

Preaching the Ecclesiological Gospel Amidst a Syndemic Context

Seyeom Kim

Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary, Evanston, IL 60201, USA; seyeom.kim@garrett.edu

Abstract: As the proliferation of new variations of COVID-19 (Coronavirus Disease 2019) continues to increase, it is evident that the COVID-19 pandemic is not over. Indeed, we are living in a world of interrelating and overlapping pandemics—a syndemic. A syndemic accelerates the polarization of access to health care, financial support, and education opportunities in marginalized communities, and the polarization breeds social injustice, violence, and ignorance. What, then, is the Gospel the Church proclaims for those who have experienced the pandemic and are now facing a syndemic? As part of a liturgical response, this paper proposes preaching as a praxis of the ecclesiological Gospel. The ecclesiological Gospel is a term I suggest to highlight the contextual, sacramental, and communal aspects of the Gospel. Highlighting God's holistic work for salvation represented in baptism and the eucharist, the ecclesiological Gospel yearns to form a church that baptizes people in diversity, that severs evil interconnections, and that welcomes people to the table of hospitality that forms a new covenantal relationship. This paper examines the concept of a syndemic and its significance for preaching in marginalized communities. It contrasts a holistic Gospel perspective with a narrow view, proposes preaching as praxis of the ecclesiological Gospel, and illustrates its application within a particular context in responding to syndemic conditions. I hope this work offers a chance to reorient the meaning of the Gospel and the identity of the Church for people living in fear, grief, and hopelessness, while encouraging them with the unwavering hope revealed in Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection.

Keywords: COVID-19; syndemic; liturgy; preaching; ecclesiological Gospel; contextuality; sacramentality; communality



Citation: Kim, Seyeom. 2024.

Preaching the Ecclesiological Gospel Amidst a Syndemic Context. *Religions* 15: 347. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15030347>

Academic Editor: Hwarang Moon

Received: 24 January 2024

Revised: 6 March 2024

Accepted: 12 March 2024

Published: 13 March 2024



Copyright: © 2024 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

The consequences of COVID-19 (Coronavirus Disease 2019) are immense. Schools, companies, restaurants, and churches shut their doors indefinitely. Because of the lockdown, day laborers lost their jobs and became homeless while others in high-ranking positions gained more wealth than before the outbreak of COVID-19. Virtual spaces became prominent places for meeting, learning, and relationships as a means of protecting the immunocompromised from contagious variants. The world grieved over the deaths of more than six million people around the globe. A bitter truth is that the pandemic is hardly over, yet we now face what scientists call a syndemic, a cluster of interrelated infectious diseases that weakens those who are more seriously marginalized socially, politically, and economically than those who are privileged.

COVID-19 made a profound impact on the external and internal life of the Church. Externally, churches had to decide whether to hold in-person or online gatherings. Some churches never gave up in-person gatherings because of their conviction that bodies must be present for meaningful public worship, while other churches moved to online worship in the interest of public welfare. Some local churches celebrated the eucharist and baptism remotely while other churches postponed both until they could celebrate them as they had before the pandemic. In addition, preachers endured the internal impact of COVID-19 because week in and week out they had to deal with immediate and thorny questions including: Where is God amidst the pandemic? Why do innocent people suffer from

the pandemic? When and how will the pandemic end? What is a gospel for the people who have lived through the pandemic and now face the prospect of a syndemic? The issues raised by the syndemic are deeply interrelated to social, political, and economic threats to the most vulnerable people in communities. Just as the pandemic accelerated the polarization of access to health care, financial support, and education opportunities, the syndemic reveals the hidden interconnectedness of social injustice, violence, and ignorance in the aftermath of the pandemic. What, then, is a gospel that the Church proclaims for the people who now face the challenges raised by the syndemic?

In this article, I first examine the term syndemic and its origins, considering the syndemic as a significant locus of preaching after the outbreak of COVID-19. I underscore that communities experiencing the syndemic are the contexts in which the Church must preach the Gospel urgently and immediately. Second, I tackle the fundamental question of what the Gospel is. Examining an aspect of the Gospel as pharmaceutical—a narrowed concept of the Gospel—I underscore the holistic aspect of the Gospel that resolves external, internal, and interconnected issues in our lives. Finally, I propose a homiletical possibility: preaching as praxis of the ecclesiological Gospel. The ecclesiological Gospel is a term I suggest to highlight the contextual, sacramental, and communal aspects of the Gospel which offer a clue for preachers who are mindful of the syndemic as an imminent and unavoidable condition for their congregations. Highlighting God’s holistic work for salvation represented in baptism and the eucharist, I argue that the ecclesiological Gospel yearns to form a church in which baptism severs evil interconnections and welcomes the baptized to the table of hospitality that forms a new covenantal relationship. At the end, I will provide an example of preaching as praxis of the ecclesiological Gospel: engaging in the preaching of Puerto Rican churches that have suffered from a syndemic situation engendered by colonialism, natural disasters, and COVID-19.

2. What Is a Syndemic?

2.1. A Definition

Merrill Singer and his colleagues coined the term syndemic in the early 1990s. While researching the HIV epidemic in poor and minoritized communities in urban North America, Singer and his colleagues realized that the term epidemic was not adequate to describe the problem in the community. So, they deeply examined the relationship between gang-related violence and AIDS and found strong connections between endemic and epidemic conditions including, yet not limited to, HIV, TB, STDs, infant mortality, drug abuse, suicide, and homicide. Those factors interacted with one another in a wide range of political-economic and social ways. In this regard, Singer defines a syndemic: “Like the terms epidemic and pandemic (spreading health problems of local or extra-local distributions), the suffix of syndemic is derived from the Greek word *demos* (the people), while the prefix is taken from the Greek term for ‘working together.’ In other words, a syndemic is a set of closely intertwined and mutually enhancing health problems that significantly affect the overall health status of a population within the context of a perpetuating configuration of noxious social conditions” (Singer 1996, p. 99).

The term syndemic illustrates a critical interrelatedness between various external and internal factors that heighten problems in a community. The outbreak of COVID-19 became an exemplar that expresses how a syndemic operates in a community or a country. Clarence C. Gravlee examines the syndemic condition in the U.S. Gravlee argues that there were much higher infection and death rates in disproportionately black, indigenous, and other people-of-color communities. Those communities were in low-income neighborhoods, and most community members had limited access to health care and were suffering from hypertension and diabetes. Moreover, those communities historically experienced systemic racism such as residential, school, and occupational segregation. Therefore, when COVID-19 hit those communities, the consequences were devastating (Gravlee 2020, p. e23482).

2.2. The Syndemic's Theological Implications

The syndemic has three theological implications for preaching. First, preaching the Gospel means to name various harmful factors and their insidious interconnectedness that fashion a context. In this sense, a gospel can be particular to a context today that needs transformation and empowerment (Brooks 2009, p. 7). Second, preaching the Gospel should focus not only on curing a temporal and peripheral disease but also on holistic healing. God saves our body, mind, and soul, as the body of resurrected Christ indicates. Third, preaching within a syndemic condition should offer an ecclesiological Gospel that embraces the diversity of individuals yet unites them with hospitality to serve the community where the Church belongs. Before articulating those three aspects of preaching the Gospel within a syndemic condition, the essence of the Gospel should be examined to demonstrate that the Gospel is holistic and particular, providing equal salvation for individuals and communities in different contexts.

3. The Gospel as Pharmaceutical

The Gospel leads each body, spirit, and society into holistic salvation. However, when the Gospel is considered narrowly as therapeutic, it attempts to cure only the sinfulness of human beings or psychological problems. A pharmaceutical aspect of the Gospel highlights a concept of the Gospel that cures individual sinfulness, psychological issues, or social issues. In his book *A Captive Voice: The Liberation of Preaching*, David Buttrick points out a therapeutic notion of the Gospel found in the twentieth century. Buttrick writes, "Most sermons from most pulpits, particularly since 1950, seem to have been aimed at an existential self in psychological self-awareness. The movement has culminated in a 'positive-thinking' pulpit on the East Coast, a 'possibility-thinking' pulpit on the West Coast. But the trust is that most of our pulpits, Protestant and Catholic alike, have read Scripture but then preached a psychological personalism for the past four decades, with sin as psychological dysfunction and salvation as inward good feeling" (Buttrick 1994, p. 13).

It is understandable that preachers tried to respond to the issues that the congregation was experiencing in the mid-twentieth century. Preachers seemed to pay attention to the psychological aspect of preaching to respond pastorally to people who were experiencing unprecedented psychological issues, including depression, anxiety, and stress. These preachers combined the perspective of pastoral counseling with their homiletic style. Harry Emerson Fosdick is a renowned pastoral counseling preacher. He was interested in using new psychology, mental health issues, and Freud to deliver the Gospel for pastoral counseling on a group scale (Edwards 2004, pp. 666–67). He endeavored to resolve the difficulties in the lives of the congregation by combining the Gospel with a psychological method: "Little by little. . . the vision grew clearer. People come to church on Sunday with every kind of personal difficulty and problem flesh is heir to. A sermon was meant to meet such needs; it should be pastoral counseling on a group scale. . . Every sermon should have for its main business the head-on constructive meeting of some problem which was puzzling minds, burdening consciences, distracting lives, and no sermon which so met a real human difficulty, with light to throw on it and help to win a victory over it, could possibly be futile" (Fosdick 1956, p. 94).

Fosdick's psychological and pastoral counseling approach helped preachers focus on the concurrent difficulties that the congregation was experiencing. In this sense, the Gospel became therapeutic, or pharmaceutical, to solve a particular difficulty. In such cases, though, the Gospel seems to deal only with psychological salvation rather than holistic salvation that includes the body and spirit, as well as the individual and society. Fosdick's preaching is significant because it helps the congregation acknowledge how God deals with and solves the issues in their situation, including psychological dimensions. However, it should be noted that this pharmaceutical Gospel fails to address the complex and interconnected social issues in congregations' lives.

A congregation listens to preaching to experience God's holistic healing and salvation and to refresh their identity as the body of Christ to serve the world. Issues that each indi-

vidual experiences seem separate, but they are not unrelated. Sinfulness and psychological issues are the tip of the iceberg. On a larger scale, one person's problem is the problem of the community. Proclaiming the Gospel must deal both with explicit individual issues and implicit corporate issues interconnected within the community, society, and country that negatively affect both an individual and their community.

4. What Does Preaching the Gospel Mean in a Syndemic World?

The aftermath of COVID-19 proved that we are both closely connected and widely polarized. On the one hand, the experience of quarantine, a forced experience of isolation, made people realize how they were closely connected and related to one another. On the other hand, marginalized communities experienced higher death rates, poverty, and violence than privileged communities. Given that the Church is called to proclaim the Gospel to the poor, weak, and oppressed, it is time to ponder deeply the meaning of the Gospel for people living in a syndemic world.

The Gospel is not the object of preaching, but the subject of preaching. The Gospel itself preaches through all possibilities that make humans apprehensive about the mystery of God's salvific grace. A preacher cannot possess the Gospel. Instead, the Gospel humbly expresses itself through preaching for communion with people. Therefore, even though ongoing confusion is unavoidable in grasping what the Gospel is, as history manifests, the Gospel, Immanuel, has dwelled with us, manifesting itself with and beyond human words. Preaching is an attempt to name the Gospel, which has existed before the Creation and been highlighted in the past event of Christ's ministry, suffering, death, and resurrection. The Gospel moves from the past to the future since God's salvific grace is not limited to a certain period and is not trapped in a written text.

Therefore, the Gospel cannot be static but must move freely to en flesh itself on behalf of those who need God's salvific grace. In her book *Good News Preaching: Offering the Gospel in Every Sermon*, Jennifer Benjamin Brooks explains how divine grace meets the human need through good news preaching. Brooks states that "Good news represents specific, recognizable, and transformative action that can be attributed to God's relationship with human beings" (Brooks 2009, p. 7). The Gospel is neither abstract nor passive. The Gospel is the good news that shows how God works in a specific context to save the oppressed and marginalized while transforming its context and empowering the weak. This aspect of the Gospel as good news must be revisited and highlighted in preaching for the people in fear, desperation, and hopelessness engendered by the pervasive negative social issues and their insidious connections that worsen their condition. Good news preaching shows that God is still working and transforming both externally and internally interconnected problems within individuals and their communities.

Naming the Gospel requires struggles with complex reality, faithful interpretations of the Scripture, and a strong faith that God saves the oppressed. In his book *Practicing Gospel: Unconventional Thoughts on the Church's Ministry*, Edward Farley offers a description of the Gospel that invites preachers to consider the multilayered questions in this world: "Gospel is not simply a clear and given content. It is the mystery of God's salvific working. Thus, we never master it, exhaust it, or directly or literally comprehend it. Rather, we continue to struggle to fathom its reality. . . . It is something to be proclaimed, but the summons to proclaim it is a summons to struggle with the mystery of God's salvific action and who that transforms the world. To proclaim the Gospel then is to enter the world of the Gospel, struggling with questions of suffering, evil, idolatry, hope, and freedom" (Farley 2003, p. 81).

According to Farley, what preaching does is to bring the past event of Jesus Christ to bear on the present in such a way that the present is both judged and drawn in hope toward redemption. Preaching opens the hopeful future to the desperate present through the past. Even though naming a gospel is an ongoing struggle with complex issues in a syndemic world, preachers need to challenge themselves to name a gospel for the people who yearn to listen to the good news.

Since there is no one-size-fits-all concept of the Gospel, André Resner encourages preachers to develop their concept of the Gospel and helps them to generate their world of the Gospel. Resner proposes a tripartite taxonomy for the Gospel that includes Previous Situational Witness, grammatical substructure, and the working Gospel. Previous Situational Witness includes “concrete instances in the past of witness-bearing to the Gospel” (Graves and Resner 2021, p. 185). This witness includes not only the witness in the Bible but also witnesses in a particular time and space that a congregation experienced before in difficult times. Grammatical substructure describes “a dynamic behind and within the particular witness that causes it to ring true to what we know gospel to be” (Graves and Resner 2021, p. 185). We should remember that this grammatical substructure always deals with the transformative and redemptive work of God in a particular context. The working Gospel is “a preacher’s always-in-process core belief and central conviction about the center of the good news of God’s redemptive work in the world” (Graves and Resner 2021, p. 192). It includes hermeneutical and theological tools to reflect critically on the past and present so that the working Gospel can be inclusive of the poor and the marginalized. Preaching begins with the Gospel and moves through the Bible and to new insights and reflections for a syndemic world. As stories in the Bible and current life experiences are juxtaposed, the world of the Gospel is freshly acknowledged and expanded. The world of the Gospel keeps expanding to the margins in a syndemic world until all are included in God’s salvific grace.

A preacher who lives in the syndemic world needs to discern his or her working Gospel. I propose a working Gospel: the ecclesiological Gospel represented in baptism and the eucharist. Preaching the Gospel in a syndemic context starts from the Scripture that includes the stories of God’s promise and God’s salvific grace toward people in need of salvation. The Scripture describes both baptism and the eucharist as significant agents that reveal Christ’s suffering, death, and resurrection. When preachers reflect on the meaning of both baptism and the eucharist for a community under a syndemic condition, they might consider the Gospel for the Church that severs evil connections, generates new relationships, and empowers the marginalized.

5. Preaching as a Praxis of the Ecclesiological Gospel

Praxis describes practice with ongoing reflection. Preaching as praxis reflects not only Scripture and the tradition of the Church but also the contemporary context and situation to help the Church as the body of Christ embody the Gospel and serve the world. Baptism and the eucharist are the essences of what Scripture and the Church tradition hold on to. Baptism is grounded in God’s holistic salvation including healing and regeneration. The eucharist sustains the baptized to live in and as the body of Christ to serve the world. And the Scripture is the written text of the baptismal and eucharistic communities. Baptism, the eucharist, and the Scripture consist of the Church.

Preaching is a praxis of the ecclesiological Gospel because it consists of the Church that serves the world God so loved (John 3:16). Preaching invites people to the baptismal font and leads them to the eucharistic table to participate in the body of Christ. When preaching is linked to the baptismal font and the communion of the Eucharist, it guides people in a syndemic world to immerse themselves in the waters of healing and regeneration. Emerging from the transformative experience, they come together to form a covenantal community that serves to heal yet another syndemic world.

5.1. Contextuality

First of all, preaching as praxis of an ecclesiological Gospel starts from a concern with its context. A context is a locus where the Gospel immerses itself and emerges anew. As the Church cannot exist without locality and historicity, the Gospel seeks a place to dwell and to transform that place for the people who yearn for God’s salvific grace. Baptism and the eucharist take seriously their context. Preaching as praxis of an ecclesiological Gospel signifies the baptismal washing of interconnected fears, desperation, and hopelessness in the past and proclaims a relationship of healing, hope, and joy that creates a new covenantal

community where diversity flourishes. The baptismal image in preaching became a locus for the death of harmful interconnectedness in a syndemic world and for the rebirth of a new relationship directed toward salvation. Preaching as praxis of an ecclesiological Gospel leads people to join a baptismal community of healing and regeneration to begin their new life in harmony (Ferguson 2009, pp. 60–76). Preachers need to evaluate the congregation through baptismal and eucharistic perspectives with the goal of inviting people into the community of diversity in Christ not by whitewashing or standardizing but by acknowledging and appreciating differences in harmony (Willimon 1992, pp. 24–33).

5.2. Sacramentality

In his book *The Language of God's Giving*, David N. Power explains the meaning of sacramentality: "Through the sacraments God gives the Church the gift of word and Spirit, and through this gift the Church worships the giver, keeping the memorial of the Cross a Pasch of Jesus Christ" (Power 1999, p. 1). Words, deeds, and elements in the liturgy project the invisible and inward grace of God. In particular, the sacramental celebrations of baptism and the eucharist enliven Jesus Christ's ministry, death, and resurrection for current congregations and allow the Church to embody Christ to continue to serve the world. In this regard, I argue that preaching can be sacramental because preaching allows us to encounter Christ through the words from past written Scripture and the future in the Kingdom of God to the current congregations.

Once a preacher acknowledges the Gospel in a syndemic context through the examination of baptismal and eucharistic perspectives, how then does the preacher name the Gospel? Mary Catherine Hilker provides a homiletical possibility: sacramental imagination. According to Hilker, sacramental imagination considers human experiences and history as the locus where God's salvific grace manifests itself. As indicated in the water of baptism capturing God's saving grace and the bread and wine embodying God's abundant life, Hilker argues that God's salvific grace is embedded and revealed in the depths of human experiences. Hilker asserts that preaching "the naming of grace in human experience" resonates with, yet is not limited to, stories in the Bible and the basic symbols—baptism and the eucharist—of the Christian tradition (Hilker 1997, p. 49).

Preachers investigate the experiences of humans not to find problems to be solved or cured; instead, with sacramental imagination, preachers delve into the experiences of the Church to know how Christ has suffered with people and tried to liberate them despite the crucifixion. Christian history and the stories in the Bible are not the subjects of intellectual interpretation; rather, they are sacramental anamnesis and prolepsis that "bring to bear a certain past event on the present in such a way as to open the future" (Farley 2003, p. 80). Through sacramental imagination, preachers name the disgrace of the syndemic world and the identity of the Church in each context that yearns for justice, peace, and holistic salvation.

5.3. Communality

Finally, preaching is communal practice; preaching is not an individual practice. When the Word is proclaimed to the congregation and the community of faith embodies the Word, it has become the Church as the body of Christ. Lucy Atkinson Rose, in her book *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church*, underscores the significance of communality in preaching. Rose argues that "preaching's goal is to gather the community of faith around the Word where the central conversations of the church are refocused and fostered" (Lucy Atkinson Rose 1997, p. 4). Faith communities gather to listen to the Word and they reshape themselves constantly, responding to the Word. This communal approach to preaching can be expanded to the margins when we focus on cultivating inclusive and empowering communities. Preaching highlights and uplifts the voices and experiences of those on the margins within congregations.

The communality in preaching as praxis of an ecclesiological Gospel considers margins as the center of preaching. Jung Young Lee explains the meaning of margins as the center of God: "God is not central to those who seek the center, but God is the center to those who

seek marginality, because the real center is the creative core, the margin of marginality” (Lee 1995, p. 97). Margins are the places where the Gospel is preached and the Church stands. Margins are the center where the identity of Christ manifests to reorient the meaning of what the center is. In his book *The Roundtable Pulpit*, John S. McClure argues that the Word of God is not an individual word but a communal Word, which originates from the margins of the community (McClure 1995, p. 23). Preaching as praxis of an ecclesiological Gospel pursues communality for the margins where Christ shows righteous anger to the oppressors and suffers at the margins with the oppressed (Lee 1995, p. 162).

Underscoring the Church’s communality toward margins, Sarah Travis also highlights the Church’s solidarity with the weak. Travis argues that the Church’s interest has always reached the margins. When the Church ignored the margins and was attracted to the center, the Church became the oppressor that betrayed its reason to exist. Considering that the contemporary mainline Church is in a process of disestablishment, Travis encourages the Church to be transformed from a product of Christendom to an incarnate, vulnerable, creative body “to become a humble, loving creation that could mingle with life at the margins, with the most vulnerable, and find its strength at the moment of greatest weakness” (Travis 2019, pp. 126–27). Preaching as praxis of an ecclesiological Gospel creates a community ready to reform, not to extend its life but to live in solidarity with those to be baptized and invited to the eucharist table from the margins.

6. An Example: Preaching in Puerto Rican Churches

History proves that the syndemic has affected many cultures over the course of human history, persisting throughout our current cultures. Offering examples and case studies from Ancient Rome to the contemporary world, *Epidemics and Pandemics: From Ancient Plagues to Modern-Day Threats*, by Joseph Patrick Byrne and J. N. Hays, provides us with evidence of epidemics and pandemics and how they impact and are impacted by political, economic, and societal factors. The Roman Empire in the second century indicates an aspect of the syndemic because during the Antonine Plague, known as the Plague of Galen, the wealthy fled the cities to avoid the spread of disease while the poor were left behind without the resources to defeat the disease. Such examples persist even now. Consider how capitalism in the nineteenth century fostered ill health and crime among the poor in the Global South. Syndemics have existed in every corner of our world.

Responding to the consequences of syndemics, churches have consistently endeavored to share the Gospel with marginalized communities by engaging in charitable initiatives, educational programs, and health care services. This commitment is exemplified by movements such as the Social Gospel Movement in the United States prior to World War I, as well as liberation theology in Latin America and other disadvantaged communities. Here is the example of Puerto Rican churches that attempt to overcome evils and misfortunes engendered by the syndemic situation. In her book *Centering Hope as a Sustainable Decolonial Practice: Esperanza en Práctica*, Yara González-Justiniano provides an example of what preaching the ecclesiological Gospel looks like and sounds like. Engaging with churches in Puerto Rico that have struggled with colonialism, natural disasters including hurricane María in 2017, and COVID-19, González-Justiniano shows how the practices of the churches provided an unwavering hope in Puerto Rico.

González-Justiniano reports interviews with local churches that show how preaching in the churches of Puerto Rico offered hope within a community and provided solidarity that overcame the doctrinal and political differences within a community (González-Justiniano 2022, pp. 45–62). In addition, González-Justiniano shows how three aspects of the ecclesiological Gospel—contextuality, sacramentality, and communality—are represented in the messages of Puerto Rican preachers. González-Justiniano introduces Jorge L. Bardegué, a Puerto Rican missionary, who advocates for a mission directed toward marginalized populations and engages in a reclamation of historical narratives to inform future trajectories. Bardegué explains that preaching actively connects a Christian theology of hope with the practices of hope within their church and wider society. When

Puerto Rican Christians listened to the messages from the pulpit, the Church sacramentally embodies a decolonial Christ who binds them in hope and encourages them to enact hope in their community (González-Justiniano 2022, p. 88).

Based on her analysis of ecclesial practices and grassroots movements in local communities, González-Justiniano maintains that the Church's proclamation in Puerto Rico works to eliminate colonial sins, including systems of economic exploitation, social stagnation, and theft of land, which have pervaded Puerto Rico and the Puerto Ricans' lives (González-Justiniano 2022, pp. 110–15). As reflected in the practice of Puerto Rican preachers, preaching as praxis of an ecclesiological Gospel invites people to consider the actual practices of liberation engineered by sacramental imagination that shows Christ dwelling within the community, inviting people to communal work and partnership beyond any kind of boundary.

7. Conclusions

In the ever-evolving landscape of the COVID-19 pandemic, marked by the emergence of new variants and the unsettling reality of overlapping crises, it becomes evident that we are navigating not just a health crisis but a complex interplay of social, economic, and educational challenges. This syndemic, with its disparities in access and opportunities, has given rise to profound injustices, violence, and ignorance.

Amidst this tumultuous backdrop, the question I have wrestled with is "What message does the Church have for those who have weathered the pandemic and now find themselves entangled in a syndemic?" This article proposes a liturgical response, positioning preaching as a praxis of the ecclesiological Gospel—a term introduced to underscore the contextual, sacramental, and communal dimensions of the Gospel.

The ecclesiological Gospel, rooted in the transformative experiences in baptism and the eucharist, aspires to shape a diverse and inclusive church. It envisions a community that dismantles the webs of evil interconnections and extends an open invitation to a table of hospitality, forging new covenantal relationships. This proposition seeks to redefine the essence of the Gospel and the identity of the Church that provide hope for those grappling with fear, grief, and hopelessness.

In the face of the challenges posed by the syndemic, the ecclesiological Gospel becomes a guiding light, encouraging individuals with the unwavering hope found in the narrative of Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection. It beckons people to a renewed understanding of faith, resilience, and community while reminding them that even in the darkest moments the Gospel persists as a wellspring of enduring hope and transformative potential. Despite the interconnected conditions of desperation and hopelessness, the Gospel awaits preachers to name the good news that emerges from their context and embodies Christ for the context to create a thriving community for the marginalized.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

- Brooks, Gennifer Benjamin. 2009. *Good News Preaching: Offering the Gospel in Every Sermon*. Cleveland: Pilgrim Press.
- Buttrick, David. 1994. *A Captive Voice: The Liberation of Preaching*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Edwards, Otis Carl. 2004. *A History of Preaching*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.
- Farley, Edward. 2003. *Practicing Gospel: Unconventional Thoughts on the Church's Ministry*, 1st ed. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Ferguson, Everett. 2009. *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries*. Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.
- Fosdick, Harry Emerson. 1956. *The Living of These Days, an Autobiography*, 1st ed. New York: Harper.
- González-Justiniano, Yara. 2022. *Centering Hope as a Sustainable Decolonial Practice: Esperanza en Práctica*. Lanham: Lexington Books.

- Graves, Mike, and André Resner, eds. 2021. *What's Right with Preaching Today?: The Enduring Influence of Fred B. Craddock*. Eugene: Cascade Books.
- Gravlee, Clarence C. 2020. Systemic Racism, Chronic Health Inequities, and COVID-19: A Syndemic in the Making? *American Journal of Human Biology* 32: e23482. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]
- Hilkert, Mary Catherine. 1997. *Naming Grace: Preaching and the Sacramental Imagination*. New York: Continuum.
- Lee, Jung Young. 1995. *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- McClure, John S. 1995. *The Roundtable Pulpit: Where Leadership and Preaching Meet*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.
- Power, David N. 1999. *Sacrament: The Language of God's Giving*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company.
- Rose, Lucy Atkinson. 1997. *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Singer, Merrill. 1996. Dose of Drugs, a Touch of Violence, a Case of AIDS: Conceptualizing the SAVA Syndemic. *Free Inquiry in Creative Sociology* 24: 99.
- Travis, Sarah. 2019. *Metamorphosis: Preaching after Christendom*. Eugene: Cascade Books.
- Willimon, William H. 1992. *Peculiar Speech: Preaching to the Baptized*. Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.