Death-Row Pastoral Care Through Preaching:
Brief Literature Review and Consideration of Potential Elements of a Theological Ethic
Towards an Ecclesiological Framework for Engagement

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He also spoke at the 2019 and 2020 *Stone-Campbell Journal* Conferences.

Introduction

I have worked in prison ministry for three years, preaching for incarcerated men approximately once a month, sometimes twice a month, most often for those incarcerated on Death Row. For the past year, during the pandemic, I wrote and sent sermons for the Death Row congregation approximately once a month. Preaching for incarcerated persons, including those on Death Row, is difficult for many reasons. One of the challenges is that pastoral care for them is a significant need. I doubted my effectiveness in providing it through my preaching from the beginning. Multiple times, I searched for resources that address preaching for persons serving on Death Row, with little luck finding materials substantively discussing the practice, much less with a specific concern for pastoral care for Death Row inmates through preaching. I resolved to begin thinking deeper about preaching for Death Row congregations in order to serve them better. This paper represents my first extended effort in such thinking and is my first published work directly related to my prison ministry besides sermons.

I appreciate the Ecclesiology & Social Ethics study group leaders affording me the opportunity to write and speak as part of the 2021 *Stone-Campbell Journal* Conference. I have attempted to focus my thoughts here on ecclesiology and social ethics in the mentioned context. While non-incarcerated persons tend to think of church congregations directing their efforts *into prisons*, there are church congregations *in the prisons*, including on Death Rows, groups of incarcerated Christians living together, gathering and worshiping together as a congregation.

The study of such churches can teach us much about not just how to effectively serve them but also much about ourselves, our own congregations, and the kingdom of God. Such study includes, of course, consideration of the social ethics of these churches and their communities, including how Christians on Death Row relate to themselves, one another, prison guards, outside congregations, and the world.

This paper has three primary objectives. Its first objective is personal and is simply *to begin*, to begin a more thorough consideration of theology and praxis in such work, the type of consideration I have found comes only through writing. Second, the paper seeks to start identifying potential elements of a theological ethic that may be useful in formulating an ecclesiological framework for engaging in pastoral care for persons incarcerated on Death Row through preaching, including elements addressing the unique social environment of Death Row. Long-term, I would like to be able to express a theological statement embodying and encouraging effective pastoral care for persons incarcerated on Death Row through preaching for them. An early step toward that goal is to identify potential elements or themes of such a statement. This paper reflects my first efforts towards this identification. Third, the paper begins a review of literature relevant to identifying and analyzing such elements.

Part I embodies the latter objective, citing and briefly commenting on many of the books and articles I found insightful or otherwise of note related to the subject at hand. Part II briefly describes 50 themes or topics for consideration as potential elements of a framework for engaging in pastoral care for persons incarcerated on Death Row through preaching derived from the literature review of Part I.

Part III proposes and discusses three potential elements of a theological ethic addressing the social problem of the environment of Death Row that might be useful in formulating an ecclesiological framework for engaging in such preaching. Various theological and psychological considerations relevant to the proposed elements are briefly discussed.

These three potential elements are derived from a sub-set of the 50 themes of Part II, specifically a sub-set associated with "The Living God and the Threat of Death," chapter 7 of Paul S. Fiddes' *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity*. These are discussed in

this paper in part in conjunction with *Living on Death Row: The Psychology of Waiting to Die*, a 2018 book published by the American Psychological Association and comprising expert analysis and observations regarding the psychological aspects of incarceration on Death Row.

Most of the discussion in this paper applies also to prison ministry beyond Death Row, but my attention in researching and writing this paper has been on the unique challenge of effective preaching for those persons incarcerated on Death Row. The paper concludes by suggesting some potential next steps in this research and analysis.

I. Initial Literature Review

This section describes an initial literature review relative to books and articles potentially relevant to preaching on Death Row and the formulation of the noted framework.

A. Pastoral Care Through Preaching

Objectives of pastoral care, care offered within Christian communities, are context-dependent and take into account relevant social systems impacting a persons such care engages, Carrie Doehring explains in *The Practice of Pastoral Care: A Postmodern Approach*.[1] Such objectives generally include "creating meaning" for the person in a relational process, and compassion plays a vital role, with the pastor embodying the compassion and care of God.[2]

Doehring describes the practice of pastoral care as listening, assessing, and cocreating.[3] This includes (a) listening to the care seeker's stories and for narrative themes from them, such as loss, grief, and trauma and how the person is coping, (b) assessing the care seeker's stories,

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[1] Carrie Doehring, *The Practice of Pastoral Care: A Postmodern Approach,* Revised and Expanded Ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015)*,* xix-xx, xxiii. *See also* Ewan Kelly, *Personhood and Presence: Self as a resource for spiritual and pastoral care* (New York: T&T Clark, 2012); Robert C. Dykstra, *Images of Pastoral Care:Classic Readings* (St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2005).

[2] Doehring, *supra*, xiv, xvi-xvii.

[3] Ibid., xxviii.

social location, and social systems (*e.g.*, community and family) relative to religious or spiritual themes and impact, (c) assessing the care giver's intersecting theology, social location, and social systems to consider how it might bias or impact care for the care seeker (reflexivity), (d) establishing a contract of care, including assessing immediate and longer term risks and needs, and (e) establishing and engaging in an ongoing plan of care, including relative to safety, trust, and accountability of the care seeker, as well as reconnecting with the goodness of life.[4]

The term pastoral care often brings to mind a private setting, a one-on-one discussion, rather than preaching or a sermon, like delivered on a Sunday morning. Many view pastoral care and preaching as two distinct, co-supporting functions. John H. Neufeld, in "Preaching and Pastoral Care" in *Vision*, for example, asserts preaching "contributes to" pastoral care by strengthening people's capacity to cope, such as by creating a worldview of faith, modeling and addressing helpful responses to difficult situations or specific issues, like grief, illness, and relationships, through reliance on scripture, as the preacher gives congregants insight, perspective, and hope and contributes to their living life to the full.[5]

Preaching, though, can serve a wide range of objectives. Thomas Long's *The Witness Of Preaching*, Barbara Brown Taylor's *The Preaching Life*, and Henry Mitchell's *Celebration and Experience in Preaching* offer advice on preaching.[6] Long urges writing out the planned

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[4] Ibid., xxviii, Diagram A.

[5] John H. Neufeld, "Preaching and Pastoral Care," *Vision,* 10 no 1 (Spring 2009), p 67-73, at 70-73.

[6] Thomas G. Long, *The Witness Of Preaching* 3d ed. (Louisville, Kentucky: John Knox Press, 2010), Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Preaching Life* (Lanham, Maryland: Cowley Publications, 1993), Henry Mitchell, *Celebration and Experience in Preaching*, Rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008); *see also* Gennifer Benjamin Brooks, *Good News Preaching: Offering the Gospel in Every Sermon* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press 2009); Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Viking, 2015); Lane Sebring, *Preaching Killer Sermons: How to Create & Deliver Messages That Captivate & Inspire* (Centreville, Virginia: Preaching Donkey, 2016); Alan Noble, *Disruptive Witness: Speaking Truth in a Distracted Age* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2018); Teresa L. Fry Brown, *Elements of Preaching: Delivering the Sermon* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008); Frank A. Thomas, *How to Preach a Dangerous Sermon* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2018).

sermon's "focus and function" to help focus it on that which the preacher wishes to do.[7] A focus is the central theme of the sermon, sometimes referred to what the sermon as a whole will be "about," while function is "what the preacher hopes the sermon will create or cause to happen for the hearers," and names "the hoped-for change."[8]

Mitchell cautions that to preach is to be used by the Holy Spirit and should be an "experiential encounter" with the Word and Spirit, not just an intellectual process to make an argument and seek agreement, *i.e.*, just "to show," but instead a facilitation of experiencing a spiritual encounter.[9] He defines preaching as being used that way so "the gospel is communicated, to the end that hearers are saved and then helped to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord [including] to move Christians to grow … in the direction of the life modeled by Jesus Christ."[10]

Indeed, preaching can embody pastoral care. Elaine Ramshaw, in *Ritual and Pastoral Care*, describes pastoral care through Christian ritual, such as baptism and eucharist.[11] A main theme of her book is her attempt to resolve a tension she perceives between how clergy and others view the value of the pastor's role in ritual, leading the assembly in worship, and other public, liturgical roles, versus the value of the pastor's role in providing one-on-one pastoral care and other private "counseling"-type roles.[12] Her view is that ritual leadership is no less valuable than one-on-one counseling and that ritual leadership is "the paradigmatic act of pastoral care."[13]

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[7] Long, *supra*, 127.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Mitchell, *supra*, 13-15.

[10] Ibid., 13.

[11] Elaine Ramshaw, *Ritual and Pastoral Care*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press (1987). Kindle Edition.

[12] Ibid., loc. 37-44.

[13] Ibid., loc. 38.

She notes multiple human needs that can be met pastorally through ritual. These include the need to reaffirm meaning, bond community, handle ambivalence, encounter mystery (including via the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist), and engage in life-cycle rites.[14]

The "paradigmatic act of pastoral care is presiding at the worship of the assembly," she explains.[15] She sees the act of preaching itself as part of ritual, a part that can function as pastoral care.[16] In other words, simply the act of presiding, when preaching for example, regardless of what is said, can function as pastoral care simply due to the ritual of it, and the preaching content can also function as pastoral care. When considering pastoral care one-on-one or in the assembly, "[a]t times when people need a sense of order or meaning, a handle on ambivalence or an approach to mystery, it may be the ritual authority of the pastor tor that draws them, even if they do not consciously define their need as having any ritual dimension."[17]

Preaching as pastoral care, specifically, is discussed in other works, including *Preaching as Pastoral Caring*,[18] and Edward P. Wimberly's *Moving From Shame to Self-Worth: Preaching & Pastoral Care.*[19] The former gives example sermons in the pastoral-care mode, sermons (a) providing comfort, assurance, and hope in the face of difficulties, (b) raising community celebrations and praise on occasions of joy and thanksgiving, (c) encouraging faithful works and witness, (d) urging spiritual growth, and (e) providing theological perspective to life.[20]

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[14] Ibid., loc. 190-243; Ibid., loc. 243-265; Ibid., loc. 265-305; Ibid., loc. 305-420; Ibid., loc. 431-605.

[15] Ibid., loc. 147

[16] Ibid., loc. 1230-1239 (she sees this as true particularly when preaching for justice is carried out).

[17] Ibid., loc. 609-612.

[18] *Preaching as Pastoral Caring*, Sermons That Work Series, XIII, ed. by Roger Alling and David J. Schlafer (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2005).

[19] Edward P. Wimberly, *Moving From Shame to Self-Worth: Preaching & Pastoral Care.* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999) (addressing shame in our lives).

[20] *Preaching as Pastoral Caring*, *supra*, 1-95.

There are many paradigms of what it means for a sermon to be pastoral. Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, in *Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach*, notes "pastoral" concerns are sometimes raised as objections to "prophetic preaching," such as preaching calling people to justice, peace, and equality.[21] That is, a concept of pastoral care is used to dissuade such preaching. She points out, though, that such preaching can and does embody pastoral care, such as the bringing of hope to people who need hope, for themselves and for their families and communities.[22]

Tisdale's view of a "pastoral" sermon relative to "prophetic" is one of mixture, balancing or combining the two. She cites J. Randall Nichols as arguing "pastoral" (or "priestly") preaching and "prophetic" preaching should not be seen as two options, but as two ends of a dialectical spectrum—*e.g.*, opposing or clashing approaches that each seek the truth—keeping a sermon balanced, a dynamic interaction to be kept up. Tisdale also notes that "prophetic" preaching often motivates further conversation that can continue pastorally in the future.[23]

Most writers emphasize a sermon's content in deciding whether it is pastoral. William Arnold, in "Preaching on Reconciliation from a Pastoral Care Perspective," for example, cites persons sitting in a congregation on a Sunday morning "grieving or fuming" over the state of one or more of their relationships with others.[24] He explains reconciliation relative to relationships is a function of pastoral care and thus reconciliation becomes a necessary topic for preaching, as "[r]econciliation itself can be accomplished, or at least begun, in the preaching event itself."[25] That is, pastoral care itself can be accomplished, or at least begun, in the preaching.

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[21] Ibid., 3, 12-13.

[22] Ibid., 105-106.

[23] Ibid., 29-30

[24] William Arnold, "Preaching on Reconciliation from a Pastoral Care Perspective," *J. for Preachers*, 26 no. 2 (2003), 15-21.

[25] Ibid., 16.

B. Death Row Environment Generally

Pastoral care through preaching for persons incarcerated on Death Row presents a special challenge due to the unique environment of Death Row and the unique circumstances under which persons sentenced to death by their government operate. Of course, there are many resources related to prison ministry generally.[26] These provide insight into the conditions and concerns relative to prisons and incarcerated persons generally, and much of the information is applicable to persons on Death Row.

Being incarcerated under a death sentence and living with a group of men also convicted of capital murder, often isolated from other inmates, creates a unique situation. *Living on Death Row*: *The Psychology of Waiting to Die* is a 2018 book published by the American Psychological Association and comprising expert analysis and observations regarding the psychological aspects of incarceration on Death Row.[27] It says that incarceration on Death Row can be "uniquely dehumanizing" and "those incarcerated with a death sentence experience 'death before dying.'"[28] The Death Row prisoner is sometimes referred to as "dead man walking."[29] Some describe it as "a series of daily 'little deaths' that are engineered to deconstruct, destroy, dehumanize, and denigrate the human person."[30]

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[26] *See, e.g.*, James C. Vogelzang, *Doing HIS Time: Meditations and Prayers for Men and Women in Prison*, Rev. Ed. (Santa Barbara: Doing HIS Time Prison Ministry, 2014); Stephen E. Canup, *Jail-House Religion: From Park Avenue … to Park Bench … to Prison, An Inmate's True Experience*, Ext. Ver. (Levelland, Texas: Freedom in Jesus Min., 2015); Chaplain Ray, *God's Prison Gang* (Dallas: American Evangelistic Assoc., 1977); *Peace Inside: A Prisoners Guide to Meditation*, Sam Settle, ed. (Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2017) (example of prison ministry that is not necessarily Christian).

[27] *Living on Death Row*: *The Psychology of Waiting to Die*, ed. By Hans Toch et al. (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2018).

[28] Ibid., xviii, 193, 263.

[29] Ibid., xviii.

[30] Ibid., 263.

It also notes that the situation is also sometimes described by persons serving on Death Row as the human person dying and being replaced by a non-human, an animal, a beast, on Death Row.[31] Many inmates describing their cell as very much like being in a tomb or the grave.[32] Human interaction that non-incarcerated persons often take for granted can be rare on Death Row. For example, in many instances, people incarcerated on Death Row go years or even a decade or more without another human touching them in a caring manner.[33]

Mental health issues abound among Death Row inmates.[34] A search for meaning can be key to their psychological survival.[35] Trauma, both from the death sentence and ongoing trauma of living on Death Row, is an important consideration impacting their mental health.[36]

Many other books tell personal stories, giving insight into the unique conditions on Death Row. Perhaps the best known such book currently is Bryan Stevenson's *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption*.[37] Stevenson, a death-penalty lawyer and founder of the Equal Justice Initiative, in an autobiographical work, describes the death penalty's history and practice in Alabama, including the story of one of his first cases as a new lawyer, that of a man wrongfully sentenced to death.

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[31] Ibid., 267.

[32] *See, e.g.*, ibid., 193.

[33] *See, e.g.*, ibid., 49, 114.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid., 205-206.

[36] Ibid., 61.

[37] Bryan Stevenson's *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption* (New York, New York: Spiegel & Gral, 2014); *see also* Dominique DuBois Gilliard, *Rethinking Incarceration* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, 2018); Scott Vollum et al., *The Death Penalty: Constitutional Issues, Commentaries, and Case Briefs*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2015); Scott Vollum, *Last Words and the Death Penalty : Voices of the Condemned and Their Co-victims, Criminal Justice Recent Scholarship* (New York: LFB Scholarly Publishing LLC, 2008); Eric Lose, *Living on Death Row*, Series: Criminal Justice: Recent Scholarship (El Paso, Texas: LFB Scholarly Publishing LLC, 2014) (ethnographic study of men awaiting their execution while confined on Ohio's Death Row based on interviews); Stephen Breyer, *Against the Death Penalty* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute Press, 2016).

Let the Lord Sort Them: The Rise and Fall of the Death Penalty by Maurice Chammah traces the history of the death penalty in the United States, including both historical data and insight from people impacted by the death penalty.[38] There are a variety of other books describing Death Row conditions generally.

Some address Death Row ministry. Dale S. Recinella, chaplain to Florida's Death Row, describes the biggest concern in such ministry as living conditions. "They're extremely primitive. … 412 … in six foot by ten foot cells with a toilet, a stainless steel shelf that serves as a bunk, and a small property locker for their legal materials and religious books. … [T]hat's it. … [N]o air conditioning … when the heat indexes here are astronomical. So the first concern of someone ministering … is the plight of people in the cells, which is extremely difficult emotionally, physically and mentally. We've all heard of inmates who say 'just give up my appeals and kill me,' … folks who don't have the strength to endure these conditions."[39]

Recinella cites as his second biggest concern, "these are human beings being held in cages until we kill them. … [W]e have people, some younger than my kids and some my dad's age, who are under the control of the state and cannot commit another crime. And yet we're going to kill them. That reality hangs over every cell visit and is extremely debilitating for the prisoners, the ministers and the people working there. God didn't make us to feel good about being part of the machinery of death. … The environment and the reality of this process is, for [those] with me in Catholic prison ministry, the greatest weight on our minds and spirits."[40]

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[38] Maurice Chammah, *Let the Lord Sort Them: The Rise and Fall of the Death Penalty* (New York: Crown, 2021).

[39] Sean Salai, "Finding God on Death Row: 10 Questions for Chaplain Dale Recinella," *America: The Jesuit Review* (July 26, 2014), accessed April 1, 2021, americamagazine.org/content/all-things/finding-god-death-row-10-questions-chaplain-dale-recinella.

[40] Ibid.; *see also* Dale S. Recinella, *Now I Walk on Death Row: A Wall Street Finance Lawyer Stumbles Into the Arms of a Loving God* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Chosen, 2011).

C. Religious Components of Death and Death Row

Death has received much treatment theologically. For example, “The Living God and the Threat of Death," chapter 7 of Paul S. Fiddes' *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity*[41] considers the threat of death in light of “the living God” relative to pastoral care for those facing death or grieving another’s death.[42] Pastors should recognize people react in a variety of ways to the threat of death.[43] A mix within a person of acceptance and denial often arises, but the most common reaction is denial, which may be unhealthy in some situations and healthy in others, just as fighting against death to the end or accepting it gracefully might be.[44]

Fiddes seeks a helpful doctrine of God to guide the process of counseling those dealing with death, reasoning that death is an enemy to life and a natural boundary marker to life.[45] He proposes death was not a punishment for sin and was natural and good from the beginning, but the Fall resulted in the corruption of death and in death becoming an enemy, God had intended death as a “provisional” (temporary) stage, one within God’s purpose and will for the maturing of mankind, one that was to eventually be abolished, as represented by the resurrection and the *eschaton*, when "Death has been swallowed up forever.”[46] Death is non-being and an important distinction between death as an enemy post-Fall and death as a boundary pre-Fall is the former is an annihilating power that is aggressive towards being and the latter represents neutral non-being and “simply a bare nothing,” per Fiddes.[47]

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[41] Paul S. Fiddes, "The Living God and the Threat of Death," in *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity,* Chapter 7 (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox 2000).

[42] *Ibid.*, 224-225.

[43] *Ibid.*

[44] *Ibid.*

[45] *Ibid.*, 230-233.

[46] *Ibid.*, 233-234 (citing Isa 25:8; 1 Cor 15:54; Rev 21:4).

[47] *Ibid.*, 235.

Fiddes claims we never experience our own death, only our own dying, pointing out God never suffers God's own death, but suffers the death of the Son; he affirms Jungle's view that God experienced dying and death via God's exposure to non-being in Christ's death, but God was not overtaken by death, as we are, and instead made death God's servant.[48] Fiddes emphasizes God experiences death and dying in the sense of perishing and relationlesness.[49] The chapter closes asserting any hope beyond death must be found in God and not in ourselves.

Many books discussing the general environment of Death Row include a prominent religious component. Anthony Graves, wrongfully convicted and sentenced to death, describes his experience, including of God, in *Infinite Hope: How Wrongful Conviction, Solitary Confinement, and 12 Years on Death Row Failed to Kill My Soul*.[50] After release, he explained that "I sustained myself through the longest nights with the simple assurance that God is good."[51]

Religious components associated uniquely with Death Row are sometimes the subject of academic study. "Race, Ethnicity, and the Functional Use of Religion When Faced with Imminent Death," an article by Ryan A. Smith in *Sociological Quarterly*, employs religious-coping theory to analyze how and why people incarcerated on Death Row frame religious last statements at the moment of imminent death.[52] He analyzed published last statements and demographic data of 429 executed by Texas between 1982 and 2016 and observed "uniformity in the dominance that black, white, and Hispanic inmates assign to relational forms of expressions

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[48] *Ibid.,* 237-238.

[49] *Ibid.*, 244.

[50] Anthony Graves, *Infinite Hope: How Wrongful Conviction, Solitary Confinement, and 12 Years on Death Row Failed to Kill My Soul* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 2018).

[51] Ibid., 192.

[52] Ryan A. Smith, ""Race, Ethnicity, and the Functional Use of Religion When Faced with Imminent Death," *Sociological Quarterly*, Vol. 59 Issue 2 (Spring 2018), pp. 279-300.

that draw them closer to God and expressions that facilitate spiritual intimacy with others, over self-focused expressions that represent efforts to gain control over the imminent death experience or signal a transformed life."[53] He also observed a substantial increase in religious statements made when a victim's family or friends might be present, particular among Hispanic inmates.[54]

Smith identifies "expressions reflecting efforts to gain intimacy with others" as the most common statements among white and Hispanic inmates (*e.g.*, asking forgiveness from a victims' family and his own; expressing prayers for people). The second most of what he calls "religious cooping expressions" among whites and Hispanics are "efforts to seek comfort from and closeness to God," like referring to God or an afterlife (*e.g.*, going to be with Jesus, thanking Jesus). The top two for black inmates were expressions drawing them closer to God" (*e.g.*, praising God) and expressions seeking intimacy with others, as mentioned.[55] He notes some black inmates, in particular, may be Muslims. The third most common were the same for white and black, that of personal transformation, often referring to a religious change in the inmate taking place during their incarceration (*e.g.,* "Christ has changed me" or "I came here a sinner and leaving a saint."), but such utterances are much less common among Hispanic inmates. The fourth, more so for white inmates, is those seeking "to establish control," normally as a "surrender" to the divine (*e.g.*, "take me home," "I am ready," "receive my spirit.").[56]

Religious services should not be taken for granted. Nearly 2/3 of the 31 states with a Death Row do not offer religious services to those inmates, per the APA.[57]

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[53] Ibid., Abstract, Section 4.

[54] Ibid., Section 5.2.

[55] Ibid., Section 5.3.

[56] Ibid.

[57] APA, *supra*, 29. This is difficult for me to believe.

D. Death Row Ministry

Death Row Chaplain: Unbelievable True Stories from America's Most Notorious Prison, is an autobiography of Rev. Earl Smith, who served as a chaplain in the San Quentin prison, including for multiple Death Row inmates.[58] Chapter 8, titled "Death Row," focuses in particular on men who were incarcerated there, including a brief biographical sketch of several.[59] Smith explains that he "found some of them to be souls crying out in emotional pain. … [No one] know[s] the time or the hour when we are going to die, but each of us must take a final breath and walk a last step. I continued to ask the men I ministered to the same question: 'Where will you be when you get where you are going? Where will you spend eternity?' I think it's a question everyone needs to ask him-or herself."[60]

"Ministering To Death Row Inmates," a brief chapter in Harvesttime International Network's *A Training Manual For Jail And Prison Ministry*, discusses guidelines for ministering to Death Row inmates and ideas on how to help them prepare to die.[61] It notes, "Feelings of isolation, depression, and hopelessness are very common because death row inmates are usually segregated, confined more often to their cells, and very limited in options as to what prison programs they can participate in. You can help by being an uplifting friend and providing ways to fill their time …." It also encourages ministers to have a thorough understanding of regeneration in Christ, citing 2 Corinthians 5:17 ("Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!"), urging "God has forgiven him/her and

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[58] Earl Smith, *Death Row Chaplain: Unbelievable True Stories from America's Most Notorious Prison* (New York, New York: Howard Books, 2015), xi.

[59] Ibid., 105, 108-131.

[60] Ibid., 131-132.

[61] Harvesttime International Network, "Ministering To Death Row Inmates," in *A Training Manual For Jail And Prison Ministry* (undated), last accessed April 1, 2021, https://globalchristians.org/htm/jail-and-prison-manual.htm.

they are a new creation. They are not the same person who did the crime," as well as of scripture, citing multiple passages, including Psalm 79:11 ("Let the sighing of the prisoner come before thee; according to the greatness of thy power preserve thou those that are appointed to die."); 2 Corinthians 5:17; Hebrews 11; 1 Corinthians 15:51-55; 2 Corinthians 5:1-4; Psalm 116:15; 2 Corinthians 5:8; and Revelation 21 and 22. In concludes with an essay by Catherine Thompson, a woman on California's Death Row, "There Are No Door Knobs Here," explaining that she spends my "days upholding my dignity. My freedom was taken, my heart was broken, my smile destroyed--but no man can take my dignity."

The reaction of those on Death Row to ministry varies. Indeed, those on Death Row can be hostile to attempts to talk with the about Jesus or religion.[62]

Those serving in prison ministry are often asked about "conversion" of inmates. "Women's Religious Conversions on Death Row: Theorizing Religion and State," an article by Paula M. Cooey in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*,[63] argues that religious scholars considering Death Row conversions ignore "the legal and political implications" of the context in which the conversion occurs, and political and legal theorists considering Death Row religious conversions ignore the implications of what the converts and those who know them say about the conversions.[64] Cooey analyzes the conversions of two women on Death Row, including scholarship written about them in various disciplines, and concludes that to theorize about religion or the state in this context adequately, it is necessary to theorize about them in

[62] *See, e.g.*, Jennifer Lee Preyss, "Former death row minister reflects on time there," *Victoria Advocate* (Feb 2, 2018).

[63] Paula M. Cooey, "Women's religious conversions on death row: theorizing religion and state," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 70 No. 4 (Dec 2002), 699-717.

[64] Ibid., 699-700, 714.

relation to one another.[65] One important example of an observation by Cooey in considering religious matters in the context of the state in such a setting is that conversions of both women studied "resist the state's authority to impose death."[66] Jesus Christ challenges the state's authority to declare law as the ultimate judge of the inmate, for example.[67] This implies that the inmate's relationship to the state influences their religious views and, indeed, their conversion.

There are, of course, other potential motivations for an inmate to convert. Michael A. Simons, a law professor, explains in "Born Again on Death Row: Retribution, Remorse, and Religion," an article published in *The Catholic Lawyer*, that "[t]he available empirical evidence suggests that a repentant religious conversion is relevant in capital sentencing because juries consider such a conversion to be an important mitigating factor."[68] Simons notes that "the conversion mitigates not because it necessarily involves religion but because it involves a repentant acceptance of responsibility and a sincere desire to atone" and "[r]eligion, of course, is the most likely vehicle through which such a conversion will be expressed."[69] He explores such issues in context of a particular defendant who argued he should not be executed in light of him becoming a committed Christian while incarcerated before his trial.[70]

One mode of ministering is by preaching. Karl Barth's *Deliverance to the Captives* is a collection of sermons he delivered in a Swiss prison in the 1950s, including on God's constant presence with those incarcerated, Jesus as savior, grace, and hope provided by Christ.[71]

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[65] Ibid., 700.

[66] Ibid., 710.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Michael A. Simons, "Born again on Death Row: retribution, remorse, and religion," *The Catholic Lawyer*, 43 No. 2 (Fall 2004), 311-337.

[69] Ibid., 336-337.

[70] Ibid., 311-312, et seq.

[71] Karl Barth, *Deliverance to the Captives* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 1978), 13-27, 35-42, 51-59.

Sermons From "Death Row": God's Glory Shines in the Darkness by Jo Ann Josey is a collection of sermons by Joshua Drucker, former youth pastor then incarcerated on Death Row in Georgia. His sentence was later reduced to life in prison without the possibility of parole.[72]

Child of Grace: Death Row Sermons by Dr. Chris Brown includes three sermons made over a period of about 20 years at "Life Row Church," a Christian congregational meeting of Death Row inmates in Alabama at the time, by Gary Brown, a man incarcerated on Death Row.[73] The last of the three sermons was made three days before he was executed.[74]

Journal for Preachers published a letter by Death Row inmate Willian Moore to pastors who are going to preach to their congregations about prison ministry, providing observations about Death Row, including (1) strain on relationships with family, including children; (2) possibility of being released brings worry, too, as inmates often have little preparation or hope for making it in life; (3) Christians simply showing they care about incarcerated persons can make a big difference in inmates' lives; (4) Christians could do much good by communicating with victims' families and defendants to bring about reconciliation; (5) the forces of death pursue those on Death Row every single day, not just sporadically, like a soldier; (6) hope can be easily lost on Death Row but hope can keep inmates alive; and (7) "churches need to know … we are people, too. We have the same faith in the same Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."[75]

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[72] Jo Ann Josey, *Sermons From "Death Row": God's Glory Shines in the Darkness*, Vol. I and II (Warehouse Ministries Int'l, 2013); Andria Simmons, "Cobb jury gives Drucker death sentence in slayings," *Atlanta Journal & Constitution* (Aug 10, 2012), www.ajc.com/news/local/cobb-jury-gives-drucker-death-sentence-slayings/mN44DcesM0HCv9a1lnEWGJ/, last accessed March 26, 2021; State of Georgia, Department of Corrections, "Changes to UDS Population During 2018" (January 1, 2019), 2.

[73] Chris Brown, *Child of Grace: Death Row Sermons* (Child of Grace Books, 2019), 5-6.

[74] Ibid., 73.

[75] William Neal Moore, "Prison and preaching: the view from death row," *Journal for Preachers*, 13 no 2 (Lent 1990), 7-9. His sentence was lessened to life in prison, and he was eventually released on parole. Shelia M. Poole, "Forgiven," *Atlanta Journal & Constitution* (March 30, 2013), last accessed March 27, 2021, www.ajc.com/news/forgiven/gIU0aa1p6wZHQsfxk2wiBL/.

E. Thinking about psychological state generally in pastoral care, preaching and liturgy

It is relatively common to discuss psychology relative to pastoral care, traditionally considered, and it is also sometimes discussed relative to the worship assembly. For example, Neil Pembroke, a Senior Lecturer in Pastoral Studies at the University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia, provides a variety of suggestions relative to pastoral care in the worship assembly.[76] His emphasis is on liturgy overall, rather than preaching specifically. Many of his points are applicable to pastoral care through preaching for Death Row inmates, though, including bearing witness to hope, reconciliation, lament, and life together in Christ.[77]

Trauma is another area of concern for pastoral care, and it, too, is often discussed in psychological terms. Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger does so, for example, in *Bearing the Unbearable: Trauma, Gospel, and Pastoral Care*.[78] Included in her discussion is approaches to dealing with trauma, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, anxiety and fear, on a communal level in light of various psychological theories, with the goal of healing.[79] She cites compassionate witnessing, forgiveness, self-empathy, prayers of lament, Koinonia (life together), and a restorative church. In considering communal opportunities in this regard, she points to communal lament, synergies that can occur when acting in community with others, the communal nature of sin, and Koinonia. As to the latter, she notes that a powerful sign of Christ's resurrection is the unity and depth of fellowship of a Christian community.[80]

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[76] Neil Pembroke, *Pastoral Care in Worship: Liturgy and Psychology in Dialogue* (London : T&T Clark. 2010).

[77] Ibid., 7-132.

[78] Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger, *Bearing the Unbearable: Trauma, Gospel, and Pastoral Care,* eBook Version (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2015).

[79] Ibid., et seq.

[80] Ibid., Chapter 6.

F. Analogous Situations

There are situations with similarities to Death Row explored by others relative to pastoral care through preaching. Cajetan N. Ihewulezi, in *Hospital Preaching as Informed by Bedside Listening*, discusses a systematic approach to learning from listening, conversing, and pastoral conversations at the hospital bedside to preach to the sick.[81] Listening to sick persons yields questions, challenges, blame, despair, witness, acceptance, hope, and the linking of God's story with the human story.[82] Ihewulezi also posits sick persons as community sacrament, observing their experience includes stories through which the Christian community (of sick persons or at large) can receive grace, better understand God's place in the world, and God's love for the ill.[83]

Frederick J. Streets, in "The Pastoral Care of Preaching and the Trauma of HIV and AIDS," discusses how a sermon can serve as a component of pastoral care for people infected by HIV and AIDS, including how advocating against stigmatizing such persons can be a form of pastoral care for them in the hearing.[84] He first encourages listening.

Streets advocates that persons telling their story "can be for them an act of self-empowerment," as "there is more to who they are than the HIV they carry."[85] He notes that pastoral preaching cannot change their status *per se*, but can be effective in energizing people to address what they can and cope with what they must, enabling people to function as agent's of God's hope for the world, and to have their life affirmed.[86]

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[81] Cajetan N. Ihewulezi, *Hospital Preaching as Informed by Bedside Listening* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2011), 1-59 (including "prison" in the sub-title seems misdescriptive).

[82] Ibid., 42-50, 55-56.

[83] Ibid., 44.

[84] Frederick J. Streets, "The pastoral care of preaching and the trauma of HIV and AIDS," *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 29 No. 3 (2008), 832-853.

[85] Ibid., 839.

[86] Ibid., 846-847.

II. 50 Themes for Elements of Pastoral Care for Death Row Inmates via Preaching

Below is a list of 50 potential themes for elements of a theological framework for pastoral care through preaching for those incarcerated on Death Row derived from Section I's literature review. Many of these are also relevant to ministry for incarcerated persons in general.

(1) Helping create meaning for the incarcerated person[87]
(2) Compassion[88]
(3) Demonstrating listening to the incarcerated person[89]
(4) Coping with loss, grief, trauma, and broken relationships[90]
(5) Reconnecting with the goodness of life and living life to the full[91]
(6) Encouraging a faith worldview, *e.g.*, God's constant presence, reliance on God and the Bible, resurrection, and growth in the direction of Jesus's example[92]
(7) Reassurance of Jesus as savior and hope provided by Christ[93]
(8) Grace and forgiveness provided by God[94]
(9) Providing comfort, assurance, theological perspective, and hope[95]
(10) Expressing the "hoped-for change" in the person or their actions[96]
(11) Facilitating a spiritual encounter and the encountering of mystery[97]
(12) Providing and embodying ritual, including leading the service and preaching[98]
(13) Facilitating and bonding community[99]
(14) Life-cycle rites, including community celebrations, praise, and lament[100]
(15) Encouraging spiritual growth, such as in faithful works and witness[101]

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[87] Doehring, *supra*, xix-xx, xxiii; Ramshaw, *supra*, loc. 190-243. An interesting thought here is the pastoral care through the inmates' actions they might offer others, inside and outside the prison walls.

[88] Doehring, *supra*, xiv, xvi-xvii. The Good Samaritan story offers much on compassion.

[89] Ibid., xxviii. A traditional "priestly" function of presence and listening in pastoral care is in view.

[90] Ibid., xxviii, Diagram A. In many cases, a Death Row inmates' family and friends have long abandoned them or they are otherwise estranged from family and friends.

[91] Ibid. What impact does interacting nearly solely with those convicted of murder have on one's view of life itself?

[92] Neufeld, *supra,* 70-73; Barth, *supra,* 13-27.

[93] Barth, *supra*, 13-27, 35-42, 51-59. Hope is prominent and a recurring theme in the relevant literature.

[94] Ibid. Assurance of forgiveness by God is a form of hope.

[95] *Preaching as Pastoral Caring*, supra; Neufeld, *supra*, 70-73.

[96] Long, *supra*. Knowing that someone else is "rooting" for you can make a meaningful difference.

[97] Mitchell, *supra*, 13-15; Ramshaw, *supra*, loc. 305-420. Honor the time together and listen for the Spirit together.

[98] Ramshaw, *supra*, xxx. Ritual relative to services can be a form of assurance and hope.

[99] Ibid., loc. 243-265. Encouraging mutual edification and love between inmates is worth consideration.

[100] Ibid., loc. 431-605; *Preaching as Pastoral Caring*, *supra*. This can go unnoticed in a prison environment.

[101] *Preaching as Pastoral Caring*, *supra*. Works and witness can be done by those behind prison walls.

(16) Care towards the incarcerated person's families and communities[102]
(17) Coping with strain on relationships, including with family, prison workers, other inmates, or victims and their family, and any needed reconciliation[103]
(18) Offering comfort and coping relative to conditions of confinement, including with isolation, depression, hopelessness, and similar feelings[104]
(19) The reality of the government having them under control but yet are going to put them to death, weighing on minds and spirits[105]
(20) "[T]he simple assurance that God is good."[106]
(21) Relational expressions encouraging closeness with God (*e.g.*, thanking, praising) and facilitating spiritual intimacy with others (*e.g.*, asking forgiveness, prayer).[107]
(22) Religious change in the inmate taking place during incarceration
(23) Seeking to establish some form of control over their life (*e.g.*, "surrender" to the divine, "give myself to God," "I am ready")[108]
(24) "Where will you spend eternity?"[109]
(25) Regeneration in Christ, the inmates as a new creation[110]
(26) Upholding and affirming the inmate's dignity[111]
(27) Resisting government authority over them and death, relative to God[112]
(28) Repentance, salvation, and conversion[113]
(29) Fear of being released, of not being capable of making it in life[114]
(30) Simply showing care about incarcerated persons[115]
(31) Coping with the forces of death pursuing the inmate every single day[116]
(32) Affirming the incarcerated person is human, that they are people, too[117]
(33) Bearing witness to hope, reconciliation, lament, and life together in Christ.[118]

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[102] Ibid., 105-106. Death Row inmates have families and can be highly concerned about them.

[103] Moore, *supra*, 7-9; Arnold, *supra*, 16; Simons, *supra*, 311-337.

[104] Salai, *supra*; Harvesttime International Network, *supra*.

[105] Salai, *supra*; Harvestime International Network, supra; Recinella, *supra*.

[106] Graves, *supra*, 192. This is particularly challenging relative to wrongfully convicted persons.

[107] Smith, *supra*, Abstract. Many of the inmates were not raised in a church or spiritual environment, so guidance in such areas may be lacking in their life. How to get closer to God, increase in spiritual intimacy, etc.?

[108] Ibid.

[109] Smith, *Death Row Chaplain*, *supra*, xi, 131-132.

[110] Ibid. (citing 2 Cor 5:17, "… if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:… old has gone, the new is here!").

[111] Ibid. There is much to be said about this.

[112] Cooey, *supra*, 710.

[113] Simons, *supra*, 311-337,

[114] Ibid.

[115] Ibid. Presence and participation in the worship service, including singing, are steps.

[116] Ibid.

[117] Ibid. I experience this with the most intensity during the singing portions of a worship service.

[118] Pembroke, supra, 7-132.

(34) Dealing with trauma, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, anxiety and fear, on a communal level[119]
(35) Compassionate witnessing, forgiveness, self-empathy, Koinonia (life together), and a restorative church
(36) Communal or individual lament, including prayers of lament[120]
(37) Considering communal nature of sin[121]
(38) Questions on their mind, reassurance, challenges, blame, despair, witness, acceptance, hope, and the linking of God's story with the human story[122]
(39) Listening to the inmates, *e.g.*, space for them to tell their story[123]
(40) Incarcerated persons as community sacrament, with their experience through which others might receive grace and improve their understanding of God[124]
(41) Enabling people to function as agents of God's hope for the world[125]
(42) Affirming a person's life, as present and valuable[126]
(43) Death Row inmates both face their own death and grieve the death of others, including other inmates, family, and friends[127]
(44) The threat of death and dying in light of the resurrected Jesus and living God[128]
(45) There is no one right way to react to the threat of death or death, whether acceptance, denial, fighting it, accepting it, or something else[129]
(46) Death is not a punishment for sin, and was natural and good at beginning, as God intended death as a boundary marker and temporary stage[130]
(47) Death post-Fall as enemy and annihilating power aggressive towards being[131]
(48) God experienced dying and death by his exposure to non-being in Christ's death, but God was not overtaken by death (as we are) and made death God's servant[132]
(49) God experiences death and dying in the sense of "relationlessness"[133]
(50) Any hope beyond death must be found in God and not in ourselves[134]

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[119] van Deusen Hunsinger, *supra*.

[120] Ibid. (for (35) and (36)).

[121] Ibid. This is a major topic, and raises questions of blame for the situation beyond the individual inmate.

[122] Ihewulezi, *supra*, 42-50, 55-56..

[123] Ibid., 42-50, 55-56; Streets, *supra*, 832-853.

[124] Ihewulezi, *supra*, 44.

[125] Streets, *supra*, 846-847.

[126] Ibid. I like the "Life Row" label suggested in Brown, *Child of Grace*, *supra*, 5-6.

[127] Fiddes, Chapter 7. Some of (43) – (50), themes inspired by Fiddes, are discussed in Part III of this paper.

[128] Ibid., 224-225.

[129] Ibid.

[130] Ibid., 233-234 (citing Isa 25:8; 1 Cor 15:54; Rev 21:4).

[131] Ibid., 235.

[132] Ibid., 237-238.

[133] Ibid., 244.

[134] Ibid., 244-247.

III. "The Living God and the Threat of Death" Inspiring Elements Towards a Framework for Pastoral Care Through Preaching on Death Row

For purposes of beginning to identify elements of a theological ethic that might be useful in formulating an ecclesiological framework for engaging in pastoral care for persons incarcerated on Death Row through preaching, I propose three elements for consideration:

> (1) A person incarcerated on Death Row can co-create with others in their close community, those with which they are incarcerated on Death Row, like Jesus, also sentenced to death, co-created with his close community, the Trinity, including co-creating by together loving other people,
>
> (2) Despite enduring a form of dying and death while on Death Row, just as Jesus endured a form of dying and death as a Trinity member, a person can love others and co-create with others in their Death Row community despite that temporary stage, just as Jesus did, and
>
> (3) By considering the death penalty a product of an aggressive, corrupted death brought by the Fall—and not as God intended it, a temporary boundary marker to a stage of our being—and by engaging in efforts against the death penalty as efforts to restore the natural boundary to allow their work for the kingdom to continue in this stage of themselves, Death Row inmates can be motivated towards life and serving God.

These are primarily inspired by "The Living God and the Threat of Death," chapter 7 of *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* by Paul Fiddes, a professor of systematic theology at Oxford University,[135] and my work with men incarcerated on Death Row. Fiddes describes the work of human beings in co-creating with God, "if God is going to allow the world to be creative with some reflection of God's creativity, there must be some things which are possible but which have not yet become actual for God. Further, when they actually happen there will be something new about them, something contributed by the world."[136]

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[135] Paul S. Fiddes, "The Living God and the Threat of Death," in *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity,* Chap. 7 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox 2000); theology.ox.ac.uk/people/professor-paul-fiddes#/.

[136] Ibid., 143.

Essentially, for Part III, I pick three of the 50 themes identified in Part II, ones inspired by Fiddes and coming towards the end of the list of 50, propose three corresponding elements, and begin analyzing them here. Fiddes' theological discussion is deep, and so this analysis only scratches the surface. Also, his discussion is general, rather than focused on Death Row, but it inspires thoughts relevant to Death Row as his theological insights bring issues associated with facing death into closer focus. Noe of this is to say that these three are the most important or the most interesting, but one has to start somewhere and Fiddes' chapter is thought provoking.

This section discusses some of Fiddes' insights relevant to formulating elements for a theological framework of pastoral care through preaching on Death Row. It considers those insights in context of Death Row and notes correspondence to the three proposed elements.[137] This discussion is not a justification of those elements, but an analysis of them. As mentioned in the conclusion, a next step might be revision of the three based in part on this analysis.

A. Allowing for a Variety of Situations and Reactions

As mentioned, Fiddes encourages ministers to recognize that people react to the threat of death in a variety of ways—*e.g.*, denial, acceptance, fighting it, accepting it gracefully—with denial being a common response and that each way can be healthy or unhealthy.[138] An important point for considering theological elements for pastoral care through preaching on Death Row is that those incarcerated there and those that come to Christian services are not a monolithic group that thinks and reacts uniformly. A second important point in this regard is that a minister should be cautious about considering any particular reaction to death as generally healthy or unhealthy.

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[137] Section III is derived in part from a paper I wrote as part of the Doctor of Ministry in Missional Theology program at Lipscomb University in Professor Greg McKinizie's Missional Theology class.

[138] Fiddes, *supra*, 224-225.

People often ask ministers serving in prison ministry if the inmates have repented. In that question, they are normally including whether those men acknowledge out loud that they "did it." The question encompasses a drastic over-simplification of the state of affairs on Death Row. A meaningful percentage of those men likely did not commit the crime of which they were convicted, some were in a state of mental health or psychosis or drugged such they do not remember the event, some repented and did the hard work of coming to terms with their situation a decade or more ago, some have active appeals and potential retrials such that their saying they "did it" could put them in jeopardy for their lives, some live in fear that what they say or results of medical assessments could be used against them in court later, some relatively recently arrived on Death Row and are in the process of coming to terms with what has happened, and some are in a combination of these or in a different situation altogether.

For example, a leading academic study found at least 4.1% of death-sentenced persons in the U.S. are falsely convicted,[139] suggesting in a Death Row population of 160, at least 7 are likely innocent. It would not be unreasonable, then, to suspect that of 25-35 attending a service on Death Row, 15%-25% or more is innocent of the crime or wrongfully sentenced to death.

Those considering pastoral care through preaching on Death Row cannot treat the men the same, including how they are reacting or should react to the threat that they will be executed. Allowance for the Holy Spirit to work individually, rather than corralling towards repentance or any particular response to their situation as a whole, is critical. Thus, any formulation of a theological framework for preaching on Death Row must not treat those incarcerated monolithically or be overly prescriptive. Considerations of the variety of what it might mean to live “in the shadow of the Valley of Death” on Death Row is urged by these observations.

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[139] Samuel R. Grossa et al. “Rate of false conviction of criminal defendants who are sentenced to death,” *PNAS*, Vol. 111, No. 20 (May 20, 2014), 7230–7235, last accessed April 9, 2021, pnas.org/content/pnas/111/20/7230.full.pdf.

B. Trinitarian Emphasis and the Experience of Death

Fiddes claims humans do not experience their own death (only their own dying) and that God never suffers God's own death, but suffers the death of the Son as part of the Trinity.[140] This claim and Fiddes' explanation inspired aspects of proposed elements (1) and (2).

Fiddes mostly endorses the view that God experienced dying and death via God's exposure to non-being in Christ's death, *i.e.*, in the death of one of three person's that make up the Trinity, God, but God was not "overtaken" by death (as human's are).[141] In a way, this seems like a position designed to avoid the difficulties involved when one considers Jesus to be God (see John 1) and Jesus to have died. Was God dead? Fiddes acknowledges Jesus was dead, but solves it by considering that death to be an experience for God. His emphasis of the Trinity and Jesus's death, though, inspires a parallel with the person incarcerated on Death Row.

For the Death Row inmate, one can debate much of Fiddes' claim. First, in practical terms, as noted in Part II, the American Psychological Association-published *Living on Death Row* describes, "[b]ecause of the uniquely dehumanizing treatment" experienced "those incarcerated with a death sentence experience 'death before dying.'"[142] Also, the Death Row prisoner is sometimes referred to as "dead man walking," and Death Row is described by some as "a series of daily 'little deaths' that are engineered to deconstruct, destroy, dehumanize, and denigrate the human person." It is also described by persons serving on Death Row as the human dying and being replaced by a non-human, an animal, a beast, on Death Row.[143]

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[140] Ibid., 237-238.

[141] Ibid. (citing Eberhard Jüngel).

[142] American Psychological Association, *supra*, xviii, 193, 263.

[143] Ibid., xviii, 263, 267.

Under such a view expressed in *Living on Death Row*, then, many Death Row inmates, in a significant sense, do indeed "experience their own death," contrary to one of Fiddes' premises. This is echoed by many inmates describing their cell as like being in a tomb or the grave.[144]

Moreover, as some consider the Trinity—the community—of God experiencing death through execution of one of its members, Jesus,[145] this parallel's Death Row inmates' experience, as a community of Death Row inmates experiences death through the execution of one of its members. Death Row communities can be close, having contact almost solely with one another. In this manner, the community experiencing death of one of its own as God experienced death may inform a theology for Death Row. For example, Death Row inmates may be urged towards a closer relationship with God as they see similarities between themselves and God, may see a motivation to work closer with one another, and may see a mission.

Indeed, Death Row prisoners have much in common with Jesus, including a death sentence and living in an unusual and close community. Moreover, the parallels to Jesus's presence in his tomb and inmates' presence in their cells give rise to more comparisons. Recognizing Jesus's mission included co-creating with his close community--the Trinity, with the Father and the Holy Spirit--to engage in a mission of love towards others might inspire Death Row inmates towards practical mission. This inspires close consideration of a Trinitarian emphasis in the theological framework under consideration, including relative to element (1) of the three proposed elements.

And recognizing Jesus endured a form of death felt and experienced by his community of the Trinity is somewhat parallel to the incarcerated person enduring a form of death while in the

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[144] *See, e.g.*, ibid., 193.

[145] Fiddes, *supra*, 237-238.

Death Row community might inspire the incarcerated person. Jesus's temporary stage of death embodied loving action for others in co-creation with the Trinity. Likewise, the incarcerated person can engage in loving others and co-creating with others in their Death Row community in this temporary stage of a form of death themselves. This inspires proposed element (2).

C. Death Corrupted

Fiddes claims death in its original, pre-Fall form was natural and good, a boundary-marker to life and as temporary stage for the maturing of humans, a marker and stage God would eventually abolish, as represented by the resurrection and *eschaton*, when "Death has been swallowed up forever."[146] He contrasts this view with considering death a punishment for sin handed down as part of the Fall, arguing instead the Fall corrupted death, making it an enemy.[147]

This is an important theological point for those engaged in practical missions within the Death Row environment. These men, having been sentenced to death by the state, view death as a punishment for that particular sin or crime of which they have been convicted by other human beings. Is death an appropriate punishment in God's eyes? Is what is happening to them simply right and God's will? Is a Death Row inmate's potential relationship with God hurt by that inmate's understanding of God cursing humans with the punishment of death?

A common evangelical viewpoint is that one of God's first acts relative to humans was to sentence them to death for their sins would tend to suggest that such punishment is appropriate in God's eyes. That God's original view of death was as a good, temporary boundary-marker, rather than punishment, and that God's design for death was corrupted by the Fall, as Fiddes advocates, might have a positive impact on the Death Row inmates' relationship with God.

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[146] Fiddes, *supra*, 233-235 (citing Isa 25:8; 1 Cor 15:54; Rev 21:4).

[147] Ibid.

One must be careful, of course in positing death as something good. Many of the men are at high risk for suicide. Some have or are contemplating being "volunteers," intentionally giving up on or waiving their appeals so that they can be executed sooner.[148] Depression and other serious mental-health conditions are rampant on Death Row.[149]

Fiddes describes death as "non-being" and "simply a bare nothing," with part of the post-Fall corruption of death making death an annihilating power aggressive towards being.[150] For the Death Row inmate, this raises the question of if death sentences emanate from such corruption. That is, the human structures that give rise to judging another human being and to bringing their being to "non-being" in an unnatural way can be viewed as corrupted, post-Fall death in the form of an aggressive, annihilating power, those human structures.

By considering the death penalty a product of this aggressive, corrupted death brought to us by the Fall, as described by Fiddes, and not death as God intended, a Death Row inmate can be inspired toward mission. That is, by recognizing death as God originally did under Fiddes' analysis, as a temporary boundary marker to this stage of our being, the incarcerated person can see a mission of engaging in an effort against the death penalty as an effort to restore that natural boundary God intended in order to allow their work for the kingdom to continue in this stage of themselves. This is relevant to aspects of element (3) of the proposed theological elements.

[148] American Psychological Association, *supra*, 62-63, 161-183.

[149] Ibid., 81-85, 109-117.

[150] Fiddes, *supra,* 235.

Conclusion

Thus begins a concentrated attempt to think deeper about effective preaching for persons incarcerated on Death Row. I found the literature review helpful, both to see what is out there and what is not. Next steps include tracing the bibliographies of the works noted above, expanding the scope and depth of research, and considering works on non-U.S. Death Rows.

Creating the list of 50 potential elements potentially useful for a framework for engaging in pastoral care for persons incarcerated on Death Row through preaching is helpful towards more effective preaching on Death Row whether I engage in further research and analysis on the topic or not. Just by looking through the list, helpful sermon themes leap out. That said, the list can bear consolidation without losing substance (I am sure there is overlap and this list of 50 could likely be condensed into a list of 35-40, maybe less) and organization (an ordering in sub-categories might help). Moreover, I am sure it is missing much and that additional research and analysis, as well as consideration of my own experience, will suggest helpful additions to the list.

My analysis of the three proposed elements is more-or-less an experimental try at analyzing potential components of a framework for effective pastoral care for Death Row inmates through preaching. Next steps could involve analyzing others in Part II's list of 50. Fiddes' work is deep, and perhaps an appropriate next step in experimentation is analyzing some of the broader and more basic concepts in the list, like hope, in context. Those may be more helpful. Further analysis of the three proposed elements is worthwhile, too. A next step in that regard might be to revise the three based on the analysis expressed in Part III. Also, the paper raises issues outside the scope of pastoral care through preaching which bear consideration.

May God bless this work and your work and help it to bring the love, justice, mercy, and peace of God to all, including people incarcerated on Death Row.