Sermon Feedback as Facework:
Task and Identity Goals in Mentoring Homiletical Theologians
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Abstract: *The problem of in-class sermon feedback has vexed the teaching and learning of preaching for some time. For too long, however, the problem has been understood in more or less personal terms insofar as it tries to facilitate an environment where task mastery becomes psychologically feasible for students in a stressful feedback situation. This article argues that the problem of sermon feedback is actually more complex in that it is also tied to privilege, power dynamics, and the multiple identities of the pluralistic classroom and cultural identities in churches. The use of facework theory in communication studies offers an alternative by placing task mastery in relation to the tending to identities in the room. Here the work of Jeff Kerssen-Griep et al. posits a compelling vision for dealing with an analogous face-threatening situation of speech feedback in the college classroom that includes both positive (belonging, competency) and negative (autonomy) facework and thus locates task mastery in relation to tending to identities in a more self-reflective manner. In the process, a more mentoring-type relation between teacher and student is envisioned, one that might even build on Dale Andrews' notion of apprenticeship in preaching education. The article concludes with homiletical-theological reflections about the relationship of face/Face and promise in reflecting on gospel in the task of teaching and learning preaching.*

Introduction: Sermon Feedback, Privilege, and the Promise of Facework

The preaching classroom can be a fraught context for teaching and learning. Nowhere is this felt more deeply than in the occasion for receiving and giving sermon feedback in class. Students worry that feedback on their work may cause them to question their own sense of vocation or dismiss their cultural identity and that of their communities of faith. Yet as difficult as sermon feedback can be, it is just as hard to imagine a ministry student who does not want to do well in preaching class. Teachers of preaching want to see students benefit and grow in their learning, which means offering both support and accountability in any sermon feedback process. As difficult as sermon feedback seems to teachers, it is hard to imagine a preaching teacher who does not want students as adult learners to become more self-assured preachers of gospel.

The difficulty about feedback in the preaching classroom is only compounded by issues of power. Although ministry students over the last several years have become more and more diverse, teachers of preaching still skew disproportionately white, male, and cisgender. As the beneficiaries of cultural privilege, we (and here I specifically mean people like me) do not often possess sufficient skill in cultural competency, an ability to deal with people effectively across cultural frames. This lack becomes all the more pronounced when the teaching of preaching moves back and forth across diverse practices and theological norms, which sometimes leads teachers of privilege to lift a merely proximate practice to ultimate theological status in the name of task-related goals. By itself, this struggle might be only a temporary problem, since classes

generally last just one semester! That said, teachers embodying varying degrees of privilege will want to account for how well an attention to excellence in the preaching classroom promotes actual excellence in practice—especially given diverse preachers in diverse communities of faith. That may well be why the particular skill of cultural competence is more and more valued by potential employers and their accrediting bodies as well.

The purpose of this paper is to jumpstart a dialogue about the impact of the sermon feedback process on pedagogical homiletical theology.[1] This form of homiletical theology is concerned with how preachers in the classroom develop and improve capacities as preachers of gospel. The theoretical tool that helps to reframe the sermon feedback process comes from an intercultural communication theory that has begun to impact the subfield of instructional communication as it pertains to the college speech classroom: facework theory. In the form we will describe below, facework theory provides a frame for reconciling task-related and *identity-related* learning goals. After situating our question about sermon feedback within a brief history of homiletical education, we will unpack elements of facework theory which in turn invite me to revise my own commitments to homiletical theology in connection to the practice of preaching in the classroom. Along the way, I will consider how mentorship may provide a more useful frame, perhaps even for persons of privilege, for thinking about the teaching of preaching in intercultural contexts in which both preaching tasks and preaching identities matter.

Sermon Feedback: Recent Trends and Developments

The problem of in-class sermon feedback has troubled homiletical educators for some time. G. Robert Jacks, in his desire to set up useful criteria for using principles of speech communication in critique of reading scripture in church, set a helpful frame for thinking through some of the interpersonal difficulties of dealing with feedback. He proposed the "critique sandwich" as a means of negotiating the problem. The practice involved bracketing critical feedback with words of support and encouragement from someone familiar with Jacks' speech communication criteria. Applied for our purposes to the preaching classroom, with every critique uttered student preachers would also hear specific references to strengths in their work. Jacks' concern is educational—desiring that readers of scripture not be too overwhelmed with critique that they cannot hear it or deal with it interpersonally. Jack's learning insight was to make critique palatable by situating it within student strengths. The theological norm was essentially rooted in a theocentric desire to situate the task in grace, Spirit, and ministry: "What we're after is growth. Growth in grace, growth in the Spirit, growth in wisdom, growth in trusting and obeying, and above all growth every day and every moment in surrendering ourselves to the Lord who can use our lives to His eternal glory."[2] Again, applied to the preaching classroom, critique and feedback should be practiced within an interpersonal relationship committed to wider ends. It represents a psychologically aware, theologically-grounded approach to learning and improving the *task*.

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[1] The term comes from Charles Bartow, "Homiletical (Theological) Criticism," in *The New Interpreter's Handbook of Preaching* (Paul Scott Wilson, ed., Nashville: Abingdon, 2008), 154. For a brief description of how such educational concerns relate to homiletical theology generally see David Schnasa Jacobsen, ed., *Homiletical Theology: Preaching as Doing Theology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2015), 9.

[2] G. Robert Jacks, *Getting the Word Across: Speech Communication for Pastors and Lay Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 226.

In his chapter on "Methods of Assessment" in *Teaching Preaching as a Christian Practice*, Daniel E. Harris follows a similar concern with the personal well-being of the student being assessed. A guiding principle for Harris is that sermon feedback should be about the sermon, and not about the person. He envisions ways of guiding in-class feedback so that each member of the class contributes, the sermon remains the focus, observations are clearly grounded in explicit examples, and feedback is balanced in terms of positive and negative items.[3] This does flesh out some of the concerns expressed in Jacks, but more importantly it also situates in-class feedback within a wider plan of assessment that includes private feedback from the instructor and congregational feedback in conjunction with evaluation forms. While these various approaches to feedback take us beyond our in-class educational focus here, they do exemplify Harris' concern that a preacher's person be respected and that students learn to become good self-critics by understanding what others perceive "through their eyes."[4]

In his article "No Preacher Left Behind," André Resner both acknowledges the anxiety of the relationship of task and person in-class sermon feedback and accentuates it.[5] Resner worries that the great hinge between affirmation and critique can prove to be a violent one. He points out that after an affirmation or two, the word "but" signals a comment, especially from a teaching authority, that all but wipes out the affirmation that might be heard in the sandwiched feedback pairing. His article places emphasis instead on reframing in-class sermon feedback *as* theological reflection for learning preaching. In response to Tom Long's call for an "identifiable core of actions" for excellence in preaching[6] and linking one of those specifically to David Lose's concern for a theological "telos for preaching" in the gospel,[7] Resner seeks to transform in-class sermon feedback into a kind of practical-theological reflection loop. In fact, he envisions a full course to encourage such reflection that precedes the introductory course in preaching. This prior course would read historical and contemporary sermons and learn to reflect on them theologically *in conversation*, picking up standards of excellence and naming the "telos" along the way. Students having taken this course, Resner argues, would then already be busy building down the kind of anxiety that plagues in-class sermon feedback when the intro course is the first occasion students have to develop such skills.

Resner's vision is compelling in that it seeks to resolve the split between task-oriented and person-centered problems by reframing in-class sermon feedback as a kind of conversational theological reflection. What Resner's approach does not treat directly, however, has to do with the negotiation of task and person within a theological perspective, but also *between* them. In her chapter in *Teaching Preaching as a Christian Practice*, Barbara Lundblad seeks to resituate the task/person tension in terms of questions around theological (and practical) *difference*.[8] Lundblad includes in the ambit of her concern not just in-class sermon feedback, but the introductory course as a whole, in which "the teacher's role is to help create a space for honoring differences, for giving and receiving criticism, for taking risks. This respectful environment needs to be fostered in every part of the class from the beginning, not only when giving feedback to

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[3] Daniel E. Harris, "Methods of Assessment," in *Teaching Preaching as a Christian Practice* (Thomas G. Long and Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, eds.; Louisville: WJK, 2008), 194.

[4] Ibid., 192.

[5] André Resner, "No Preacher Left Behind: A New Prerequisite for the Introductory Course," in *Teaching Theology and Religion* 13:4 (October 2010), 339-49.

[6] Tom Long, "A New Focus for Teaching Preaching," in *Teaching Preaching*, 15.

[7] David Lose, "Teaching Preaching as a Christian Practice," in *Teaching Preaching,* 52.

[8] Barbara Lundblad, "Designing the Introductory Course in Preaching," in *Teaching Preaching*, 207-22.

sermons."[9] Her guidelines for engaging the feedback process in class are not all that different from Jacks and Harris.[10] The difference, for Lundblad, is facilitating an environment that goes beyond the task/person tension to see the theological differences around dealing with tasks of preaching and diverse communities of learning. This discernment of difference is grounded in a way of doing theological (and exegetical and practical) reflection through the entirety of the course.

Most recently, Jared Alcántara names a similar learning dynamic in his take on in-class sermon feedback in *Crossover Preaching*. He argues that by creating a "360-degree feedback loop," a preaching class can develop twin skills that are at once theological and intercultural.[11] His vision begins with student preachers posing questions, after which the teacher as facilitator allows classmates to join in questions and reflection from their varying cultural perspectives, and then ending up with the student preacher at the end.[12] Alcántara argues that the process democratizes while it enables deeper theological and intercultural reflection. In doing so, however, he also succeeds in reframing our initial learning problem.

Perhaps now we can argue that the in-class sermon feedback moment is fraught not only because of the tension between task mastery and personal psychology, as we have so long framed the issue. With a specific focus on theology in relation to difference and the intercultural context of the preaching classroom, the presenting problem can now be redefined: how do we deal with the in-class tensions of doing homiletical-theological work and difference in connection with the task of preaching and *identities* in the classroom?[13] For further thought on this, we turn to the field of instructional communication and facework theory.

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[9] Ibid., 210.

[10] Ibid., 220.

[11] Jared Alcántara, *Crossover Preaching: Intercultural-Improvisational Homiletics in Conversation with Gardner C. Taylor* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 273-75. For more on preaching and cultural competence generally, see Matthew Kim's book, *Preaching with Cultural Intelligence: Understanding the People Who Hear Our Sermons* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017).

[12] Jerusha Neal argues that the genius of Alcántara's approach is that it deals specifically with the shifting roles of the student preacher. The kind of vulnerability faced in the role of preacher needs to be coordinated with the unique vulnerability in the role of student receiving in-class feedback. For Neal, Alcántara's 360-degree vision helps to foreground the preacher's own questions and concerns in the feedback process, thus respecting both the identity *and* the role of the student preacher. Email correspondence with Prof. Neal from August, 20, 2018. It may be that careful consideration of task and identity in the diverse preaching classroom will also need to contend with the roles being adopted in the learning context of the preaching classroom—especially insofar as it names a key element in the power dynamic.

[13] Marianne Gaarden in her new book, *The Third Room of Preaching* (Westminster Monograph Series; Louisville: WJKP, 2017) offers thoughtful help in dealing with the sermon feedback process in a way that uses careful empirical study and culminates in a thoroughgoing learner-centered approach. While such an approach has much merit and offers helpful, concrete ideas about the sermon feedback process (see the Appendix of Gaarden's book), the risk is that the homiletical-theological task itself becomes a matter of purely learner-centered personal preference, of "like or dislike" as Gaarden herself puts it, a problem which hegemonic, exclusively teacher-centered approaches that rush to judgment themselves also perpetuate, albeit from a position of power. The goal with pedagogical homiletical theology, to my mind, is to hold to elements of offering at least some critical feedback of use to students as preachers. However, this needs to be done in ways consistent with face needs, ways that honor growth in the task of preaching and different identities in the room, which are themselves a matter of critical theological work, and not solely personal preference.

Facework Theory and Instructional Communication in Feedback Intervention Situations

We begin by defining terms and grounding them in the seminal work of Erving Goffman on social interaction. Face in Goffman's work refers to a person's preferred and presented self-image that emerges in interaction with others; facework describes self and others' efforts at communication (or other forms of action) that either sustain or re-establish face.[14] A sense of the meaning of Goffman's terminology comes through ordinary language, where we describe doing certain things as "saving face" or even "in your face." In early attempts to describe facework in communication, Tae-Seop Lim and John Bowers distinguished between two kinds of positive facework and one kind of negative facework.[15] Negative facework for Lim and Bowers was concerned with preserving autonomy. Positive facework, by contrast, took two forms: a concern for inclusion *and* esteem/respect.[16] The result is that Lim and Bowers focus interactively on two types of positive face and one type of negative face: fellowship face (expressed through solidarity), competence face (approbation), and autonomy face (tact). The roles of these types of face are conditioned by three relational elements: intimacy, power distance, and rights.[17]

What might this look like in a classroom? In Lim and Bowers' view what is at stake is far more than task mastery. A class in which teaching and learning take place is also a place for negotiating identity(ies) by means of face. A teacher who baldly tells a student what to do impacts negative face by calling into question that preacher's autonomy. The way in which the teacher does so may affect positive face either by compromising the student's fellowship with others (inadvertently threatening belonging) or critiquing their competence (by not offering approbation). In a teaching and learning environment like a *preaching* class, where both support/praise and critique are offered concerning sermons, it becomes important for teachers (as well as classmates) to do that task-related work on preaching cognizant of the identities in the room. Thus, the point is far more than offering balanced "critique sandwiches." Instead, the issue is to attend to identity while doing the work of task mastery in the most effective way possible: to engage communicational tools that attend to solidarity (for fellowship), approbation (for competence), as well as to tact (for autonomy/respect).[18] In fact, in a complex context of task learning and identities, it becomes important to do facework to enable the kind of connected, agential, and autonomous action that preaching as a homiletical-theological practice actually is.

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[14] Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-face Behavior* (Garden City, NY: Anchor & Doubleday, 1967).

[15] The distinction between positive and negative facework goes back to Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson's politeness theory in "Universals in Language Usage: Politeness Phenomena," in *Questions and Politeness: Strategies in Social Interaction* (E. Goody, ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 56-289. They posited only one type each of positive and negative facework, concerned with inclusion and respect, respectively.

[16] Tae-Seop Lim and John Waite Bowers, "Facework, Solidarity, Approbation, and Tact" in *Human Communication Research* 17: 3 (March 1991), 415-450.

[17] Ibid., 420.

[18] An interesting possibility for this might be found in a more descriptive preliminary approach to sermon feedback. Jerusha Neal mentions that her experience of Sally Brown's classroom feedback began with a careful, extended description of the preacher's work that preceded any attempt to weigh in on the preacher's efforts. Neal experienced this as an important way for preachers to feel as though they had been "seen" in the classroom, email correspondence from August 20, 2018. I would argue that such a being "seen" may be important as well as an honoring of the identity or facework needs of autonomy/respect.

What might this look like more concretely? Imagine a preaching classroom where sermons are being evaluated.[19] A student preacher, an instructor, and classmates are present when a student preaches and the evaluation time ensues. A teacher who wishes to ensure the possibility of a real pedagogical homiletical-theological moment needs to do far more than simply transfer information. Too often, especially where critical evaluation is proffered, the face threat in the classroom becomes just too great, as Resner names so well above. How might facework theory help? By attending first to "negative" facework, an instructor and classmates would need to be allied in focusing on the autonomy of the preacher as a homiletical theologian as they give feedback. This would entail offering feedback that honors the ability of the learner to engage in acts of discernment going forward. The question of offering critical feedback cannot be mere conformity to a hegemonic norm, but rather a matter-of-fact way of engaging multiple options or avenues of learning for a student to consider. Discernment and respect for the choices students exercise as theologians of the Word is key, to my mind, to enable such autonomy of face to be honored. Similar issues hold for how positive facework might shape the sermon feedback moment. Teachers of preaching can be attentive to the importance of "fellowship/belonging" in the room, as well as the agency of the learner. These could be enhanced, for example, by structuring the feedback moment as not something just "undergone," but also inviting preachers themselves into the constructive task being envisioned in the classroom in a dialogical process that is critical, pluralistic, and respectful of different possibilities. The goal for helping homiletical theologians pedagogically is to find a space in between where critical theological reflection always matters and identities are always honored.

The work of communication studies scholar Jeff Kerssen-Griep et al. gives us a limited, useful analogue for the preaching classroom that uses in-class sermon feedback.[20] Kerssen-Griep's work in particular is focused on the use of facework in the context of interpersonal, instructional communication. You might imagine its value in reflecting on the kind of "feedback interventions" that happen analogously in a college speech class. Kerssen-Griep uses facework theory because of its importance for dealing with both task mastery and identity negotiation in the classroom. Using a social-science approach, he also does empirical study to evaluate elements of facework theory for impacting motivation in instructional contexts.[21] Ideally, a good learning environment in which teachers are attentive to both task mastery and face will promote student autonomy, fellowship, and agency as a support to student learning. While in practice

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[19] The question of how intercultural communication theory might impact homiletical pedagogy concretely will be the focus of a new HTP consultation scheduled for early 2019 and funded by the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning: "Exploring Intercultural Instructional Communication for Homiletical Pedagogy: Facework Theory, Cultural Competence, and 'Peering Behind the Curtain'" (Amy McLaughlin-Sheasby and David Schnasa Jacobsen, co-directors). The object of this consultation will be to probe its value in practice in a more sustained fashion.

[20] A helpful video summary of Kerssen-Griep's work in facework theory and instructional communication is available here: https://uportland.mediaspace.kaltura.com/media/Dr.+Jeff+Kerssen-Griep/0_7k7htob2 accessed August 15, 2018. The limits of the theory, of course, are bounded by the unique elements of the relationship of theology and identity to the preaching classroom. Any analogue contains elements of similarity and dissimilarity within it and will require of homiletical theologians a suitably differentiated approach to the task in the preaching classroom in particular.

[21] Here communication studies scholarship draws in particular on social science literature around motivation and learning: see P. R. Pintrich, "A Motivational Science Perspective on the Role of Student Motivation in Learning and Teaching Contexts," *Journal of Educational Psychology,* 95 (2003*), 667-686; and R. M. Ryan and E. L. Deci, "Self-determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-being," *American Psychologist, 55* (2000), 68-78.

other variables enter into the equation and condition the relative value of different kinds of facework, the empirical testing of the theory provides further guidance for our own classroom practice.

In some of his early work, Kerssen-Griep, together with co-researchers Jon Hess and April Trees, focused on the particular importance of solidarity (for fellowship face needs) and tact (for autonomy/respect face needs) for developing a good motivational environment for students.[22] In a more recent article, the same research team considered how the mitigation of "face threat" in an in-class feedback intervention shaped positively those students' sense of relationship not only with classmates, but also the teacher, for whom a more supportive learning environment enabled something more like a mentor rather than "parent" or "cop"—relationships which helped them to accept guidance around task mastery.[23] In the same team's most recent work, they investigated how teachers can shape environments to enhance the credibility of teachers in helping students grow in task mastery; here, preventive and mitigating facework in speech evaluations helped to mitigate threats posed by in-class feedback interventions.[24]

The upshot of facework theory, as borrowed from intercultural communication, is its value for rethinking the relationship of task mastery and the negotiation of identities in the classroom.[25] With attention especially to solidarity and tact in our evaluation work, with a desire to see our teaching roles shaped more and more by mentoring models, and in the hope that attending to facework will actually enhance teaching as well as learners' task mastery, we can envision a different way of doing in-class sermon feedback that is much more of a win/win than a mere trade-off between competing goals. What remains is an integration of this theory of interpersonal communication for instruction into the contexts of intercultural and homiletical-theological work.

Revising In-Class Practice and Mentoring Culturally Competent Preachers of Gospel

Kerssen-Griep essentially borrows a theory of intercultural communication and applies it to the more interpersonal, instructional context. Nothing here implies that Kerssen-Griep cannot explore *more* than the individual relationship of teacher and student with respect to task mastery and identity negotiation. The unspoken step means acknowledging that a classroom consists of *multiple* identities which in a given in-class feedback setting are being negotiated. I mentioned in the beginning that the task of learning cultural competency falls first on those whose privilege until now has buffered them from having to learn the skill sets that others with less power use with more or less facility all the time. I aim in this article to loosen the hold of privilege in homiletical education sufficiently to set a different kind of in-class sermon evaluation (and identity negotiation) in motion.

Lundblad's work in *Teaching Preaching as a Christian Practice* gets us part way there. You will recall that her attending to theological difference goes a long way to set up structural

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[22] J. Kerssen-Griep, J. A Hess, and A. R. Trees, "Sustaining the Desire to Learn: Dimensions of Perceived Instructional Facework Related to Student Involvement and Motivation to Learn. *Western Journal of Communication,* 67 (2003)*,* 357-381.

[23] J. Kerssen-Griep, A. R. Trees, and J. A. Hess, "Attentive Facework during Instructional Feedback: Key to Perceiving Mentorship and an Optimal Learning Environment. *Communication Education,* 57 (2008)*,* 312-332.

[24] A. R. Trees, J. Kerssen-Griep, and J. A. Hess, "Earning Influence by Communicating Respect: Facework's Contributions to Effective Instructional Feedback" in *Communication Education,* 58 (2009), 397-416.

[25] For further reading in intercultural communication theory, see William B. Gudykunst, ed., *Theorizing about Intercultural Communication* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005), esp. chapters 4, 9, and 10.

features in the educational setting that set a tone for a more fruitful growth in something like cultural competence. Dale Andrews was likewise well known for developing a case for appreciating the role of apprenticeship in African American preaching traditions that is helping to transform homiletical teaching and learning into a more carefully "allied" form of education different from mere friendship or even facilitation, but also something quite a bit more relational than the traditional delivery models of white mainline theological education.[26] Similarly, Marianne Gaarden in her book *The Third Room of Preaching* envisions a qualitatively different kind of relationship between teachers and learners in the preaching moment. She views the teacher as a kind of personal mentor or guide who facilitates the internal learning processes of the student.[27] What differs with Kerssen-Griep's offering of facework is the opportunity to *thematize* the possibility of difference and identity in the moment of "feedback intervention" that is in-class sermon evaluation. It is actually only implicit in the way Kerssen-Griep uses his theory, but it may be just the thing that privileged teachers particularly need to align task-oriented goals in preaching with a multifaceted, pluralistic identity negotiation in the twenty-first century homiletics classroom.

Promise and Face: Toward a Pedagogical Homiletical Theology of the Gospel

The key goal with this essay on homiletical teaching and learning, however, is not merely to adopt the best theory-laden practices of college speech classes. Something about the homiletical-theological task of articulating the gospel itself should stand rightly at the center of our necessarily theological reflections. For this reason, I wish to develop facework theory in light of a *theology of face and promise*.

The language of promise, its content, character, and shape have already exercised a signal influence on homiletical theologies of the gospel.[28]. Homileticians as varied as Sally Brown, James Kay, Dawn Ottoni-Wilhelm, David Lose, Olin Moyd, Christine Smith, and myself have placed promise at the center of their work. Others like Sunggu Yang, Kenyatta Gilbert, Paul Scott Wilson, and Ruthanna Hooke have made significant contributions to the conversation on promise as part of the 2016 Consultation on Homiletical Theology.[29] Promise as a basic starting point of reflecting on the gospel in context already has significant reach in the field.

In this case, however, we are aiming to bring promise into conversation with the "face" of facework. The notion of face is hardly foreign to other homiletical-theological reflections. The generative work of John McClure placed face at the center of a kind of a postmodern, theo-ethical vision for preaching drawing on the philosophical work on the "face of the other" in the writings of Emmanuel Levinas.[30] For McClure it is the face of the other that interrupts forms of

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[26] Dale Andrews, "Teaching Black Preaching: Encounter and Re-encounter," in *The African American Pulpit* (Fall, 2006), 8-12, and "Teaching Black Preaching: Homiletic Instruction as 'Pre-Encounter,'" *The African American Pulpit* (Winter, 2006-07), 22-26. Andrews' reflections have powerful implications for sermon feedback in the homiletics classroom.

[27] Gaarden, *Third Room*, 129-30.

[28] For more on these, see David Schnasa Jacobsen, "The Promise of Promise: Retrospect and Prospect of a Homiletical Theology," in *Homiletic* 38:2 (2013), 3-16.

[29] David Schnasa Jacobsen, ed., *Toward a Homiletical Theology of Promise* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2018).

[30] John McClure, *Otherwise Preaching: A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2001). Here he is drawing especially on Levinas' work in *Otherwise Than Being*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981) and *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority,* trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969).

homiletical discourse that tend toward a totalizing sameness that occludes difference. The face is thus an interruptive move toward embracing alterity.

My desire is to see how the face of "facework" might also offer a theoretical means for dealing with otherness, here chiefly in the homiletics classroom, but in its specific engagement with promise in all of its theological richness. Could it be that the preaching classroom, like preaching itself, is a place where gospel promise is named and enacted among both faces and the Face? In speech act theory promise is understood as "self-involving." Its eventful action is tied up with the promiser who utters it as a pledge of what is being given. A promise doesn't so much have an external referent (like most denotative language), but it does have a self-involved Speaker, a Face, if you will. At the same time, a homiletical theology of the gospel as promise is, with respect to a theology of preaching, both a human and divine act as a carrying out of what philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff calls the "double agency" of a promissory speech act with split locution and illocution.[31] Thus preaching as a human utterance joins the aforementioned "Face" to the faces of the diverse people gathered to hear promise spoken. At this moment, the promise is self-involving as locution: "other" involving as an illocution. This itself shapes the context in which promise is uttered; it helps make it a homiletical-theological moment of gospel-in-context.[32] Promise emerges as gospel-in-context in relation to the faces of others in the midst of divine self-involvement in the Face.

One other thing, however, adds theological depth to the educational issue we have surfaced by means of facework theory above: the importance of promise to understanding the telos of both preaching and learning preaching. Promise as "gospel-in-context" is not merely about invoking a flattened language of divine presence in relation to human faces. The nature of the promise itself presses beyond ontology to what philosopher Richard Kearney calls onto-eschatology: a kind of traversing presence common to epiphany and transfiguration. Here, says Kearney, divine self-disclosure is beyond the actual ontology of "I am who I am" and the endlessly deferred eschatology of "I will be who I will be," but the possibilizing disclosure of "I am who I will be," a traversing impingement of the future on the present.[33] For the preaching classroom this is no less important! The teaching and learning of preaching takes place within a possibilizing onto-eschatological horizon that teaches and learns preaching with a view toward a kind of transformation that does more than save face, but risks face and vulnerability in the face of others and the Other. In other words, facework itself is a kind of educational prolepsis of the gospel of promise. It is thus intercultural not only in the classroom but with respect to its ultimate transformational telos.

The educational result is more than culturally competent students, but preachers of a culturally competent gospel which itself places that work in the context of divine Face and human faces. In this sense, it helps form and enlist homiletical theologians going forward.

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[31] Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[32] This notion of the gospel-in-context is important not only in the aforementioned *Toward a Homiletical Theology of Promise,* but its companion volume in the same series, *Theologies of the Gospel in Context: The Crux of Homiletical Theology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017).

[33] Richard Kearney, *The God Who May Be: A Hermeneutics of Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 20– 38.

Conclusion

No doubt, along the way toward promise a more mentored vision of homiletical education that includes both task-mastery *and* identity negotiation will also renew a homiletical theology of promise itself. The center of homiletical theology—whether in its pedagogical, professional, or academic forms—is, after all, a working theology of gospel in conversation with texts and situations and contexts. However, a culturally differentiated context for learning, even at the point of in-class sermon evaluation, will naturally set in motion new articulations and practices of attending interculturally that will only complement the invention-oriented models offered by Alcántara and Kim's groundbreaking efforts to further intercultural and culturally intelligent preaching.[34] The use of facework theory as an *intercultural communication theory* in conversation with homiletical education might then not only help us preach the divinely self-involving gospel of promise, but to learn together in class once again just how to listen for it in the very faces of others and with a view toward God's unfolding transformation.

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[34] Matthew Kim, *Preaching with Cultural Intelligence: Understanding the People Who Hear Our Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017). Kim's book is actually more concerned with integrating cultural competency into homiletical invention.