THE STAINED-GLASS CEILING:
REPRESENTATIONS OF FEMALE PREACHING IN PATRIARCHAL SOCIETIES

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ABSTRACT

Throughout the New Testament, we see a picture of the Church with women and men alike at the forefront of proclaiming the Gospel. The gospel accounts depict women as among the last few to travel with Jesus to the cross, the first to see the empty tomb, and the first to proclaim the news of the risen Lord (the cornerstone of the Christian faith). However, in the centuries to follow, women’s roles in the Church have been relegated to the domestic sphere and far from the realm of the pulpit. So where did the church deviate so far from the examples Jesus provided in these gospel accounts?

The fact remains that the accounts of church history, exegetical analysis of scripture, and drafting and implementation of doctrine has been, throughout history, nearly exclusively proclaimed from a male perspective in a patriarchal context where women were either excluded completely or relegated solely to domestic works. How then do women operate in this sphere that for millennia has neglected or undermined the contributions of women in this greater narrative of the Christian church? What is worthy of further examination is not an implementation of scriptures in the Church—for I do believe that the Bible is the chief authority in the Christian church—but a cultural read that interprets scripture from an androcentric, patriarchal lens that may seem culturally relevant though not biblical sound. We see throughout history a Church that strives to not
bow to the whims of popular culture, but, in ways that have alienated and devalued some of its most faithful constituents, it already has. Perhaps then, the goal of the Church is not about moving forward, but rather returning to the Gospels. Returning home.

In this thesis, I hope to draw upon the experiences of female preachers as well as the ways female preachers are constructed in fiction, recognizing that the milieu of experiences constructs, only in its totality, the reality for women preachers. Conversely, the goal of this thesis is not to devalue men’s contributions to the field of preaching (through selected works will certainly be critiqued for their androcentrism), but rather, recognizing that these contributions simply do not depict the entire reality. I will look both at the evolution of women’s roles in the Christian church (with a focus on Protestant denominations) as well as the gendered rhetoric surrounding the art and practice of homiletics. After establishing these deeply embedded masculine biases in the Church, I hope to explore the question, how do women enter into this sphere that has centuries long been dominated by men?
To Professor Pfordresher:
your constant encouragement has driven me to produce better work. I won the lottery with you as my advisor, and you have made this experience wonderful, my own depth of knowledge richer, and my faith in humanity deeper. You are truly a gem to all blessed enough to be advised by him.

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And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.

2 Timothy 2:2

In my field of work, we always say, find your Paul, find your Timothy, and find your Barnabas.
I dedicate this thesis to the strong women who have been my Pauls, those who have been my Timothys, and to Jessie, who is my Barnabas.
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UNRELIABLE WITNESSES:
AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ROLE OF FEMALE PREACHERS

Jesus said unto her, “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?” She saith unto him, “Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.”
John 11:25-27, King James Version

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?” “Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”

In an intimate moment recorded in each of the synoptic Gospels, Jesus asks Peter in front of the crowds a simple question: “Who do you say that I am?” Peter responds, “You are the Messiah.” In no less profound an exchange, Jesus, following the death of her brother Lazarus invites his dear friend Martha to respond to this same question. With great faith, she answers this prophetic question: “Yes, Lord. I believe”—the same exhortation he required for his apostles. Upon his bodily resurrection three days after his crucifixion—the cornerstone moment of the Christian faith—Jesus reveals his victory to Mary Magdalene, still weeping at the empty tomb: “Mary” Jesus called [...] “Go [...] to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’ Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: ‘I have seen the Lord!’ And she told them that he had said these things to her” (John 20:16-18, NIV).

Mary Magdalene plays a crucial role in John’s Gospel spreading the news of the resurrection. A role that James Martin in Jesus: A Pilgrimage claims is all the more remarkable because at the time women were often considered to be “unreliable witnesses” (399). In fact, Martin argues, one of the arguments against the notion that the resurrection was “made up” is that “if evangelists wanted to concoct a story designed to
convince doubters, they would not have chosen women as the main witnesses” (399).

Furthermore, in Luke’s gospel account, the disciples find the women’s story lēros or nonsense—an “idle tale” (399). Luke Timothy Johnson in his assessment of this passage in *The Gospel of Luke* notes “there is a definite air of male superiority in this response” (388). Nonetheless, Jesus chose one of his most faithful followers to initially proclaim the reality of the resurrection, and—judging by the content of the gospel stories—this should not come as a surprise. However, despite the reality of the gospel accounts of the resurrection, women of the period culturally enjoyed no where near the same level of respect and reliability afforded to their male counterparts—even amongst Jesus’s own disciples. The same Christ that restored the woman at the well; the same Christ that reaches out to women—both named and unnamed, but always on the fringes of society (by both circumstance and by virtue of their gender)—invites them to draw closer.

In the earliest gospel account, Mark recounts the story of an unnamed woman anointing Jesus’s head with oil—a controversial act, that in hindsight proved symbolic of his coming crucifixion:

> While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head. Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, “Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year’s wages and the money given to the poor.” And they rebuked her harshly. “Leave her alone,” said Jesus. “Why are you bothering her? She has done a

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1 *The Gospel of Luke*, not to be confused with the gospel account of Luke in the Bible, was written by Luke Johnson (also not to be confused with the gospel writer Luke).
beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.” (Mark 14:3-9, NIV)

Despite the fact that this woman remained unnamed in each of the synoptic gospel accounts, she grasped the reality of Jesus’s life (and subsequently his impending death) in a way that his disciples may not have yet understood. While Peter professed Christ’s divinity, it seems as if he struggles to accept the necessity of Christ’s suffering. The unnamed woman anointing Jesus’s head demonstrates clearly that Jesus’s Lordship means suffering and death (Schüssler Fiorenza xiv). But as the Passion narrative progresses, the women prove in action and deed to be the faithful few, down to preparing both physically and symbolically his body for death. While many of the men scattered and abandon Jesus in his final hours, the women in Jesus’s life followed him faithfully to the cross and ultimately to the tomb. And yet, despite their apparent esteem in Jesus’s own life, women are largely ignored in Church history or misunderstood completely. As Martin asserts, “the question of whether the inclusion of women is Jesus’s ministry may be disputed. What is not disputed is that throughout Christian history, women’s

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2 Interestingly, of the synoptic gospels, Mark and Matthew are the only to record the woman anointing Jesus’s head (while Luke records a woman “who lived a sinful life” anointing his feet) (Luke 7:37). James Martin (through the words of Schüssler Fiorenza and Elizabeth Johnson) notes the importance of anointing Jesus’s head: “anointing the head is a prophetic act—the woman commissions Jesus to his messianic destiny—while anointing the feet is a sign of repentance of affection” (Martin 496). Schüssler Fiorenza argues Luke “may have modified this story to fit the expectations of a male-dominated culture” (Martin 401). Rather than the one who foretells the coming death of the savior, she is instead relegated as a sinner (401).

3 Mary Magdalene, for example, is often identified as a former prostitute though that is never actually stated anywhere in the New Testament.
contributions have been downplayed, ignored, or mislabeled” (400). But given the content of the Gospels and the accounts of Jesus’s ministry (written through the lens of a patriarchal culture), how did the role of women in the Church get relegated to secondary positions?

To address the very presence of women in the Gospels, James Hurley put it succinctly, stating: “The most striking thing about the role of women in the life and teaching of Jesus is the simple fact that they are there” (Hurley 82). Jesus certainly did not come to overthrow a patriarchal culture (or any form of cultural institution—to the disappointment of many), but in establishing his Church, he certainly transcended cultural barriers that excluded women from the public sphere. His treatment of women defied widespread Jewish customs at the time, creating a spectacle which scandalized the Scribes and religious Pharisees of the day whose social castes were undermined by the public inclusion of women in Jesus’s ministry (Donawerth 245). In her 1889 text *Women in the Pulpit*, Frances Willard notes that the “long record of priestly intolerance” culminated in the “ostracism of Christ’s most faithful followers from their right to proclaim the risen Lord” (244). Paradoxically, then, at the crux of the vocation of a minister, this right to proclaim the risen Lord was bestowed initially exclusively to a woman. In the gospel accounts, there is nary a moment where Jesus diminishes the role of women, isolates them away from his teaching, or renders them ineligible for service in the propagation of the gospel. Quite the contrary in fact, Willard argues: “his gracious words and deeds, his impartation of his purposes and plans to women, his stern reproofs to the men who did them wrong [...] and the tenor of his whole life and teaching—all point out precisely the opposite conclusion” (245). In Dorothy Sayers’s classic text *Are
Women Human? she indicates the profound effects Jesus’s display of what we would consider feminist attitudes had on the women in his life: “Perhaps it is no wonder that the women were first at the Cradle and last at the Cross. They had never known a man like this Man—there never has been such another...nobody could possibly guess from the words and deeds of Jesus that there was anything ‘funny’ about women’s nature” (Russel 22). So where did the church deviate so far from the examples Jesus provided in these gospel accounts?

In 2011, the New International Version of the Bible (one of the most widely used translations among American evangelicals) switched from masculine to gender-neutral pronouns as the default reference for unspecified persons or groups. An innocuous, if not long overdue, change only promoted what Biblical scholarship already knew about the original ancient languages: the instances of change indicated that the pronouns were probably never intended to be gendered. After all, it would seem unlikely that the personable Jesus would “say unto her” that “he who believeth in me, he who were dead, yet shall he live” (John 11:25 KJV, emphasis mine). The direct contradiction in pronouns indicates either a confused Jesus or a translation influenced more by the patriarchal culture of its time than the author’s intention (odds yield significantly towards the latter).

This shift (and the controversy that ensued as a result) revealed problematic assumptions about the inflated importance of masculinity in the Church. This inflated importance that relegated women out of primary church leadership beginning as early as the second century, created both centuries of masculinized scholarship in the art of rhetorical homiletics and silenced centuries of potential female contributions. The Church then, it seems, has deviated substantially from its initial depictions in the first century
Pauline epistles and even further so from the gospel narratives of Jesus himself. We see—even through biblical texts written largely through a man’s perspective—not only that Jesus and Paul recognized the value in women, but understood that the Church’s functionality depended profoundly on a joint, gendered effort.⁴

I should state from the beginning that the tension between feminism and the church is personal to me. As a female preacher and minister of the Gospel, I love the Church. While flawed like all of humanity, I look with admiration to the words of St. Augustine, Reverend Henry W. Beecher, and all of the men whose life works this thesis will scrutinize. For every area of scrutiny, there could be one of praise (but an exhortation of classic works does not a good thesis make). I believe these men to be wise and trailblazers in the art of Christian rhetoric of church doctrine, with the intention that with proper training, the Holy scriptures could be clearly communicated to the “common man” to use their terms. The fact remains however, that the accounts of Church history, exegetical analysis of scripture, and drafting and implementation of doctrine has been, throughout history, nearly exclusively proclaimed from a male perspective in a patriarchal context where women were either excluded completely or relegated solely to domestic works. How then do women operate in this sphere that for millennia has neglected or undermined the contributions of women in this greater narrative of the Christian church?

The book of Genesis, while asserting that God gendered his creation before the fall: “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27 NIV), also implicitly asserts that from

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⁴ Paul’s epistles are sprinkled with evidence that women (whom he mentions by name) played a vital role in early church leadership. In Galatians 3:28, Paul wrote “nor is there male and female,” a call back to Genesis 1, “for all are one in Christ Jesus.”
the beginning, both genders, only when together, reflect the full image of God—certainty a way of understanding God’s full presence which Jesus certainly propagates during his time on earth. Yet, over the centuries, the Church has evolved from its egalitarian roots to a highly masculinized version of itself, represented primarily through the role of the preacher (these ideas reinforced through popular hymns of the nineteenth century). The preaching manual has aided for centuries in what Henry W. Beecher refers to as the “preparation of young men for preaching and ministry” (Beecher v). What is problematic in the evolution of these preaching manuals and guides is not entirely the representation of the male preacher (though there is a propensity towards striving for superhuman efforts), but the ways in which these writings classify the “other”—or the female preacher. In her examination of Aemilia Lanyer’s Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum, Hillary Elder makes a subtle, yet important distinction between the terms feminist and feminine:

Although Lanyer’s work could be described as “protofeminist” or even “feminist,” I use the term “feminine” to keep the cultural construction of gender identities and relations in view. Lanyer is both keenly aware of the importance of culture in forming gender identities, and centrally concerned with an equality based on redefining and promoting feminine virtue, rather than on eradicating gender difference. (214)

Through this “feminine” lens, I argue that the goal is not to simply eradicate gender differences, but rather to subvert the notions that associate the idea of femininity with negative connotations (as we see extensively in the preaching manuals of the nineteenth century). Arguably, Jesus himself embodied many of these virtues that have been socially constructed as feminine through his life on earth and his apparent weakness on the cross
in death. Lanyer, then, would argue that “those who speak ill of women, then, speak against Christ and his kingdom” (219). Therefore, to be a Christian, and more so to be a preacher of this gospel, one must not—as the Church at its worst has modeled—relegate Jesus and his church to promote these ill-constructed notions of masculinity.

Referring to Letty Russell’s book on liberation theology, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, in her book *In Memory of Her*, studies how the women’s role in the Church has been largely misunderstood: “Patriarchal imagery and androcentric language are the form but not the content of the biblical message. Since the content of the tradition is Christ, feminist theology must make clear that Christ's work was not first of all that of being male but that of being the new human” (Schüssler Fiorenza 15). She furthers that notion later in her book when she states “Jesus calls all women without exception to wholeness and selfhood, as well as to solidarity with those women who are the impoverished, the maimed, and outcasts of our society and church” (153). What is worthy of criticism then is not an implementation of scriptures in the Church—for I do believe that the Bible is the chief authority in the Christian church—but a cultural read that interprets scripture from an androcentric, patriarchal lens that may seem culturally relevant though not biblically sound. We see throughout history a Church that strives to not bow to the whims of popular culture, but, in ways that have alienated and devalued some of its most faithful constituents, it already has. Perhaps then, the goal of the Church is not about moving forward, but rather returning to the Gospels. Returning home.

In this thesis, I hope to examine the ways in which women have been portrayed negatively or relegated out the preaching sphere altogether in both fiction and reality. As such an undertaking is too vast to be done successfully in the context of a thesis, I will
largely focus my attention on the nineteenth century (with some other examples thrown in for good measure), which saw the rise of this notion of “muscular Christianity” and ideas that the Church could be equated with a “cult of manhood.” The pulpit as a symbol for authority reached its peak prestige in this century and the portrayal of female preaching within the realm of the traditional church structure was far and few between. While this introduction by no means presents a comprehensive picture of how women in the Bible were called by God to build the church or lead his people, my hope is that it serves to depict the contrast with how women were viewed and used in the centuries to follow.

Roxanne Mountford in *The Gendered Pulpit* articulates that an entire history of women preachers has been lost—erased completely from public memory: “…secular feminists have preferred to recuperate secular foremothers rather than study women who, no matter how pioneering they were, preached a message that could not always be squared with contemporary feminism” (Mountford 11). If we are attempting to ascertain what the sphere of women preaching (and their roles in the church at large) through a feminist lens, then we must define what that looks like: what does it mean to re-read this history and this sacred text through a feminist lens? bell hooks defines feminism as “a struggle to end sexist oppression. Its aim is not to benefit sole any specific group of women, any particular race or class of women. It does not privilege women over men. It has the power to transform in a meaningful way all our lives” (hooks 26). For hooks, to simply view the plight of feminism as achieving equality for men and women negates the experiences of women of color. As Bonnie Miller-McLemore states: “feminism strives to eradicate sexism and related exploitative classificatory systems and to allow those
silenced to join in the cultural activity of defining reality” (Miller-McLemore 79). In this thesis then, I hope to draw upon the experiences of female preachers as well as the ways female preachers are constructed in fiction, recognizing that the milieu of experiences constructs, only in its totality, the reality for women preachers. Conversely, the goal of this thesis is not to devalue men’s contributions to the field of preaching (through selected works will certainly be critiqued for their androcentrism), but rather, recognizing that these contributions simply do not depict the entire reality.

With this in mind, I recognize that attempting to access the role of women preachers in the church (using the nineteenth century as a primary vantage point for study) could neglect issues of intersectionality. The topic of women in ministry is a complex one and complicated further by factors such as race, social class, and denominational lines. It would be impossible to access with any depth the ways in which intersectionality factors and influences one’s perception of religion. As a former female slave, Toni Morrison's Baby Suggs in Beloved would view religion—and more specifically the role of the preacher—through a completely different lens than the white, Methodist Dinah Morris in George Eliot’s Adam Bede. Both women face marginalization by way of their gender, however race and social class further contribute to Baby Suggs’ marginalization (and thus, the content and performance of her preaching). Nor do women I speak about in this thesis simply hold the sole identity of female: they are former slaves, mothers, wives, women of color, wealthy and poor. Some experience Christianity through simply participating in the dominant culture and others experience it through the
lens of injustice by slave-owners who utilized and exploited religion as a tool for submission.5

All of these identities and experiences affect their preaching and their practice of faith in a way that it is impossible to isolate one of them. The effects and implementation of Christianity in pre-emancipation America (and even after) create additional barriers to how the Gospel is both heard and preached. While it is impossible to isolate any one factor of marginalization from the complete religious experience, for the purposes of this thesis, I will attempt to look at the ways in which gender specifically affects the role of the preacher in the nineteenth century, understanding that, while there are only few white female preachers published in this era, there are far fewer female preachers of color. Thus, this history of women preachers will always be incomplete.

While I cannot address the incompleteness of this history, this thesis will identify the inherent masculine biases and power symbols in place that prevent women—both in the past and in the present—from being fully accepted and successful in the public sphere of preaching. To examine this history of women preachers, I will turn to fiction to argue that literary symbols and characters serve to depict the reality and innate inequality amongst male and female preachers. I will explore the exclusive manner by which preachers were trained in a way that deviates substantially from the example of the early church through prominent preaching manual’s problematic representations of women.

5 Slavery was among the many atrocities either committed in the name of Christ or justified by a skewed and poor reading of the scriptures. Yet another crucial and tragic layer of Church history that this thesis will not cover.
In Herman Melville’s mid-nineteenth century homage to masculinity *Moby Dick*, sailor Ishmael narrates the quest of Ahab’s journey to seek revenge of the novel’s titular white whale. Prior to embarking on his maiden whaling voyage, Ishmael attends a Protestant service in the appropriately named “Whaleman’s Chapel.” It is apparent, upon entering the chapel that every detail from the name to the architecture serves to remind its congregants of life and death at sea. If a chapel is a ship, then the pulpit represents the bridge—the captain’s quarters from which the sailors are led to life or death. Appropriate to the metaphor, Father Mapple’s pulpit is so ornate and intricate that Ishmael dedicates an entire chapter-and-a-half to describe the Reverend’s ascent to it—a pulpit so lofty and positioned so high above the congregation that the preacher must climb a steep ladder of “man-ropes” to reach it, designed from the mind of Father Mapple, no doubt influenced from his former life as a rugged harpooner: “like most old fashioned pulpits, it was a very lofty one [...] the architect, it seemed, had acted upon the hint of Father Mapple, and finished the pulpit without a stairs, substituting a perpendicular side ladder, like those used in mounting a ship from a boat at sea” (Melville 42).

Despite the dreadful rainy weather on the exterior, the venerable Father Mapple approached for his ascent wearing a “great pilot cloth jacket” soaked from the rain and undoubtedly from his days of sailing the untamed sea. His advancement in years did not hinder his climb to the pulpit:

> Halting for an instant at the foot of the ladder, and with both hands grasping the ornamental knobs of the man-ropes, Father Mapple cast a
look upwards, and then with a truly sailor-like but still reverential dexterity, hand over hand, mounted the steps as if ascending the main-top of his vessel. (42)

Such an seemingly exuberant performance of authority strikes Ishmael who “was not prepared to see Father Mapple after gaining the height, slowly turn round, and stooping over the pulpit, deliberately drag up the ladder step by step, till the whole was deposited within” (42). Once at the top of the pulpit the preacher remains elusive and alone, separate from the congregation sitting quietly below. “It must symbolize something unseen,” Ishmael thought, “Can it be, then, that by that act of physical isolation, he signifies his spiritual withdrawal for the time, from all outward worldly ties and connections?” (43). The pulpit, then, represented “a self-containing stronghold” from which Father Mapple solitarily ascended and began to speak (43).

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Set in the mid-nineteenth century, Father Mapple’s pulpit, while ornate and heavy with nautical imagery, was not uncommon. Indeed the pulpit gained traction as a symbol of authority and prestige throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century. In fact, the very term pulpit spiked in books and novels in the mid-nineteenth century in such a manner that had not happened at any other juncture in the history of the written word.⁶ Congruent with the message propagated by preaching manuals of the same time, the symbolic nature of the pulpit was equated to the authority of the preacher—an authority that manifested itself in ways that merged the role of the preacher with a culturally accepted definition of manhood. Roxanne Mountford asserts in her book on rhetorical

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⁶Google’s NGram Viewer allows a person to search a term (in this case pulpit) to explore the prevalence of the term throughout written English fiction and nonfiction. The chart can be seen in Appendix A.
space *The Gendered Pulpit*, that Melville consciously both constructs and reinforces these gender binaries: “As if to reinforce the masculine offices represented by this pulpit, Melville mixes his metaphors…the preacher is a soldier as well as a sailor, offices associated with traditional masculinity and the absence of women” (18). Written in an era that saw the rise of what Mountford links with “muscular Christianity,” both the implicit message of the pulpit and the explicit message of the sermon connoted associations of strength, power, and masculinity.

But where did this notion of the masculinized pulpit as a prerequisite for authority come from? One sermon by English preacher J. Rogers goes as far as to say “every time [a woman] travels her way to the pulpit, she tramples underfoot the divine command of Almighty God!!” (Clarissa 9). Access to the pulpit in this century was severely limited or altogether denied to women. The pulpit becomes such a symbol for masculine authority that literature—at least pre-twentieth century—does not depict any woman preacher near one. Conversely, we are presented in literature the image of only the manliest of men behind the pulpit, with Father Mapple the epitome of masculine strength and piety (Mountford 46). It would seem in a survey of nineteenth century literature that—when it comes to the role of the preacher—physical prowess is equated with Christian piety (46).

Progress remains the watchword for any movement seeking equality, but perhaps in the realm of female leadership in the church, progress does not mean moving forward, but rather retreating back. This chapter will explore the very first examples of Christian preaching with Jesus’s messages in the Gospels, focusing on rhetorical space and sermonic pedagogy. After establishing these conventions of preaching as the standard, I will examine the ways in which two fictional preachers—Father Mapple and Toni
Morrison’s Baby Suggs—embody these standards and what their fictional portrayal may reflect about nineteenth century American culture’s views on privilege and the pulpit.

_Jesus as Preacher: A Closer Look at Rhetorical Space in the Gospels_

Juxtaposed with the ornate pulpits that characterized many traditional Protestant churches, Jesus, in fact, rarely preached in any traditional setting (and certainly never in an extravagant one). After 40 days of fasting in the desert, Jesus returned to his hometown of Nazareth ready to begin his public ministry. On the Sabbath he went into the synagogue and declared through the Old Testament passage in Isaiah that he was indeed the Lord’s anointed. Infuriated, the crowd drove him out of town intending to throw him off a cliff (to be fair, Father Mapple’s elusive pulpit protected him from these kinds of crowds). It is safe to say Jesus had an interesting relationship with these traditional religious settings. The synagogue had been his religious home, however, at this moment he is expelled from this protective interiority and is driven into the open air where much of his preaching will henceforth take place. His open air style of preaching reflected he was a prophet of the people. And while the Gospels record powerful moments of teaching within these religious walls (intentionally modest and simple by Jewish design), we almost exclusively find him seeking those on the outside: he ate with tax collectors and sinners, he fished with his disciples, he preached in the open desert air of Galilee to the masses, and he traveled to Samaria to meet a woman at a well. In any and every environment Jesus taught people about the coming kingdom.

Mountford introduces this notion of “rhetorical space” or the “rhetorical situation” as the basic form of the Greek concept _nomos_—or “custom” or “law” (Mountford 16). Essentially, it is the manner in which a person communicates to a given audience. To
make this term more useful however, she narrows this notion of rhetorical space to refer specifically to the physical space the speaker occupies and what that may contribute to their rhetorical strategy (16). For example, Father Mapple’s rhetorical space was an immoveable, ornate pulpit that reinforced, to some degree, his message of divine punishment from a Calvinist God. Jesus’s rhetorical space, however, was simply where the people were. Whereas Father Mapple’s space connoted a masculine environment symbolic of authority, Jesus was instead one with nature—by the sea, on the mountaintop or in a modest synagogue; he did not rely on his environment to create the authority for him. Quite the opposite in fact.

In Jesus and the Oral Gospel Tradition, Henry Wansbrough notes the relative oddity of Jesus’s style and intentionality: “Preaching and teaching outside synagogues and schools was not impossible for other Jewish teachers, but to do so in front of crowds was rather the exception to the rule” (192). In fact, unlike the religious teachers of the time, outdoor preaching and large crowds were common for Jesus (192). Wansbrough posits that “if Jesus felt his message to be eschatologically relevant, he faced also some kind of special pedagogical responsibility” (192). Indeed in addition to his teachings, it has been traditionally understood that he was preparing a small group of disciples to lead the future church. In every story, there was both a lesson for his listeners and a model for his disciples. With this pedagogy, Jesus presents a framework in his teaching that serves as a guide for those who preach his words today. As we will explore more in the next chapter, this framework for preaching is critical for understanding the ways the church has both deviated from it and “masculinized” it in a way that both harms notions of masculinity and dismisses women from this public sphere.
Wansbrough describes various aspects of Jesus’s preaching style, which I will explicate further. First, he notes that Jesus’s teachings were understandable, not in that they were free of mystery, but rather that they were delivered in such a way that met his audience where they were. His calling of the first disciples illustrates his penchant for using the familiar to explain the divine. He invites two fishermen to drop their nets that they might become *fishers of men* (a term never used previously in Jewish scripture). Jesus uses the life that was familiar to his disciples and invited them into a new one. From the beginning of his public ministry to the end, he used the familiar to both call his followers and then teach them about the kingdom of God. From the seed that fell on the four soils, to the pearl of great price, to the small, yet mighty mustard seed, Jesus taught his audience about that which is complex and mysterious through the things that were known. Perhaps most interesting thing about Jesus’s style of teaching specifically is that he was able to transform and subvert the social, cultural and religious system, while at the same time not asserting a physical authority or stereotypical “manliness” that characterized others with influence at the time. While churches in the nineteenth century reinforced these long-standing cultural norms and social status (at the expense of those in marginalized groups), Jesus did the opposite. By calling his disciples to be his witness “in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth,” he beckons the modern preacher to do the same (Acts 1:8 NIV).

Finally, Wansbrough notes that Jesus made his preaching impressive (192). This was not, however, simply an impressiveness of oratory style, but rather a provocation of thought. Simply put, William Wilkinson, in *Jesus as Preacher* states: “In the matter and

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7 To be sure, the New Testament does use imagery of war to communicate certain principles (such as the Armor of God), though Jesus’s emphasis seemed largely to promote peace in response to interpersonal interactions.
substance of his preaching, Jesus did not claim to be, and he was not, new and original in any such sense, or in any such degree, as will at all account for his unique influence” (476). He spoke in parables and presented the complex mysteries of the kingdom of God. His impressiveness was rooted in the fact that the audience recognized that “Jesus taught with authority” (this echoes remarks made in the Gospels themselves) (476). This authority, however was not something he imposed on his audience, or enforced in accordance with social and cultural privileges at the time, but rather it came from his divinity. Jesus taught with authority because he was the authority. Wilkinson asserts that “the New Testament student is not surprised, therefore, to find Jesus saying, with unaffected majesty, of his own words what he had before said of the words of the law: ‘Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away’” (Matthew 24:35, Wilkinson 480). Jesus’s authority came through his identity as the son of God, and it would seem that centuries later, preachers attempt to assert this same authority through other means, replacing the inherent authority of Jesus with a culturally accepted definition that promoted masculine ideals. The church traded the simple boulder on which Jesus sat and delivered the famed Sermon on the Mount to his disciples for a distant pulpit situated distinctly above the people.

Intersectionality in the Preaching of Father Mapple and Baby Suggs

In her essay “Preaching as an Art of Resistance,” Christine Smith writes: “[Preaching] is done within particular social and religious contexts, and is thoroughly influenced by the social location of the individual preacher” (39). As we will explore in more depth in the following chapter, preaching—particularly in the nineteenth century—within the dominant WASP culture perpetuated a specific style that was predicated on
social privilege. The mainline church postured preaching as an exclusively “manly”—not simply male—act, with all other forms of preaching left outside the parlance of traditional preaching manuals. Smith continues in her essay to the effects this has on the wider audience of Christianity not represented in the mainline church movements:

In the United States there are [...] many women and men today who understand that almost every category of religion, faith, theology, and life has been defined and proclaimed as universal truths by White Euro-American males. With contemporary social and theological awareness we know that such generalizations perpetuate privilege and domination at the expense of human specificity and diversity. (39)

We know from the Gospels that Jesus came not to promote a social agenda but rather to usher in the Kingdom of God. His message, nonetheless, was inclusive and transcended these social barriers that have plagued the church ever since. The role of hegemony and privilege—as it is intrinsically linked to race, class, and gender—profoundly affects the spread of the Gospel through one of its primary means: the act of preaching.

The selection of Father Mapple and Baby Suggs as the two fictional preachers for further analysis brings an intersectionality of issues to the forefront. It seems the two—despite preaching their sermons within a decade of one another—differ significantly in both their use of space and setting and their choice of words (each geared towards the audience they are speaking to). Within these two American novels set in the mid-nineteenth century, we as an audience are privy to the ways hegemony and privilege are reflected in American society, and thus, we see how race, class, and gender profoundly
and intrinsically affect the proclamation Gospel in different social spheres. Jesus demonstrated a method for preaching that transcended each of these barriers—constantly engaging (to the dismay of the Pharisees) both cross-culturally and across genders. With Father Mapple representing the white-hegemonic power structure in place in the nineteenth century, and Baby Suggs representing the opposite, we see a deviation from mainline Protestant church and the teachings and practices of Jesus. Father Mapple’s style and discourse mirrors that of a traditionally Calvinist, mainline form of preaching while Baby Suggs ventures towards the evangelical.

However, for a fair characterization of Father Mapple, it appears—to use the old-age adage—the devil is in the details. There is a distinction (and a disconnect) from Father Mapple as character and his function as a profound moral voice in the novel and the rhetorical space he occupies. As a character, Melville’s creation embodies some similarities to Baby Suggs (albeit with significantly more inherent privilege). The congregations of both these preachers, to varying degrees face some sort of marginalization. Father Mapple preaches to a congregation of poor to impoverished working men, their wives, sisters, and daughters, gathered together in an institution outside the “mainline” churches (indeed the very label of “chapel” as opposed to church reflects a working class connotation). He speaks his sermons in a language his working class congregation could grasp (due to their experiences with the sea), and preaches to their deepest fears and needs. In these ways, Father Mapple shares more similarities with the marginalized than the privileged. However, when focusing on the issues of rhetorical

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8 Morrison’s *Beloved*, while set in the nineteenth century, was written in the twentieth, perhaps reflecting themes of the latter century as well despite its setting in a different time.

9 The mainline Protestant churches (also called mainstream American Protestant and sometimes oldline Protestant) are a group of Protestant denominations in the United States that contrast in history and practice with evangelical and charismatic Protestant denominations.
space (an issue Melville spent significant detail describing), Father Mapple’s pulpit represents a level of prestige that Melville’s nineteenth century readers would have likely recognized. In terms of character functions, both of these preachers serve as positive and important functions in their respective novels, but when solely accessing the rhetorical space they occupy, the authors tell a different story.

These two characters exist almost as a somewhat of a foil for each other: one, an inheritor of privilege and prestige due to his race and gender (although isolated by social class), and the other a member of the marginalized (Baby Suggs is a female former slave living in the north post-Civil War)—a marginalization that Jesus himself was familiar with. Born into the working class community of Nazareth, Jesus would have known what it meant to be poor. In his ambitious undertaking on the life of Jesus, Martin ascertains that archaeological evidence would point to a “simple peasant existence in Nazareth”: “Jesus’s family was in the artisan class and likely near the bottom rung of the economic ladder [...] He would have known what it meant to live in a world of interconnected relationships, where the artisan would have helped out the farmer, the older woman her pregnant neighbor, and the one with extra food the family whose crops had failed” (Martin 79).\[10\] This is probably why biblical readers will see Jesus teaching in the open desert air—he knew where the people were. In short, it appears Jesus’s preaching in first century Nazareth mirrors much more closely Baby Suggs post-antebellum Ohio clearing as opposed to Father Mapple’s ornate pulpit in his maritime community.\[11\] But what are

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\[10\] The artisan class, due to their lack of land ownership, ranked even below the peasants in the social ladder. As Martin notes in his own footnotes, there is a lively debate among Biblical scholars over how poor Jesus was. However, with the absence of the middle class the family lived in the economic underside of society (Martin 473).

\[11\] Despite the fact that mariner community (and thus Father Mapple himself) was arguably working class, the ornateness of the pulpit, the evident prestige of the preacher, and the content of his message conveyed a
we to make of this?

While the Gospel transcends these socially constructed barriers, the Church cannot always say the same. Studies in the late twentieth century present an interesting picture to shed light on the ways privilege has infiltrated and divided the church. William McKinney, in *Revisioning the Future of Oldline Protestantism*, quotes Sidney E. Mead in noting that, for the most part, “American denominational organizations came into being not so much to maintain the integrity of church doctrine or ecclesiastical procedures as to achieve specific goals, to get things done” (1015). These specific goals, it could be argued, were to maintain the social prestige and platform the church held in society. McKinney goes on to state that the modern forefathers of the church maintained the luxury of understanding where they fit into cultural socially: “Most of the major oldline Protestant institutions we know today were founded in a period when Protestantism still enjoyed established status…[they] were people secure in their social position who assumed a leadership role in society and whose sense of social responsibility was born of religious conviction” (1015). These men, like the reverential Father Mapple (despite his working class past as a whaler), were leaders not only of the church, but had the capacity to shape the broader societies around them (whereas Baby Suggs only held influence within her immediate community of former slaves).

This notion hit its peak, McKinney contends, in the nineteenth century where the Church arguably hit the pinnacle of social prestige and influence in America. We see sociological data that reinforces these differences and shifts in expressions of the Christian church dating back centuries. Works of literature in the nineteenth century

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traditional oldline Protestant church associated with maintain certain degrees of privilege—something I will explore shortly.
reinforce these notions, and perhaps illustrate the effects of these social conditions in a way that objective data could not. Perhaps, as Mountford asserts, we should turn to literary examples to explore this evolution of the conventions of speaking “because writers, like all spectators of life, offer a fresh lens for understanding the nature of rhetoric” (23). Using *Moby Dick* and *Beloved* as case studies, let us take a closer look at the ways privilege—or lack thereof—is represented in Father Mapple’s and Baby Suggs’ sermons.

Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* simultaneously embodies many themes through the character of female preacher Baby Suggs—the destructive nature of slavery, the bonds of community, the use of language, and the ways in which religion unites them all. Forgoing a pulpit and a church building (reserved for men in American literature), Baby Suggs ministers from the Clearing—a place Morrison describes as “green and blessed.” In “Beloved: America’s Grammar Book,” Karla Holloway acknowledges Morrison’s representation of the Clearing as a “place where the motley community could become ‘flesh’—surely a signifying allusion to the biblical gospel where the word becomes flesh” (112). Holloway furthers this notion by presenting the irony that in America “fleshed black personhood was legally challenged.” While their personhood was challenged by the law, Morrison depicts a reclamation of their personhood through religion. Through these religious allusions, Morrison challenges the law by transcending the law: “the Word (which in the biblical context of the epigraph replaced the Law established in the Old Testament) became flesh” and in this case, the Word transcended the normative expressions for society in that era and was preached far from the four walls of a church to an audience attempting to reconcile their alienation from society with their *belovedness*.
from God. It was in this clearing situated on a “huge flat-sided rock” (similar to Jesus’s “pulpit” in the sermon on the mount) that Baby Suggs preached the sermon that Holloway argues “explicated the challenge confronting this newly freed, escaped, and hopeful yet haunted community” (Morrison 87, Holloway 112).

In attempting to convey that tension between enslaved and free, she preaches:

She did not tell them to clean up their lives or to go and sin no more. She did not tell them they were the blessed of the earth, its inheriting meek or its glory bound pure. She told them the only grace they could have was the grace they could imagine. That if they could not see it, they would not have it. (88)

Mountford notes that Suggs’ “unconventional sermon focuses on self-love in the face of racism” (20). Baby Suggs’ sermon continues: “love your flesh...your eyes...your hands...your mouth. You got to love it...You. For this is the prize” (Morrison 88). The scene continues the women danced, they sang and “long notes held until the four-part harmony was perfect enough for their deeply loved flesh” (88). This scene remains one of the most powerful in the novel for it is the moment where the meaning behind the epigraph (Romans 9:25) begins to be realized by the characters—that their personhood is not just acknowledged but that they are truly beloved. Interestingly, Baby Suggs preaches

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12Morrison’s epigraph is critical to understanding her portrayal of Baby Suggs in the novel. The epigraph comes from Romans 9:25: “I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved.” This scripture introduces in itself a dichotomy of sorts: those that were God’s chosen and those who are now God’s chosen—those that were Beloved and those who are now his beloved. This dichotomy of past and present, enslaved and free, chosen and unchosen, resonates throughout the entire novel. A close reading of this verse reveals that Morrison’s choice of scripture ties together more of the novel than one might think, and to miss the meaning would be to miss much of the transformation of the individual characters and the community as a whole that she portrays. It is possible that Morrison intended to complicate the epigraph when read through the lens of the racial subjugation the people faced: The verse starts: “I will call them my people who were not.” The Israelites were essentially a chosen people—a chosen race—that God set apart and whose zealousness obliterated their enemies. Baby Suggs and her community were far from a chosen people and far from a protected people—but He called his Beloved from those not his Beloved.
on a very physical self-love—of flesh, eyes, hands and mouth—yet this contrasts profoundly with this “inheritance” and “prize” she speaks of. The grace she speaks of is in no way physical—they have to imagine it. Although atypical in terms of biblical content, the sermon leads the congregation to a place where they can encounter Jesus. In that moment, they can communally acknowledge their personhood, but outside of that sacred and salvific setting—they must be content with imagining the reward tied to that personhood.

One need look no further than the physicality behind Baby Suggs’ rhetorical space (that is the physical setting of her preaching) to identify her marginalization as both a woman and a former slave. These identities, shared with many members of her congregation, profoundly influence the ways she chooses to propagate the gospel. Such a vastly stark contrast to Father Mapple’s church and pulpit, Baby Suggs’ preaching actually appears more in line with the style and teachings of Jesus then the cold, distant pulpit in *Moby Dick*. In fact, it was her very marginalization in society that afforded her the tools to so effectively model Jesus’s teachings. It was the remnants of slavery that haunted her congregation that allowed them to experience the full truth of the gospel in the face of their trauma. Wilkinson argues that in Jesus’s preaching, when facing the reality of the cross, the promises of hope evolved in tone. The animation dissipated and was replaced with the gloomy reality of impending sorrow. But Wilkinson argues, even these were relieved with gleams of promise and of hope—for a remnant; and the discourse of Jesus, as a whole, if not to be pronounced enlivening rather than depressing, was at least enlivening as well as depressing. To describe his preaching as mainly of a bright and cheering
tenor, would be to make a serious critical mistake of disproportion in judgment. (487)

Like Baby Suggs, “He saw things as they were, and not under any glamour of rose color thrown upon them from a light and happy temperament in himself” (488).

In *Church in the Round: Feminist Interpretation of the Church*, Letty Russell argues that to adopt a feminist theology, one must employ methods that take into “account the struggle to move beyond the competitive and hierarchical forms of patriarchal methods, which seek a truth that is made secure through the vanquishing of all other truths” (Russell 30). One such method is by implementing a feminist ecclesiology that moves from the center to the margins:

Recognizing that a theology connected to the margin must include the experience of those women who are “the oppressed of the oppressed,” feminist theologies work contextually out of communities of faith and struggle. They search for ways of working and learning together with women suffering from social structures of racism, classism […] and other forms of exclusion and who often suffer multiple disadvantages in an oppressive world (30).

Russell continues: “From the point of view of those who are marginalized, it is an important form of empowerment to choose the margin as a place to stand and work or to move to the center in order to gain the ability to talk back” (30). Baby Suggs’ sermon is unconventional in both location and content—she chooses to stand and work in the margins, and ultimately preaches the message that Paul spoke to the Romans, they are now God’s *Beloved* so long as they believe themselves to be. The “grace they could
have” was the “grace they could imagine” (87). In exercising this ability to “talk back” Baby Suggs’ presents a reading of scripture independent of the prominent androcentric interpretations. She both represents and preaches to a people whose personhood was challenged and whose bodies were abused at the hands of their oppressors. As a result, her view of the body contrasts significantly with Father Mapple’s seemingly Reformed Calvinist theology.

This is perhaps one of the most fascinating distinctions between Baby Suggs and Father Mapple’s preaching styles—one only recognizable when reading through the lens of the marginalized. Father Mapple presented a world that condemned the sinful flesh, and created this dichotomy between the physical body and the spirit. He begins his sermon on Jonah and the whale with this notion: “And if we obey God, we must disobey ourselves; and it is in this disobeying ourselves, wherein the hardness of obeying God consists” (Melville 46). Here, Melville—through Father Mapple—is reinforcing this notion that the physical flesh is sinful and bad in favor of the idea that only our spirit is redeemed.13 In the midst of the storm and nautical imagery in his preaching, Father Mapple returns to his “two-stranded lesson”: “But observe his prayer, and learn a weighty lesson. For sinful as he is, Jonah does not weep and wail for direct deliverance. He feels that his dreadful punishment is just...And here, shipmates, is true and faithful repentance; not clamorous for pardon, but grateful for punishment” (51). In Father Mapple sermon, he wishes to send a strong message to the men (that will resonate throughout the novel): they must repent and accept the physical punishments of their sin. Baby Suggs

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13 To be fair, without the personal connection to the history of slavery, Father Mapple had the privilege of viewing the physical body as an entity prone to sin’s control as opposed to something controlled directly by other people. Within the reading the entire novel, Father Mapple’s sermon functions as a lingering moral conscience. Isolated and compared to other sermons, however, it depicts a relative privilege that Baby Suggs does not possess.
controverts this notion completely. As if understanding Jesus’s “body that was broken for them” as an instruction that they are called to the same fate, the physical body is instead viewed as an opportunity to be like Christ too. For a community so haunted by memory of slavery, and for a people so marginalized because of the color of their skin, the moment of hope Morrison offers through these subtleties is the reminder that they are now God’s *Beloved* too.  

14 That the brokenness of their bodies at the hands of their slave masters and oppressors are not an indication that the flesh is evil, but rather a comfort that Jesus’s physical body was broken for them too. The key, as Baby Suggs preached before her death, was to possess the self-love for their own “deeply loved flesh” (88).

Perhaps one of the chief purposes of preaching, Baby Suggs managed to do in her proximity to her congregation what Father Mapple in his physical distance from the congregation literally could not: invite people into a deeper community, not only with each other, but with a triune God. Russell argues that in order to create an ecclesiology of greater equality, we must process the Church in the context of community—specifically through the lens of the oppressed. While Baby Suggs’ preaching ended with a communal dance in the Clearing, Father Mapple’s sermon ended in solitude: “He said no more, but slowly waving a benediction, covered his face with his hands, and so remained, kneeling, till all the people had departed, and he was left alone in the place” (Melville 55). The service ended as it began, with Father Mapple and his pulpit. Father Mapple’s characterization presents an interesting question when analyzing its rhetorical implications: what does the scene function as in the larger context of the novel and what does its physical representation communicate about representations of power in relation

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14 This hauntedness by the memories of slavery is the crucial way in which the Jewish community also defined itself—they were liberated from slavery in Egypt by God’s direct action since he had chosen them as his people. Suggs would understand this, and claims it for her community, as does Morrison.
to gender? Herein lies the tension. From a matter of function, this closing scene of Father Mapple isolated at his pulpit carries with it a distinct biblical imagery (that Beloved never explicitly reaches). Melville portrays Father Mapple in this closing moment like Jesus in certain biblical scenes: alone after communicating the gospel, Mapple’s solitude stems from his overwhelming vision of the tragedy that he foreshadows and ultimate hope of the human condition. Just like Baby Suggs, Father Mapple communicates with fervency a biblical message within the context of his congregation. In the end, it is not Father Mapple’s characterization that yields him an example of the deeply embedded masculine biases in the Church, but rather, the physical space that he occupies and what that may communicate to the readers only when isolated by factors of race and gender.

Both literature and nonfiction depict an interesting relationship between both the style and strategies for preaching and access to the pulpit in the nineteenth century. A stark contrast to the pomp and circumstance associated with male preaching, women were instead depicted in nature, far away from the institutional four walls of a segregated church. If Father Mapple was the captain of his ship at Whalemens’s Chapel (and “as a pilot of the living God”), then Baby Suggs was “an unchurched preacher,” “accepting no title or honor before her name” (Morrison 87). Whereas Father Mapple reinforced and perhaps even intentionally performed the social expectations that equated divine authority with strength and masculinity, Baby Suggs had no choice but to employ every element of her community and her own marginalized identity to, like Jesus modeled thousands of years before, meet the people where they were.

Perhaps more important than the act of preaching are the preachers themselves. Wilkinson notes that “it must be said that Jesus as preacher was in his own view nothing
whatever in importance compared with Jesus the suffering Savior” (489). In essence, Jesus modeled with his life that the words of a preacher (including himself) are not nearly as important as the call to carry one’s cross to death:

What his preaching, even his preaching, had failed to effect, it remained for his obedience unto death, the death of the cross, to accomplish. His preaching itself thus acknowledged that his preaching alone was vain. Jesus as preacher preached Jesus as Redeemer by blood. He set herein an example which every faithful minister of his gospel, to the end of the age, must follow. (489)

An example that is much simpler said than accomplished. It would seem then, that much of the instruction in the training of a preacher falls not exclusively to developing strategies for preaching, but also to cultivating a certain character to sustain the ministry. But how does one embody the humble and meek character of Jesus in a culture that promotes a narrow definition of masculinity when training ministers of the Gospel? And perhaps more importantly, if this definition excludes women by nature, how are we to redefine it?
The formal study of rhetoric emerged as early as the fourth century B.C. with Aristotle’s treatise appropriately titled *The Art of Rhetoric* in the English translation. Building upon these rhetorical theories widely considered the touchstone of persuasion, the craft of preaching began to be developed following the creation of the Christian church in the first century. This chapter will look at the evolution of the preaching manual from the fourth century writings through nineteenth century renditions. These guiding principles in the practice of homiletics, as one may suspect given the patriarchal societies in which they were written, reveal problematic gender assumptions. In her own assessment of Roxanne Mountford’s *The Gendered Pulpit*, Lindal Buchanan notes the surface level differences:

Nineteenth-century manuals, for example, encouraged ministers to develop an authoritative, heroic, manly character that would empower them to save the world one person at a time, an irrelevant and inappropriate ethos for women. Twentieth-century manuals, while not as overtly masculine, failed to address gender directly and instead promoted “a generic ideology of gender” that left traditional masculinist biases intact. (1)

In the previous chapter, we saw an introduction of this vast disparity between both the physicality and setting of Jesus’s preaching (particularly his famous *Sermon on the Mount*) and the gendered representations of preaching in both literature and popular culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This chapter will analyze the centuries
of instruction and teachings that created a men’s club of sorts, and promoted this idea that
the art of preaching necessitates “manly” expressions, with often degrading
representations of the feminized “other.” With the tools for teaching and training
ministers then exclusively written for the male audience, is there room for anyone outside
of the heteronormative white male to successfully learn the craft?¹⁵

I want to explore this question not by demeaning the male preacher, but rather by
examining the effect of patriarchal practices evident in the cultural expression of the
church and by exploring how women can successfully enter into this sphere that has been
much dominated since the beginning of the church by men. Indeed when looking back at
the earliest teachings of Christian exegesis and homiletics, the role of women in society
was relegated solely to the domestic sphere, so it would seem anachronistic for these
writers to direct their teachings towards women.¹⁶ Thus, I would divide the texts and
manuals I study in two camps (granted with relatively subtle distinctions): firstly, those
written to men only because the patriarchal society rendered the rights to the pulpit as an
exclusively male privilege. Secondly, those that were written to men because of the
biblical belief that women’s roles in the church were never to have spiritual authority
over men. The former is an unfortunate product of the culture and times; the latter,
however, is problematic because even as culture evolves to hold more progressive views
of women, this common exegesis stands strong as a means to devalue a woman’s role in
the church.

¹⁵While this chapter will bring in the female voice when available for the context, chapter three will
examine a wider variety of female-authored texts from the nineteenth century.
¹⁶The Didascalia Apostolorum treatise from the early-to-mid 3rd century instated severe restrictions on
women, relegating their roles in the church largely to the domestic sphere. While these restrictions
generally loosened over time they have yet to be overturned completely by the entirety of the Christian
church.
Before examining the gendered politics of homiletical rhetoric, it seems appropriate to start from earliest official writings on the craft. If the art of preaching at its core is the art of effectively testifying about the risen Christ, then Aristotle’s works on argument formation proves highly valuable as the precursory text for all subsequent teachings on homiletics. He defines the nuances in the art of rhetoric:

Of the modes of persuasion some belong strictly to the art of rhetoric and some do not. By the latter I mean such things as are not supplied by the writer but are there at the outset—witnesses, evidence given under torture, written contracts, and so on. By the former I mean such as we can ourselves construct by means of the principles of rhetoric. The one kind has merely to be used, the other has to be invented. (7)

Aristotle further broke down these modes of persuasion into two categories: artistic proofs (which he defines as within the scope of rhetoric) and inartistic proofs (which conversely remains outside the art of rhetoric). The popular notions of pathos, ethos and logos formulate the essence of any artistic proof or argument. As a result, it is no surprise that future homiletical rhetoricians focus much effort on employing and perfecting them. Where in Aristotle’s treatise, artistic proofs became the cornerstone concepts from which the likes of Augustine would write their own rhetorical and homiletical works, women instead utilized the opposite Aristotelian tactic of “inartistic proofs.” Perhaps anticipating that audiences in these eras would be hostile to female preachers, these “inartistic proofs” led female Christian rhetoricians such as Frances Willard to “construct [their] argument not straightforwardly, but interwoven with refutations and [...] testimonies from witnesses,” as if to prepare themselves for the counterarguments they were sure to face
(Donawerth 243). To bear any semblance of effectiveness, women must let other voices speak alongside theirs in order to be heard—particularly the voices of men (243). In her late-nineteenth century work *Women in the Pulpit*, Willard did just that: she “separates men and women into their own chapters—creating literally separate spheres of nineteenth century social life” all while trying to demonstrate that a “woman’s domestic and moral role as mother makes her especially suitable for the role of preacher” (243). This juxtaposition of rhetorical dynamics creates an interesting divide when discerning the most effective ways for women to enter into these male dominated spheres.

While initially propagated in a gendered manner by Augustine and further perpetuated in nineteenth century preaching manuals, this idea that ethos (the notion that speaker’s “personal character […] that should make us think him credible”), logos and pathos are associated with masculinity took shape due to the patriarchal power structures of the time (Aristotle 7). Aristotle also purports that “It is not true […] that the personal goodness revealed by the speaker contributes nothing to his power of persuasion; on the contrary, his character may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion he possesses” (7). The critical importance of developing ethos when giving a sermon became the primal idea within the pages of popular preaching manuals. The radical genderization of this ethos in the nineteenth century further removed women from this sphere. As women in the church were further relegated into the realm of domesticity, it became difficult—if not impossible—for their words to achieve the same level of respect when spoken from wives and mothers. This truth in the nineteenth century is the same in the present: in order for women preachers to reclaim their role in church leadership,
society must adapt to allow women to achieve the same mastery of ethos—that is credibility in the minds of listeners—as their male counterparts.

*The Early Teachings on Rhetorical Homiletics*

At the turn of the fifth century, patriarch of western Christianity Saint Augustine of Hippo in his theological work *De doctrina christiana* defines exegesis and homiletics as the chief role of a preacher: “There are two things on which all interpretation of Scripture depends: the mode of ascertaining the proper meaning, and the mode of making known the meaning when it is ascertained” (77). Here, Augustine reveals a simple truth known to any preacher who has been taught on the proper exhortation of scriptures: a good sermon requires both sound exegesis of scripture and a clear communication of it to the congregation. That the best rhetoric cannot compensate for poor understanding of scripture. Such a fundamental rule in the art of preaching, however, creates tension when ascertaining a woman’s role in this sphere. The justification that has kept women out of the public preaching sphere for centuries is, arguably, predicated on a false premise and poor interpretation of scripture (an interpretation I will look at more in depth in the following chapter). If people believe this premise to be true, however (as many of the early preaching manuals do), then the logic follows that any “making known the meaning” of scripture by women loses its credibility.

Having established the role of a preacher, Augustine continues throughout *De doctrina christiana* to establish the type of man a preacher should be (that is the ethos he should possess). This emphasis on the importance of the character and morality of a man, while not a marked departure from classic rhetorical scholarship at the time, reflects a critical juncture in which the role of a preacher began to be perceived as an exclusively
masculinized role. This should not come as a surprise given that Augustine is attempting to merge what Aristotle did not. In his article *The Dialectic of Orality and Literacy*, John Schaefer makes this case for Book Four (the rhetorical element of Augustine’s work):

“Book Four attempts to resolve a central paradox of early Christianity by synthesizing the oral world of public performance with a religion grounded in writing and addressed to the inner person […] *De doctrina* presents Augustine’s attempt to bring classical rhetoric […] to bear on Christian preaching” (Schaeffer 1142). Furthermore, Augustine’s remarks that the preacher “should pray that God will place a good speech in his mouth” attempts to replace the inspiration of the Aristotelian “muse” with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (Augustine 168).

When such practices as prayer, scripture study and piety function as a part of rhetorical—or homiletical—discourse, it becomes nearly impossible to disregard the character of the male preacher. In fact, Mountford notes this trend has not evolved much since the fourth century: “A significant ‘trope’ in preaching manuals since *De doctrina christiana* is the figure of the minister as a morally fit leader, a ‘good man’ whose piety underscores his words” (Mountford 47). Augustine certainly works to lay this foundation in Book One when he writes his extended metaphor of Christ as the great physician to humanity in need of healing:

He was born of a woman to deliver us who fell through a woman: He came as a man to save us who are men [...] and those who can follow out the matter more fully, who are not hurried on by the necessity of carrying out a set undertaking, will find many other points of instruction in
considering the remedies, whether opposites or likes, employed in the
medicine of Christianity. (Augustine 13)

As Augustine draws out his extended metaphor, he creates the aura of importance around
the role of the minister. As Mountford suggests, “God in Christ is the Great Physician;
however the minister, as the deliverer of God’s wisdom is God’s physician on earth”
(Mountford 47). An eloquent metaphor, as Christ makes a similar one himself: “for it is
not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick” and Christ came for the wounded and
broken among them. If Christ then is the “Great Physician” then logic ensues that a
minister’s calling should be to do likewise. However, culturally, this notion of the pious
preacher tasked with healing the broken among him, served not to make the minister a
man among his own but rather created a chasm predicated on spiritual class and prestige
that separated the minister from his congregation. While Christ was a man among the
people, the minister’s role shifts into a place of privilege and distinction, forming a chasm
so wide that Melville depicted pulpit so lofty as to be accessible solely by a ladder.

No longer directly among the people, but rather responsible for the spiritual
education of them, Augustine instills the need to be a man worthy of such a position,
though acknowledging that the congregation “may hear usefully those who do not act
usefully” (Augustine 164). Even so, the emphasis shifts to place the appeal not
necessarily on the words spoken, but rather on the morality of person speaking them—a
trend of prioritizing the ethos in sermons that continues in the present. This is not in its

17 Ironically, as noted in Chapter 1, Jesus makes this statement while in the midst of a crowd of people—
hardly the example homiletics such as Augustine followed where the preacher is promoted to a role of
increased importance. Arguably, while Augustine views the Church as the broken who needed healing the
preacher could offer, perhaps a more adequate metaphor for what Jesus conveyed would be to view the
Church as a medical school—training all without preference to social standing with the skills to help the
broken among them.
entirety a bad thing. In the past, much like the present, the words of a righteous and moral man speak volumes—certainly the characteristics a person would desire in their minister and even in themselves. The Christian church, after all, was founded on the eloquent teachings of a man who embodied perfection in moral behavior—that is his words and his actions told the same story. However, to use the Aristotelian language, women simply did not have the same cultural capital to achieve that same level of ethos men could in society. It is easy to see why. While Augustine’s portrayal of the male preacher is not entirely problematic, the way he chooses to represent women is exceedingly so. To illustrate the art of good preaching, Augustine chooses the example of how to communicate the importance of cultivating “modesty and fear” in women:

And what testimony to thine ugliness can we find, O woman, that is more unquestionable than thine own [...] If thou art plain, why test thou lyingly pretend to be beautiful, when thou can’t not enjoy the pleasure of the lie either in thine own consciousness or in that of another? [...] Thou art the evil promptress of thine own injury. For even the woman who has been the victim of a pander shrinks from acting the pander’s part, and though she be vile, it is herself she sins against and not another. The crime of adultery is almost more tolerable than thine; for adultery tampers with modesty, but thou with nature. (100)

With this sort of rhetoric surrounding discussion of women during this time period, it is no wonder they stood no chance in developing any credible ethos amongst the people—when “examples” were to be given on proper preaching, at least in Augustine’s work, women suffered in reputation and credibility. Far from being viewed as equals in their
usefulness in building the church, women were instead often portrayed as hindrances to the mission—with the common trope of “women of questionable morals” often resounding in the public discourse.

During the century that Augustine was writing, women were excluded from any primary leadership role in the Church.\(^{18}\) Thus, it would be simple to ascribe his representation of both men and women as merely a result of social conditioning of the times, but the Church was warned to never bow to the whims of popular culture. It is not merely the lack of positive reinforcements that prevent women from establishing sounds ethos, but the direct propagation of negative ones. As the promotion of male leadership in the church was a prescription of the culture, so the language surrounding female submission was as well. With the art of preaching being largely narrowed down to creating and building up strong and noble men, women by virtue of gender could not achieve the same level of credibility regardless of their perceived moral character. The trend we see in Augustine’s work—and the centuries of preaching manuals that followed—is that the Pauline vision of the Church was cheapened, tacitly equating parochial manliness with Christian virtue.

*The Nineteenth Century Rise of the “Manly Man”*

The nineteenth century gave rise to the increased masculinization of the preacher, propagated by the prestigious divinity schools that the Ivy League was known for. Beecher’s *Lectures on Preaching* was published in 1872 in efforts to “secure a more

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\(^{18}\) Despite this exclusion that undoubtedly contributed to Augustine’s rather coarse statements on women, there is a tension in his larger canon of writings in regards to his views of women in their totality. He writes of the role his mother, Monica, played in developing his own Christian faith (granted within the realm of her domesticity). There exists, then, a dichotomy in Augustine and the other male writers and thinkers between their blunt statements and the reality of women’s roles in their own formation. The challenge of this thesis is to capture these masculine biases in their own writings, while also recognizing issues surrounding women are occasionally more nuanced than they appear.
perfect preparation of young men for preaching, as the highest act of the Christian ministry, [...] by providing them [...] a course of practical instruction in the art of preaching” (v). Riding on the heels of a country reeling from a civil war (and congruent with images that popular hymns of the era promoted), Beecher’s lectures connoted a strong message: “A sermon is a weapon of war. Not the tracery enameled upon its blade, not the jewelry that is set within its hilt, not the same that is stamped upon it, but its power in the day of battle, must be the test of its merits” (227). If the sermon is a weapon of war, then the logic follows that the preparation of a minister was akin to a soldier marching into battle—a far cry from the image of Jesus submissively marching while shouldering his cross to his death; an attempted transformation of the “Prince of Peace” into a man of war. One hears echoes in this discourse of the widely popular hymns “Onward Christian soldiers,” “A mighty fortress is our God,” and the “Salvation Army” which further promote this masculinized Christianity—an idea I will discuss more in depth later in the chapter.

Much like the Bible, in Christian texts of the nineteenth century, unless the subject was specifically female, the masculine pronoun was exclusively used. In analyzing the ways these centuries old texts promote this culture of Christian masculinity, it is imperative to distinguish when the terms “man” or “manhood” are being used to describe the male gender or rather being used as a means to describe humanity. If the latter were true, then women could make the mental adjustments in their minds and move on with their calling (though the impetus is always on the marginalized to make adjustments). However, there is great evidence to suggest the former to be true. Thus, the preaching manuals of the century tended to focus exclusively on the man as preacher—
and furthermore, as Mountford would assert, promulgates this notion of the “masculinity of preaching,” making it difficult to discern where women fit in these highly gendered rhetorical manuals, if at all. It is probable that much of the impetus contributing to the rise of “muscular Christianity” surrounded the glorification of the soldier and the army (which, during that era was the traditional calling of the aristocracy). Thus to be perceived as tender and compassionate was feminine and shameful. Thus, if the soldier was the marker for aristocracy, then for the office of the preacher to hold any social capital, the connotation of the manly man must hold.

While Augustine’s *De doctrina christiana* implicitly referred to the exclusivity of the metaphorical pulpit for men, manuals and lectures written by the likes of Stalker, Beecher and their Calvinist contemporaries strongly argued for this idea that “the highest character in which a preacher can stand is that of simple Christian manhood” (Beecher 231). In his Yale Lecture Series: *The Preacher and His Models*, James Stalker emphasized the supreme value of ethos in homiletical rhetoric over any other rhetorical strategy, revealing the weight of what is required for a minister:

> The regular hearers of a minister gradually form in their minds, almost unawares, an image of what he is, into which they put everything which they themselves remember about him and everything which they have heard of his record; and, when he rises on Sunday in the pulpit, it is not the man visible there at the moment that they listen to, but this image, which stands behind him and determines the precise weight and effect of every sentence which he utters. (168)
Such emphasis placed on a single man further widens the chasm that Augustine first mildly introduced fifteen centuries prior with the notion that minister wears the cloak of Jesus and carries the cross of Christ in a way that those in the congregation do not (a medieval model of thinking). Even so, where Augustine’s focus was specifically on personal piety, these manuals praised exclusively this embodiment of manhood.

I would be remiss not to add that this “muscular Christianity” is as detrimental to the men who exist within it as the women who are removed from this realm of Christian leadership. Interestingly, when describing the most difficult nuances of the preacher, Stalker notes the importance of traveling down the path to viewing human beings as the most interesting things in the world—the duality and beauty of the “saint and the sinner” in one soul, a beautiful sentiment on the importance of truly seeing the entirety of a person (Maya Angelou centuries later captured this sentiment best: “I’ve seen the wonders of the world / not yet one common man”) (171).19 Aside from this powerful content, this line marks, in a single footnote at the bottom, the first mention of a female in the entire manual: “It has often astonished me to observe how easily ministers’ wives in this respect find for themselves the right path” (171). Even during a time of peak pressure to promote a strong front of masculinity from the pulpit, there still seems to be a sense among the authors that something is indeed missing.

The nineteenth century saw a peak in prestige for the Calvinist minister. With this added prestige of the minister, the preaching scholarship further evolved, ironically training generations of men who could successfully persuade and convince even their congregations that they “do not respect the cloth unless they find a man in it” (Stalker

19 From Maya Angelou’s poem, *Human Family*. 
If the nineteenth century saw the rise of the “manly” art of rhetoric, then the twentieth century saw a slight decrease in the prestige of the pulpit and a seeming increase in the fragility of masculinity. The twentieth century saw the rise of institutions of manhood, such as the Boy Scouts of America and the Young Men’s Christian Association, formed to compensate for the “institutional anxiety within mainline Protestant Denominations over the declining status of the minister” (Mountford 41). If the status of one longstanding white-male institution was declining, the status of the white man in America was stronger than ever. Even so, these twentieth century manuals evolved to reach more subsets of the population. Unlike the nineteenth century manuals, this generation of ministers saw training in how to speak in terms that women, children, widows and other subsets of the population could understand. Despite the evolution to pay more credence to the diversity of the congregations listening to the sermons, the rhetorical audience for whom the manuals were written is undoubtedly white men. The effects of this and the increase in female authorship on rhetoric and homiletics will be explored in greater depth in the following chapter.

_The Battle Hymns of the Nineteenth Century_

Coupled with this notion propagated in these manuals of preachers as the “manliest of men,” the Church further deviated from its first century roots with the imagery of war and battle infiltrating hymns of worship. While Paul’s letter to the church in Ephesus encouraged the Ephesians that “…we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places,” the hymns seemed to instead have
uncomfortable nods to long-standing traditions of Western Imperialism (Ephesians 6:10, KJV).

Manifested in popular hymns of the nineteenth century, this Christian masculinity flexed its muscles with zeal during Sunday morning worship. Hymns such as “Onward Christian Soldiers” and “Am I a Soldier of the Cross” propagated this image that the world—and the Church—was in dire need of this of what Mountford calls this “cult of manhood.” This notion of Christianity as a “cult of manhood” is well reflected in literature as well. Retreating back to chapter one, we see the scene being set for Father Mapple’s sermon through the fictional hymn that was closely adapted from the hymnbook of the Calvinistic Dutch Reformed church in which the author Herman Melville was raised (Cook 31). Jonathan Cook states that “in the version of the hymn sung in the Whaleman’s Chapel, the Jonah-like speaker faces the deadly horrors of being swallowed by a whale, a type of eternal damnation” (31). The hymn reads:

The ribs and terrors of the whale, Arched over me a dismal gloom, While all God’s sun-lit waves rolled by, And left me deepening down to doom. I saw the opening maw of hell; With endless pains and sorrows there; Which none but they that feel can tell— Oh, I was plunging to despair. In black distress, I called my God, When I could scarce believe him mine, He bowed his ear to my complaints—No more the whale did me confine.

(Melville 41–42)

In this hymn we see a fascinating dualism of sorts transpiring: the language both appeals exclusively to the sailor’s time at sea, but also uses that same language to—in some
ways—frighten them into submission to God. Either way, the language simultaneously draws its intended male audience in and prepares them for the message to follow.

Winston Churchill nearly a century later famously chose “Onward Christian Soldiers” as the hymn to be sung at a church service honoring the meeting between the prime minister and President Roosevelt:

Onward, Christian soldiers
marching as to war
With the cross of Jesus
going on before!20

Churchill expanded on his choice, explaining somewhat perniciously (as far as the church is concerned) that he:

felt that this was no vain presumption, but that we had the right to feel that we serving a cause [...] from on high. When I looked upon that densely packed congregation of fighting men of the same language, of the same faith, of the same fundamental laws, of the same ideals...it swept across me that here was the only hope, but also the sure hope, of saving the world from measureless degradation. (Collins 153-154)

It appears “sweeping across him” was not simply hope, but hope with a tinge of nationalism that was sweeping across the allied powers at the precipice of the United States’ entry into World War II. My purpose for including this anecdote is not to cast any moral judgments surrounding the events of the war, but rather to demonstrate the interconnectedness between the church and the political patriarchal culture it exists within. Perhaps as interesting as why, the question remains how did these notions of

20 A nineteenth century English hymn written by Sabine Baring-Gould.
imperialism and this “muscular Christianity” become so uncomfortably and intrinsically tied in Church history?

We see this linkage between the state and the church in a way that promotes this muscular Christianity as early as the turn of the nineteenth century. In Charles Kingsley’s sermon “England’s Strength,” he promotes both the duty of men to their country and to their God: “I say, to our wise Constitution and to our wise Church, which teach us that all power is of God; that men who have power, great or small, are His stewards” (196). In fact, this very notion of “muscular Christianity” can be traced back to a review of Kingsley’s novel Two Years Ago (Mountford 45). Randy Balmer coined the term that “came to be associated with masculine expressions of piety and with various initiatives designed to make Christianity more attractive to men” (qtd. in Mountford 45). Perhaps alluding to popular claims that women are amongst Christianity’s most faithful followers, it is curious that the very notion that alienates women from leading from the pulpit is simultaneously the notion designed to make Christianity attractive to men in the first place. While these popular battle hymns were sung and metaphors of war resounded from the church on Sunday mornings, a different devotion remained un-uttered within the four church walls, content to be left only in its written form:

Verily, Devotion, thy name is Woman!

Not She with trait’rous kiss her Savior stung;

Not she denied him with unholy tongue;

She, while apostles shrank, could danger brave,

Last at his cross, and earliest at his grave. (Barrett 11.183-86)
No less a image to the highest of Christian aspirations, Eaton S. Barrett’s poem on Mary Magdalene reveals what is perhaps a direct foil to the popular masculine hymns of the time. “She, while apostles shrank, could danger brave” contrasts directly with the battle imagery these popular hymns promulgated. These lines bring to mind images of the apostle Peter, passionately aiming to defend Jesus by drawing his sword and cutting the ear off of the high priest’s servant, to which Jesus responded: “Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?” (John 18:11, KJV).

Those familiar with the impassioned apostle’s story know that before the night’s end, his sword and his valor could not save him from denying Jesus three times. While the apostles largely scattered, only the faithful few followed Jesus to the cross, among them Mary Magdalene and his mother Mary—indeed “last at his cross, and earliest at his grave.” It would be useful to inquire into how much of this ignoring or turning away from the Magdalene and from Mary emerges from the powerful antipathy to Roman Catholic practice felt by Protestants in the nineteenth century. It may well be that the masculinized cult in part “felt” as if it was successfully defying the feminized Christianity and all of its pieties which the Church of Rome promoted.

How then, does one reconcile the Biblical truth promoting virtues far from exclusively masculine (if anything, virtues closer to what Western society would depict as feminine traits) with the culturally practiced gendered exclusion of the message? Perverting Jesus’s great commission to “go and make disciples of all nations,” the Church evolved at its best to reach men, women and children with the Gospel, but at worst

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21 For the purposes of this thesis, different translations of the Bible will be used corresponding with the century I am discussing. For discussions prior to the nineteenth century, the King James Version will be quoted (as it was the prominent translation of the time).
promote and protect the authority of the white male—both from the pulpit and the government.

*The Notion of Evangelical Feminism*

Perhaps even lagging way behind popular culture, the path to the pulpit remains an uphill climb for female preachers. While liberal feminism’s roots can be traced back to the early 18th century, the movement gained momentum in the 1960’s, riding into the public eye on the heels of anti-war sentiments and the emerging struggle against social inequality. These tinges of what the church renamed as “secular feminism,” brought to light an uncomfortable tension between complementarian and egalitarian denominations. For the former, the integrity of scripture was at stake with the rise of feminism leading to the creation of the *Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, an organization that, according to their mission statement, “believes women should submit to their husbands in the home and only men can hold some leadership roles in the church,” while believing it is sin that “inclines women to resist limitations on their roles.” The latter egalitarian denominations began to experiment with what would later be termed “evangelical feminism”—a marked departure from the longstanding parochial practices regarding the roles of women in the church.

Even amongst Christian denominations that affirm this newly coined evangelical feminism there still lies a tension where women pastors find themselves either too feminist to be Christian or too Christian to be feminist. Surely there is room for both? Women were on the frontlines of the church: they followed Jesus, they were among his closest friends, and were the first to witness the cornerstone of the Christian faith: the resurrection. From the beginning, the church has been inherently gendered, but equally
so. It would seem logical then, that the solution is not to dismantle theories of preaching that promote the building up of “men of God,” but rather to compensate for cultural biases to determine how women can enter this sphere successfully to reclaim their vital role in the church.

The problem, therein, is not that this cult of manhood exists—male preachers should always aim to be men of character, virtue, strength, courage and piety. The problem is both the exclusion of men of color from the normative WASPs\(^{22}\) and the fact that there is no culturally displayed sense of Christian womanhood that proposes virtues deemed worthy enough to build up preachers. While legions of homiletical manuals and denominational doctrine define this idea of Biblical manhood (which provides the basis for Beecher’s assertion that “the highest character in which a preacher can stand is that of simple Christian manhood,”) there is no similar idea of Christian womanhood that is not defined outside of patriarchal culture (Beecher 231). Among complementarian doctrine, the definition of Biblical womanhood is simplified and confined to the context of domesticity: a woman of God is a supportive, submissive and loving wife and mother. Among egalitarian denominations—whose doctrine allows for the equal practice of preaching and ministry amongst males and females—there is not a clearly defined path for how females should rhetorically preach from the pulpit. With centuries of religious tradition and manuals centered on the “preparation of young men for preaching and ministry,” how does a woman enter this sphere? (Beecher v). How does a women lead the church forward in a way that is distinctly feminine without the centuries of gendered homiletical manuals to train her?

\(^{22}\) White Anglo-Saxon Protestants
CHAPTER THREE
IN SEARCH OF A ROUND TABLE: A FEMINIST ECCLESIOLOGY

Concerning the why and how and what and who of ministry,
one image keeps surfacing: A table that is round.
-Chuck Lathrop

In the Medieval legend of King Arthur’s Court, the knights gathered around the
famed round table. As the name suggests, there was no head of the table, and thus, those
invited to sit were considered among equals. The symbolism of the table evolved over
time, but came to be the mark of the chivalric order of the Knights of the Round Table.
While the king still presided over his retinue of knights, there lacked a sense of inequity
among them. In a similar manner, as we saw in chapter one, Jesus, while still exercising
his divine authority, ministered to groups of equals, going so far as to abolish this deeply
embedded social hierarchy within the kingdom of God. Paul, in his letter to the Galatians,
reinforces this equality writing “there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free,
nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28, NIV).

Given the social and political context in which Paul was writing, this idea was
revolutionary because the law in general still maintained these social distinctions. In The
Jewish Annotated New Testament, according to Diogenes Laeritus, a historian in the
second century, Socrates said he had three blessings: “that I was born a human being and
not a beast, a man and not a woman, a Greek and not a barbarian” (339). Despite Jesus’s
intended abolition of this social hierarchy (its effects something we will explore more

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23 Extracted from “In search of a round table,” a poem by Chuck Lathrop.
24 In Letty Russell’s Church in the Round, she also alludes to this Arthurian legend. I retell it here in my
own words.
later in this chapter), we need not look too far to note the prevalence of inequality in today’s society and within the walls of the church.

In Letty Russell’s *Church in the Round: Feminist Interpretation of the Church*, she explores this metaphor of the church as a round table—that is the church as a place free of the social hierarchy that exists outside of its walls. Russell argues that for the church to be a true expression of the gospel it must access, as Jesus did, reality and ministry from the margins of society. She explains:

> The critical principle of feminist ecclesiology is a table principle. It looks for ways that God reaches out to include all those whom society and religion have declared outsiders and invites them to gather round God’s table of hospitality. The measure of the adequacy of the life of a church is how it is connected to those on the margin. (Russel 25)

Similarly, she notes “Jesus’s preaching is constantly directed toward the invitation of those who are the rejected ones of society, those on the margin” (25). Revisiting the ways in which Baby Suggs ministered to her congregation in such a manner that was non-hierarchical in nature (and literally in nature), we see that she employs, either consciously or unconsciously, this act of leading her “church” and interpreting scripture through the lens of the marginalized. This makes perfect sense, given Baby Suggs and her community’s lives as a former slaves, but what would it look like for those possessing social privilege to do the same? How do we, in Russell’s terms, “develop a feminist theory about the church that makes sense of women’s reality and experiences of oppression and yet continues to affirm Jesus Christ as the source of life and connection in the Christian community?” (21). Tracing this twentieth century question, we see that
while these thoughts and movements gained traction in the later centuries, they were being discussed and formed with vigor in the early nineteenth, when women began asserting on a theological level their rights to the pulpit.25 Perhaps most prominently, Catherine Booth, and other women in nineteenth century England possessed enough social capital to bring the case for female preachers to the public sphere, arguably for the first time at this magnitude. This chapter, while still focusing on nineteenth century female preachers, will travel across the pond to explore the impact of Victorian era female thinkers, including Booth, on the sphere of public preaching. I will provide a (perhaps overdue) hermeneutical framework that justifies women’s leadership in the church, continue the discussion on the “feminine” nature of Christ, and examine the ways that, perhaps the most famous fictional female preacher in Victorian literature, Dinah Morris in George Eliot’s *Adam Bede* embodies this struggle for the pulpit in the midst of the patriarchy.

*A Vigorous Resistance*

One of the lasting implications of the Reformation was that the scriptures became accessible to the “common man,” and as history would prove, the common woman as well. With this newfound notion that an individual could be scripturally literate, women were able to read and explore for themselves the idea that the sacred text may have more egalitarian roots than was communicated in the church at the time. In *The Reader's Repentance: Women Preachers, Women Writers, and Nineteenth-Century Social Discourse*, Christine Krueger argues that beginning in the late eighteenth and carrying

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25 These same conversations have undoubtedly been happening for centuries, but published accounts of women asserting their rights to the pulpit began to take shape in the public sphere in the early nineteenth century. Using the Google’s NGram viewer, we see a sharp spike in the term “female preacher” in the early nineteenth century. That term was virtually non-existent in print prior. See Appendix B for more information.
into the nineteenth centuries, women mounted a vigorous resistance to the popular ideology surrounding who had the right to preach the gospel (7). Krueger notes that:

Christian women pointed to the Hebrew judge Deborah, Queen Esther, or Sarah—who laughed at God—as precedents for divinely sanctioned female speech, in opposition to patriarchal authority. Women preachers reminded their enemies that at Pentecost Peter had quoted the Prophet Joel, who described an era of special blessing as one in which “thy sons and daughters shall Prophesy.” (7)

In this era (and continuing in the present), Paul’s writings were used to uphold these longstanding notions of female domesticity and thereby continue the patriarchal traditions of the Church where women were relegated solely to tend to issues fitting for the domestic woman. However, with increased access through the scriptures, and—to some degree—without the deeply imbedded masculine biases of those with access to interpret scriptures prior, women began to recognize this profound disconnect between their call to submission in the Church and the promises that their “daughters will prophesy” (Joel 2:28, Acts 2:17). They began to perceive that perhaps this notion of biblical womanhood that equates piety with domesticity was more socially constructed than divinely inspired.

Further along in this chapter, I will argue that it is actually in Paul’s writings that we find the answers to justify women’s full rights to the pulpit as opposed to the justification to keep them out. While Paul’s words are used by many, even in the present, to justify women’s submissiveness and silence in the church, I would place Paul only second to Jesus in terms of championing women’s rights in the Church. While his writings were solely aimed at teaching his readers how to live out the kingdom of God in their context, he nonetheless recognizes women as being pivotal in that mission. A further examination will follow.

Nigh Hogan, in Response to Choi and Huff: Paul and Women’s Leadership in American Christianity in the Nineteenth Century Pauline, notes than scholarship has continued, with more degrees of success in the twentieth century: “today’s exegetes also find messages of equality and empowerment for women where generations of male scholarship had found only limitations on women’s roles” (Hogan 266).
While the Evangelicals argued that the lack of scriptural literacy in society hampered their Pentecostal mission to “save all souls, regardless of sex, class, or race,” more oldline churches sought to uphold these traditional notions of biblical manhood and womanhood. This egalitarian interpretation of scripture that began gaining traction in the nineteenth century threatened traditional notions of masculinity and the patriarchal structure of the church at large (7). The women in this era—both writers of fiction and preachers alike—began to recognize the implications of androcentric interpretations of text on the mission of God, and, as a result, developed their own discursive communities to flesh out these tensions between the notions of equality among all believers and parochial traditions. Krueger argues that most importantly, “finding in scripture calls to essentially literary vocations as preachers, prophets, and evangelists, women writers could re-envision women’s lives and represent them authoritatively. These women were revising and subverting the dominant Christian ideology, and thereby reconstructing social discourse” (9).

Though extremely nervous to begin her public ministry, Catherine Booth advocated that women had equal rights to the pulpit, and consequently created a radical movement in the case for equality in ministry. If the marked beginning of the movement was the accessibility of scriptures to women, then Booth was primed to be a leader in this movement. Her education, while limited in scope, was highly effective: “by the age of five she could read; by the age of twelve she had read through the Bible eight times” (Read 6). Booth rose to prominence as a voice for this movement during an era

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28 It is worth noting that it was Booth’s husband, a pastor himself, who encouraged and fully supported his wife’s claim to the pulpit. The two assumed an equal partnership in both their ministry and their founding of the prominent Salvation Army. With her husband’s encouragement, Booth wrote the pamphlet Female Ministry: Woman’s Right to Preach the Gospel in 1859, in response to the social trepidation caused by American pastor Phoebe Palmer’s preaching.
where the intricacies of faith, gender, authority, and submission contributed to these tensions surrounding women in leadership. Pamela Walker’s *Gender, Radicalism, and Female Preaching in Nineteenth-Century Britain* notes that “for some British evangelicals, if a woman received a special call, she might modestly address an audience. Women, according to one influential writer, would assume no ‘personal authority’ but would serve only as ‘instruments through which divine instruction is communicated to the people’” (172). Notions of what it actually meant to “modestly” address audiences with no “personal authority” complicated this conversation further. While the argument could be made that all preachers surrender personal authority in exchange for the Holy Spirit’s guidance, these debates surrounding the use of such authority pertained only to women—and the use of this authority was tied into nineteenth century notions of submission and femininity. Critics of Booth felt female preaching was both unnatural and unfeminine (which makes sense given the preaching manuals’ underlying message that the word of God was to be proclaimed through this lens of masculinity). Booth, however, did not maintain, nor did she advocate that female preaching needed to exist outside of social conventions and order, but rather argued that it was fully inspired by the Holy Spirit and thus already existed as part of the institutional church. In other words, women preachers were not anomalies or prophetic figures, but rather “dutiful Christian [wives and mothers]” who “proclaimed [their] right to preach as a part of the covenant between God and humanity” (Walker 179).

Walker furthers this notion by stating, “for evangelical women at mid-century, the duty of submission was an important part of their understanding of femininity. But

29 This stands in direct contrast to eighteenth century British writer Samuel Johnson’s infamous one-liner in response to women preaching: “A woman's preaching is like a dog's walking on his hind legs. It is not done well; but you are surprised to find it done at all.”
submission was difficult to reconcile with a call to preach to a nation that seemed dangerously indifferent to the spiritual condition of its people, especially those dwelling in the growing cities” (174). Women, therefore, were forced to reconcile these culturally and parochially enforced gender roles with Jesus’s proclamation that “the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few” (Matthew 9:37, NIV). The “workers” of the day excluded roughly half (or more) of its qualified laborers, and women were feeling the call to serve in a way that was counter-cultural at the time. But a few evangelicals who, in Walker’s words, “took seriously the biblical injunction that there is neither male nor female in Christ Jesus” demanded women’s access to the pulpit (172).

A Hermeneutical Framework: The Case for Women Preachers

In one of Booth’s most famous pamphlets Female Ministry: Woman’s Right to Preach the Gospel, she, as the title would indicate, presents a biblical framework for women preachers in response to what were perhaps the three biggest arguments she encountered in opposition to women preaching in the public sphere. Written in response to the controversy surrounding her American contemporary Phoebe Palmer’s preaching, Booth’s argument contained three central premises: first, that women were created equal to men; second, that their subsequent subjugation to men was part of the post-fall curse; third, that in Jesus, the equality of women has been restored. This pamphlet was not only a work of scriptural exegesis (which she found most important), but as Walker notes, “a polemic against a corrupt church that had misused Scripture to silence women and to hoard spiritual authority for itself” (181). In her work, Female Ministry or Women’s Right, Booth rhetorically asks “surely there must be some unfaithfulness, ‘craftiness,’ and ‘handling of the word of life deceitfully’ somewhere. Surely the love of caste and
unscriptural jealousy for a separated priesthood has had something to do with this anomaly” (9). In attempt to prove this, Booth provides a scriptural exegesis of three prominent scriptures that are often cited as evidence for women’s exclusion in preaching. While arguments that women preaching were “unnatural and unfeminine” were a common opposition, Booth took careful note dismantling this long-standing framework that the Bible prohibits women from speaking.

Still, the historical traditions of hermeneutics did not favor Booth’s lens through which she interpreted the scriptures. Nearly a century later, Schüssler Fiorenza, in Transforming Vision: Explorations in Feminist Theology, attributes a newly articulated critical lens that works (likely unintentionally) in conjunction with Booth’s conclusions. Before laying out a hermeneutical framework that supports these feminist readings of scripture, it is important to consider a brief history of the field. Schüssler Fiorenza notes that “although hermeneutics appreciates tradition, it does not sufficiently consider the centuries of [women’s] silencing and exclusion and the resulting systematically distorted communication” (58). She goes on to say that “while hermeneutics can be understood with [Jacques] Derrida as a matter of the free play of signs and with [Richard] Rorty as merely keeping the lines of communication open, according to [Hans Georg] Gadamer hermeneutics has the task of translating meaning from one ‘world’ into another” (61).

Simply put, Schüssler Fiorenza argues that we cannot simply appreciate the sacred texts as written in the context of a patriarchal society (and thus through an androcentric lens), but must draw on alternative “methodological approaches” to develop a “critical feminist rhetoric of liberation” (59). Without these approaches, Schüssler Fiorenza argues that the primary concepts for proper hermeneutics remain problematic for feminist readings.
because they do not “sufficiently take into account relations of domination and power” (62). Thus, Booth’s pamphlet—the generation of female preachers that succeeded them, seek to not simply provide a scriptural case for women in ministry, but also translate that into a rhetorical message of liberation.30

The following three passages are obviously not a comprehensive hermeneutical study on the case for women in ministry, but arguably stand as three of the primary passages used to justify women’s silence and subjugation in the sphere of public ministry leadership.31 I will state these three passages, and then (albeit briefly) explicate (using both Booth’s interpretation and my own studies) their meanings in the social, cultural, and political context through which Paul was writing. For the first two passages, Paul is responding to concerns from the young church in Corinth (where things are going morally astray for the congregants). In these passages, Paul is addressing disorder in this Corinthian church:

Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head. But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head

30 Even Booth’s “The Salvation Army” adopts militaristic the terms of “generals” and “soldiers.” Booth’s husband was known as “The General” while Booth herself was known as “The Mother of the Salvation Army,” despite their equal roles as founders of the organization. Despite Booth’s groundbreaking work as a woman in the organization, it is unclear if their use of a military rhetoric and culture undercuts the masculinized traditions of British militarism or reinforces it.

31 There are other common passages that seem to discuss gender roles within the context of marriage that would be fascinating to explore further through a feminist critique. However, for the purposes of this thesis, I will focus on scripture that pertains specifically to women in the public sphere. However, Nigh Hogan challenges these notions of gender roles and authority within marriage in such a way that contributes to this conversation on the church as a patriarchal institution: “[In regards to the submission called for in Ephesians], Christ does not coerce faith or obedience, thus the verse does not legitimize coercive leadership. Moreover, the husband is to imitate Christ’s love for the church in his love for his wife. Mollenkott underlines the kenotic quality of Christ’s love that is not based on power but on self-emptying of privilege. She states that a husband “is expected to yield up his patriarchal advantages and humbly serve his wife’s best interests just as Christ gave up everything in order to bring the church into being” (Hogan 265).
uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven. (1 Corinthians 11:4–5, King James Version)\textsuperscript{32}

Contextually, the purpose of prophecy is the public edification—or the strengthening, encouragement, and comfort—of the church. So when Paul prescribes behavior for this practice, he is referring to the physical speech that serves to edify and lead the church. What is interesting about this passage (and an important precursor for what follows) is Paul is not prohibiting women from this practice, he is merely giving \textit{both} men and women instruction for dress and avoiding indecorous behavior while praying and prophesying (men must leave heads uncovered, while women were required to cover their heads—a seemingly equal, yet different, instruction). Booth argues that Paul “would not provide precise instructions on how women ought to preach if he intended to forbid the practice” (Booth 5). Thus, whatever prescription Paul is giving in regards to prayer and prophecy, it has equal implications for both men and women.

It would not sufficient to simply address that Paul acknowledges women as participants in publically edifying the church without examining moments in scripture where Paul seems to demand women’s silence in the church. There are two distinct scriptures that are often used as the primary exegetical proof for opposing women in ministry positions. Further along in his letter to the Corinthians, Paul writes:

\textit{Let your} women keep silence in the churches; for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands

\textsuperscript{32} As the \textit{King James Version} would have been the translation Catherine Booth used, I will use it as well in this instance.
at home; for it is a shame for women to speak in the church. (1 Corinthians 14:34–35, King James Version, *emphasis mine*)

A seemingly blunt and clear command complicated by the fact that this is the same writer who chapters before gave instructions for how women were to speak in the church. It is noteworthy then, that under the Christian premise that the Bible is infallible word of God, Paul cannot be contradicting himself. Thus, he cannot be offering instructions on how to pray and prophesy while simultaneously demanding their silence—to the same church (and subsequently the same group of women) nonetheless.

Drawing on the exegesis of translation skills of several theologians, Booth asserts that the Greek word λαλεῖν translated as “to speak” was more precisely translated as “to chatter,” “to prattle,” as “opposed to articulate speech” (Booth 9). Furthermore, Walker argues that the passage “could not refer to women’s preaching because the women were asking questions in a disorderly manner, seeking to learn, while preachers were themselves teachers” (Walker 178). Thus, this command was a directive towards a specific group of women who, in speaking out of turn and outside the context of edification, were disrupting the service. In the context of Jewish culture we know that women also spoke publicly in their capacity as civil leaders, thus this passage is generally regarded as contextual specific to the church in Corinth and not a mandate for all time (also evidence by the fact, Booth would argue, that the text says “let your women” as opposed to “let all women”) (Booth 13).

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33 Some scholars consider this passage and the subsequent passage in 1 Timothy 2:12-13 as non-Pauline additions to the letters. For the purposes of this thesis, I will assume a literal interpretation of Paul writing these verses.

34 It is also worth mentioning that women of this time were, on the whole, significantly less educated than their husbands or male counterparts when it came to the Hebrew scriptures. Theologian Gordon Fee argues that it is imperative to consider the cultural differences between the present and the first century church. Given that education for women is widely available (at least in the Western world) in the present, as opposed to the first century where it was limited, may affect our understanding of this passage.
However, on a similar note, Paul writes in a letter to Timothy about the church in Ephesus: “But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve” (1 Timothy 2:12–13, King James Version). There is reason to believe that this verse is also culturally relative. New Testament scholar Gordon Fee maintains that this argument could be supported by exegesis of all three Pastoral Epistles. He states (I have removed scriptural references for ease of reading): “Certain women were troublesome in the church at Ephesus, and they appear to have been a major part of the cause of the false teachers’ making headway there. Since women are found teaching and prophesying elsewhere in the New Testament, it is altogether likely [this passage] speaks to a local problem” (Fee 85).

Booth herself argued that this scripture “was not intended to forbid teaching but only the usurpation of authority from men” (Walker 178).

In the end, Booth defined preaching as both “the rational and systematic exegesis of Scripture and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit” independent of the restrictions of any patriarchal institutions. She looked to the likes of Deborah in scripture who, as a prophetess, serves as the fourth Judge of Israel. An important distinction, Booth sought to maintain that while the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on women was enough to justify their calling, there is no shortage of scriptural evidence to support women’s rights to the pulpit as well.

*The Almost Trailblazer: A Look at Dinah Morris in George Eliot’s Adam Bede*

Allen Smith, in “George Eliot and the Authority of Preaching” argues that serious challenges to the patriarchal system emerged after the enlightenment period, where men and women were forced to consider their roles and place in society in light of these
newfound enlightenment ideas (176). “Nevertheless,” Smith argues “preaching events featuring women preachers remained a small minority. Their influence was not generally widespread. Instead, it may be argued that the most influential challenges to the idea of the necessary maleness of the preacher came from literature” (Smith 176). We need look no further to see the effects of the deeply rooted gendered hierarchy than George Eliot’s *Adam Bede.* In this novel, Eliot merges fictional and reality, for while Dinah Morris exists only in fiction, her character reflects significantly female influences in Eliot’s life.

Eliot’s construction of Dinah had to, according to Kathleen Watson in “Dinah Morris and Mrs. Evans: A Comparative Study of Methodist Diction” satisfy two questions: “How realistic is Dinah’s speech, and how successfully does George Eliot use it to create a character who is acceptable to the reader and adequate in fulfilling her role in the novel?” (283). Plenty has been said about the choices Eliot has made in her character development for *Adam Bede,* however, in her representation of Dinah Morris as a Methodist preacher, I argue she had to portray a female preacher in that role in such a way that could be commercially successful in light of the male-dominated social and religious structures characteristic of the Victorian age at the time. Taking a step back from the novel itself, George Eliot published under a male pseudonym in hopes to appropriate this male authority so that her novels would be given more credence to the wider audience, proving her awareness of how the hyper-masculine culture-at-large would perceive her literary choices and write accordingly.³⁵

³⁵ A fascinating aside is that, some would argue, George Eliot never intended for the novel to have this “happy ending.” In criticizing this ending, John Diekhoff says: “‘The original plan contemplated no happy ending. The novel was to be the story of Arthur and Adam and Hetty, building up to the scene at the gallows, which was to end the book- and it is permissible to hope, without the reprieve.’ The evidence Diekhoff offers that George Eliot changed her mind is the famous journal entry for November, 1858, in which she describes the origins of Adam Bede and how George Henry Lewes's ‘fascination’ with Adam and Dinah caused her to extend her conception of the novel to center on those two characters” (Bruce
Before the reader is introduced to Dinah for the first time, Eliot concisely addresses the concerns of Victorian society in regards to female preachers (proving literature as an excellent tool for reflecting the social and political temperature of society) when the stranger in the village comments to himself before Dinah preaches:

A sweet woman, the stranger said to himself, “but surely nature never meant her for a preacher.” Perhaps he was one of those who think that nature has theatrical properties, and, with the considerate view of facilitating art and psychology, “makes up” her characters, so that there may be no mistake about them. But Dinah began to speak. (Eliot 21)

The stranger’s comments reflect the prominent attitude in the nineteenth century (one that Booth challenged significantly in her works) that preaching was not simply a male activity, but a distinctly masculine one. In these character’s interactions with one another, Eliot explicitly challenges these systems in place. Smith argues, that Eliot’s characterization of Dinah challenges these basic assumptions about women and preaching:

Eliot’s novel provides a powerful challenge to pervasive assumptions and beliefs concerning women and preaching. “Indeed, the reader enters the world of Adam Bede and lives in the power of Dinah’s sermon [...] Dinah’s motivation to preach comes, according to the narrator, from her experience and encounter with Christ through conversion, and thereafter

Martin 757). It is curious then, that it was a man’s opinion that completely altered the characterization of Dinah Morris (as she probably would not have gotten married if the novel had stuck to its original form). An interesting notion given at this point in Eliot’s life she was no longer a practicing Christian. Eliot’s characterization of Dinah and her role as a preacher represents her own internal struggle to placate and then distance herself from her own religious past.
finds that she is called to preach the good news of Christ. It is, as it were, the most natural thing she can do (177).

As her sermon continues, we see the way Dinah is viewed by her audience through the lens of this stranger, who Eliot writes, is “won over by her words”:

The stranger had ceased to doubt, as he had done at first glance, that she could fix the attention of her rough hearers, but still he wondered whether she could have that power of rousing their more violent emotions, which must surely be a necessary seal of her vocation as a Methodist preacher, until she came to the words, “Lost!—Sinners” when there was a great change in her voice and manner. (Eliot 25).

In this scene, the stranger is forced to confront and reconcile the presence of Christ through the words of a woman.

The narrator continues by describing that Dinah “was not preaching as she heard others preach, but speaking directly from her own emotions, and under the inspiration of her own simple faith” (25). This description alludes to images of Christ speaking to the people in the synagogue in the Gospel of Mark: “And they went into Capernaum; and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and taught. And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes” (Mark 1:22). It is clear there is, as Booth argued in the previous section, a connection between Jesus’s authority and the authority of Dinah’s preaching. With this in mind, Smith suggests that gender is irrelevant when it comes to the presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit that compels one to preach:

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37 This “inspiration” negates the Church as an institutional “middle man” and reflects Booth’s idea that the Holy Spirit works directly through individuals without reference to gender.
the authority of preaching is found not in the gender or sex of a person but rather in response to a confrontation with Christ. Indeed, after an experience with Christ, the only instinctive thing to do is to preach what is experienced. Thus, the authority of preaching is an individual’s response to an encounter with the Christ. Indeed, Dinah, like any other man or woman who is confronted with Christ, is compelled into a decision: to proclaim or to keep silent. Dinah chooses to speak. (Smith 179)

Dinah, and the audience of men and women alike that gathered around the clearing (not completely unlike the one where Baby Suggs preached to her community—perhaps Morrison explicitly echoes Eliot here), proves that that the authority to preach is not found in gender, but rather in calling. Dinah felt this calling seemingly clearer than any other in her life; however, as Eliot would portray, her character was not infallible, nor was she void of discontinuities in her character.

In this regard, her fictional representation of Dinah reflects with great depth the challenges of women preachers in the nineteenth century. In some facets, Dinah’s character proved a trailblazer for women in the field of preaching, proving that women could exercise authority independent of their gender. However, the ending complicates this character analysis when Dinah falls into a seemingly classic literary trope where a woman must choose between love and calling. Watson represents the underlying tensions in regard to Dinah’s fallibility to social norms:

Her certainty that it is her vocation to live and die without a husband or children proves to be wrong. Despite her assurance to the contrary she really refuses Seth because she does not love him. When Adam declares
his love she finally decides that despite her frequent vision of “Jesus, the Man of Sorrows...standing looking towards me, and pointing to the sinful, and suffering, and afflicted” it is God's will that she should marry.

(Watson 292, Eliot 335)

Eliot depicts Dinah throughout the novel as a purely selfless character. Though, in the end, she is portrayed as finally—despite much personal strife in the decision—getting the thing that she desires: a man she loves. In perhaps a larger effort to not upset the patriarchal culture (and her readers accustomed to these gender expectations), Eliot, in the end, has Dinah conform to the traditional gender norms at the times. She gets married (albeit to a man she loves dearly), becomes a housewife, and leaves the priesthood as a result of increasing dissent from the men in the novel.\(^{38}\) This introduces a precarious question for women I feel has permeated this debate for centuries: can women have both? And perhaps more precarious, why does literature portray that they can not?

\(^{38}\) *Adam Bede* is an early work of fiction by Eliot. Heroines in subsequent novels will achieve quite different “happy endings.”
CONCLUSION
THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS NOW AND NOT YET

This thesis oscillates between the theological and the literary, reality and fiction—predicated on the idea that the fictional characters of Baby Suggs and Dinah Morris reflect the culture as much as the real people who have the ability to change it. The examination and analysis of characters both of fiction and reality merges at the crossroads of literature and biography (and at points autobiography). Whether it is Baby Suggs reminding her ragtag congregation of outsiders that the only grace they could receive was the grace they could imagine, or the woman caught in adultery watching the men one by one drop their stones, each portrayal serves as a reminder that Jesus was never far away.

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From the age of five, I longed to know this person of Jesus. Many of my early encounters came from a small-town church on the Texas-Mexico border—la frontera—a place where cell phone service would shift to international roaming every so often. The church building was a former strip club (the neon signs of alcohol hanging above the former bar converted to baptismal space)—always a reminder, I was taught, that grace is never far away.

While the pulpit remained an elusive, sacred space as a congregant, the altar was open to everyone. It was a place I frequented early on in my faith, should my salvation ever come into question. “You can never be saved too many times,” I was told. One such occasion a man spoke words of prophesy over my life, stating that I would be a pastor one day. The men at my church loved and respected women, probably why I never gave
much thought about why I never saw a woman behind the pulpit. While speaking to a nineteenth century classroom of wide-eyed men in seminary learning the art of preaching, Henry W. Beecher shared that his vocation was practically destiny:

I never had any choice about it. My father had eight sons. Only two of them ever tried to get away from preaching; and they did not succeed. The other six went right into the ministry just as naturally as they went into manhood. (Beecher 43)

In some ways, my journey into ministry seemed just as natural. Despite the fact that I neither had the familial legacy nor prescribed gender for the habit, my path felt less like a calling and more an extension of growing up.

Those prophetic words were never far from my mind as I entered for the first time through the front gates of Georgetown University as a wide-eyed freshman, who left behind the rural farmlands and simplicity of la frontera for the complexities and diversities the big city offered. Fitting then, my first view of Georgetown, with all my worldly possessions in tow, would be the official seal that marked the front gates. The scroll in the eagle’s mouth bears the words “Utraque Unum,” which comes from Paul’s epistle to the Ephesians:

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have become near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, he who made both one and broke down the dividing wall of enmity, through his flesh, abolishing the law with its commandments and legal claims, that he might create in himself one new person in place of the two, thus establishing peace, and might
reconcile both with God, in one body, through the cross, putting that
enmity to death by it. (Ephesians 2:13-16, NABRE)

The passage from which the two words are taken tells of the oneness of Jews and Gentile
in Christ. *From many, one.*

The Church has since emerged into times where the predominant dichotomy expands beyond ethnic lines (Jew or Gentile) into dichotomies of gender—a dichotomy as old as the Church itself. Supported by a patriarchal culture that has long governed western civilizations, Paul’s words to the Ephesians (amongst other churches) were taken by many to be a mandate for all time—setting into motion a strong divergence between Biblical definitions of manhood and womanhood and cultural ones. Literature gives faces to women who for centuries preached outside the normative Church structure.

Fiction, however, does nothing if not represent the political and social climate of the time. For each of these fictional characters there were legions of women striving to move their realm of influence straight into the church walls—pulpit optional. A feminist move, by any account, striving for this kind of equality afforded to men for centuries. However, these early women preachers pioneering and quietly asserting their calling were precipitously erased from public memory. Thus in lies the tension for women of the cloth: how does a woman function in a culture where she is too radical for complementarian Christianity and too conservative for liberal feminism? A struggle I still attempt to reconcile today.

While the chapters of this thesis would certainly suggest the Church has evolved into a patriarchal institution, the truth is I love the Church. My college years proved the church’s expression in culture expanded beyond all that I had previously experienced—
invitations to the altar may be far and fewer between, but now the once-elusive pulpit seemed within grasp. My sophomore year, I sat in service and, for the first time, watched and listened to a woman preach—something I never realized I was missing. It was not until years had passed and I became the woman preaching that I realized it was truly an exception and not a norm. That there would be those who questioned my calling, my abilities, and the validity of my words on the basis of my gender. That even a place like Georgetown was not immune to the sexist institutionalism that the church (only at its worst) could express. That, like Paul, I would have confront the newly discovered social implications of my calling. Like Paul writing to the people of Corinth, Georgetown, too, stands at the crossroads of our nation. Rural and urban. American and international. Rich and poor. Man and woman. All enter through the same front gates—from many one. It is impossible to enter the gates and leave them years later unchanged. With time and challenges, I see that the Church, too, is changing.

During the time that Catherine Booth wrote her decrees for a female priesthood (and the centuries that preceded it), Paul’s writings have long been used to justify a patriarchal tradition of the Church. Like me, Paul, too, was forced to come to terms with the consequences of his own (rather dramatic) religious conversion. It seems that women throughout the centuries had to do the same. They were forced to reconcile the open invitation from Christ with the limitations the institutional structures maintained. However, the early Church provided opportunity for women to transcend their social limitations in a way that had a profound influence on its growth. They were deacons, prophetesses, leaders, and for Jesus himself, loyal followers. The Church provided an outlet in a way that their patriarchal society of the time did not. In essence, Paul’s epistles
provided guidelines for how to live and behave in a pre-existing social system (often hostile to the early Church) within the context of this new world order Jesus established where these hierarchical presuppositions were completely subverted. This new world order—or the “kingdom of God” as Jesus refers to it—is both now and not yet, or to use Hilary Elder’s phrasing, “at once here and not here” (221). Thus, parts of Paul’s letters existed to teach the young Church to live out this new faith in a specific social context, under the promise that the kingdom was coming (and as Paul desperately hoped, coming soon). And nearly two thousand years later, that the kingdom is still coming.

While Paul never addressed the patriarchy as a social order adverse to the laws of the Church, Hilary Elder, studying the feminine theology of Aemilia Lanyer, notes that the conclusions to be drawn about patriarchy’s role in the Church shifts when the sacred stories are retold and re-accessed in explicitly feminine terms (214). Through this new lens, Lanyer concludes:

Patriarchy is an important aspect of the curse of the Fall, and so an anomaly in a post-Christ world, no longer divinely ordained, because of the terrible, and male, crime of the crucifixion, and the friendship, loyalty, and support that Christ and women showed each other during his life. Those who speak ill of women, then, speak against Christ and his kingdom [...] the implication [...] is twofold: on the one hand, those who advocate patriarchy are not true Christians; on the other, the continued existence of patriarchy is a sign that Christ’s kingdom is not yet complete. (Lanyer 219)
We return to that guiding notion that the Kingdom of God is both now and not yet. While women and men alike seek to improve and strengthen the Church through the full participation of women in leadership, the ever-present influence of the patriarchal culture at large is a reminder that the Kingdom of God has yet to be fully realized. Even so, Jesus offers hope to this. Almost as if recognizing the challenges of inequality that would plague the Church long after his death shattered social hierarchical distinctions amongst people, Jesus, in his life and death, provides us a picture of loving the church in spite of its tremendous imperfections. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul captures the Christian theology of *kenosis*:

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death. (Philippians 2:5-8, NIV)

What Paul captures here is the notion that Jesus’s love was displayed not as a symbol of power, but as an self-emptying of privilege.\(^3^9\) A call to society that when Jesus beckons his followers to take up their cross, he beckons them not to contribute to others’ marginalization, but to empty themselves of their own inherent privileges and social statuses so that his kingdom would come. Revisiting Letty Russell’s metaphor that the church is a round table, she states “As with other forms of distinction and difference that carry a valuation of superiority and inferiority, power and powerlessness, we are called to act out and make our commitment to inclusion of the marginalized as a sign of God's

\(^{3^9}\) “Self-emptying” coming from the Greek *kénōsis*.
intention for humanity” (26). The burden is unfair and weight of that burden does not fall equally on every person’s shoulder. In fact, it is always the marginalized that carry the heaviest burden.
APPENDIX A

Google’s *NGram Viewer* allows a person to search a term (in this case pulpit) to explore the prevalence of the term throughout written English fiction and nonfiction.

Published accounts of women asserting their rights to the pulpit began to take shape in the public sphere in the early nineteenth century. Using Google’s *NGram Viewer*, we see a sharp spike in the term “female preacher” in the early nineteenth century. That term was virtually non-existent in print prior.
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