Faith for Tomorrow

ESSAYS ON THE OCCASION OF THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF
WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

Wake Forest University

1834

School of Divinity

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CONTENTS

ESSAYS

Faith For Tomorrow Michele Gillespie

PREFACE

DELIVERED AT THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY CONVOCATION OF THE WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF DIVINITY ON OCTOBER 22, 2024

It is an honor to address this community on the momentous occasion of the 25th anniversary of Wake Forest University's School of Divinity. This school holds a very special place in my heart for three reasons, two of them quite personal.

First, the School of Divinity and I are both celebrating our 25th anniversary at Wake Forest.

I joined the faculty of the college the same year that the divinity school began, which is, of course, totally coincidental, and an inconsequential fact at best. What matters here is that founding dean Bill Leonard, and his intrepid faculty and staff, followed by his terrific successors, Deans O'Day, Crainshaw, Walton, and Walker, built a divinity school from the ground up. It is thrilling to reflect upon how far the divinity school has come and the impact it has had.

The divinity school is also very special to me because my mother, a retired nurse and social services administrator, and an Episcopalian turned Quaker, audited two courses in the first years of the divinity school, one of them with Dean Leonard, whom she adored. She was so enraptured with what she learned and the students whom she met that she beat the drum for the div school everywhere she went. I will always be grateful to the divinity school for the joy that experience brought her, and for my own introduction to the transformative education that it provides all its students.

And third, and most important, the divinity school holds a very special place in my heart because of its commitment to its students, to Wake Forest University, and to the world. I will address this third reason more fully in my brief remarks on the critical role that the divinity school has played and must continue to play at Wake Forest.

The Past

I am a historian by training, so whenever I enter Wait Chapel, I always cast my mind back in time to Wake Forest's beginnings, in all the good and the bad. I think about Samuel Wait and the NC Baptist State Convention members, and their hopes and dreams for those handful of young white men they sought to educate for Baptist ministry back in 1834, and how quickly they had to give up on their aspirations only four years later, because most students did not want to labor in the fields or become ministers.

I also ponder how those hopes and dreams took on new shapes and forms over the last 190 years, and in exciting new ways. So that in 1945, at the end of World War II, when the NC State Baptist Convention asked Wake Forest College to establish a professional school of theology, and the college leaders said no—subsequently putting all their energies toward building a new campus two hours away by automobile—that was not a bad decision, but in hindsight, a very good one.

In fact, things didn't really get interesting in terms of theological education at Wake Forest until about 1976, when a feasibility study funded by the Rockefeller Foundation explored what divinity schools were for—at a university and in the world.

Twenty-four years before the school was actually launched, Wake Forest leaders were exploring a really good question asked by the study: Why build a school of theology at the university? Because, the study concluded, training ministers within a university was an intellectual imperative for society. The best education for ministers must be "intellectually respectable and relevant," and it took a university to make that happen.
The study added that "Govern[ment] by a self-perpetuating board of trustees committed to defending the University against undue intrusions from outside . . . governmental, commercial, or ecclesiastical . . . [assures] intellectual and spiritual freedom." For these Wake Forest leaders, the future of the ministry, and its depth, its integrity, and its ecumenicalism, could best be cultivated within the university, with its unfettered pursuit of knowledge and its wide-open interdisciplinary embrace.

A dozen years later, and two years after Wake Forest's break with the NC State Baptist Convention, another confidential feasibility study made an additional case for building a school of theology at Wake Forest—this time because the university needed it to better deliver on its core values. Building the divinity school upon Wake Forest's distinctive intellectual cornerstones to better educate the next generation of ministers was important. But Wake Forest needed the future divinity school's mission to help it live up to its commitments—the commitment to freedom of inquiry and expression, and the commitment to the personhood of the individual: our motto of *Pro Humanitate*.

The study, in making its case for the university's need for a divinity school, concluded: "A divinity school would build on Wake Forest's greatest strength, its capacity to nurture both thinking and caring . . . and so to make richly human, the power of the mind and the promptings of the heart." Those words ring especially true today, thirty-six years later, as the School of Divinity holds all of Wake Forest to this high standard.

The Present

From its inception, the School of Divinity has pressed the university to embrace the power of the mind and the prompting of the heart. The school has had exceptional leadership on this front, beginning with founding dean Bill Leonard, renowned expert on American religious history and Baptist studies.

He and each of the deans who followed him have built exciting new intellectual pathways and networks not only within the school but across the university—from Dean Leonard's partnership with Dean of the College Paul Escott to secure our university's first Lilly Endowment grant, which enabled undergraduates to pursue the theological exploration of vocation, to Dean Corey Walker's compelling Initiative on Religion, Pluralism and American Public Life today.

The School of Divinity has contributed mightily to an intellectually rich academic community. All the lecture series across the last twenty-five years, from the Phyllis Trible lecture series on feminist thought and theology to the Margaret A. Steelman Lectures to the Mac Bryan Prophetic Speakers Series, have brought one leading mind after another to our campus. Year in and year out, the divinity school has made sure that the university has hosted extraordinary baccalaureate speakers at commencement, from Marian Wright Edelman to Barbara Brown Taylor to Rebecca Chopp to Eddie Glaude to Kimberly "Kym" Lucas '92.

Across the last twenty-five years, divinity school faculty have shared their considerable gifts as teachers, scholars, ministers, and public intellectuals, from James Dunn, national champion of religious liberty and the separation of church and state, to Alton B. Pollard III, the James and Marilyn Dunn Chair in Baptist Studies and University Professor of African American Studies, whose acclaimed discipline-crossing scholarship engages critical questions about religion, culture, politics, and the human condition. The school has built a substantive imaginative curriculum, offering a dynamic theological learning community and seven degrees, five of them in partnership with Wake Forest's other graduate schools, the better to engage hearts and minds with faith communities and the world—in bioethics, sustainability, counseling, education, and law—and one of them just launched this year through the divinity school, a Doctor of Ministry.

The Future

In short, the School of Divinity, because it cultivates the power of the mind and the personhood of the individual, has become essential to Wake Forest's core mission—indeed, the school stands as its guardian and light. Guided by *Pro Humanitate* in its purest form, the divinity school prepares moral leaders who seek to transform the world through theological reflection and action. It is through this work that the divinity school aligns so closely with Wake Forest University's journey into its third century in our strategic framework.

This work can be summarized by the divinity school's strategic framework, embodying three core principles. First, as a community of lifelong learning, the School of Divinity exemplifies the best of Wake Forest's commitment to academic excellence. Through rigorous theological study, students are not just learning for today; they are developing the skills and wisdom necessary to lead and serve for a lifetime. The school's ecumenical approach, drawing from a wide range of Christian traditions, prepares students to engage in ongoing learning—deepening their faith and understanding as alumni throughout their lives.

Second, the School of Divinity is a community of inquiry. Here, our faculty and students ask some of the boldest and most difficult questions of our time, pushing us beyond the boundaries of comfort and tradition. It is in this space of questioning that the divinity school's intellectual distinction truly shines, as it challenges us again and again to think more deeply about faith, justice, and the human condition. This spirit of inquiry is what drives both the school and the university forward into a future where faith, ethics, and reason are in constant conversation.

Finally, the School of Divinity embodies the heart of Wake Forest's strategic goal to be a community of partnerships. The divinity school's commitment to ecumenical education, its focus on justice and community engagement, and its collaborative work with churches, nonprofit organizations, and communities, all speak to its role as a bridge between the academy and the world. These partnerships are vital to the divinity school's mission, as they create opportunities for students to live out their calling in real ways, whether through ministry, advocacy, or social justice work. Together, these partnerships strengthen the divinity school, the broader Wake Forest and Winston-Salem communities, and the world.

As Wake Forest approaches its bicentennial in 2034, the School of Divinity will continue to play an essential role in shaping not only the future of theological education, but also the future of the university itself. By standing at the intersection of faith and public life, the school asks the pressing questions of our time: How do we ensure that all of creation can flourish? How do we respect "the personhood of the individual" and reconcile our differences in a fractured world? And how do we cultivate compassion in ways that lead to genuine transformation?

Over the next quarter century, the School of Divinity is poised to expand its vision, and the university's too—a vision that challenges all of us to think more deeply, act more boldly, and love more fully than we ever thought possible. These are not small ambitions, but they are the ambitions that, rooted in faith and intellect, can truly change the world.

To the faculty and staff, who have guided generations of students with wisdom and care, and to the alumni and students, who embody this mission in the world, thank you. Each of you has played an integral role in writing the story of this school, and as we look to the future, I am confident that you will continue to learn, grow, inspire, challenge, and lead the way.

Together, as part of this remarkable institution, we will carry forward the legacy of faith, justice, and compassion into a future filled with promise. This is the work of Faith for Tomorrow—a faith that grows, evolves, and, ultimately, transforms.

In November of 1945, the Baptist Convention of North Carolina received a petition from the Durham Ministers Conference "urging that the Wake Forest Religion Department be upgraded sufficiently in curriculum, faculty, and equipment to warrant the granting of theological degrees." In the spring of 1946, the Wake Forest College Board of Trustees "responded by reconstituting the department [of Religion] to the School of Religion" and appointed Dr. Sankey Lee Blanton—former pastor of the First Baptist Church in Wilmington, North Carolina—as dean.[1]

On Friday, April 12, 1946, *The Old Gold and Black* reported the Board's action under the headline, "Religion School Created With Blanton As Dean." Just above this article was another headline that would change Wake Forest College forever: "Trustees, Council, and Board Vote Unanimously to Accept Z. Smith Reynolds Trust Fund."

While the move to Winston-Salem would ultimately result in the opening of the Reynolda campus a decade later, the journey of the School of Religion would take a more circuitous path.

Dr. Sankey Lee Blanton served as dean until his resignation on November 18, 1949, to become president of Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, Pennsylvania, where he would go on to lead an institution that would contribute to the education of a young Atlanta minister—Martin Luther King, Jr.[2] Upon Blanton's departure, J. Allen Easley was appointed Acting Dean and served until 1958, when the Board of Trustees chose not to pursue advanced theological education. As a result, the School of Religion reverted to the Department of Religion.[3]

The dream of a graduate theological school, however, remained alive into the 1960s during the presidency of Harold Tribble. A $69 million capital campaign included "$3 million for the schools of Law, Business Administration, and Medicine—and a projected graduate school of Religion."[4]

[1] Bynum Shaw, *The History of Wake Forest College: Volume IV 1943-1967* (Wake Forest University, 1988), 50.
[2] See Patrick Parr, *The Seminarian: Martin Luther King Jr. Comes of Age* (Lawrence Hill Books, 2018).
[3] Bynum Shaw, *The History of Wake Forest College: Volume IV 1943-1967*, 237-238. See also J. Allen Easley, *These Things I Remember: An Autobiography Written for My Family and Friends* (Stratford Books, 1988).
[4] Bynum Shaw, *The History of Wake Forest College: Volume IV 1943-1967*, 164-165.

INTRODUCTION

Great universities are distinguished not only by the breadth and depth of scholarship but by the enduring commitment to creating a more just, humane, and sustainable world.

This enduring truth affirms the vision and significance of the Wake Forest University School of Divinity. We mark a quarter-century of graduate theological education at Wake Forest University—a milestone rooted in a legacy that stretches back to 1946, and arguably to the founding of the University in 1834. This moment invites us to embrace a calling uniquely shaped by the distinct identity of our School of Divinity. At its core, our mission resonates with the University's guiding motto, *Pro Humanitate*—a charge that finds its fullest expression in the transformative work of theological education.

Wake Forest University School of Divinity is the hub of a "graduate theological ecosystem"—a vibrant network engaging students and scholars in graduate programs in the arts and sciences, business, law, and medicine. It thrives through deep partnerships with congregational, community, and corporate collaborators. Wake Divinity is uniquely positioned to leverage the abundant resources of the university to cultivate the capacity to see—and honor—the infinite particularity of all of God's creation. Our vocation is a shared response to a call rising from the depths of the human condition. In building bridges and life-giving partnerships, Wake Divinity models graduate theological education that is embodied, active, and visionary. Here, education equips students to embrace and exemplify justice, reconciliation, and compassion in all they do, say, and hope. It empowers them to live an audacious faith rooted in the coming reality of a transformed world.

Nearly a decade and a half ago, an audio recording was rediscovered in the Z. Smith Reynolds Library archives. It captured the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s address at Wake Forest College on the evening of October 11, 1962. During the height of the modern Black freedom struggle, Dr. King spoke at two predominantly white universities in the South – Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kentucky and Wake Forest College in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. At Wake Forest, it was the students who extended the invitation to Dr. King to speak.

In his address delivered to a packed Wait Chapel, Dr. King issued a prophetic call that would later echo in his 1963 "I Have a Dream" speech. He urged "Black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics" to join hands and sing the Negro spiritual, "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we're free at last!" His words called upon a newly integrated Wake Forest College to live more fully into its motto, *Pro Humanitate*.[5]
It is King's call that continues to animate our deepest commitments—best expressed through three guiding words in the mission of the Wake Forest University School of Divinity: justice, reconciliation, and compassion. These commitments ground our community of learning, our community of inquiry, and our community of partnerships.

In his inaugural convocation address on October 12, 1999, founding dean and renowned American religious historian Bill J. Leonard stated:

> "On the threshold of a new century, Wake Forest University begins a divinity school and the faculty asked me to say what that might mean. Strugglings for a 'handle' I lighted on Emerson, less for his Transcendentalism, as fascinating as that may be, than for his wonderful imagery. 'Not instruction, but provocation': it is a dangerous line and an event more dangerous idea. Provocation, the dictionary says, can be "to incite to anger or resentment," a frightening possibility in any school, and not desired here. But it can also mean, "to stir," "to challenge," or "to call forth." So tonight, let us say that, at least in part, this new school seeks to provide, not simply instruction, but provocation that stirs up students, challenging them, and calling forth from them ideas and issues that help to form their Christian ministry. Learning is always dangerous and difficult to domesticate. Thus, my thesis this evening is this: Sooner or later, all good "instruction" involves "provocation," pressing us beyond our certainty, and ourselves, demanding more than we ever dreamed possible."

A quarter-century later, Dean Leonard's challenge remains as relevant as ever. Today's faculty of the School of Divinity still wrestle with the questions and issues he posed, but now in a rapidly changing world. In *The End of Theological Education*, Ted A. Smith opens with these bracing words:

> "With quarantines closing campuses, uprisings for Black freedom shaking foundations, denominations splitting, established financial models collapsing, and the role of religion in American lives changing in deep, epoch-defining ways, the challenges facing theological schools today can make it seem as if the end is near. And in some sense it is. But these times between the times are not unprecedented. We've been here before." [6]

[5] Susan Faust and John Llewellyn, "Prelude to a Dream: Martin Luther King, Jr.'s 1962 Speech to Recently Integrated Wake Forest College," Special Collections, Wake Forest University Z. Smith Reynolds Library, Winston-Salem, NC.
[6] Ted A. Smith, *The End of Theological Education* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2023), 1

Drawing on his experience leading the "Theology Between the Times" project, Smith offers an unflinching yet hopeful critique. The present moment—shaped by political turbulence, institutional flux, and shifting religious landscapes—may feel unprecedented, but in truth, theological education in the United States has always been shaped by disruption and crisis. Wake Forest University School of Divinity was born amid such challenges. These challenges did not hinder its creation—they inspired it. While the times and circumstances have changed, the provocations are still relevant a quarter of a century later.

Faith for Tomorrow: Essays on the Occasion of the 25th Anniversary of Wake Forest University School of Divinity embodies the distinctive ethos of our graduate theological community as it confronts new opportunities and challenges with faithful vision and dedication. Across these essays, the School's enduring commitments to courageous inquiry, prophetic imagination, and theological integrity are not simply affirmed, they are enacted. As Wake Forest University School of Divinity navigates the turbulent waters of theological education, it does so with resilience, conviction, clarity, and a deep fidelity to our calling. These essays do more than commemorate. They call us together, anchor us in our shared purpose, and contribute meaningfully to the ongoing work of inviting reflection, inspiring action, and offering a compelling vision of who we are—and who we are becoming. ●

**To you, O God in Zion,
silence is praise.**

— Psalm 65 [1]

Today's world is noisy, often drowning out all but the loudest and most powerful voices. Amid this word-saturated noisiness, who speaks truth—and could silence reveal it? This question lingers for me after many years of inviting students to find their voices and speak sacred truths. A critical dimension of "vocation," along with God's voice or call, is the act of human voices proclaiming Gospel wisdom. Yet, though I remain true to my vocation, I sometimes fear David McRaney is right—that authentic voices are rarely discernible in a world dominated by oppressive and amplified powers.[2]

The stakes are high. Injustices abound, and dominant voices permeate our discourse. In this soundscape, I invite theological education to explore a radical idea: that silence, far from being absence, can itself be transformative truth-telling. This essay explores silence as a generative force capable of disrupting injustice and creating space for profound wisdom.

[1] An ancient Aramaic translation, The Targum, provides this wording of Psalm 65: 1-2: "Before you this silence is reckoned as praise, O God whose presence (Shechinah) is in Zion." Mark Solomon explores this translation in his essay on Martin Luther King, Jr.'s speech "Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence." *American Rhetoric,* 4 April,1967, https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkatimetobreaksilence.htm. Accessed 6 December 2024.
[2] David Raney, *How Minds Change: The Surprising Science of Belief, Opinion, and Persuasion* (Penguin Random House, 2022), xi.

CHAPTER 1

**Silence can be a plan
rigorously executed
the blueprint to a life
It is a presence
it has a history a form
Do not confuse it
with any kind of absence**

— Adrienne Rich [3]

The Transformative Power of Silence

Silence holds theological and social significance. The Targum, an ancient Aramaic translation of Psalm 65:1, frames silence as a meaning-full offering to God. This framing underscores how silence, more than mere absence, embodies profound engagement. Similarly, the biblical *tehom*—the "murmuring deep" existing prior to creation—celebrates silence as alive with possibility, teeming with the "groans, hums, and coos" of the yet-to-be-spoken. [4] Philosopher Slavoj Žižek suggests that silence itself is an act of creation that carves out space within the noise for life-giving transformation [5]

What if, in theological education, we explored how silence disrupts the hum of injustice and challenges assumptions that louder voices hold more truth? What if we listened into silences for a prophetic counternarrative of wisdom yet to emerge? [6]

Centering Marginalized Voices Through Silence

Historically, the voices of women, communities of color, disabled people, queer individuals, and others on the margins have been silenced by dominant narratives. For instance, disabled persons who struggle with speech or rely on alternative communication methods remind us that silence can be a profound form of self-expression and resistance within a society that equates verbal fluency with worth. Ferrari critiques the "coloniality of voice," asking whose communication patterns are amplified when a particular kind of speaking is privileged as the primary emancipatory act. Ferrari reframes silences as "fecund sources of radical meaning-making" that offer resistance and revelation. [7]

Silences hold truth that words cannot contain, offering decolonial wisdom beyond dominant speech patterns. [8] By embracing an intersectional approach, theological education cultivates spaces where silences—such as those of queer, disabled, and racialized persons—are recognized as sacred and prophetic. Silence invites us to unlearn colonial legacies that equate voice with power and allow the prophetic wisdom of the unspoken to emerge.

[3] Adrienne Rich, "cartographies of silence," *A Change of World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951).
[4] From Stephen Frosh, "The Unsaid and the Unheard: Acknowledgement, Accountability, and Recognition in the Face of Silence," in Amy Joy Murray and Kevin Durrheim, eds., *Qualitative Studies of Science* (Cambridge University Press, 2019). Frosh argues that silence—if silence means no sound—is unattainable. Even in moments designated as silent, unnoticed sounds are all around us. Frosh calls these sounds "murmurs of reality," which "various interventions try to silence." For example, "speaking can be a way of warding off the noisy murmurs."
[5] Slavoj Žižek,*The Parallax View* (MIT Press, 2006) offers this insight: "People intervene all the time, 'do something': academics participate in meaningless 'debates,' and so forth, and the truly difficult thing is to step back, to withdraw from all this. Those in power often prefer even a 'critical' participation, a dialogue, to silence—just to engage us in a 'dialogue,' to make sure our ominous passivity is broken" (334). Zizek describes a provocative connection between silence and the murmuring deep: "The primordial fact is not Silence (waiting to be broken by the divine Word) but Noise, the confused murmur of the Real in which there is not yet any distinction between figure and background. The first creative act is therefore to create silence—it is not that silence is broken, but silence itself breaks, interrupts, the continuous murmur of the Real, thus opening up a clearing in which words can be spoken."
[6] Frosh, 256, puts it this way: "The murmuring deep remains, even if it is subjugated and often hard to hear."
[7] Martina Ferrari, "Questions of silence: On the emancipatory limits of voice and the coloniality of silence," *Hypatia*, 35.1 (2020), 123-42
[8] Ibid

Radical Silence in Practice

How can radical silence shape theological education? First, pedagogical strategies must integrate silence and encourage reflective listening that encourages students to dwell in the discomfort and possibility of what cannot be said with words. By discerning the murmurs of the deep, leaders can engage silence as spiritual practice and a tool for social healing and transformation. [9]

Second, institutions must address systemic silencing. Rituals like Wake Forest's remembrance of enslaved persons—naming followed by silence—demonstrate silence's power as an act of justice and remembrance. This practice not only honors the lives of those erased from historical narratives but also creates a sacred communal space for reflection and accountability, challenging participants to confront systemic injustices and their legacies. Silence in institutional spaces can honor marginalized narratives, urging participants to unlearn biases and dismantle hierarchies.

Wake Divinity: A Vision for the Future

Wake Divinity exemplifies this reimagining of theological education. Through initiatives that center intersectionality and resist injustice, Wake Divinity offers a countercultural model of vocational formation. Embracing silence as transformative spiritual wisdom positions the institution itself as a leader in inclusive, justice-oriented praxis.

Divesting from entrenched hierarchies, embracing the discomfort of silence, and holding space for marginalized wisdom requires courage. Yet, silence offers a countercultural vision, amplifying the whispers of the divine and honoring the sacred murmurs of the oppressed.

Conclusion: The Future of Silence

Silence, when embraced as a generative force, transforms individuals, institutions, and communities. It creates spaces where all wisdoms—spoken and unspoken—are valued.

In the noisy world of theological discourse, silence calls us to pause, listen, and act. It invites engagement with the mysteries of the divine and the complexities of human existence. By embracing silence, we honor new possibilities for justice, liberation, and transformation. Let us listen to the murmurs of the deep and respond with courage, wisdom, and hope.

[9] See Sheena Malhotra and Aimee Carrillo Rowe, eds., *Silence, Feminism, Power: Reflections at the Edges of Sound* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

CHAPTER 2

African American religious thought has been identified as one of the strategic focuses of Wake Forest University. The School of Divinity is well resourced to provide visionary leadership in this critical area of research, teaching, and scholarship, with broadening implications for the near-term needs and long-term aims of our university. The clear task of African American religious thought is education for transformation. We need African American religious scholarship to share its intellectual gifts with our undergraduate departments and programs, graduate and professional schools, and those wider initiatives and projects that distinguish the academic enterprise at Wake Forest (African American studies, religious studies, the School of Law, women, gender, and sexuality studies, environmental and sustainability studies, the natural and social sciences, come readily to mind, just to name a few).

African American religiosity has long encompassed extant sacred institutions and expansive cultural expressions that offer complex challenges and creative commitments to a constantly evolving educational landscape, a more expansive envisioning of democratic ideals, and the beloved community. The School of Divinity is well positioned to be both participant and leader in an expansive and principled commitment to *Pro Humanitate* by the university, together and in concert with it, for the foreseeable future and beyond.

I am honored to return to Wake Forest as a member of the venerable faculty of the School of Divinity and the University. The pivotal shift in my academic career was the turn to graduate theological education after having taught in undergraduate programs, including here at Wake Forest in the department of Religion from 1988 to 1998. However, the emancipatory intellectual project for me always remained at heart the same: a focal and fontal commitment to the human condition, made confident in the knowledge of what W.E.B. Du Bois had earlier particularized as *The Gift of Black Folk* (1924) and Vincent Harding later called the "Gifts of the Black Movement" (1990).

The gifts of Blackness are indigenous, communal, and holistic. The gifts are ancestral, those incomparable resources of head, heart, and hand, which are available to us in the present and for the future. They are the gifts of a people whose humanity has ever been contested and who, despite this nation's still faltering movement toward our common humanity, have committed to the struggle for freedom and justice, to new modes of community, to the possibility of realizing a life-affirming future for all. We are now four hundred years and counting.

There is an undeniable efflorescence of African American religious thought at Wake Forest School of Divinity, a constellation of distinguished Black scholars and advocates whose wisdom and insights are carrying over into the lifeways of the university as a whole. Here in this group, rigorous intellect and sanctified imagination and critical analysis and cultural empathy are met, rooted in the following distinctive characteristics (and there are undoubtedly more):

It is axiomatic. No real distance between our university's policies and practices can exist if we are committed to the principles of *Pro Humanitate*. The gift and promise of African American religious thought at the School of Divinity to our university community is an integrous call to all of us to intellectual rediscovery, reinvention, re-creation, and repair. The invitation of African American religious scholarship is to learn about and respond to systemic injustices in ways that enable us all to see reality differently and, once having seen, to act accordingly.

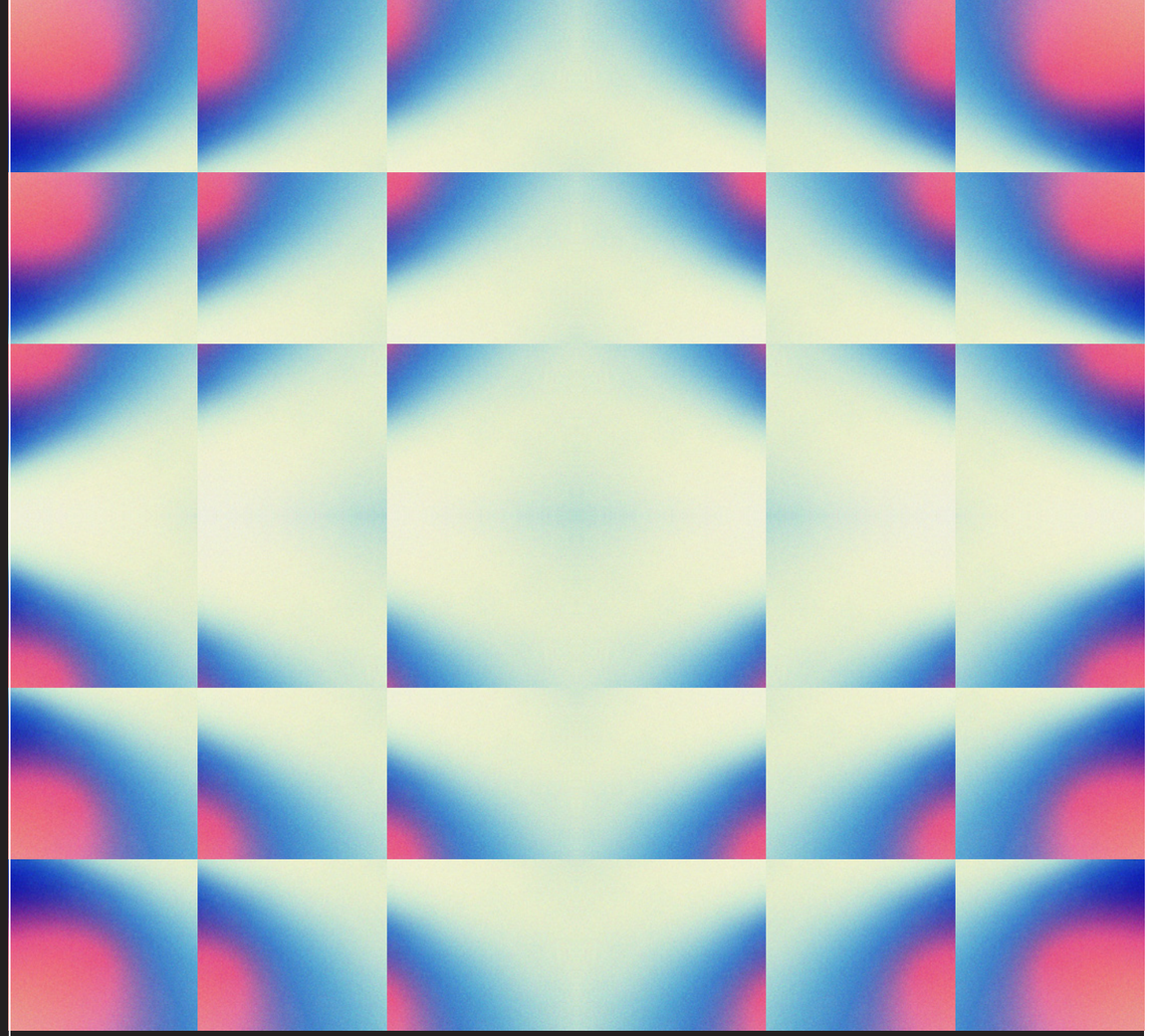
Scholars of African American religiosity faithfully and critically center justice, integrity, and frontline inclusion. We honor the arc of progress made in the ongoing struggle for Black freedom and our collective dignity and worth. We call attention to those structures that exploit and oppress our humanity still, in the cruel collusion of supremacy, patriarchy, imperialism, racism, sexism, transphobia, xenophobia, violence, destruction, and insatiable greed. We conduct research, identify practices, cultivate solutions, contribute to strategic initiatives, and seek to be collaborative; we celebrate one another. We work to foster just and lasting change in the wider university and with university leadership. Lest we forget, justice and equality are not inevitable. Dignity and equity are not a fait accompli. The dynamic witness of African American religious scholarship is to the spirit of a people. At Wake Forest, the spirit of the Harlem Renaissance and the Azusa Street Revival is here.

African American religious thought celebrates and confirms that building community at Wake Forest is a promise and prologue to the building of a better world for everyone everywhere. There are illuminating paths to the future in our university. The very meaning of *Pro Humanitate* (no less the democratic ethos of "a more perfect union") invites us to grow beyond our fears of one another. It requires ever more courageous, representative, nuanced, and solution-oriented public conversations with and for each other across our university and nation.

African American religious thought at the School of Divinity is a vital voice and essential agent of change for our institution. It resolves to be deeply relational, collaborative, creative, and supportive of forms of research, artistry, and application at the intersection of diverse fields, initiatives, programs, departments, and schools.

At its best, the genius of African American religious scholarship actively upends the hallmarks of our divides with a hermeneutic that transforms the very values and structures that gave rise to them to begin with.

The historically subjugated and socially silenced, the unknown and unsung—our glad dedication is to lift their voices and every voice through our scholarship, particularly the voices of Black women and girls, nonbinary people, boys and men, and by definition all people who are bereft and yearning to breathe free. In an uncertain world, the near and long-term future of our university and the School of Divinity calls for the mosaic of voices—the full spectrum of ideas and insights—if we would reconstitute our world. Through all our aching uncertainty, African American religious thought summons us to seek fresh perspectives and bold ideas in scholarship and faith. All are welcome. Beloved community and earth's care await.



Provocative theological education needs two questions to forge a path into the next twenty-five years: Who is missing from our usual stories of faith? What understandings of justice, compassion, and reparation are left out of our institutions and pulpits and spiritual lives? Justice-oriented, compassionate, reparative theological education cannot help but respond to these questions because it speaks in voices we too often ignore.

Provocative Biblical Studies in Theological Education: Who Is Missing? What's Left Out?
Katherine A. Shaner

CHAPTER 3

For most of the 20th century and into the first decades of the 21st, theological education concerned itself with the institution of church and its language, with the idioms of biblical quotation, with the jargon of spirituality. Those who already know how to speak this language, use these idioms, and wield that jargon have already found their sustenance. Yet there are multitudes whose hunger for something larger, more communally and equitably shaped than themselves, who do not know church or Bible or spiritual jargon. These voices should guide us. Those of us who do speak the language of church, or the idiom of biblical quotation, or the jargon of spirituality need this provocation. As a biblical scholar, a Lutheran pastor, and a person of faith, I need this provocation. As an institution of theological education, Wake div needs this provocation.

One way to meet this challenge is to retool our biblical interpretation. I know this is a surprising solution coming from a biblical scholar. To be clear, I do not mean simply teaching more biblical interpretation. I mean completely revising how we do biblical interpretation. Biblical interpretation in its historic modes (the way we have been teaching it for decades) has enabled oppressive, authoritarian, exclusionary, trauma-inducing religious formation. We need to unlearn these modes of biblical interpretation. We need to reorient our biblical witness around paradigms of provocation for the sake of creating opportunities for justice, reparation, and compassion in our churches and the world beyond.

Whose voices do we not hear in our biblical stories, even when they are clearly present in the story? Onesimus's voice, for one. He is the enslaved object of Paul's letter to Philemon. [1] Whose presence is missing from the telling of biblical stories, but assured in the embodiment of the story? Women, who Luke 8:1–3 notes are funding Jesus's ministry, need to be counted as disciples and apostles. [2] What impulses toward justice or reparation or compassion are left out of our stories? Remember the Canaanite woman (Matt 15:21–28; cf. Mark 7:24–29)? The dog crumbs of Jesus's ministry may have brought healing, but crumbs don't change systems that thwart flourishing. [3]

These are just some of the questions we need to keep asking—and finding ways to answer by retelling the stories of our ancestors in faith. Let me offer one more in a little more depth. Most of us know the story of the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4:1–42. As Jesus and his disciples return to Galilee from Jerusalem, their path goes through Samaria near Sychar, where they stop at Jacob's well about noon. The disciples go into the city to find food, leaving Jesus at the well. A woman approaches and Jesus asks her for water. A theological dialogue ensues—about living water, about the Messiah, about living life as it comes. Once the conversation ends, the woman goes back into the city and the disciples return—with nothing but food and lots of questions about Jesus's conversation partner. Later in the story, the woman comes back to the well, this time with a whole community of people, searching for living water, searching for Jesus. She is often called the first evangelist, the first person to bring people to Jesus. Tradition even gives her a name: Photini, or "luminous one."

Those of us who know the story from church or Bible study or literary allusions, we talk about Jesus as doing something shocking in this story: talking to a woman and a sexually questionable woman at that—one who has had multiple husbands and now a man on the side. But notice in the story that Jesus simply asks for water, and then talks to the woman about her life experience as a person of faith. He does not suggest that there is anything about her sexual choices that would make her unfit for conversation, that would make her a social outsider. We as interpreters follow the disciples' lead in questioning Jesus's choice of conversation partner. We as readers assume he crosses taboo social boundaries. We assume either trauma or sexual promiscuity leading to shame and marginalization from her community with little or no evidence in the text that this is the case.

When we use shame and marginalization as our interpretive framework for Photini's story we are usually trying to do one of two things. We either reinforce shame as something Jesus's presence increases even as he chooses to overlook it, or we celebrate our progressiveness in contrast to ancient communities who ostracized women, sexualized minorities, and racialized foreigners. What would it mean to draw on interpretive frameworks that assume Jesus eliminates shame and draws on community dynamics that already include social acceptance?

In fact, the text of John assumes these latter conditions. What we fail to see in the story is that Photini must have already had a vision for creating, shaping, and leading a whole community long before Jesus stopped at her well for a sip of water. How would she have been able to bring the whole town out to meet Jesus otherwise? This is the only explanation I can muster for why an entire community comes out to the well, at noon, to see a foreign traveler who preaches against their ancestral traditions and claims to be the Messiah. This stranger, Jesus, has disciples with him. These disciples go themselves into the city, interact with the community, and bring back mere vittles. Why didn't the disciples bring people to meet their divinely inspired leader? What witness have the disciples made to those who sold them olives and bread, wine and cheese? If Photini were a scorned woman, as the commentators say, why would the whole community believe her and follow her to the well rather than the disciples?

The clear answer is that she is a community organizer, a religious visionary, a theological griot, a wisdom-filled leader in her city. She is a powerful example to us of someone who has done the work of justice, reconciliation, and compassion in her own community. But because of our assumptions we do not see the work she has done even before Jesus showed up.

> If we allow Photini the recognition she deserves as a community leader, what might we understand about the power of voices we disregard, or spurn, or worse yet, silence such leaders? What would we begin to understand about the power of community, of caretaking, of proclamation, of teaching, of gathering, of the body of Christ in our world?

Photini shows those of us who speak the language of church, the idiom of biblical quotation, and the jargon of spirituality that we are not necessarily ready to recognize God among us. She challenges us to trust those we would rather shame, embrace those we would rather spurn, follow those who we would rather had stayed away. Provocation in biblical studies as well as theological education requires us to ask who is missing and what is left out—and put those missing and left out at the center of our stories.

[1] Katherine A. Shaner, *Enslaved Leadership in Early Christianity* (Oxford University Press, 2018), 42–62.
[2] Shelly Matthews and Barbara E. Reid, OP, *Luke 1–8* (Liturgical Press, 2021), 247–50.
[3] Katherine A. Shaner, "Crumbs are Never Enough: Decentering the White Supremacist Jesus," in *At the Intersection of Hermeneutics and Homiletics: Transgressive Readings for Transformational Preaching,* Yung Suk Kim, ed., (Pickwick, forthcoming 2025).

CHAPTER 4

Click, like, and share—these three ordinary actions, so ingrained in digital culture, carry extraordinary potential for the future of theological education and religious life.

Bill Leonard's provocation that the church is "not dead, just asleep" sets the stage for a critical interrogation of how both the church and theological education might be slumbering as new forms of religious expression emerge online. It is my conviction that we must wake from these long naps to embrace the profound possibilities of digital praxis.

As an Afrocentric, Afrofuturist womanist who teaches preaching and practical theology, with scholarly interests in digital Black religion, multireligious belonging, and spiritual formation, I witness firsthand how the digital sphere becomes a fertile landscape for reshaping theological education and ministerial vocations. I am a spiritually malleable Black preaching woman who studies and theorizes about other spiritually fluid Black preaching and multireligious women curating digital space. From these vantage points, I see networked environments being claimed by Black women who serve as digital griots, using livestreams as new-age hush harbors that circumvent oppressive religious structures and challenge traditional hierarchies of authority. [1] Their work and witness illuminate how digital contexts are changing the very nature of religious space, making room for multireligious belonging in ways that outdated theological training has yet to imagine.

Across social media feeds, video platforms, and chat-based communities, religious and spiritual engagement is being reconfigured. [2] The boundaries of the brick-and-mortar church give way to a more fluid and dynamic interplay of communal formation. No longer must faithful seekers conform to inherited structures that too often fail to honor the complexity and multiplicity of identity, particularly for those of us who stand at the intersection of race, gender, and religious traditions. Instead, digital arenas invite

[1] Melva L. Sampson, "Digital Hush Harbors" *Fire!!!* 6.1 (2020), 45-66.
[2] Melva L. Sampson, "Going Live: The Making of Digital Griots and Cyber Assemblies" *Practical Matters 12* (2019).

a visionary theological approach in which "click, like, and share" become gestures of theological meaning-making. In these interactions, spiritual seekers and everyday theologians sacralize their lived experiences and imagine possibilities that colonized religion, and the offline Black church, has not fully recognized. Here, a digitally mediated womanist practical theological method unpacks and refigures religious authority, knowledge production, and communal shaping of the sacred.

My research sits at the crossroads of these developments, focusing on Black preaching women who inhabit spiritually fluid, multireligious worlds and who leverage digital tools to name their truths, amplify marginalized voices, and extend Black traditions of sacred storytelling. Acting as digital griots, these women translate ancestral wisdom into new media formats, constructing livestream services that function like hush harbors. In our history, hush harbors represented clandestine gatherings where enslaved Africans forged counternarratives and embodied spiritual agency beyond the gaze of oppressive authorities. In a similar spirit, digital hush harbors emerge as virtual sanctuaries where Black preaching women and their communities critique, resist, and transcend oppressive theological models. These leaders do more than adapt old forms; they innovate, remix, and re-signify tradition. They deliver sermons and create rituals that reflect their Afrofuturist imaginings, their multireligious sensibilities, and their womanist ethics of communal flourishing. By doing so, they construct a living, breathing theology that values flexibility, adaptability, and inclusivity—features absent from static, 20th-century modes of theological instruction. In these digital enclaves, religious authority is not conferred through clerical titles, academic degrees, or denominational approval alone. Rather, authority arises in communities of practice where likes, shares, and comments serve as engagement points—reminders that theology is not a product simply to be consumed, but a communal discourse to be shaped, contested, and enriched. This phenomenon demands that theological education, as we know it, evolve.

The urgency of this shift is particularly pressing as we consider the next quarter century and beyond. At institutions like the Wake Forest University School of Divinity, where I imagine my pedagogy and research unfolding, continuing to rely on 20th-century methods will no longer suffice. Historically, theological education has often operated from a posture of hierarchical transmission—professors dispensing knowledge to passive learners who then go forth into traditional churches. Today's students, however, require a theological formation that speaks to the fluid, networked world they inhabit—a world where religious seekers navigate among Christian, African diasporic, Indigenous, and other spiritualities seamlessly; where faith is expressed in YouTube homilies, Instagram liturgies, and TikTok testimonies as much as in Sunday morning pews. In this environment, a digital womanist practical theological method becomes indispensable. Womanist thought demands that we center the experiences and wisdom of Black women and insists on a holistic approach that addresses spiritual, material, and communal dimensions of life. A digital womanist lens recognizes that those who have historically been consigned to the margins—Black women, queer folks, multireligious practitioners—are not marginal at all. Rather, they carry keys to unlocking innovative theological approaches that challenge entrenched hierarchies and expose the limitations of static dogmas.

The digital environment, unlike the traditional classroom, invites these voices not merely to speak but to become agents of shared sacred knowledge. This does not mean jettisoning all past models. Wake div and similar institutions can carry forward their rich academic traditions, but they must integrate the tools, languages, and ethics of digital engagement. Educators can partner with digital content creators, activists, and cultural producers to co-create theological resources. In 2019 I developed a course called Digital Proclamation to focus on digital homiletics, thus equipping students to craft messages that can travel across social networks and into virtual communities of care. Digital Proclamation is not solely about preaching but also about spiritual formation. Going forward, spiritual formation courses that I teach will feature guided online meditations, digital Afroconographies of transnational digital prayer groups, or narrative exercises in storytelling apps to cultivate global consciousness and broaden the horizons of faith.

By building curricula that are interdisciplinary and multimedia-rich, Wake div will form leaders who readily navigate religious pluralism and racialized inequities in digital contexts. For example, in that same Digital Proclamation course, students are asked to create sermon podcasts that incorporate African diaspora music traditions, blending womanist hermeneutics with Afrofuturist aesthetics. Further, students preparing for ministry in multireligious contexts might use digital simulators to engage in interfaith dialogues, learning to listen and respond with empathy and theological imagination. As institutions embrace these modes, they release themselves from the constrictions of an earlier century and emerge as agile, responsive, and prophetic spaces of religious learning. It is my intellectual hunch and spiritual hankering that when forward-thinking Black preaching women couple digital media with spiritual agency, they sacralize their multireligious lived experiences in transformative ways. Their work critiques the limited frameworks of colonized religion and challenges the offline Black church to see beyond inherited boundaries. By learning from and collaborating with these digital griots, we can reimagine theological education as a dynamic, inclusive, forward-looking endeavor that is as fluid as the communities it seeks to serve.

In sum, the digital turn has revealed a moment ripe with opportunity for the church and theological education. It beckons us to awaken from the slumber of old certainties and linear models of knowledge transmission. It invites us to recognize the value of "click, like, and share" as not mere consumerist gestures but catalysts for sacred transformation. By grounding ourselves in Afrocentric, Afrofuturist, and womanist perspectives—by training our gaze on Black preaching women who fashion digital hush harbors and digital griot traditions—we discover that theological education can be remade. It can flourish as a vibrant ecosystem that honors multireligious belonging, dismantles oppressive hierarchies, and amplifies the voices of communities historically relegated to the margins. The future of theological education lies not in sleeping through these changes but embracing them fully. Let us awaken, then, to the power of the digital domain and the spiritual agency that emerges when we dream beyond the boundaries of the past.

The inaugural convocation of the Wake Forest University School of Divinity took as its theme "Theology on the Threshold of the Twenty-first Century." It was a moment saturated with a sense of an expectant unfolding in a new century. What sort of thinking would be appropriate for this new time? What sort of theological education could host the panoply of forces unleashed in the maelstrom of a new millennium? What school would develop in the coming years and decades in a moment transfixed with novel intellectual, institutional, and political attempts aimed, in the words of Marx, "to discover the new world from a critique of the old"? [1]

To be sure, the temporal logic of that initial gathering was one of *Chronos*. A sequential ordering of past, present, and future of a "particular history, which is the most well-known . . ." in the words of the French historian François Hartog. "*Chronos* is the omnipresent, the inevitable, the ineluctable . . . [and it gives way to] the famous Augustinian paradox—so long as no one asks him what time is, he knows; as soon as the question is posed, he no longer knows." [2] *Chronos* provides the smooth texture of a temporality without gaps. It is a time of the writing of history, which carries with it a trace of another thought best expressed in the statement by Michel de Certeau that "It might seem that an entire society expresses what it is in the process of fabricating through the representations of what it is in the process of losing." [3]

Michel de Certeau's haunting statement finds an echo in the temporality of "Theology on the Threshold of the Twenty-first Century." The echo is not so much with the *Chronos* that is announced in the title, but by the subject of "theology." The shadow of an/other thought, an/other thinking of theology is best expressed by a temporality of *Krisis*. It is a theology that traveled through Southern Baptist seminaries in a quest to purify them of nondoctrinal teachings and professors. It was and is a theology that understood its critical articulation as one that is co-extensive with political sovereignty and with the sovereign. It was a theology animated by the spirit of recovery from a theological liberalism that was not dogmatic enough. In all it was a theology predicated on a logic of division and exclusion.

[1] Paul North and Paul Reitter, "Editor's Introduction" in *Karl Marx, Capital: Critique of Political Economy Volume 1* (Princeton University Press, 2024), xliv.
[2] François Hartog, "*Chronos, Kairos, Krisis:* The Genesis of Western Time." *History and Theory* 60.3 (2021), 426.
[3] As cited in Ibid, 427.

CHAPTER 5

"Theology on the Threshold of the Twenty-first Century" also carries with it a sense of theology that sought to take up the task of making evangelical Christianity intellectually respectable. The theology of evangelicalism of the rising religious right of the latter half of the twentieth century was met by a trinity of Wheaton College graduates, George Marsden, Nathan Hatch, and Mark Noll, who set out to re/present and recover evangelical Christian life and thought from what Mark Noll called the "intellectual disaster of fundamentalism." [4] It is a theology that aspired to represent the nation as the unfolding of a unique expression of Christian democracy. It is religious history written as the exemplary theological articulation of a distinctive idea of a populist, vernacular American Christianity. While the players can be diverse and span centuries, the ideas, concepts, and frameworks reinforce the singularity of American evangelical Christianity.

Finally, "Theology on the Threshold of the Twenty-first Century" casts the shadow of another theology that gained critical expression of a "shared sensibility" in a Peterhouse colloquium at the University of Cambridge. This tendency carried the trace of another time that Alan Jacobs in his exquisite book, *The Year of Our Lord 1943: Christian Humanism in an Age of Crisis*, gracefully captures when he writes, "Christian intellectuals in Europe—Jacques Maritain, T. S. Eliot, C. S. Lewis, W. H. Auden, and Simone Weil—were seeking the way forward for a morally and spiritually exhausted West." [5] For a trinity of Cambridge scholars—John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward—radical orthodoxy placed an "emphases on 'participation' and sacramentalism; a critique of both secularism and the hegemony of Enlightenment reason; an attention to the mythic, the poetic and the materiality of language, the impact of twentieth century French schools in theology and philosophy and a concern with the political." [6] This dialectical retrieval would place in conversation the likes of Thomas Aquinas with Duns Scotus and Henri de Lubac with Slavoj Žižek as it embarked on a quest to out-narrate the secular modern and its progeny—political liberalism and secular criticism.

Looking back, "Theology on the Threshold of the Twenty-first Century" emerged in a *Chronos* of the Baptist wars, the evangelical revival, and the emergence of radical orthodoxy. It was in keeping with a *Chronos* sensibility but also responding to a twofold *Krisis*—institutional and epistemological. This latter dimension of time is best captured in the question, "What is the fate of theology in a post-theological age?" This is an acute question for a modern university embarking on establishing a school of divinity in the time of the secular.

The shift in the sensibility of time—from *Chronos* to *Krisis*—that is encased in the theme of the inaugural convocation forces a confrontation with the perennial issue announced in Immanuel Kant's 1794 "The Conflict of the Philosophy Faculty With the Theology Faculty." The *Krisis* at the close of the eighteenth century reverberates at the closing of the twentieth century. Kant stages the confrontation thusly, "So the ranks customarily assigned to the higher faculties—*theology first, law second, and medicine third*—are in accordance with reason. According to natural instinct, however, men consider the physician most important, because he prolongs their life. Next to him comes the jurist, who promises to secure their contingent possessions. And only last

[4] Joel Carpenter, "Reawakening Evangelical Intellectual Life: A Scholar's Review." *Christian Scholar's Review*, 51.2 (2022), 128. See also Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (1994; Eerdmans, 2022).
[5] Ibid. See also Alan Jacobs, *The Year of Our Lord 1943: Christian Humanism in an Age of Crisis* (Oxford University Press, 2018).
[6] Graham Ward, "Radical Orthodoxy: Its Ecumenical Vision." *Acta Theologica* 37 (2017), 29.

(almost at the point of death) do they send for the clergyman, no matter how highly he commends the happiness of the world to come, actually perceives nothing of it and hopes fervently that the doctor can keep him in this vale of tears a while longer." [7] In 1999, the natural instinct remains the same, but the ranking in accordance with reason no longer obtains. Theology, and by extension theological education was not only in institutional, political, and cultural crisis, but also epistemological crisis. "Theology on the Threshold of the Twenty-first Century" sought to carve out a critical space to think the theoretical and methodological abyss within an institutional context that called into *Krisis* the very *raison d'etre* of this intellectual enterprise.

After a quarter century, our thinking cannot and should not remain calibrated within the prison house of *Chronos* or *Krisis*, particularly considering the contemporary outflows of this earlier moment that includes a reformed resurgence, an integralist intervention, and a Christian nationalist renaissance. This is not to suggest some Kierkegaardian leap out of temporality. Rather, what is needed is not a positing of theology, and by extension theological education, as a discrete, always, already understood disciplinary formation within an existing institutional and temporal nexus. What is needed is a theological thinking that sharpens our attention to what Hannah Arendt underscores, namely the "gaps"—"those moments when something that was still there yesterday, still in evidence, slips into darkness and undoes itself, while at the same time something new, something unprecedented, seeks expression despite lacking (for now) the words it needs to shape itself." [8]

Today, we have been gifted with an opportunity to hear the provocations of our distinguished faculty of Divinity here at Wake Forest University. My colleagues have critically, creatively, and collaboratively responded to a provocation posed at the inaugural convocation twenty-five years ago. Then, Dean Bill Leonard advanced the thesis: "Sooner or later, all good 'instruction' involves 'provocation,' pressing us beyond our certainty, and ourselves, demanding more than we ever dreamed possible." [9] Bill's thesis, inspired by Ralph Waldo Emerson's famed 1838 "Divinity School Address," transformed Emerson's declaration into a guiding precept informing the scholarship, imagination, spirituality, and vision for a then new divinity school opening at the cusp of the twenty-first century.

In the wake of the last quarter century, Bill's thesis is now transformed into a question for the current faculty of Divinity to engage: What is "pressing [Wake Divinity] beyond our certainty, and ourselves, demanding more than we ever dreamed possible?" [10] Pressing Bill's thesis into the form of a question opens the horizon of thought to possibilities that have yet to be revealed or realized. As Gadamer reminds us in his magisterial *Truth and Method*, "To ask a question means to bring into the open. The openness of what is in question consists in the fact that the answer is not settled." [11]

The reflexivity exhibited by the faculty of Divinity in today's conversations reminds us that the task of graduate theological education is not fixed; not by Schleiermacher in the 19th century nor by traditional protocols of theological education in the 21st century. As such, we have fashioned a panoply of responses creatively woven together in the spirit of looking to our collective past, capturing the spirit of the present, and looking expectantly to the infinite horizon of the future. The responses are each grounded in a deep intellectual humility and practice of intellectual hospitality and solidarity that welcomes new knowledge, fresh perspectives, and probing critical horizons in search of new questions and new ideas.

Theological thinking is a craft that we practice, work at, and learn from to engage our intellectual endeavors with a level of fidelity that is required to faithfully engage the call that comes from without.

[7] Immanuel Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 33.
[8] As cited in François Hartog, *"Chronos, Kairos, Krisis:* The Genesis of Western Time," 427.
[9] Bill J. Leonard, "'Not Instruction, but Provocation': Doing Theology at a New Divinity School." Inaugural Convocation Address, Wake Forest University, October 12, 1999.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (1975; Continuum, 2004), 357.

Thus, with Nathan A. Scott, "[W]e must plunge into the *gouffe*, into the Abyss, for, if the world is resonant of 'infinite things,' then we cannot be satisfied with the forest of symbols, since it is but a point of departure and a way of moving into the unplumbed depths of Being itself." [12]

To the question "What is "pressing [Wake Divinity] beyond our certainty, and ourselves, demanding more than we ever dreamed possible?" Let us return to 19th century Massachusetts, but with a difference. Given our excursion on Greek conceptions of time and the times, it seems that an intervention is in order. Instead of thought proceeding along a linear evolutionary logic taken from dominant categorical registers, we may pursue a fugitive theological thinking that elaborates a "new corpus of sensibility"—to borrow from the Guyanese philosophical novelist Wilson Harris—for creative conceptions of human being and belonging. In unveiling such a thinking, the temporality to which we are gesturing is none other than the third of the temporal trinity which we have been discussing—*Kairos*. [13] It is this to which we turn our attention.

Following the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850, Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth addressed an audience of abolitionists in Boston's Faneuil Hall. In prosecuting his case against the United States, Douglass forcefully argued that American democracy suffers from an acute inability to deal justly and equitably with African Americans. Douglass not only questioned the terms and conditions of the political order of the nation, he went on to interrogate the very possibility of the United States to ever "repent" and "atone" for its "sins." Eventually, Douglass concluded that the only viable option for African Americans was establishing a new political order. In his speech, Douglass enacts a critical shift in his language of criticism—from a political language germane to liberal democratic discourse to a theological language that sought to register the bankruptcy of the political order and that challenged the very order of things. Douglass's speech—an exemplary instance of parrhesia, fearless speech, that Michel Foucault tracked in his 1983 Berkeley seminar—articulated his critique and commitment to transform American politics and American democratic order. Indeed, for Douglass, the lessons he culled from the history of the United States up to the point of the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 forced him to confront the issue of the efficacy and utility of a properly political vocabulary whose referents no longer—if ever—were able to (re)present the substance of his critique. With a stunned and silenced crowd looking on, Sojourner Truth posed a most prescient question to Douglass: "Frederick, is God dead?" Sojourner Truth's question highlights a deep ambiguity regarding Douglass's disavowal of the languages of the political and, most important, the theological to appropriately register and articulate a critique of the democratic practices, politics, and ethos of the United States. Such an ambiguity calls into question Douglass's linguistic shift as well as the necessity of ceding significant linguistic and theoretical terrain in a moment when particular critical languages are seemingly exhausted and certain forms of critique are paralyzed. "Frederick, is God dead?" is not a sectarian ploy by Truth to convert a non-, or, rather, no-longer-believing Douglass. Truth's rhetorical question operates to force open a reflexive thinking into the very possibility of critique in a political context that is seemingly impervious to traditional and theological languages of criticism. To be sure, the question "Frederick, is God dead?" is not one which so much requires a definitive answer as it extends an invitation to interrogate the myriad methods, categories, norms, and substantive commitments that inform the construction of a thinking, a theological thinking, that registers with the disruption and eruption of a new time. It is Truth's question—"Frederick, is God dead?"—

[12] Nathan A. Scott, Jr., "The Recent Journey Into the Zone of Zero: The Example of Beckett and His Despair of Literature," *The Centennial Review* 6.2 (1962), 146.
[13] Wilson Harris, "History, Fable, Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas," in *Selected Essays of Wilson Harris*, A.J.M. Bundy, ed. (Routledge, 1999), 152.

echoed later by Nietzsche's madman in *ekklesia* , "Whither is God?"—that continues to reverberate in our theoretical registers and presents significant implications for the present and possible future(s).

Sojourner Truth's question "Frederick, is God dead?" calls forth a new possibility that can not be registered in the dominant languages of the mid-nineteenth century. It is also out of joint in the time of our moment. To be sure, in light of the (possible) death of God, "might a sensitivity reappear for transcendence, for difference, for the sacred," for a generation "who [has] run out of holy spirit [and] [speaks] with mechanical tongues"? [14]

The celebration of a quarter century of Wake Forest University School of Divinity should not be a repetition of that which has gone before. Rather, it is a *Kairos* moment that interrupts the existing and invites us to take up Truth's invitation to break the hegemony of Chronos, the moment of *Krisis* that is also a moment of theology. Our response in a time of *Kairos* is a living out of an/other way of life, a theological thinking at the end of a world, a disposition to the day beyond the reign of the present. It portends a particular opening that was articulated here at Wake Forest University over six decades ago.

And here is where we have a language and a theological thinking that refuses to move to the temporality of *Chronos*, *Krisis*, and theology proper. A theological thinking that does not conform to the dominant dictates of power, order, and knowledge in the academy, but does respond to the *Kairos* announced in the question "Frederick, is God dead?" Perhaps the emerging language of our School of Divinity for the next quarter century is also a language appropriate for a School of the Maladjusted.

Almost a decade and a half ago in our Z. Smith Reynolds Library archive, we recovered an audio recording of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King's speech at Wake Forest College on the evening of October 11, 1962, right here from this pulpit in Wait Chapel. In his speech at Wake Forest, Dr. King issued his prophetic call that would galvanize a nation in his 1963 "I Have a Dream" speech. [15]

But it is King's invocation of "maladjusted" that we return to this scene. King would deploy this psychological concept on the terrain of ethics in calling for a new order of society and of humanity. It was a concept long in development in King's theological architecture, his having engaged it early in his public ministry during the Montgomery Bus Boycott, in the speech "Desirability of Being Maladjusted" at Beth Emet Synagogue in Evanston, Illinois, and at the Highlander Research and Educational Center in Tennessee, where he elaborated his ethic in this manner:

> "[T]there are some things in our social system to which I'm proud to be maladjusted and to which I call upon you to be maladjusted. I never intend to adjust myself to the viciousness of mob rule. I never intend to adjust myself to the evils of segregation or the crippling effects of discrimination. I never intend to adjust myself to an economic system that will take necessities from the masses to give luxuries to the classes. I never intend to adjust myself to the madness of militarism and the self-defeating effects of physical violence. And my friends, I call upon you to be maladjusted to all of these things, for you see, it may be that the salvation of the world lies in the hands of the maladjusted." [16]

His friend and fellow freedom worker, the historian Lawrence D. Reddick, sought to temper the challenge of King's maladjustment ethic in his letter of July 31, 1959, writing, "I think you should tie up your use of maladjusted with the phrase 'until the good society is realized.' Otherwise, it might appear that you are simply endorsing maladjusted people in general." King did not tether maladjustment to the *Chronos* of the good society or the *Krisis* foregrounded in the phrase "until the good society is realized." [17] King's fidelity is to an ethics of maladjustment temporally oriented to *Kairos*.

In his 1967 speech to psychologists gathered at the American Psychological Association convention, King rendered his ethic thusly:

> ". . . it may well be that our world is in dire need of a new organization, the International Association for the Advancement of Creative Maladjustment [. . .] And through such creative maladjustment, we may be able to emerge from the bleak and desolate midnight of man's inhumanity to man, into the bright and glittering daybreak of freedom and justice." [18]

[14] This section draws from my article Corey D. B. Walker, "The Infinite Rehearsals of the Critique of Religion: Theological Thinking After Humanism." *boundary 2* 35.3 (2008), 189-212.
[15] Prelude to a Dream: Martin Luther King, Jr.'s 1962 Speech to Recently-Integrated Wake Forest College," unpublished paper by Susan Faust and John Llewellyn, January 2011, Z. Smith Reynolds Library Special Collections and Archives, Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, NC.
[16] MindFreedom International, "MLK on IAACM: Martin Luther King on the International Association for the Advancement of Creative Maladjustment." MindFreedom International, accessed September 30, 2024, https://mindfreedom.org/kb/mlk-on-iaacm-martin-luther-king-on-the-international-association-for-the-advancement of-creative-maladjustment-mfiportal/.

King's call, issued within the walls of Wait Chapel, and in innumerable spaces across this nation, reverberates in this moment. A new ordering and formation are called for as a result of our time. This *Kairos* moment does not disappear into the midst of the past, rather the call for maladjustment erupts—disrupting the present and presenting a new possibility. A possibility of a school that is more than a moment, more than a mission, more than a motto, but the very materialization of an intellectual and institutional commitment to justice—intellectually, politically, culturally, socially, and spiritually. A new school, a School of the Maladjusted, animated and moving to a temporality of *Kairos*.

Walter Benjamin famously declared in his bracing "Theses on the Philosophy of History, "The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the state of emergency in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight." [19] Benjamin's insight provides us with a critical principle for the time of our School of Divinity, the *Kairos* of Wake Divinity, our School of the Maladjusted.

While there are other schools, the gift of the Wake Forest University School of Divinity is that we are a graduate theological community that does not aspire to model a theology of imperialism, missionaries, and colonizers, not of a theology of the Confederacy and of enslavers, not a theology of patriarchy, intolerance, and xenophobia, but rather to a theological thinking that inaugurates a new beginning and is a witness to the movement of Jesus across time. A theological thinking that finds its expressions in *ekklesia* of antiquity, recovered in the hush harbors and backwoods of the Americas, and renewed in the spirit of freedom and liberation grounded in the living of the affirmation of the worth, value, and dignity of all humanity and all of creation.

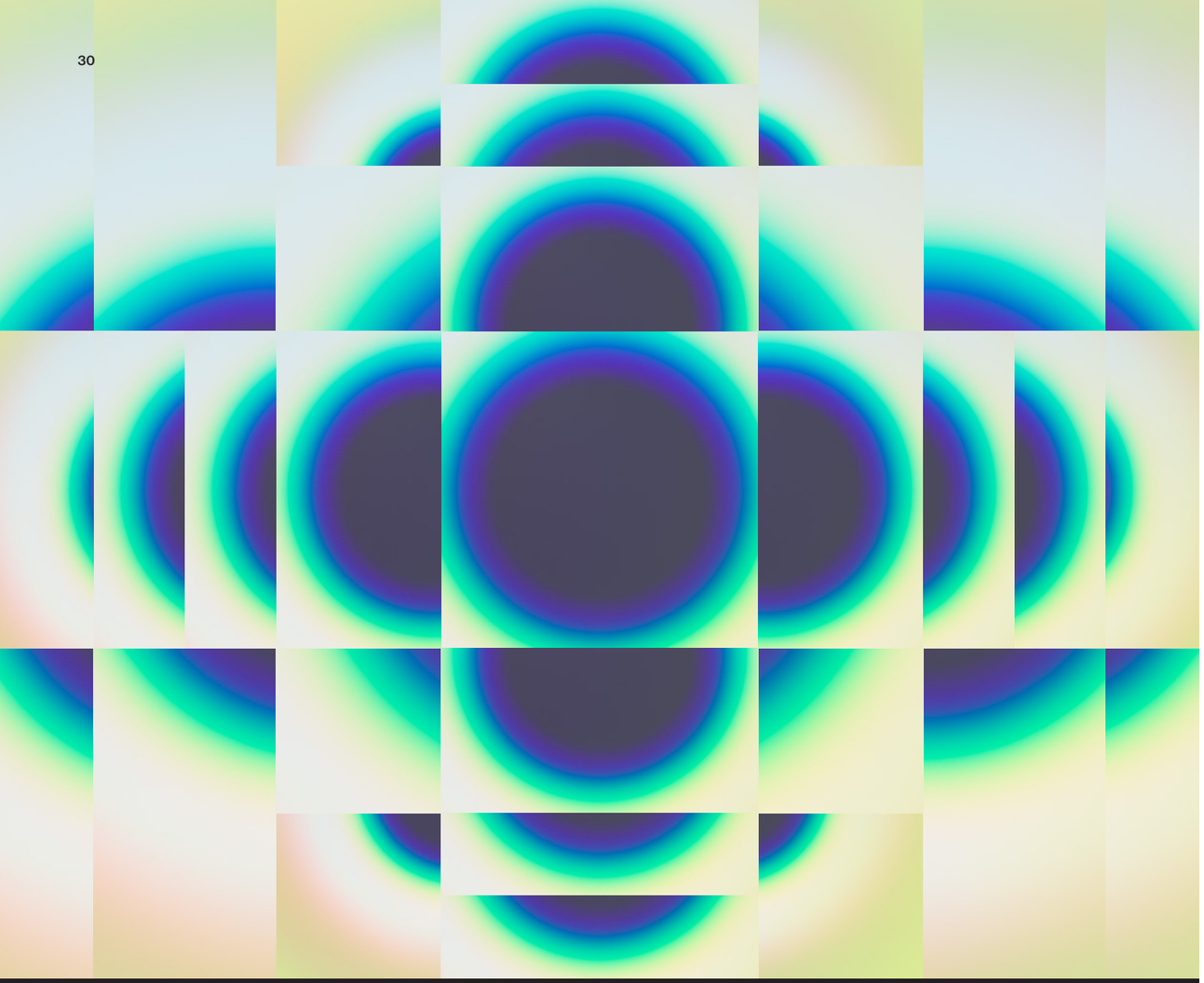
The promise of the prophets stands at the center of Wake Divinity. Now and in this time, this time of *Kairos*, is when and where we enter a new moment bearing witness with a faithful testimony on our lips and a song in our hearts of a loving, living, and liberating God. Our witness, our thinking, our practice, our hope is the infinite promise that God is not a God of Empire; God does not stand on the side of injustice; God does not stand on the side of the rich against the poor; God does not support the unjust and the powerful; God is not God of the mighty against the marginalized. God is a God of Liberation. God is a God of freedom.

Ours is the institutionalization of a promise, of the theological thinking of a community living *Kairos*—that "justice must flow like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream." [20]

And now and only in this time can we join Emerson with the spirits of the army of Angels and Ancestors in this assembly, of the founding convocation, of this 25th anniversary convocation of Wake Forest University School of Divinity, and of "the beautyful ones [who] are not yet born," and say, "I look for the new Teacher [who] shall follow so far those shining laws, that [they] shall see them come full circle; shall see their rounding complete grace; shall see the world to be the mirror of the soul; shall see the identity of the law of gravitation with purity of heart; and shall show that the Ought, that Duty, is one thing with Science, with Beauty, and with Joy." [21]

May this be so, now and into the long future. Amen ●

[17] Lawrence Reddick, "From Lawrence Dunbar Reddick," July 31, 1959, MLKP-MBU, Martin Luther King, Jr., Papers, 1954-1968, Boston University, MA
[18] Aerielle M. Allen and Colin Wayne Leach, "The Psychology of Martin Luther King Jr.'s 'Creative Maladjustment' at Societal Injustice and Oppression." *Journal of Social Issues*, 74.2 (2018), 323.
[19] Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, Hannah Arendt, ed. and Harry Zohn, trans. (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1968), 257.
[20] Amos 5:24
[21] Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (Houghton Mifflin, 1968) and Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Divinity School Address* (Philip Green, 1903), 77-78.



The Bible begins indicating that the igniting idea in the mind of God—the very first word—is “life.” A dozen billion years later we live on this side of the Protestant focus on the written, printed, and bound Word. We read “Word” and think of pages of words. But who could imagine the mind of God contained in any library of pages, as we are ″complex, beautifully and wonderfully made,″ or, as oddly translated, ″fearfully” made. All we have learned about the universe that emerged from the Mind teaches us to continue to expect generative, creative, impossibly varied life.

Our theological anchor among pages upon pages is not helped by the very modern tether to the health sciences, which have, oddly again, turned our imagination in the exact opposite direction from that first lively thought. The modern health sciences are only 150 years beyond the discovery of germs but, with the pride of young thinking, are proud of their many tips and tricks about this and that cause of death. Indeed, since the early 1900s, the broad application of basic public health knowledge about sanitation, clean water, food inspection, and a bent toward prevention in such obvious ways as motorcycle helmets and seat belts has given us an almost doubling of average life expectancy. Most of those added years of life are attributed to the Child Survival Revolution and the education of women, but we would not know that for all the enormous attention on expensive, high-technology interventions toward the very end of life. Hospitals absorb (one is tempted to say suck) a vastly disproportionate share of investment at every scale. Many a family’s life savings evaporate in the impossibly high expenses of medical care during the last few months of life.

Many of what should be called *health* professions-—including those involving theological education—are largely captured by the disproportionate focus on the end of life. The one thing every human should know even without theologians is that we all die. But one can almost forgive those in the medical sciences for their focus on training to give the rest of us a few more years, maybe months, even days of breath. But how to explain that capture of theology when our Book begins and ends with such a profound focus on life?

All of my formal academic training has been theological. But for the past thirty years my domain of theological application has been in structures built for public health and then two large academic medical centers that had been created by Methodists or Baptists a century or so ago. Most of my writing—both scholarly and popular—has been about that practice. Only since my faculty appointment at the School of Divinity has become more the center of my life and thought have I turned toward theology informed by, but not contained by, the fieldwork of health care and public health.

I had to trace my personal journey back to the same building in which I now teach, though long before the School of Divinity emerged. It was here at Wake Forest that this suburban Methodist student first heard of Baptist Dr. King and the Social Gospel of mercy and justice. I learned more at Emory University (where God

"...there are leading causes of life just as there are leading causes of death."

was supposed to have died, but thrived in the social implications of the every-creative One). Another Baptist, President and Deacon Jimmy Carter, launched a many-faceted engagement of science and democracy for human possibilities, one of which was his Interfaith Health Program, partnered with public health (and a few forward-thinking hospitals).

What are the theological implications now visible? The most basic is the subject itself. Almost all public health thinks about what negative phenomena is trying to kill us. Health care such as that provided by hospitals is even worse, almost entirely obsessed with pathology, ailments, and what are quaintly called "complaints." Working at The Carter Center sometimes meant my speaking at important places instead of President Carter (imagine the disappointed audience!). One time in Milwaukee I followed Dr. David Williams, now of Harvard, at a meeting on racial disparities in birth outcomes. He had almost become an Adventist minister so he spoke with truth and passion, saying just about all that can be said about race and infant mortality in urban America.

I had nothing to add to the study of death, but for the first time spoke of the basic intellectual and practical responsibility of grown-ups to start where the Bible does and study life. It turns out this is important for science, too, as there are leading causes of life just as there are leading causes of death. This has profound theological implications that are lost in the normal fixation on death in health care professions, including even chaplaincy. The first great metanoia today is the same as it was at the very beginning—turning from death to life; turning our imagination and aspiration toward the most obvious and overlooked witness: *I have come that you might have life and live abundantly.* The first word in Genesis and the last word in Revelation is about that mystery.

This turn of theology and science is a sharp shift from our typical friends in the biomedical disease care organizations that accept our chaplains but not our prophets who call into question their profits. We need to turn toward our whole gospel, especially the social one, not just the parts that support their operations. Full-band theology, not just vocational training.

We can move beyond dead, desperate, defensive theism and get on to the good news that Theo is alive, generative, always about tomorrow. This is why hearts are made to leap . . . together. Love casts out fear, especially the well-informed love of life itself. Finally, we can see the substance faith knew all along: life.

Wake Forest University School of Divinity, a thinking organ of the Church located within Wake Forest University, functions as a mirror, revealing to the entire university community the true nature of the work that the university, at its best, engages. As an intellectual community that is also a Christian spiritual community, Wake Divinity reveals that an education in becoming human and humane (recognized as the university's purpose in its motto, *Pro Humanitate*) is necessarily also an education in becoming divine. To present this mirror, we must continue to open ourselves to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in our life together, empowering us not only to speak of, but also to embody, the Christian vocation to divine humanity.

"What is pressing Wake Divinity beyond our certainty, and ourselves, demanding more than we ever dreamed possible?" In this question I hear an echo of the New Testament:

> **Now to him who is able to do far in excess of all we ask or imagine because of the power at work within us, to him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations of the age of ages. Amen.** (Ephesians 3:20–21)

This doxology gives glory to God as "one who is able to do far in excess of all we ask or imagine," one, in other words, who "presses us beyond our certainty, and ourselves, demanding more than we ever dreamed possible." The glory given to this God is situated within the almost incomprehensibly broad horizon of the entire economy of God's purposes: it is "unto all generations of the age of ages," that is, through the entire succession of epochs, worlds, and ages through which God's creatures pass from their beginning in the beginning to their end in the day when God will be all in all. This glory is said to be "in the Church," that is, in the community of those creatures who have been and are being transformed into the likeness of God. It is also said to be "in Christ Jesus," the one who has united in himself heaven and earth, Creator and creature, divine and human, the one in whom, as the beginning, all things were made, and in whom, as the end, the age of ages will reach its consummation in the sabbath of divine rest.

This doxology also states why it is that God is able to do far more than we ask or imagine, why it is that we find ourselves pressed beyond our certainty and beyond ourselves: it is "because of the power at work within us." Christian theology most commonly names this power the Holy Spirit. Paul, in the letter to the Romans, writes of the Holy Spirit as the gift through whom the love of God is poured into our hearts; in the Gospel of John, Jesus speaks of the Holy Spirit as the one who leads us into all truth. To be filled with love and to be led not into partial knowledge, but into all truth, is certainly to be pressed beyond ourselves in the most fundamental fashion. Who but God rests in all truth? Who but God is entirely love? To receive these things from the Spirit is to become human beings who are also divine. A remarkable thought—and yet this doxology from Ephesians reminds us that it is just such a strange, remarkable process, which Christian theology most commonly calls salvation, that currently we are in the midst of. When we open ourselves to the transformations of this Power, we will find ourselves pressed beyond our certainty and beyond ourselves, because this Power is utterly, transcendently beyond us, even as it is also the end for which we were brought into being.

All this may seem a strange way to talk about the place of a professional school in a secular university. But it is precisely to say such things as this that divinity schools exist within universities. Wake Divinity is not merely a professional school within Wake Forest University but also a thinking organ of the body of the Church. It is a Christian spiritual community as well as an intellectual community. As such, the divinity school is a mirror to the broader Wake Forest community. A mirror shows you what your face actually looks like. The mirror of the divinity school shows the university community that there is more to the purposes of our shared life than is generally acknowledged. Wake Forest's motto, as just noted, is *Pro Humanitate*, "for humanity," or "for humaneness." The School of Divinity reveals that to be human is to be divine, that to become humane is to be transformed into the likeness of God.

This is because the grand story alluded to in that doxology from Ephesians is not merely the story of Christians, but the story of all creatures. Although the doxology's repeated use of "us" reveals that it is addressed to a particular community of Christian believers, the story it speaks of is in fact one that we are all in the midst of. Every soul on this campus is on this journey from the beginning to the end, from Christ Jesus to Christ Jesus in Christ Jesus—and, in fact, I would also say every blade of grass and every earthworm and all the bacteria in your gut are too.

This is why the School of Divinity as an element of the university community that is also a Christian spiritual community can reveal, at its best, the secret truth and fundamental purpose of the university as a whole, at its best. Because the purposes are ultimately the same. When the university indeed embraces the summons to humaneness it claims as its purpose, it embraces a summons to transformation into godhood. For just as the Divine Word, Christ Jesus, has become human, so we also become divine when we embody in our own lives the perfect love, the perfect humaneness, embodied in his. This can begin to happen in a physics laboratory or a music rehearsal or an introductory language class to Chinese. It can also begin in the School of Business as well as the School of Law and School of Medicine. Because the Spirit, this Power at work within us, goes where she will.

It is simply that at the School of Divinity we name the working of this Power and, at our best, we explicitly and intentionally orient our intellectual community around it. To continue as the mirror of the university, then, we must never cease from this naming, and we must continue to be a community that intentionally orients itself toward the Spirit's transforming work. To be open to such transformation from above, to seek it, and to say so, is to stand out from our colleagues and fellow students in other parts of the university in a way that is uncomfortable. It is to be pressed beyond our certainty, beyond ourselves. But it is the calling to which we have been called, the human calling "in the Church and in Christ Jesus unto all the generations of the age of ages."

Educating the Whole Person Beyond Flourishing: A Theological Provocation
John E. Senior

CHAPTER 8

When I say, for instance, that someone loves me, I am saying that I have been touched by something at a depth in me that is beyond all of my limitations or qualities or virtues; beyond all that is good in me, beyond all that is evil in me. At last, in the awareness of that, I say, 'Here is one who understands me.' So, if it be true, as I think it is, that only in the love of God does man have that experience completely and fully, it is only here then that the meaning of the eternal takes on its binding character."

-Howard Thurman, *The Growing Edge* [1]

[1] Howard Thurman, *The Growing Edge* (Friends United Press, 1956), 136.

In this essay, I suggest a "provocation" around higher education's commitment to the education of the whole person, which is often framed in terms of character education. The orienting telos of character education is identified as "human flourishing." Theological education, at its best, reflects an awareness that God's deep affirmation of human creation is not exhausted in flourishing. Christian theological traditions offer a complex understanding of human experience that a preoccupation with flourishing often overlooks. For that reason, the contributions of theological schools are vital for the university's project of educating the whole person.

Graduate theological education in the Christian tradition prepares persons for the work of ministry. Christian ministry holds space for persons and communities to experience the love of God beyond all limitations, qualities, or virtues. The pattern for the work of ministry was set in the very beginning of the story of God's relationship with creation. After completing God's creative work, God saw all that God had made, and it was very good (Genesis 1:31). The divine creation is good not because of what it once was or might still become; it is good because of what it *is*, in all of its messiness and complexity. As mystic, theologian, and pastor Howard Thurman understood, the *is*-ness of human creation is of far greater value to God than its achievements, mistakes, virtues, or limitations. Christian ministers join God in that moment of seeing the goodness of creation; they look at creation, as God did, and see that it is fundamentally very good.

The "very good"-ness of human creation is disclosed within the boundaries of human experience. That God's deep affirmation of human beings is not exhausted in flourishing is not to say that God doesn't desire the flourishing of creation. But we human beings are human, as God created us. Our lives are precarious. We make mistakes and poor decisions, suffer from sickness and injury, abuse our freedom, and act out of our insecurities to hurt others. At the end of our lives, we die.

Theologians and philosophers often talk about human flourishing as if it is an attainable good, an end state representing the culmination of human striving, tempering or vanquishing the vicissitudes of human finitude and suffering. There are, however, no moments in any human life in which persons experience flourishing without qualification or ambiguity because there is no such thing as unqualified and unambiguous human flourishing. In any season of flourishing, we still wrestle with the ambiguities of happiness, success, and well-being, in our own lives and in the lives of people we love. Even the resurrected Christ, the Christ who grappled with death and prevailed over it, rises to new life with a wounded body, the piercings of nails and spear still gaping in his hands and side, which he invites his disciples to see for themselves (John 20). Flourishing, like all human values, is fraught with paradox. Death—the ultimate culmination of all forms of human limitation, finitude, and frailty—represents the termination of our earthly experience of value. As such, death is terrifying. But death is also a necessary condition of the intelligibility of value. Human values like love, courage, loyalty, commitment, and, indeed, flourishing would not be intelligible to us if we were invincible, enjoyed lives of infinite duration, or were infallible in our judgments, intentions, and actions. All of what we value is meaningful to us because of the possibility of loss, failure, devastation, and, ultimately, death. Human beings understand and experience human values precisely because our earthly lives end in death. Thus, in the human horizon, finitude is a necessary condition of value. Any construal of human value that does not account for human finitude is therefore incomplete, threatening to reinforce structures of power and privilege that so often undermine the aims and goals of higher education.

The Christian witness affirms that in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God joins human beings in suffering, injustice, devastation, rejection, persecution, and death. God experiences the fullness of human pain, abandonment, loneliness, and alienation with us. Such experiences are conditions of new life, since growth is never possible without death of some kind, and death is always painful. Most important, the Christian witness holds that God transforms and transfigures experiences of death into new life. Christian ministers hold space for persons and communities to experience God working through the fullness of death to create new life. Said differently, Christian ministers hold space for persons and communities to experience themselves as genuinely human, a creation loved by God beyond all limitations, qualities, and virtues.

What does it mean to "hold space"? It is a metaphor that suggests passivity. In that way, it is misleading. One might have said that Christian ministers "make space" rather than "hold space," to better capture the active nature of ministry work. In my view, however, God is ultimately the space-maker. Ministers draw attention to and encourage others to join God in the work of affirming the irreducible goodness of God's creation, particularly as God works to bring forth life out of death. They do so in a variety of contexts and institutional settings—not only ecclesial settings but secular ones, too. At Wake Forest School of Divinity, we identify God's ongoing creative work as "justice, reconciliation, and compassion," all of which are intelligible only because of the ambiguities of human experience. Christian ministers hold space for persons and communities to join God in the work of justice, reconciliation, and compassion, all expressions of God's continuing presence in and affirmation of God's creation. ●

Reverberant Sounds of Double-Consciousness Amid Caregiving in a Multicultural World Wynnetta Wimberley

CHAPTER 9

It was just about noon on Saturday morning, and I was home reviewing my Sunday sermon one last time. Unfortunately, I still hadn't come up with an appropriate sermon title. It simply wasn't coming to me. So, I proceeded to go about my day and headed to the huge going-out-of-business sale at the local Kmart, with the understanding that the sermon title would eventually come. While poring over unbelievable finds in the store, I ran into a clergy colleague. We both quickly agreed it wasn't time to engage in our usual "preacher chat" since potentially, there might be a fishing rod in the sporting goods section with his name on it. Within seconds, he disappeared into the fray. Sometime later, satisfied with my purchases, I proceeded to the checkout counter, completed my transaction, and headed toward the exit. Off in the distance, I could hear the sound of police sirens approaching. Upon exiting the store, I noticed a small crowd beginning to form at the entrance, when suddenly, two police cars came veering onto the curb in front of the store. As I, along with others, rushed to get out of the way, I found myself thinking, "Lord, thank you for getting me out of the store just in time—someone has stolen something from Kmart!"

Suddenly, I heard an officer say, "Ma'am, drop the bags and step against the wall!" In my attempt to move out of the way, I looked up to find there wasn't anyone standing behind me. The officer was talking to me! "Ma'am, I'm going to ask you again—drop the bags and step against the wall!" In shock I gasped, replying, "Who, me?" "Yes, you! I'm going to ask you for the last time—drop those bags and step against that wall!" As he and his partner approached me, with their hands on their guns, I dropped my bags and moved toward the wall. I was mortified. I asked, "Officer, would you please tell me what is going on?" He responded, "Wait here until my partner returns." As I waited, I noticed the size of the crowd steadily growing as they murmured while pointing toward me. In that moment, I felt spectacle-ized by what philosopher George Yancy describes as "the glaring white gaze." [1] After twenty minutes passed, I proceeded to ask the officer again, "Why am I being held?" He responded, "Ma'am, there's been a robbery in the store." I replied, "What does that have to do with me?" The officer responded, "You fit the description."

Amid the ordinariness of a Saturday afternoon, while shopping in a department store for cotton balls and toothpaste, this black body was a problem. Not unlike the ordinariness of a twelve-year-old playing at a neighborhood playground on a Saturday afternoon and subsequently being fatally shot twice, at point-blank range, by a police officer. As I reflect on my own shock and hesitancy (as an adult) in responding to the command of a police officer running toward me with a gun, I can only imagine the shock and hesitancy of twelve-year-old Tamir Rice, when those police cars came veering onto the curb of that neighborhood playground, with police officers running toward him with a gun. Tamir's black body was a problem.

On this, the 25th anniversary of Wake Forest University School of Divinity, I am reminded that it is also the tenth anniversary of the murder of Tamir Rice. As such, my own theological provocation draws me to the work of scholar-activist William Edward Burghardt Du Bois's The Souls of Black Folk. He writes, "It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others. One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro: two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder." [2]

As a womanist pastoral theologian, with multiple experiences of racial profiling riddled throughout my narrative, I find the utility of a Du Boisian concept of duality quite fitting, when considering caregiving in a multicultural world. The experience of duality in America is reverberating transculturally, within the fields of psychology, sociology, and public health, specifically. Emergent research on Latina, Asian, and Indigenous peoples demands a pastoral theology response that is grounded in interculturality—where cultural identity and ethnic diversity are valued. International pastoral theologian Emmanuel Lartey argues, as humans, "we are like all others, like some others, and like no other." [3]

Engaging practical theology in the public square over the next quarter century requires Wake Divinity students to acquire a cultural humility, to meet the burgeoning needs of this generation—suicide, gun violence, sex trafficking, unhoused trans youth, migrant children slashed by razor wire along the Texas border, spikes in children entering foster care due to the opioid epidemic, etc. The task is great, and I suspect we are able.

May it be so, in the name of Jesus.

[1] George Yancy, *Black Bodies, White Gazes: The Continuing Significance of Race* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008).
[2] William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903; South Kingstown, 2014).
[3] Emmanuel Y Lartey, *In Living Color: An Intercultural Approach to Pastoral Care and Counseling* (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1997).

Improvising Grace: A Convocation Sermon Bill J. Leonard

DELIVERED AT THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY CONVOCATION OF THE WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF DIVINITY ON OCTOBER 22, 2024.

"They have no wine," his mother said to the Son of God, when the cabernet ran out at the wedding in Cana of Galilee, on the edge of the kindom of God.

But Jesus of Nazareth wasn't getting involved in that nuptial catastrophe.

"Woman," he says to the Blessed Virgin Mary, "what do you and I have to do with this? My hour has not come."

But Mother Mary refuses to take no for an answer, even from the Word of God made flesh. "Do whatever he tells you," she says to the servants.

And, whether his hour has come or not, Jesus is committed. Raise your hand if your mother has ever ordered you to do something you didn't want to do. The rest of you are lying!

So, the one whom the Nicene Creed calls "God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God," obeys his mother and improvises with six stone water jars —capacity 20 to 30 gallons. He orders them filled "to the brim" with clear, fresh water. And in a twinkling, something wondrous happens.

"Draw some off," Jesus tells them, and "take it to the caterer" who, not knowing where the liquid came from, takes one small sip, and then perhaps a larger second, smiles broadly (I'm guessing here) and says: "Usually we serve the really good wine first and wait until the guests are a little drunk (the NRSV translation) and then serve the stuff we picked up at the convenience store" (my 2024 translation).

Turning spirits to spirituality, the guy adds: "But you have saved the best until last."

EPILOGUE

That brief, powerful phrase carries us from familial prickliness through water into wine, to the kin-dom of God, God's New Day in the world; a story filled to the brim with grace and frivolity, irony and gospel, vintage Jesus all the way.
"Mother Mary seems to know, even before her son does, that sometimes where grace is concerned you must improvise."

Mother Mary seems to know, even before her son does, that sometimes where grace is concerned you must improvise. To say that we are free, free to live by faith and grace alone, does not mean we fail to prepare, study, reflect or struggle. It means we never can prepare enough. All the education in the world, all the implicit doctrines, creeds or constitutions we pledge to follow never can ensure we won't have to improvise. Life and faith can readily thrust us into situations for which we never could prepare even if we knew in advance it was going to happen.

The Cana story concludes with John's comment: "This deed at Cana-in-Galilee is the first of the signs by which Jesus revealed his glory and led his disciples to believe in him." The disciples were surely pleased that they had chosen to follow such a hospitable prophet.

But John won't let the Gospel rest on wine and wedding receptions, turning instead to Jesus, danger and dissent: "As it was near the time of the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. There he found in the temple the dealers in cattle, sheep and pigeons, and the moneychangers, scattering their coins. Jesus made a whip of cords."
Again, Jesus improvises, the one who changed water to wine made a whip of cords and drove out the infamous "moneychangers." Once Jesus learned to improvise, he couldn't stop —life (and gospel) wouldn't let him.

John is the only one of the four Gospels that puts the moneychanger story at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, not at the end. But more significant is that John pairs the wedding feast with the cleansing of the temple.

In the book *God and Empire*, John Dominic Crossan says Jesus' message of liberation was a prophetic protest against "religious cooperation with ... imperial control, ... a permanently valid protest demonstration against any capital city's collusion between conservative religion and imperial violence at any time and in any place."
Jesus says, "You must not turn my Father's house into a market." Sound familiar in 2024?
The Cana wedding is "the first of Jesus' miracles."
Today we say it was the beginning of a Reformation.
Why? First, because Ecclesia semper Reformanda, the church is always reforming, and it needs one right now.

Second, if the wedding at Cana marks God's New Day in the world, then, we Protestants say, Martin Luther's posting of 95 theses on the church door in Wittenberg, Germany, Oct. 31, 1517, marked yet another sign of God's New Day, calling the church to rethink its identity, its foundation, its mission in the world.

Third, 507 years after that landmark moment, we say the church of the here and now —at least in the land of the free and the home of threats against judges, jurors, FEMA workers, librarians and school board members —is desperate for reformation.
"Today's churches live, like Jesus and Martin Luther, somewhere between celebration and dissent."

The ripple effects of that reformation mean today's churches live, like Jesus and Martin Luther, somewhere between celebration and dissent, between the wedding at Cana and the indulgence sellers. Luther's Reformation starts with celebration: The just shall live by faith; the priesthood of all believers; the end of clerical celibacy. Remember: Martin Luther was an ex-priest who married Katherine von Bora, an ex-nun and together they had six children, and that if nothing else is reformation.

Celebration soon turns to dissent. Jesus turned on the moneychangers; Luther turned on the indulgence sellers, hucksters selling documents by which normal sinners could purchase grace drawn on the storehouse of merit —good works generated by the saints who didn't need all that holiness for salvation, so it could be transferred to those who needed a little more to get themselves or their relatives out of purgatory. One of Luther's theses declared, "The saints have no extra credits." In *Dissent in American Religion*, the late historian Edwin S. Gaustad writes, "Dissent cannot be understood simply in terms of whines against oppression, resistance to organizational corruption, demurrers against the affirmations of others." Dissenters, Gaustad insists, are more than "merely noisy naysayers." Instead, "the dissenter is a powerful if unpredictable engine in the service of a cause."

Today, let us say that at their best, and their messiest, dissenters are a prophetic witness to insensitivities in church and culture and agents of celebration for the possibilities of reformation. Gaustad admits that "history hones dissent to a fine edge: sharp, severe and unyielding." "Dissent is concerned with change, to right the wrong, to correct the injustice. But that may not happen all at once."

That's an extremely crucial point. At its best, dissent is concerned with change, to right the wrong, to correct the injustice. But that may not happen all at once. The moneychangers and indulgence sellers kept hawking their wares long after Jesus and Luther had their say.

Dissent for the sake of justice doesn't usually begin with change, it begins with witness, a dissenter consumed with a "zeal for God's house," the breaking of God's New Day in the world. Sometimes the most we can do is "give a witness" with our dissent and hope for reformation aided by others who long for social and spiritual transformation. It is time for such a witness.

They will come, those moments, in some dark night or early morning when we are all alone and called to respond to situations our mother couldn't have warned us about. And neither Donald Trump nor Kamala Harris, Tucker Carlson nor Joy Reid, Franklin Graham nor Aretha Franklin can tell us what to do. There we are in an emergency room or a country full of imminent pain and instant chaos and there's no time to organize a response; only time to improvise beyond phone texts or proof texts, long-range plans or short-term solutions. We improvise grace by sola fide, faith alone.

In the quarter century of the Wake Forest Divinity School, we've often had to improvise. Sept. 11, 2001, comes immediately to mind. It was a Tuesday, chapel was at 11, but before that time, the planes had hit the World Trade Towers and the Pentagon. Our guest preachers that day were Nancy Sehested and Linda Weaver Williams, Baptist ministers extraordinaire who quickly revised their plans, improvising a time of prayer and reflection without platitudes or false bravado. Before we knew it, the small Davis Chapel was filled with divinity and undergraduate students, the latter seeking sanctuary without knowing others were gathered.

When it ended, I stood to offer a benediction, only to hear myself saying, "In light of today's events, there will be a Communion service at 4 p.m. in Wait Chapel." Again we improvised, as university chaplains joined religion and divinity faculties in preparing and distributing bread and cup with stations across the front of the chapel.

We invited Professor Jill Crainshaw to preach, and I shall never forget what she did. Standing behind this very Communion table, she lifted shards of matzah flatbread and began to break them in her hands, fragments flying across the table and dropping to the floor, confessing the brokenness present in the world, in New York and across the American nation, including this very room. And then we came to the table, an estimated 800 of us, some weeping, others in shock, all caught up in a national tragedy. Crainshaw improvised the real presence of the Christ amid the brokenness of the moment. Grace in the midst of desperation, an audacious witness to a sustaining moment of hope.

"To improvise grace is to take a chance, to risk everything on faith."

To improvise grace is to take a chance, to risk everything on faith. You gamble, with only moments to spare, that something will be right, that the Spirit will inspire and it won't hurt more than it helps. Does that mean the gospel is relative? No, it means life, including Christian life, is unpredictable.

And the wisdom to know when to stand on unshakable convictions and when to grab for all the ambiguity you can get is what Holy Spirit is about. It is also to know moments of abject terror, for sometimes even in our best efforts to help nothing seems to change, and grace is a long time coming.

Where will God's New Day take American churches exploring old/new ways of ministering as agents of justice, reconciliation and compassion in a divided church, state, nation, dangerous world? When the rhetoric of the public square nurtures bigotry, cynicism and downright meanness, can we be dissenting witnesses to the new wine of grace, care and conscience?

Yet amid that sober condition, we can remember the days when water turned to wine, when the Spirit fell like fire, days when the church seemed drunk with the divine explosion. So, in times of light or darkness, formation and reformation, consensus and dissent, we hold on to the God who saves the best until last, and who saves even the last ones best. Alleluia!

CONTRIBUTORS

First	*Last*	
Jill Y.	Crainshaw	is University Ombuds, Vice Dean for Faculty Development and Academic Initiatives, and Professor of Worship and Liturgical Theology.
Michele	Gillespie	is Provost and Presidential Endowed Professor of Southern History.
Gary	Gunderson	is Professor of Faith and Health of the Public.
Bill J.	Leonard	is Founding Dean and Professor of Divinity Emeritus.
Alton B.	Pollard III	is James and Marilyn Dunn Chair in Baptist Studies and University Professor of African American Studies.
Charles Augustine	Rivera	is Assistant Professor of Church History.
Melva L.	Sampson	is Assistant Teaching Professor of Preaching and Practical Theology and Faculty Fellow in the Faith COMPASS Center.
John E.	Senior	is Assistant Dean for Vocational Formation and Doctoral Education.
Katherine A.	Shaner	is Associate Professor of New Testament.
Corey D. B.	Walker	is Dean of the School of Divinity, Wake Forest Professor of the Humanities, and Director of the Program in African American Studies.
Wynnetta	Wimberley	is Assistant Teaching Professor of Practical Theology and Faculty Director of the Thriving Congregations Initiative.

EDITOR
Corey D. B. Walker

Essays on the Occasion of

NINETEEN NINETY NINE

Twenty Five Years of

TWO THOUSAND TWENTY FIVE

Wake Forest University School of Divinity

These essays do more than commemorate. They call us together, anchor us in our shared purpose, and contribute meaningfully to the ongoing work of inviting reflection, inspiring action, and offering a compelling vision of who we are—and who we are becoming.

Corey D. B. Walker

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