

Unfinished and Unfolding Tasks of Preaching: Interdisciplinary, Intercultural, and Interreligious Approaches in the Postcolonial Context of Migration

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***Abstract:** Addressing the preacher's need to identify their social locations as a preacher, this article explores three critical approaches for homiletics in the postcolonial context of migration: interdisciplinary, intercultural, and interreligious. The interdisciplinary approach to homiletics was sought in the New Homiletic movement but has yet to be fully pursued. Continued dialogue with other disciplines is urgent in a context where complicated postcolonial realities must be addressed. The intercultural issues of preaching are equally important in this context. This paper, therefore, sketches the changing ecclesial landscape where a monolingual homogeneous white congregation and preacher are no longer a norm. How can preaching reflect multivocality and prevent linguistic minority members from being tokenized? The power imbalance embedded in the language of the preacher needs consideration. The interreligious approach has only recently appeared on the horizon of homiletical thought, challenging the Christian-supremacist positions and interpretative practices. Overcoming Christian-centrism, the article argues, can happen once the fear of the other, the fear of difference, and the fear of mixing are acknowledged in the preaching event. Interreligious reality is unfolding and inevitable as a marker of our postcolonial migration context. It potentially ushers in an exciting opportunity for the study of Christian preaching, if we are willing to embrace it.*

Self-Locating: Touchstone for Preaching

Naming where one came from or where one stands is important. Self-locating helps scholars of homiletics claim a perspective and outline the scope of their interests while also identifying the limits of their research. As Christine Smith reminds us, preachers should consciously know how “their social locations influence their biblical hermeneutics, their theological thinking, their pastoral sensitivities, and their homiletical methodologies.”¹ The changing landscapes of migration are a critical contemporary context of preaching. Yohan Go, David Jacobsen, and Duse Lee argue that this emerging context urges preachers to study and examine “not only how and what to preach but also where and therefore with whom to preach.”² Preachers and those who study preaching are, then, challenged to self-locate within this context. Paying attention to their identity formation in its complexities and fluidities is not a luxury or an auxiliary but a necessity in preaching practice and the study of preaching today.

Locating Myself in the Migrant Context

For this author, the job of self-location in the context of global migration suggests itself readily. I grew up in South Korea and moved to Canada in the 1990s. I left South Korea, my

¹ Christine Smith, ed., *Preaching Justice: Ethnic and Cultural Perspectives* (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1998), 2.

² Yohan Go, David Schnasa Jacobsen, and Duse Lee, “Making New Spaces in Between: A Post-Reflective Essay Weaving Postcolonial Threads into North American Homiletics,” *Homiletic* 40:1 (2015): 56.

place of birth, in a definitive way. I only hold a Canadian passport as South Korean law generally does not permit dual citizenship. I am a migrant. If I dig deeper, I clearly see that I have been impacted by my parents' migration as well. My parents were born in North Korea and escaped to the South during the Korean War (1950-1953). Their forced migration connects them and me to the global phenomenon that has reached unprecedented scale in the twenty-first century. This migrant identity informs everything I do. What I bring and contribute to the scholarship of homiletics is intricately connected to my migration experience. I contend, however, that migration is not my reality alone or the reality of a minority in North American society. Migration is something that affects us all, to a greater degree today than ever before. Those who are living in the same place they were born can still locate themselves relative to migrants and the phenomenon of migration. Migration is, therefore, a valid and urgent locus of theological reflection, as many theologians and scholars of religions have argued.³ Migration is a lens through which to see a web of relevant, complicated, and interconnecting realities.

The scholarship of homiletics has some catching up to do in this regard. In this field there have been scholarly treatments of many aspects of human identity: gender, disability, ethnicity, culture, and class. Yet the migration issue has barely surfaced in the area of homiletics. It does not appear among the 144 key terms in preaching, for example.⁴ There is a helpful, albeit small, handful of books that deal with migrant realities in light of biblical, ethnic, cross-cultural, and postmodern perspectives.⁵ None of these, however, explicitly and comprehensively addresses migration as a source for doing homiletical theology, or considers it as a hermeneutical method by which various preaching tasks could be carried out. Even my own work featuring biblical figures as migrants is only a small step.⁶ Migration is a reality unfolding before the eyes of preachers and homileticians—a reality that deserves far more attention.

The Current Postcolonial Reality

Postcolonial reality is inseparably related to and in many cases a cause of migration. The postcolonial era began in 1946 when India gained independence from British imperial power. This achievement was followed by many more colonized countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, which also gained political independence from European colonial powers (British, French, Spanish, Dutch, or German) imposed in the nineteenth century. Most colonized countries on these three continents gained their political independence in the 1960s.⁷ Many struggled thereafter with internal conflict and political instability. My homeland of Korea went to war (1950-1953) after independence from the Japanese Empire. The hardship of war and conflict often led people to leave their homes. The result was a massive flux of migration from many of these colonized countries to Europe and European settler countries such as Australia, the United

³ Martha Frederiks and Dorottya Nagy, eds., *Religion, Migration and Identity: Methodological and Theological Explorations* (Leiden: Brill, 2016); Susanna Synder, Joshua Ralston, and Agnes Brazal, eds., *Church in an Age of Global Migration: A Moving Body* (New York: Palgrave, 2015).

⁴ John M. McClure, *Preaching Words: 144 Key Terms in Homiletics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007).

⁵ In chronological order, for example, Walter Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home: Preaching among Exiles* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), Christian Smith, ed., *Preaching Justice: Ethnic and Cultural Perspectives* (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1998), James R. Nieman and Thomas G. Rogers, *Preaching to Every Pew: Cross-Cultural Strategies* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), Ronald Allen, *Preaching and the Other: Studies of Postmodern Insights* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2009).

⁶ HyeRan Kim-Cragg and Eunyoung Choi, *The Encounters: Retelling the Bible from Migration and Intercultural Perspectives* (Daejeon: Daegangan, 2013).

⁷ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literature* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 2.

States, and Canada. The ongoing problems of violence, poverty, corruption, and economic and political instability in these formerly colonized countries must be viewed as a part of the colonial legacy, the aftermath of a brutal and oppressive history of colonialism. Thus so-called migration “problems,” as Western governments often want to call them, which are actually a host of immigration and refugee issues, are also postcolonial realities in which all colonizers are implicated and within which all must find ways to negotiate and coexist.

The very etymology of the terms Asia, Africa, and America were given by Europeans. Asia and Africa are words derived from European languages as a product of ancient imperialism. America was named after the Italian Amerigo Vespucci in the fifteenth century. These names, as markers of places in various part of the world, embed the colonial history.

In short, the twenty-first century is indelibly marked by European colonialism. Even if we wanted to we could not go back to a pre-colonial world. We cannot completely know or trace what it was like before the conquests, though we may know our past fragmentally. That is why we cannot preach the full gospel to the world unless we understand the powers and principalities of colonialism as one of the major causes of displacement in twenty-first century migration.

The Problem of Representation in Preaching

Preaching as a communicative event inevitably represents reality in a certain way. In preaching we represent others—others in the Bible, others in society—and we do so from our own limited and biased perspectives.⁸ As migration is a reality in the postcolonial context, migrants are often labelled as victim or villain, or hero/heroines.⁹ Othering happens when names, categories, and descriptions are applied to us before we even become aware that it is happening. Categories can thereby become a part of us before we begin to make them our own or to correct and resist them.¹⁰

An autobiographical experience may help to clarify how this othering happens. When I first arrived in Canada, right away I felt conscious that I was no longer the norm in the way I had been in Korea. At every turn, people made me aware of my difference where I once had been the same as everyone else. I would often hear the comment, “Oh, you are from Asia.” There was nothing malicious about this comment. And yet it was unsettling because I never thought of myself as Asian while I lived in Korea. The stereotype of being Asian had already been put on and the name Asian was applied before I began to make it my own or before I could respond to that label with a different label.

In preaching, this imposition of names and categories is a challenge from which we cannot escape, and our postcolonial reality makes it incredibly tricky. That is what editors of essays presented in a consultation on postcolonial theology and preaching have argued; they write, “Postcolonial theology offers new vistas for thinking about the language and images we use in preaching as acts of representation, the ways we construe ourselves and our hearers in

⁸ Pablo Jiménez, “Toward a Postcolonial Homiletic,” in *Hispanic Christian Thought at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Alvin Padilla, Roberto Goizueta, and Eldin Villafaña (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 159–167.

⁹ See <https://www.united-church.ca/blogs/round-table/what-stake-celebrating-asian-heritage-month>; HyeRan Kim-Cragg, “A Postcolonial Portrait of Migrants: Vulnerable and Resistance,” *Practical Matters* Vol 11 (2018): x–xxx, practicalmattersjournal.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Kim-Cragg-A-Postcolonial-Portrait-of-Migrants.pdf;

HyeRan Kim-Cragg, “Between and Beyond Asian-ness: A Voice of a Postcolonial Hybrid Korean-Canadian in the Diaspora,” in *What Young Asian Theologians Are Thinking: the CSCA Christianity in Southeast Asia Series No 7*, ed. Leow Theng Huat (Singapore, Trinity Theological College, 2014), 90–102.

¹⁰ Judith Butler, “Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance,” in *Vulnerability in Resistance*, ed., Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti, and Leticia Sabsay (Durham, Duke University Press, 2016), 24.

their contexts, and the kinds of sinful realities and hopeful visions we might name in the intercultural, postcolonial reality that we live in.”¹¹ For many who find themselves minoritized in the postcolonial context of migration, “sinful realities” clearly include the phenomenon of othering.

You don’t have to be a recent migrant, however, to feel othered in a dehumanizing way. If we are from rural places in an urban-centered world, if we are queer in the heteronormative world, if we are racialized in the white dominant world, if we are women in a male-centered world, if we are disabled in the ableist world, if we speak another language in an English normative world, if we practice more than one religion or a religion other than Christianity in a Christian-centered world, we know what it is like to be categorized, spoken for and misrepresented. The list goes on. And the list of othered experiences may not represent some of us because we fit the norm quite well, but wrestle with our power and privilege nonetheless as we seek to make a difference in this highly polarized, exclusive, and violent world. Confronting this reality and untangling it is an unfinished business of postcolonial society, and an unfolding task in preaching as we seek to proclaim the gospel in ways that build a sense of belonging rather than prejudice.

The emerging tasks of homiletics lie in addressing these new and not-so-new realities, including but not limited to migration and postcolonial struggles. The following is a modest attempt to address these realities in homiletics by embracing interdisciplinary, intercultural, and interreligious approaches as unfinished and unfolding agendas for preaching from postcolonial perspectives. One might have noticed that these approaches share the prefix “inter.” This is more than a personal fetish. It is rooted in an insight gleaned from Asian linguistic background. East Asian calligraphy represents “inter” as “間.” This Chinese character is pronounced “*gan*” in Korean, and “*ma*” in Japanese.¹² Many East Asian words are hieroglyphics, a kind of picture writing. “Inter” combines two picture words, the gate or door, “門,” and the sun, “日.” “Inter,” therefore, literally refers to the light of the sun that comes through an open door or may be the crack in a door. As the sun comes through the crack in the door, so, too, the space between people and their perspectives illuminates. In my way of thinking, therefore, interdisciplinary, intercultural, and interreligious approaches can shed light on homiletical tasks. Or, as the famous Canadian poet, the late Leonard Cohen, drawing upon the wisdom of his Jewish tradition, once put it, “There is a crack, a crack in everything. That’s how the light gets in.”

The Interdisciplinary Approach to Homiletics: Unfinished Business

The need to self-locate within the context of postcolonial migration meshes with the need for an interdisciplinary approach. Homiletics that seeks an interdisciplinary approach may benefit from the postcolonial perspective because, as Joyce Ann Mercer concludes, interdisciplinarity “disrupts static identities” and “creates small moments of scholarly coherence akin to other complex identity positionings.”¹³ The disruptive nature of interdisciplinary scholarship finds a kindred spirit in postcolonial hermeneutics when such key postcolonial

¹¹ Yohan Go, David Schnasa Jacobsen, and Duse Lee, “Introduction to the Essays of the Consultation on Preaching and Postcolonial Theology,” *Homiletic*, 40:1 (2015): 5.

¹² HyeRan Kim-Cragg, Joanne Doi, “Intercultural Threads of Hybridity and Threshold Spaces of Learning,” *Religious Education*, 107:3 (May-June: 2012): 268, 262–275.

¹³ Joyce Ann Mercer, “Interdisciplinarity as a Practical Theological Conundrum,” in *Conundrums in Practical Theology*, ed. Joyce Ann Mercer and Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 184.

concepts as “unhomeliness”¹⁴ reflect the scholarly dislocation of interdisciplinary work.¹⁵ The interdisciplinary approach to homiletics requires a crossing over into other fields of study, despite feeling unhomely, in order to be responsive to today’s postcolonial migration contexts. The postcolonial migration reality is so massive and so complex that homileticians must rely on and work with scholars and activists from all corners of the world and across disciplines. This kind of scholarship is showcased, for instance, in the edited volume *Religion and Migration: Negotiating Sites of Hospitality, Resistance, and Vulnerability*.¹⁶ This example of interdisciplinary learning with the gesture of humility and curiosity is an exciting and innovative model for scholarship in preaching.

I intentionally chose an interdisciplinary approach to homiletics as “unfinished” business because I acknowledge that preaching as a multifaceted academic discipline has reached out to other areas of research. Fred Craddock, for example, appreciated Eugene Lowry’s interdisciplinary effort of using philosophy, psychology, and drama. He writes, “Preaching, like other areas of thought and practice, cannot survive by breathing in its own face.”¹⁷ That is what contributors to *Performance in Preaching* also called for: an interdisciplinary approach that takes performance, speech theory, and embodiment in preaching seriously.¹⁸

The interdisciplinary approach to biblical studies that reflects postcolonial and migration realities has yielded some surprising results. Ten years ago, in the book *They Were All Together in One Place?*, racially and ethnically aware scholars from the United States proposed “minority biblical criticism,” and argued for an “interdisciplinary turn.”¹⁹ Inspired by this work, Canadian scholars have recently published *Reading In Between*, questioning once again the compartmentalization of academic disciplines as if they exist as detached, unrelated fields of study.²⁰ They instead show how the intertwined nature of interdisciplinary academic work is essential to empower minoritized communities of faith in the postcolonial world of migration.

The current work groups in the Academy of Homiletics are a prime example of promoting interdisciplinary methods, wherein preaching theoretically and practically converses with biblical studies, culture, ethics, pedagogy, performance, sociology, and technology. The journal *Homiletic* book review section also supports an interdisciplinary approach, as it includes various disciplines such as worship, biblical studies, practical theology, and systematic theology. It is common for scholars of preaching to teach Hebrew Bible or Christian scriptures and vice versa. Many professors around the world hold teaching and research positions that include both worship and preaching. Both the 2018 Religious Education Association annual conference and

¹⁴ Homi K. Bhabha, “The World and the Home,” in *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation and Postcolonial Perspectives*, ed. Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shohat (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 445.

¹⁵ Catherine Manathunga, “Post-Colonial Perspectives on Interdisciplinary Identities,” in *Academic Research and Researchers*, ed. Angela Brew and Lisa Lucas (Maidenhead: McGraw Hill Education, 2009), 133-145.

¹⁶ Andrea Bieler, Isolde Karle, HyeRan Kim-Cragg, and Ilona Nord, eds., *Migration and Religion: Negotiating Sites of Hospitality, Resistance, and Vulnerability* (Leipzig: EVA, 2019) where I grappled with the issue of home and hospitality in relation to preaching. See “Home, Hospitality, and Preaching: A Need for the Homiletical Engagement of Migration,” 233-245.

¹⁷ Fred Craddock, “Foreword,” in Eugene L. Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), x.

¹⁸ Jana Childers and Clay Schmit, eds., *Performance in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 14.

¹⁹ Randall Bailey, Tat-Siong Benny Liew, Fernando F. Segovia, eds., *They Were All Together In One Place? Toward Minority Biblical Criticism* (Atlanta: SBL, 2009), 27, 28, 35.

²⁰ Nestor Medina, Alison Hari-Singh and HyeRan Kim-Cragg, eds., *Reading In Between: How Minoritized Cultural Communities Interpret the Bible in Canada* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2019).

the 2019 Academy of Homiletics annual conference addressed themes aimed at unmasking and moving beyond whiteness as a normative category of identity.²¹ Both guilds are currently engaged in interdisciplinary reflection on race and ethnicity.

Notwithstanding all these fruitful attempts, healthy accomplishments, and meaningful crossings, the dominant pattern of homiletics, as with other disciplines in academia, is still operating with a largely siloed mindset, compartmentalized and hierarchal.²² For instance, as I argued in my book *Story and Song: A Postcolonial Interplay between Christian Education and Worship*, Christians in Protestant traditions have, in the name of *Sola Fide*, *Sola Scriptura*, overemphasized the proclamation of the Word as if nothing else happens or matters in worship.²³ In many Protestant churches, preaching dominates the worship service. This norm also happens to be adult-centered. What child wants to listen to a preacher talk for, in some cases, over forty minutes? One may wonder why the fields of preaching and Christian education do not find obvious partnership in terms of faculty positions in the way that Bible-and-preaching and worship-and-preaching have traditionally done. Could it be that preaching is still traditionally understood as something for adults, and Christian education as only for children? We know this understanding is exclusionary. Yet adult-centered, clergy-centered, solo preaching is still the norm.

The dominant pattern of adult-centered preaching has persisted because until recently preachers had not paid sufficient attention to the importance of the congregation, including children, as active participants in sermon-making and delivery. Some headway, however, is being made. Through interdisciplinary engagement within homiletics begun many decades ago, congregations as active participants in the preaching event are being studied. The term “New Homiletic,” coined by David James Randolph who spoke at the first Academy of Homiletics in 1965, stressed this issue by addressing the concrete situation of the hearers.²⁴ The New Homiletic movement sought to challenge detached, expository, topical sermonizing and clergy-centered, sovereign preaching. This challenge shocked many preachers who believed what people in the pew were thinking or feeling was less important than the transcendent word of God. This movement made a crack in the fortress of clericalism in preaching. It is laudable that advocates of the New Homiletic movement were interdisciplinary. They found inspiration in linguistic philosophy and literature including narrative theory. Cultural studies also contributed to homiletics’ deeper appreciation of orality as a source of knowledge and critique of the dominant printed culture in the West.²⁵ The New Homiletic was not totally “new,” however, even in the 1960s. At Riverside Church in New York in the 1920s, Harry Emerson Fosdick had emphasized that the sermon should address the needs of the congregation.²⁶

²¹ See <https://religiouseducation.net/rea2018/> (accessed May 16 2019); <http://www.homiletics.org/2019-meeting-schedule> (accessed October 31, 2019). The 2018 Religious Education Association theme was “Beyond White Normativity,” and the 2019 Academy of Homiletics theme was “Unmasking Whiteness.”

²² Mercer, “Interdisciplinarity as a Practical Theological Conundrum,” 163–189.

²³ HyeRan Kim-Cragg, *Story and Song: A Postcolonial Interplay between Christian Education and Worship* (New York: Peter Lang, 2012), 2.

²⁴ O. Wesley Allen, Jr., “The Pillars of the New Homiletic,” in *The Renewed Homiletic*, ed. O. Wesley Allen Jr. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 7.

²⁵ Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (New York: Methuen, 1982).

²⁶ Harry Emerson Fosdick, “What Is the Matter with Preaching?,” *Harper’s Magazine* (July 1928), cited in Allen Jr., “The Pillars of the New Homiletic,” 3.

Despite persistent and steady scholarly efforts for almost 100 years, there is much still to be done.²⁷ Gerrit Immink lamented in 2004 that scholars of homiletics seemed to be arguing the same thing as if no progress had been made.²⁸ The fortress of solo clergy-centered and adult-centered preaching has not yet tumbled down. Thus there is an urgency about the change from clergy-centered and adult-centered preaching to genuinely participatory preaching. This change calls for postcolonial perspectives because postcolonial optics view preaching as “a communal task of an entire faith community,” and preaching authority thus needs to be “shared with members of the community”²⁹— especially overlooked and marginalized members, including children. Postcolonial perspectives promote the dynamic interaction between a preacher and a congregation as a part of identity formation and negotiation.

While being critical of the fortress mentality, there is no need to dismiss or downplay the unique role of the designated preacher. Whereas the involvement of the congregation is important in the sermon preparation and delivery as well as afterwards, preachers can develop an embodied delivery which makes full use of their position as the minister of the word within a completely participatory practice of preaching. It is time to get on with the unfinished business of *fully* developing an interdisciplinary approach to preaching as a shared, not a sovereign, responsibility, attending to and empowering congregations that include children. Performance theory, religious education scholarship, and other disciplines could inform ways to engage people in their diversities and differences in preaching.

Preaching and the Intercultural Approach: Unfinished and Unfolding Tasks

I now want to focus attention on a related problem and suggest another approach to homiletics: an intercultural approach. The crucial issue here is the power-laden aspect of language vis-à-vis the intercultural context. I mainly focus on differences in modes of communication and language within and among different cultures. By culture, broadly speaking, I mean a group’s way of living, speaking, thinking, and behaving in the world.³⁰ In short, culture is defined as a shared social reality that is expressed and embedded in beliefs, attitudes, and practices inevitably mediated by languages.³¹ That is why language is one of the most integral and critical intercultural issues.

Biblical translation and application in preaching is a profound intercultural issue. An intercultural approach to preaching does not use language to refer only to biblical stories of the ancient past. Preachers choose a particular language to speak of the present, as well. Depending on the choice of language, preachers may bestow knowledge and instruct and inspire hearers. But the preacher’s language may sometimes distort meanings and mislead people. In shaping the

²⁷ E.g., in chronological order, Reuel Howe, *Partners in Preaching: Clergy and Laity in Dialogue* (New York: Seabury: 1967); Fred Craddock, *As One Without Authority* (St. Louis: Chalice, 1971); John McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit: Where Leadership and Preaching Meet* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995); Leonora Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997); Lucy Rose, *Sharing the Word* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997); Lucy Hogan and Robert Reid, *Connecting with the Congregation: Rhetoric and the Art of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999); Joseph Jeter and Ronald Allen, *One Gospel, Many Ears: Preaching for Different Listeners in the Congregations* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2002).

²⁸ F. G. Immink, “Homiletics: The Current Debate,” *International Journal of Practical Theology* 8 (2004): 89–121.

²⁹ Go, Jacobsen, and Lee, “Introduction to the Essays of the Consultation on Preaching and Postcolonial Theology”: 6.

³⁰ Matthew D. Kim, *Preaching with Cultural Intelligence: Understanding the People Who Hear Our Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 10.

³¹ Mark J. Cartledge and David Cheetham, eds., *Intercultural Theology: Approaches and Themes* (London: SCM, 2011), 2.

present and directing the future, the language of the preacher also carries the baggage of the past lost in translation. For example, David Buttrick raised the inadequacy of the translation of *basileia* from Greek to English as “kingdom of God.”³² He noted others suggest *kin-dom* as a more adequate translation, making a case where language itself needs “to be remade in other images.”³³ Languages, including such scriptural concepts as *basileia*, are “infinitely translatable,”³⁴ yet contain constraints, tensions, and ambiguities.³⁵ As far as biblical translation is concerned, an intercultural approach focusing on language is an unfinished agenda for preaching.

At the same time, intercultural approaches to language accentuate the dangers preachers encounter when referring to an individual or group different from ourselves. It is possible to misrepresent, silence, or even do violence through our language. As Edward Farley argued, the preacher constantly needs to be on guard, lest “in and through language, we render the other marginal, invisible, or such an absolute threat that anything we do to that other is justified.”³⁶ The problem of representation is directly related to the problem of language because language as a cultural phenomenon may contain the toxic patterns of naming, labeling, and othering people. In the case of people with disabilities, Kathy Black rightly warns of the danger of the metaphorical approach to preaching using the religious vocabulary of deafness, blindness, and paralysis, which is often equated with sin or viewed as entirely negative traits.³⁷ Teresa Fry Brown urges preachers to develop a “justice thesaurus” in order to create a vocabulary that avoids stigmatizing those who have disabilities or are disabled by society.³⁸ In this regard, an intercultural awareness of the ways that language functions (often harmfully) across and between cultural groups is an essential consideration that requires further attention in homiletics.

Another intercultural issue is the hegemony of so-called “native” languages in homiletics. It is hard to appreciate how a given language may be associated with power unless you step out of it. This is the lesson I learned when I first left my home country, stepping outside of my Korean language bubble and into an English one. I learned not only what it was like to be a linguistic minority but also to recognize my privilege back home. In Korea, I took the normativity of both the Korean language and my accent for granted. Those from the north or southwest of Korea, far from the capital Seoul, are discriminated against in Korea based on their accent. My privilege was almost completely hidden from my consciousness and only surfaced when I left home and crossed the Pacific Ocean to find another home.

Looking at the wide range of brilliant homileticians and scholars of preaching who have written ground-breaking books in English, there are only a handful who can fully understand what it is like to approach an English pulpit as someone for whom English is not their first language. There are even fewer books available that address this critical issue translated into a

³² David Buttrick, *Preaching the New and the Now* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 4–24.

³³ Salman Rushdie, “The Empire Writes Back with a Vengeance” *The Times* July 3, 1982, 8.

³⁴ Thomas Troeger, *Ten Strategies for Preaching in a Multi-Media Culture* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 16–17.

³⁵ HyeRan Kim-Cragg and Don Schweitzer, *The Authority and Interpretation of Scripture in the United Church of Canada* (Daejeon: Daeggangan: 2016); Mary Ann Beavis and HyeRan Kim-Cragg, *What Does the Bible Say? A Critical Conversation with Popular Culture* (Eugene: Cascade, 2017).

³⁶ Edward Farley, “Toward a New Paradigm for Preaching,” in *Preaching as a Theological Task: World, Gospel, Scripture, In honor of David Buttrick*, ed. Thomas Long and Edward Farley (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1996), 167.

³⁷ Kathy Black, *A Healing Homiletic: Preaching and Disability* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 54–56.

³⁸ Teresa Fry Brown, “The Use of Language” in *Teaching Preaching as a Christian Practice*, ed. Thomas Long and Leonora Tubbs Tisdale (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 110.

language other than English. “In which language should we preach? How can we develop resources for the Caribbean as a whole, when language barriers divide us?”³⁹ Pablo A. Jiménez asks these questions as a burning issue, reflecting a postcolonial reality of the Caribbean where many distinct dialects are spoken, yet translated materials are hard to come by. Language has historically signaled the colonial power (British and English) within the Caribbean colonial history and context, and most parts of the world. The lack of attention to the intercultural power dynamic embedded in the language of the preacher means there is insufficient academic consideration of the issues in multilingual, non-Anglo, and racialized congregations in North America, and across the globe.

Issues that have to do with the power of language are inseparably related to other minoritized issues. That is why the United Church of Canada’s decision at the General Council 2006 to become an intercultural church included a commitment to intentionally disclose power differentials and unmask violence committed against cultural and linguistic minority communities, including but not limited to Aboriginal (Indigenous), francophone, deaf, and racialized members of the church.⁴⁰ The language of preaching, whether naming God or using allegorical/literal/analogical/moral/inclusive/expansive/metaphoric/language, spoken or signed, points to the core of personal and corporate identity.⁴¹ Preaching has to do with the formation and the transformation of Christian identity.⁴² If language is not merely a tool to describe a past or current reality but is also a means to create a future reality, *whose* language is represented and respected in preaching shapes the church and the world in which we want to live.

Homiletics in the twenty-first century, an era marked by the postcolonial context of migration, must address linguistic power dynamics as an intercultural issue. It is no longer safe to assume that a preacher’s first language is the same as those in the congregation. In many mainline Protestant and Catholic churches, the number of preachers who have come from other countries is increasing. This is another sign of the impact of migration in the ecclesial landscape around the globe. Thus, equipping preachers and people with intercultural linguistic sensitivity and competence to move beyond Anglo-centrism is an area of unfolding work for homiletics.

While we have a long way to go, a well has already been dug and we can drink of its water thanks to the pioneering work of our elders who lived through and in postcolonial migration contexts. Two come to mind from my Korean and Canadian contexts. One is the late Rev. Dr. Sangchul Lee, a former moderator of the United Church of Canada (1988–1990) and the chancellor of Victoria University at the University of Toronto (1992–1998). His life is a salient example of colonialism and migration. Lee was born to refugee parents in Siberia, and his family was forced to leave and flee their home to Japanese-controlled Manchuria in 1931 when he was seven years old. Threatened with imprisonment by communists suspicious of his Christian commitments, he fled again to South Korea. Years later, after a time studying in Canada, Lee was called to a congregation in Vancouver—not to a Korean congregation, but to an English-Japanese one. In 1966, the year after he started, Koreans began to immigrate to Canada in large numbers and a group began to form around his leadership in the same church. “By 1966,” he recalls in his memoir, “I had unintentionally become a trilingual pastor. On Sunday

³⁹ Pablo A. Jiménez, “If You Just Close Your Eyes: Postcolonial Perspectives on Preaching from the Caribbean” *Homiletic* 40:1 (2015): 28.

⁴⁰ HyeRan Kim-Cragg and Don Schweitzer eds., *An Introduction to The United Church of Canada* (Daejeon: Daeganggan, 2013), 79.

⁴¹ Paul Scott Wilson, *God Sense: Reading the Bible for Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001).

⁴² Tubbs Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, 29.

mornings I preached in English, in the afternoons in Korean, and in the evenings in Japanese. Nor could I simply repeat the same sermon for each group. Each of the three was a distinct community, not only in language, but in its problems, understandings and level of spiritual maturity.”⁴³ Sang Chul Lee is exemplary on many levels. For starters, he shows how preachers are called to cross cultural, national, and linguistic borders in this post-colonial era. Second, he demonstrates that multilingualism is a quality that is in need in this context. Third, he shows that preaching is not a matter of directly translating one single message, but needs to take into account cultural contexts and meanings and social locations as well, attending to the context of the hearers’ lived experiences.

A second example is the Rev. Dr. Kay Cho, who was the first Korean woman ordained in the United Church of Canada, and is to this day the only woman to serve a Korean-speaking United Church congregation. Cho is also another person heavily impacted by colonialism and migration. She was born in North Korea, lived through Japanese colonization, escaped during the Korean War, settled in South Korea, and emigrated to Canada, where she married a person living in Canada. In an interview for a qualitative research project about the experiences of racialized, ordained women preachers of the United Church of Canada, she shared this story: “After a few years of serving an English-speaking congregation, one day a parishioner came to me after the service. ‘I could hear everything you said. Your English has improved a lot,’ they told me. So I answered, ‘Thank you for the compliment. I think your hearing seems to have improved, too.’”⁴⁴ Cho was pointing out that it was not only a matter of her working on English pronunciation, but of the congregation working on their listening skills. As my research indicates, the church as a whole, including the preacher, has a lot of work to do to open their ears to hear people whose first language is not English or who speak with a different accent. And this ear-opening has as much to do with an attitude towards those who are different as it does an acclimatization to a different accent. This listening and speaking dynamic embedded in power-laden language is the heartbeat of intercultural preaching.

The stories offered by these two Korean Canadian elders shed light on the roles that language plays in preaching in a postcolonial intercultural migration context. Kwok Pui-Lan captures this well:

If the aim of postcolonial preaching is to create a multivocal and dialogical faith community committed to justice, we have to attend to the issue of language in intercultural contexts. In urban global cities, it is increasingly common to have church members speaking different mother tongues and immigrants struggling with English or another colonial language. Many of them live in bicultural and bilingual worlds, speak the dominant language with an accent, and must negotiate and translate constantly between hybrid contexts.⁴⁵

Pui-Lan’s observation poses a question: how can preaching reflect multivocality and prevent linguistic minority members from being tokenized? Whether you are a preacher or a congregant, your language (mother tongue) ought to be acknowledged and reflected in worship. For preaching to promote abundant life as its goal, it needs to rely on the Spirit of Pentecost, the

⁴³ Sang-Chul Lee and Erich Weingartner, *The Wanderer: The Autobiography of a United Church Moderator* (Winfield: Wood Lake Books, 1989), 96.

⁴⁴ HyeRan Kim-Cragg, “Sharing the Feast and Hearing Complex Calling: A Study of Racialized Ordained Women Ministers of The United Church of Canada,” report submitted to the McGeachy Senior Scholarship Committee, 2011, <https://unitedchurchfoundation.ca/wp-content/uploads/Sharing-the-Feast-and-Hearing-Complex-Calling-HyeRan-Kim-Cragg.pdf> (accessed May 16, 2019).

⁴⁵ Kwok Pui-lan, “Postcolonial Preaching in Intercultural Contexts,” *Homiletic* 40:1 (2015): 18.

myriad tongues of fire that have descended on our congregations, blessing us with the gift of intercultural communication in multiple languages. The future of preaching is not monolith but polyglot.⁴⁶

To conclude what we have discussed thus far, among the three approaches suggested as emerging tasks of homiletics, an interdisciplinary approach has been identified as the one with a long history of extensive engagement and yet remains as an unfinished task. The intercultural approach is the one that has been employed by many, but insufficiently. Giving particular attention to non-Anglo languages and the power embedded in language as intercultural issues of preaching need to be discussed more vigorously as an unfolding task of homiletics. The last approach suggested here, the interreligious, is probably the one that is still newly beginning to unfold, but is doing so rapidly. We turn to this next.

Preaching and the Interreligious Approach: An Unfolding Task

Interdisciplinary and intercultural approaches are inevitably interwoven. My musings on the East Asian etymology of the prefix “間” (inter) above, cannot be fully understood without an appreciation of Buddhist religious philosophies out of which East Asian words and concepts such as “間” evolved. Homiletics is on the cusp of some important interreligious insights. An interreligious approach to Christian preaching, like migration, is an understudied and unfolding area to explore. In my recent book *Interdependence: A Postcolonial Feminist Practical Theology*, I called for a move in Christian scholarship and practice beyond Christian-centrism.⁴⁷ The landscape of Christianity is changing. In many Western countries Christians are sharing the stage with a growing number of practitioners of non-Christian religions. As a matter of fact, Christianity has never been the dominant religion in most regions of the world, and with the end of colonialism no longer holds a privileged place globally. However, this does not mean that the sun of Christendom has completely set. Its twilight legacy lingers. Indeed, I suspect the current rise of far-right and fascist politics around the world has something to do with the legacy of Christendom, and by extension with colonial practices of Christian preaching. Can it be pure coincidence that countries that have elected far-right populist leaders in recent elections including the United States, Philippines, Poland, and Brazil, are predominantly Christian? Preachers must ask self-critically what the roles of preaching are in this politically dangerous reality. These violent political developments call on us to discern whether our preaching has been faithfully practicing “nonviolent resistance” to the dominant powers, as Charles Campbell called for.⁴⁸ Otherwise, it may have been held captive, coopted by that power.

One major reason why Christianity remains Christian-centric, without fully appreciating other religions or embracing religious pluralism, is because Christians are fearful and ignorant of religious hybridity. Many Christians are still obsessed with its purity, clinging to a theological singularity. Even creating the category of religion, John Thatamanil notes, leads to the creation of singular identities, which in turn “generates the idea that religions are neatly separated by clearly demarcated and impermeable borders.”⁴⁹ In this narrow framework of understanding

⁴⁶ HyeRan Kim-Cragg, “Probing the Pulpit: Postcolonial Feminist Perspectives,” *Liturgy* 34:2 (2019): 22-30.

⁴⁷ HyeRan Kim-Cragg, *Interdependence: A Postcolonial Feminist Practical Theology* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2018), 81–105.

⁴⁸ Charles Campbell, *The Word Before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002).

⁴⁹ John Thatamanil, “Comparative Theology after Religion,” in *Planetary Love: Spivak, Postcolonialism, and Theology*, ed. Stephen Moore and Mayra Rivera (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 243.

religion, being interreligious or hybrid means being “impure” for many practitioners of Christianity, a threat to the orthodox faith. This logic of singularity and purity has resulted in violence against followers of other religions including Indigenous spiritualities.

However, have Christian traditions and practices ever been completely singular and pure? They have not, according to Laurel Schneider, as long as these traditions and practices are grounded in the theology where God in Jesus “pursues incarnation in terms of bodies, the messy variability of bodies.”⁵⁰ Christian theology as incarnational and trinitarian is plural rather than singular, and messy rather than tidy. Embodiment is bound to have to deal with shifting multiplicities because bodies are many and they change. Various bodies are different. Yet, as Cláudio Carvalhaes critiques, churches as ecclesial bodies generally opt for normative uniformity.⁵¹ It is understandable to be anxious about dealing with multiplicity and difference, encountering people and practices that are different from our own. There is undeniably a risk involved in the new and foreign, as it may confuse our identity. But it is also possible to understand difference as “a relation, a differential relation of embodiment,” as Catherine Keller suggests.⁵² If we know that we do not need to give up our own particular religious tradition in order to embrace other traditions, as preachers we may be able to ease our community’s fear and anxiety by articulating fluid and hybrid religious identities that are multiple, multiply-configured, and lived out.

That is what is happening in many faith communities in North America. As I recently described,⁵³ several congregations in Canada have received couples where one partner is of another faith, Jewish or Hindu, for example. In my travels I have met pastors who serve congregations composed of many families and couples of mixed religious traditions in the United States. To them, choosing one religion over the other religion is not an ideal option, as it would result in the loss or suppression of their identities. But these pastors and their faith communities have come to recognize their religious hybrid identities as a gift rather than a threat.

What could preaching look like in such interreligious, religiously-hybrid contexts? These contexts probably do not reflect the contexts of the majority of our congregations today, and they might never do so. However, they may reflect the context of more congregations than we imagine. Therefore, seasoned preachers, preachers in training, and teachers of preaching will find it increasingly important to engage with these religiously-hybrid interreligious contexts rather than dismiss or ignore them.

While we have a long way to go, the work of exploring an interreligious approach to preaching has begun. Hans Malmström and David Jacobsen have introduced a sermon focusing on John 5:31-47 preached by Francis X. Clooney, a Jesuit priest and a leading authority on Hinduism. Clooney offered a self-critique of Christian anti-Semitism embedded in the Gospel of John by making a reference of Shankara’s critique of the Brahmans in a Hindu scripture. The examination of his sermon is an interreligious homiletical move. Biblical exegesis in this sermon was influenced by interreligious hermeneutics which promotes conversational preaching and interfaith dialogue.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Laurel Schneider, *Beyond Monotheism: A Theology of Multiplicity* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 1–2.

⁵¹ Cláudio Carvalhaes, “Liturgy and Postcolonialism: An Introduction,” in *Liturgy in Postcolonial Perspectives: Only One is Holy*, ed. Claudio Carvalhaes (New York: Palgrave, 2015), 4.

⁵² Catherine Keller, “The Flesh of God,” in *Theology that Matters: Ecology, Economy and God*, ed. Darby Kathleen Ray (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 101.

⁵³ HyeRan Kim-Cragg, “Baptism as Crossing beyond Belonging” in *Liturgy in Postcolonial Perspectives*, 201–11.

⁵⁴ Hans Malmström and David Schnasa Jacobsen, “Preaching as Internal Interreligious Dialogue: A Harvard Case Study,” *Homiletic* 42: 2 (2017): 15–33.

Another example is found in Eunjoo Mary Kim's examination of the story of a widow's son who was raised from death by Jesus in Luke 7:11-17, in light of the Buddhist story of *Kisa Gotami*.⁵⁵ Seeking to go beyond the limitations of an intertextual approach to Christian scriptures, she searches for a partner text found in Buddhism and found one in the *Pali Canon*. Delineating similarities and differences between the two stories, Kim argues how this interreligious reading deepens theological wisdom about suffering and salvation. In this intertextual interreligious endeavor, Kim advises not to assume the superiority of Christian scripture but rather to commit to a mutually beneficial reading in tension with humility and creativity.

Let me share my own baby-step examples of an interreligious approach to homiletics in terms of biblical interpretation, translation, and the performative practice of preaching. The first example came from teaching a course where Buddhist, Muslim, and Christian (Catholic, Evangelical, and Protestant) students were learning together. In one session, we studied the story of Hagar in both Genesis and Galatians, based on my co-authored book *The Encounters: Retelling the Bible from Migration and Intercultural Perspectives*.⁵⁶ Most Christian students offered a negative view of Hagar and were inclined to see her from Paul's perspective as an allegory of slavery vs. freedom. A Muslim student, however, shared his understanding of Hagar as someone who is revered in the Islamic faith, citing the Quran. The well she found in the wilderness is marked and remembered in the *hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca, by millions of Muslims every year, he said. A Buddhist student who had never heard of the story noticed Hagar's name for God as "the one who sees" (Gen 16:13). She connected it to the Buddhist bodhisattva, *Guan In*, a divine figure whose name literally means "the one who sees the sound (of suffering)."

My second example comes from a student I supervised whose graduate study research was on the Cree translation of Methodist hymnody.⁵⁷ Erin McIntyre demonstrated in her thesis that Indigenous translators had an ability to incorporate their spiritualities and theology into the hymns they translated. For example, in the English version of a hymn that extols the blessings of God that flow to "saints" but not "sinners," the Cree translation has blessing flowing to "all," contesting an exclusive view of salvation. A former moderator of the United Church of Canada and Cree elder Stan McKay claims that the missionaries had to depend on the Indigenous people to find the right words to preach, including key biblical terms such as sin and salvation. It is possible they were doing more than literally translating what they heard, but were making room for Indigenous interpretations and understandings, however subversive, at the preaching event.⁵⁸

Finally, for an example of interreligious sensitivity in the delivery in preaching, we need to look no further than the Gospels themselves. In Matthew, Jesus is portrayed in a Jewish posture, teaching while seated on a mountain (5:1). When the story of the same sermon is told by Luke to a Greek audience, Jesus is presented as one who preaches while standing in a level place (6:17). We do not know how Jesus preached, but we do know that preaching from an elevated pulpit does not have to be the norm. An interreligious approach informs us that different preaching postures may convey important messages. In Indigenous traditions the elder speaks to

⁵⁵ Eunjoo Mary Kim, *Christian Preaching and Worship in Multicultural Contexts* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2017), 71–77.

⁵⁶ Kim-Cragg and Choi, *The Encounters*. See chapter 1.

⁵⁷ Erin McIntyre, "United Church of Canada Cree Hymnody in Translation: A Theological Locus of Hybridity," Master Sacred Theology Thesis (Saskatoon Theological Union, Saskatoon, 2018).

⁵⁸ Stan McKay and Janet Silman, *The First Nations: A Canadian Experience of the Gospel-Culture Encounter* (Geneva: WCC, 1995), 42.

people gathered around in a circle. In Buddhist temples monks deliver a sermon seated cross-legged in front of their followers. Perhaps we as scholars charting a future of homiletics are invited to imagine and explore what it is like to preach while sitting in a circle, or while cross-legged in a posture of meditation. How would such posture communicate the message differently? How do our bodies inform, form, and transform our view, our interreligious sensitivity, even our own content of Christian preaching?

Conclusion

I have identified three unfinished and unfolding tasks of homiletics that are required in the postcolonial migration contexts of the twenty-first century. In doing so I have woven three “inter” related and complimentary approaches. Interdisciplinary, intercultural, and interreligious approaches seek to uphold the importance of solid scriptural exegesis and robust, embodied delivery in preaching while at the same time intentionally enhancing the roles of the people in the pew as active participants in sermon preparation and the preaching event. If we take these approaches seriously, the result will be more faithful and just attention to the people in the pew who are minorities due to age in the case of children, language in the case of non-Anglo speaking people, and religion in the case of families who represent more than one faith tradition. God is present today, actively working in a world marked by postcolonial migration, and compelling us to engage more vigorously in interdisciplinary work while probing intercultural language issues and embracing interreligious realities. In so doing, there is promise that we may make some sense of complicated life situations, interacting with each other and making meaning for our world as the Good News is proclaimed.