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**Special Issue: Exploring Intercultural Instructional Communication for Homiletical
Pedagogy**

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**Introduction to the Essays of the Consultation
on Exploring Intercultural Instructional Communication for Homiletical Pedagogy**

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These papers emerged out of the 2019-2021 Wabash Consultation on Exploring Intercultural Instructional Communication for Homiletical Pedagogy. They are the culmination of several months of exploration into the literature of contemporary intercultural communication theory and reflection on our classroom pedagogical praxis. A small project grant from the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology provided us the resources we needed to meet, discuss, and interrogate a body of literature that was largely new to us as homileticians and classroom instructors. More importantly, however, our grant provided us the service of a knowledgeable guide: University of Portland's Communication Studies Professor Jeff Kerssen-Griep. I came to value Prof. Kerssen-Griep's expertise when I first began studying the potential of facework theory for dealing with the problem of in-class sermon feedback during my last sabbatical in 2018. Little did I know that his presence at our Wabash consultation would inspire much broader questions and interrogations of intercultural and instructional communication theory for the work of homiletical pedagogy.

I use the phrase "intercultural and instructional communication theory" for a reason. Intercultural communication theory generally is a way of dealing with communication that accounts for cultural differences. As with many other fields, the definition of intercultural communication has not only changed but is still changing as different identities inflect the theorizing and different contexts create variegated settings for its work. Sometimes intercultural communication focuses on interpersonal relations and communications; sometimes it is more group oriented. The extension of our more or less coined phrase "intercultural and instructional communication," however, is pasted together to narrow an only general definition into something specific. Experts in instructional communication, like Kerssen-Griep, are bringing a concern for intercultural communication into the classroom. It is this key aspect of the phrase intercultural and *instructional* communication that makes all the difference. And that difference hangs close to an analogue that speech and communication instructors also face: feedback interventions in culturally diverse classes that focus on public speech. While not identical, communication instructors must hone their own craft as pedagogues in a situation not dissimilar from our own as homileticians. Intercultural and *instructional* communication becomes for our purposes a specialized form of intercultural communication that has pedagogical implications for our in-class sermon interventions, too.

Of course, even the most crisp definition of intercultural communication cannot herd the cats that are the homiletics guild. We, too, find ourselves teaching from different positions of culture and privilege and in ever more culturally diverse classrooms. As a result, an initial consultation invitation to focus on facework theory occasioned something much broader—and more in line with our respective classroom issues. The manifold nature of this exploration became clear when our diverse team of homileticians met Prof. Kerssen-Griep for the inaugural session of our consultation in January 2019. The initial dialogue around facework theory and in-class sermon feedback quickly branched out to include a variety of questions and research foci: cultural humility, intercultural conflict theory, anxiety/uncertainty management [AUM] theory, and stereotype threat theory among others. Some of the projects continued to center the issue of

in-class sermon feedback, but other important questions loomed large as well when we thought carefully about the complexity of the homiletics classroom and its role in identity formation.

The result is this collection of papers. And they don't all view the significance of intercultural instructional communication the same way. Amy McLaughlin-Sheasby, for example, recounts her experience with facework theory in a mentoring role with students as a Teaching Fellow. She sees and articulates deep dimensions of how "witness" as a theological and ethical commitment grounds the kind of intercultural interactions she witnessed in a classroom in 2020. Her description of her own facework pedagogical practice, interpretation of student evaluation responses, and theorizing around witness and facework pedagogy make for a rich invitation to the intercultural work to be done. Jared Alcántara uses stereotype threat in dialogue with the work of a social psychologist to help "purify the air" in our classrooms. With close attention to tools like identity seeing, intelligence shifting, and imaginative shaping he seeks to help teachers "recognize and reduce stereotype threat" so that classrooms and teaching and learning relationships are interculturally enhanced. Sarah Travis focuses on cultural humility as a help to the homiletics classroom. She asks how cultural humility can also help us imagine people who are not in the classroom, who are *not* in the room where it happens, as a means to help preaching assume a more *public*-theological role. Travis aims to see how cultural humility can help us by means of curiosity and wonder about others so we can decolonize our perspectives. My article rounds out the set and seeks to envision a way in which the preaching teacher might in the end "un-master homiletics." It begins by describing the implementation of a facework-oriented pedagogy in my 2020 "Introduction to Preaching" class. In 2020 this facework-informed pedagogical praxis was carried out in course sections of about 7 students each to further a kind of mentored learning that furthers students' growth as homiletical *theologians*. The article takes into account student responses on an anonymous course evaluation to assess facework's value in furthering in particular a sense of belonging among students for their homiletical-theological formation. Looking ahead, the article considers how Willie Jennings's *After Whiteness*, a recent work on belonging in theological education, actually recasts the intercultural value of facework theory amid institutional problems with white supremacy--and thus offers the possibility of "un-mastering" homiletics.

Thanks are due to so many. I am grateful for the journal *Homiletic* who agreed to jury our articles for publication. I am grateful also to the Wabash Center whose funding made this whole research arc possible. I also want to thank André Resner and Gerald Liu who participated in the early phases of our consultation's work. I am aware that I have found both Liu and Resner's writings and reflections so generative for my own and know that they have also had impact on many of these pages. I am grateful for the commitment of our consultant, Prof. Jeff Kerssen-Griep who continued with us for several months as we thought about our research projects and our pedagogical praxis on Zoom calls. I also need to thank Amy McLaughlin-Sheasby who was co-administrator with me on this Wabash small project grant. She wrote the bulk of the proposal and carried us all forward with her uncanny insight, commitment to justice, and enthusiasm. All these interpersonal connections make me hopeful about pedagogy in our field and the promise we are aiming yet to fulfill: to promote a truly life-giving, intercultural theological education in preaching classrooms.

**The Witnessing Community:
Cultivating Face-Attentive Learning Environments for In-Class Sermon Feedback**

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Abstract: *Preaching courses customarily involve elements of public performance and evaluation that stir deep feelings of anxiety and dread among student preachers. This article considers a concept from intercultural communication theory called facework, which is concerned with mitigating perceived face threats for the purpose of optimizing student receptivity to critical feedback. This article explores facework in relation to the development of classroom environments and proposes an ethic of bearing witness as a means by which instructors can shape classroom relationships and tend to the theological formation of preaching students. The article concludes with a review of a student survey, reflecting on the implementation of face-attentive pedagogical practices during in-class sermon feedback.*

Introduction

Academic courses that require an element of public performance regularly produce a sense of dread among students, whose attention is divided between the task at hand and their social standing among their peers and educators. Preaching courses typically include at least one performance of a sermon, followed by a feedback intervention led by the professor.¹ Students may experience varying levels of fear or anxiety leading up to the assignment as they attempt to gauge their own competence, while also negotiating elements of personal identity in relation to others. Though student experiences are varied, this much remains clear: the moments leading up to, and following, a student's in-class performance of a sermon are fraught and require a great amount of pedagogical skill on the part of the professor. This paper explores the concept of *facework* from intercultural communication theory to illuminate the pedagogical challenges of in-class sermon feedback.² The purpose of this paper is to present a pedagogical approach that cultivates a learning environment in which students bear witness to one another as a witnessing community. The mode of witnessing generates opportunities for mitigating *face threats*, thereby promoting student receptivity to feedback and instruction. Additionally, to bear witness to preaching students is to participate in the homiletical tradition of witnessing—that is, to affirm students' capacities to speak about God in a communal context. The cultivation of a witnessing community in the homiletical classroom enjoins students to become witnesses to the theological formation of their peers, to affirm each other's testimonies, and to engage one another's social needs, thereby improving student learning outcomes.

Face Under Threat in Sermon Feedback

¹ Feedback interventions are "actions intended to give information about one or more aspects of another's task performance, ideally without provoking the defensive, negative attributions that can thwart their desired impacts on the hearer." April R. Trees, Jeff Kerssen-Griep, and Jon A. Hess. "Earning Influence by Communicating Respect: Facework's Contributions to Effective Instructional Feedback" *Communication Education* 58:3, 397-416.

² Specifically, this article incorporates the research of Jeff Kerssen-Griep, April R. Trees, and Jon A. Hess on facework and instructional feedback.

It is a familiar sensation to the seasoned instructor of preaching: the rising tension in the room following the delivery of a student sermon. Despite its familiarity, the sensation may be somewhat confounding even to the most experienced teachers of preaching. Homileticians have developed and employed an array of methods and procedures for reducing tension during in-class sermon feedback. Though many of these methods help to alleviate momentary bouts of anxiety, these methods rarely consider the social formation of the student in relation to others beyond the moments of sermon feedback. One exception can be found in Barbara Lundblad's chapter in the edited volume, *Teaching Preaching as a Christian Practice*. Lundblad treats not only task-mastery, but also the student as a person in relation to a learning environment. She is mindful of matters of identity in the classroom and is concerned with developing a learning environment rooted in respect and openness. Lundblad's attention to cultivating a learning environment that tends to social and theological difference moves toward the concept of a witnessing community developed in this article.³

While homileticians have certainly gained greater awareness of student needs and pedagogical techniques, the palpable tension among students during in-class sermon feedback remains a considerable obstacle for many. What is often brushed aside as garden-variety stage fright is actually a rather complex constellation of student needs emerging in competition with one another. Some communication theorists refer to this constellation as *face needs*. In their article titled, "Earning Influence by Communicating Respect: Facework's Contributions to Effective Instructional Feedback," April Trees, Jeff Kerssen-Griep, and Jon Hess describe the concept of *face* as "the desired self-image individuals present in interaction with others."⁴ Every person in the classroom is working to establish face as they negotiate space, representation, and recognition among peers and with their professor.

In their 1987 study on the construction of polite speech, Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson identified two categories of face needs: *positive face* and *negative face*.⁵ Positive face is the need to belong, to feel accepted and affirmed by others. Negative face is the need to be autonomous, retaining full independence and agency, free from constraint or domination.⁶ Both positive and negative face needs emerge and contend with excessive urgency in the context of feedback interventions. April Trees, et al. note that "particular speech acts may threaten these identity needs, and these face threats pervade the teaching-learning relationship."⁷ *Face threats* are actions, verbal or nonverbal, that threaten the negotiation of face needs. Trees, et al. go on to describe the "face-threatening nature of criticism" endemic to feedback interventions in classrooms, arguing that poorly conceived approaches to feedback may produce ineffective and counter-productive results.⁸ Thus, communication theorists have developed *facework* strategies for mitigating face threats, while sustaining the preferred social identities of others.⁹

³ Barbara K. Lundblad, "Designing the Introductory Course in Preaching," in *Teaching Preaching as a Christian Practice* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 207-222.

⁴ Trees, et al., 398.

⁵ Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson, *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

⁶ Trees, et al. 398.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 397.

⁹ Jeff Kerssen-Griep, April R. Trees, and Jon A. Hess, "Attentive Facework During Instructional Feedback: Key to Perceiving Mentorship and an Optimal Learning Environment" *Communication Education* 57, no 3. 2008, pp. 312-332. 313.

Facework strategies for feedback interventions are focused on building trust and rapport with students in an effort to mitigate face threats and increase student receptivity to instruction and guidance. Research suggests that the way a student feels about their instructor and their learning environment shapes the way the student receives feedback from their instructor and peers.¹⁰ The implementation of facework in student feedback positively predicts the student's perception of their teacher's credibility.¹¹ Thus, strategies that aim to personally affirm a student's belonging in the classroom, while also acknowledging their autonomy and agency, are more likely to promote growth in students, which may result in higher learning outcomes.

However, facework strategies are not one-size-fits-all and must be curated as the instructor intuitively discerns the particular face needs of various students. For example, a student who culturally identifies with the instructor may be more inclined to feel a sense of belonging than a student who does not culturally identify with the instructor. Or a first-generation college student or graduate student may negotiate their face needs in a manner different from a student whose parents attended college or graduate school. Or, as is common in preaching classrooms, women may find themselves filling a pulpit for the first time, coming from denominations that bar their bodies from pulpits. These women may experience disproportionate levels of interpersonal stress compared to their male peers. Similar observations can be made about some LGBTQ+ students entering the pulpit for the first time. Such aspects of identity are constantly factoring into the ways in which students negotiate their face needs in the classroom, and especially during in-class sermon feedback.

Cultivating an Ethical Learning Environment

Effective facework requires that the instructor foster a learning environment in which all students can safely pursue learning and task-mastery without defending face at every turn.¹² In a study by Kerssen-Griep, Trees, and Hess, facework in instructional feedback was found to significantly impact student perceptions of classroom relationships and classroom environment.¹³ In this sense, facework does not merely concern learning outcomes; facework concerns accessibility and interactivity within the broader context of a learning community. When students perform in a context that is designed to uphold face needs, they feel more empowered to receive and integrate critical feedback. When students no longer feel that their identities and social needs are being threatened, they are more likely to invest themselves in their professor's instruction.

The cultivation of a learning environment that tends carefully to the wellbeing of others requires a presiding ethic—a pedagogical ethic for the relationship between teacher and student, as well as relationships between peers. In their chapter, "Ethical Issues in Intercultural Communication," Judith Martin, Lisa Flores, and Thomas Nakayama outline three principles for ethical intercultural communication. The first principle is the *humanness principle*. This principle emphasizes the interpersonal responsibility to respect and care for fellow humans, while also pursuing growing awareness of humanity. The second principle is the *dialogic*

¹⁰ Trees, et al., 398.

¹¹ Ibid., 403.

¹² According to Trees, et al., "Depending on how the [feedback intervention] is perceived, a hearer either activates *self-identity-protection* processes, or, if the self does not feel threatened by the [feedback intervention], the hearer will devote cognitive energy to more specific and useful *task-learning* or *task-motivation* regulatory processes." 399-400.

¹³ Kerssen-Griep, et al., 323.

principle, which asserts that we become most human in the context of relationships with other humans. This principle emphasizes empathy and the capacity to reach across social divides. The third principle is the *principle of speaking “with” and “to” (rather than “about” or “for”)*. This principle emphasizes the importance of maintaining boundaries in communication, determining to speak only for oneself and with others, rather than about or for others.¹⁴ These principles for intercultural communication are helpful when considering how one might develop a learning environment rooted in face-informed ethics. Further, they resonate well with the theological concept of witnessing in homiletical literature, and the concept of social witnessing in philosophy, both of which are taken up in the following section.

Witnessing and Social Obligation

While Martin, Flores, and Nakayama certainly provide important insights for classroom ethics, the cultivation of a witnessing community in homiletical classrooms requires greater attention to two areas: (1) the theological formation of student preachers in relation to one another and the instructor; and (2) a critical engagement with the philosophical concept of witnessing the other, in order to flesh out a more nuanced understanding of social obligation. A brief overview of witnessing in homiletical literature will illuminate the theological formation of preachers in relation to their communities and will then be connected with a deeper exploration of social obligation.

Witnessing as a Homiletical Tradition

Witnessing in homiletical tradition informs this project in three primary ways: (1) the act of witnessing is a communal act; (2) to bear witness in preaching is to affirm the authority of one’s own lived experiences; and (3) testimony retains the capacity to upset paradigms of social power disparity. The term “witness” in homiletical literature most frequently refers to the action of one who testifies to God’s activity in the world. A preacher may be called a witness, and a preacher may participate in the act of witnessing, while the community may also be called witnesses who witness the preacher’s testimony. In his book, *I Believe I’ll Testify*, Cleo LaRue argues that “[t]he best of black preaching and the oratorical devices through which it is communicated are indeed testimony, for they witness to the power of God to provide, empower, and sustain a people historically and to this present day.”¹⁵ In this sense, the act of bearing witness informs hearers not only of God’s activity, but also indicates something about the people in relation to that activity. In his seminal work *The Witness of Preaching*, Thomas Long focuses on witnessing as the primary task of preachers who are called upon to testify from their own encounters with God in scripture.¹⁶ Yet Long also connects testimony to a community of hearers,

¹⁴ Judith Martin, Lisa Flores, and Thomas Nakayama, “Ethical Issues in Intercultural Communication” in *Readings in Intercultural Communication: Experiences and Contexts* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2002), 363-370.

¹⁵ Cleo LaRue, *I Believe I’ll Testify: The Art of African American Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), XIV. Perhaps worth noting, LaRue cites Paul Scott Wilson’s work on confession and witnessing for his own understanding of the concepts. LaRue quotes Wilson to indicate the multifaceted nature of testimony: “The testimony may be the preacher’s own or spoken on behalf of someone in the Bible or contemporary world.” Paul Scott Wilson, *Setting Words on Fire: Putting God at the Center of the Sermon* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2008), 149.

¹⁶ Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1989), 49.

writing, “Preaching and the community of faith, then, are reciprocal realities. Those who hear and believe the witness to Christ in preaching are thus gathered into the community of faith that continues to tell, to teach, and to celebrate that witness.”¹⁷ Thus, for both Long and LaRue, witnessing is a communal activity.

In her book, *Preaching as Testimony*, Anna Carter Florence ventures (by way of Ricoeur) that all theology is testimony.¹⁸ Thus, for Florence, all *preaching* is carried out in the mode of testimony. She develops this concept of preaching as testimony by locating a history of testimony in the lives of three preachers: Anne Hutchinson (1591-1643), Sarah Osborn (1714-1796), and Jarena Lee (1783-?). Her narration of the lives and ministries of these women highlights the way in which testimony emerged like a mother tongue of those who were marginalized or systemically silenced. In the historic and present barring of certain bodies from pulpits, testimony has opened the possibility of reclaiming authority in the space of one’s own body. The preacher’s body becomes a heuristic standard for gauging the validity of the Word to be proclaimed.¹⁹ Florence’s work marks a significant turn in the homiletical tradition of witnessing toward the body of the preacher.

This attention to bodies in the witnessing tradition finds expression in the work of Lisa Thompson. In her book *Ingenuity: Preaching as an Outsider*, Thompson calls upon her readers to bear witness to the lives of Black women—though she does not overtly employ the language of witness and testimony. She writes,

I posit first and foremost, those we have most excluded from the conversation, by deeming them as the *other* or *outsider*, must set the terms for our rules of engagement. If we do not privilege the lives and truth of the most vulnerable in our communities, then we cannot be faithful to the most fundamental work of preaching itself. Therefore, in these pages I am endeavoring in a process that revisits the rules for engaging the practice of preaching if we are committed to taking the lives and ministries of black women seriously. [. . .] Black women become the lens through which our collective paradigms of preaching and its instruction are revisited, reshaped, and broadened.²⁰

Thompson’s insistence that Black women “become the lens through which” the paradigms of instruction are revisited brings the homiletical tradition of witnessing into proximity with philosophical concepts of witnessing and the other.

Witnessing as a Philosophical Concept and Ethical Obligation

Bearing witness as a philosophical idea is never removed from its ethical obligations. To bear witness is to engage in relation with others. In his book, *Witness to Dispossession: The Vocation of a Post-modern Theologian*, Tom Beaudoin frames his work as a theologian in terms of such witnessing. For Beaudoin, theology has an ethical responsibility to bear truthful witness to the lives of others—particularly those who are oppressed. He draws upon the Lévinasian concept of face when he writes,

¹⁷ Long, 51.

¹⁸ Florence cites Ricoeur’s “The Hermeneutics of Testimony,” in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980).

¹⁹ Anna Carter Florence, *Preaching as Testimony* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), xvi-xxii.

²⁰ Lisa Thompson, *Ingenuity: Preaching as an Outsider* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2018), 7.

A story of suffering may become a morality tale or be co-opted by theory. A *face* calls in a different way. The Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas famously argued that to be human is to be responsible for the suffering of the other, for the person whose well-being our very existence may be threatening. This obligation to others is encountered and symbolized in a unique way in the face-to-face relation. The faces of others present persons genuinely different from us, exposed to us. The vulnerability of the human face presents us with the claim: do not kill me. In a sense, Levinas says, the bare face of another says “do not deface me”; allow me, it says, my otherness without violation, shame, or indifference.²¹

Indeed, faces and their needs call in a different way to the professor. The call is to not deface, but to honor and make room for the truths espoused and imposed by the bodies in the room. And yet, there remains an unknowability in others. Even in the close proximity of a classroom, professors may struggle to discern the needs of their students. How might a professor tend to face needs of others when the others—our students—are essentially unknowable? How might classmates tend to the needs of their unknowable peers?

Philosopher and ethicist Kelly Oliver argues for an ethics of bearing witness, which accounts for this space between people through the concept of subjectivity. While affirming her indebtedness to poststructuralist theories of identity and relation, she offers a critique of poststructuralist notions of the “Other” in which, “the other is sometimes mute, impoverished, unavailable, still to come, almost worshiped (à la Derrida and Emmanuel Lévinas), or the other is invisible, unspoken, nonexistent, the underside of the subject (à la Foucault and Butler).”²² She raises concern for the manner in which others are consistently objectified for the subject. She asks, “What of the subjectivity of this so-called other? What of the subject position of those othered by these discourses of subjectivity? What of their speech, their present, their existence? Surely they don’t just think of themselves as mute, still to come, invisible, or nonexistent.”²³ Thus Oliver determines that the only way to construct a proper ethic of social relations is to begin with the position of the othered in an effort to uphold their subjectivity.²⁴

To uphold the subjectivity of others, Oliver promotes the mode of witnessing, in which others engage in “address-ability” and “response-ability.”²⁵ That is, others are not merely observed, but are actively engaged and received. Oliver’s concern for the address-ability and response-ability of others finds compatibility with the aforementioned ethics of intercultural communication: the humanness principle, the dialogic principle, and the principle of speaking “with” and “to” (rather than “about” or “for”). However, Oliver’s witnessing involves a more robust mode of engagement. Empathy is good, and consideration for others is essential, but Oliver’s vision of relationship entails something more far more constructive. Oliver insists that

²¹ Tom Beaudoin, *Witness to Dispossession: The Vocation of a Post-modern Theologian* (Mayknoll: Orbis Books, 2008), 33.

²² Kelly Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 5-6.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 7.

²⁵ Of address-ability and response-ability, Oliver writes, “What we learn from beginning with the subject position of those othered is that the speaking subject is a subject by virtue of address-ability and response-ability. Address-ability and response-ability are the roots of subjectivity, which are damaged by the objectifying operations of oppression and subordination. Address-ability and response-ability are what I identify with the process of witnessing.” Ibid.

the space between people is not some unknowable chasm, nor is it an untraversable social division. Rather, the space between people is full of shared input, accessible to all parties. She writes,

We create an impossible problem for ourselves by presuming to be separated in the first place. By presuming that we are fundamentally separated from the world and other people by the void of empty space, we at once eliminate the possibility of connection and relationships even while we make desperate attempts to bridge that abyss. [...] Space, however, is not an empty void. It is full of air, light, and the circulation of various forms of electrical, thermal, mechanical, and chemical energies that sustain us and connect us to each other and the world.²⁶

Thus, if the space between people is full of shared sensory input, as well as anything humans impose or self-disclose to one another, then the space itself offers a context in which humans can come to know one another on some level. In turn, the space confers an ethical responsibility upon the one who beholds another: to bear truthful witness to the other. Witnessing opens the possibility of moving beyond simple recognition of another, into intersubjective response-ability and engagement.²⁷

Though one human may not ever *fully* know another, humans are bound together in a social fabric of relations which makes an ethical call upon an individual to pay attention. In her book, *Poetics of the Flesh*, Mayra Rivera cites Édouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* stating,

[...] because Relation is indeterminate, it cannot be fully known. Not knowing Relation is thus not a weakness, Glissant assures us. But "not wanting to know it certainly is." For our inability to grasp Relation is no excuse for indifference. To the contrary, one shall seek the "entanglements" of worldwide relations.²⁸

Rivera draws upon Glissant's notion of Relation to develop a concept of social identity in which humans are vulnerable to one another, bound in a social matrix with one another, and co-construct one another. To engage with another is to be necessarily imprinted upon. In this sense, both Oliver and Rivera develop social theories which open possibilities for seeing, experiencing, and relating to others in a way that is ultimately constructive.

Thus, from the homiletical tradition of witnessing, one may derive the idea that individual bodies have testimonies to share, rooted in their own personal, lived experiences. And as Thompson points out, the lives of those who have been silenced, rejected, or marginalized ought to push back against dominant paradigms of preaching and instruction. Philosophical considerations of witnessing open the possibility of pursuing understanding of the other, while also placing an ethical call on the individual to tend carefully to social difference. Together, the homiletical and philosophical traditions flesh out a theological orientation for facework. To tend to the face needs of students in the classroom is not merely an exercise in effective teaching; it contributes to the theological formation of students in relation to one another. To cultivate a witnessing community is to cultivate a community in which students and instructors step into the responsibility of witnessing God's activity in and through one another. To bear truthful witness

²⁶ Ibid., 12.

²⁷ Ibid., 15.

²⁸ Mayra Rivera, *Poetics of the Flesh* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2015), 3-4.

to that activity is to be attentive to matters of identity, and to engage one another at the level of face needs.

Witnessing as Face-Attentive Pedagogy

The mitigation of face threat in preaching classrooms requires something more than simple kindness.²⁹ Indeed, it requires active witnessing—the continual pursuit of understanding and responsibility with others. As Glissant noted, *not* wanting to know or understand relation is a weakness. In a pedagogical sense, increasing understanding between professor and students and among peers opens greater possibility for successfully anticipating face needs across social difference. As facework theory demonstrates, if a student perceives that their professor wants to understand them, and exhibits earnest openness and welcome, the student is likelier to perceive the professor as trustworthy and credible, and the learning environment as conducive to their success. Thus, witnessing—that is, seeking truthful understanding about people and their social relations in the classroom, and responding with responsibility and care—offers a helpful framework for face-attentive pedagogical practices.

To bring a witnessing pedagogy to bear upon in-class sermon feedback, one must carefully consider how classroom interactions impact student face needs, both positive and negative. Intercultural communication theorists have tested several hypotheses regarding best practices in the classroom in relation to face needs and have produced a number of recommendations. For example, Trees, et al. found that students favor informative, elaborated, specific, and personal feedback, when face needs have been met.³⁰ The temptation for instructors might be to default to non-specific and impersonal feedback during feedback interventions, as to avoid defacing of the student. Yet, impersonal feedback gives the impression that the student is not seen or known. Bearing witness to the student’s particularity, when combined with face-affirming practices, is more likely to result in student receptivity.

Similarly, students respond better to motivational feedback that conveys high standards while affirming and encouraging the student’s capacity to reach those standards, than “unbuffered criticism, simple performance praise, and invocation of high standards alone.”³¹ Again, the tendency may be to default to mere praise in order to preserve the student’s face. However, mere praise deprived of high standards may actually threaten the student’s sense of competence and value in the classroom. Holding students to a high standard is certainly riskier than offering praise but bringing the two together optimizes the possibility for student receptivity and growth.

Several behaviors that denote the instructor’s capacity to see students and empathize with them, such as expressions of solidarity, words of encouragement, use of a considerate tone, and recognition of student effort, have also been shown to support student receptivity to feedback.³² Teaching-learning relationships always pose threats to face.³³ The power dynamic between instructor and student presents ample risk for intellectual and emotional violence. Students are

²⁹ Trees, et al. note, “Because they are complex interactions that address multiple goals for multiple parties, skilled [feedback interventions] clearly require conditions and abilities well beyond simply being nice or friendly with hearers. Evidence overall suggests a pervasive dilemma good teachers must navigate: detailed, personally tailored [feedback interventions] are both more desirable *and* inherently more face-threatening for students.” 399.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 400.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid, 412.

often able to sense the risk intrinsic to the educational experience. Thus, when a professor mitigates this risk by honoring the humanity of the student (along the lines of the aforementioned humanness principle) with personally affirming behaviors, students feel safer. A study carried out in 2002 found that one-third of all teacher-student conflicts resulted from student's perception of their professor's damaging personal interactions.³⁴ Behaviors perceived as "defensive, insincere, retaliatory, or humiliating" chisel away at a student's relationship with their instructor and their learning environment, infringing upon the student's capacity to receive instruction and feedback.³⁵

Kerssen-Griep, et al. recommend a mentoring model of pedagogy for optimal face-attending. They define mentoring as an "individualized, mutually respectful relationship between a student protégé and an expert invested in guiding the student's professional and personal development."³⁶ Instructional mentoring is described as "a high-quality social and reciprocal relationship where a teacher is seen to nurture students' intellectual growth, self-efficacy, resourcefulness, and sense of identity by helping guide their professional and personal development."³⁷ Mentoring relationships may be harder to establish with larger class sizes, but elements of a mentoring relationship can still inform face-attentive practices in sermon feedback. With direct, personalized, motivational, affirming, yet challenging criticism, a student may feel seen and recognized, while also receiving individualized cultivation. When the student feels seen, recognized, and empowered to self-present before their peers and instructor, witnessing becomes possible.

Witnessing as a Shared Classroom Ethic

To cultivate a face-attentive classroom environment rooted in ethics of bearing witness, the instructor must facilitate in developing an environment that encourages mutual witnessing between all parties. Kerssen-Griep, et al. cite a number of studies when they claim that "Optimal classroom group environments themselves have been shown to exert influence on learners and transform their achievements."³⁸ Witnessing is not merely a set of behaviors; witnessing establishes a presiding classroom ethos in which mutual subjectivity is upheld. In order to revise practices around in-class sermon feedback according to face-attentive witnessing, instructors must tend to the classroom culture as a whole. In turn, the manner in which the instructor conducts face-attentive feedback impacts student perceptions of classroom environments.³⁹ Kerssen-Griep, et al. found that "the facework students experienced from instructors during feedback had a significant impact on their classroom relational and environmental perceptions." Thus, the classroom offers a social system in which individual actions shape perceptions of the whole, and experiences of the classroom culture shape the individual.

³⁴ Tantleff-Dunn, S., Dunn, M. E., & Gokee, J. L. "Understanding Faculty-Student Conflict: Student Perceptions of Teacher Competence and Trustworthiness." *Communication Quarterly*, 55, 433-450.

³⁵ Trees, et al., 412.

³⁶ Kerssen-Griep, et al., 312.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 315.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 313.

³⁹ The third hypothesis tested in the study reported by Kerssen-Griep, et al., states, "Students' reports of positive and negative facework received from instructors during evaluative feedback positively predict students' perception of a supportive classroom climate." Of six different standard multiple regressions, findings of the study supported the hypothesis on five climate dimensions. Thus, the hypothesis is generally supported by the research carried out by Kerssen-Griep, et al. 321-323.

Classroom cultures participate in and consist of social matrices like those described in Rivera's work, in which all parties are vulnerable to one another in processes of identity negotiation. In these vulnerable spaces, wherein some students experience varying levels of relative privilege and power while others struggle to assert their value and strive harder for a sense of belonging, the instructor holds mighty influence. The dedication to bear witness to social matrices in the classroom translates well into face-attentive practices. Instructors have the opportunity to mentor students into such practices, guiding students into seeing, respecting, and receiving their peers. While such practices may be modeled and instilled in the most mundane activities, day in and day out, these practices become exceedingly clear and crucial during in-class feedback interventions. During such interventions, instructors are not only responsible for their own responses to students, but also for cultivating face-attentive responses among the student's peers. Many preaching classrooms invite peer engagement during feedback interventions. For many students, offering such feedback may be an entirely new experience. If the instructor has been cultivating a classroom environment rooted in respect and mutuality, students will likely play into the trust and rapport they have already established with one another. But the students will also be looking for cues from the instructor for how to properly communicate feedback, especially critical feedback. In such cases, the mentoring approach may prove quite useful.

The Witnessing Classroom

Face-Attentive Procedures

The facework principles and pedagogical ethics outlined in this paper have been exercised with great intention with four different groups of students. The first group consisted of undergraduate preaching students at Abilene Christian University. The subsequent three groups were all graduate students enrolled in Boston University School of Theology's Intro to Preaching course, for which I assistant taught. This section of the article will reflect on experiences with the students at Boston University School of Theology and will reference the results of a survey distributed to one particular group of students.

Beginning in the spring semester of 2019, I joined Dr. David Schnasa Jacobsen in teaching revised curriculum for Intro to Preaching which sought to incorporate insights from intercultural communication theory. Our goal was to tend to students' face needs through mentoring groups of 7-8 students per group. The teaching team was encouraged to employ pedagogical techniques that would affirm face needs like autonomy, agency, and belonging. In my own group, the development of a witnessing community started in the very first group meeting. I gathered my students at a round table, so that we were sitting in a circle facing one another. This kept me from becoming the touchstone for all student relationships, enabling students to get to know one another better. I created ample time for student introductions and sought to establish a personal connection with each student. I facilitated in making connections between students and encouraged interactivity. Though I had removed myself from the focal point of the room, I demonstrated my competence as their instructor by communicating expectations and high standards, while also declaring my confidence in the students to meet those standards. By cultivating practices of witnessing from the first day of the course, I sought to develop a face-attentive classroom environment that would culminate in a smoother in-class sermon feedback process several weeks into the course.

For the purpose of integrating facework into student feedback interventions, we developed a sermon feedback process that consists of four steps. The first step is designed to emphasize the visibility of the preacher. In this first step, the instructor reflects back to the preaching student what they heard. This step is marked by language that affirms the student's autonomy, such as, "What I, personally, heard in your sermon was..." or "What really stood out to me in your sermon was..." By taking ownership of personal perception, the instructor does not impose upon the negative face needs of the student. But by naming a distinct and particular message that the instructor heard in the student's work, the instructor tends to the student's need to be seen and to belong.

In the second step, the instructor guides the class through a peer feedback process. The student preacher should not comment or respond during this process. This second step provides insight into the hermeneutical interactivity between preacher and hearer. The student preacher is given the opportunity to discover whether or not their intended message was received, while also experiencing a heightened level of care and attention from their peers. During this step, the instructor asks the peers a series of pointed questions, such as, "What do you think this preacher wanted you to hear?" and "To what extent do you think the preacher had you in mind as they wrote this sermon?" and "Did this sound like gospel for you?" These questions tend to draw out deeper reflection on student's relationships with their peers, and usually spur deeper theological reflection on the student's selected text.

The third step invites peers to identify strengths, as well as possibilities for improvement. In this step, it is absolutely crucial for the instructor to model face-attentive modes of communication. The instructor should model sincerity and precision when naming strengths, and a dedication to the student's autonomy and agency when voicing criticism. For example, the instructor might suggest, "This critical feedback is offered for your consideration. If it seems valuable or helpful, please accept it as a gift. If it seems ill-fitting or incorrect, maybe put it aside for now." This honors the student's capacity to choose whether they will receive the critical instruction. Honoring their capacity to choose actually increases the likelihood that they will accept the criticism from their instructor and peers. Additionally, according to the aforementioned studies on facework in student feedback, if the instructor has been skillfully attending face needs throughout the course, the student is likelier to deem the criticism credible and worthwhile.

The fourth and final step invites the preacher to have the final word. The preacher is invited to briefly respond to any questions or concerns raised during feedback, or they may simply share what they have learned through the experience. Inviting the preaching student to have the last word gives the student space to renegotiate their identity and sense of belonging in the room on their own terms. The instructor must refrain from speaking over, correcting, or refuting the student's final word, unless the student's final word is overtly damaging or harmful.

The four-step process, by nature, disrupts the power dynamic between instructor and student, and generates collaboration and camaraderie among students. In what is undoubtedly the most face-threatening moment of a preaching class, students may actually experience a profound affirmation of their face needs, thus enabling them to focus on task-mastery and personal growth.

Student Responses

"Your testimony was moving. But moreover, I am moved by the experience of watching you preach. I know that I was supposed to be here today to bear witness to you—to *bear witness*

to you becoming a preacher.”⁴⁰ This was one student’s response to a classmate who had just preached her very first sermon. She preached from Exodus 4, in which a reluctant Moses is finally convinced to step into his calling.⁴¹ The poetry was not lost on the class, as they watched their classmate step into her own calling. And the poetry of the student’s response was not lost on me, either. Comments like this one that emerged in the second and third steps of the feedback process affirmed the research outlined in this article: that facework in sermon feedback interventions shapes the classroom environment, and that the learning environment shapes student perceptions of their relationships with their peers.

In an effort to gauge the impact of facework in the preaching classroom, a survey was administered to one of the Boston University School of Theology classes, which prompted students to reflect on the degree to which they felt their autonomy, agency, and sense of belonging were honored in the course. The survey questions appeared as follows:

- (1) Do you feel your autonomy, agency, and sense of belonging in the class as a preacher/theologian were honored in this course?
- (2) What did you learn about your own “working gospel” or “gut sense” of what the gospel is?
- (3) How did the practices of preaching that you learned in this course challenge you to become a more critical theologian of the gospel in your sermons?
- (4) What role did sermon feedback from your instructional team play for you and your growth as a theologian of the Word?

A total of fourteen students, all members of the same class, responded to the survey. In response to the first question, twelve students responded “Yes,” two students responded “Partially,” and zero students responded “No.” Given the anonymity of the survey, it is impossible to know if the students who answered “Partially” participated in the same mentoring group with the same instructor. What is abundantly clear in the responses of the two students is that both students experienced face threats in their groups and did not perceive threat mitigation from their instructor or peers. There seems to be some connection between their response to the first question, and their response to the final question. One student responded to the final question defensively, stating, “It definitely reminded me that the audience I have might never listen to me, but that’s not always my fault.” Facework research illuminates the connection between the student’s sense that their face needs were only partially met, and their defensive response. This response is consistent with the tested hypothesis from Trees, et al., which stated, “Students’ assessment of instructors’ attention to face concerns will positively predict students’ assessment of feedback usefulness.”⁴² Trees, et al. noted that, “Face-attentive [feedback interventions] should help mitigate the identity threats that otherwise will steer learners’ cognitive attention toward off-task identity-protection.”⁴³ It is possible that this student veered

⁴⁰ Permission was received to share this quote, though the student requested anonymity.

⁴¹ The student specifically focused on the following segment of her selected biblical text:

“But Moses said to the Lord, “O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.” Then the Lord said to him, “Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak.”” Exodus 4:10-12 (NRSV)

⁴² Trees, et al., 400.

⁴³ Ibid.

into “off-task identity-protection” when they encountered unmitigated face threats during sermon feedback.

The other student who responded “Partially” to the first question also indicated a level of face threat in their response to the fourth question of the survey. This student did not exhibit any defensive behavior, but instead resigned to a sense of personal failure and incompetence. The student responded to the fourth question of the survey, saying, “I appreciated the honesty. [...] I focused on the scope of the sermon within 5 minutes and I failed to put myself in the sermon. [...] I did not do a good job.” This student also cited negative critiques from peers in their response to the third question, and offered an explanation for their blunder, saying, “[...] my peers felt I focused on narrative and lacked confession. It was just I ran out of time, I should have scoped narrative down and brought out confession.” In this case, it seems the student was abundantly receptive to criticism, but also left the feedback intervention feeling deflated and disconnected from peers.

Of the twelve students who responded “Yes” to the first question of the survey, all twelve identified in their responses areas of growth, and lessons learned from in-class instruction and feedback. One student, in particular, responded to the fourth question saying, “The feedback I received was spot on. It reinforced my knowledge of a weakness I was aware of in my delivery. And it gave me more confidence in my ability to find authenticity in my preaching even with a difficult text.” This response indicates receptivity to critical feedback, in connection with perceived facework from the teaching team.

Of the twelve students who responded “Yes” to the first question of the survey, seven students indicated elsewhere in the survey a new (or renewed) sense of connection and solidarity with peers and colleagues. In response to the third question of the survey, one student responded, “Having the space to workshop with the readings and with fellow theologians was so valuable. Being able to contribute to others and having my own thoughts nurtured and developed was an important part of being able to grow in my ability to do ministry.” Another student responded to the fourth question, stating, “The questions and feedback I received from both my TF and my classmates was vital in helping me recognize how my words were resonating with others.” These results seem to confirm that a student’s perception of successful facework from their instructor shapes not only their reception to critical feedback, but also their perception of the learning environment with their peers.

Conclusion

In-class sermon feedback interventions are inherently face-threatening situations in which a student’s social and personal needs easily override the student’s capacity to interpret and receive instructional feedback. Adept facework, however, mitigates face threat, and opens greater possibility for the student to receive instruction and work toward task-mastery and skill development. Although facework in sermon feedback is important, developing a classroom environment in which face needs are regularly tended to in the ebb and flow of the course may contribute to threat mitigation. Orienting a face-attentive pedagogy to an ethic of bearing witness joins the instructor and students alike in a shared process of responding to one another with care and openness. The ethical obligations conferred in the power-laden space between instructor and student require ethical intention to uphold the subjectivity of students. To deny the obligation to tend carefully to those gathered in the space of the classroom is to risk bearing false witness to students’ theological formation as a preacher. But in establishing a witnessing community,

instructors help preaching students emerge in their faith communities as ones who bear witness to both God and others.

Fundamentally, instructors who bear witness to the particularity of students, whose face needs find diverse expression in classroom environments, create an atmosphere in which students feel seen and empowered. By modeling such witnessing behavior, instructors create a classroom environment in which students learn how to bear witness to each other. By embracing behaviors that affirm students' positive and negative face needs, and by skillfully discerning when and how to mitigate face threats, instructors optimize learning opportunities for their students, especially in the context of sermon feedback.

Pedagogy that Purifies the Air: Recognizing and Reducing ‘Stereotype Threat’ in the Preaching Classroom

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Abstract: *In this article, I commend a homiletical pedagogy that ‘purifies the air’ by recognizing and reducing “stereotype threat” in preaching classrooms. In the first section, I outline how to recognize stereotype threat in dialogue with social psychologist Claude M. Steele, a thought leader in the field. Then, in the second section, I propose three pedagogical interventions for how to reduce stereotype threat: identity seeing, intelligence shifting, and imaginative shaping. The end goal is simple: homileticians who are trained to recognize and reduce stereotype threat both inside and outside their classrooms.*

Introduction

Before Brent Staples worked as a columnist at *The New York Times* and long before he won the Pulitzer Prize (2019), he studied psychology at the University of Chicago. Born in 1951 in Chester, Pennsylvania, he moved to Chicago in the mid 1970s to pursue a master’s degree in psychology, which he received in 1976. He went on to receive his PhD in psychology from the same university in 1982. Now imagine a young Black male wearing street clothes and walking down the streets of a Hyde Park neighborhood (where the university is located) late at night in the 1970s and early 1980s. Staples writes: “I became an expert in the language of fear. Couples locked arms or they reached for each other’s hand when they saw me. Some crossed to the other side of the street.” Others would stop their conversation and remain silent. Others would avoid eye contact at all costs. Staples did not know what to do. “I began to avoid people. I turned out of my way into side streets to spare them the sense that they were being stalked.”¹ In these concrete situations, it did not matter that he lived in the same neighborhood; neither did it matter where he went to school nor how many degrees he had on his wall. Based on his appearance, the strangers stereotyped him as a violence-prone African American youth, a threat to their safety.

Those who read Staples’ story already have a sense of why the strangers’ initial assumptions were both wrong and racist. But, what do we make of the story from *his* perspective? How do we account for the *experience* of being stereotyped? The short answer is this: Staples experienced what social psychologists refer to as “stereotype threat,” a situational context that brought about psychological stress due to an existing stereotype, a toxicity in the air, if you will. The long answer – a broad description of what stereotype threat is, why it matters, its relevance to homiletical pedagogy, and how to reduce it – will come in the pages that follow.

In this article, I call for a pedagogy that purifies the air through recognition and reduction: recognizing stereotype threat for what it is and reducing its toxic influence in the preaching classroom. To accomplish this aim, I define and describe stereotype threat in dialogue with Claude M. Steele, a thought leader in the field, and I recommend three interventions for how to reduce it; what I call identity seeing, intelligence shifting, and imaginative shaping. I use the words *recognition* and *reduction* with intentionality here since teachers of preaching do not have the power to do the work of *removal*. Stereotype threat occurs when *individuals* experience

¹ Brent Staples, “Black Men and Public Space,” *Harper’s Magazine*, December 1986, 202–3, as cited in Claude M. Steele, *Whistling Vivaldi: And Other Clues to How Stereotypes Affect Us* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010), 6.

psychological stress in situational contexts – their experiences fall outside of our control since theirs are theirs and ours are ours. However, as teachers, we *do* have agency over the situational contexts we seek to cultivate. We cannot remove all toxicity, but we can make the air less toxic.

Recognizing Stereotype Threat

I define stereotype threat as *added pressure experienced by individuals arising from stereotypes and resulting in diminishment in a manner that nonstereotyped counterparts do not experience*. Let me use two imperfect analogies to illustrate what I mean, especially as it pertains to the connection between pressure and diminishment. Imagine that you own a home but that you have to pay double to triple the property taxes on it despite all your neighbors' houses being around the same size and the household incomes being somewhat commensurate. On top of the extra financial burden, you notice that your neighbors are sending you messages, whether discursive or non-discursive, conscious or unconscious, that you do not belong in their neighborhood. On a variety of levels – financial, relational, emotional, familial – you come to the realization that you are paying “taxes” that none of your neighbors have to pay.

Now consider a different situation: various allergens or toxicities in the air impact your ability to breathe normally and function at your job. These same allergens and toxicities do not seem to impact other people around you in the same way despite the fact that they impact *you* in a disproportionate way. You feel like you are choking on the air whereas those around you feel like nothing is wrong at all. In fact, they seem like they can thrive and flourish while breathing this air. Perhaps they feel like the problem is with you rather than the air that harms you.

These scenarios highlight the various environmental obstacles faced by those who are stereotyped, by which is meant here people of color in general and seminarians of color in particular who deal with stereotype threat on a semi-regular basis. It also illustrates the connection between added pressure and diminishment. In an environment where stereotype threat is present, the stereotyped person experiences a situational threat, an additional tax or toxin, that a nonstereotyped person does not also experience. If the conditions were different, perhaps the person would be able to function fine, enjoying the neighborhood, breathing clean air just as others breathe it. But the challenges in the environment itself introduce impediments that others do not have to overcome, obstacles that have an adverse impact on the individual experiencing stress in the situational context, obstacles that in and of themselves suppress and even sabotage the individual's desired outcomes within the system.

Over the last three-plus decades, a growing body of research has emerged on the psychological stress that stereotyped individuals experience and the harmful outcomes that it produces as a result of the stress itself. Most scholars agree that the leading thinker, researcher, and problem solver on stereotype threat is Dr. Claude M. Steele, a well-known and widely respected African American social psychologist. Steele spent the majority of his more than three-decade career (1985-2016) focused on three overlapping areas of research: addictive behaviors, self-affirmation, and stereotype threat. He made noteworthy contributions in the first two domains of research, especially early in his career, and he also highlighted important interrelationships that existed among the three domains. But people know him best for his work on stereotype threat.

In 1986, the University of Michigan offered Steele one job with two roles, one part teaching and research and the other part administration. He was teaching full-time at the University of Washington in Seattle at the time, but considered accepting the two-part job from

the University Michigan because it was a nationally recognized graduate program in social psychology. However, the administrative request gave him pause. The university wanted him to direct an academic support program for minoritized students designed to close the achievement gap on campus. After assessing the program and interviewing cohorts of minoritized students on the campus at the University of Michigan, he knew right away that he should decline the job offer. Although he cared deeply about improving the educational experiences of minoritized students in higher education, he also knew that he could not maintain a productive research agenda while overseeing a program that “served the advising, tutoring, and financial management needs of over 400 students, and it did so within a large bureaucracy, the kind that it takes to run a university of 36,000 students.”²

The University of Michigan did not give up its recruiting efforts. One year later, in 1987, Steele joined the faculty when he received an offer to teach and conduct research full-time as a regular faculty member. Shortly after he arrived on campus, the university selected him to be part of a task force designed to improve recruitment, retention, and academic success for minoritized students. This allowed him to focus on these areas of passion and interest without having to manage the demands of directing an academic support program.

An important shift took place in Steele’s thinking and research when he interviewed students and studied data sets initially in the spring of 1986 when he declined the first job offer and later in the fall of 1987 after accepting the second job offer. He already knew an achievement gap existed between White majority students and minoritized students at the university, and he also knew that dropout rates were much higher for students of color than for their White peers, but he wanted to go deeper in order to get at the root cause of the problem.³

The epiphanic moment came when he discovered that many of the students that were struggling at his university had been high achievers in high school with strong SAT scores, good grades, and high levels of intrinsic motivation. He could detect this in interviews which functioned as soft evidence. He could also detect it through data analysis which functioned as hard evidence. When he studied the students’ SAT scores in high school and compared them with the academic grades that they received in college, he realized:

At every level of entering SATs, even the highest level, black students got lower grades than other students. If we assume that the SAT is a rough measure of preparation for college, this meant something dramatic: *that among students with comparable academic skills, as measured by the SAT, black students got less of a return on those skills than other students.* Something was suppressing the yield they got from their skills.⁴

In other words, the achievement gap had little to nothing to do with past performance, deficiency in academic skill, motivation, or self-destructive patterns. Both the soft evidence and the hard

² Claude M. Steele, *Whistling Vivaldi: And Other Clues to How Stereotypes Affect Us*, 17.

³ I use the phrase “minoritized students” here for a strategic reason. Steele worked primarily with African American students in his earliest research, but his studies were replicated with other cohorts of minoritized students soon after he published his work, and his thesis was empirically verified. For instance, to learn more about the adverse effects of stereotype threat on Latinx students, see Patricia M. Gonzales, Hart Blanton, and Kevin J. Williams, “The Effects of Stereotype Threat and Double-Minority Status on the Test Performance of Latino Women,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 28, no. 5 (2002): 659–70; Toni Schmader, Michael Johns, and Chad Forbes, “An Integrated Process Model of Stereotype Threat Effects on Performance,” *Psychological Review* 115, no. 2 (2008): 336–56.

⁴ Steele, *Whistling Vivaldi: And Other Clues to How Stereotypes Affect Us*, 20. Italics in original.

evidence revealed that the context in which the learning was taking place was somehow suppressing the yield. Over and over, Steele and his collaborators could demonstrate a strong connection between underachievement by minoritized students in college and their experiences of college itself. He writes: “Something was causing their strengths to let them down consistently – even the strongest among them. Something in the air on campus seemed part of their problems.”⁵ Steele gave a name to the “something in the air” when he started presenting his work on achievement gaps at other universities and later publishing it.⁶ The name that he gave was “stereotype threat.” Leaders at Stanford University saw the potential significance of his work along with his proposed interventions, and thus recruited him onto the faculty there in 1991.

In the interviews especially, Steele could see the connections that were emerging between stereotype threat, academic underachievement, diminished wellbeing, and suppression of yield. The students that he interviewed did everything right. They prepared well; they worked hard; and they told him that they were proud to be students at the University of Michigan. But these same students also reported being isolated from others, being marginalized and ostracized, being constantly made aware of their otherness inside and outside of class, and being “worried that teaching assistants, fellow students, and even faculty might see their academic abilities as less than those of other students.”⁷ Many of the student interviewees worked harder and prepared better than many of their nonstereotyped counterparts, but it seemed like those who worked the hardest and prepared the best were the ones who struggled the most with tests and grades. Ironically, some of the most capable students in the cohort, what Steele would describe as the “academic vanguard of their group,” struggled the most with the debilitating effects of stereotype threat.⁸ These students had not internalized negative stereotypes about their academic proficiency especially because of their past successes, but they also seemed like they were the *most* likely candidates to expend disproportionate amounts of energy proving that they belonged in academics and disproving the stereotype about their group before others. According to social psychologists Steven J. Spencer, Christine Logel, and Paul Davies, “one ironic and unfortunate aspect of stereotype threat is that the very people who tend to be the highest achieving and care the most are those most affected by negative stereotypes.”⁹ The added pressure, the psychological stress associated with proving their legitimacy as students on campus and disproving stereotypes concerning their skill, intellect, or motivation, impeded their ability to succeed.¹⁰

⁵ Steele, 23.

⁶ Claude M. Steele and Joshua Aronson, “Stereotype Threat and the Intellectual Test Performance of African Americans,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 69, no. 5 (1995): 797–811; Claude M. Steele, “A Threat in the Air: How Stereotypes Shape Intellectual Identity and Performance,” *American Psychologist* 52, no. 6 (1997): 613–29; Claude M. Steele, “Thin Ice: ‘Stereotype Threat’ and Black College Students,” *The Atlantic* 284, no. 2 (August 1999): 44–45, 50–54; Steven J. Spencer, Claude M. Steele, and Dianne M. Quinn, “Stereotype Threat and Women’s Math Performance,” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 35, no. 1 (1999): 4–28; Claude M. Steele, Steven J. Spencer, and Joshua Aronson, “Contending with Group Image: The Psychology of Stereotype and Social Identity Threat,” *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 34 (2002): 379–440.

⁷ Steele, *Whistling Vivaldi: And Other Clues to How Stereotypes Affect Us*, 19.

⁸ Steele, “A Threat in the Air: How Stereotypes Shape Intellectual Identity and Performance,” 617.

⁹ Steven J. Spencer, Christine Logel, and Paul G. Davies, “Stereotype Threat,” *Annual Review of Psychology* 67 (2016): 423.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Spencer, Logel, and Davies argue that the extra pressure to succeed due to stereotype threat has an adverse impact on performance through “at least three main mechanisms: mere effort, working memory depletion, and conscious attention to automatic processes” (419). Mere effort means the extra energy that a person spends on disproving the stereotype, energy that distracts one from the task at hand and impedes performance. Working

In the years after these initial studies, Steele and his co-researchers took their ideas on stereotype threat and academic underperformance in minoritized communities and they tested these ideas in other areas in which stereotype threat might be present including areas beyond academic performance. For instance, they studied the ways that stereotype threat impacts women who underperform in mathematics, White males who are told that they are being tested on their natural athletic ability, or White males who are being tested in mathematics but are told that they are being tested in comparison to Asian Americans. In fact, over the last three decades, a growing body of research revealed that “stereotype threat can negatively affect performance in domains as diverse as negotiations, financial decision making, golf putting, safe driving, and memory performance among older adults.”¹¹ Although stereotype threat has been found in more than one group across more than one domain, Steele took a special interest in stereotype threat’s impact on academic performance among students of color, and how educators might deploy useful strategies to reduce its effects in classrooms. In the next section, we will turn our attention to the work of reduction by highlighting these proposed interventions and exploring their significance for the preaching classroom.

Reducing Stereotype Threat in Preaching Classrooms

Without a doubt, Steele’s research on stereotype threat draws attention to a “wound in need of redress,” to use practical theologian Mary McClintock Fulkerson’s term.¹² The wound cuts deep enough that it impacts more than academic performance. The research reveals that it affects self-worth, emotional and spiritual wellbeing, sense of belonging, and physical health. Lament seems like the most fitting word here, a theological word which signals that life is not the way it is supposed to be, an idea that calls for both an honest and costly account of realities on the ground. Why would we not lament that sin goes beyond the personal to the systemic and structural, that institutions preparing people for ministry in and alongside the church end up perpetuating powers and principalities instead of doing battle against them? Far too often, seminarians of color enter classrooms or walk around their campuses, and they sense intuitively that there is something in the air, some kind of toxin, that will inhibit their ability to breathe in this space where everyone else believes the air is fine.

What would need to happen for homileticians to purify the air, that is, to practice pedagogy that reduces the toxicity in the space? Although a full answer to this question is beyond the scope of this essay, and removal is outside the bounds of our control, we can consider part of the answer, albeit a narrow part. Moreover, we can do the work of reduction. Steele and his collaborators tested interventions that were designed to reduce stereotype threat both inside

memory depletion occurs when the psychological stress required to suppress negative thoughts and feelings steals energy from the part of the memory used to “control attention and effortfully process information” (420). Conscious attention to automatic processes means that a stereotyped person expends energy and effort on tasks that would normally be automated and effortless, so much so that one becomes “more vigilant for signs of failure” during processes that would normally require little to no conscious energy. See Spencer, Logel, and Davies, 419–20.

¹¹ Ibid., 417. See also Dianne M. Quinn, Rachel W. Kallen, and Steven J. Spencer, “Stereotype Threat,” in *The Sage Handbook of Prejudice, Stereotyping and Discrimination*, ed. John F. Dovidio et al. (Washington, DC: Sage, 2010), 379–94; Geoffrey L. Cohen, Valerie Purdie-Vaughns, and Julio Garcia, “An Identity Threat Perspective on Intervention,” in *Stereotype Threat: Theory, Process, and Application*, ed. Michael Inzlicht and Toni Schmader (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 280–96.

¹² Fulkerson’s larger point is that theologies that matter arise out of situations that matter. The situations that matter most occur at the site of a wound in need of remedy and transformation. Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 13–14, 22.

and outside of classrooms, as did other researchers who followed after them. We cannot examine every proposal that they made so let me highlight three interventions in particular, strategies that I will call identity seeing, intelligence shifting, and imaginative shaping.

Identity Seeing

Identity seeing refers to *the intentional cultivation of a “critical mass” of minoritized voices in such a way that seminarians of color see more identity representation than they would have otherwise anticipated*. By “critical mass,” Steele means “the point at which there are enough minorities in the setting, like a school or workplace, that individual minorities no longer feel uncomfortable there because they are minorities – in our terms, they no longer feel an interfering level of identity threat.”¹³ When a stereotyped person sees more rather than less representation in the space, it reduces the possibility that the space will be seen as a situational threat, which then reduces the added pressure that often leads to diminished performance.

Some critical mass work remains outside of a homiletics professor’s control. Perhaps we have little to no influence on our seminary’s practices of recruitment, retention, service, and placement, let alone its faculty hiring practices. Perhaps we do. If we do not have much influence, then we will not be able to exert much control over the “counting” that usually happens when seminarians of color enter White-majority classroom spaces, most often on the first day of class. To quote from African American tennis great Arthur Ashe: “Like many other blacks, when I find myself in a new public situation, I will count. I always count. I count the number of black and brown faces present...”¹⁴ While we might not be able to influence “the count,” we still have influence. Some activities remain within our control. How might we contribute in a positive way to an increased critical mass? What might we do to change a negative critical mass cue – “There is almost no one who looks like me here” – into a positive cue – “There are more voices and perspectives in this space than I thought there would be”?

Perhaps more than we know, our homiletics classrooms communicate to students what we value most. Do seminarians of color see a critical mass of identity representation in the syllabus that we send them before we meet them on the first day (or release on the first day)? Again, the notion of a critical mass matters here since just one reading or one class period devoted to these discussions might actually further the problem by reifying a norm-other binary. Which sermons do students watch or listen to in our preaching classes, and what do our choices communicate about which voices will be heard and which ones will not be heard? How might we de-center White normativity in the physical or digital spaces in which we teach since, in a racialized society, these spaces have immense rhetorical power to communicate who is welcome and who is not, who is family and who is a guest? Who might we recruit and lift up as role models, leaders of color in the academy and the church whose presence refutes negative stereotypes and demonstrates that these stereotypes are not at all based in fact? How might we communicate that we dialogue with a critical mass of minoritized scholars and pastors in our theological-homiletical discourses? What do we read, who do we quote, who do we cite in our publications, so that students see, hear, and know that we value minoritized voices and perspectives? Which faculty members of color, administrators of color, scholars of color, and

¹³ Steele, *Whistling Vivaldi: And Other Clues to How Stereotypes Affect Us*, 135.

¹⁴ Arthur Ashe and Arnold Rampersad, *Days of Grace* (New York: Knopf, 1993), 144, as cited in Claude M. Steele, *Whistling Vivaldi: And Other Clues to How Stereotypes Affect Us* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010), 140.

ministers of color do we point to who are in positions of authority, especially since many seminarians of color are sensitized to power differentials in the space? How might we change negative cues related to power and authority and replace them with positive cues? As Steele reminds us, “If no powerful people in a setting have your identity, it tells you something.”¹⁵

The cultivation of a critical mass of minoritized identity representation has the potential to lead to significant decreases in the experience of stereotype threat. Students of color do less counting. They feel less added pressure. They learn important things about what their professor values. Most importantly, they breathe clearer air than they might have otherwise.

Intelligence Shifting

Intelligence shifting refers to *the strategic reconstrual of intelligence as a muscle to develop as opposed to a measurement of one’s capacity*. According to Spencer, Logel, and Davies, stereotype threat remains pervasive in spaces where “intellectual performance is both fixed and group based.”¹⁶ When Steele and his collaborators conducted their experiments on stereotype threat, they discovered how much priming matters in the determination of outcomes for minoritized students who might be trying to disprove stereotypes related to aptitude, skill, and motivation. The groups that heard messages that primed the stereotype threat such as, “This test is a measurement of your intellectual ability,” “White students tended to do better on this exam,” “This test will reveal your latent abilities,” and other messages like these, performed significantly worse than groups that did not receive this priming at all or that received positive priming instead such as messages about how the testing was nondiagnostic instead of diagnostic or that intelligence was broader than the exam. Notice the two-fold layered priming with the second group: what is *not* stated and what is stated about how to understand intelligence. Not only did the second group perform significantly better than the first group; more importantly, the second group performed the same or better when compared to their nonstereotyped counterparts. Put simply, simple priming strategies helped to close the achievement gap.

In a homiletics classroom, how might we cast intelligence differently than we do now, as a muscle that we can strengthen over time? How might we shift the way we talk about intelligence, describe it, evaluate it, and assess it? How do we promote what Carol Dweck refers to as a “growth mindset” over against a “fixed mindset” in the messages that we send and do not send to seminarians of color? Dweck argues that a person with a fixed mindset believes that “your qualities are carved in stone,” which then results in an “urgency to prove yourself over and over,” whereas a person with a growth mindset believes that “your basic qualities are things that you can cultivate through your efforts, your strategies, and help from others.”¹⁷ Although Dweck makes the important point that everyone should move toward a growth mindset, one could also argue that her research-based recommendations could be especially salient among those from stereotyped groups, individuals who experience added taxation in academic performance, and whose intelligence is consistently called into question and undermined through racist, dehumanizing messaging.

Consider a few possibilities for how to engage in intelligence shifting. How might you introduce lower-stakes assignments throughout the semester so that minoritized students (and all students for that matter) become more process-oriented and less event-oriented, so that there is a

¹⁵ Steele, *Whistling Vivaldi: And Other Clues to How Stereotypes Affect Us*, 141.

¹⁶ Spencer, Logel, and Davies, “Stereotype Threat,” 428.

¹⁷ Carol S. Dweck, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2016), 6–7.

greater focus on growth over time and less of a focus on the zero-sum game of success or failure? We do not have to do away with high-stakes assignments, but we do have to ask whether just one or two high-stakes assignments encourage a fixed mindset or a growth mindset. How might you encourage goal-setting so that growth feels like it is less ambiguous and more achievable? How might you construe growth less like an unattainable, moving target and more like an attainable and definable outcome? As Spencer, Logel and Davies observe, “seeing intellectual performance as something that can grow and that is not limited can thus serve as an important antidote to stereotype threat.”¹⁸

It can also make a major difference when we make slight changes to the way that we give feedback whether in writing, class activities such as discussions or sermon debriefs, face to face, or in online settings. Steele and his co-researchers discovered that the most important message to send is actually a two-fold message which I will paraphrase here: “I have high standards, and I believe in your ability to meet those standards.”¹⁹ The first half of the message communicates that a muscle cannot be built without significant effort and exertion. The second half communicates that the student has what it takes to build it, that the person is both talented enough and motivated enough to meet high standards. Bear in mind that the language does not have to be formal or written when we give this kind of feedback. It can be written, verbal, in public, or in private. For instance, in a one-on-one meeting in my office, I might say in passing something to the effect of, “Now, I’m going to push you to be a better preacher in this class, but don’t worry. You’re smart. You’re a good preacher. You’ll figure it out.” I send the same message in various ways at various times for various reasons throughout the semester. Find the language that works for you with the larger goal of sending both the first and the second half of the message at one and the same time.

Imaginative Shaping

Imaginative shaping refers to *the purposeful rescripting of identity in such a way that seminarians of color are less likely to connect their identity to their performance*. In 2007, Steele and one of his coresearchers, A. David Nussbaum, introduced the language of “situational disengagement.” In their research, they studied minoritized students who maintained high levels of motivation and resilience despite being in stereotype-threatening contexts. What trait did these students share in common? They learned how to deflect messages of devaluation without losing their motivational drive or losing their connection to their racial-ethnic identity over the long term. Put differently, they knew “how to lose the battle to win the war.”²⁰ According to Steele and Nussbaum, a person who knows how to practice “situational disengagement,” learns how to adapt and improvise in the moment of the threat without disidentifying permanently or in an unhealthy way. “Rather than permanently disidentifying, a student under stereotype pressure may simply disengage from a particular performance by denying its relevance to his or her self-

¹⁸ Spencer, Logel, and Davies, “Stereotype Threat,” 428.

¹⁹ Geoffrey L. Cohen, Claude M. Steele, and Lee D. Ross, “The Mentor’s Dilemma: Providing Critical Feedback Across the Racial Divide,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 25, no. 10 (October 1, 1999): 1302–18; Geoffrey L. Cohen and Claude M. Steele, “A Barrier of Mistrust: How Negative Stereotypes Affect Cross-Race Mentoring,” in *Improving Academic Achievement: Impact of Psychological Factors on Education*, ed. Joshua Aronson (San Diego, CA: Academic Press, 2002), 303–27.

²⁰ A. David Nussbaum and Claude M. Steele, “Situational Disengagement and Persistence in the Face of Adversity,” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 43, no. 1 (January 1, 2007): 128.

worth and thus be able to persist in the domain even in the face of frustration.”²¹ Notice that Steele and Nussbaum do not claim that the students in the study somehow abrogate their identity. Rather, the students disengage their identity from their performance by disconnecting it from their self-worth, by reorienting their identity around more important value distinctions.

As homileticians, what might we do to encourage the work of disengagement, disconnection, and reorientation? How might we help seminarians of color imagine a different possibility for interpretive work, one that is not as tied to their performance in the classroom? How might we as teachers of preachers participate in the work of shaping a more deliberate and expansive account of identity?

Without denying the theological possibilities for the first two strategies, let me suggest that the richest possibilities for theologizing-for-good can be found here. Perhaps more than we realize, homileticians have access to a deep reservoir of theological resources, traditions, doctrines, stories, experiences, and retellings that position us well for doing this work. I would argue that some of us have homiletical theologies that support this kind of imaginative (re)shaping, that cast preaching as a redescription of reality itself, a sacred event that invites us out of seeing things as they *seem* to be and into seeing them the way they really are.²² Faith itself at its core, Barbara Brown Taylor claims, is a “surrender of one set of images and the acceptance of another. It is a matter of learning to see the world, each other, and ourselves as God sees us, and to live as if God’s reality were the only one that mattered.”²³ “The invitation of preaching (not unlike psychotherapy),” Walter Brueggemann writes, “is to abandon the script in which one has had confidence and to enter a different script that imaginatively tells one’s life differently.”²⁴

We know that theological language is sometimes used to damage others and to cause harm – students of color will often tell these stories about theology’s misuse to professors that they trust – however, we also know that theological language grounded in affirmation, dignity, and worth has the power to redescribe reality, to speak words of life and liberation to individuals and communities.

Let me mention just two brief examples. Black womanist theologian Jaclyn L. Grant claims that her sense of dignity and worth were imparted to her through her parents’ “theology of somebodiness, which they lived out without pretension,” a theology that conveyed to her that “in spite of the world’s denial of you, Jesus (God) affirms you.” Her life in Jesus, she writes, was “not one that restricted me as a Black person or as a female, but affirmed me and projected me into areas where, I later learned, ‘I was not supposed to go’ by virtue of my race and gender.”²⁵ Puerto Rican theologian Loida Martell-Otero tells a similar story about the power of redescription for marginalized Latinx women. Far too often, Martell-Otero observes, Latinx women hear painful and even hateful messages related to identity, being called *satas* (dogs or mongrels) by strangers and being treated as *sobrajas* (leftovers) by individuals and communities.

²¹ Nussbaum and Steele, 128.

²² See Paul Scott Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart: New Understandings in Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1988); Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Preaching Life* (New York: Cowley, 1993); Mary Catherine Hilkert, *Naming Grace: Preaching and the Sacramental Imagination* (New York: Continuum, 1997); Walter Brueggemann, *The Practice of Prophetic Imagination: Preaching an Emancipatory Word* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012); Geoff New, *Imaginative Preaching* (Carlisle, UK: Langham Partnership, 2015).

²³ Taylor, *The Preaching Life*, 42.

²⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home: Preaching Among Exiles* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 34–35.

²⁵ Jacquelyn Grant, *White Women’s Christ and Black Women’s Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), ix.

To them, good news sounds like a Jesus who understands what it is like to be seen as a *sobrajo* from Galilee and treated like a *sato* by those he came to love and serve. “God has intentionally chosen to be with the *sat@s* and *sobrajas* of the world.”²⁶ In fact, God does more than stand with and suffer alongside. Martell-Otero writes: “In Christ and through the Spirit...what the world has rejected, God has called and loved. *Las satas ya no son sobrajas sino santas*, a people called by God.” In English: “The dogs are no longer leftovers but saints...”²⁷

Many of us who teach homiletics already preach sermons in which we invite people to disengage their identity from their performance, to separate their self-worth from their achievement or lack thereof, and to reorient their identity around more important value distinctions. Such a message can be heard as a word of life to all people, of course, but, in homiletics classrooms in particular it can sound like an especially hopeful word of life to those most at risk of stereotype threat. As teachers of preachers, through the work of imaginative (re)shaping, we can invite students into a “different script,” to return to Brueggemann’s phrase, a script infused with life, hope, and the possibility of shalom.

As preachers who believe in and preach about the promise of imaginative (re)shaping to others, we can also ask: What sort of disorientation for the sake of reorientation might be required of us? Both majority-culture and minoritized seminary professors benefit from re-imagining their role as teachers in light of their theologies. How might our identities be wrapped up in our performance? How might our sense of self-worth be tangled up in our achievements or lack thereof, our roles or our responsibilities? How might we de-center without abrogation? How might we reorient our identities around more important value distinctions in the classroom?

Conclusion

In this article, I have proposed a plan for mitigating stereotype threat in preaching classrooms through the work of recognition and reduction. Much more could be written about how to do both. More interventions could be proposed, especially since the research on how to mitigate this threat extends beyond my proposals, and the work of classroom interventions requires person- and context-specific strategizing. Although the ideas that I have set forth in this article for reducing stereotype threat are empirically validated strategies, the specific language that works best for me in my context might not be the language that works best for someone else in another context. For good reasons, we will use different language for the same work and imagine better interventions in one space over against another. That stated, in the work of contextualizing, we cannot lose sight of the fact that the work itself remains vitally important, that a plan of intervention is required.

Brent Staples came up with a plan for what to do while walking the streets of Hyde Park late at night. He did not so much come up with a plan as happen upon an idea by accident:

Out of nervousness I began to whistle and discovered I was good at it. My whistle was pure and sweet – and also in tune. On the street at night, I whistled popular tunes from the

²⁶ Loida Martell-Otero, “From *Satas* to *Santas*: *Sobrajas* No More: Salvation in the Spaces of the Everyday,” in Loida I. Martell-Otero, Zaida Maldonado Pérez, and Elizabeth Conde-Frazer, *Latina Evangélicas: A Theological Survey from the Margins* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2013), 38. Italics in original and @ symbol in original.

²⁷ Martell-Otero, Maldonado Pérez, and Conde-Frazer, 51. Italics in original.

Beatles and Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*. The tensions drained from people's bodies when they heard me. A few even smiled as they passed me in the dark.²⁸

Especially when Staples would whistle Vivaldi, he noticed that the whole context would change from a situation of psychological stress to a non-threatening situation. The strangers may not have recognized that it was Vivaldi, but they did recognize that it was classical music. Through a simple intervention, Staples could communicate that the stereotypical scripts that others might have believed about him at first glance did not apply to him at all.

Granted, we cannot map this story onto the classroom without complication. The intervention that Staples came up with did not tackle the larger problem of the wrong and racist assumptions made by others about him, assumptions that would have continued had he not done something to change their perspective. A good teacher knows how to come up with strategies for dealing with the macro-problem and not just the micro-situation. Also, Staples had to come up with a survival strategy as a non-dominant person with less power in a racialized system whereas teachers of preaching have more power to shape the classroom or system in which they teach.

Even so, Staples' survival strategy does not strike seminarians of color as peculiar at all. It sounds all too familiar. Ask just about any seminarian of color with whom you have built trust about whether or not they have developed survival strategies for dealing with racial and ethnic prejudice at seminary in general and navigating toxic classroom ecologies in particular, and their answer will be a definitive "yes." Although there are some differences between Staples' story and what I am proposing here, my larger point is this: teachers of preachers have the capacity to come up with interventions that make situations like the one that Staples describes less likely to occur. We cannot do the work of removal, but we can do the work of recognition and reduction. Good teaching strategies reduce the need for good survival strategies.

Steele does not tell the story about Staples in *Whistling Vivaldi* in order to offer readers some kind of quaint anecdote about how a person of color made life easier for White folks a few decades ago, and he most certainly does not tell it in order to offer some kind of general panacea for eradicating racism in society. Rather, he tells the story to make a larger point: yes, stereotype threat is both pervasive and destructive and, yes, there are dynamic interventions for reducing it. A person who walks down the street without a plan experiences high levels of added pressure and psychological stress, a toxin in the air that can be debilitating. However, a person who walks down the street *with* a plan can walk with more confidence, can increase the likelihood of breathing freely without fear. Interventions *do* exist to make the air less toxic.

Although the plan that I have proposed here is both imperfect and incomplete, it is better to have a plan than not to have a plan. If I could set the plan to music, it would sound like teachers of preaching learning what it sounds like to whistle Vivaldi in their classrooms and empowering seminarians of color to do the same.

²⁸ Brent Staples, "Black Men and Public Space," *Harper's Magazine*, December 1986, 202–3, as cited in Steele, *Whistling Vivaldi: And Other Clues to How Stereotypes Affect Us*, 6.

**In the Room Where It Happens:
Cultural Humility, Curiosity, and Wonder in the Homiletics Classroom
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Abstract: *This essay explores the homiletics classroom as a space of cultural humility, curiosity and wonder. As students are prepared for the work of being public theologians, they must be equipped to preach to those beyond the walls of the church, particularly in a digital age. What is the significance of those who are ‘not in the room’ where the preaching happens? I argue that teachers of homiletics can assist students to learn and practice cultural humility, which is an aspect of intercultural communication that will encourage a decolonized perspective. Cultural humility can then initiate creative responses such as curiosity and wonderment about others. This essay describes a process by which cultural humility, curiosity, and wonder can be modelled in the classroom and fostered in the evaluation of student sermons.*

Introduction

When I was taught to preach, the audience of the sermon consisted of those who were ‘in the room’ where the preaching happened. We could see these individuals face to face and embrace them after the worship service. We could look into their eyes, confident that we knew something about them and their context. In a digital age, this audience has expanded to include those who are listening and watching, even if they are in different physical locations. These are our listeners, whom we seek to understand contextually in terms of cultural perspectives and backgrounds. To the best of our ability, we craft and form sermons that speak to this audience. We preachers are accountable to our listeners and we bear responsibility to represent our community and its faith as genuinely and accurately as possible. However, our audience goes beyond those we know, it goes beyond those who are ‘in the room’ where the preaching happens.

This essay argues that those who are not in the room where the preaching happens are an important consideration for the homiletic enterprise. This elusive audience forms part of the reality for which our pedagogies must prepare – that is, students must be taught an approach to thinking about this public audience. Cultural humility is an aspect of intercultural communication which will help to decolonize the ‘preacher’s gaze’ by encouraging cross-cultural knowledge and understanding. Cultural humility can then initiate creative responses such as curiosity and wonderment. I describe a process by which cultural humility, curiosity and wonder can be modelled in the classroom and fostered in the evaluation of student sermons.

The Audience for Preaching

In the era of Covid-19, our digital audiences are growing. Our sermons are encountering contexts for which they were not prepared. We stand to preach on a digital street corner, engaging with a virtual public space. As Cassandra Granados writes: “Preaching on social media is like standing on a digital street corner and proclaiming the Gospel amid memes, partisan political posts, and selfies. The audience that gathers may

include parishioners, social media followers and friends, and random visitors.”¹ The concept of ‘room’ means something different when it comes to the internet – it is possible for people to come and go from the space of the sermon without our knowledge.² It may be that people are scrolling past us on Facebook and decide to stop and listen for a few minutes. Or perhaps they come across us on YouTube and stay a bit longer. Or they have received a copy of a link to a sermon which they will share with their friends and neighbors. My congregation sends the weekly sermon across the world – to people that I, the preacher, will never meet nor fully understand.

As our audience grows and changes, so does our accountability. How can we be accountable not only to our own context but also to others – those who are not in the room? What are the limits of our responsibility toward those who are not in the sanctuary (real or virtual)? As Christians, we share the world with a multiplicity of others. It is an occupational hazard to talk about ‘the world’ – as it was, as it is, as it might become. How do we represent that ‘world’? To what extent might our preaching constitute an accountable public discourse? To what extent are we to hold ourselves accountable to the public who may never hear our sermons but constitute an important population for our preaching?

Our sermons must take into account an audience beyond what is traditionally understood to be the audience of preaching. Frequently in our sermons we represent others – we define them and describe them. Drawing an example from my own Canadian context, I am compelled to preach about the relationship among Indigenous peoples living in Canada and Settler Canadians. It is obviously impossible for me to preach about Indigenous peoples without also representing them in some way. Even when I borrow their own words, it is a representation – I choose which words, I choose how those words will come to speech, what will be emphasized or excised. Thus, I must develop the skills to represent diligently, as I have responsibility toward Indigenous peoples, and hold myself accountable to them for my representations and my attitudes. This emerges out of a conscious commitment to hold myself accountable to the wider public for the accuracy and empathy of my preaching.

We preach into almost unimaginable complexity. This public is magnificently diverse – multicultural, multiracial, multireligious. If this diverse public indeed forms an elusive part of our audience, as will be argued below, our interactions with the public constitute intercultural communication. Intercultural communication is simply the verbal and non-verbal interaction between cultures. When we engage the public, we are encountering a variety of contexts and cultures. We may not have been prepared for these encounters in our seminary training, as we tended to think of the context of our preaching as those who are nearest and dearest, with whose context we were intimately familiar. I believe that preaching, in some cases, is no longer an intimate exercise. Instead, it is communication among myriad cultures.

We preachers can never predict where our words will go, how far they will travel, and on whose ears they will fall. We preach in public. We bear witness with our lives, in public. Our sermons are lived out, in public. The Spirit of God is at work in the public sphere, and God’s redemptive activity is directed toward all of creation. In the words of Luke Powery, “The Word is resurrecting not only in church seats but on society’s streets, whether we recognize it or not.”³

¹ Cassandra Granados, email message to author, May 21, 2021.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

What emerges is a complex conversation with the culture at large – those who are not in the room. In order to engage the culture as a whole with our words and with our lives, we will need to develop capacity for such engagements. Here we turn to an intercultural communication theory, cultural humility, as a means to explore the relationship among the church, the preacher, the listener, and the public.

Cultural Humility

Cultural humility has been defined as a lifelong process of self-reflection, self-critique, continual assessment of power imbalances, and the development of mutually respectful relationships and partnerships.⁴ Cultural humility is an ethical stance that assumes that although professionals must gain cultural knowledge about the other, the other always exceeds our capacity to know and master. When we understand ourselves, we increase the chance of understanding others, even as we come to realize how much we don't know about others. In addition, being culturally humble means accepting that it is possible to hold two or more perspectives simultaneously.⁵ Cultural humility has been distinguished from cultural competence.⁶ Cultural competence assumes that one can attain fluency in a culture other than one's own, while cultural humility makes a less grand claim for itself.

Cynthia Foronda's recent article performs a concept analysis of the term cultural humility, seeking out the antecedents, attributes, and consequences of the term, with the goal of achieving a definition.⁷ Following an extensive review of relevant literature, her team adopts the following definition: "In a multicultural world where power imbalances exist, cultural humility is a process of openness, self-awareness, being egoless, and incorporating self-reflection and critique after willingly interacting with diverse individuals."⁸ It is useful to explore some of the findings of Foronda's study, as it builds not only an understanding of cultural humility but also demonstrates a process by which it occurs. In this study, the antecedents of cultural humility, or the conditions in which cultural humility can arise, were diversity and power imbalance.

It is helpful to unpack the various attributes of cultural humility. Openness, one of the early stages in the process of cultural humility, refers to "possessing an attitude that is willing to explore new ideas."⁹ If an individual is to explore cultural diversity, they must first have an open mind that allows them to enter into a new experience. "Cultural humility involves entering a relationship with another person with the intention of honoring their beliefs, customs, and values."¹⁰ In order to benefit from cultural humility, individuals must be open to this kind of relationship.

⁴ Melanie Tervalon and Jann Murray-García. "Cultural Humility Versus Cultural Competence: A Critical Distinction in Defining Physician Training Outcomes in Multicultural Education," *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved* 9, no. 2 (1998): 117–25. <https://doi.org/10.1353/hpu.2010.0233>.

⁵ Alan Guskin, "Cultural Humility," ed. Janet M. Bennett, *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Intercultural Competence*, July 20, 2015, pp. 163–164, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483346267.n61>, 162.

⁶ Tervalon and Murray-García, "Cultural Humility," 117.

⁷ Cynthia Foronda, Diana-Lyn Baptiste, Maren M. Reinholdt, and Kevin Ousman. "Cultural Humility: A Concept Analysis," *Journal of Transcultural Nursing* 27, no. 3 (May 1, 2016): 210–217. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1043659615592677>.

⁸ Ibid, 213.

⁹ Ibid, 211.

¹⁰ Dorothy E. Stubbe, "Practicing Cultural Competence and Cultural Humility in the Care of Diverse Patients," *FOCUS* 18, no. 1 (January 24, 2020): pp. 49–51, <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.focus.20190041>, 50.

Self-awareness is defined “as being aware of one’s strengths, limitations, values, beliefs, behavior, and appearance to others.”¹¹ If individuals are to work with others, they must first develop an understanding of themselves.

According to Foronda, to be ‘egoless’ is defined as “being humble, viewing the worth of all individuals on a horizontal plane. The poignant descriptors illustrate a more grand concept than just humility; they illustrate one must enact a belief system of equal human rights and flatten any hierarchy or power differential.”¹² This will be especially difficult for Christians for whom the church is a naturally superior being to ‘the world’. Especially those who grew up in culturally homogenous setting may have developed a sense of superiority about their own way of life.

Foronda next describes the phenomenon of ‘supportive interaction’ which she defines as intersections of existence among individuals that result in positive human exchanges. This might involve becoming active and engaged with others or taking responsibility for interactions with others. These are really opportunities to be with others and to practice the skills of cultural humility. The final attribute is self-reflection and critique. This is a continual and critical process of reflection on actions, thoughts, and feelings.¹³

Foronda and the other authors of the study note the discovery of a number of terms that are *not* cultural humility, thus contributing further to its definition: “prejudice, oppression, intolerance, discrimination, stereotyping, exclusion, stigma, inequity, marginalization, misconceptions, labeling, mistrust, hostility, misunderstandings, cultural imposition, judgmental, undermining, and bullying.”¹⁴ Thus, the opposite of cultural humility is cultural encapsulation – the inability to see outside of one’s own cultural lens, an inability to enter the lived experience of another.¹⁵

Cultural humility is a transformative process that potentially leads to greater social equality. “In our attempts at working toward cultural humility, we must not stop at simply being “sensitive” and “aware” but must remain diligent in seeking to remediate those injustices that we have come to understand around us.”¹⁶ There are real, material consequences to communication skills such as cultural humility. While cultural humility is a beneficial practice for preachers, engagement with others must not stop with the words that we preach. Mature cultural humility goes beyond words to actions and advocacy.

Cultural Humility in the Homiletics Classroom

This section applies the process of cultural humility as outlined by Foronda to teaching preaching. Cultural humility can be modelled by the teacher at all times. Although the actual practice of cultural humility is a life-long and self-reflective process, the process itself can be taught as part of the curriculum. It is important to note that “cultural humility cannot be learned merely in the classroom with traditional teaching methods. Reflection on experiences over time

¹¹ Foronda et al., “Cultural Humility”, 211.

¹² Ibid, 212.

¹³ Foronda et al., “Cultural Humility”, 212.

¹⁴ Ibid, 213.

¹⁵ Kelley Haynes-Mendez & Jill Engelsmeier, “Cultivating Cultural Humility in Education,” *Childhood Education*, 96:3, (2020) 22-29, DOI: 10.1080/00094056.2020.1766656

¹⁶ Miguel E. Gallardo and Miguel E. Gallardo, in *Developing Cultural Humility: Embracing Race, Privilege and Power*, ed. Miguel E. Gallardo (Los Angeles, CA: Cognella, 2014), pp. 239-264, 246.

leads to the development of cultural humility.”¹⁷ For this reason, some practitioners have recommended journaling as a practice that can encourage the development of cultural humility.¹⁸ Journaling would be an excellent addition to the pedagogical toolbox. A teacher might invite students to journal specifically about their daily interactions with those who are not in the room where the preaching happens. These glimpses into the lives of others help to expand the preacher’s pastoral vision.

As mentioned above, the preconditions for cultural humility are diversity and power imbalance. Both of these are evident in my homiletics classroom. My students represent many cultures – Korean, Taiwanese, Indian, Syrian, Ghanaian, Nigerian, and various white European backgrounds. Diversity is not limited by race but is extended to socio-economic status, sexual orientation, denomination, etc. I am frequently a minority in terms of race and gender yet I have a position of power. There are various hierarchies at play – racial hierarchies, professional hierarchies, and ecclesial hierarchies, to name just a few. Not only are there power imbalances between teacher and student due to positional power and race, but also among the students. Some, for example, are more fluent in English than others. White students hold more power than students of colour- one reason being that white students are often more proficient in English. Some students have more knowledge and experience than others. These power imbalances result in an unequal dynamic.

In this diverse classroom it is essential to ensure that all voices are given opportunity to be heard. Teachers can model cultural humility by being self-aware about their own social location and context. They can model respect and genuine curiosity about other cultural groups. We might approach our students with an air of curiosity, wondering: “how they have come to understand themselves as cultural beings, the challenges and rewards in their process of understanding themselves culturally, how they have integrated their identities in their personal and professional lives, and what challenges they continue to face as they move forward.”¹⁹ Teachers must be continually aware of the potential for miscommunication and misunderstanding, and respect the possibility that these will arise within the classroom.²⁰

The process of developing cultural humility begins with openness. Students are invited into a diverse classroom and are expected to engage with others. They are encouraged to be open to seeking new ideas and connections. Obviously, the degree of openness will vary – some students will be more open than others. Those who have already developed a degree of cultural humility will come to the classroom eager to interrogate difference, and to be curious about others.

The process of teaching preaching is already steeped in self-awareness. We ask students to consider their social locations – where they situate themselves in terms of race, class, sexual identity, geographic location, age, ability, education – every situation of life and lifestyle. In my experience, many students struggled to talk about their own social location, as if it were the first time they had been asked to describe the impact of their race and ethnicity. Ancis states: “In terms of challenges in the classroom, I have found that White students are often not cognizant that they have an ethnic identity. I believe that this lack of knowledge and lost identity

¹⁷ Jenny B. Schuessler, Barbara Wilder, and Linda W Byrd. “Reflective Journaling and Development of Cultural Humility in Students,” *Nursing Education Perspectives* 33, no. 2 (2012): 96–99.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Miguel E. Gallardo and Miguel E. Gallardo, in *Developing Cultural Humility: Embracing Race, Privilege and Power*, ed. Miguel E. Gallardo (Los Angeles, CA: Cognella, 2014), pp. 1-26, 1.

²⁰ Gushkin, “Cultural Humility,” 163.

contributes to a resistance to fully recognize and appreciate the cultures of others and hinders the development of sensitivity to others.”²¹ Gallardo writes in *Developing Cultural Humility*, “I am deeply concerned when I hear my ‘White’ students each year in both my doctoral and master's level courses tell me they have no culture, or provide me with a response that they are ‘American,’ or ‘I don't know, I have not thought about that before.’”²² It is not only white students who might have trouble articulating their cultural identity in a mixed classroom. I had a class that was entirely composed of Korean males. I asked them to describe what it is like to be a Korean male in this time and place. They were unable to answer – whether because they were uncomfortable articulating cultural self-understanding in the classroom, or they genuinely didn't know how to express their self-understanding. In a world that is increasingly diverse and unknowable, it becomes more important for students to be able to name their own location. This is obviously a challenge that goes beyond the homiletics classroom and reveals a need for the development of self-awareness to be part of the larger curriculum of theological education.

Foronda's analysis discovered that an important part of the process toward cultural humility is to be humble, or ‘egoless.’ This is a much more difficult process to teach but it can be modelled, especially when it comes to flattening hierarchy within the classroom. It may be particularly helpful for teachers in multicultural classrooms to develop new pathways for communication that do not rely only on norms from the teacher's own culture. “When communicators are inventive, they surpass the idea that they must accommodate to the style of one of the cultures involved. Instead, they work on establishing, often tacitly, new patterns that work for both.”²³ A recent example arises from a lecture in which I referred to ‘the lectionary’ in a multi-denominational setting. A student reminded me that there are, in fact, multiple lectionaries. I was able to apologize for my misleading statement, and we were able to have a constructive conversation about various lectionaries. I showed humility by recognizing the limited nature of my insight, and together we were able to forge a new path. Together, we honoured the diversity that was present not only in the classroom, but in the churches that we serve.

Foronda's next stage in the process is “supportive interaction.” This part of the process lends itself especially well to student sermon evaluation. If cultural humility is to be taken seriously as an aspect of intercultural communication, then it must find its way into the evaluation of preaching. It would not be beneficial to evaluate students based on their degree of cultural humility as this is an ongoing process and impossible to measure. However, the evaluation of student sermons can model and practice curiosity and wonder as a means to explore the identity of the other.

There is a moment in the “Children in Worship” or “Godly Play” liturgies in which children are invited into a time of wondering. The storyteller/leader has told the biblical story beautifully and gently using familiar and delicate physical objects. She then invites the children to wonder aloud about what they have heard. I wonder what Jesus was feeling? I wonder what the temple smelled like? I wonder what it felt like to be the Samaritan?

²¹ Ancis, J. R., & Szymanski, D. M. (2001). “Awareness of White privilege among White counseling trainees.” *The Counseling Psychologist*, 29, 548–569. In *Developing Cultural Humility*, 251.

²² Gallardo, op.cit., ch 1.

²³ Kathy Domenici and Stephen W. Littlejohn. *Facework: Bridging Theory and Practice*. (SAGE Publications, 2006,) 160.

These questions follow a natural progression that helps children ease into the wondering (we all know what we like best) to larger issues (what is really important?) to making the story about ourselves (where am I in this story?) to the great existential questions of limits (what can we leave out?). It is not unusual for a child to respond to these questions with deep thoughts about the meaning of life, the nature of our call as Christians, and even the mystery of death. A storyteller does not correct or offer easy answers; instead he holds space for the children to wonder by wondering himself. Other children may add to the wonderings of others. This sacred time is Spirit-filled and conveys the deep work of Christian life.²⁴

Here we have an incredible model for thinking respectfully, awe-fully, about those who are not in the room. This is a stance and a practice that will complement conversations around student sermon evaluation. Wondering questions would provide a means to ponder the existence of another. For example, “I wonder how this sermon will be heard in an indigenous community?”

Curiosity is an attitude that enhances the practices of cultural humility – both in terms of curiosity about the self (intrapersonal) and curiosity about the other (interpersonal). Intercultural curiosity is “the desire or inclination to know or learn about people who are culturally different and their cultures.”²⁵ Curiosity is found to be a predictor of positive outcomes when it comes to the effectiveness of intercultural communication.²⁶ Cultural humility calls on us

to remain curious and self-aware, to avoid assumptions, keep biases in check, and make necessary changes. This practice requires us to closely examine our views, decisions, and actions, as well as our contributions to the systems that perpetuate inequities. Curiosity and respectful dialogue are the cornerstones of cultural humility. Curiosity about one’s self is necessary to examine and challenge our beliefs. Curiosity also means learning about others with openness, including learning about the ongoing legacies of their historical and present-day realities.²⁷

Curiosity can enhance the preaching process and the teaching of preaching. We can become curious about our own motives and attitudes. We can become curious about our students, about how they experience the world, what their experiences have been. We can become curious about other faiths and traditions that occupy the public space.

The concepts of ‘wonder’ and ‘curiosity’ are fruitful in the evaluative process. I theorize that the evaluation of student sermons is an ideal time to ask wondering and curious questions about those who are represented in the sermon, as well as those who might hear the sermon or be impacted by it in some way. In essence, students are invited to wonder about those who are not in the room. For example, students are invited to become curious about the public square and wonder how this sermon would be heard by particular groups. To return to the example of a sermon that addresses Indigenous-Settler relations in Canada, in an evaluative process, students are asked to wonder aloud: I wonder how this sermon might be heard by a Settler Canadian? I

²⁴ Jerome W. Berryman, “Godly Play and the Language of Christian Faith,” *Christian Century*, March 27, 2019. <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/features/godly-play-and-language-christian-faith>
This article provides an excellent introduction to the practices of Godly Play.

²⁵ Mark Earl Mendenhall, “Curiosity.” In *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Intercultural Competence*, 215–216 (215). Thousand Oaks, SAGE Publications, Inc., 2015. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483346267>.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Zahra Jimale and Jennifer Smith, “Making a Case for Cultural Humility.” *Bar Talk*, Dec 2020. <https://www.cbabc.org/BarTalk/Articles/2020/December/Columns/Making-the-Case-for-Cultural-Humility>

wonder how this sermon might be heard by an Indigenous person? I wonder about the history of Indigenous-Settler relations. I wonder about Canada's history and contemporary situation. I wonder whether this sermon will heal or hurt? To wrestle with these questions out loud and together is to open a space in which cultural humility might be encouraged. In discussion, students will find that they have varying levels of knowledge about various groups. They are able to pool their knowledge and their questions, while becoming aware of the various perspectives and identities that are presented by classmates. These kind of "wondering" questions lend themselves not only to the evaluation of sermons but to the study of scripture. "I wonder" is an open, curious and humble statement.

Finally, according to Foronda, we come to the part of the process that is about self-reflection and critique. This is an ongoing practice that continually asks the individual to evaluate their attitudes and behaviour. The goal is to continue learning and reflecting about different cultures in a way that provides a continual feedback loop of positive engagement and ongoing change. In the homiletics classroom, this is perhaps most adequately fulfilled by a self-evaluative exercise.²⁸ Students can be asked to wonder about their own growth through the term. Many preachers engage in a week to week process of sermon preparation. They imagine the faces of the people sitting in the pews, thinking about their needs and their sorrows, their joys and their struggles. This imagined, yet real audience offers insight for the preacher. What if the imaginative gaze was levelled further afield? What if imaginary audiences included those who are not in the room when the preaching happens? What if our imaginary audience was filled with characters we encounter in our daily lives who might never hear our sermons but to whom we are accountable in terms of our representation of our shared reality? What might the gospel mean for the women in the line at the bakery? What might it mean for the food delivery driver? What might it mean for the man at the dog park? Including this "public" in our sermon preparations on an ongoing basis will result in sermons that are more connected and relevant.

Decolonizing the Curious Preacher's Gaze

In critical theory, the "gaze" is the way that an individual perceives or defines another. The colonial gaze refers to the way that colonizers define and characterize the colonized – often in negative and demeaning ways. Representation is a dangerous enterprise. The way that colonial agents have represented the colonized has tended to be deeply flawed and inaccurate, often to the benefit of the colonizer. In order to maintain superiority and justify colonial projects, it has been necessary to build a strict boundary between colonized and colonizer. In addition, the colonizer must construct the colonized other in a particular way. This social construction functions to maintain difference and distance between colonized and colonizer. This kind of discourse aims to concretize the status quo in relationships of unequal power. When we teach or preach, we are in a position of power. The gaze of the teacher/preacher has the power to represent, to define, to label.

In the classroom, it may be necessary to decolonize the preacher's gaze, especially as our curious gaze falls upon the lived experience of the other. This involves, at the very least, inquiring whether our representations and theologies are adequate and accurate. Catherine and Justo González write: "In a Thanksgiving service, for instance, we must be ready to repeat in the presence of our Native American sisters and brothers whatever is said about the ownership of the

²⁸ According to Gushkin, no metric yet exists to measure cultural humility.

land.”²⁹ Teachers must ask whether their words can be reasonably spoken in the presence of a diverse body of students. In addition, whether their words will hold up in another context - Can we say that....to an Indigenous Person living on treaty lands in Canada? Can we say that....to a recent refugee? Can we say that....to someone who has experienced deep trauma? Can we say that....in a situation where someone has not received healing from illness? This intentional pause gives us an opportunity to become curious about the other and to measure our words against the lived experiences of other groups. We can only become familiar with the lived experiences of others if we listen carefully to what a group says about itself.

The act of teaching preaching is a contact zone where we encounter other cultures and perspectives as well as different situations vis a vis colonial power. It is important to pay attention, to be co-present, at these intersections. In these contact zones, we may gain insight into those who are not in the room by maintaining a gentle, respectful, and mutual gaze.

Cultural Humility in the Process of Preaching

It is hoped that this practice of cultural humility will continue outside of the classroom. It is very much a practice to be cultivated in the preacher's life - to seek accuracy, to seek empathy with others, to seek to be humble and curious. I am theorizing this as a deeply imaginative process, although it could be a much more concrete and practical process if preachers were to engage in the lives of others outside of the preaching space - in conversation, through social media, by asking questions and listening carefully to answers. It is hoped that this wondering will lead to more robust engagement through research or personal contact. I, for example, have found Twitter to be a useful tool for monitoring my own assumptions and biases about other cultures. By engaging with a wide variety of individuals, I am practicing opening my mind, being curious and other-oriented.

The process of developing cultural humility could easily become part of a preacher's self-critical practice. What are the benefits of developing cultural humility in the pulpit and classroom? In the process of preaching? According to Foronda, “The results of achieving cultural humility are mutual empowerment, respect, partnerships, optimal care, and lifelong learning.”³⁰ It is easy to see how each of these could enhance pastoral ministry. Becoming curious about those who are not in the room is a pathway toward empowerment for both the preacher and the group about whom they preach. This is a means to form partnerships and increase respect for others. In healthcare settings, cultural humility has led to optimized care. We can imagine that the same might be true in pastoral settings. As we practice cultural humility, we are opening a space in which we might optimize our pastoral care by listening and wondering. Finally, setting preachers on a path of lifelong learning means that they will continually be prepared and challenged to consider those who are not in the room.

Alicia Elliot, a Haudenosaunee writer, explains what it means to write from another perspective with authenticity. It takes empathy, but it also takes love. She writes:

If you can't write about us with a love for who we are as a people, what we've survived, what we've accomplished despite all attempts to keep us from doing so; if you can't look

²⁹ Catherine and Justo Gonzalez “The Larger Context” in Art Van Seters, *Preaching as a Social Act: Theology & Practice*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988,) 31.

³⁰ Foronda, *Cultural Humility*, 213.

at us as we are and feel your pupils go wide, rendering all stereotypes a sham, a poor copy, a disgrace – then why are you writing about us at all?³¹

Preaching from another perspective with authenticity also requires love and humility. This is especially true if we are to represent others as fairly and realistically as possible. The goal is to engage the public square with curiosity and humility, and to be accountable for the manner in which we represent the world beyond our listeners

³¹ Alicia Elliot, “On Seeing and Being Seen,” in *A Mind Spread Out on the Ground*, (Toronto, Doubleday, 2019), 30.

Un-mastering Homiletics Interculturally: Gospel, Belonging, and Communion for In-Class Sermon Feedback

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Abstract: *Facework offers more than a useful intercultural theory for enhancing the homiletics classroom by attending to individual face needs like belonging, competency, and autonomy in threatening moments like in-class sermon feedback. Facework in my class also provided a framework in sections for mentoring preaching students as homiletical theologians in their own right, as evidenced by a description of classroom practices as well as student responses to an anonymous survey in 2020. Furthermore, when illuminated by Willie Jennings’s groundbreaking work on theological education in After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging, such attending to face needs and mentoring might begin to deepen homiletical education in our interculturally challenged environment of white supremacy.*

Facework and Mentoring: Goals for an “Introduction to Preaching” Course

In Spring 2020 a team of Boston University School of Theology PhD teaching fellows (TFs) and I inaugurated a mentor-oriented vision for the teaching of preaching based on the key principles of facework theory. Our initial goal was to integrate the teaching and learning of preaching with respect to both task mastery and identity formation—a central aim of the theory.¹ Facework, an intercultural communication theory as elaborated in the literature of instructional communication for basic college speech courses, notes how in-class discussions of student speeches pose a threat to basic human face needs: specifically, belonging, competency, and autonomy.² While facework theory’s ability to account for face needs in teaching and learning has tremendous implications for instructional communication in speech settings, its value for our work in giving in-class sermon feedback extended further: as a way of doing homiletical-theological education. Student preachers in our class were not only developing preaching skills (in other words, “task mastery”), nor even solely forming identities (which are always negotiated in classroom feedback), they were doing so while becoming reflective homiletical theologians in their own right.³ As a result, the instructional team as mentors set the goal of fostering small groups capable of contributing to task mastery and identity formation in preaching along with a

¹ The importance of task mastery and identity formation for intercultural instructional communication is beautifully treated in a brief seven-minute video (accessed October 23, 2021) which can be viewed at https://uportland.mediaspace.kaltura.com/media/Dr.+Jeff+Kerssen-Griep/0_7k7htob2.

² For a full and ample treatment of facework theory and its potential in the homiletics classroom, see the opening pages of the first article in this special issue of *Homiletic*, Amy McLaughlin-Sheasby, “The Witnessing Community: Cultivating Face-Attentive Learning Environments for In-Class Sermon Feedback.” The “face-attentive” concern in her subtitle refers to the very human face needs that I identify above. Readers may also wish to consult my introduction to facework theory and homiletical-theological pedagogy from an earlier issue of this journal, David Schnasa Jacobsen, “Sermon Feedback as Facework: Task and Identity Goals in Mentoring Homiletical Theologians,” *Homiletic* 43, no. 2 (2018): 3-12. For an exceedingly helpful look at facework’s value for instructional communication see Jeff Kerssen-Griep, April R. Trees, and Jon A. Hess, “Attentive Facework During Instructional Feedback: Key to Perceiving Mentorship and an Optimal Learning Environment” *Communication Education* 57, no. 3 (2008): 312-332.

³ The chief goal of my preaching courses is to help students become more than technique- or even identity-savvy, but homiletical theologians for whom task mastery and identity formation are theologically crucial. See *Homiletical Theology: Preaching as Doing Theology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2015).

growing awareness of their own “working gospel” or “gut gospel” in relation to the preaching task.⁴

The course syllabus’s concern for student task mastery and identity was therefore framed by informal assessments of students’ understanding of the gospel at the beginning and end of the term. Students’ “working gospel” or “gut gospel” was assessed in an ungraded exercise at the beginning of the course as part of a video-taped discussion in sections. The end of the course featured yet another such assessment, this time in the form of an oral student presentation followed by a group discussion that integrated the section’s feedback by means of Ron Allen and Clark Williamson’s criteria for discerning gospel: coherence, intelligibility, and moral plausibility.⁵ This oral presentation/discussion at the end was designed to be integrative of the course and a self-conscious product of group theological reflection. This final ungraded assignment would be an occasion to move from one’s working theology of the gospel to that of incorporating ongoing critical reflection in the company of one’s section and TF/mentor. The hope was to see preaching in deep relation both to homiletical theology as *dispositio* or *habitus* and as *scientia* or critical reflection, a pedagogical moment that aims in classroom practice toward Edward Farley’s vision of a unified *Theologia*.⁶

The point of a course that begins with one’s “gut gospel,” however, is to help students cultivate a *constructive* theological vision which goes beyond mere dry, propositional claims. A “gut gospel” or “working gospel” is deeply related to students’ embodied lives and social locations. The teaching team was committed to the notion that a student’s “working gospel” had to pass muster with the bodies in the room, beginning with the student’s own and with classmates in the section. Over the two halves of the course, students were asked to come to terms with their own embodied responses to biblical texts and situations to do their homiletical-theological work, whether in the first half with Anna Carter Florence’s inherently embodied and dislocative exercises of “attending” and “describing,” or in the second half in situationally focused discussion groups that dealt with traumatic situations emerging from COVID-19 which deeply affected the students and the hearers they loved. Across both halves of the course, the gut gospel the students began articulating had to pass through the prism of their own lives and had to make sense in light of the real human beings in their sections, whether the sermon frame was provided by a biblical text or a situation that called forth gospel speech.⁷ The fact that all this

⁴ André Resner’s notion of “working gospel” appeared in an insightful article, “Reading the Bible for Preaching the Gospel,” in the *Collected Papers of the 2008 Annual Meeting of the Academy of Homiletics*, 223. Most recently, Resner elaborated on his notion of working gospel in “Do You See this Woman? A Little Exercise in Homiletical Theology” in *Theologies of the Gospel in Context*, 19–24. Resner goes on to develop his own tripartite taxonomy of gospel in his later work, “” in *What’s Right with Preaching Today* (M. Graves and A. Resner, Eds.; Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2021), 154–83. Frank Thomas has developed this notion even further with his exploration of the impact of the gospel as “working gospel” and “mystery” on what Thomas calls the moral imagination in preaching in *Surviving a Dangerous Sermon* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2020), chapters 1–2.

⁵ Clark Williamson and Ronald Allen give their most fulsome iteration of these criteria in *A Credible and Timely Word: Process Theology and Preaching* (St. Louis: Chalice, 1991) 71–82, 101–111.

⁶ Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 32. Farley’s vision in this book is important here not as a mere criterion for assessment, but as part of a desire to renew theological education beyond its role within the Enlightenment university and its division of labor between theology (usually understood as systematic theology) and theological disciplines, like homiletics. Farley wished to see the whole of contemporary theological education embrace a unified vision of *theologia* that integrated theology as *disposition* and *scientia*.

⁷ The primary textbooks for the course were Anna Carter Florence’s *Preaching as Testimony* (Louisville: WJKP, 2004) and lectures based on my co-authored book with Robert Kelly, *Kairos Preaching: Speaking Gospel to the Situation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009). Lisa Thompson’s text, *Ingenuity: Preaching as an Outsider* (Nashville:

took place as COVID-19 began to confine students and the instructional team to Zoom by mid-March underlined both the course's challenge and its value. How do we preach gospel in this time and place *and in the (virtual) presence of these bodies*? We were not equipped to answer this question but knew it would be key to acknowledge somehow our bodily displacement. This explicit focus on embodiment, while an emerging part of my work, has a long pedigree in the field of homiletics.⁸ For the instructional team the specific pedagogical angle of vision was to see how embodiment would inform a theological hermeneutic relative to one's working gospel.⁹

One special note about our teaching team's ongoing facework practice, especially in the sections. Facework theory, insofar as it attends to threats to "face needs" during speech feedback in the classroom, finds its natural homiletical analogue in the practice of in-class *sermon* feedback. Facework encourages meeting the face needs of "belonging, competency, and autonomy" so that students are able to attend to learning homiletical tasks trusting that they are "seen," or put differently, that different identities in the room are respected and recognized in the learning process. One additional thing the teaching team tried was to practice these feedback moments at various stages in the course—not just after student sermons. Facework theory informed the group discussion times when students first articulated their oral "working gospel" and when they reflected critically on their understanding of gospel in a written assignment at the end of the course. When students received feedback on a public scripture reading, we used the same facework format to help familiarize students with what they would face when it came time to receive sermon feedback (see below). In other words, attending to face needs became a way of doing much of the public-facing feedback that a basic preaching course might have to do. This way of organizing our teaching moments allowed us to build facework into several other parts of the course and gave opportunity in particular for the teaching team to build face-to-face mentoring relationships into the task work and ongoing identity formation that went in to learning the constituent parts of preaching. This gave the teaching team other in-class moments in which to deepen the mentoring work they hoped to do and link those moments to the learning outcomes of the course, especially the course-long growth in theological wisdom and gospel reflection.

Facework and Mentoring in Practice: A Format for In-Class Feedback

Abingdon, 2018) also played a large role in centering embodied experience and answerability to life "on the ground" for the course. As a result of the drastic change to the course in March 2020, the syllabus assignments underwent substantial revisions. Instead of preaching a second sermon that was situational, the final sermon assignment was to develop a situational sermon "primer" for people reflecting on what it might look like to preach a sermon in light of some crucial aspect of COVID-19 for a specific group of people.

⁸ The literature of embodiment works often at the intersection of homiletics and performance theory (Charles Bartow, Jana Childers, Richard Ward, and Ruthanna Hooke). Embodiment has also played a large role in homiletical work informed by feminist theory (Christine Smith, Anna Carter Florence, and Karoline Lewis), womanist theology (Teresa Fry Brown, Lisa Thompson) and other liberationist perspectives (Christine Smith and James Harris). Luke Powery's work in relating embodiment and culture to homiletical theology has been especially helpful to enlarging my own take on its importance, in *Dem Dry Bones: Preaching, Death, and Hope* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012) and later in his article, "Nobody Knows the Trouble I See: A Spirit(ual) Approach to the Interpretive Task of Homiletical Theology," in *Homiletical Theology in Action: The Unfinished Theological Task of Preaching* (David S. Jacobsen, Ed.; Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2015), 85-107.

⁹ Special thanks here to Boston University doctoral students Amy McLaughlin-Sheasby and Nikki Young, whose deep interest and emerging research projects in embodiment and theology prompted me to familiarize myself with a bibliography that includes trauma studies (Judith Herman, Bessel Van Der Kolk, and with respect to "white body supremacy," Resmaa Menakem), social flesh (Mayra Rivera), and most recently carnal hermeneutics (Richard Kearney).

In practice, of course, the use of facework in our class was a growing edge for us all and was implemented with some unevenness in practice. Our aim was to give feedback to a student for a sermon (or presenting their theology of the gospel, or a scripture reading, or even a random question about practice) in the following format:

1. The TF/instructor began after the student's sermon or reading with a description of what he/she/they heard, speaking directly to the student preacher. We wanted to begin all of our in-class responses with largely descriptive language that helped the student feel seen. In this way, we really hoped to attend to the preacher's identity from the beginning.
2. The TF then led the class in identifying strengths of the sermon, and with respect to the Anna Carter Florence text we used, focusing on narrating and confessing what the student preacher believes about it. These moments helped the teaching team (the TFs and me) together with classmates to highlight the competencies of the student preacher.
3. From here, we shifted to ways students might improve upon their work. This could tend, of course, to be yet another iteration of the old "critique sandwich" whose revision is a crucial part of this pedagogical exercise.¹⁰ We sought to handle this "face threat" in a way that either emphasized autonomy and competency of the student preacher or maximized respectful dialogue between students and the teaching team. In other words, comments that named a concern about the student's sermon were often framed as questions or as "I wonder..." statements. When it came time to propose an alternative way of doing some particular part of the preaching task, even those were to be presented to students in plural forms: you could try X, or perhaps you could do Y, or Z might help you do it this other way. This presentation of options may seem a small thing but its significance is large insofar as it is designed to preserve the agency and competency of the student in his/her/their learning of preaching. From time to time, this section could also become a time for the teaching team or a student just to pose questions—the idea being that a question becomes an opportunity for student preachers to articulate alternatives on their own.
4. This is also why in this final part of the format the in-class sermon feedback time concludes with the student preacher *talking back to the teaching team and the class*. The teaching and learning of preaching took on a deeply dialogical form. Often times, the questions were such that they posed moments for theological reflection as a class on a specific claim made in the sermon. Sometimes, this even touched on the students' "working gospels" being articulated in the section. With this final moment of talk back, the agency and autonomy of the student is placed at the center in a face-to-face environment.

The reality was that our in-class practice was not always consistent, especially insofar as we on the instructional team were all still learning how to do this together. I think the hardest part to

¹⁰ The phrase "critique sandwich" refers to offering sermon critique between two affirmations as a way of making critique palatable and making the interpersonal work of learning preaching as task mastery feasible. I first encountered the term in G. Robert Jacks, *Getting the Word Across: Speech Communication for Pastors and Lay Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995). In doing so, Jacks aimed to couch task-oriented feedback theologically in a desire to see "growth in grace," p. 226.

learn—and here I speak from my own experience as instructor—was how to do the descriptive piece well immediately after the student preached. What I would aim for was (1) a matter-of-fact description of what I heard the student preacher say without an evaluative take on my part. It was easy for me, however, to let this section go long and morph into (2) the strengths of the sermon. Attending to face needs here, and affirming identity in particular, is always an important purpose that deserves its own moment—a student preacher needs to be “seen” first and foremost. I realize that this remains a growing edge for me. By contrast, encouraging student preachers to improve their work (3) always seemed to be hardest for their classmates. Over time, this section began to broaden out in some of my other teaching settings to include what I called “questions, concerns, and wonder-ments.” I tried as a facilitator through such language to help the class (or their TF/mentors) to develop ways of engaging *learning* the task of preaching with more than one way of posing the concern, and one hopefully commensurate with the classmates’ own relationship to the student preacher who had just spoken.

Student Survey Responses: Face Needs and Growth as Homiletical Theologians

The ultimate integrative piece, however, was the theological growth that the course as a whole was promoting. To that end, I developed an anonymous survey instrument that would allow me to sense how belonging, agency, and autonomy helped to facilitate theological integration around the preaching task. The survey was presented to students on the final day of class and in conjunction with our usual electronic course evaluation instrument. Fourteen of our twenty-two students participated in the survey; nearly 64% of the class. Most of the questions were open-ended and left space for students to describe and reflect upon their learning in the class. The first question, however, presented them with a choice: “Do you feel your autonomy, agency, and sense of belonging in the class as a preacher/theologian were honored in this course?” Of the fourteen students surveyed twelve responded “yes” and two responded “partially.” No student who took part chose “no” for an answer.

The quality of the respondents’ affirmation of belonging (and other face needs) is more precisely reflected in their answers to the other questions. Their other responses allowed them to articulate their own growth as preachers who were theologians in their own right. Across several of the survey questions, student respondents discussed the value of the intentionally shared work we did as dialogical theologians with one another. One student wrote: “That gospel is both deeply personal and deep[ly] co-creative. We are constantly creating with one another and shaping how our gospels are formed.” Another student pointed out the same dialogical value in the interpretive practices we cultivated in the mentored sections: “Having the space to workshop with the readings and with fellow theologians was so valuable. Being able to contribute to other and having my own thoughts nurtured and developed was an important part....” Another student mentioned how sermon feedback from the instructional team was important for both grounding in belonging and developing as a theologian in their own right: “...they have given me a lot of constructive comments that makes me believe that I belong here, that I can be a preacher. So, I am very grateful for this opportunity to be with these amazing teaching team and fellow theologians of the Word.” The students’ comments are far from uniform. In fact, one student was explicit about a feeling of failure. Even so, their varied responses were consistently rich in one way: many linked their theological growth in gospel to a sense of *belonging* and an ability to engage in shared dialogical work after preaching their sermons.

Revising Facework in the Context of Eurocentric Theological Education: Belonging, Communion, and Gospel in Willie Jennings' *After Whiteness*

This linking of student responses in particular to matters of belonging resonated with me even more after I read Willie Jennings's *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging*. What's more, Jennings's work helped me to understand what an interculturally-informed homiletical-theological pedagogy was actually up against in a theological context dominated by whiteness.

From his time as an academic dean, Jennings knew to attend carefully—both to what people said *and their bodies*. His understanding of theology in a white dominant institution includes what he calls its habitation: theology's way of ordering bodies within the cultural orientation of whiteness. Jennings's way of listening to bodies and reading thoughts, of "knowing the secrets" of how bodies in theological institutions work, allows him to bring readers along with him and yet also to recognize what we already know deep down, even when it appears as tacit knowledge. And he does this thick description not just as anyone but precisely as a lover of God.¹¹

On this basis, Jennings makes two key theological moves in the introduction to his book on the de-formational impact of whiteness on Western theological education. The first is to recognize not just the importance of belonging, but its theological significance as *communion*.

I hope to show that the deepest struggle for us all is a struggle for communion. Theological education is supposed to open up sites where we enter the struggle to rethink our people. We think them again, but now with others who must rethink their people. And in this thinking together we begin to see what we had not seen before: we belong to each other, we belong together. Belonging must become the hermeneutic starting point from which we think the social, the political, the individual, the ecclesial, and most crucial for this work, the educational. Western education (and theological education) as it now exists works against a pedagogy of belonging.¹²

In setting a hermeneutic of belonging at the center of theological pedagogy, Jennings posits a theological vision of communion, a kind of "...God drenched life attuned to life together."¹³

Yet even communion finds its ground in a promising yet troubled space for pedagogy: the gospel itself as translated across cultures and tongues. Built into a gospel that is translatable, argues Jennings, is "a dynamic filled with possibilities and problems." Gospel for Jennings is one of the key ways in which a pedagogy of belonging pushes back against the homogeneity of Western theological education. The gospel enters language, culture, and life as lived and connects people in all their particularity to the loving God. Jennings calls this the "true root" of theological education. Yet, in actuality, both the possibility and *the problem* of the gospel's translatability is tied up with its boundary-crossing capability. In fact, says Jennings, translatability is the very place where the problem of theological education becomes clear. Boundary crossing can also be used as a tool of hegemonic and homogenizing forces—in this case, to reproduce whiteness in the habituated form of the purpose of Eurocentric theological education: the white self-sufficient man. Will theological education use the boundary crossing

¹¹ Willie Jennings, *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020), 2.

¹² Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 10.

¹³ Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 12-13.

nature of the gospel to reproduce whiteness and its kind of mastery in theological education or will it be a place where the boundary-crossing translatability of gospel leads to belonging, to *communion*?

Conclusion

Facework does not provide all of the answers to pedagogy. The struggle to develop a classroom space where in-class sermon feedback can work in tandem with a commitment to belonging or communion and a gathering around the theological task of naming gospel goes on. The fact that it all happens under conditions where Eurocentric hegemony and the homogeneity of whiteness continue to thrive mean that homiletical educators will need to attend ever so carefully to belonging, agency, and autonomy, to be sure. However, it also means that homiletical educators, particularly those with privilege, will need to learn to exercise power differently in the classroom. There will be times when this entails nurturing a critical capacity among students as we help them in the words of the instructional communication scholar Jeff Kerssen-Griep to “peer behind the curtain” of our own power and the institution’s power in the classroom. More than that, however, the intercultural theory that is facework can launch a process of mentoring that begins to push beyond what Jennings describes as the “mastery” of the white, self-sufficient man that is the tacit curriculum of Eurocentric theological education to something that is shared, respectful, life-enhancing, and theologically dialogical. And in that moment, we may just find ourselves “un-mastering homiletics,” engaging in a real dialogue around homiletical theologies, and struggling together in our classrooms to let gospel speak, again and again and again.

Benjamin I. Simpson. *Ephesians: An Exegetical Guide for Preaching and Teaching*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2020. 412 pages. \$36.99 (hardcover).

As part of the *Big Greek Idea Series*, the given volume on Ephesians provides scholars and clergy with a valuable resource for in-depth preparation. “Every volume of this series has a threefold audience in mind: the busy pastor, the overworked professor of an academic institution, and the student with demanding Greek professors” (10). The book’s usefulness lies in its ability to serve as an exegetical tool specifically within the context of the Pauline and pseudo-Pauline Epistles, beyond Ephesians. Simpson provides readers with a great appreciation for attentiveness for the role of linguistic and grammatical criticism through an emphasis in examining semantics and syntax of an ancient language. An intermediate proficiency level in Greek would help the reader. Therefore, the primary audience does not include lay readers. The book does not intend to function as a typical single volume commentary laced with implicit theological biases. Rather, the author focuses on critical issues that arise when analyzing the grammar and style of each passage to attain a grasp of Paul’s intended rhetorical effect. Simpson does not aim to provide his personal interpretation of any text but seeks to raise questions that derive from translation challenges.

Simpson wrote the volume while serving as faculty at a seminary where Master-level students have the requirement of passing language proficiency exams during the middle year(s). Therein lies evidence that the author aims to produce a commentary that helps students improve their translation skills. Throughout the book, Simpson inserts various sections entitled text-critical, semantical, theological, syntactical, and lexical nuggets to assist readers in grasping the connotation of words and expressions from the perspective of original audiences. Despite a small but growing number of scholars who have doubts that Paul actually wrote Ephesians, Simpson does not question Paul’s authorship.

An astute reader should take caution in avoiding a narrow view of any part of the book’s clausal outlines, devoid of the greater context. Attention to the context redirects the reader to Paul’s situation while in prison, a call to unity in Christ that transcends ethnicity and other comparable identity markers, and a call for a distinct Christian community while under the conditions of a contrary culture and under the rule of an antagonistic empire. “The letter of Ephesians is Paul’s call for this new community without ethnic distinction to live differently in a hostile world in light of the radical change that God accomplished in their lives” (39). Simpson embraces a spiritualized perspective of the letter of Ephesians with the theological theme that Christ’s death cancels prior enmities between two groups. However, there lies no mention that on a broader scale intergroup peace and reconciliation has failed to come into fruition.

Except for the book’s introduction, each chapter begins with a primer entitled “Big Greek Idea” followed by an extensive section called “Structural Overview.” Both sections combined provide the reader with an overview of Paul’s instructions for first century believers, the significance of how the passage’s organization provides ethical implications, and an account of God’s present and future actions. The book can provide a reader with fresh inspiration to further study Paul as a moral theologian through the lens of Biblical Greek. Alongside the Greek, Simpson provides a near literal English translation throughout the given volume. For preachers and teachers who refer to commentaries, Simpson’s volume provides a valuable preparational tool under the condition that one consults a variety of other like sources with respect to their unique purposes and theological biases.

The book's greatest strength rests in the idea that it uses advanced linguistic scholarship to refute flawed interpretations of commonly decontextualized proof-texted passages such as the "the household codes," which have consequentially evoked a theological mandate for an unjust social order. It would have helped if the author placed an emphasis on the degree in which customs and mores of the Roman Empire influence the letter. Further, this book can inform lay Christian educators in the U.S. who may have historically and frequently used the passages from Ephesians in the absence of the two themes that Simpson raises, which include God's creation of a new people from two rival groups and the concept of victory in Christ. The book's main shortcoming lies in the absence of existential applicability for modern readers, especially marginal members of society. To the author's defense, Simpson remained consistent in adhering to the primary focus of the book as a useful exegetical resource.

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Leonora Tubbs Tisdale. *How Women Transform Preaching*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2021. 93 pages. \$29.99.

Tubbs Tisdale's *How Women Transform Preaching* takes the reader on a journey--a journey with women who have followed the call to preach and teach preaching, despite opposition. Originally presented as the 2019 Lyman Beecher Lectures, the research shows how the increasing presence of women clergy over the past sixty years, albeit gradual, has transformed the practice of preaching. Tubbs Tisdale skillfully weaves together stories of early preaching women, homiletical foremothers, and women students of preaching, analyzed with her own homiletical instincts and experiences, resulting in a collection of *herstories* that have altered the landscape of the preaching tradition in the United States.

The book begins with an exploration of early studies conducted on women clergy and ordination, namely, Zikmund, Lummis, and Chang's *Clergy Women: An Uphill Calling* and Carpenter's *A Time for Honor: A Portrait of African American Clergywomen*. Both studies revealed the low rates of ordination for women across denominations, if ordination was an option at all. Those women who did receive ordination often found it difficult to find ministry employment; were often steered towards positions with less status; and were significantly undercompensated as compared to their male counterparts. The author notes how opportunities for fulltime pastoral employment were slim, and even more so for African American women desiring to serve in historically Black denominations. More recent studies (2018) show increased percentages of ordained women in mainline denominations, yet delayed growth in other traditions. Challenges for women in ministry identified in earlier studies persist, including inequitable compensation and clergy women appointments as assistant pastors or to rural churches for extended time periods. Tubbs Tisdale connects the statistical data to lived experience by sharing personal stories from women homileticians recalling when they first heard a woman preach, even if the sacred speech act wasn't acknowledged as 'preaching'. The narratives reveal tenacity, ingenuity, and creativity as women preached, regardless.

The second chapter is a concise view of early preaching women in the United States. Tubbs Tisdale cites works by Larson and Brekus covering Quaker and Evangelical preaching women, respectively, and Collier-Thomas' *Daughters of Thunder*, specifically addressing African American preaching women of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Mentions of women prophetesses, active in the Puritan tradition at least as early as the seventeenth century, and women spiritual leaders in Africa and in enslaved communities, offer glimpses into the under documented history of women who chose to follow God's call, often in the direst circumstances. Tubbs Tisdale identifies three types of transitions that facilitated the rise of women as early preachers in the United States: 1) ecclesial and theological transitions; 2) political and geographical transitions; and 3) transitions in the lives of the women themselves (31). Readers are invited to consider what contemporary evolutions and innovations make space for more preaching women today.

The book concludes with the author in conversation with sixteen foremothers in the field of homiletics, reflecting on the central question: *what difference has the presence of preaching women made in preaching today?* Here she abridges ten progressions, even revolutions, in the field of preaching because of women preachers, such as: expanded imagery for God; reclamation

of under preached texts, using feminist, womanist and postcolonial hermeneutical resources; theologizing from a feminine perspective; expanded views of voice and authority in the pulpit; and preaching that is more invitational than authoritative. Not insignificantly, women scholars have excavated untold stories of women preachers through in-depth research, thus, making available literature that reclaims women and centers the voices of women. These changes in preaching, asserts Tubbs Tisdale, have created more welcome conditions for some marginalized persons, but it is still not enough. Preaching and teaching women of color continue to experience resistance and disregard for their homiletical contributions and persons in LGBTQ+ communities experience ongoing challenges for acceptance in many faith traditions.

How Women Transform Preaching is a needful historical and contemporary record of stories of named and unnamed preaching women and women homileticians. I recommend this book for academic classrooms as well as church studies, and any persons interested in the ways in which preaching women impact the church and the world. The book is a resource for researchers of the traditions of women preachers across time, race, denominations, sexuality, and ordained/not-ordained status. It also includes a convenient timeline of women's ordination in the United States and biographical sketches of the homiletical foremothers interviewed. Tubbs Tisdale points preaching women, and those who support them, forward with hope and with a dose of realism: "we still have a long way to go" (74).

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O. Wesley Allen, Jr. and Carrie La Ferle. *Preaching and the Thirty-Second Commercial: Lessons from Advertising for the Pulpit*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2021. 145 pages. \$21.37.

This book is one of the Perkins Center for Preaching Excellence projects. These projects bring non-theological disciplines into dialogue with homiletical scholarship, aiming to offer new insights for homiletical practitioners. At first glance, the book's title appears strange, as it suggests that commercials have a lesson to offer preachers. The purposes of preaching and advertising seem radically different. The former proclaims Christ, who told the rich man to abandon all his possessions before following him. The latter seeks to increase wealth and promotes materialism.

O. Wesley Allen Jr. is a scholar of homiletics and Carrie La Ferle is a scholar of advertising. Despite the apparent incompatibility of these two practices, the authors offer an intriguing argument in this interdisciplinary study. They state that preaching and commercials are both "communicative endeavors aimed at persuading the audience to consider new options for their lives" (1). Advertising influences people's desires, needs, and communication. Preachers could study commercials for the purpose of communicating their sermons more pertinently to the contemporary minds and hearts.

The six chapters in this book bring context, stories, and wisdom from the advertising industry into dialogue with homiletical theories. Some chapters end with one of Allen's sermons as a useful example. The first chapter, "The Problem," considers the context of the modern audience. This context is characterized as an immersion in multimedia noise, postmodernism, and pluralism, where truth is considered relative and intersecting cultures complicate individual identities. The authors believe that advertising's strategy of analyzing how people communicate could be helpful in shaping preaching as communication.

The second chapter, "How Communication Has Changed," describes the change in modes of communication from linear to multidirectional. In the traditional model of advertising, the sender encodes a message in words or images and sends it to the receiver, who decodes it. However, the contemporary model recognizes a more participatory role for the receiver, who now returns their feedback to the sender to allow for more meaning-making. Such a change in communication trends is also visible in the homiletic field, as seen in Fred Craddock's inductive preaching or the collaborative-conversational school of homiletics.

In the third chapter, "Understanding the Hearer," the authors illustrate how the advertising industry has grown to focus on the local needs of their consumers by utilizing geographic, demographic, behavioristic, and psychographic segmentation. In a similar fashion, a growing number of homileticians have emphasized the importance of understanding the congregational context to make preaching more effective. Therefore, Allen and La Ferle propose that as preachers prepare their sermons, they imagine talking with a group of diverse people who form their "imaginary focus group."

The fourth chapter, "Advertising and Sermonic Forms," introduces a popular method that advertisers use to develop their message: attention, interest, desire, and action (AIDA) (63). The authors compare the narrative nature of AIDA with the traditional African American sermon and Eugene Lowry's homiletical plot, because they emphasize the experiential dimension of the good news that is maximized by building tension. The desired outcome of a commercial is the purchase of a product, but the authors clarify that the action in a sermon is taken by God, not human beings, and therefore, they try to discourage works-righteousness.

The fifth chapter, “Sermonic Imagery and Narrative Advertising,” discusses how the advertising industry has used storytelling to create experiences that inspire consumers to act rather than simply giving information about a product. While they are economical with words, due to their short length, these “sticky” stories in commercials tend to be “simple, unexpected, concrete, credible, and emotional” (88). In applying these principles to homiletics, Allen and La Ferle advise preachers to present a story featuring a protagonist with whom the listeners can easily identify, based on their shared struggles, experiences, and celebrations.

In the final chapter, “Advertising Campaigns and Cumulative Preaching,” the authors point out that advertising campaigns are implemented through various mediums over a period of time to increase brand awareness and sales and produce more loyal customers. While being consistent in its message, the campaign needs to use fresh words, images, or stories to connect with customers. Similarly, preachers need to reflect on their theology to improve the consistency of their message and discern how frequently they need to communicate the same message so that it can be received more effectively.

TV is no longer the dominant platform for advertising. Instead, people encounter commercials on portable devices, such as smartphones and tablets, looking at YouTube, Facebook, or Instagram. These media outlets value convenience and speed and require commercials to be provocative and experiential. The authors of this book discuss what preachers can learn from “the best of advertisers.” However, designing a sermon inspired by contemporary commercials is bound to be highly expressive, trendy, and emotive, leading to the question: What message would be communicated by such a homiletic method?

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T. D. Jakes (with Frank Thomas). *Don't Drop the Mic: The Power of Your Words Can Change the World*. Faith Words, 2021. 464 pages. \$26.00 (Hardcover).

On an otherwise unremarkable evening in the 1960's, a young boy from rural West Virginia watched Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on the evening news and was so inspired by the courage and cadence of King that some 50 years later, he still recalls the experience: "Whatever the allure, that night left me with one unforgettable takeaway: *A man with a microphone could change the world!*" (emphasis original, 15). Now in his 60's, Thomas Dexter Jakes, Sr. (widely known as Bishop T. D. Jakes) has himself become an unforgettable pastor with a microphone, amassing millions of followers on each of the major social media platforms, twice gracing the cover of Ebony magazine, landing the cover of Time Magazine as "America's Best Preacher," and being featured in Time as one of the 25 Most Influential Evangelicals in America. Jakes is an entrepreneur, filmmaker, and the founder and chancellor of Jakes Divinity School. His level of success rarely emerges in preaching circles, eliciting reverence in some and jealousy or skepticism in others.

Jakes has authored more than forty books, but *Don't Drop the Mic: The Power of Your Words Can Change the World* is his first focus on communication. Jakes states, "...my intent is to enhance our respect for the art of speaking and to enhance our eloquence as preachers, presenters, politicians, performers, poets, and entrepreneurs" (17). Perhaps as a nod to homileticians skeptical of his homiletical training, Jakes humbly, yet confidently, addresses the matter right away:

Down through the years, I've become best known for my communication as a preacher and public speaker... My speech and the style of my delivery began outside the camp of any academic training and beyond the doors of any seminary. Instead, I've relied on spirit and sound, wind and warmth, compassion and conversation seasoned with a passionate and often poetic fusion of ancestry, heritage, and the power of a listening ear and open heart. Nonetheless, I've always appreciated the academic perspective--theological, hermeneutical, and linguistic--showcased by many other preachers and ministry leaders (30-31).

By addressing the "elephant in the room," Jakes skillfully sets the stage to introduce Dr. Frank Thomas as a contributor to the book. Thomas, a homiletician and current president of the Academy of Homiletics, has built his career as an expert in African American preaching and founder of the world's first doctoral program on the subject. Thomas describes Jakes as "[u]ndeniably, one of the most nationally and globally imitated preachers in the digital age" (339) and "an optimist by nature" (366). Their collaboration comes at Thomas' urging.

The book consists of five parts (each with three chapters) and an appendix. Jakes authors the first four parts, starting each chapter with quotes from influential communicators such as activist Audre Lorde, writer Maya Angelou, and educator Stephen Covey. In Part 1 (Introduction: The Voice of Hope), Jakes revisits his childhood, the role of his parents in shaping his communication skills, and the impact of King on his understanding of "the power of communication." Jakes reflects on his first sermon and uses it to launch into a discussion on owning one's fear as a communicator and understanding the pain of others. Part 2 (The Legacy of Language) teaches brand development and reveals Jakes' process for preaching: "Study yourself full, think yourself clear, pray yourself hot, and let yourself go" (137). Part 3 (The Promise of Practice) highlights how and why to take advantage of each opportunity. The dynamism of Part 3 makes it a must read for communicators. In Part 4 (The Discovery of

Delivery), Jakes stresses authenticity, creativity, and responsibility in communication. Jakes writes each chapter with ease, demonstrating his effectiveness as a communicator while effortlessly drawing the audience through Bible stories and personal anecdotes. The audience experiences Jakes' Baptist and Pentecostal roots, alongside the breadth of his knowledge in a range of disciplines.

Thomas authors Part V (The Meal in the Message) and relies on an earlier established metaphor of preaching as cooking. He adds, "The recipe and sermonic food of Bishop Jakes comes directly out of African American preaching context and tradition" (341). Thomas focuses on the "recipe", "ingredients", and "taste" of Jakes' preaching alongside an analysis of a sermon by Jakes. To critique the preaching of Jakes is no easy task. Thomas treads lightly, for he is aware of his audience. He carefully refers to Jakes as "Bishop" or "Bishop Jakes", apologizes to readers when he quotes Jakes at length, and requests for readers to "[p]lease understand that I am not the kind of critic who seeks to find something wrong with Bishop's preaching, or what is missing, and offer correction" (380). Thomas encourages readers to examine the preaching of Jakes and use it to reflect on their own preaching styles. Readers new to African American preaching may want more from Thomas in his sections. As well, future editions would benefit from an index.

Students and teachers of homiletics will find this work refreshing, because Jakes is an expert storyteller. This work is useful for its accessibility, practicality, relevance, and clear examples. Additionally, Jakes covers topics usually not addressed in homiletics textbooks. To appeal to a range of audiences, the book is available in large print, audio, electronic, and paperback. Readers will also appreciate the 3-part interview between Jakes and Thomas (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=US2_FMgBwHI). Jakes shines as a storyteller and Thomas contributes the homiletical structure. I write this review as a homiletician and a professor of communication studies, a point of view particularly important in examining a book that seeks to appeal to both arenas and does so powerfully.

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Matthew D. Kim. *Preaching to People in Pain: How Suffering Can Shape Your Sermons and Connect with Your Congregation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021. Xv + 251 pages. \$24.99.

Preaching to People in Pain is a practical guide for those who seek ways to deal with suffering in their preaching. Matthew D. Kim understands suffering as a form of discipleship, imitating Christ, and participating in Christ's sufferings. Kim points out that by revealing the weaknesses of not only the preacher but also the individual members of congregation, sharing suffering can contribute to creating a culture of healing in a church. Arguing that preaching suffering is beneficial for the life and transformation of individuals and communities, the first part of this book names the pain of preachers and listeners and considers a plan for preaching pain.

In the first chapter, Kim notes that the preacher also struggles with suffering and addresses the reluctance of our culture to respond to others' suffering. Kim is concerned that preachers may tend to minimize or hide their pain because preachers have thought that revealing their vulnerability might damage their pastoral authority or leadership. Kim invites preachers to explore their suffering in the physical, psychological, emotional, relational, financial, and spiritual areas. In chapter two, Kim says preachers need to give their congregations the time they need to immerse themselves in their grief, avoiding the mistake of seeking an immediate happy ending. Congregations need ears to listen, people to pray with, and people to sit with in sorrow: "We preach to comfort those in pain, but we also remain close to them in their suffering" (46). Kim argues that having a culture of vulnerability in a community increases the possibility of creating a safe place to speak openly and share suffering. In the third chapter, Kim presents how to read the Bible through the specific lens of suffering and how to apply this reading to sermons.

In the second part, Kim presents six themes of pain, including sermons related to each theme. Through nine questions, Kim considers dealing with suffering in preaching in each chapter. He examines and analyzes biblical texts and offers sample practices for how to shape a sermon. Chapter four considers painful decisions that deal with the matter of moral decision in relation to sensitivity to sin. Related to the painful subject of finance, in chapter five, preachers may give biblical suggestions about financial issues. When dealing with the theme of physical and mental health issues, Kim notes that meditating on the sufferings of Christ in these afflictions can serve as spiritual and emotional balm. Especially, Kim emphasizes the sovereignty of God in terms of illness and the trials related to it, seeing that sickness and other trials can bring us closer to God. Readers may compare his idea with another view on preaching disability and illness offered by Kathy Black in *A Healing Homiletic: Preaching and Disability*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996. While covering the subject of painful loss, Kim brings attention to the loss of agency or identity. Kim notes that the suffering experienced by immigrants and powerless people is often a source of shame and sadness. Chapter eight, which talks about painful relationships, argues that preachers may have the courage to tell the truth, even on difficult or confusing topics. Specifically, Kim insists that sermons may address violence such as sexual harassment, abuse, assault, and rape. Kim also refers to racial and ethnic conflicts and divisions as forms of painful relationships, arguing that we need to face the painfully wrong principle that minorities ought to submit to the authority of the majority culture. In the last chapter, on the subject of painful sins, Kim opposes the belief that present suffering is a direct result of that sin and argues that we need to lament for our sin. He admits suffering is

how God tests disciples and presents the image of God who calls sinners and does not let the faith and salvation of sinners be lost.

Kim contributes a valuable consideration when he suggests that preachers and communities need to deal with suffering in preaching and in their community life. Kim's theological approach related to theodicy may work at some point; however, he could explore more diverse theological perspectives on understanding and expressing suffering in preaching. Further deep consideration of the complexity of suffering and how to make space for the reality of suffering is also needed while presenting the God who suffers and weeps with those who suffer. As Kim confesses, "God [he] is here with us before, during, and even after our initial pain" (202).

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Daniel O. Aleshire. *Beyond Profession: The Next Future of Theological Education*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021. vii + 149 pages. \$19.99.

In this timely volume, Daniel O. Aleshire, the former executive director of the Association of Theological Schools (1998-2017), presents a set of very helpful insights about the future of theological education, particularly for Protestant schools. As a likely sequel to his previous work, *Earthen Vessels: Hopeful Reflections on the Work and Future of Theological Schools* (2008), which rather focuses on the history and current trends of theological education, this volume is more about how to revamp the current theological education in order to better train religious service providers and pastors of local congregations in such a challenging time like ours in the 21st century. He summarizes his proposal in the following comprehensive sentence, “The goal of theological education is a wisdom of God and the ways of God fashioned from intellectual, affective, and behavioral understanding and evidenced by spiritual and moral maturity, relational integrity, knowledge of the Scripture and tradition, and the capacity to exercise religious leadership” (90). Put simply, Aleshire calls his proposal “formational theological education.”

Aleshire spends Chapters 1 and 2, which he superscribes as the Prelude, in explaining reasons for formational theological education in terms of the surrounding culture today, religion’s status in society, and continued changes in higher education. Briefly, he points out the surrounding culture’s rapid secularization and distrust in the institutionalized religion, the rise of religious nones and decline of traditional churches, and higher education’s focus on professional skills preparation of students (thus, the “death” of humanities) and far less on their moral or ethical character. Aleshire urges substantive restructuring of theological education to effectively respond to such a challenging, multilayered social ethos around religion and education. Again, his responsive proposal is formational theological education.

It is his critical diagnosis that current theological education is designed after the professional school model originated in 19th century Germany, largely thanks to Friedrich Schleiermacher (see his *Brief Outline of the Study of Theology*). The theological school or seminary as a professional school, Aleshire points out, heavily emphasizes the development of professional ministry skills in students, such as biblical language capacity, church historical knowledge, pastoral care techniques, preaching performance, church planting skills, etc. Yet what is missing in that model is whole personality development in students, including their spiritual, moral, ethical, and people-relational character. It is not that Aleshire completely degrades seminary as a professional school or its evidenced merits, but that in today’s world, seminary should become something beyond that, as his book’s main title firmly indicates, *Beyond Profession*.

Aleshire devotes Chapter 3 to the detailing of what he means by formational theological education, in particular articulating his long definition of it, “The goal of theological education is a wisdom of God and the ways of God fashioned . . .,” which requires “increased attention to the behavioral and affective learning that occurs in experiential context” (135). Then the final chapter (Chapter 4) is spent on practical suggestions for the improvement of theological education, in terms of renewing institutional goals and vocation, reorienting faculty’s educational approaches, rethinking of assessment of theological education, and creating educational curriculum aiming for whole personality formation.

Finishing up the book, readers may feel that the author’s “practical” suggestions for the improvement of theological education in Chapter 4 are rather superficial or repetitive of the main

ideas of Chapter 3 with a slightly practical nudge. Thus, Chapter 4 would be more helpful for readers if it became practically more specific; for instance, if it provided a sample MDiv or MA in Ministry curriculum, or new courses or programs that could help actualize the author-proposed formational theological education at a local seminary level. Also, it would be very helpful if Chapter 4 had more sections on digital education, multicultural context, sexuality and gender, and other urgent matters, as (formational) theological education today is not possible without honestly and effectively facing these matters.

Despite the few aforementioned shortcomings, this new volume is set to become another must-read for all theological school administrators and concerned faculty around the nation, beyond cultural or denominational boundaries. Readers will find many good insights in this work for the reform of today's theological education. Particularly, Chapter 3 could be a helpful student orientation reading source for all new students entering seminaries as well as existing faculty.

As Aleshire admits, his ideas are not really new. Edward Farley, already a couple of decades ago, shared similar ideas in his *Theologia* (2001). And many Catholic theological communities have already practiced certain aspects of his ideas for a long time. Thus, he believes, it is a matter of determination, not a new invention when it comes to adopting formational theological education. In other words, it is a matter of how we better apply what we already know in this new era of novel challenges and opportunities.

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Miguel A. De La Torre. *Decolonizing Christianity: Becoming Badass Believers*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2021. 224 pages. \$24.99.

Beginning with a reference to critiques of his previous conversation-generating book, *Burying White Privilege*, Miguel A. De La Torre opens *Decolonizing Christianity* with equally potent conversation-generating content. The response to questions such as “What is the solution?” or “Tell us what to do!” is, as De La Torre observes soberly, “not complicated.” De La Torre uses the parable found in Matthew 25:31-46 as a framework for this response. Building on the insight from critical race theory that “racism is not a belief but complicity with an ideology,” the author argues that decolonizing solutions are clear as daylight and points to the need to focus on unmasking complicities of ordinary people such as “clergy, Boy Scouts, nursing mothers, and cookie-baking grandmas” (84). Identifying and redressing the evil of such “banal people” is a central part of the De La Torre’s proposed solution. As De La Torre puts it in his characteristic manner, “While people of color can better plan to protect themselves from those who blatantly express race-based stereotypes, they find it more difficult and dangerous to safeguard against courteous allies” (98). Giving flesh to this insight through various examples and arguments is a significant contribution of the book.

Employing a framework rooted in realities of racialized socio-economic systems is another strength of the book. For instance, De La Torre argues rightly that “there is money to be made in destroying the lives of Brown children” (79). In other words, while detaining children in camps and separating them from their parents is certainly a matter of the heart, the author roots such moral concerns in the brutal yet real matrix of racialized socio-economic systems that are built to profit from the destruction of lives and communities. Readers’ attention is drawn to both these pressing concerns.

A theologically creative and ethically potent portion of the book is the analyses and description of the figure of the “antichrist” as one that arises in each generation. By circumventing the periodization of the antichrist as just this one malevolent figure in a particular time, De La Torre argues that “every generation has its Nero, its antichrist” (117). It is this cyclic understanding of the antichrist that allows De La Torre to make the observation that “Trump, at the end of the day, is irrelevant” (217). The author thus calls readers’ attention to the logics of destruction, hatred, and domination that permeate every generation. Those readers looking for examples will appreciate De La Torre’s description of other “mass-murdering presidents” of the United States. The brief but specific descriptions of those figures are enough to disabuse any naiveté about what exactly each of those figures said and did. For instance, De La Torre details the horrific death of about 75,000 Mayan people as a result of the Reagan presidency. Genocidal impulses and actions, however, as the author argues, continue to play out against Indigenous people in our own time. Periodization of history—that is, among other things, relegating particular evils to particular time periods in way that allows one to mistakenly claim progress or regress, therefore, is to be eschewed. This is a significant reminder to theologians and ethicists of all stripes.

De La Torre makes several astute observations that allow readers to ask corresponding timely questions. For instance, he notes how “mass killing for the purpose of detonating a race war” have increased so much that national security agencies have described such instances of violence as a “national threat with a priority greater than foreign terrorism” (171). And yet, readers only need to ask how much the defense and military budget is and to what ends the funds are allocated in order to get a sense of where the perceived priority lies. A strength of the book,

therefore, is not only in raising pertinent questions but also creating the conditions for readers to ask similar ones. This reviewer, for example, gasped while reading about how “even today, one of the top terms used to search the internet for supremacist material is ‘RaHoWa’—Racial Holy War” (175) because of the identifiable connection between racism and religion.

For those wondering how he describes “badass believers,” De La Torre has provocative proposals. In an age characterized by strategic postures, he calls for “spiritual correctness” rather than “political correctness.” In other places, the author calls for “withhold[ing] forgiveness” and “acts of jodiendo—acts that f*ck with the social structures responsible for oppression” (187). Curious readers will find plenty of material that unpacks these provocative proposals in accessible language that does not compromise rigorous analysis.

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Grace Ji-Sun Kim. *Hope in Disarray: Piecing Our Lives Together in Faith*. Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2020. Xxiii + 131 pages. \$16.95.

Grace Ji-Sun Kim throws out a multi-faceted reflection on what is Christian hope and how to seek God in the midst of an era of living with loss, isolation, and anger that runs deep in every part of human life. However, it is not an abstract and metaphysical hope, rather it points out the intense anguish she has witnessed, as well as the world's pain which we all endure. Kim presents Christian hope and spatiality that begins and is bestowed in a relationship with God, and speaks with the voice of social justice. This book invites readers to intense contemplation on how to redefine and seek Christian hope and spirituality.

This book consists of three major themes: living in the church, culture, and relationship. Each theme has nine snapshots which includes spiritual and ethical discourses. Several questions at the end of the chapters lead readers to dwell on the meaning and practice of hope in the conversation with a community whose members sustain each other. The first theme deals with hope through the Church calendar from Advent to Pentecost. That theme guides readers to confirm God's presence everywhere around us, and to see God, the Giver of life, in those who suffer the most. This theme lets readers face the intersectionality related to the oppression and offers readers a warning about Christians' "judgment and self-righteousness" (4). This theme criticizes bourgeois thinking and material prosperity, gender injustice in churches, and addresses the issues of differences and the excluded. The church calendar does not ignore contemplation of sin, evil, and rejection, but rather embraces such suffering in the redemptive action of the triune God. The wonder of the church calendar of celebrations is to help us find, in our misery and suffering, that there is resurrection and new life.

The nine discourses of the second theme focus on imagining a more ethical future and on challenging us to communal action to "examine and reimagine our current culture" (41). This part notes racism, sexism, prejudice, and stereotypes of intersectional oppression against minorities, including immigrants and indigenous citizens. Kim encourages us to redefine racial justice and equality as both are sometimes dysfunctional in our society. Also, Kim refutes the culture that has imposed shame on survivors. She calls for the church's involvement with survivors and urges a place of memory and truth-telling against their oppression. Kim also brings up the social hazard of public shootings, mentioning the countless lives that have been lost and the violence that has occurred in exchange for freer gun ownership. Kim includes damage being done to our ecology and the desire of humans to receive benefits from nature, noting how the poor are impacted by changes in climate and the economy. She realizes that climate change will exacerbate poverty, hunger, and disease, and will negatively impact politics, labor, resources, and refugees. In the face of these crises, Kim emphasizes the need to be responsible for our destiny, our actions, and our progress. The power of the Spirit, she believes, can motivate us to act beyond fear with compassion and hope for the creatures of the earth and those who suffer.

The third theme focuses on human-human and divine-human relationships. To build healthy relationships, Kim points out a sense of vulnerability. Vulnerability, according to her, is acknowledging participation in an imperfect world. Kim challenges the patriarchal culture and conventions that are fixed in gender roles regarding internalized oppression and argues that churches and societies need to create resources to support those who suffer abuse, including women and children. For the discourse on peace, Kim draws on the particular suffering of North and South Korea as the only divided nation in the world. She notes that Christians need to practice the principles of faith as peacemakers in the face of destructive world events and

divisive leaders. This effort includes dealing with the bias against North Korea that has been politically manipulated.

This book encourages readers to develop diverse ways of considering hope and to reexamine what we can accomplish by sharing each other's narrative of suffering and pursuing solidarity. For Kim, hope is not about the world we dream of but about the world we live in and is a belief that is based on solidarity that we can nurture a better life for those suffering around us and for all.

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Comparing Two Women's Lectionaries: Wilda C. Gafney and Ashley M. Wilcox

Wilda C. Gafney. *A Women's Lectionary for the Whole Church: Year W*. New York: Church Publishing, 2021. 336 pages. \$33.26; and *A Women's Lectionary for the Whole Church: Year A*. New York: Church Publishing, 2021. 326 pages. \$36.95

Ashley M. Wilcox. *The Women's Lectionary: Preaching the Women of the Bible Throughout the Year*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2021. 294 pages. \$36.50

Widely used across the world and by numerous denominations, the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL) has long been a primary scriptural resource for congregations aligning with the liturgical calendar. Recently, a few fourth-year supplements have sought to address missing texts, while the Narrative Lectionary more intentionally orients readers to experience the contiguous story of the people of God. What is missing in each of these lectionaries is significant attention to the presence of women in the Bible, as evidenced in pericope selections. The dearth of attentiveness to women and feminine imagery for God in lectionary resources has contributed to invisibility and obscurity of certain Biblical women and elevation of others.

However, in 2021 two authors published lectionary resources to fill the "gender gap." Ashley M. Wilcox has written a single stand-alone book, *The Women's Lectionary: Preaching the Women of the Bible Throughout the Year*, while Wilda C. Gafney has released two volumes of what will be a four-volume set, *A Women's Lectionary for the Whole Church*. Gafney's work will include a three-year cycle of readings as well as a stand-alone volume for a single year. In this review, we examine the latter alongside Wilcox's book. Each author makes a distinctively significant contribution to the lectionary resource family.

Wilcox "reimagines the liturgical calendar of preaching...to focus on the passages about women in the Bible and feminine imagery of God" (xiii). Each of the 65 sets of readings pairs a pericope from the Hebrew Scriptures with one from the New Testament and provides "evocative, not comprehensive" commentary and discussion questions (11). The lectionary blends women-focused passages with selected RCL texts (listed in bold in a helpful chart of readings) to offer a more expansive view of both God and women in the biblical text. Not only does her lectionary attend to named and unnamed women and sexual violence against women, but also to the maternal imagery of God scattered throughout the sacred writings.

Wilcox's lectionary provides the weekly scripture references (not the actual passages) and retells the text in accessible language, inserting insights and interrogatives that may prompt preachers to see the women in the text for the first time or to see them in ways that disrupt narrow views of women in the ancient world. For instance, she draws readers' attention to the differing treatment of Lydia and the Enslaved Girl in Acts (166), raising implicit questions at the intersection of gender and class. The work also includes eight suggested sermon series composed of select lectionary readings.

Though Wilcox and Gafney share a similar impetus for writing these lectionaries—visibility of women and girls as well as sensitivity to issues such as antisemitism, patriarchy, and violence against women—Gafney's distinguished scholarly imprint is immediately evident. *Year W* is a multi-gospel single year lectionary, whereas *Years A, B, and C* follow the basic RCL pattern. Each volume contains readings for 89 days in the liturgical year including three different options for both Christmas and Easter, as well as additional readings for each day of Holy Week and Easter Week and other feast days. Gafney's *Year W* follows the traditional four-fold model: lesson from the Hebrew Bible, Psalm, Christian Testament lesson, and Gospel reading

appropriate to the liturgical season. Each set of readings is accompanied by textual notes for exegesis as well as brief preaching prompts.

Gafney does more than center women and girls who have been hidden in masculine generic language and non-gendered plurals, such as ‘children’ or ‘Israelites’; she names androcentrism and misogyny in the text and in textual interpretation as culprits. To right this wrong, Gafney provides her own translations of the pericopes, taking care to use feminine pronouns and images for God as well as nuanced renderings of the text that bring the implied presence of females to the foreground. As well, she shares her own textual commentaries in conversation with original language texts, a range of Biblical translations, and select commentaries, with particular focus on women and girls. Her dexterity with extra-biblical resources treats the reader to interpretive gems not readily discoverable.

A brief analysis of Holy Week selections in each lectionary highlights distinctions between the two works. Curiously, Wilcox does not include readings for Palm Sunday, but for the “Sixth Sunday of Lent.” She examines the Passion story in Matt. 27:11-23 through the lens of Pilate’s wife and invites readers to consider what the story would be like told from her perspective. Each of the New Testament readings for Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday focus on the events of Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection from the women’s perspectives, offering a fresh interpretation of the story as told in the four Gospel texts. However, the Hebrew scriptures paired with each reading seem randomly chosen and have no discernable relation to the day or the New Testament passage. This mismatch between the selected readings and the theme of the holy day is a frequent occurrence in Wilcox’s volume and may be reflective of her denominational stance as a Quaker, a tradition that does not closely follow the liturgical calendar or design worship around seasons and feast days of the church year.

In contrast, Gafney offers her own translations of the Hebrew and Christian texts for Palm Sunday (including the full Passion narrative), Monday through Wednesday of Holy Week, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, the Easter Vigil, and an Easter Day and Evening service, as well as readings for each day of the week following Easter. Her work is a written clinic on close reading, expert biblical interpretation, practical ancient language use, and intentional gender inclusivity. However, while Gafney recommends this volume for lay readers, it makes assumptions about their familiarity with biblical scholarship that may be a stretch for some. For example, she references sources such as the Qumran which may be unfamiliar to those who are not seminary trained. Nevertheless, her preaching prompts give evidence of the vast networks she consulted for this project. Hers is a collaborative scholarship done in conversation with different faith communities around the world representing thirteen different denominations and a range of clergy, seminarians, and lay leaders, as well as gender identities and expressions.

For preachers, professors, congregants, and individuals, we recommend both lectionaries. As the firsts of their kind, they effectively draw attention to women and girls who have always been in God’s story, even if neglected, overlooked, and mistreated. Both authors offer a much-needed corrective to the androcentrism of existing lectionaries by focusing on women’s stories, female images for the Divine, and the complex and often disturbing ways in which the Bible (and our contemporary society) renders the personhood of females. The aim of each of these authors is to enable preachers and congregations to more fully understand and reflect on humanity made in the image of God, especially the women and girls who are often relegated to silence, namelessness, and subservience. Lay readers may find Wilcox more accessible; academic readers may find Gafney more integrative of scholarly research. Whereas Gafney

provides brief, yet in-depth exegetical notes, Wilcox devotes more space for homiletical implications of the readings. Differences aside, there can't be too many women's lectionaries, and both will be valuable for preachers, worship-leaders, and lay readers alike.

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Mike Graves and André Resner, eds. *What's Right with Preaching Today: The Enduring Influence of Fred B. Craddock*. Eugene: Cascade Books, 2021. \$31.00.

In *What's Right with Preaching Today?*, Mike Graves and André Resner invite a diverse host of homileticians to answer that infamous question by looking at the life and work of Fred Craddock. Fred Craddock's name is immortalized in homiletical lore as one of the most significant contributors to preaching in the 20th century. Professors of preaching, seminarians, and listeners of sermons will benefit from these personal stories and essays written both by those who knew Craddock personally and some who knew him briefly or from a distance. This festschrift is worthy of the legend in whose honor it is written. *What's Right with Preaching Today?* highlights, among many other honorable qualities, the rhetorical genius, homiletical wisdom, humor, personable affection, and the down-to-earth personality that characterized Fred Craddock.

The title of the book is influenced by Harry Emerson Fosdick's question, "What Is the Matter with Preaching?" from a 1928 essay written in *Harper's* magazine (xi). Just as Fosdick examined and identified the "matter" with preaching in 1928, Craddock is known for his critique of the popular propositional, deductive sermon approach common in the last half of the twentieth century. Craddock's incisive diagnosis of the "matter" of preaching resulted in a prognosis that preaching had promise and potential in the inductive sermon method. However, *What's Right with Preaching Today?* reintroduces the reader to a multifaceted Fred Craddock whose genius extends beyond his most notable contribution as the father of the New Homiletic movement.

Graves and Resner aim to highlight positive aspects of contemporary preaching. They also seek to stimulate conversation between listeners and preachers while offering encouragement to the Body of Christ (xxi). The editors accomplish their goals and offer other profitable takeaways such as challenging their reading audience to think deeply about how homileticians teach preaching and how preachers are developed. Two examples in the text come to mind. Debra J. Mumford raises the question, "But how are preachers supposed to preach about a subject that is as divisive and potentially explosive as race?" (100). Mumford contends that Craddock's emphasis on how people receive images helped her approach in teaching preachers how to engage congregations on the topic of racism. Margaret Moers Wenig, in her short but significant piece, speaks to how the form of the sermon shapes the faith of the listener (91-92), another pedagogical admonishment.

An equally beneficial aspect of the book is the textbook-like chapters which focus on homiletical strategies and concepts. The writers provide these homiletical insights while honoring Craddock. Barbara K. Lundblad, for example, writes about images in the sermon (49-64), while André Resner features the work of theologian Edward Farley who stressed the relationship between the Bible and the sermon, making for more theologically robust proclamation (156-180). As another example, Luke Powery masterfully provides commentary about preaching and prayer (137-149).

The most significant and unique offering of this book comes from Craddock's former students whose chapters make the reader *feel* as if they knew Craddock, or that they want to be like Craddock -- a scholar who was simultaneously pastoral and professorial. In this book his students testify of a teacher who knew that effective pedagogy rests in one's ability to put relationship above research, without compromising the latter. These testimonials are consistent in their description of what Craddock's teaching meant for them. M. Eugene Boring writes, "It could not have entered my mind that, apart from my immediate family, no one on the planet would have a greater influence on me" (44). Likewise, Robin Meyers confesses, "Fred Craddock

was the single most important influence on my life as a preacher and teacher” (1). And Nancy Coil Lear admits that hearing Craddock made her feel “that I was truly in the presence of Jesus (not Jesus the Christ, but Jesus the man)” (133).

The personal stories contained in *What’s Right with Preaching Today?* convince me that Craddock’s prescription of the inductive method for preaching was more influenced by his love and devotion for the people who hear sermons than his technical analysis as a scholar. He cared about listeners so much so that he invited them to participate in the homiletical journey as companions on the way to faithful revelation. These writers present a scholar who “challenged barriers and broke down stereotypes with his humility” (221). The inductive method remedy to one-way, top-down preaching was a product of a tender heart and a tough mind, to borrow a phrase from The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. *What’s Right with Preaching Today?* reminds us of the gift God gave the academy and church in Fred Craddock as well as what’s right about preaching today.

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Michael P. Knowles. *Third Voice: Preaching Resurrection*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2021. 263 pages. \$34.

Third Voice is a call for preachers to adopt homiletical humility with regard to the resurrection. It is a book especially useful for those who teach preaching but written for any preacher who is interested in the theology of proclamation. Rather than seeking to make the audacious claims of the empty tomb palatable to modern sensibilities, and rather than demythologizing or retreating into vague propositions about resurrection in psychological, mythological, or ecclesiological terms, Knowles challenges preachers to seek out a “third space” of cruciform knowing and preaching. He describes this kind of space as a hermeneutical pilgrimage where preacher and congregation are companions on the journey. By doing so, he attempts to avoid the authoritarian perspective of literalism while letting the authority and sovereignty of God to do new things speak for itself.

Knowles draws inspiration from a variety of quotable homileticians, philosophers, and poets, but he also writes with similarly poetic prose. He states the main problem thus: “...belief in resurrection is not a destination at which we may arrive by virtue of negotiating an appropriate material, moral, or intellectual strategy” (21). He summarizes the solution this way: “...preaching modeled on resurrection is an act of trusting speech that takes Christ and the text at their word with respect to God’s willingness and ability to raise dead hearers to life (preachers foremost among them)” (28).

I am convicted by Knowles’s assertion that preachers often feel skewered by their own disbelief. Progressives who are uncomfortable with fundamentalist interpretations of the resurrection are especially likely to shoulder the impossible burden of works-righteousness: “...rather than waiting for God, it seems much simpler to take the tasks of encouragement, inspiration, and empowerment upon ourselves” (39). Simpler and, I would add, exhausting, especially two years into a global pandemic. Knowles’ words here are both a challenge and a relief: “...since some are bold enough to admit grave doubts about the resurrection in any non-metaphorical sense, might we also have courage to concede that preaching doesn’t always work the way we tell others it should?” (41). I find this honesty refreshing and pastoral, especially for preachers who have been laboring these many months in the face of death, obstinacy, and flagging church morale.

After the introduction, the book is structured in three sections: Listening, Speaking, and Waiting. A significant amount of the “Listening” section is less about listening as such and more about hearing and attending to the insufficiency of human speech. In this section he summarizes J.L. Austin’s categories of speech acts: locutionary (intelligible propositions), illocutionary (words intended to perform a function, like apologies), and perlocutionary (the effect itself, like persuasion or inspiration). He returns to these throughout the book as he describes the way preachers should leave the perlocutionary action to the God who raises the dead. It’s also in this section that he both critiques the New Homiletic and uses it as a launching point, reframing David Buttrick’s metaphor of Adam naming the animals as an example not of the human power to create worlds with words, but of that power’s limits: it is only God who can create new life from Adam’s own flesh.

In the “Speaking” section, Knowles dives into exegeting stories of the resurrection, lifting insights from the crucifixion and resurrection accounts and using them as models for how preachers can approach the gospel message. He also incorporates insights from the Pauline epistles and postcolonial studies, attempting to rescue the “kingdom” metaphor from

triumphalistic and colonizing language while simultaneously avoiding relativism. The preacher's authority to proclaim the kingdom is a borrowed authority, and the kingdom a provisional one. Becoming citizens of the already-but-not-yet kingdom requires that hearers become homeless, exiles waiting for God to gather them into a different way of being. Knowles doesn't romanticize this perspective. He reminds the reader that only God can raise the dead to life, and that the preacher's rhetoric lacks the power to do so.

In the "Waiting" section, Knowles calls preachers to imitate the disciples on Holy Saturday. Rather than trying to preempt the resurrection power of God by raising the church from the dead with our own failing words, he invites preachers to trust in God's promises. This time in between the crucifixion and Easter, the place where God's promises await fulfillment, is a sabbath that tries our ministerial patience. Again, our unusual pandemic context makes this metaphor particularly poignant.

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M. Shawn Copeland. *Knowing Christ Crucified: The Witness of African American Religious Experience*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2018. 198 pages. \$26.

M. Shawn Copeland is a retired American womanist, former religious sister, and Black Catholic theologian. She is professor emerita of systematic theology at Boston College (where she had a joint appointment in the Program in African and African Diaspora Studies). *Knowing Christ Crucified: The Witness of African American Religious Experience* continues her previous exploration in *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*, with an emphasis on a specific theological anthropology focused on bodies, gender, race, and suffering.

The work is neither a theodicy proper nor a glorification of redemptive suffering. It is distinctively Catholic, both in self-identification and method of Catholic moral reasoning informed by Bernard Lonergan. It will, however, be fully accessible to non-Catholic theologians, clergy, and laity. Some essays have the tenor of guided Ignatian meditations and could be useful resources for adult church school classes or retreats.

The book is a collection of essays organized in three major sections (*From the Heart of the Quarter, Marking and (Re)membering the Body of Christ, and Following Jesus Crucified and Risen*), each grounded in the history of American chattel slavery and drawing out implications of a theology of the cross among enslaved African Americans and in the necropolitics of the plantation.

Copeland intends to “situate the broken body of Christ at the center of Christian reality and situate the broken bodies of black humans at the center of American reality” (97).

Copeland’s method of centering bodies allows her to bring the suffering of black bodies, queer bodies, and all bodies into synergy with the suffering body of the crucified Jesus. While many feminists and womanists have categorically rejected the crucifixion as a locus for theological reflection, Copeland deems that problematic, invoking Johann Baptist Metz’s caveat that “dangerous memories” should not be erased. “To fulfill that ethical obligation as church, we – who member it – must refuse to turn away from and must look directly at the dreadful history of chattel slavery. We must assume responsibility for the memory of chattel slavery, protecting that memory from trivialization, outright rejection or denial, and voyeurism; moreover, theology calls the church to lament” (98).

Chapter 1, “Dark Wisdom From The Slaves,” establishes origins in the transatlantic slave trade, chattel slavery, and the plantation -- what Copeland calls “a canon of anguish” and the distortions of Christian faith warped by white supremacy. Some will be familiar with this chronicle of forced assimilation and the ways enslaved persons heard and interpreted Christian teachings and developed their own oral traditions of liberation theology and freedom prayers. Because Jesus was himself beaten, tortured, and murdered, the enslaved believed that he understood them like no one else.

Chapter 2, “Meeting and Seeing Jesus,” is by far the most crucial. Copeland draws on Richard Horsley, John Dominic Crossan, and Obery Hendricks to create a Gadamerian fusion of horizons between the world of the enslaved and the world of Jesus’ Galilee to construct a “topos” for meeting Jesus, a whole landscape of pain, need, and eschatological expectation. Galilee becomes a site for resistance, the Beatitudes are protest speech, and the Parable of the Tenants becomes a critique of oppression. “Jesus calls his followers to do as he does, to be of complete and utter service to one another; he upends the world of lords and masters, servants and slaves” (52). The name of Jesus becomes a kind of sacred conjuring, beckoning the enslaved to freedom.

“A fearless and dangerous Jesus waits with God’s crucified people. He knows them and they know him . . . they know Jesus Christ crucified” (58).

The third chapter, “Marking the Body of Jesus, the Body of Christ,” shifts attention to the LGBTQ community, themes of *imago dei*, and malevolent heteronormativity. Copeland attempts to reverse traditional asceticism grounded in the cross, arguing that the cross enters into full erotic embodiment and is not a rejection or devaluation of bodies. She asserts that Christology must include *all* dimensions of corporeality and embodied particularities, a sacramental aesthetics of eucharist, a vigorous display of difference. “If Jesus of the Nazareth, the Christ of God, cannot be an option for gay, lesbian, transgender people, then he cannot be an option” (73).

The remaining chapters continue the Christological interrogation of the contemporary black experience in the United States, including the “shape-shifting” of white supremacy, the ethics of restorative justice, and discussions that will resonate with current issues of Critical Race Theory, the 1619 Project, the Prison Industrial Complex, reparations, sex-trafficking, and immigration. These theological reflections would be valuable resources for community or congregational exploration.

Copeland’s book is informed by Marianne Sawicki, Wendy Farley, Rebecca Chopp, Kelly Brown Douglas, Delores Williams, and Katie Cannon among others. She doesn’t argue with them (there is no polemic) but folds their ideas into her Christology. The book is a gem and should be in every scholar’s library and every pastor’s study. It would be particularly helpful for white scholars and clergy.

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Donna Giver-Johnston. *Writing for the Ear, Preaching from the Heart*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2021. 136 pages. \$19.99.

Donna Giver-Johnston's book is an ode to the power and continuous role of memory, heart, and holistic presence in crafting sermons that engage listeners. She describes her book as "a guide for helping preachers write sermons for the ear so that they can be remembered and preach sermons from the heart, without a manuscript, so that they are memorable" (xix).

She opens chapter 1, "Aching Ears," with a concrete example of the need listeners have for good news by sharing her experience as a Presbyterian church pastor in Pittsburgh during the 2018 Tree of Life Synagogue shootings. She uses the story as a bridge to a discussion of cultural changes that have led to declining church attendance and effected the way people in the United States identify with religion. Noting the limited attention spans and increased noise evident in contemporary culture, Giver-Johnston states that the "result has been a disconnect between church and society, between preacher and listener" (18). She then offers an overview of the ways preaching has and has not changed, including an examination of the New Homiletic, and the ways late 20th and 21st century homiletics has "moved away from the restrictive written word to reclaim the spoken word" (21). Giver-Johnston applauds many of these moves and argues for preachers crafting sermons that offer "a word [listeners] can relate to and remember" (27). She "encourage[s] preachers to lay down the written manuscript and pick up the practice of oral proclamation" (27).

In chapter 2, "Longing Hearts," Giver-Johnston carries forward her emphasis on the oral conveyance of stories and on remembrance. She shares Scripture passages speaking to ways God has communicated in the past, asserting, "Ultimately, God spoke a word of remembrance.... Throughout the biblical story, God remembered the covenant and communicated divine love in different ways, through different spokespersons, so that God would also remember" (37-38). She then focuses on the Incarnation and a God of relationship who continues to communicate in and through the body, including through the church, as the body of Christ, in its rituals and practices. Giver-Johnston observes, "The word of God continues to be made flesh and communicate love to us and through us in preaching. Preaching is...a dynamic encounter between God's word and human words" (53). Preaching can provide what contemporary listeners want, which according to Giver-Johnston, is to "come to know the heart of God, which is always longing to connect with and speak to the hearts of God's people" (56).

Chapter 3, "Writing for the Ear," gives practical tips for developing sermons with few or no notes. She begins with sharing how she analyzed her writing and edited her manuscripts. She states for example, "I found that I did my best editing not sitting at the computer but standing in the pulpit, practicing my sermon, not silently writing down words from my mind but speaking words aloud" (59). Her goal she says was "to communicate in such a way that listeners would remember what was said or how they felt when they heard it and could take with them a word from God" (59). Noting the differences between impromptu, memorized, and extemporaneous sermons, Giver-Johnston shares extemporaneous methods used by other preachers and gives a detailed description of her version of extemporaneous writing for the ear. The chapter includes her weekly process and practices for crafting sermons, exercises, and a sample sermon.

Chapter 4, "Preaching from the Heart," sets forth descriptions of and exercises for spiritual practice and preparation. Giver-Johnston asserts, "Throughout the week, the preacher prepares by attending to prayer and self-care and by asking and seeking God's presence" (102). She also addresses the performance of the sermon, observing that "the preacher who proclaims

the sermon through animation of the mind, body, and spirit and who abides in the present moment brings the sermon to life” (102).

Although there are places in the early chapters with an overabundance of statistics and strung together Scripture passages, Giver-Johnston makes up for them in the last two chapters, where her voice is engaging and her passion for connecting with her congregation, and desire to help other preachers enhance their connections with listeners are evident. She reminds preachers of the benefits to listeners of preaching without a manuscript and offers detailed guidance on how to do so.

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Tito Madrazo. *Predicadores: Hispanic Preaching and Immigrant Identity*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2021. 189 pages. \$39.99.

Tito Madrazo's new book *Predicadores* (Preachers) lays an important marker for the field of homiletics with his thick description of preachers and preaching in first-generation Hispanic immigrant communities in North Carolina. Madrazo's work is an impressive execution of the kinds of anthropological methods that homiletics has been talking about for years but has never fully made its own. Madrazo uses "collaborative ethnography" as a way of walking alongside the 24 male and female preachers whom he studies. In doing so, he pushes back against what Hispanic homiletics "should be" in terms of what first-generation Hispanic immigrant preaching actually *is*. Madrazo's crucial distinction between the "is" and the "ought" has implications for Hispanic preaching, the field of homiletics, and the theologies that it deigns to notice.

We begin with the very term Madrazo uses to characterize his study's collaborators and subject matter: *Hispanic*. The descriptor "Hispanic" has problems because of its ties to the US government, of course, but Madrazo is concerned that the designation Latino/a or Latinx is not yet close enough to the people and traditions he is researching (163, n. 3). Madrazo's research methodology, collaborative ethnography, specifically requires him to make his work accessible to his research subjects. The Assemblies of God, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, Iglesia de Dios Pentecostal M.I., Independent, and United Methodist traditions are represented in the study and the immigrant preachers themselves are both men and women. Madrazo uses the designation Hispanic because he wishes to place no barriers to his collaborators' understanding.

An important key to understanding the project is the immigrant experience that his 24 collaborators share. As first-generation immigrants preaching mostly to other rural, suburban, and urban first-generation immigrants they share in a powerful experience of dealing with the dangers of transnational crossings and threats from authorities. Madrazo thus emphasizes Mary McClintock Fulkerson's insight that theology begins with a wound. The transnational crossing itself is a moment fraught with difficulty, threat, and change. In the sermons he studies, these immigrant wounds are often connected to conversion (not a few of Madrazo's preachers are new to Protestantism) and a sense of call. Naming the wound of immigration becomes a deep theological locus for the sermons, too.

Chapter 1 begins by introducing Madrazo's study and methods. Chapter 2 then deals with the various traumatic journeys of immigration that preachers and hearers share. Such experiences become the very focus of Hispanic preaching which aims to heal those deep wounds. This shared experience then leads to a study of immigrant identity in chapter 3. Here Madrazo underlines the multiple identities that his subjects assume as preachers who are bi-vocational, transnational, and bicultural. Chapter 4 looks at preaching itself by identifying theological themes represented in the preachers' sermons: Christ as Savior and Friend, God as Miracle Worker for the Marginalized, God as Gatherer of a New People, God and God's Law as Provider of Structure in Chaos, and God as Healer of the Family. The themes together bear witness to the particularity of his first-generation immigrant communities and sketch out a bicultural, transnational, immigrant homiletical theology. Chapter 5 focuses on the experience of Hispanic women preachers. The complexities of the roles of men and women in immigrant families are extended to the church and its gendered understandings of leadership, occasionally worked out in ad hoc, local ways that themselves can be surprising. In chapter 6 Madrazo offers his conclusions about collaborative ethnography in practical-theological research and the tendency of homileticians to prescribe

rather than describe preaching in relation to specific cultures. Here Madrazo pushes back on the work of Justo González and Pablo Jiménez in *Púlpito* (2005) for thinking of Hispanic preaching in the liberative prescriptive terms of the academic guild, and not the descriptive, communal terms that Madrazo himself offers where preaching is informed by liberation *and* tradition.

I do have one concern. Madrazo's critique of González and Jiménez runs the risk of closing off a necessary and living dialogue between homiletical theologies in faith communities and the kinds of liberative, prophetic theological claims that homileticians critiquing their own traditions can articulate. I am not convinced that the "is" of thick description for thriving communities with their preachers and the "ought" of a critical homiletic theory are forever stuck in a zero sum game. Even so, the significance of Madrazo's work is not to be gainsaid. He invites us to see not just the forest, but the trees (146f.). With Madrazo, we learn about the theologies of preachers and communities who struggle with real wounds and proclaim healing in their life together. And that may just change the way the guild envisions homiletics going forward.

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John S. McClure. *Ethical Approaches to Preaching: Choosing the Best Way to Preach About Difficult Issues*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2021. 128 pages. \$21.

John McClure's new book, *Ethical Approaches to Preaching*, is another excellent addition to his fascinating corpus over the last several decades, inspiring many homiletics and preachers. Like his previous works, this book draws on his understanding of preaching and sermon-listening as *theo-ethical Christian practices*. However, the author specifically designed it to help working preachers learn how to preach about many difficult ethical issues of our time (including those unearthed by the COVID-19 pandemic).

The overall structure of the book is very straightforward, clear, and easy to follow. Each chapter begins with the author's introduction of one of four distinct ethical approaches that preachers can employ for this task: (1) communicative ethics, (2) witness ethics, (3) liberation ethics, and (4) hospitality ethics (xiv). Then, McClure elaborates how preachers will take each approach in the chapter with the following steps but in different ways, like setting out on a new ethical journey with listeners: (1) identifying an ethical problem and pointing to *the way out* of that problem to listeners, (2) guiding *the way into* the problem by facilitating their own experience, understanding, and engagement, (3) creating messages with cognitive and affective signposts (key concepts, symbols, messages, categories of thought, topics, feelings) to show *the way through* the problem, and (4) identifying and claiming *the way toward* a new and better world or a hoped-for future (xvi-xx).

To help preachers get a feel for the approaches and see them in actual sermons, McClure offers his four sample topical sermons on the same topic, immigration, with helpful annotations. Also, since one approach is not universally applicable, he encourages them to read situations and become aware of the assumptions and expectations of listeners in order to discern the best approach. For this, he adds a section regarding the kinds of situations that call for each approach, followed by a situational sample sermon that clarifies how each approach functions in particular historical contexts and situations. Then, McClure includes a list of additional readings for further insights, theoretical formulations, examples, and ideas for application and practice at the end of each chapter.

Since this handbook is easily understandable for most working preachers, it is unnecessary to summarize the entire content. However, because the book has in itself many implicated layers from a wide range of sophisticated, homiletical-ethical-practical resources, it would be helpful to explicate McClure's core arguments. So, what follows is a summary of the unique characteristics of each ethical approach to aid readers.

First, a communicative ethic is *universal* and *intersubjective*, establishing a universally acceptable *moral consensus* on ethical issues in *and* beyond the faith community. Preachers speak to as many people as possible to establish common ethical ground across lines of differences (religious, socio-political, cultural, linguistic, and so forth) and bring about the communicative interlocutors' binding/bonding experiences (1-4).

Second, a witness ethic is *communal* and *non-negotiable*, fostering a Christian *virtue* or *moral agency* for the ethical issues. Preachers endeavor to create *countercultural* faith communities by critiquing and resisting the dominant culture of the larger society. They witness

the uniqueness of the gospel and teach the language, concepts, and practices of the church through its inner communal and liturgical life (36-38).

Third, a liberation ethic is *social* and *intersectional*, addressing the systemic inequities of power and resources disclosed by the issues in *moral advocacy*. Preachers unmask, critique, and change the current oppressive system by educating the faith community (*consciousness-raising*, conscientization) and building solidarity with other organizations or religious groups for the social justice and liberation of the oppressed (60-62).

Fourth, a hospitality ethic is *interhuman* and *collaborative*, creating and enhancing relationships based on *moral reflection* in actual face-to-face encounters in conversations. Preachers welcome genuine others who have different, asymmetrical knowledge, experience, and resources for moral discernment and action on the issues, come to terms tentatively, and foster solidarity among the conversational participants (90-92).

Ethical Approaches to Preaching is a fascinating book, and three contributions should be named. First, this book has exceptional readability for any working preachers regardless of different backgrounds. McClure laid out a clear roadmap and explained difficult, scholarly ideas (philosophical, theological, homiletical, and ethical) to help readers stand on the solid theoretical ground to move forward. Second, the book comprehensively covers almost all current ethical approaches to preaching condensed in a small volume and points to additional resources available, which is to be highly applauded by many homileticians and preachers who desire to get more insights and practical advice. For example, readers can better understand communicative and hospitality ethics by reading McClure's other essential books (*Speaking Together and With God*, *Other-wise Preaching*, and *The Roundtable Pulpit*). Third, McClure's sample sermons on the same topic are beneficial for preachers to see how each approach is practically embodied and understand the difference between the approaches.

There are several caveats to be mentioned. First, while this is an unavoidable limitation for any small-sized handbook, just *reading* this book is similar to seeing only a few plateaus of a mountain range of homiletical-ethical discourse. Therefore, as McClure suggests, it is crucial to read into and learn from the larger body of literature available. Second, while preachers need to understand their contexts and situations to decide on the best approach, using only that approach can aggravate the siloing of each congregation. It is thus necessary to motivate the congregation to move onto other ethical terrains with various approaches to resist its insularity. For example, a preacher can approach a congregation siloed in witness ethics with hospitality ethics or perhaps liberation ethics, not with communicative ethics immediately, because they may not be ready to leap. Each preacher needs to be creative, introducing other approaches or their elements (signposts) in the long run.

This book is highly recommended to working preachers and homileticians. It distills many insights about preaching difficult ethical issues in and beyond our faith communities to transform this world.

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Cláudio Carvalhaes. *Praying with Every Heart: Orienting Our Lives to the Wholeness of the World*. Eugene: Cascade, 2021. 290 pages. \$35.00.

I found the title of this text somewhat challenging. It seemed to be a legitimate call to pray-ers to widen the scope of their communication with the divine, to encompass the existential nature of the human world, while simultaneously presenting an erroneous descriptor of the world situation. To pray “with every heart” implies attuning oneself to all people and their issues in the magnitude that represents the differences of our world. To that end the contents address a wide spectrum of human experiences and need, with the recognition that “every” (and therefore all) is an impossible and unreachable goal. On the other hand, to speak of the “Wholeness of the World” in the way that it is presented, seems to offer an image of the current world as a place of harmonious unity. This is inherently false because the common and normative use of the term wholeness, which implies positive completeness is not a state that is representative of the known world or even the one Carvalhaes presents in the text and for which he calls his hearers to pray.

To pray with every heart for the wholeness of the world by orienting one’s prayer life to the cultural challenges that hinder the attainment of such a state seems more appropriate to the contents of the text. Carvalhaes aptly describes many of the challenges that result from the marginalization and de-humanization of peoples because of outward differences. He focuses on peoples and times and places that need the human and divine intervention sought in the action of prayer and attempts to reconstruct a trajectory of human devaluation that he considers are needful of prayer. In response, he uses the trajectory of his own prayer persona, which is based on both faith and practice, believing that “prayers have the power to recreate the past, reshape the present, and invent a future where the Reign of God can happen” (7). Within his story, he weaves the storied experiences of others met along his journey, both personally and through written accounts of their stories. This interweaving adds flavor to the book, but at times is somewhat disjointed in the movement of the text. And yet perhaps the intent may be deliberately to cause the reader to pause and reflect on the impact of the story on their own situation of as a pray-er, past, present, and future.

Carvalhaes takes several and deliberate (I presume) excursions into a theologically interpretative mode that seems aimed at naming or even calling out particular ills of individual Christians and the corporate Church on beliefs and practices that seem to offer specific and urgent reasons for praying. This may be somewhat discomfiting to the reader who expects to be simply guided in ways of praying, based on both the title and the Table of Contents, but may also serve as a guide to those who do not yet understand the challenges faced by those who are not considered normative in the present hierarchy of the culture in both the United States and the developed world.

The text offers actual prayers for use by practitioners, that are meant to shine God’s light into those situations that represent for many, in the words of St. John of the Cross, “the dark night of the soul.” Commendably, these prayers provide practical resources for praying Christians that both name and offer word pictures of situations world-wide that are apt representations of the woundedness of individuals and groups, for which prayer is needed. They provide the sentiments and a means by which pray-ers might address situations that are not part of their own experience, even that they do not fully understand, but for which they recognize the need for divine action so that they might be withstood in the present or overcome in the future.

In shaping this text, Carvalhaes has woven together several streams of previous work into a text that is as much theological as it is liturgical. That is both the strength and the challenge

inherent in the text. If one approaches the text with the expectation of finding immediate liturgical resources, there may be disappointment that one must weed through much surrounding material to understand the fullness and the applicability of the resources. On the other hand, the theological material pushes into several streams of liberation theology and ethics without fully engaging any of these areas. Most provide an appropriate backdrop to the prayers they precede or surround, but at times seem to be more of a critique than an interpretative stance and may be off-putting to the reader.

As the latest offering from this author, one recognizes the work as another way station along his journey, but it is a good representation of the wide focus of his knowledge, his energetic engagement and his liturgical imagination that is, as always, a gift to the church.

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Ruth C. Duck. *Worship for the Whole People of God: Vital Worship for the 21st Century*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2021; Second edition/with contributed appendix from David Gambrell (xxii + 366 pages, ISBN 9780664264765), \$28.80.

As indicated in the title, *Worship for the Whole People of God* argues for the need for diverse voices in Christian worship. Although the emphasis on the diversity of Christian worship is not something new, Duck's book is not limited to introducing us to various forms of worship. By articulating the nature and role of Christian worship within varied cultural contexts, the entire book gives us an opportunity to reconsider why we should focus on these liturgical practices and their Christian communities.

According to Duck, our paying attention to the various voices and perspectives in Christian worship "is not a matter of hospitality" (6). Instead, she says that "the history of Christian worship [itself] is a story of worshiping God in diverse cultural contexts" (36). Indeed, since early Christianity praying, praising, and preaching have been commonly used as liturgical practices to reveal who God is and what God has done for God's people, but as noted by Duck, the real liturgical experience does not happen in a cultural vacuum. Worship is not something sacred that fell from heaven. Although we as Christian believers would not deny the importance of liturgical practices in forming and nurturing our faith and life, our fully, conscious, and active participation cannot occur without considering our specific time and place.

The book leads me to reconsider the important root meaning of the word *leitourgia* – the work of the people. This word has already received much attention from modern liturgical scholars and church leaders who want their congregation to fully participate in the worship service, so that it is not just a work of the clergy. But according to Duck, the meaning of *leitourgia* should not be merely left at the attendance of worship. Rather, it should include various ethnic believing communities and their liturgical practices. In particular, this new edition of the book, influenced by the recent pandemic, suggests that we need to pay attention to how we can help all God's people to participate fully, including in online worship. This could be a crucial reason for those who consider designing and leading Christian worship service in varied situations, to use her book as a liturgical textbook beyond a denomination.

As suggested by the newly added fourteenth chapter, "A New Church Still Emerging," the second edition continuously challenges our way of thinking about how we can help people fully participate in the worship service. The important lesson is that we cannot be complacent. Duck says, "We never arrive at a perfect form of worship that remains the same forever, so it is the task of each generation, each culture, each context, to seek new ways to touch the hearts of all with the word of the gospel (292)." This is because, until the final kingdom of God, our world and worship are not perfect. Duck's new edition provides a broader perspective for liturgical studies but most of her examples are still from the North American cultural context.

Although Professor Duck shares her experience while teaching and guiding many international students over twenty years in Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, her liturgical examples seem to be limited to the North American church environment. There might be a danger in interpreting the peculiarity of local worship in the world from an American point of view. Of course, no book could include every liturgical variation in the world. Indeed, Duck's new edition is almost 370 pages and contains plenty of valuable information about liturgical practices.

Though the book does not specifically mention preaching, the participation of the congregation through liturgy is of course critical to the pastoral art. Thus, I think this book also

provides a useful perspective for pastors and theologians who want to prepare for congregational sermons and worship while considering their multi-cultural and social contexts.

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Khalia J. Williams and Mark A. Lamport, eds. *Theological Foundations of Worship: Biblical, Systematic, and Practical Perspectives*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021. 290 pages. \$29.99.

Theological Foundations of Worship: Biblical, Systematic, and Practical Perspectives is a textbook intended to explore the practice of worship by offering a variety of theological entry points. It aims to expand beyond previous works that more readily support students and worshippers from high church and lectionary-based traditions by expanding their awareness of scholars who come from different traditions as well as the topics addressed in the different chapters. By utilizing themes that readers would not readily find in other worship volumes, Williams and Lamport intentionally constructed a wider conversation so that more traditions could engage. The volume is broken up into three different sections: Biblical Practices of Worship, Theological Principles of Worship, and Cultural Possibilities for Worship. Each explore different entry points into the conversation about the layers one might encounter in worship.

Part 1, Biblical Practices of Worship: Exegetical and Biblical Theology, offers insight into the ways we might think theologically through the biblical text about the practice of worship. Andrew Hill's chapter on the Old Testament offers extensive evidence of worship throughout the Old Testament, noting how the evolution of worship illuminates the history of who God has been known as through a deep dive into worship practices. PHEME PERKINS chapter focuses on the New Testament. This chapter posits that the New Testament helps to us to understand ecclesiological orientations in worship as seen in the New Testament around practices of table and prayer. Both chapters present helpful evidence of the historical practice of worship in the Bible, which offers a solid foundation for thinking about Christian worship today.

In Part 2, Theological Principles of Worship: Systematic and Historical Theology, the reader can consider a myriad of themes such as "Creation and Worship" and "Mystery and Worship." A highlight in this section is Khalia Williams' chapter "Pneumatology and Worship." Williams' approach highlights different images and ideas of the Spirit, while acknowledging the inherent mystery and expansive possibility of Spirit. In her work, the Spirit is an active and transformative entity, such that we as worshippers and people are changed and developed through our encounter. Thus, readers might consider how their daily life is being guided by the Holy Spirit and what that means differently within the container of a particular worshipping environment. This section at large supports ongoing conversation and the creation of dynamic worship through theological inquiry.

Part 3, Cultural Possibilities for Worship: Practical and Apologetical Theology, explores themes that may not always be seen as theological and/or are not exclusively talked about within the canon of Christian Worship. The chapters explore themes around time, ecology, the individual, secularization, and other world religions. Each chapter shows how their particular theme intersects and impacts Christian worship, and what the reader can gain from critical inquiry on their own within their specific context alongside the theme of the chapter. This section by nature also invokes the curiosity of the reader to consider what other themes might need to be explored in the conversation focusing on theological implications of worship.

Theological Foundations of Worship invites the reader to think through the possibilities of worship from a consortium of different topics. This volume is an effective conversation partner in that it offers a diversity of ideas for theological inquiry that can be taken even more deeply by those reading and using this in their day to day practice. The structure of the book as

an edited volume supports the need for diverse voices across different identity markers to write about worship from their tradition as a contribution to how worship is explored in scholarship. The racial makeup of the authors also reminds us that there is still work to be done for our books on worship to reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of the expansive body of worship traditions that would serve an edited volume like this well.

The most profound gift of this book to both scholars and practitioners is the pragmatic telos of each of the chapters. Every contribution tells you why that theme and their assertions matter to conversations about the nature of worship and the impact of these ideas in worship spaces. Readers can move directly from the book into the everydayness of their practice, utilizing the resources they have just read which will both enhance their understanding of worship and their practice within worship.

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