

JUSTICE AND FAITH: A HOMILETICAL ANALYSIS OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN A SECULAR SOCIETY

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Abstract

This study explores the intersection of homiletics and human rights, examining the role of preaching in promoting social justice, religious liberty, and the right to live. Through a critical analysis of biblical and theological frameworks, this study demonstrates how homiletics can be a powerful tool for advancing human rights and dignity. The study is divided into three sections. The first section examines the biblical and theological foundations of human rights, with a focus on all individuals' inherent dignity and worth. The second section explores the role of preaching in promoting social justice, religious liberty, and the right to live, highlighting examples of effective homiletics in human rights advocacy. The third section provides practical guidelines for preachers and religious leaders, offering strategies for integrating human rights themes into sermons and teachings. This work provides a critical resource for scholars, students, and practitioners seeking to promote social justice, religious liberty, and the right to live by examining the intersection of homiletics and human rights.

INTRODUCTION

The intersection of homiletics and human rights emerges as a profound and vital discourse in a world grappling with complex challenges and ethical dilemmas.¹ Homiletics, the art of preaching and writing sermons, has long been a conduit for moral and spiritual guidance. When intertwined with the principles of human rights, it becomes a powerful tool for advocating social justice, ensuring religious liberty, and upholding the right to live¹.

Religious leaders possess the unique ability to influence thoughts, inspire actions, and mobilize communities through their sermons. By addressing issues of injustice, inequality, and oppression from the pulpit, they can champion the cause of social justice, urging their congregations to engage in transformative action. Furthermore, the advocacy for religious liberty ensures that individuals are free to practice their faith without fear of persecution, fostering a society that values and protects diverse beliefs¹.

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The right to live underscores the inherent dignity and worth of every human being. The sacredness of life is emphasized through homiletics, calling for the protection and respect of life in all its forms. As preachers weave together the teachings of their faith with the universal principles of human rights, they create a compelling narrative that calls for compassion, justice, and respect for all individuals¹.

This introduction sets the stage for a deeper exploration of how homiletics can be a driving force in the pursuit of social justice, religious liberty, and the right to live, highlighting the pivotal role of religious leaders in shaping a just and equitable society. Homiletics and human rights intersect in powerful ways, particularly in the pursuit of social justice, religious liberty, and the right to live. Homiletics practically aligns with being a platform for the administration of justice among all.

HOMILETICS

Homiletics is the art, writing, study, and delivery of speeches to a group of people via a pulpit in the form of lectures¹. This includes all forms of preaching, sermonizing, lectures, and talks that address the immediate congregation¹.

The term homiletics originates from the word ‘Homily’ which is basically a sermon. Ordinarily, the art of homiletics is embedded in practical pastoral theology, dealing with sermon preparation and preaching. Individuals who have studied or possess the applied art of homiletics are the best at communicating and successfully delivering their ideas to the recipients of sermons¹. Homiletics has historically integrated biblical teachings and rhetoric, such that some theologians insist on it as an art of speaking or writing that is effective, persuasive, and thought-provoking.¹ However, theologians such as Karl Barth have asserted that homiletics, though somewhat persuasive, does not have a purpose entirely related to rhetoric, stylish devices, or tools in the influential sense. The term homiletics is derived from the Greek homilies, signifying both to amass and to converse together; the term has been chosen to denote the application of rhetorical principles to preaching. However, the phrase is related to sacred rhetoric, which is typically described as instructive.

The style of address from the individual delivering the message should be more familiar than necessary before a large congregation or a public setting. This development led to the home delivery of sermons to the immediate congregations or audience. The title allows for ‘moral instruction’ on the part of the preacher or speaker to the listeners. Homiletics is a branch of theology that teaches the principles and rules for which sermons are prepared and delivered. This is said to be the subject, science, and art of preaching or public address before the congregation. It is the chief aim and end note of all theological studies, and homiletics itself may be theologically implicative.

Arguments have long persisted vis-à-vis the nature of homiletics, whether it is a tool or a vista of theology. Consequently, it may not be a tool for theology, but it stands as a distant sight and underrated art of theology. Homiletical theology is the renaissance of the first-century gospel to a congregation in the twenty-first century. Homiletics, like many other Christian disciplines, is hard to define adequately, but in essence, it is the study and practice of preaching the Word of God. There is a strong biblical basis for preaching, both in precedent and in injunction, and it has been a central feature of the church throughout all ages. The history of homiletics reveals a general shift in focus from the text to the preacher and then to the audience. Although there are several different terminologies for the text, the main divide in approach is between expository and topical sermon form. The focus on the preacher, rather than the text, highlights the source of authority for preaching. Concerning the audience, preaching is always in the context of a group of listeners; thus, their needs must be an area of concern. However, needs and cultures should never override fidelity to the Word of God as the primary preaching responsibility. While preaching cannot be divorced from its audience, it should not be separated from the contexts of sound hermeneutics and church worship and ministry.

HUMAN RIGHT

On December 10, 1948, the U.N. The General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), proclaiming inalienable rights to which all human beings are inherently entitled, regardless of race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, or other status . In the biblical narrative, all men were made in the likeness of God. In the assertion of this likeness to the image of God is the standard of equity for all, we can see that this description of ‘all’ is inclusive of attributive status, young-old, male-female, language, color, and race. The fact that Genesis 1 relates the divine image to everyone speaks to a fundamental human equality, that is, no one has more of God’s image than the other. Everyone, so long we are all created by God and are of equal status in His likeness. The scripture capitalizes on the narrative in saying that all are called into freedom, and everyone should reserve the mutual relation to be loved as one loves himself/herself.

“You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. However, do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Galatians 5:13-14, NIV.

Freedom, equality, and dignity are bestowed on all by being human and made in the image of God. In Galatians, the Apostle Paul reminds us that these rights are not earned but divinely ordained. Paul’s understanding of freedom is not individualized license but the freedom to love and serve God and others. Paul’s use of the term “slave” does not mean that we are enslaved or become enslaved by others. Slavery here is a metaphor for a radical commitment to love and serve one another in a community. Furthermore, the warning against “self-indulgence” should not be interpreted as removing the benefits of God’s compassion or denial of the more fundamental assertion that everyone, even the sinner, deserves equal respect. Hence, all are instructed to “love your neighbor as yourself.” Ultimately, we are called to care about human rights because of God’s love for all human beings and our human obligation to love others. Several injunctions are given in the scriptures on how to maintain justice for all. The Israelites are given instructions to prepare a safe and equitable space for all who inhabit the land. They were narrowed down to nurturing a community for which people will act justly, even when it is not by their preferences or self-interest. Therefore, Exodus 23 ensures that everyone is equally entitled to the rights set forth by the law, just as the UDHR guarantees everyone’s entitlement to the rights and freedoms set forth without discrimination. Human rights constitute a set of norms governing the treatment of individuals and groups by states and non-state actors. These norms are incorporated into national and international legal systems, which specify mechanisms and procedures to hold the duty-bearers accountable and provide redress for alleged victims of human rights violations.

Human rights are inherent to all human beings. Invoking the term “human rights” (often referred to as “human rights discourse” or “human rights talk”) is based on moral reasoning (ethical discourse), socially sanctioned norms (legal/political discourse), or social mobilization (advocacy discourse) . These three types of discourse are by no means alternative or sequential but are all used in different contexts, depending on who is invoking human rights discourse, to whom they are addressing their claims, and what they expect to gain by doing so. The three types of discourse are interrelated in the sense that public reasoning based on ethical arguments and social mobilization based on advocacy agendas influence legal norms, processes, and institutions. Thus, all three modes of discourse contribute to the social reality of human rights.

IMPORTANCE OF INTERSECTION

As a people, the big question is how do we overcome the abuses of human rights, poverty, corruption, violence, herdsman killing, structural inequality, and injustice that persist with homiletics? This concern must be answered through preaching and homiletic messages. A pastor is not exempt from all mannerisms of injustice or human

rights abuse that the people are challenged with, for the pastor or the preacher is also an active member of society. A preacher must be willing to walk their talk by actively involving in the restoration of the dignity and rights of individuals. This is a duty and responsibility that must be taken seriously. The Church has a special duty toward the poor and the less privileged. Peter's admonition in 1 Peter 3:15 should be the focus of the church in defending this hope in us.

- Preachers can educate congregations about human rights issues, thereby promoting empathy and understanding. Advocating for human rights is another specification of homiletics, inspiring action, and activism. Proverbs 31:8-9. Empowering marginalized groups, preaching amplifies the voices of marginalized communities, promoting their rights and dignity, Matthew 25:31-46.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

In the mid-1800s, the Italian Jesuit Luigi Tapparelli d'Azeglio first introduced the term as an economic concept. Seeing extreme levels of inequality and economic distress caused by the social class system in Europe, Tapparelli d'Azeglio derived the term based on Thomas Aquinas' idea that, in addition to doing the right thing, we should strive to do what is necessary for the betterment of others.

Today, the concept of social justice often refers to human rights, centered on improving the lives of historically marginalized groups based on race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, and disability. Preaching can be a critical tool for advocating social justice. Religious leaders often draw upon sacred texts to highlight the importance of justice, mercy, and love for one's neighbor. Sermons can encourage congregations to engage in social action, promote equity, and address systemic injustices. By highlighting social issues from a moral and ethical standpoint, preachers can inspire their followers to work toward a fairer society.

ROLE OF HOMILETICS IN PROMOTING SOCIAL JUSTICE

Biblical values are associated with social justice, compassion, and equality (Micah 6:8; Isaiah 58:6-7). Historical examples of homiletics, the art of preaching, play a significant role in promoting social justice. Some ways that homiletics can contribute to social justice are as follows:

- Raising awareness: Preaching can educate congregations about social justice issues, such as poverty, inequality, and discrimination.
- Inspiring action: Homiletics can motivate listeners to act, advocate for change, and promote social justice.
- Providing a moral framework: Preaching can offer a moral framework for understanding social justice issues, grounding them in biblical values and principles.
- Empowering marginalized voices: Homiletics can amplify the voices of marginalized communities, promoting their rights and dignity.
- Fostering empathy and compassion: Preaching can encourage empathy and compassion, helping listeners understand and relate to others' experiences.
- Contextual preaching: Preachers must consider their congregation's social, cultural, and economic context.
- Inclusive language: Preaching should use inclusive language to promote equality and dignity for all individuals.
- Biblical foundation: Homiletics should be grounded in biblical values and principles, such as justice, compassion, and equality. Prophetic voice: Preachers should speak truth to power, challenge unjust systems, and promote social change.

RELIGIOUS TEACHINGS ON JUSTICE AND EQUALITY

Jesus emphasizes the importance of treating others with kindness, respect, and fairness (Mark 12:31). The Bible emphasizes the need for justice, righteousness, and equality (Isaiah 1:17). Christian teachings emphasize the importance of community, solidarity, and mutual support (Acts 2:44-45).

The Quran emphasizes the importance of justice, fairness, and equality according to the Islamic Pillars of Faith (Quran 4:135, 16:90). Islamic teachings emphasize the importance of giving to those in need and promoting economic justice and equality.

Which is referred to as Zakat (Quran 2:177, 9:60).

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

Religious liberty is a fundamental human right that allows individuals to practice their faith without interference or discrimination. Homiletics can play a vital role in promoting and defending liberty. Preachers can speak out against laws or actions that threaten religious freedom, advocating for a society where diverse beliefs are respected and protected. They can also foster an understanding of the importance of religious liberty within their communities and promote tolerance and acceptance of different faith traditions. Religious liberty is a fundamental human right for individual dignity, freedom, and flourishing.

SIGNIFICANCE OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

1. Freedom of conscience: Religious liberty protects individuals' freedom to hold, practice, and express their beliefs without fear of persecution or reprisal.
2. Diversity and pluralism: Religious liberty promotes diversity and pluralism, allowing individuals to contribute their unique perspectives and values to the public sphere.
3. Human dignity: Religious liberty is essential for human dignity, as it recognizes the inherent worth and autonomy of individuals to make choices about their spiritual lives.
4. Social cohesion: Religious liberty can foster social cohesion by promoting mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation among individuals from diverse religious backgrounds.

CHALLENGES OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

1. Restrictions on freedom of religion: Government restrictions, social hostilities, and extremist violence threaten religious liberty worldwide.
2. Intolerance and discrimination: Intolerance and discrimination against religious minorities, including blasphemy and anti-conversion laws, undermine religious liberty.
3. Polarization and extremism: Rising polarization and extremism, often fueled by religious or ideological differences, pose significant challenges to religious liberty.
4. State-sponsored repression: State-sponsored repression, including surveillance, censorship, and persecution, threatens religious liberty in many countries.
5. Societal pressures and norms: Societal pressures and norms can also limit religious liberty, particularly for individuals who hold minority or unpopular beliefs.

PROMOTING TOLERANCE AND ACCEPTANCE

- Interfaith community events: community events that bring people from different faith backgrounds together.
- Religious education and literacy: Religious education and literacy are promoted to foster greater understanding and respect for different faith traditions.
- Advocacy and activism: Advocate for policies and laws that protect freedom of belief and promote tolerance and acceptance.
- Media and storytelling: To promote positive narratives and challenge stereotypes and misconceptions.

KEY PRINCIPLES FOR TOLERANCE AND ACCEPTANCE PROMOTION

- ☐ Respect for diversity: Recognize and respect the diversity of faith traditions and beliefs.
- ☐ Empathy and compassion: Foster empathy and compassion toward individuals from different faith backgrounds.
- ☐ Open-mindedness and humility: Approach interfaith dialogue with open-mindedness and humility, recognizing one's knowledge and understanding limitations.
- ☐ Commitment to justice and equality: Advocate for justice and equality for all individuals regardless of their faith background or beliefs.

UPHOLDING THE RIGHT TO LIVE

The Right to Live: The right to live is a core human rights principle that emphasizes the intrinsic value of every human life. Through sermons, religious leaders can advocate for life's protection in various contexts, including against violence, war, poverty, and other threats. They can provide a moral framework that underscores the sanctity of life and encourages actions and policies that support the well-being and dignity of all people.

Homiletics, when aligned with human rights principles, becomes a powerful vehicle for advocating positive change and upholding individuals' dignity and rights. The Bible teaches that human life is created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) and is therefore sacred. Christians believe that life is a gift from God (Psalm 139:14) and should be protected and respected.

Ethical Considerations in Life Protection

- Respect for human dignity: Protecting life requires respect for human dignity and every human being's inherent value.
- Non-maleficence: The principle of non-maleficence (not harm) is essential in protecting life and preventing harm to others.
- Beneficence: The principle of beneficence (do good) requires that we take positive actions to protect and promote human life.
- Autonomy: Respecting the autonomy of individuals requires protecting their right to make decisions about their own lives and bodies.
- Justice: Protecting life requires the promotion of justice and fairness, particularly for vulnerable populations such as the unborn, the elderly, and those with disabilities.

Key Principles for Life Protection

- Sanctity of life: Human life is sacred and should be respected.
- Respect for human dignity: Protecting life requires respect for human dignity and every human being's inherent value.
- Non-discrimination: Protecting life requires the promotion of equality and non-discrimination, particularly for vulnerable populations.
- Compassion and empathy: Protecting one's life requires that we show compassion and empathy toward others, particularly those who are suffering or vulnerable.
- Responsibility and Stewardship: Protecting life requires that we take responsibility for our actions and steward the gift of life with care and respect.

Homiletics as a Peace building and Reconciliation Tool

- Preaching for peace: Sermons can promote peace by emphasizing the importance of nonviolence, forgiveness, and reconciliation.
- Addressing root causes of conflict: Preachers can address the root causes of conflict, such as poverty, inequality, and injustice, and promote solutions that address these underlying issues.

- Promoting empathy and understanding: Sermons can promote empathy and understanding by sharing the stories and experiences of people affected by conflict and violence.
- Encouraging forgiveness and reconciliation: Preachers can encourage forgiveness and reconciliation by emphasizing the importance of letting go of grudges and working toward healing and restoration.
- Advocating for justice and human rights: Sermons can advocate for justice and human rights, promoting a culture of respect and dignity for all individuals.
- Contextual relevance: Sermons should be relevant to the congregation's context and experiences.
- Biblical foundation: Sermons should be grounded in biblical teachings and principles.
- Empathy and compassion: Sermons should promote empathy and compassion for individuals affected by conflict and violence.
- Call to action: Sermons should include a call to action, encouraging congregants to work toward peace and reconciliation.
- Follow-up and accountability: Sermons should be followed up with concrete actions and accountability to ensure that the message is translated into practice.

CONCLUSION

Homiletics can be a powerful tool for promoting human rights, social justice, and religious liberty. Human rights and social justice are rooted in biblical teachings and principles. Religious liberty is essential for promoting human rights, social justice, and peaceful co-existence. Homiletics can address systemic injustices such as racism, sexism, and economic inequality. Preaching can promote empathy and compassion toward marginalized communities and individuals. Homiletics can encourage activism and social justice advocacy.

Religious liberty is essential for promoting freedom of religion and belief. Homiletics can address persecution and discrimination against religious minorities. Preaching can promote interfaith dialogue and understanding, fostering peaceful co-existence.

Homiletics emphasize the sanctity of life and the importance of protecting human life. Preaching can address poverty and inequality, promote economic justice, and promote human dignity. Homiletics can promote nonviolence and peace, encouraging congregations to work toward a more just and peaceful world.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Integrate human rights into sermons and teachings: Incorporate human rights themes and messages into sermons, homilies, and teachings to raise awareness and promote education.
2. Use biblical and theological frameworks: use biblical and theological frameworks to advocate for human rights, emphasizing the inherent dignity and worth of all individuals.
3. Amplifying marginalized voices: Provide a platform for marginalized communities to share their stories and experiences, thereby promoting empathy and understanding.
4. Advocate for policy change: Homiletics are used to advocate for policy changes that promote human rights, justice, and equality.
5. Collaborate with human rights organizations: Partner with human rights organizations to amplify advocacy efforts and support human rights initiatives.
6. Empower congregations to act: Encourage congregations to act on human rights issues by providing resources and opportunities for engagement.
7. Foster interfaith dialogue and cooperation: Engage in interfaith dialogue and cooperation to promote human rights and social justice, recognizing the shared values and principles across faith traditions.

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