’re living in the valley in-between. The mountain on your left represents Jesus going to the cross, and the mountain on your right represents the rapture. The valley in between represents the struggles you must go through to be among those called when Jesus returns. In that valley there is pain; in that valley there is suffering; in that valley there are heartaches; in that valley there is cancer. In that valley there is heart disease, in that valley there is diabetes, in that valley there is unemployment. There is financial hardship in the valley, drugs in the valley; alcohol in the valley, in that valley, Jesus Christ resides. Sometimes as peculiar people we forget He’s in the valley with us. When we take our eyes off of Him as Peter did, we begin to sink. Therefore, what Peter is telling us is we must keep our eyes on God.
Solution #6: Emulate the Life of Suffering with a Purpose

Text: 2 Corinthians 6:3-10 NRSV

Antithesis: In this text, Paul describes life for himself and those working with him. They were careful not to do anything that would cause the ministry to be blamed. He let it be known that regardless of your talents as a minister, if there be no confidence in your purity of life, your influence will be neutralized. Therefore, believers should be anxious that their lifestyle does not hinder the gospel. Paul goes through such lengths to boast about his weaknesses—by detailing all the ways he has suffered as Christ’s apostle.\footnote{Ehrman, Bart D. *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to Early Christian Writing* – 4th ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press), 338/339.} At the time that Paul wrote this letter, the mob had often been the enemy of Christianity, but for us today, it is not the violence but mockery or trying to become self-made as the super apostles of our day, the T. D. Jakes and Joel Osteen and the Joyce Meyers whose ways are so much more appealing. Jesus is the product. Jesus is for sale; you give and you will be blessed.

Thesis: But we have to remember that as followers of Christ, we will suffer; however, it’s not so much the suffering as it is how we handle the suffering that proves our faithfulness to Christ. In all that Paul did, his main mission was to prove that he was a sincere and profitable minister of Jesus Christ, even if it meant enduring afflictions. What we have to remember is “The suffering of the present age, however, is not enough to tarnish the hope of the true believer, ‘for this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure (2 Corinthians 4:17).’” God will bring you out of whatever struggles you are faced with.

Relevant Question: Why should I continue to struggle following Paul’s example when others make it look easier to follow those who are prospering in wealth?

Synthesis:

Jesus will equip you. The Holy Ghost will empower you with a love that you will have victory over criticism, condemnation, and over those who consider you to be insignificant. Jesus will arm you with patience, the kind of patience that gives courage and triumphant ability to pass.

You can be content in your struggle because God is steering the situation. God made a promise in Hebrew 13:5, “Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. This is good news because you continue in your ministry, an unknown to the world, yet well known by God, and continue to suffer for a purpose and have eternal life. In Paul’s day, his suffering wasn’t just due
to his opponents and the mob causing riots because of his preaching. His suffering was because he took a stand. His suffering was by choice. His suffering was for a purpose

Trusting in the Lord living by the Word of truth will equip you with the armour of righteousness that in the midst of your sorrows there is rejoicing. Although you may not have worldly riches, you will have the riches of Christ (Romans 8:32). Trust in the Lord; your suffering is only for a little while. Chapter 4 of this book serves as a reminder, “For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measures.” Following Christ will lead you to God. “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21).
Solution #7: Speak Life into the Body

The End Result

Text: Ezekiel 37:1-14

Antithesis: Whatever the job you have been called to fill, remember the end result is the deciding factor of a job well done. You position DOES NOT define you, your actions do. It’s time to speak life into the body that it may live.

Thesis: By bringing life to the body, we are guaranteed a positive end result for perfecting the saints, for the work of the ministry, and for the edifying of the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:12 [KJV].

Relevant Question: How do we restore life back into our ministries?

Synthesis: God gifted the churches to equip the disciples for working in the ministry and educating the body. Ephesians 4:11 says, “He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers.”

God has equipped the gifted as a team to be pillars to hold up the body. As one serves in the ministry that God has called them to, it is imperative that he or she walk in unity to edify the body of Christ. Paul explains in Ephesians 4:1-3 [KJV], “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called; with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” By bringing life to the body, the church is guaranteed a positive end result “for perfecting the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love (Ephesians 4:12,16).”

Know that God will turn it around. Pastor, when you prophesy in love in your leadership, those dry bones will live. Reverend, when you prophesy with joy in your teaching, those dry bones will live. Deacon, when you prophesy with a heart of peace in the deacon ministry, bones will live. Choir, when you prophesy longsuffering in song, those dry bones will live. Youth leader, when you prophesy with gentleness in the AWANA ministry, bones live. Sister, when you prophesy with goodness in the trustee ministry, dry bones will live. Deaconess, when you prophesy with faith in the deaconess ministry, dry bones will live. Speak life to the hearts that they may want to rise above their comfort zone.
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A.A.S. Early Childhood, Wake Technical Community College
B.S. Human Development & Family Studies, Minor, Business Administration, University of North Carolina Greensboro
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Childcare Provider, 25 Years
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AWARDS

Mary McLeod Bethune Award, Top Teens of America Raleigh Chapter, 2009
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January 23, 2014

Jacqueline Montague  
IRB Approval 1771.012314: Biblical Hermeneutics for the 21st Century Church: The Pigment of Tutelage Through the Prism of Being

Dear Jacqueline,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Please retain this letter for your records. Also, if you are conducting research as part of the requirements for a master’s thesis or doctoral dissertation, this approval letter should be included as an appendix to your completed thesis or dissertation.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

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