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Hagiographic Feminist Rhetoric: An Analysis of the Sermons of Bishop

Marjorie Matthews

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Abstract

In July 1980, in Dayton, Ohio, church history reached a milestone for gender equality. Marjorie Swank Matthews became the first woman to be elected as a bishop in any Protestant Christian denomination. The purpose of this thesis project is to conduct a feminist rhetorical criticism of three of Bishop Matthews’s sermons from across her four-year term in the episcopal leadership of the United Methodist Church. Feminist rhetorical scholarship broadly falls into two perspectives, writing women in and challenging rhetorical standards. While neither perspective is complete, this project’s method is to combine the two perspectives, an approach that offers the potential for insightful and productive knowledge generation. Therefore, this thesis simultaneously considers questions from scholars with diametric understandings of feminism and the application of feminist values to rhetorical theory and criticism. The sermons this project considers, in chronological order, are “Chosen for Challenge,” dated February 16, 1982; “The Sign of Discipleship,” dated May 1, 1983 and May 15, 1983; and “We Shall Go Forth,” dated October 13, 1984. This project uncovers the rhetorical strategies of the first woman bishop in any Christian denomination and argues that understanding her life and rhetoric as hagiographic is valuable. Implications for the usefulness of each perspective (and the combination of perspectives) for rhetorical theory and criticism are considered.
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Chapter 1: One Bishop, Two Perspectives, Three Sermons

In July 1980, in Dayton, Ohio, church history reached a milestone for gender equality. Marjorie Swank Matthews became the first woman to be elected as a bishop in any Protestant Christian denomination (Craig, 2004). Matthews served as the Bishop of the United Methodist Church in Wisconsin from 1980-1984; she retired in 1984 and died from cancer in 1986 (Craig, 2004; General Commission on Archives and History, 2008). One colleague described the four foot and eleven inches tall Matthews as a “diminutive powerhouse of a woman” who pushed against history itself in her ascent through the stained-glass ceiling to the highest level of church leadership (Craig, 2004, p. 283).

The purpose of this thesis project is to conduct a feminist rhetorical criticism of three of Bishop Matthews sermons from across her four-year term in the episcopal leadership of the United Methodist Church. Because there are as many definitions for feminism as there are feminists and as many definitions for rhetoric as there are rhetoricians, a clarification of how those terms are used throughout this project is necessary. For the purposes of this project, Meyer’s (2007) definitions of feminism and feminist rhetoric are consistent with the author’s uses and understandings of the terms: “The essence of feminism is a rejection of domination and oppression and a critique of social systems or practices that assert power over particular individuals or groups of individuals” (p. 3). Feminist rhetorical analysis is “a commitment to reflexive analysis and critique of any kind of symbol use that orients people in relation to other people, places, and practices on the basis of gendered realities or gendered cultural assumptions” (Meyer, 2007, p. 3). Patriarchy is defined as “a system of power relations that privileges and accords power to the white, heterosexual male; anyone who does
not fit this category is devalued in this system” (Foss, Griffin, & Foss, 1997, p. 121). The analysis that follows explores a variety of conflicts and disagreements among scholars who consider themselves feminists, rhetoricians, and feminist rhetoricians. The theoretical tensions between different perspectives then allows for a consideration of the ways in which Matthews manages her rhetorical contexts specifically and, more important, the overall rhetorical task that faced her as mainline Protestantism’s first woman bishop.

This chapter begins by explaining the need for, and academic value of, this project. Next, a literature review explores two broad schools of thought that have formed the historical basis of feminist rhetorical criticism: the writing women in approach and the challenging rhetorical standards approach (Meyer, 2007). Finally, the methods section, recognizing the benefits and limitations of each school of thought, proposes using each as a perspective that can help explain the ways Matthews rhetorically navigated the office of bishop.

Articulation of the Problem: Woman as Rhetor, Pastor, Bishop

Matthews’s primacy alone makes her worthy of study, especially against the backdrop of the institutional church, a place where patriarchy is often sacralized and thus exponentially more difficult to overcome (Johnson, 2002). The sexism of the institutional church is both a product of and a contributor to the generally patriarchal nature of society, which is also reflected in communication scholarship. Reflecting on the problem of patriarchy in rhetorical scholarship, Campbell (1989a, 1988) has argued that the canon of great rhetoric has largely excluded women. Campbell has done considerable work in making women’s contributions in public address available for study
(Campbell, 1989b, 1993b, 1994), as have other scholars (Marshall & Mayhead, 2000; Sarkela, Ross, & Lowe, 2003). This scholarship has mainly focused on women who were or are leaders in social movements or in politics. Compared to these contexts, rhetoricians have devoted little time to studying women’s discourse within the institutionalized Protestant Church, especially in the highest levels of leadership in these institutions.

The communication of women in the highest levels of leadership in the institutional church is important to study because the barriers to gender equality in religious institutions are more pronounced than in other occupations. For example, “compared to other occupations whose gender ratios [have been changing over the past three decades,] only ordained ministry had been understood to be declared by God to be off-limits to women” (Charlton, 2000, p. 420). Foss (1984) argues that when the Episcopal Church began ordaining women, the women priests were not well received by people who believed that the women challenged the order, tradition, and exclusiveness of the priesthood. Lehman (1981) explains:

One obvious factor militating against receptivity [to clergywomen] is the masculine nature of the [Christian] tradition itself. The Judeo-Christian concept of Deity per se is couched in masculine terms, and this motif filters into other areas of theological discourse--soteriology, eschatology, and ecclesiology. It is genuinely difficult for church members to think in other terms. Add to this the simple historical fact of a male ministry, coupled with other misogynous themes in Western culture, and you have powerful forces for resisting the claims of clergywomen to a call to pastoral forms of ministry. (p. 318)
These beliefs become amplified when the ordained woman is the bishop rather than the youth minister, associate pastor, or lead pastor of a congregation.

The pulpit has historically been a masculine-gendered rhetorical space (Casey, 2000; Mountford, 2001). By 1980, women in several United States Christian denominations had claimed and occupied the rhetorical space of pulpits in local congregations and positions of regional church leadership, but Matthews was the first to attain a denomination’s highest office. In that role, she did more than occupy the historically masculine-gendered pulpit. She also took on the rhetorical symbols of the office that had hitherto been exclusively the province of men. As the first woman bishop, Matthews was the first woman to carry a crozier, wear the episcopal seal, and place her hands on the heads of candidates for the ministry and utter the words, “I ordain you.” In each of these groundbreaking situations, how did Matthews use, modify, or reorient the rhetorical space? Finlay (2003) found that both women and men who enter pastoral ministry tend to start at small churches or in associate roles. Men move on from those whereas women stay in them or move horizontally. Women are also likely to leave ministry for other careers. Given that advancement within ordained ministry is disproportionately difficult for women, how do those women who do advance to supervisory roles rhetorically manage their upward movement?

While a project focused on the rhetoric of Bishop Matthews cannot answer these questions with statistical significance for all women in ordained ministry, this project does illuminate the strategies and styles the first woman bishop in any mainline church used to function in a position that had only ever been held by men. These strategies are especially important because Matthews is a person whose work has served as an
inspiration for those who have come after her (Craig, 2004). Of early women speakers whose careers in public address began at a time when most people considered women's public speech to be morally reprehensible and divinely prohibited, Campbell (1989a) notes: “When a woman spoke, she enacted her equality, that is, she herself was proof that she was as able as her male counterparts to function in the public sphere” (p. 11). As the first woman bishop, Marjorie Matthew’s presence—physically and rhetorically—enacted her equality. She was a bishop with the same rights, responsibilities, authority, and salary as the other bishops of her denomination. The rhetoric of all women bishops ought to be studied, but Bishop Matthews stands out as significantly deserving of scholarly attention. She was simultaneously the church’s first and only woman bishop for the four years she served.¹ She was a living enactment of the movement for equality.

Literature Review: Two Approaches to Feminist Rhetorical Criticism

In her review of the history of feminist contributions to rhetoric, Meyer (2007) asserts that feminist rhetoricians generally operate from one of two critical approaches. The writing women in perspective argues that feminist rhetoricians ought to expand the rhetorical canon so that it is inclusive of women as well as men. Rhetoricians who take this perspective often work to publish anthologies of women’s speeches and other rhetorical artifacts so that women’s discourse may be studied (Campbell, 1999, 1998, 1994, 1993b, 1989a, 1989b, 1988, 1973; Marshall & Mayhead, 2000; Sarkela, Ross, & Lowe, 2003). The challenging rhetorical standards perspective posits that merely inserting women into the rhetorical cannon allows the oppressors to define the terms (i.e., what counts as rhetorical discourse worthy of study, whose discourse should
be studied, what qualities make the discourse effective or ineffective). Thus, these scholars analyze the criteria by which rhetoric itself is judged and evaluated and offer alternative models of approaching rhetorical criticism from a feminist perspective (Foss & Griffin, 1992, 1995; Foss, Griffin, & Foss, 1997). This review examines both the writing women in perspective and the challenging rhetorical standards perspective and then outlines the scholarly challenges to each approach.

**Writing women in**

Campbell’s (1973) article “The Rhetoric of Women's Liberation: An Oxymoron” is considered one of the foundational pieces of scholarship in feminist rhetorical theory (Foss, Foss, & Griffin, 2006). Campbell (1973) argues that rhetoric as it is traditionally studied focuses on self-reliance and independence and thus goes against social gender role expectations for women, and she argues that scholars must look beyond traditional understandings of rhetoric to study the rhetoric of the women’s liberation movement. She cites consciousness raising groups as an example of rhetoric in the women’s liberation movement. Rosen (2006) describes consciousness-raising as “the process by which women in small groups could explore the political aspects of personal life” (p. 197). Campbell notes that the groups were leaderless. Ideas were shared, and individual autonomy was stressed. When women in consciousness-raising groups made decisions, they did so individually rather than collectively.

For Campbell (1973), the rhetoric of the women’s liberation movement was radical because it challenged gender roles, which are deeply held psychological assumptions. Reflecting on the phrase, “The personal is political,” originally coined in 1968 by radical feminist Carol Hanish (Rosen, 2006), Campbell argues that
“consciousness raising requires that the personal be transcended by moving toward the structural, that the individual be transcended by moving toward the political” (p. 83).

While rhetoric traditionally deals with public, structural, and social issues, women’s liberation rhetoric also considered personal and private issues. The movement, Campbell argues, was responding not just to one but to multiple rhetorical exigences: it was social and personal, public and private.

Because the rhetoric of the women’s liberation movement was different from rhetoric as it had been studied before, Campbell introduces a vocabulary for understanding women’s rhetoric:

Women’s liberation is characterized by rhetorical interactions that emphasize affective proofs and personal testimony, participation and dialogue, self-revelation and self-criticism, the goal of autonomous decision making through self-persuasion, and the strategic use of techniques for “violating the reality structure.” (p. 83)

Campbell develops these ideas in a later two-volume work on the rhetoric of first wave feminists (Campbell, 1989a, 1989b). Therein, she codifies the notion of feminine style. She argues that analysis of persuasion by women indicates that many strategically adopted what might be called a feminine style to cope with the conflicting demands of the podium. That style emerged out of their experiences as women and was adapted to the attitudes and experiences of female audiences. However, it was not, and is not today, a style exclusive to women, either as speakers or audiences. (p. 12)
Campbell goes on to explain that the characteristics of feminine style include personal tone; the use of personal experiences, anecdotes, and examples; inductive organizational patterns; a conceptualization of the audience as participatory peers; and a goal of empowerment. In these ways, Campbell argues that feminine style is similar to consciousness raising.

Since Campbell’s articulation of the concept of feminine style, other scholars have adapted and extended it. Dow and Tonn (1993) argue that women often adapt to patriarchy in their speeches, using formal evidence, deductive organizational patterns, and linear models of logical reasoning, but they also include issues like family values or claim to represent a feminine perspective. For Dow and Tonn (1993), feminine style includes not just the attributes Campbell lists but also a use of masculine style to achieve feminist goals. Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles (1996), in their re-conceptualization of feminine style, retain the idea that feminine style is personal, features inductive organizational patterns, and relies on anecdotes and examples. They also describe the feminine style as stylized and ornamental, and they extend Campbell’s notion of audience to suggest that in the feminine style, the rhetor intentionally seeks to establish identification with the audience. Notably, Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles agree with Campbell that there is “nothing inherently or naturally female about such a style of discourse” (Parry-Giles & Parry-Giles, 1996, p. 339). What distinguishes feminine style is not who the rhetor is, but whether the rhetoric is consistent with social gender roles for women or for men. While some scholars have used and extended the notion of feminine style and other scholars have taken up the mantle of introducing hitherto
unknown or under-studied women’s speeches to the rhetorical canon, other scholars find the writing women in approach to be problematic.

Biesecker (1992) is Campbell’s most vocal critic. She accuses Campbell of female tokenism, simply putting great women along great men in the canon of rhetoric. According to Biesecker, this suggests that most women cannot achieve the level of greatness attained by the rhetors Campbell valorizes. Biesecker claims to acknowledge the value of including women in the rhetorical cannon, but she contends that Campbell falls short because she does not challenge the criteria that determine what is worthy of inclusion in the rhetorical canon. This failure to challenge the criteria for canonicity allows patriarchal definitions of what counts as valuable rhetoric to rule the day. Further, Biesecker suggests, Campbell’s focus on particular women is patriarchal because it puts the responsibility on individual women to confront their own oppression. For Biesecker, a more important question than who is speaking is what made it possible for that person to speak.

Rather than focusing on individual women rhetors, Biesecker argues, “for the feminist historiographer interested in rewriting the history of Rhetoric, the plurality of practices that together constitute the everyday must be conceptualized as a key site of social transformation and, hence, of rhetorical analysis” (p. 157). In other words, Biesecker believes feminist rhetoricians should consider the rhetoric and practices that constitute the life of everyday women rather than focusing on famous or exceptional women. Because terms like famous and exceptional are defined within the realm of patriarchal oppression, studying rhetors who fall under that lexical rubric is tantamount to participation in the hegemonic patriarchy that feminism seeks to resist. In Biesecker’s
view, Campbell’s fatal flaw is her assumption that great women rhetors represent all women; on the contrary, Biesecker argues, feminists need to relativize rather than universalize understandings of women’s rhetoric.

Campbell’s (1993a) response to Biesecker argues that the individual women she studied were neither supporters of the status quo nor examples of female tokenism because they were radical in their specific times and contexts. Campbell says that Biesecker’s attack on another woman who is trying to expand the rhetorical canon is worse than a man who tries to exclude women. Finally, Campbell points out that while Biesecker suggests that feminist rhetoricians study collective rhetorics, Biesecker fails to offer even one example of a collective rhetoric that should be studied instead of studying the rhetoric of individual women. Thus, Campbell concludes that Biesecker’s criticisms are nothing more than another attempt to silence women.

Biesecker represents the disagreements in the scholarly community with the subjects of Campbell’s work, and other scholars have criticized Campbell’s methods as well (Rich, 1979; Spitzak & Carter, 1987). Campbell’s concept of feminine style has undergone critique both from other scholars and self-reflexive criticism from the very scholars who use and apply it as a rhetorical perspective. Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles (1996), in their extension of the concept of feminine style, acknowledge that the use of feminine style in communication does not necessarily mean women are more included. They note that the presence of feminine style can actually reinforce hegemonic masculinity. In that way, the use of feminine style is not categorically emancipatory or feminist.
Dow (1995), reflecting on feminine style generally and on some of her own claims about feminine style (Dow & Tonn, 1993), warns that too many essays look for feminine style in women rhetors and stop there. This can be limiting because it focuses on differences between men and women—either in the selection of artifacts to study, in the conclusions, or in both. Difference feminism, as Dow labels it, universalizes the experience of women and belies the differences among women. There is danger in seeing feminine style as a natural result of the differences between women and men, especially because “feminine style is as much a product of power as it is a product of difference” (Dow, 1995, p. 109).

In sum, the writing women in perspective is useful because it has expanded the boundaries of what is considered useful to study in rhetorical scholarship. By only including famous or politically noteworthy women in the expansion of the canon, however, scholars who work from the write women in perspective may inadvertently suggest that only a few women are great or worthy enough to be studied. In codifying the concept of feminine style, the writing women in perspective provides for a way of understanding rhetorics that do not align with social gender role expectations of men. A disadvantage of using feminine style as a critical perspective is its potential to imply that women and men are innately different. Other scholars see this approach as capitulating to patriarchal definitions of rhetoric and argue that feminist rhetoricians need a different way of understanding rhetoric altogether.

**Challenging rhetorical standards**

Scholars who work from the challenging rhetorical standards perspective contend that the problem of patriarchy reaches to the very definition of rhetoric. From the ancient
debates between Plato and the sophistic teachers of rhetoric to Aristotle and Cicero, and even among contemporary theorists like Stephen Toulmin and Kenneth Burke, rhetoric has been understood as persuasive communication (see Golden, Berquist, & Coleman, 2000; Foss & Griffin, 1995; Herrick, 2009).

Foss and Griffin (1992) differentiate between domination rhetoric, wherein hierarchal modes of communication seek compliance through manipulation, and inherent value rhetoric. In inherent value rhetoric, the rhetor appreciates her or his own interconnectedness with the audience and with all creatures. The inherent value rhetor uses modes of communication that share power and control with the audience rather than exerting power over the audience. Foss and Griffin (1992) suggest that domination rhetoric can be transformed through empowered action, refusing to function within the terms of the system by offering alternatives to that system.

Building on the notion that empowered action can transform domination rhetoric by offering alternatives to patriarchal, oppressive systems of rhetoric, Foss and Griffin (1995) propose a model known as invitational rhetoric. They view rhetoric’s historical focus on persuasion as problematic because persuasion involves attempts to change others, which is a way of gaining power and control. Foss and Griffin (1995) suggest that invitational rhetoric is based on equality, immanent value, and self-determination. While they recognize that feminism is not monolithic, they contend that most feminists hold these three qualities to be centrally important. By equality, they do not mean that there are no differences between people, but that differences do not need to be ranked as good and bad. Immanent value means that all living beings have worth because all are a “necessary part of the pattern of the universe” (p. 4). Self-determination is defined
as being respectful of others’ choices about how to live and seeing people as experts in their own decision-making.

Invitational rhetoric allows others to enter the rhetor’s world and see the world from the rhetor’s point of view. It is a mode of discourse that is free of guilt, humiliation, and pain. The focus is not on persuasion or on changing other people, although people may decide to change based on what they experience in the rhetorical encounter. In that case, the change happens in a context that is respectful of the audience’s agency. Foss and Griffin (1995) suggest that the invitational rhetor’s communicative options include offering perspectives and creating auspicious external conditions. Offering perspectives means sharing ideas without forcing those ideas on others. Creating favorable external conditions means the environment must be open to the process of invitational rhetoric. The rhetor should feel safe and valued. Everyone involved should practice absolute listening; Foss and Griffin (1995) note that in absolute listening, the audience considers the rhetor’s perspective without interruption or feedback. The audience and rhetor practice reversibility of perspective, and they should hold unconditional positive regard for one another.

From Foss and Griffin’s (1995) point of view, invitational rhetoric offers five important implications for rhetorical theory. First, because it is not focused on persuasion, it encourages thinking about other multi-faceted or nontraditional forms of rhetoric. Second, it offers a model for “cooperative, nonadversarial, and ethical communication” (p. 15). Third, it removes the entire rhetorical exchange from the framework of argumentation. Fourth, it reminds scholars and students of rhetoric to
question traditional rhetoric. Finally, it offers a mode of communication for the marginalized to challenge oppression.

Foss and Griffin (1995) are careful to point out that invitational rhetoric is one perspective that should be used alongside others. They do not intend to usurp persuasion altogether, but just to offer an alternative model as well. They acknowledge that “persuasion is often necessary,” but when persuasion need not be the goal, rhetors can use their invitational model (p. 5). They recognize that invitational rhetoric is not for every situation, and that there are other legitimate forms of rhetoric that might be appropriate at different times. Although their analysis outlines problems with persuasion, their perspective is not that persuasion by itself is inherently and categorically problematic; rather, it is the exclusive and one-dimensional focus on persuasion in the history of rhetoric that is the concern. On the surface, scholars who call their model one perspective to be used alongside others seem to be making a meaningless concession in an effort to garner support, but in Foss and Griffin’s (1995) articulation of their model as a perspective, they actually live out their own axiology. They invite the reader to understand their point of view that the exclusive focus on persuasion in the history of rhetoric is problematic, and then they offer another model to be used with or instead of persuasion, depending on the rhetorical situation.

The *challenging rhetorical standards* perspective has encountered some of the same criticisms the *write women in* perspective received. Dow (1995) argues that invitational rhetoric is guilty of being difference feminism. Dow notes that most feminists would agree with the qualities of equality, immanent value, and self-determination, but she disputes the assumptions that undergird Foss and Griffin’s (1995) application of
those ideals. The notion that men’s rhetoric is violently persuasive and women’s rhetoric is not (or does not have to be) assumes that women and men are completely different.

Condit (1997) echoes Dow’s concerns, calling invitational rhetoric an example of dichotomy feminism because it treats women and men as totally separate. Condit sees the history of rhetoric as diversely gendered, not just primarily masculine-focused as Foss and Griffin (1995) suggest. Condit says that invitational rhetoric comes from “an already constructed essentialist gender” rather than recognizing that gender is formed socially and rhetorically rather than being innately biological (p. 102). Further, Condit takes issues with the notion of self-determination, arguing that a person with racist or sexist ideas should not be respected in her or his ability to make decisions about such issues.

Condit proposes that a gender diversity approach is better than a gender dichotomy approach because it does not assume that women’s and men’s uses of rhetoric in the past must always be the same in the future. A gender diversity approach sees gender as entirely socially constructed and in many categories, not just two. Therefore, a gender diversity approach does more than simply compare women and men.

In their response to Condit’s attacks, Foss and colleagues (Foss et al., 1997) point out that Condit's analysis never addresses patriarchy. Foss and Griffin's (1995) claim was never that only men have been included in the history of rhetoric, but that the history of rhetoric has largely been patriarchal. Condit’s argument that the history of rhetoric is diversely gendered misses the point (Foss et al., 1997). In Condit’s assertion that self-determination is flawed because it indiscriminately allows people to decide
what they want to believe—including racists, sexists, and other bigots—Condit overlooks two important points. First, Foss and Griffin (1995) acknowledge that persuasion is still useful; invitational rhetoric is an additional way of understanding human communication behavior, not the only legitimate model. Second, and more important, Foss and colleagues (1997) point out that Condit allows the rhetor to decide which parts of an audience’s identity are integral and which parts are expendable. In the case of bigoted audience members, inviting the audience to hear another perspective (why the rhetor is a feminist or anti-racist activist, for example) is probably more useful than an attempt at persuasion (e.g., telling the audience members they are bigoted and haranguing them to change). Finally, Foss and colleagues (1997) point out that Condit’s understanding of gender might be visionary, but that Condit does not provide specific indications of how the gender diversity approach offers new directions for rhetorical theory.

Foss and colleagues (1997) describe their approach as the feminist-reconstruction approach. It asks who is privileged in contemporary rhetorical theory and how non-dominating tenets of rhetorical theory might be used instead of dominating ones. The feminist-reconstruction approach uses the communicative practices of marginalized groups and is axiologically based in the feminist principles of equality, immanent value, self-determination, and freedom. This approach uses gender as a starting point and begins with the question, (How) does this rhetorical artifact reify or subvert traditional gender roles? This model enacts feminism by disrupting hierarchy, not by claiming that its own ideas are the best.
In applying the feminist-reconstruction approach, this project takes seriously Dow’s (1995) assertions that the theories Foss and Griffin’s (1995) original essay are based on essentialized differences between women and men. Dow warns that equating all attempts at persuasion with domination is dangerous and unwarrantedly separatist. This project, then, works from the perspective that persuasion is not innately problematic or patriarchal in and of itself. The exclusive study of or focus on persuasion in rhetorical theory and criticism is, however, patriarchal as well as reductionistic. Thus, this study asserts that there is no necessary opposition between persuasion and invitation. Indeed, sermons are the ideal rhetorical artifacts for representing communication that may be designed to be simultaneously invitational and persuasive.

When the preacher recognizes the congregants as agents with free will (self-determination) made in the image of God (equality) and with inherent dignity endowed by God (immanent value), the sermon may be considered axiologically invitational. At the same time, as Campbell (1989a) explains, sermons are intended to persuade:

As rhetorical acts, sermons are distinctive in that they are addressed to the converted, and, as a result, the range of possible persuasion is usually limited to reaffirmation and recommitment. Argument is grounded in the authority of a sacred text whose meaning is interpreted and enriched through amplification by the speaker. In this process, audience members renew their covenant with God and pledge to incorporate these values, now more fully understood, into their lives. (p. 123)

In this case, the possibility of a marriage between invitational and persuasive rhetoric is felicitous. Because the sermon is based on a sacred text, the preacher may understand
her task as one she is called of God to do. Refusing to persuade a congregation could be understood as irresponsible. At the same time, the intimate trust a congregation accords its pastor in the care for their spiritual lives should be honored; to preach in a way that is purely persuasive and not at all invitational could be seen as abusive, abrasive, or offensive.

Critical perspectives

Self-reflexivity is one of the defining characteristics of feminism. Dow (1995) argues that feminist rhetorical critics should be up front about the theories they are using and should be intentionally self-reflexive about their work. In other words, feminist critics are most honest when they acknowledge their biases and the limitations of their scholarship as well as its benefits. Meyer (2007) agrees, noting that the rhetorician should unashamedly put herself or himself into scholarship rather than hiding behind the veil of an objective writing style.

Against that backdrop, the methodology of this project is self-reflexive and self-critical. Recognizing that both the writing women in perspective and the challenging rhetorical standards perspective are simultaneously valuable and flawed, this study uses both to analyze the rhetoric of three sermons from across Bishop Marjorie Matthew’s four years of service as an episcopal leader of the church.

This analysis works from the assumption that a scholar can use a methodological perspective for its heuristic and academic value without categorically endorsing the meta-theoretical assumptions on which the methodological perspectives are based. In other words, it is possible to study the rhetoric of one notable woman (as this paper does) without suggesting that only the rhetoric of notable women ought to be studied. It
is possible to analyze evidence of feminine style and examples of invitational rhetoric in an artifact without believing that women’s speech is wholly different from men’s speech or that women and men are fundamentally different.

Post-positivistic and interpretive researchers often employ methodological triangulation, “the use of and comparisons made among multiple methods to study the same phenomenon” (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 2000, p.85). If using quantitative statistical analysis and qualitative theme analysis on the same survey data, for example, offers more insight into the meaning of that data than one method alone, can rhetoricians not also use more than one rhetorical perspective to understand and interpret the ways in which rhetors make meaning? Given that Meyer (2007) also calls for more collaboration among feminist rhetoricians, the use of multiple feminist rhetorical perspectives to understand the same texts is appropriate and generative.

Furthermore, the purpose of scholarship is to generate new knowledge. From the very beginning of the rhetorical tradition when the sophistic teachers of rhetoric told the ancient Greeks that truth is found in the clash of viewpoints, rhetoricians have understood that the tension of disagreement at the overlap of ideas is a rich source of learning. Condit (1990) argues that post-positivistic, interpretive, and rhetorical scholars might have more in common than any is eager to admit, and she suggests that legitimate offspring can come from the marriage of disparate scholarly positions. This analysis takes that same argument to be true for feminist rhetorical perspectives. Two different perspectives can be used to analyze the same phenomenon, and out of that confluence, new knowledge can be generated.
Therefore, this analysis uses both the *writing women in* and the *challenging rhetorical standards* approaches to feminist rhetorical criticism. Rather than considering either approach as its main theoretical foundation, this project considers both approaches to be perspectives, useful tools for analysis. Each perspective offers its own vocabulary, its own discourse for understanding a rhetorical text. The hope in this analysis is that the differences between the perspectives generates a deeper understanding of the ways in which Matthews makes meaning. Exploring what about the artifacts each perspective foregrounds, examining the parts of the artifacts that are emphasized in one perspective and deflected in another, and considering the different conclusions each perspective draws from the same artifact promises to provide a better understanding of the text—certainly to provide more knowledge than using just one perspective.

To the degree that this project looks at the rhetoric of one particular woman, the scope of the project at least fits squarely within the realm of the *writing women in* approach. This is justified because it is a “recognition of female influence in [a] public domain,” and in a domain where a woman had never previously served at such a high level of leadership (Spitzack & Carter, 1987). As Blair and colleagues (1994) note, “entire groups, institutions, or other power networks are speaking when individuals speak” (p. 388). In this case, Matthews’s presence alone spoke to (and of) the whole United Methodist Church. In addition, Matthews spoke for the women who came before her as leaders in the church who were unable to be ordained and women who were ordained but denied opportunities to ascend to the highest levels of leadership. She also spoke for the women who would come after her; among the living clergywoman
bishops of her denomination, Matthews is still a source of courage and inspiration (Craig, 2004).

Thus, using Matthews as a rhetorical case study is indeed an example of writing women in, but this project resists accusations of female tokenism for three important reasons. First, this essay does not claim that a majority of women are unable to rival men’s accomplishments. The historical fact is that Matthews was the first, but she was not the last; the significance of her primacy is undeniable.

Second, while this project does explore the rhetoric of one particular woman in a position of leadership, the existence of this project does not preclude other scholars from exploring issues at the overlap of gender and religious rhetoric at other levels of religious structures. A study on the rhetoric of a clergywoman bishop does not mean that the rhetoric of everyday parishioners, local church pastors, and denominational agencies has to go unexamined. This essay may serve as an inspiration and impetus for such projects.

Third, this project conceptualizes the study of Matthews’s rhetoric as hagiographic. A hagiography is an educational biography useful for teaching life lessons. Most often, hagiographies are written about saints, but they are written in such a way that the reader can identify with and emulate the saint’s life. As van der Vliet (2006) argues, “hagiography has many roles and functions,” but “its most central function is precisely to construct a Christian landscape where the holy is always within reach” (p. 48). Precisely because Matthews’s life is “in reach” of her audience, this analysis argues that the study of Matthews’s rhetoric is hagiographic. It is educationally biographical, and other rhetors can use Matthews’s learn from Matthews’s example.
Beyond the scope of the project, this thesis eschews categorization in either approach because it rightly belongs in both. The hope in juxtaposing these two perspectives is that the confluence of their strengths and a minimization of their weaknesses will generate greater understanding.

Method: Pointing to the Plausibility of Perspective Permeability

Research questions

Based on the literature reviewed above, this project considers one broad question. Two main research questions clarify the broad question, one from each approach to feminist rhetorical criticism. Under the scope of each main question, three sub-questions provide further direction:

**Overall question:** How does Matthews work toward achieving her goals in each sermon?

**RQ1**: How does Matthews’s use feminine style to work toward achieving her goals?

1a: How, when, and with what effect does Matthews use a personal tone?

1b: How, when, and with what effect does Matthews use an inductive organizational pattern?

1c: How, when, and with what effect does Matthews empower the audience as peers?

**RQ2**: In what ways does Matthew’s use invitational rhetoric to work toward achieving her goals?

2a: How, when, and with what effect does Matthews address or implicate equality?
2b: How, when, and with what effect does Matthews address or implicate self-determination?

2c: How, when, and with what effect does Matthews address or implicate immanent value?

These questions are concerned with what is present as well as what is absent in Matthews’s messages. In other words, the analysis considers these questions both positively and negatively. For example, in answering 1b, evidence of deductive organizational patterns can be considered from the critical lens of Dow and Tonn’s (1993) observation that a rhetor can use a traditionally masculine style to achieve feminist goals.

In the second research question, this project retains Foss and Griffin’s (1995) definitions of terms with one exception. Because Condit (1997) specifically objects to Foss and Griffin’s (1995) understanding of self-determination, which implies that the rhetor holds an unconditional positive regard for the audience, self-determination herein will be understood more liberally as a genuine respect for the audience’s freedom and agency. This definition rejects the Fossian notion that audience members are always necessarily experts in their own decision-making, but it holds that in a just social order, audience members have a right to make their own choices.

Artifacts

This project considers three sermons from Matthews’s four years as a bishop. The sermons, in chronological order, are “Chosen for Challenge,” dated February 16, 1982; “The Sign of Discipleship,” dated May 1, 1983 and May 15, 1983; and “We Shall Go Forth,” dated October 13, 1984. The sermons were selected from the Matthews
papers at the General Commission on Archives and History of the United Methodist Church.

These three sermons were selected because complete manuscripts were available and some evidence suggests that they were preached either multiple times (the first two sermons) or for a diverse audience (in the final sermon). They represent different times in Matthews’s service as a bishop (her second year, her third year, and shortly after retirement, respectively). On several of her typewritten sermon manuscripts, Matthews has dates and locations at the top or in the margins on the first page in her own handwriting. Presumably, these annotations serve as reminders to her about when and where she delivered adaptations of those sermons. The repetition of a sermon suggests that it was heard by a larger cross-section of her constituents and that it represents some of the themes she generally communicated homiletically.

Several drafts of “Chosen for Challenge” appear in Matthews’s papers, suggesting that this was a sermon she used on multiple occasions. One draft of the sermon is written in Matthews’s handwriting. “The Sign of Discipleship” was written as a confirmation sermon for a church in Las Vegas, suggesting that Matthews was invited there as a guest speaker. In Matthews’s handwriting, the typewritten manuscript is annotated “Colby 5/15/83,” suggesting that Matthews preached the sermon at the Colby United Methodist Church in Wisconsin two weeks after she delivered it in the context for which it was originally written. In each case, this analysis will consider the last typewritten draft of each sermon. Where Matthews has made written changes (e.g., inserting words, changing words, or deleting words), this analysis assumes that those changes were reflected in her delivery. Making handwritten changes to typewritten
manuscripts is not uncommon for speakers, especially in the early 1980s when producing a new draft meant retyping the entire document rather than making the changes on word processing software.

“We Shall Go Forth” was a sermon written for the meeting of the Wisconsin Conference United Methodist Women; it was preached six weeks after Matthews retired. Whereas the other sermons this study analyzes were preached for local congregations, “We Shall Go Forth” was preached for an audience that included people from all over the state of Wisconsin. Presumably, the audience for this sermon was entirely—or nearly entirely—women.

Conclusion

Before 1980, no woman had ever held a position of leadership in the organized Christian church as the office of Bishop. Marjorie Swank Matthews changed that, and as the first person ever to be called woman and bishop, Matthews is clearly a worthy subject for rhetorical study, especially given the challenging and paradoxical history of patriarchy in the Christian tradition. Feminist rhetorical scholarship broadly falls into two perspectives, writing women in and challenging rhetorical standards. While neither perspective is perfect, combining the two perspectives offers the potential for insightful and productive knowledge generation. Thus, this project considers three of Matthews’s sermons using both perspectives as tools for analysis.
Chapter 2: Facing the Challenges in “Chosen for Challenge”

The first sermon this project considers is “Chosen for Challenge.” Theologically, the sermon focuses on the idea that God calls all people and challenges God’s people to work for justice. Matthews’s goal is greater than just communicating that idea, though. She also makes it clear in the sermon that she is disturbed that women’s history of service in the church is often downplayed or unknown. Matthews homiletically writes women in to church history throughout the sermon. Matthews manages that goal using an appropriate tone and organization of the sermon. This chapter begins with a description of the manuscripts available for study and the information the content and annotation of those manuscripts offer about the sermon’s contexts. Next, the sermon is summarized, and finally analyzed.

Texts and Contexts

One handwritten and two typewritten copies of the sermon are available in the archival materials. The handwritten copy and the first typewritten copy indicate that the sermon was delivered on February 16, 1982. The second typewritten copy is a slightly expanded version of the first. Though the second typewritten manuscript is not dated, one of the addendums to the second edition of the sermon reveals that it was preached at least once in July 1984. The second typewritten manuscript alludes to the denomination’s recent election of two more women bishops as well as a Hispanic bishop. These allusions suggest that the sermon was probably delivered to the multi-state regional body that elected those bishops or to another general church audience. Had she made the same allusions in a local church setting, she would have needed to be more specific. Most lay members in local church settings do not keep up with news
about denomination-wide episcopal elections. Cited references throughout this chapter come from the 1982 version of the sermon except where otherwise indicated because the 1982 version is Matthews’s original version of the sermon, and the sermon (with the exception of the 1984 addendum that suggests the general church audience) was written for a local congregation.

Summary

The main point of the sermon is that God calls people to work for justice. The sermon is based on a text from the Book of Amos. Amos was a shepherd and fig grower who leaves his hometown of Tekoa in the southern Jewish nation of Judah and goes to Bethel in Northern Israel. Amos’s message is that the people there need to reform their ways because they are straying from the hopes God has for them. Amos challenges the people to live up to God’s standards for justice (Amos 7:7-17).

Matthews begins her sermon by imagining that Amos might have been a woman. She then explains that God makes choices that seem strange when God calls people:

I have [a] fond dream that someday some very sharp graduate student will discover that the prophet Amos was actually a woman. And the reason why I am tempted to think of Amos in that way is because Amos was a most unlikely candidate to carry the message of God’s justice to a society bent on injustice. (¶ 1)

Matthews notes that many women have been called by God but ignored by society, and she offers the example of Anna Howard Shaw. While Shaw is revered by many women’s organizations for her role in the early feminist movement, Matthews had only recently learned that Shaw was also an advocate for women’s ordination and was
herself one of the first women licensed to preach in a denomination that was a predecessor to the United Methodist Church. Matthews was surprised: “The church is just beginning to recover that large portion of its history [i.e., women’s contributions to church history] that has been tucked away in dusty files and faulty memories of those who had a vested interest in the perpetuation of the status quo” (¶ 5). Matthews regards Shaw as a symbol of courage and persistence, a nineteenth-century Amos proclaiming a message of justice and fairness to a society that did not want to hear that message (especially from a woman).

Matthews continues by noting that everyone is called: “We are all called to many things in the service of God” (¶ 8). Then she contemplates the mystery of God’s choice of prophets: “Why me? Why a middle-age mother with a teen-age son, with no formal education beyond high school, Why me? Why you? or why Anna Howard Shaw, or why Amos” (¶ 9). Amos was called, she contends, to challenge Israel with the image of the plumb line, a metaphor that illustrated that they had fallen short of God’s standards for justice. Just as a plumb line shows whether a wall is straight, Amos is called to offer the Israelites a standard to measure the metaphorical straightness—or correctness—of their own lives. The metaphor of the plumb line allows Amos to point out the crookedness of the Israelites’ lives. Matthews then names clergywomen and laywomen from different denominations whom God called to Christian ministry. She contends that they stand as symbols of courage because they served at a time in history when mainline institutional churches excluded women from positions of leadership in both polity and practice. Matthews tells the congregation that they, like Amos, must challenge people to meet God’s standard for justice. Matthews contends that God gives people
courage, a gift that is often necessary for accepting God’s call, and she notes that God calls people whose presence alone is confrontational. The recognition of this confrontational nature allows Matthews to move into the moral of her sermon: God chooses people for challenge, courage, and confrontation. She then concludes the sermon by charging the congregation to accept that call.

Analysis

The sermon teaches that all people are called to challenge, courage, and confrontation while also writing women into the audience’s understanding of church history. It does this by presenting the confrontation of injustice as a theological imperative. Matthews does this in two ways. First, she uses an organization pattern that foreshadows the moral that appears explicitly only at the close of the sermon. Second, she blends a personal and egalitarian tone with examples that emphasize equality and empowerment.

Foreshadowing

As the summary noted, Matthews does not reveal the moral of her sermon until the final few sentences. Matthews begins by using examples that foreshadow the issues of challenge, courage, and confrontation. Similarly, she uses an inductive approach to make her argument that women have been left out of church history and that the rich example of these women needs to be recovered. The sermon’s introduction foreshadows both of her goals when she opens the sermon with her hypothetical gender reassignment of Amos. This preview does not reveal the specific points Matthews will cover in her sermon, but it does offer insight into both of the sermon’s goals. Matthews builds up to her thesis throughout the sermon by using a variety of
stories and examples that offer the audience glimpses of her claim that God calls people to challenge, courage, and confrontation.

Matthews introduces the extended illustration of Anna Howard Shaw without directly connecting Shaw to the issues of challenge, courage, and confrontation. The congregation is expected to make connections between Shaw and Amos. The use of Shaw simultaneously illustrates Matthews’s argument that “the church is just beginning to recover a rich heritage, its hidden treasure of lives of women, chosen by God, but invisible to society” (¶ 3). The inductive structure allows Matthews to achieve her goal of writing women into her congregation’s understanding of church history. This objective becomes embedded within her eventual goal of communicating the main points of her sermon. Later, the Shaw example serves to instantiate Matthews’s points about challenge, courage, and confrontation as well. Because of the inductive structure, the example is more versatile than it would otherwise be.

Tone and Examples

Matthews transitions from the first part of her sermon, which includes the extended example of Anna Howard Shaw along with other examples, to the second part of her sermon, wherein she talks directly about her main points. She broaches these points with a set of rhetorical questions, each beginning with “why.” She acknowledges that she is called, but then asks, “Why me? Why a middle-age mother with a teen-age son, with no formal education beyond high school, Why me? Why you?” (¶ 8).

Matthews transitions from the example of Shaw to her main points creating an identification between Shaw and the congregation. Matthews uses her own life as a way to help the congregation relate to Shaw by emphasizing emotions she experienced and
questions she had as she first entered seminary. Like her, the audience might also feel unequipped, unqualified, and unprepared for the tasks ahead of them. Matthews’s personal tone allows her to connect with the congregation in a way that the example of Shaw might not, and that allowed Matthews to move on to the revelation of her main points. The application of those points to the lives of her congregation was more salient against the backdrop of Matthews’s personal references than against that of the Shaw example by itself.

Shaw was a great woman, and understanding her contribution to church history is valuable, but using the example of Shaw exclusively might indeed suggest to the congregation that only a few select women can reach the level Shaw did (see Biesecker, 1992). As the denomination’s first woman bishop, Matthews’s use of herself as an example could come with the same risk, but two things mitigate against this possibility. First, Matthews’s personal tone helps to encourage identification between her and the congregation. Second, she eschews discussion of her role as bishop to focus instead on her experience when she was called to ordained ministry. She was a middle-aged mother without even a college degree when the ordination process requires a bachelor’s degree and a master of divinity degree.

Matthews establishes herself as an equal with the audience when she questions her own qualifications for a calling from God. In asking “Why me? Why you? or why Anna Howard Shaw, or why Amos” (¶ 8), Matthews positions the congregation on the same level as an Old Testament prophet, one of the denomination’s earliest clergywoman, and the denomination’s first woman bishop. No one of these persons, in
Matthews’s construction, is more qualified than another to be called of God to embrace the challenges God offers.

The tone of the sermon also frames the audience as Matthews’s peers and helps the audience feel empowered. Matthews uses examples that cross gender and racial boundaries. Matthews says that Amos was called,

   just as women have been chosen in the past—not only Anna Howard Shaw, but Antoinette Brown (Ord. Congregationalist in 1853), Lydia Sexton (United Bretheren), Eunice Cobb, Phoebe Palmer, Mary Fletcher, Hester Ann Rogers, Georgia Harkness, and each one of you. (¶ 9)

Again, Matthews includes her audience alongside these influential women in church history. For Matthews, the people listening to the sermon are no different than these women or than Amos: all are called by God to confront whatever injustice is in their midst.

In addition to specifically gendered example, Matthews includes examples of other figures identified with challenging racial and nationalist oppressions:

   Martin Luther King’s very presence was a rebuke to the bigots of the 1960’s—Mahatma Gandhi didn’t have to make many great speeches—his quiet rebellion and identification with India’s poor was a rebuke to the powers of his day. (¶ 12)

The 1984 iteration of the sermon expands this list of empowering examples to include individuals recently elected as bishops:

   [Amos] was chosen for confrontation, and for courage—just as those others we mentioned earlier: Moses, Joshua, Abraham and Sarah, Mary and Joseph, and those we can mention today, our church’s first Asian Bishop, our first Hispanic
Bishop in the United States, our first black woman Bishop, our second white woman Bishop, our first black male Bishop in the Southeastern Jurisdiction. What a week this has been for the church, and the challenges that have been made to societies or institutions that do not measure up to the standards of God’s justice.

(July 1984 version, ¶ 8)

Matthews’s use of this rich diversity of examples empowers her audience because she is able to reach out to a wide variety of people and illustrate that her point applies to all people. These empowering examples facilitate Matthews’s goals in the sermon because they help the audience see that no matter who they are, the points in the sermon apply to them. Matthews’s references to the newly elected bishops suggests that these bishops instantiate God’s call for challenge and courage just as the biblical figures do. To the degree that anyone in the audience can relate to any of these bishops, they join the same lineage of courage that extends through Biblical figures to people in the present day.

In addition to the empowering nature of Matthews’s examples, Matthews rhetorically constructs her audience as peers through her use of pronouns. Matthews’s use of the words we and us throughout the sermon positions the congregation members as Matthews’s peers. When she gets to the part of the sermon where she challenges the congregation to act, Matthews uses phrases like “We have been chosen to carry that challenge to our communities and into our homes” (¶ 10), “God chooses us for courage—not that we have it to begin with, but that through God’s grace, it is given to us when we need it” (¶ 11), and “God calls us for Challenge, for Courage, for Confrontation” (¶ 13).
Matthews is not the preacher-bishop telling the congregation what they must do. Instead, she is another Christian alongside the congregation in their efforts to live faithfully. She shares in the calling she asks the congregation to accept. She is simultaneously the preacher and the congregant, both issuing and receiving the challenge. She has the same concerns, the same questions, the same fears, and the same responsibilities as the others in the congregation; she just happens to be the one delivering the sermon. By presenting herself as another Christian woman in an audience of Christians, Matthews facilitates the congregation's acceptance of the message because the message feels more authentic when the speaker includes herself in its implications. This strategy is one feature of sermons that makes sermons as a genre compatible with invitational rhetoric. Certainly not every preacher includes her- or himself in the sermon’s directives, but Matthews exemplifies this quality.

Conclusion

Matthews's goals in “Chosen for Challenge” appear to be twofold. Her main goal was likely to communicate her belief that God calls all people to work for God's standard of justice. Her secondary goal seems to have been to introduce notable women in church history to her congregation, and she contends that those women’s stories are important for the church to know. Matthews’s organization and tone help her achieve these goals.

The sermon’s most compelling feature is Matthews’s effort to write women in, or, in this case, speak women into church history. Matthews’s work in this sermon is analogous, on a small scale, to Campbell’s work in the field of rhetorical criticism. Campbell’s (1988) definition of feminist criticism emphasizes this:
Feminist scholarship is distinguished by the systematic inclusion of women, by an absence of language and/or perspective that degrades women or minorities, by rigorous testing of assumptions that hearken back to stereotypes and mythology, and by a concern to rectify the omissions, the degradation, and the errors of the past. (p. 4)

To accomplish those goals, Campbell says rhetoricians must recover the unpublished and/or out-of-print speeches of women of extraordinary rhetorical ability, and through critical analysis we must show how and why these works are eloquent, that they are vital to our understanding of rhetorical history and how humans have been symbolized. (p. 4)

Matthews’s purpose in “Chosen for Challenge” parallels to Campbell’s goals for feminist criticism. Matthews’s contention in the sermon that “the church is just beginning to recover that large portion of its history that has been tucked away in dusty files” due to a “conspiracy of silence” (¶ 5-6) is a similar lamentation to that Campbell (1989a) makes when she notes that “women have no parallel” to men in the rhetorical canon (p. 1).

Matthews introduces her audience to Shaw through an extended example, but Matthews also lists several other notable women from the last two centuries of church history. Matthews does not say enough about Antoinette Brown [Blackwell], Lydia Sexton, Eunice Cobb, Phoebe Palmer, Mary Fletcher, Hester Ann Rogers, or Georgia Harkness for the audience to understand why many of them are notable, but in listing their names, Matthews establishes that Shaw is not an isolated, extreme, enigmatic example of a woman serving in Christian ministry.
Matthews links her examples of Shaw and others back to her audience, thus mitigating again the harmful veneration of famous women as superior to everyday women that Biesecker (1992) warns feminist rhetoricians to avoid. After Matthews lists the aforementioned group of notable women, she concludes the sentence with “and each one of you” (¶ 9). Matthews puts the people in her audience on par with these notable women from church history, and her justification is a spiritual one. According to Matthews, all are called by God. God’s call is the denominator that equalizes the women who make history with those who have not and will not. It is not their particular achievements Matthews celebrates, but rather their courage. Similarly, she is not calling the audience to duplicate their achievements, but rather to emulate their courage.

Matthews also avoids the “Great Woman” problem in her references to herself. In disclosing to the audience that she was “a middle-age mother with a teen-age son, with no formal education beyond high school” when she was called to ministry, Matthews reminds the audience that she faced challenges and doubts about responding to God’s call. Matthews confesses that she and other bishops “wrestle with” questions about the purpose of their calls (¶ 8). In this way, Matthews is just like her audience. Technically, no one in the audience can achieve exactly what Matthews has achieved—it is impossible for more than one person to be the first woman bishop in any mainline Protestant denomination—but this sermon de-emphasizes the particularities of that achievement and instead focuses on the common struggles all people of faith have to respond to God’s call.

For many of the same reasons that Matthews manages to write women into church history without falling victim to the pitfalls of female tokenism, Matthews’s
sermon can also be understood as an example of invitational rhetoric. That Matthews considers herself an equal with the audience is evident in her positioning herself alongside the audience as someone called by God but who questions and doubts that call, both when she first experienced it and even as a bishop. Matthews does not claim that everyone has the same call, but she affords the same importance to everyone’s call. All people are called by God, so no one call is more valuable than another. This is consistent with Foss and Griffin’s (1995) understanding of equality, wherein differences between people exist, but the differences are not assigned value judgments.

Matthews affirms the immanent value of the congregation when she tells the congregation that everyone is called, “each according to his or her own talents—God knows what those are” (¶ 13). She goes on to say that the challenge to the church and the world is the “wholeness of creation” which God “intended from the beginning of time” (¶ 13). Matthews also suggests that “the standards of God’s justice” include a “demand for recognition and concern for the human rights of each person” (¶ 10). That all people are involved and that the wholeness of creation is the goal are directly in line with the concept of immanent value. This exultation of each person’s gifts and the dignity of all humanity is empowering.

The third feature of invitational rhetoric, self-determination, is not evident in this sermon. As the previous chapter suggested, self-determination as defined by Foss and Griffin (1995) requires an unconditional positive regard for the audience’s agency to make their own best decisions. The absolutism of this understanding of self-determination conflicts with the purpose of most sermons, which include appeals from the authority of scripture and the commandments of God (Campbell, 1989a). Matthews
wants her audience to embrace God’s challenge to act courageously and confront injustice. While the audience can choose to reject this call, Matthews’s desire is that they accept it. Even so, the sermon can be understood as feminist and even as invitational since each manifestation of feminist rhetoric will foreground different feminist values in response to the context the rhetor faces. In homiletic contexts, self-determination will rarely be the most salient feminist value reflected.

For all these reasons, Matthews’s rhetoric is truly hagiographic. Matthews’s life is accessible to her audience, and the audience can learn from Matthews. Matthews is not so great a figure that she is beyond emulation. In this sermon, Matthews illustrates her ability to construct a sermon with an invitational tone without essentializing women or shying away from the homiletic tasks she faces. This trend persists in the other sermons considered in this project. The next chapter explores a decidedly persuasive and simultaneously invitation sermon, “The Sign of Discipleship.”
Chapter 3: Two Goals in “The Sign of Discipleship”

This project now turns to the sermon “The Sign of Discipleship.” The sermon is focused on the command of Jesus to love one another, and the main point of the sermon is to encourage the congregation to show love for other people. Matthews also has another goal in the sermon, which is to put forward a new image for the United Methodist Church. She compares the United Methodist Church to intertwined grape vines because grape vines wrap around one another very tightly and serve as a support for one another. According to Matthews, members of the United Methodist Church do likewise.

Text and Context

“The Sign of Discipleship” is a sermon Matthews preached at least twice. A typed heading at the top of the sermon manuscript says “Las Vegas – Confirmation Sunday, May 1, 1983.” According to a handwritten annotation in the corner of the manuscript, Matthews used the sermon again at Colby United Methodist Church in Wisconsin on May 15, 1983. The analysis that follows considers the sermon as one written with an audience of confirmation students in mind. While still appropriate for the recycled iteration two weeks later, the content of the sermon is especially appropriate for an audience that includes persons who are about to join the United Methodist Church. As a part of the membership ritual in the denomination, the congregation affirms its own membership vows alongside the confirmation students who are taking those vows for the first time (Franklyn, 1992). Thus, the sermon’s specific references to United Methodist membership are especially relevant for the confirmation students, but also for the church members who are affirming the students’ decision to join the denomination.
Summary

Matthews begins the sermon by reading a short passage from John 13 wherein Jesus instructs the disciples to love one another. This is an excerpt of the full text for the confirmation service, which was probably read before the sermon was delivered. That repetition establishes the John 13 passage as the main text for the homily. Matthews then says that love is what keeps the denomination united despite differences in theological perspective and social position among its members. Matthews celebrates the diversity of opinions that characterizes the denomination, and she claims that love unites the denomination to such a degree that the theological and ideological differences are not divisive. Then, Matthews emphasizes that being a disciple of Jesus means following Jesus, and she notes that doing so can sometimes seem difficult:

“Following Jesus” meant following his teachings and his example, and the disciples understood that, too—being willing to be a servant to each other, sharing food and shelter, bringing healing to those who needed it, visiting those imprisoned in dungeons or in chains of their own manufacture—but loving one another? Wasn’t that going just a little too far? (¶ 3)

Next, Matthews explains that the call is to love one’s neighbor, and the term neighbor means everyone. In defining neighbor, Matthews notes that “Jesus put no restrictions on the commandment” (¶ 4). Matthews explains that the term neighbor originally just referred to family members, was later extended to include traveling strangers, and was finally universalized by Jesus.

Matthews then paraphrases a section from John 15 where Jesus calls the disciples friends: “Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his
friends" (¶ 5). She explains that Jesus has the same message here as in the main sermon text from John 13, but that in chapter 15, Jesus uses the metaphor of the true vine. Matthews then explains the process of pruning vines. She notes that some grape vines grow at the episcopal residence, and she has learned that tending to the vines means keeping the ones that are producing fruit and pruning the ones that do not produce fruit. The challenge in doing that is that the vines are intertwined, so pruning just one is difficult. The act of pruning seems to run counter to the notion that people are called to love one another, but the relationship between the vines is what makes the pruning difficult. No vine can ever be completely cut out because separating the vines from one another is nearly impossible. For Matthews, this represents the love and support church members have for one another.

Following the introduction of the vine metaphor, Matthews then asks whether loving one another is actually possible. She says that human beings have a selfish nature that makes loving one another nearly impossible, “but what is impossible to human beings is possible to God” (¶ 8). The vines are wrapped around one another to support each other. That, Matthews argues, is an appropriate metaphor for the United Methodist Church. In the church, people love and support one another because of God’s power:

We are bound together by our love for God—not all of us are productive members at this point—but that really doesn’t matter—right now—because the vines do not prune themselves—our job is to support one another [...] and] to love one another because God loves us. (¶ 10)
Matthews tells the congregation that the hope of the world is that God’s love never fails, and she concludes with a story about the disciple John. John was the only disciple who lived to an old age, and tradition holds that John would go to homes where groups of Christians were meeting and remind them to love one another. In closing, Matthews says, “We need to love one another for Christ’s sake, and that is the sign of our discipleship. ‘Little children, love one another!’ So be it. Amen” (¶ 12).

Analysis

In this sermon, Matthews works toward her goals by using three strategies. First, Matthews uses an inclusive tone that connects with her audience. Second, she redefines the holiness code and the Hebrew concept of neighborliness. Third, she employs arguments by refutation and example.

Tone

Matthews’s tone in “The Sign of Discipleship” is similar to that in “Chosen for Challenge.” Matthews uses plural, self-inclusive pronouns throughout the sermon. In so doing, she includes herself in the sermon’s imperatives and directives. In her conclusion, Matthews implores the congregation: “We are all children in a world too full of frightening possibilities, we need to support one another” (¶ 12). Instead of a second person construction that frames the audience as people in need of direction, Matthews uses first person, passively telling the congregation that she, too, lives in a frightening world and needs to respond by loving and supporting other people.

Her use of plural pronouns has a similar effect when she describes humankind’s proclivity for selfishness earlier in the sermon. Matthews asks, “How can anyone possibly love one another all the time? And the answer is, of course, we cannot of
ourself [sic]—it is truly impossible, given our selfish human natures” (¶ 8). In this case, the use of the first person pronoun is not just appropriate but necessary. By acknowledging that she struggles with selfishness and needs God’s grace in order to show love, Matthews positions herself as an equal with her audience. All are called to love, and all find it impossible on their own. The challenge, then, is made clear to the whole audience. The newest members of the denomination are reminded on the day they are joining the church that they are called to love, and they are encouraged to know that when that task is challenging for them, even the bishop shares in that struggle.

**Redefining Traditional Hebrew Concepts**

During this sermon, Matthews asks her audience to consider new understandings of the holiness code from Leviticus and the concept of neighborliness. Matthews opens the sermon by repeating John 13:34, of scripture the congregation had previously heard. The repetition establishes those verses as the central verses for the homily. Later in the sermon, Matthews alludes to the holiness code of Leviticus 19, another text the congregation heard read before the sermon:

[Jesus’ disciples] knew the demands of the Holiness Code: “You shall be holy, as I am holy—or because I am holy.” You shall keep the commandments because not keeping them makes God of no account. You shall be just and merciful because to be unjust and unmerciful is to denigrate the power of God in your life—and you shall love your neighbor as yourself—simply because I am the Lord and I say so! These are the words from Leviticus on the living of the holy life, required of every Israelite. (¶ 4)
Matthews goes on to explain that the definition of *neighbor* developed from meaning one’s relatives to including strangers without a place to call home and finally, in Jesus’ conceptions of the term, to including everyone. Thus, Matthews uses the Old Testament reading for the day to support the point she is making about the importance of loving one another. The main text is Jesus’ command to the disciples to love one another, and the text from Leviticus serves two functions. The text itself, as a part of the canon of Christian scripture, is an additional piece of evidence to support Matthews’s challenge to the congregation; the call to love one another is not new, but is an historic part of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Second, the Leviticus text is a backdrop for Jesus’ original articulation of the command. The disciples were familiar with the directive to love their neighbors, so in commanding them to love each other, Jesus was repeating and extending something the disciples already knew. In pointing out the development of the definition of *neighbor*, Matthews highlights that Jesus does more than repeat the holiness code; Jesus explicitly makes the holiness code more inclusive. The challenge to love each other is one Jesus makes to the disciples, and Matthews makes the same challenge to congregation.

Matthews later introduces an additional scripture passage to reinforce her point about love when she reads the passage from John 15 where Jesus uses the metaphor of the vine. By that point in the sermon, Matthews has already established the relationship between the Old Testament and Gospel readings for the service, so the addition of another passage does more than reinforce her point. The introduction of the passage with the vine metaphor allows Matthews to use a concrete, practical example to illustrate the point she is making about love and to introduce her metaphor for the
denomination. When Matthews explains the process of pruning the vines in her own garden, she tells the congregation,

Each and every vine receives individual attention—the branch is traced back to its main source, the new growth noted, and those that produce are carefully pruned back, and those branches that have not produced are cut away. It is important that each branch be judged separately, on its own merits (¶ 7).

On the surface, this example of the scripture does not sound loving. Branches that have not produced are cut away. However, Matthews returns to the example and completes the metaphor:

as many of you may know, when I started to trim those vines, I discovered [that] it was almost impossible to separate them—they had twined themselves around each other for mutual support, and the tendrils were so strong they could not be pulled apart. (¶ 9)

Therefore, the branches that were producing fruit and those that were not producing fruit were in a mutually supportive relationship, and that relationship made the branches impossible to separate or divide. The harsh, judgmental act of cutting away any vine that is not prolific is overcome by the mutually supportive relationship the vines have with each other. Because the most prolific and least prolific vines are intertwined so tightly, none of them can be cut away without hurting all of them. This example, inspired by the third scripture passage Matthews uses, sets up Matthews’s metaphor for the United Methodist Church, a denomination “bound together by our love for God” even though “not all of us are productive members.” After all, each member’s job is “to support each other, to help each other grow in grace, to fulfill the expectations that God
has for us” (¶ 10). The three scripture passages, then, work in tandem to offer support for Matthews’s point and offer her audience different examples and illustrations to which they might relate.

**Arguments by Example and Refutation**

Matthews moves from her discussion of the scripture passage to a rather prosaic example from contemporary church life. After she reads the first scripture passage, Matthews relates a story about attending the 1980 General Conference, the quadrennial meeting where United Methodist polity is discussed, debated, voted on, and updated (see Custer, 2001). Matthews says: “I thought the sign outside the General Conference hall in Indianapolis in 1980 was prophetic and true when it proclaimed for all the world to see [that] this was the General Conference of the United Methodist Church!” (¶ 2, emphasis in the original). This example appears in the beginning of the sermon where Matthews previews the idea that the denomination values a plurality of viewpoints. Despite differences in opinion in the church, Matthews holds that the church remains united, so she concurs with the placard-maker’s underscoring the word United. This message of unity despite differences is important for any congregation to hear, but it is especially appropriate for an audience that includes new confirmands because Matthews is teaching them about a cornerstone value of the United Methodist tradition. Matthews simultaneously affirms their diversity of opinion and reminds them to remain united as “the church of Jesus Christ in the world” (¶ 2). For Matthews, the placard is a modern-day application of Jesus’ directive to the disciples to love one another as Jesus loved them. The example is a practical way of applying the lessons from the scripture
passage, and the use of a short example allows Matthews to transition to discussing the
difficulty of following Jesus’ command to love one another.

As important as loving one another is, Matthews recognizes that it is not always
easy. To set up her discussion about the difficulty of loving one another all the time,
Matthews quotes Sigmund Freud: “I think it was Sigmund Freud who said that
Christianity was the most impossible religion there was—with impossible demands—
How can anyone love one another all the time?” (¶ 8). Here, Matthews uses a strategy
of refutation. She establishes Freud’s point of dissent, and then she answers it with the
assurance that “what is impossible to human beings is possible to God” (¶ 8). In
Matthews’s point-counterpoint examination of this issue, she is not hostile or
confrontational in the face of Freud’s skepticism. She agrees that Freud is right: loving
one another is impossible for human beings alone, but with God, it is possible.
Matthews’s willingness to consider a dissenting point of view and treat it with fairness
and respect is representative of Matthews’s veneration of a plurality of viewpoints and
an embracing of divergent opinions. Freud’s point is not a straw argument Matthews
knocks down, but rather, Freud’s argument becomes an important piece of Matthews’s
enthymemematic reasoning. The refutation of Freud generates that premise that loving one
another is impossible for human beings but possible with God. The unstated premise is
that God helps people of faith to love, and the conclusion is that people of faith can love
one another with God’s help.

Matthews concludes the sermon by sharing a final anecdote:

The story is told of the disciple John that he lived to a very old age. He was the
only disciple to do so, and after seeing his friends martyred and persecuted, he
remained faithful to the great experience that had been his—walking daily with Jesus, hearing [Jesus’] words, and trying to live them. He was so old and frail that he had to be carried into the midst of the Christians that were meeting in homes, or other secret places, and he would sit there in the middle of the group, look at each one, and say, “Little children, love one another.” (¶ 12).

Matthews offers very little interpretation of the story, except to say that “in a world too full of frightening possibilities, we need to support one another—we need to love one another for Christ’s sake, and that is the sign of our discipleship” (¶ 12). The only disciple to live to old age attended meetings as long as he had life, even though he had to be carried there, and the one piece of advice he offered after spending three years with Jesus during Jesus’ earthly ministry and seeing his friends and colleagues martyred was “love one another.” Of all the teachings of Jesus about which John could have decided to remind the first century church, John chose the commandment to love one another. The story powerfully sets up the impact of that simple statement and allows Matthews to conclude that loving one another is the sign of Christian discipleship. Matthews’s brief interpretation of the story extends John’s advice from the first century of the Common Era to the twentieth century. Matthews does not need to detail why the world is a frightening place because the focus of her point is the enduring importance of loving one another.

Conclusion

Matthews achieves two goals in “The Sign of Discipleship”: to encourage the audience to love one another and to introduce her metaphor for the United Methodist Church as a tangle of vines each supporting and holing up the other. Matthews
achieves those goals through a tone with which the audience can connect and through a variety of strategies including appeals to scriptural authority, argumentation, and examples.

This sermon has a persuasive goal. Matthews wants the audience to love each other, and she especially wants to communicate to the class of newly confirmed church members that love is the most telling sign of Christian discipleship. Because Matthews communicates that message while steadfastly affirming the equality and immanent value of her audience, this analysis argues that “Sign of Discipleship” is an example of persuasive rhetoric that Foss and Griffin (1995) would consider consistent with the feminist values they discuss.

Foss and Griffin (1995) seem heavily critical of persuasion. Using the work of Gearheart (1979), who considers any act of persuasion to be violent they assert that persuasion is linked to patriarchy, but Foss and Griffin (1995) recognize that “persuasion is often necessary” (p. 5). For Foss and colleagues (1997), the key to feminist rhetorical criticism is not a legalistic prohibition against persuasion as much as a point of view that reflects on how and whether a rhetorical artifact reifies or subverts traditional gender roles and hegemonic patriarchal oppression. To that end, “Sign of Discipleship” is a sermon that can be described as simultaneously persuasive and feminist because it offers insight into how a persuasive speech can also be invitational.

Matthews insists that the audience accept her message about the commandment to love. So strong is her assertion of that point that she calls it the sign the Christian discipleship. Love—more than anything else—symbolizes or represents the Christian faith. That message is clear from the beginning of the sermon and is spread throughout
the entire message. Matthews’s insistence that the audience accept her message is persuasive, but the style in which she presents the message and the reasons she offers are consistent with the feminist values Foss and colleagues articulate (Foss & Griffin, 1995; Foss et al., 1997).

As the above explication about Matthews’s use of first person plural pronouns indicates, Matthews views herself as an equal with the audience. Matthews sees herself as both the preacher and a member of the audience. The message to love one another does not come from Matthews, but from God, and Matthews simply delivers that message. Matthews’s admission that love is not easy is further evidence that she sees herself as an equal to the audience. Never does Matthews claim that she has Christian discipleship figured out and now has to teach everyone else how to live; instead, Matthews identifies with the struggle her audience has to live out Jesus’ command to love one another.

Even more poignant that Matthews’s focus on equality is the sermon’s affirmation of the immanent value of the audience. When Matthews talks about the historical etymology of the term neighbor, she makes it clear to her audience that she believes all people are loved by God and have value in God’s eyes. She intentionally reminds the audience that no one is excluded. That means all people have worth. This idea is further cemented in the vine metaphor. Instead of cutting away people who are not presently productive, Matthews submits that the role of the church ought to be one of support and love for all persons. A member’s worth is not determined by how active she or he is at a particular moment because all people have value in the eyes of God. Matthews’s
affirmation of the plurality of theological and ideological perspectives in the
denomination also forwards her beliefs in the value of every person's worth.

For these reasons, even “Sign of Discipleship,” the sermon considered herein
that is the most persuasive, is arguably a feminist text. This homily further illustrates the
utility of considering Matthews’s rhetoric as hagiographical. In this sermon, as in the
others this project analyzes, Matthews is accessible. Neither her life nor her rhetoric are
beyond imitation. For the audience and the rhetorician, Matthews is an example who is
both ideal and possible to emulate. The next chapter considers the sermon “We Shall
Go Forth,” another sermon where Matthews’s rhetoric reflects the feminist values that
are emphasized by Foss and colleagues.
Chapter 4: “We Shall Go Forth,” Where the Question is the Goal

The final sermon to consider is “We Shall Go Forth.” This sermon, preached to a gathering of the United Methodist Women (UMW) in Wisconsin, focuses on that group’s purpose. The sermon considers the question of the organization’s future goals and purposes. Matthews reflects on some of the organization’s aims from years past, offers a vision of possible goals for the future, and closes with a question to the congregation: In the coming years, how will the organization choose to focus its energies?

Text and Context

Unlike the other manuscripts under consideration in this project, evidence suggests that this sermon was preached only once. Under the sermon’s title on the first page of the manuscript, Matthews typed, “Conference UMW – Madison, Wisconsin,” and under that, the date, “October 13, 1984.” The content of the sermon is highly specific to that occasion as well, and a flyer for the event is attached to the sermon manuscript. The flyer indicates that the event is the centennial celebration of the United Methodist Women (UMW) and predecessor groups in Wisconsin.

The polity of the United Methodist Church requires that each local congregation have a chapter of the UMW (Olson, 2004). The purpose of the UMW chapter is “to know God and experience freedom as whole persons through Jesus Christ; to develop a creative, supportive fellowship; and to expand concepts of mission through participation in the global ministries of the Church” (Olson, 2004, p. 169). UMW chapters actively advocate for and support mission work that helps women and children around the world. On local and global levels, the UMW leads the denomination in raising money for
mission work and helping women and children in need. The gathering where Matthews is speaking includes leaders from United Methodist Women chapters across Wisconsin.

Summary

Matthews begins by sharing an excerpt from the novel Alice in Wonderland. She recounts a conversation between Alice and the Cheshire Cat. Alice asks the cat which way she should go, and the cat’s response is, “that depends a good deal on where you want to get” (¶ 4). Alice tells the cat that she does not care where she gets, and the cat answers, “Then it doesn’t matter which way you go” (¶ 6). Alice responds, “so long as I get somewhere,” and the cat replies, “Oh, you’re sure to do that if you only walk long enough” (¶s 7-8).

Matthews then compares Alice’s position with that of the UMW. Matthews notes that the purpose of the gathering is “to answer the question, ‘Which way should we go from here?’” (¶ 9). The answer, Matthews tells the congregation, depends on where the group wants to get. Matthews says that the UMW has come a long way, but that the group must now decide what to do next.

Then, Matthews compares the UMW’s current position with that of Moses. She tells the congregation that Moses delivered a speech to the Hebrew people before they entered the Promised Land. The people were eager to get there, but Moses gave a speech to remind them why they were going to the Promised Land. Matthews explains that the speech was important because “the purpose of going forth must be clearly in mind before a foot is planted in any direction” (¶ 11).

Matthews suggests that reviewing what has happened in the past is beneficial, and now the group is at the place where everyone must look forward toward new goals.
Matthews then poses a series of rhetorical questions about which goals the UMW will set for the coming years: “Are we going forward as quickly as possible toward the goal of peace? Or are we wasting precious time debating whether or not this is an appropriate goal for the church” (¶ 13). She also asks whether the UMW will focus on eliminating homelessness and hunger: “Who cares about feeding the hungry—women do, most of us prepare three meals a day, and it’s difficult to imagine one meal a day—a little rice and a few beans if one is lucky” (¶ 14). Finally, Matthews asks whether the UMW is still committed to raising money for mission work. Matthews summarizes those potential objectives this way: “Those are the big goals, and there’s not much new about that, you say?” (¶ 16).

Next, Matthews casts a vision for new goals the UMW could consider. She tells the congregation that she is particularly concerned about the issue of domestic violence. Matthews says the issue of domestic violence is one “that should concern every person who is called a Christian” (¶ 17). She recounts several recent news stories about horrific situations of abuse and violence. Matthews then says that she believes the church needs to do a better job of responding to crises in people’s lives. She reminds the congregation of a survey conducted by the national office that administers the UMW, the Women’s Division of the General Board of Global Ministries about life crises and the church’s responses thereto. Matthews reports that the survey results indicated that most people who experienced these crises did not talk about them with their pastors, and Matthews was stunned to read that when the crises happened in pastors’ families, the pastors often did not know where to turn for help.
Matthews concludes that these are appropriate goals for the UMW to consider because “Christian community is the covenant relationship of all Christians, supporting one another, helping one another” (¶ 19). In the end, though, Matthews tells the congregation that they must choose which direction to go. “Unlike Alice,” she says, “we do care where we should be—let us make up our minds, and move on out!” (¶ 20).

Analysis

Matthews encourages her audience to think about the question, “Where do we go next as a group?” To achieve that goal, Matthews begins with the story about Alice to establish that direction is important, looks to the biblical example of Moses to explain how to answer the question about the group’s direction, and then applies Moses’ strategy in to the task of helping the UMW answer the question about where they will go next.

Alice, Moses, and Direction

Matthews begins and ends the sermon with references to Alice’s conversation with the Cheshire Cat. The excerpt from the story serves as the main text for the sermon, and it gives Matthews a starting point for posing the sermon’s theme question to the audience. Just as Alice needs to decide where she wants to go before she can start moving in the right direction, so the UMW needs to decide where it wants to go as an organization. About the question, “Where do we go from here?,” Matthews tells the congregation, “We know the truth of the answer even before we hear it—‘That depends a good deal on where you want to get’” (¶ 9).

Having used the excerpt from Alice in Wonderland to pose the question, Matthews turns to the Book of Deuteronomy to identify how to answer the question.
Matthews describes Moses’ speech to the Hebrew people before they entered the Promised Land. Moses tried to help them remember the past in order to appreciate their future. Understanding Moses’ speech is important because “the purpose of going forth must be clearly in mind before a foot is planted in any direction” (¶ 11). In establishing the purpose and content of Moses’ speech, Matthews sets herself up to speak in the rhetorical tradition of Moses. Moses dies after his speech and does not enter the Promised Land with the people, yet Moses’ speech helped the people to remember the past with reverence and look ahead with anticipation. Similarly, Matthews is no longer the bishop of the Wisconsin Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. Therefore, Matthews will not directly join the Wisconsin chapter of the UMW in the direction they take, but she still helps them remember their past and casts a vision for what may be ahead.

Notably, Matthews’s reference to Moses is the only scriptural allusion in the sermon, and the sermon includes no quotations from the Bible. The sermon’s theme question is what drives the homily, not a theme passage from the Bible. Nonetheless, the reference to Moses and Matthews’s assumption of the rhetorical tradition of Moses situates the sermon and the audience not just in their own history as a mission-focused organization of women in a particular denomination but as a part of the larger Judeo-Christian tradition. As an outgoing leader, Matthews has scriptural precedence for the sermon she is giving—a sermon that reviews the past with a goal of focusing on the future. The review of the past, then, becomes the strategy Matthews uses for answering the question she poses through the story of Alice.

_Glimpses of the Past, Visions for the Future_
To introduce her review of the UMW’s previous work, Matthews tells this brief story: “While I was in seminary, someone taped one of those ads on my door—[…] which said, ‘You’ve come a long way, baby,’ and underneath, someone had written ‘now let’s see you make the best of it.’” Matthews adds, “That’s not bad advice” (¶ 10). Matthews arguably had come a long way in being a divorced, middle-aged single mother when she decided to enter full time Christian ministry in 1959 and had “made the best of it” in her ecclesiastical career. Just as Matthews had come a long way and made the best of it, so had the UMW come a long way. The UMW could then “make the best of it” by answering the question Matthews poses in the sermon about where the organization should go in the future.

Against that backdrop and in the rhetorical tradition of Moses, Matthews mentions several of the projects that the UMW has undertaken in years past. She refers to peacemaking efforts, hunger relief, and mission fundraising. When Matthews discusses hunger, she connects with her audience by saying, “Who cares about feeding the hungry—women do, most of us prepare three meals a day, and it’s difficult to imagine one meal a day” (¶ 14). Matthews appeals to a common womanhood in order to create a personal identification between the issue of hunger relief and her audience. In her discussion of fundraising for mission work, Matthews reminisces about “the days of vanilla and broom sales, and the determination of the women in seeing that their pledge to missions was met” (¶ 15). Matthews then confesses that she remembers back even farther than that—to the days of mite boxes, and those friendship quilts where families bought a quilt block with their names on it for a dime. A few
of those precious quilts are still in existence, but the cause of mission as a goal has never faltered, but grows stronger every year. (¶ 15)

These examples of previous fundraisers perform two functions. First, Matthews’s recollections of past fundraising programs, including programs that happened many years earlier, established her as a participant in the UMW, which creates identification with her audience. Second, Matthews refers to specific examples that will conjure memories in her audience members whether they have been involved with the organization only a few years or for several decades, which is consistent with Matthews’s strategy of reviewing the past as a basis and inspiration for moving forward.

Having reviewed the UMW’s past and establishing herself as a part of the proud traditions of the UMW, Matthews is in a place where she can share a vision of some potential goals for the group. She says, “I’d like to leave those for a little bit and call your attention to situations that are occurring more frequently in society” (¶ 17). She then addresses the issue of domestic violence before moving on to discuss family crises more generally. Matthews recommends the use of the Women’s Division survey about family crises in local church settings, at least by local chapters of the UMW. Matthews also adds to the list of crises she thinks should be studied and considered, noting that her extensions of the list emerge “from my experience” (¶ 18). The magnitude of the issue is amplified when she notes, “Would it surprise you to learn that the pastor often has nowhere to turn if any one of these crises happens to be his or hers as well?” (¶ 18). Matthews exemplifies the pastoral concern of a bishop for congregants and for pastors in these comments. This pastoral ethic of care is evident in Matthews’s discussion of crises that families face because she departs from the UMW’s more
typical focus on women and children to mention specifically that family crises often leave pastors (who, incidentally, are mostly men) helpless without resources to address them. Matthews’s suggested issues actually extend the UMW’s areas of concern beyond the mission work on which the group normally focuses.

Matthews concludes her own suggestions for the group’s next agenda by owning that those issues emerge from her perspective: “My notion of the Christian community is the covenant relationship of all Christians, supporting one another, helping one another” (¶ 19). Matthews personalizes this notion of Christian community instead of citing a theologian or other scholar who offers a definition of Christian community that fits Matthews’ rhetorical needs. Matthews grounds her suggested future directions in her vision of Christian community. Her conclusion does not push the audience toward embracing one of her ideas; the only push there is to make some decision about where to go next. Thus, Matthews’s vision is one that comes from her own professional experience as a pastor and bishop and her values as a Christian, both of which she cites in making her claims.

As she has in the other sermons considered in this project, Matthews includes herself in the sermon’s implications by using first-person plural pronouns throughout the message, and nowhere is this more evident than in the sermon’s conclusion. In the final paragraph of the sermon, a very brief conclusion, Matthews uses the word we eight times:

*We Shall Go Forth*—we shall indeed. Progress will be made, even if we stand still and let the earth spin around us. But if we want to get from here to there, we
need to know where we want to be eventually. Unlike Alice, we do care where we should be—let us make up our minds, and move on out! (¶ 20, emphasis added)

This conclusion is notable for three reasons. First, Matthews reaffirms her identification with the UMW by repeatedly referring to the mission “we” share. Second, by contrasting the UMW with Alice, she asks the audience to contemplate seriously the future directions of the UMW, and while she suggests some future directions, she leaves the specifics of that future open to debate and discussion amongst the group. In this way, she persuades the audience to take up the issue, while inviting them to contemplate and consider the one specific path she offered.

Conclusion

The goal of “We Shall Go Forth” is to ask the audience a question: What is the UMW going to do next? Matthews insists, in the end, that the UMW pick foci for the coming years, but she does not tell them what to pick. Instead, Matthews poses the question through the lens of Alice, discovers a way to answer the question in the rhetorical tradition of Moses, reviews the past accomplishments of the group, and casts a vision with some possible ideas for the future.

Like the other two sermons considered in this project, “We Shall Go Forth” includes elements of both feminine style and invitational rhetoric. Matthews uses a personal tone and empowers the audience, and Matthews affirms the values of equality, immanent value, and even self-determination. Simultaneously, this sermon includes a few questionable details: Matthews’s compares herself to Moses and her audience to Alice, and Matthews makes an apparently essentialist claim about women’s involvement in food preparation. This conclusion begins by unraveling each of those seemingly
contradictory details, what Kirby (2008) calls feminist paradoxes, moments when someone’s feminist consciousness clashes with other important values.

First, Matthews compares herself to Moses and contrasts her role with that of her audience, whom she compares to Alice. Matthew's equating herself with Moses is notable because Moses is in arguably the most important figure in the Old Testament and Moses is male. For that reason, this example in particular seems to move Matthews’s rhetoric outside the realm of hagiography. On one level, this comparison is the most grandiose thing Matthews has said about herself in the sermons this project has considered. If Matthews actually sees herself as a twentieth-century parallel to Moses, she certainly becomes difficult to emulate, and Biesecker’s (1992) fears are confirmed. However, the evidence in the text does not support a conclusion that Matthew’s self-comparison to Moses is grandiloquent. As is her custom, Matthews uses first person plural pronouns throughout the sermon, which indicates that she is a part of the rhetorical audience. “Where do we want to go when we sally forth in the name of Christ,” Matthews asks (¶10, emphasis added). Later, Matthews asks if “we” are “going forward as quickly as possible toward the goal of peace,” (¶13), and the sermon’s conclusion makes Matthews’s involvement in the message clear as well.

Moses’ maleness may seem to contradict with a feminist reading of the sermon, but Moses’ maleness is not the salient part of the comparison. Matthews is like Moses not because of her gender, but because she must encourage her audience to think about their future as they begin moving in that direction. A metaphor, by definition, would not be a metaphor if a one-to-one correspondence between the tenor and vehicle existed (see Ivie, 1987; Miller, 1999; Richards, 1936). Matthews’s comparison may
actually be empowering to women because Matthews is in a position to compare herself to Moses. The advice is not coming from a past president of the organization or a staff person in the national office of the Women’s Division; the speech is being delivered by a bishop, a clergy leader of the area. That Matthews’s life and rhetoric are still “in reach” for the audience is evident not just in the historical relationship Matthews had established with her audience prior to the delivery of “We Shall Go Forth,” but also in the tone of the sermon itself. The ethos of pastoral care that Matthews evinces when she discusses family crises establishes Matthews as approachable. She is like Moses because she is a leader inviting the people in her care to think about where they are going in the future, but Matthews is not delivering the speech from the top of a mountain and looking down on those below. Instead, Matthews speaks with her audience and understands herself to be a part of that audience.

The second feminist paradox of the sermon is Matthews’s claim that the UMW cares about the problem of world hunger because most women prepare three meals every day. On the surface, this statement seems to support the status quo and affirm a traditional, patriarchal role for women. Statistically, Matthews’s statement is accurate. Although nontraditional families and egalitarian families exist, in most households in the United States, women prepare the meals; this is true in 2009 and was even truer in 1984 when the sermon was preached (see Bem, 1998; Berryman-Fink, 2006; Blair & Johnson, 1992; Brown & Miller, 2002; Renzetti & Curran, 2002; Sayer, 2005). The difficulty of assessing the value of Matthews’s statement resides in the issue of permanence. Pointing out of a socially constructed difference between the sexes is not inherently patriarchal, but doing so in a way that suggests that difference is permanent
or natural is problematic as well as essentializing (Dow, 1995; Finke, 1986; Spitzack & Carter, 1987). As Wood (1988) suggests, feminist scholarship is necessarily political and offers hope for change (see also Condit, 1988; Foss & Foss, 1988). To the degree that Matthews positions women as the world’s caretakers in this example, the reference is patriarchal. Conversely, the example is a statement that reflects a contemporary statistical reality with which most of her audience can personally identify, and the purpose of the example is to inspire social change: the mitigation of global hunger. In other words, Matthews’s statement is descriptive of a current reality for the purpose of making a mission- and social justice-related point, not a proscriptive statement that fatally sentences women to servitude in the kitchen for all time. In the context of the sermon, Matthews’s statement makes her point relatable to the audience, and it encourages the social reformation feminist rhetoric’s axiology calls for (Condit, 1988; Foss & Foss, 1988; Wood, 1988).

These feminist paradoxes initially called into question the practicality and the desirability of understanding Matthews’s rhetoric as a hagiography. If Matthews’s comparison to Moses made her inaccessible to her audience, Matthews’s rhetoric would be outside the definitional boundaries of hagiography. If Matthews’s reference to meal preparation were patriarchal, she would arguably be less worthy of emulation by feminists. However, a more nuanced examination of those ostensible paradoxes reveals that Matthews is neither inaccessible nor categorically patriarchal. Thus, Matthews remains within the reach of her audience and of scholars of feminist rhetoric; therefore, hagiography continues to be a useful form for understanding Matthews’s rhetoric.
Chapter 5: Conclusions

This project set out to reveal the rhetorical strategies of mainline Protestant Christianity’s first woman bishop. Against the backdrop of the history of feminist rhetorical scholarship, the sermons “Chosen for Challenge,” “Sign of Discipleship,” and “We Shall Go Forth” were analyzed, revealing that Matthews’s rhetoric reflects strategies and values that relate to both perspectives. The previous chapter considered the sermon, “We Shall Go Forth,” which Matthews concludes by reminding her congregation that they are like Alice because they must decide where to go next; unlike Alice however, they care about where they want to be. In the same way, this project concludes by suggesting that feminist rhetorical scholarship is in the same situation: like Alice, scholars of feminist rhetoric must decide where to go next, and like Matthews’s congregation, scholars of feminist rhetoric care about where the field goes.

This project starts with Meyer’s (2007) twofold categorization of feminist rhetorical criticism into the writing women in perspective and the challenging rhetorical standards perspective, and then following Condit’s (1990) call for a marriage of different intellectual perspectives, it uses both perspectives to examine the sermons of Marjorie Swank Matthews. Using both perspectives to examine the same texts reveals that a rhetor can fulfill multiple feminist goals, and the goals of two perspectives are not mutually exclusive. To merge these two different but not entirely divergent perspectives, this project proposes conceptualizing the works and lives of women rhetors as hagiographies, educational biographies that emphasize the rhetors’ accessibility to audiences of everyday people; similarly, this project contends that feminist rhetoric should be hagiographic in its presentation of women rhetors. In a hagiography, “the holy
is within reach” of the audience (van der Vliet, 2006, p. 48). In less religiously-loaded language, a hagiography for the feminist rhetorician is a story where that which is valorized is accessible for and imitable by the audience.

The concept of hagiography is useful because it acknowledges that Campbell (1973, 1988, 1989a, 1999) is right: women rhetors need to be studied. For a rhetorical history to reflect the diversity of human experience and communication, women must be included in it. Those who study rhetoric value touchstone, rhetorical exemplars that can guide future rhetoric (Leff & Sachs, 1990) and the more complete the range of available models is, the better. As educational biographies that keep the subject within reach of the audience, hagiographies simultaneously solve the problem Campbell articulates and address concerns about the Great Woman problem (Biesecker, 1992; Spitzack & Carter, 1987). If only “exceptional” women are added to the rhetorical canon, then everyday women are disempowered. One of the defining features of a hagiography is that it avoids that pitfall by emphasizing the similarity between the subject and the audience and the possibility that anyone can emulate the subject.

Matthews is an exceptional woman, but she is not beyond emulation by her audience. Rhetorically, Matthews repeatedly puts herself on the same level as her audience, using first person plural pronouns to include herself in the sermons’ implications, telling stories that include self-disclosure, and revealing her ethic of pastoral care. While Matthews does not explicitly downplay her role as the first woman bishop in the sermons this project considers, she certainly never emphasizes that role. In each sermon considered here, Matthews is as much a member of the rhetorical audience as the rhetor. She does not embody the persona of judgmental pontiff looking
down on a congregation; instead, she constructs an equal relationship with the audience. Personal tone and audience empowerment are hallmark features of feminine style (Campbell, 1989a), so Matthews’s use of the feminine rhetorical style is precisely what makes her hagiographic.

Matthews’s use of feminine style makes her accessible to her audience, and Matthews’s homiletic construction reflects a blend of invitational and traditional rhetoric that is worthy of feminist emulation. Of the three feminist values Foss and colleagues (Foss & Griffin, 1995; Foss et al., 1997) valorize, self-determination is the most controversial (Condit, 1997), and self-determination is the value that is least evident in Matthews’s sermons. In all three sermons, Matthews affirms the equality and immanent value not only of her audience, but of all people. This makes sense, as those feminist values are also consistent with Christian values as professed by mainline Protestant denominations (e.g., Olson, 2004). That Matthews’s rhetoric downplays or omits self-determination also makes sense given the rhetorical task of a sermon (Campbell, 1989a). Effective sermons are likely to comfort and challenge congregations. One of the preacher’s tasks is to help the congregation live in a way that is consistent with the Christian faith, and that might require a change from the way the congregation is behaving.

For these sermons specifically, Matthews challenged her congregation to accept God’s call, to love one another, and to make a decision about where to go in the future. In each case, Matthews advocates for the audience to behave in a certain way. Though Gearheart (1979) might feel violated by even these attempts at changing an audience, and though these goals violate Foss and Griffin’s (1995) definition of self-determination,
where the audience is the expert of their own decision making, Matthews’s efforts at persuasion were ethically feminist. In “Chosen for Challenge,” Matthews encourages her congregation to understand that women were an important part of church history and advocates for social justice. In “Sign of Discipleship,” Matthews tells the congregation to love one another and encourages the congregation to see their relationship as one of mutual support. In “We Shall Go Forth,” Matthews is speaking to an audience of women with a history of working for social change. If social justice is or ought to be a goal of feminist scholarship as several feminist scholars suggest (Condit, 1988; Foss & Foss, 1988; Wood, 1988), this type of persuasion is consistent with feminism, even though it is persuasion. This analysis suggests that Foss and Griffin’s (1995), essay presents an alternative to persuasion rather than a categorical case against persuasion, and that Matthews’s rhetoric comports with the ideals they identify. To that end, Matthews’s rhetoric is hagiographic for rhetors and scholars who take seriously both Foss and Griffin’s (1995) claims about the patriarchal history of the field and Condit’s (1997) and Dow’s (1995) fears that invitational rhetoric is essentialist and extreme. Matthews persuades her audience while steadfastly affirming their equality with her and each other and clearly embracing the immanent value of all human beings. Matthews does so without separating women from men or endorsing any gender differences as innate and essential.

This project, then, is hagiographic on two levels. The first, as has been established, is that this project constitutes a hagiography of Matthews. Matthews speaks broadly to all people, especially to those who are looking for religious women rhetors as icons, and she manages to accomplish the rhetorical task of preaching while
simultaneously upholding feminist values. The values she espouses and the egalitarian stance she takes allow her audiences to relate to her and incorporate her values and rhetorical practices as their own, if they wish.

Second, this project itself is hagiographic. This analysis intends to write Matthews into the rhetorical canon, especially the religious feminist rhetorical canon, and simultaneously, this project invites scholars of feminist rhetoric to consider Matthews as one rhetor who embodies feminist values worthy of emulation. More broadly, this project suggests that hagiography is a useful rhetorical tool for reconciling the differences within and between the two perspectives that have characterized the history of feminist rhetorical scholarship. This analysis agrees with and embodies Meyer’s (2007) call for more cooperation and self-reflexivity among scholars of feminist rhetoric, especially given the demonstrated utility of considering texts from both perspectives without fully endorsing either perspective’s meta-theoretical assumptions wholesale.

Given the particular challenges that face clergywomen and the popular misconception that religion and feminism are contradictory, more work like this project would be useful. Religious women’s rhetoric is potentially useful for teaching and learning, so more hagiographies wait to be written. More generally, continued efforts to expand the rhetorical canon and understand the ways feminist values are useful in rhetoric while simultaneously taking seriously the challenges to those approaches promise to generate greater knowledge. As Meyer (2007) has noted, feminist rhetorical scholarship has a richly diverse four-decade history. Like Alice, the field must now
decide where to go next, and this project invites readers to consider hagiography as a viable direction to turn.
References


Notes

1. In 1984, the year Bishop Matthews retired, two more women were elected to office of bishop in the United Methodist Church; another two United Methodist women were elected bishops in 1988 (Craig, 2004). The Episcopal Church’s first woman bishop, Barbara Harris, was elected in 1989. April Larsen became the first woman bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in 1992.

2. Foss, Griffin, and Foss (1997) expand the list of feminist values to include freedom in addition to the original three articulated by Foss and Griffin (1995). For the sake of parsimony, the rest of this analysis treats freedom as a characteristic of self-determination rather than its own separate category.

3. While these values are certainly not inherent to all Christian preachers, they are reflected in the social principles of the United Methodist Church in the church polity that all bishops vow to uphold (see Olson, 2004), so this analysis works from the assumption that Matthews would, at least at a basic level, endorse those values. The little that is written about Matthews by the people who knew and worked with her corroborates that assumption (Craig, 2004).

4. Matthews is referring to Judith Craig, Leontine Kelly, and Elias Galvan, respectively.