

Studia Homiletica 11

Preaching Promise

within the
Paradoxes
of life

Johan Cilliers
Len Hansen
EDITORS



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Conference 

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Editors' Foreword	ix
Johan Cilliers and Len Hansen	
Paradox and Promise: Voices from the book	xi
Presidential Address – Preaching Promise within the Paradoxes of Life	1
Johan Cilliers	

Keynote Addresses & Responses

To not be Afraid to say it – Preaching as Promise and Presence of Prophetic Faithfulness	17
Allan A Boesak	
Is the Voice of the Church Compromised in South Africa?	29
Sipho Mahokoto	
Preaching in a Time of Protest? On Solidarity, Justice, and the Flourishing of All	37
Nadia Marais	
On not only Speaking, but Performing the Truth	41
Marnus Havenga	
The Reign of God – A Holistic Vision of Human Health	47
Debra J Mumford	
What about Human Health in Preaching?	57
David Plüss	
Paradoxical Hope in the Promise of Preaching among Refugees in the Church of Denmark	61
Marlene Ringgaard Lorensen	
The Paradox of Strangeness and Familiarity – A Response to Marlene Ringgaard Lorensen	73
Albrecht Grözinger	
Bicycle Theology	77
Michael Lapsley	
Remarks on the Presentation by Fr. Michael Lapsley	81
Frank Thomas	

Paper Presentations

Preaching as Poetic Thinking (<i>fides quaerens imaginem</i>) within the Framework of an Aesthetics of Life and the Beautification of Lifestyles (<i>fides quaerens vivendi</i>)	85
Daniël Louw	
The promise of Performing the Gospel – Preaching as Theo-dramatic Paradox	103
Ian A Nell	
Do Men and Women Preach Differently? Gender Differences in German Sermonic Language use – A Quantitative Empirical LIWC Analysis	115
Jantine Nierop	
More than Words – A Multimodal and Socio-material Approach to Understanding the Preaching Event	123
Tone Stangeland Kaufman and Hallvard Olavson Mosdøl	
Kerygmatic Scavenging	133
Gerald C Liu	
Performing Messiah in the Midst of Paradoxes – Preaching Prophetically in Public	141
Elsabé Kloppers	
Collaborative Preaching: A Conversation to Open Up both Text and Participant	151
Pia Nordin Christensen	
Studying the listener? The paradox of the individual in sermon reception research and a reassessment of preaching as caring for the community of faith	161
Theo Pleizier	
Preaching in Urban Spaces – Observations on the Dialogue between Urban Sociology, Urban Theology and Homiletics	169
Ruth Conrad	
The Emerging Life within Preaching Experienced from the Pew – Paradox or Promise?	179
Marianne Gaarden	
<i>Claritas Scripturae</i> in Luther – A Liberating Preaching Proposal	189
Klaus A Stange	
Promises as Paradoxes? Preaching, Receiving and Believing God’s Promises – Being Deceived or Decisive?	197
Maarten Kater	
The doctrine of the Two Natures of Christ as Homiletical Theology and Applied to Sermon Reflection	203
Maria Harms	
The Paradox of the Preacher – The Great Tension in Homiletics and Preaching	211
Literaty Zoltan	
The Paradox of the “Little Leaven” (1 Corinthians 5:6) and the Power of Truth, Peace and Justice	219
Dimitra Koukoura	

Political Preaching with a View to Life's Contradictions	227
Isolde Karle	
Preaching as Church Discipline – A Case from the Norwegian Church Struggle during World War II	235
Egil Morland	
“Around Capes of Good Hope God’s Wind Never Subsides” – Preaching Promise as Hope against Hope	243
Friedrich De Wet, Ferdinand Kruger and Ciske Stark	
Why did Jesus Calm the Storm? Miracles as a Homiletic Resources – A Study of Sermons on Matthew 8:23-27 by Augustin, Luther and Bonhoeffer	259
Sivert Angel	
St. Augustine – Preacher of Paradox and Promise in Early Fifth-century North Africa.....	273
Stephan Borgehammar	
Communicating the Gospel to Dalits in India in the Midst of the Paradoxes of Life	283
Anuparthi John Prabhakar	
Preaching and Promise in Latin America: Eschatological, Liberation and Prosperity Preaching within the Paradoxes of Life	293
Júlio César Adam	

Workshops

Preaching and the Language of Paradox: A Workshop	305
Elisabeth Grözinger	
Preaching Promise in the Midst of Paradoxes – Plain Language between Ethics and Aesthetics	313
Anne Gidion	

Sermons

Is the Voice Enough?	319
Allan A Boesak	
Luke 9:23	325
David Hunter	
Isaiah 50:4-9a	331
Charles L Campbell	

EDITORS' FOREWORD

When one hears the word “South Africa”, chances are good that the word “apartheid” will also, if not immediately, come to mind. And, when one hears the word “South Africa”, chances also are good that the name “Nelson Mandela” will, immediately, come to mind. These two notions (apartheid/Nelson Mandela) underline, perhaps most clearly, that South Africa is a place of paradox, as a matter of fact, a place of many paradoxes.

During the summer of 2016, about 120 delegates from across the world gathered in Stellenbosch, South Africa, to discuss not only the paradoxes in South Africa, but also the paradoxes that have become characteristic of many parts of the globe. Paradoxes such as poverty and privilege, empire and oppression, migration and enclave-seeking, war and peace, justice and injustice, reconciliation and revenge – and the list goes on.

Stellenbosch is in itself a place of paradoxes. The university that is situated here was formerly known as the place where the idea of apartheid was conceived in part and later fervently defended. Stellenbosch still is home to one of the leading universities in Africa. And, although apartheid officially came to an end in 1994, the town today has the dubious distinction of being the town with the highest income inequalities in South Africa ...

However, the *Societas Homiletica* conference of 2016 did not only revolve around the notion of paradox – we discovered and rediscovered that, as preachers, we have been called, inter alia, to preach promise within these paradoxes of life. This promise is made to us through the grace of God and the gospel of Christ, the promise is embodied in and through us by the Spirit of Christ. This promise may take many forms and calls for discernment; it often interrupts our status quos in a surprising – sometimes shocking – ways. It is a promise that interrupts, in order to comfort.

We, members of the *Societas Homiletica*, were enriched by the contributions in the form of keynote addresses, papers, workshops, discussion groups and sermons from colleagues from countries as diverse as Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, the United States of America, Brazil, India and, of course, South Africa. As often at conferences, the many informal discussions between presentations and during our excursions were of particular significance, especially in forming and strengthening new and old ties and friendships for years to come.

Because this was such a historical occasion, being the first time that the international conference of the *Societas Homiletica* took place in Stellenbosch, the editors decided to include as much as possible of the events that took place, i.e. not only the keynotes, responses, and papers, but also the workshops and sermons. We hope that this will serve as a documentation of the richness of the conference, representing the variety of voices, styles, methodologies and epistemologies.

The Stellenbosch conference was organised by the then president of *Societas Homiletica*, Johan Cilliers, in conjunction with a very able international board and in partnership with the Faculty of Theology at the University of Stellenbosch. In this regard, the name of Ms Helette van der Westhuizen needs to be mentioned as she was instrumental in executing the plans for the conference. We are also extremely grateful in this regard for the support of the staff of the Department of Practical Theology and Missiology at Stellenbosch University.

We also thank our publisher AFRICAN SUN MeDIA for their willingness to publish this book, in particular Emily Vosloo, for the courteous, professional and patient manner in which she cooperated with us on the project. As editors, we express our gratitude to those who made financial contributions towards, not only the conference, but to the publication that resulted from the conference. In this regard, we are especially grateful to the Dean of the Faculty of Theology, Professor Eugene Cloete, Vice-Rector Research and Innovation at Stellenbosch University and the joint curatoria of the Dutch Reformed Church and the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Stellenbosch for their substantial and indispensable contributions.

May the Promise be with us, in all of life's paradoxes.

Johan Cilliers and Len Hansen
Stellenbosch, July 2018

PARADOX AND PROMISE: VOICES FROM THE BOOK

Throughout the history of Christianity, social justice has served the wind beneath the wings of many churches and individuals. When the prophetic teachings of the Christian faith are fully understood and internalised by the faithful, including the teachings of the biblical prophets and Jesus himself, many of the faithful become motivated to apply their faith to situations and circumstances in the world around us. ... The work of social justice is good and necessary, but, God may be calling us to something more. God may be calling us to embrace a vision, an image of what the world can be and who we can be as a people.

– Debra J Mumford

Prophetic preaching is seeking to be the faithful presence of God's promises for God's people in a world shaken by deadly convulsions. And these are the unshakable, unchangeable promises of a God who hears the cry of God's people, who sees their misery, who knows their suffering and comes down to rescue them...

– Allan A Boesak

How happy we are does not require us to retreat from the real world as we preach God's promises, but to "withdraw" to it. Seen from this perspective promises are windows onto that real world. *God's promises are decisive, although they do have the character of paradox, and often seem to be deceitful.* For this concept of decisiveness two reasons are offered, namely that, on the one hand, we preach from a Christological pulpit but, on the other hand, we also preach from an eschatological pulpit. Preaching those promises in the midst of the paradoxes of life will result in truly *pastoral preaching* when seen from this double perspective on the pulpit.

– Maarten Kater

[!]If we release our preconceived notions of what constitutes preaching and pay closer attention to the musicalities that fill the world, do we begin to notice proclamation happening in every place? ... The world proclaims the glory, judgment and mercy of God in the midst of the human condition ... Noticing, interpreting and dialoguing with the homiletic witness of the world in all of its variety and complexity are crucial endeavors for becoming thoughtful and relevant preachers for Christ.

– Gerald C Liu

From the perspective of the pew the preaching event is not primary about understanding the gospel or the sermon. The encounter between the listeners' inner experience and the preachers' outer words facilitates ... a third room in which the listeners, in internal dialogue, create a surplus of meaning that was previously not present in either the preacher's intent or the listener's frame of reference ... The preacher cannot control the production of meaning, but must rather surrender to the preaching event. Thus the preacher is not the creator ... of the third room, but the third room is depended upon the preachers' willingness to serve as the tool.

– Marianne Gaarden

Presidential Address – Preaching Promise within the Paradoxes of Life



Johan Cilliers¹

Paradox?

“A nation of paradoxes.” This is how Mary Robinson, the United Nations Human Rights Commissioner and former president of Ireland, described South Africa when she delivered the 10th Nelson Mandela Annual Lecture in Cape Town in August of 2012.² In a moving address and speaking as “an outsider, but a genuine friend”, Robinson listed a number of reasons why this country could indeed be called a place of paradoxes. She mentioned, amongst other things, the grinding poverty and hopelessness of the population in the Eastern Cape in contrast to her experiences in a so-called rich enclave in the town Paarl in the Western Cape – and the fact that she found it hard to believe that these two realities exist in the same country. She praised the remarkable progress being made in female representation in the political arena, noting that, at that time, 41% of cabinet positions were held by women; that five of the nine provincial premiers were women and that 42% of the seats in parliament were occupied by women. However, she added, “There is a darker side”, referring to rape and murder statistics and the still-prevalent and increasing abuse of women. She was amazed at the apparent thriving civil society in South Africa, but lamented the fact that this same society, inclusive of the religious leaders, often and paradoxically, seems disengaged. She stated:

Are they doing enough? Are they truly working to hold government to account for the inequities, the imbalances, the injustices they witness close to home? Or are they more concerned with their own survival, their own advancement, to the detriment of that wider common purpose of achieving a constitutional democracy: that vision of a united, non-racist, non-sexist, democratic and prosperous South Africa?³

1 Professor in Homiletics and Liturgy in the Faculty of Theology, University of Stellenbosch, South Africa.

2 *Freedom, truth, democracy: citizenship and common purpose*. Online at: <https://www.nelsonmandela.org/news/entry/transcript-of-mary-robinsons-nelson-mandela-annual-lecture> (Accessed: 28 February 2016).

3 *Freedom, truth, democracy: citizenship and common purpose*, 5.

Indeed a nation of paradoxes – and the list of paradoxes substantiating this claim may be extended, apparently ad infinitum.⁴ This is, however, nothing new. After an American journalist, Allen Drury, visited South Africa in the late 1960s, he felt the need to write a book entitled *A Very Strange Society*.⁵ That we (still) are. Our own beloved Archbishop Desmond Tutu called us the “Rainbow Nation”, but, at the same time, he wondered: “Who in their right mind could have believed South Africa could be an example of anything but the most awful ghastliness? We are such an unlikely lot.”⁶

But, who knows, perhaps it is exactly because we are such an unlikely lot, that the unexpected, dare I say, the unexpected touch of grace, might be felt in such a paradoxical place. One of our other “prophets” from the apartheid era, Dr Beyers Naudé, was of the opinion that South Africa is a microcosm of the contemporary world, where “white and black, East and West, rich, developed First World and poor, developing Third World meet as in no other country in the world”, adding that:

...this sets a tremendous challenge, but it is also a unique privilege. In the melting-pot of this meeting Christians who want to live out their faith have an incomparable opportunity to witness to justice, love of neighbour, truth and compassion?

I am quite sure that all delegates present here today will be able to list their own set of paradoxes, unique to their country and context – as well as the opportunities and challenges that accompany these...

The term *paradox* will be one of the keywords used during the coming days of this conference. It is not such an easy concept to describe. The official definition of paradox – or at least one of them – differentiates between different levels of meaning, calling it: “A seemingly absurd or contradictory statement or proposition which when *investigated may prove to be well founded or true.*” Elsewhere, the term is understood to refer to “[a] statement or proposition which, despite sound (or apparently sound) reasoning from acceptable premises, leads to a conclusion *that seems logically unacceptable or self-contradictory*” [my italics – JC]. And, of course, just to bring it closer to home: “A person or thing that combines contradictory features or qualities *in him/her or itself*” [my italics – JC].⁸

The latter definition of a paradox indeed refers to the biggest paradox that we face. *We* are our biggest paradox. *I* am. However, perhaps paradox is also inevitable, particularly when we try to speak about God – or in the vocabulary of this conference, when we try to preach the promise(s) of God. Obviously, the promise(s) of God can be and indeed has been described in many ways. There are many promises of God. They are as multi-coloured as God’s grace itself.⁹ God promises us peace beyond understanding; justice that will roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream; care surpassing that of the lilies of the field and the birds of the air, and many, many more.¹⁰

4 In the invitation to this conference, I listed the following: the paradox of poor and rich, or rather, of *extremely* poor and *extremely* rich – South Africa currently being identified as the country in the world with the widest gap between those that have and those that do not have. There is the paradox of luxurious mansions and affluent housing estates on the one hand, and, on the other, often just a few kilometers from these, struggling townships and dilapidated shacks. There is the paradox – in comparison to many other countries – of the highest unemployment statistics and the lowest life expectancy rates; the highest forms of educational inequalities and the lowest productivity rates; the most sophisticated technological advances in the world (for example the largest disk-shaped telescope, SKA, being constructed in the Karoo) and a seemingly crumbling provider of electricity (Eskom); of being able to host, in the spirit of *Ubuntu*, one of the most successful Soccer World Cups in history (2010) and experiencing some of the worst bouts of xenophobia ever (in 2008 and again in 2015); of indescribable natural beauty and inexcusable waste and pollution; of having probably the best political constitution in the world and some of the worst cases of poor service delivery; of having fabricated Apartheid but also producing Nelson Mandela, etc.

5 Drury, A. 1967. *A Very Strange Society. A journey to the Heart of South Africa*. New York: Trident.

6 BBC News, January 2000.

7 Translated from *Pro Veritate*, 15 January 1972, 5-7, 20. Quoted from Hansen, L. & Vosloo, R (eds). 2006. *Oom Bey for the Future: Engaging the Witness of Beyers Naudé*. Stellenbosch: AFRICAN SUN MeDIA, 1.

8 Craigie, W.; Murray, J. & Simpson, J. (eds). 1992. *Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

9 Cf. 1 Peter 4:10: *Poikilos*, translated as “multi-faceted” or “multi-coloured” grace.

10 Cf. Philippians 4:7; Amos 5:24; Matthew 6:26-28.

To me, all of God's promises hinge on *the trustworthiness, i.e. the faithfulness of God's continued presence with us*. The golden thread running through all of God's promises is God's enduring relationship with us. There is a theological connection, an inherent unity and correlation between God's faithfulness and God's promises, i.e. between *teleios* (that which God brings to fruition) and *promissio* (that which God promised to bring to fruition).¹¹ The faithful Promise of God creates hope, but this hope

*... is not a principle founded by the potentiality inherent in creation or material matter. Hope is a Person, based upon the fulfilled promises of a suffering and living God.*¹²

So, how does one preach this Person as Promise, and Promise as Person? Some years ago my good friend Chuck Campbell and I grappled with this very same question when we tried to write a book together about the foolishness of preaching. We came, inter alia, to the following conclusion:

Theologians have often tried to interpret these images [of the faithful presence of God – JC] in the language of paradox. God is present in this world, and is revealed sub contrario (in contradictions). Or, in the words of Hendrikus Berkhof: “[God] can be present in [God’s] world only as a stranger, the suffering servant, the crucified one. The concept of paradox is suitable here: God is present contrary to (para) the appearance (doxa) of the opposite.”¹³ However, while “paradox” does capture the tensions inherent in the foolishness of the gospel, it is, as Berkhof suggests, fundamentally a reference to human limitations... we human beings, and especially we preachers, function with human language and concepts. God is transcendent, we might say, not through some majestic grandness, which we can comprehend, but rather through embodied folly. So we resort to paradox, unable to disentangle the seeming contradictions, having to live in the tensile space between them. ... At the heart of the preacher as fool lies the profound paradox of a God whom we know in contradictions.¹⁴

In short, the promise of God's person and presence can only be preached in and through paradox. Paradox is something situated beside or outside the *doxa* (popular opinion). Paradox is free of all *doxa*, but at the same time calls the *doxa* into question.¹⁵ It is indeed *para-doxa*; swimming against the stream of public or popular opinion, and contradicting apparent appearances. And, if I may for a moment use the term *doxa* as we theologians have come to understand it: paradox runs against the grain of what we often understand to be glorious or even holy. Paradox – the Paradox of the Promise of God's Person and Presence – more often than not contradicts what we tend to praise as worthy.¹⁶

Paradox, also from a theological perspective, is more than a set of *complications*, whether they are issues or conditions or concepts, that we strive to solve or dissolve and which we find difficult to

11 Louw, D.J. 2015. *Wholeness in Hope Care. On Nurturing the Beauty of the Human Soul in Spiritual Healing*. Vienna: Lit Verlag, 48.

12 Louw, *Wholeness in Hope Care*, 320.

13 Hendrikus Berkhof in Campbell, C.L. & Cilliers, J.H. 2012. *Preaching Fools. The Gospel as a Rhetoric of Folly*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 54.

14 Campbell & Cilliers, *Preaching Fools*, 54.

15 Ellul, J. 1985. *The Humiliation of the Word*. Transl. J Main Hanks. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 24.

16 According to Martin Luther, the most fundamental paradox of all theology is that of the *Deus absconditus-Deus revelatus*. Cf. Klappert, B. 1976. *Promissio und Bund. Gesetz und Evangelium bei Luther und Barth*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 204.

harmonise.¹⁷ It is not like a mathematical formula, say $2 \times 2 = 4$; rather, it represents *complications*, that is, a set of circumstances, or a web of notions and ideas that are intertwined in such a manner that it cannot necessarily be solved and dissolved, but the acknowledgement and understanding of these complications, albeit fragmentarily, sensitises one to the potential for discovery, for the expectation of the strange twists and turns *within* these paradoxes – *in so far as one can expect the unexpected*. Seen from this perspective, paradoxes are, or could be, problematic. This may, however, also harbour possibilities of new beginnings, of new life, of hope. In this sense, paradoxes do swim against the current of what seems to be evident or is commonly believed, but it also goes further and deeper. The *para* of paradox does not remove the paradox from life, but in fact returns it – and us – to life, in the hope of kindling new life, of stimulating new understanding, of initiating true behavioural transformation. In this “chaosmos of life”,¹⁸ or “beautiful chaos of being”,¹⁹ paradox is neither deified nor eternalised, nor is the myth of equilibrium and manageable stability accepted. On the contrary, the paradoxes of life are viewed as heuristic and transformative spaces.²⁰

May I coin a term, perhaps using the notion of paradox in a paradoxical way? Paradox is “outside” of doxa, in order to transform doxa, and, in doing so, it is also “inside” doxa, or at least it returns to doxa. It is not only *paradoxum* (the Latin version of paradox), but also *intradoxum*.²¹ Things that are paradoxical are also, simultaneously, intradoxical. In this sense they are resonating with and within *life*. The paradox as *intradox* lies within us, within me. We – you and I – can, therefore, never speak of paradox in a so-called “objective” manner; on the contrary...

So, let me try and do the intradoxical paradoxical, and articulate a few tensions that, in my opinion, are part and parcel of the challenge of preaching God’s Promise *within* the paradoxes of life – obviously an open-ended and preliminary articulation. I briefly mention four movements of paradox within the preaching of Promise, namely: affirmation, provocation, migration and anticipation.

Preaching promise as affirmation

The multi-coloured promises of God hinge on the Promise of God’s Person and Presence, i.e. on the fact that God will not forsake or reject this world that we are part of. The gospel of Christ speaks of incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, inhabitation, and glorification – confirming God’s enduring relationship with us, and indeed with this planet called Earth. In her moving writings about

17 I take my cue here from the so-called *chaos theory* or *theory of complexity*. Within the latter, chaos is not viewed as the negative of order; it is not not-order. The Greeks already understood chaos as the possibility for order, as space and horizon filled with potential (*Möglichkeitshorizont*).

Cf. Theisen, B. 2010. *Chaos-Ordnung*. Ästhetische Grundbegriffe 1. Stuttgart, Weimar: JB Metzler, 754. In this sense, beauty (or wholeness) could be interpreted as the dialectic or paradox, i.e., as the perpetual and reciprocal movement between chaos and order. Disproportion of chaos is not the deformity of proportionate order. Chaos is something in itself – as is order. The link between these two realities could be described as beauty. Beauty exists in the tentative space between proportionate order and disproportionate chaos. The quest for beauty is sparked off by this tension; it is perpetually energised by the movement from disproportion to proportion, i.e., from chaos to order. Therefore, understood in this sense, beauty does not exclude the ugly (or disproportionate), but in fact incorporates it in its quest for (healing of) proportion. The very existence of the tension created by disproportion kindles a faith that is in search of beauty (*fides quaerens pulchrum*).

Cf. Cilliers, J. 2011. *Fides Quaerens Pulchrum: Practical Theological Perspectives on the Desire for Beauty*. *Scriptura* 3(108): 257-268. Against this background, one could perhaps say that the “paradoxes” to which Mary Robinson referred, should rather be called “contradictions”, which should urgently be solved, and in no way be either deified or seen as a harmless state of affairs.

18 Cf. Montuori, A. 2008. Foreword. Edgar Morin’s Path of Complexity. In: E Morin. *On Complexity*. Cresskill: Hampton, xxiv.

19 Nietzsche spoke about “the beautiful chaos of being” (*schöne Chaos des Daseins*) in Friedrich Nietzsche. 1973. *Die frühhliche Wissenschaft* (1882), *Nietzsche (KGA)*, Abt. 5, Bd. 2. München: De Gruyter, 201.

20 “Ontologically, the underlying belief is that of unordered and subjectivity; epistemologically, of heuristics or antipositivism; and teleologically, of a transformative nature.” Nilsson, F. 2007. *Towards a Dialectic Complexity Framework: Philosophical Reflections*. In: KA Richardson & P Cilliers (eds), *Explorations in Complexity Thinking: Proceedings of the 3rd International Workshop on Complexity and Philosophy*. Mansfield: ISCE Publishing, 239.

21 The closest equivalent in Greek would be *endoxa*.

prophetic preaching Dawn Ottoni-Wilhelm echoes this and reminds us that preaching is always an expression of:

...the fact that God is compassionate, not deserting that which God has created; that God has made certain promises, expressing God's enduring faithfulness; and that there are alternative manifestations of God's inbreaking new world that can be discerned even in our darkest moments.²²

Preaching, understood in this sense, affirms, and indeed re-affirms God's Promise – even, and in particular, within the paradoxes of life. Daniël Louw describes this “theology of affirmation” as follows:

A theology of affirmation... seeks to deal with ontological issues that affect the status and identity of human beings ... Affirmation theology describes signification and ascribes human dignity and subject particularity. It emanates from the ontological “Yes” in Christ to our human being (as demonstrated through Baptism and celebrated in the Eucharist) and is demonstrated in new patterns of pneumatic living....²³

This theology and consequently preaching of affirmation is not innocuous; on the contrary, it protests against any form of destructive ideology or so-called eternalised systems that refuse to believe that God has no, or no longer has any, compassion with this world. Preaching Promise as affirmation within the paradoxes of life is to say that this universe is not cold and empty; not without the compassion of a faithful God. It is to unmask all powers and notions and movements and ideologies that destroy the dignity and identity of humans as humans. In this sense, preaching God's Promise as affirmation is not simply saying “no!” It is rather saying “yes!”, because God is continuously saying “Yes!” to this world and its peoples.

In this paradoxical place called South Africa, we have been gifted with preachers that understood this theology of affirmation – people like Desmond Tutu, Allan Boesak, Beyers Naudé and others. Desmond Tutu, for instance, never grew tired of “affirming” – swimming against the stream, and speaking out against structures that propagated the indignity of humans, and the divisions between them.²⁴ He truly understood the art of *para-doxa*, of thinking, and preaching outside of, and against the popular opinion, but never leaving or rejecting those human beings whom he was addressing. He still does exactly that. The title of one of his most recent publications says it all: *Made for Goodness*. In it Tutu says that

God's gaze is like the gaze between lovers wrapped in a tender embrace. God looks at us the way a mother looks at her newborn baby. If you can see the loving gaze between mother and child in your mind's eye, you can begin a small meditation on being held in God's gaze. Once you are able to fix the gaze in your mind, put yourself in the sight line of the one gazing. Allow yourself to be the subject of that long, loving look. In this way you can imagine, then experience, the loving gaze that God turns to us. As we allow ourselves to accept God's acceptance, we can begin to accept our own goodness and beauty. With each glimpse of our own beauty we can begin to see the goodness and beauty in others.²⁵

22 Ottoni-Wilhelm, D. 2003. God's Word in the World: Prophetic Preaching and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In: DB Greiser and MA King (eds), *Anabaptist Preaching: A Conversation between Pulpit, Pew & Bible*. Telford, PA: Cascading, 84-91.

23 Louw, D. 2008. *Cura Vitae. Illness and the Healing of Life*. Cape Town: Lux Verbi, 30.

24 The most important dimension of Tutu's communication in preaching as always the “centrality of love/compassion” with its opposite ‘judgmental to listeners’”. Cf. Pieterse, H & Wester, F. 1995. Communication Style. In: HJC Pieterse (ed.), *Desmond Tutu's Message. A Qualitative Analysis*. Kampen: Kok, 69. The aim of Tutu's preaching was “to weave them into a united group, putting their trust and hope in God the Liberator...”; Wester, Communication Style, 65-66.

25 Tutu, D. & Tutu, M. 2010. *Made for Goodness, and why it makes all the difference*. Cape Town: Random House Group, 221.

“As we allow ourselves to accept God’s acceptance, we can begin to accept...” This, in my opinion, is preaching of the *affirmative Promise of God*, par excellence.

Preaching promise as provocation

One can already sense it: when one preaches the affirmation of the Promise of God as *para-doxa*, one also provokes. One challenges even so-called optimistic views on life. In the now almost iconic book of Douglas Hall, *Lighten our Darkness*, already published in 1976, he analysed the world-view of North Americans and came to the conclusion that they basically represent an *officially optimistic society* with a concomitant *officially optimistic religion*.²⁶ He understood these expressions of optimism as one of the major stumbling blocks for the proclamation of the Gospel of Hope. *Hall contested that it is difficult to hope, truly hope, when you are optimistic.* According to him, what most people heard from the preaching in the churches at that time was “...a positiveness that is phony and ridiculous: a bright and happy message that has all the depth of a singing commercial.”²⁷ It is remarkable to note that he wrote those words even before the emergence of the so-called market-based megachurches or the popularity of the prosperity gospel industry.

In an interesting article, entitled “Cross and Context: How my mind has changed”, written many years later, Hall in fact – even though he has changed his mind on many points – reiterated his belief that optimism sabotages hope:

*When we turn the story of Jesus into a success story, we both cheat ourselves out of its depth and effectively banish from our purview all those (and they are billions now) whose actuality precludes their giving themselves eagerly to stories with happy endings.*²⁸

There is indeed something like the *banality of optimism* – a banality that robs hope of its profundity.²⁹

I am not sure whether Douglas Hall’s original description of the North American people was in fact correct or whether he would still describe them as an officially optimistic society – in fact, I doubt it – but I know, sadly enough, that I could describe the current world view of at least a large number of South Africans as *officially pessimistic*. Broken promises have led to *disillusionment, and a syndrome of distrust* – a phenomenon to be seen on many levels of South African society. Whilst some churches and religious communities are still trusted by a number of South Africans, institutions like the police and in particular parliament have, to a large extent, lost the trust of the people. Politics and politicians, are often seen as synonymous with promises being made, just to be broken. When one hears the word “politics”, the word “promises” is conjured up, but also “distrust”. In a recent survey, the following disheartening data was made public: 36.9% of South Africans feel it is unsafe visiting parks or open spaces; 25.4% feel it is unsafe to let children play in public spaces; 18.4% feel it is unsafe to let children walk to school; 17% feel it is unsafe to walk to work or downtown; 13% feel it is unsafe to walk to the local café.³⁰

26 Hall, D.J. 1976. *Lighten our Darkness. Towards an Indigenous Theology of the Cross*. Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 112.

27 Hall, *Lighten our Darkness*, 141.

28 Hall, D.J. 2010. Cross and Context: How My Mind Has Changed. *The Christian Century* 127(18) (September 7), <http://www.christiancentury.org/article/2010-08/cross-and-context> (Accessed: 21 February 2016).

29 Eagleton, T. 2015. *Hope without Optimism*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1ff.

30 Victims of Crime Survey. Graphic no 24, <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0341/P03412013.pdf> (Accessed: 12 February 2016).

According to many commentators, the South African “rainbow nation” is losing its kaleidoscopic charm.³¹ Many are lamenting the demise of many aspects of the era that was so boldly inaugurated by Nelson Mandela and others. Some of these laments express a longing for the “good old days” of apartheid! However, others are lamenting what has gone wrong, without giving up the hope of an alternative future. If I may quote Desmond Tutu again from a speech titled “What has happened to You, South Africa?” that he delivered in 2006. In it Tutu expresses his sadness concerning certain events in our country:³²

My naiveté was that I believed that these noble attitudes and exalted ideals [of the liberation struggle – JC] would, come liberation, be automatically transferred to hold sway in the new dispensation. We South Africans were a special breed, and I believed we would show the world, hag-ridden especially in Africa by the scourge of corruption, that we were a cut above the hoi polloi. Wow! What a comprehensive let-down – no sooner had we begun to walk the corridors of power than we seemed to make up for lost time... The trouble with these people in government is that they've got power now and they believe that they're going to have power forever, and you have to keep warning them. The Afrikaner Nationalists thought they were invincible. Let me tell this ANC government what I told the Afrikaner Nationalist government: You may have power now, but you're not God. Remember: you're not God, and one day, you'll get your comeuppance.³³

It may seem easier to hope, i.e., to believe in promises when you are pessimistic, but it is not necessarily so. *Pessimism, like optimism, can sabotage hope.* Pessimism can foster (the preaching of) false hope. One example of this would be the many forms of prosperity gospel being proclaimed throughout our country. Promises are made on the basis of religious convictions and mostly against the background of economical poverty and pessimism – promises of what seems to be unconditional health, wealth, and prosperity, but in fact being conditional on the quality of your “faith” and even the extent of your tithing. In many cases, those that make these promises grow rich, and those that these promises are made to, become even poorer.³⁴

The Promise of God, however, is para-doxa, contra popular opinions, be they optimistic or pessimistic; contra our understandings and expressions of glory and prosperity. Neither optimism, nor pessimism offers the keys to hope. Both optimism and pessimism keep us behind the bars of self-constructed promises and the disillusionment with these. The para-doxa of God’s Promise, in fact, interrupts and even disrupts our constructs of hope and hopelessness; it is provocative in the deepest sense of the word. It calls

31 See my discussion in Cilliers, J. 2015. “Between separation and celebration: Perspectives on the ethical-political preaching of Desmond Tutu.” *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 1(1): 41-56. <https://doi.org/10.17570/stj.2015.v1n1.a2>

32 In this speech, Tutu openly spoke about his dismay that someone like Jacob Zuma could be elected as president of South Africa. Although retired, Tutu still exposed injustices in society, whatever form it takes on. He once stated: “I do not do it because I like to do it. ... I cannot help it when I see injustice. I cannot keep quiet...” Tutu, D. 1983. *Hope and Suffering. Sermons and Speeches.* Johannesburg: Skotaville, xiii. In recent times he has spoken out against the massacre of mine workers by police at Marikana, the waste of almost R250 million on so-called “security upgrades” to president Jacob Zuma’s private residence at Nkandla, and in particular against the plight of abused woman and children, and the fragmentation of family life in South African society. In a recent appearance on national television, he even said: “Be aware. We will start praying for the downfall of the ANC...” The paradoxes of the past, and the paradoxes of the present, still plaguing our country, perplex Tutu. He protested against the “God-with-us” theology of the apartheid era, and he protested against the “God-with-us” theology of the current ANC government, from whom we often hear statements like: “God was there at the inception of the ANC – therefore it is the only Party to vote for”; “If you vote for any other Party than the ANC, you will go to hell (sic)”; “If you vote for the ANC, it is your ticket to heaven”; “The ANC will rule until Jesus comes again...”; and so on.

33 Tutu, D. 2011. *God is not a Christian. Speaking Truth in times of Crisis.* London: Rider, 202, 212.

34 See the illuminating article by Eric ZM Gbote and Saelelo T Kgatla. 2014. Prosperity gospel: A missiological assessment. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 70(1), Art. #2105, 10 pages. Online at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v70i1.2105> (Accessed: 12 February 2016).

forth that which could be hidden and masked, and challenges that which may be seen as popular opinion; it is the *pro-vocare of para-doxa*; the provocative paradox of God's Promise.

Preaching that expresses this *pro-vocare*, this provocation might and should sometimes be born out of a *theology of anger*. This theology of anger cries out: in God's Name, things cannot continue as they are...³⁵

As I have stated earlier, we have been blessed in this country with preachers that practiced and still practice this *theology of indignation, of interruption and holy provocation*. More often than not, these preachers spoke out when most of the church was silent. They issued a challenge in the face of the incongruities of injustice. For instance, in a sermon on Acts 2:1-4 preached on Pentecost during the seventies, Allan Boesak, another one of our "prophets from the South" in the struggle against apartheid, lampoons the church that has lost its critical edge in society, boldly stating:

And so the prophetic witness of the church, the voice of the Bride, is being exchanged for an unintelligible mumbling that is heard nowhere, and in the preaching the roar of the lion for the sake of righteousness (Amos) becomes nothing more than the squeaking of a scared mouse.³⁶

Indeed, (preaching of) the Promise of God is not necessarily a comforting dressing for an epidermal wound; not merely a soothing lullaby that intends slumbering and sleep...

On the contrary, preachers who dare to articulate the Promise of God, become prophets that provoke. In recent years, it has often been asked where all these prophets have gone.³⁷

Preaching promise as migration

Preaching God's Promise, however, does not only entail affirmation, interruption and provocation. Its intention is to change the state of affairs, to move us forward towards transformation, a transformation that does not serve any political agenda, and yet serves them all, with contents of true justice, unity and reconciliation. Preaching God's Promise "... embodies a kind of missional perspective namely *promissio*; i.e. to be sent out, and to direct in a proactive way, life in terms of the fulfilled promises of the gospel."³⁸

The notion of missionality has become a type of theological buzzword in South Africa – at least in the Dutch Reformed tradition to which I belong. This trend has been both hailed and criticised.³⁹ I am of the opinion – which I debated in more detail elsewhere – that this trend of missionality offers many valuable perspectives, but in fact fails to challenge, to interrupt and provoke the systemic roots of,

35 This "Theology of Anger" is, however, not about anger merely for the sake of anger; on the contrary, it flows from the basis of compassion and hope. Indeed, "... it is clear that some of the most effective 'prophetic preaching' in our time by such dazzling voices as Desmond Tutu... has the power of indignation, but comes across as utterances of hope-filled, compassionate truth-telling largely free of rage." Brueggemann, W. 2003. *Ancient Utterance and Contemporary Hearing*. In André Resner, Jr. (ed.), *Just Preaching. Prophetic Voices for Economic Justice*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2003, 73.

36 Boesak, A. 1979. *Die Vinger van God. Preke oor Geloof en die Politiek*. Johannesburg: Ravan, 37 [my translation – JC].

37 Cf. my discussion in Cilliers, J. 2015. Where have all the Prophets gone? Perspectives on Political Preaching. *Stellenbosch Theological Journal*, 1(2): 1-11.

38 Louw, *Wholeness in Hope Care*, 511.

39 Cf. Saayman, W. 2010. Missionary or missional? A study in terminology. *Missionalia*, 38(1): 5-16. Saayman pertinently asks whether the exchange of these two terms (missional for missionary) is not simply an effort to *rebrand* the latter, which has fallen into (anti-colonial) dispute? But, he states: "The definitive question is: is that what we really want to do? Is that what we really need to do to overcome our problem?... If we choose for *missional*, we choose at the moment unavoidably for emerging churches in postmodern contexts. How useful is such a choice for the theological discourse in the Third World in general and Africa in particular? ... (15-16).

for instance, poverty and inequality in this country.⁴⁰ For me, we are simply missing the point with our *missio*.

We might not be the first people to do so. The Netherlands has also seen a drive towards a missional church, with concomitant critical voices. Marcel Barnard, my provocative colleague from the lowlands, for instance, after giving an extensive overview of the countless activities that have been initiated to fuel this drive, of money being invested and personnel being appointed, expresses his misgivings, as follows:

After eight years we have discovered that nothing has come of these ideals. The Protestant Church in the Netherlands consists of spectacularly waning communities... Particularly in the years that the church claimed a new missional identity, she did not even come close to retain her dwindling numbers. The missional project has failed, or we should give a different meaning to the word "missional"... Against the backdrop of the waning church, missional language and pretences have become laughable. We are playing in a tragicomedy... Let us agree: from now on we will no longer be "missional". We call a halt to the missional activism. We rather return to the inner chamber. The inky night. The void. The great silence. The judgment of God. There, not visible to any outsider, we bend over the Scriptures and search whether we may not again, perhaps softly, hear the foolish voice of the Gospel... Here we gather around a table and share a tiny piece of bread and take a tiny sip of wine. And then we say (and we believe it ourselves): This is a sign of the great feast of all nations, with the best food and the best wines. And we inconspicuously walk an extra mile with those who need it – the refugee, the vulnerable elderly, and the abused child. Maybe a few people might ask themselves: what is it with those Christians? Then we will have little to say. Perhaps stutter: "You know, we belong to an executed Criminal, crudely hung up on a piece of wood." That is it. Let us simply be. Our God works in secret. That is his mission.⁴¹

On the one hand, it must be underlined: God is a God that moves. God is movement, not a monument.⁴² Dare I say: God is the ultimate cosmic Migrant?⁴³ On the other hand, God's migration often goes undetected; God's pro-missio is mostly hidden away, incognito, indeed sub contrario.

And, for the moment staying in the realm of the provocative: if God is the Migrating God, can God's body not be found amidst the many migrating bodies on this planet – in Africa, in Europe, on sinking ships in the Mediterranean Sea...? Perhaps God's Body is being battered in Johannesburg, in frenzies

40 Cf. my discussion in Cilliers, J. "Poverty and Privilege": *Re-hearing sermons of Beyers Naudé on Religion and Justice*. Paper delivered at the International Summer School held at the University of the Western Cape, South Africa, 24-26 February 2015, on the theme: *Religion, Law, and Justice*. In collaboration with the Humboldt University, Berlin, the University of Stellenbosch, and the University of KwaZulu-Natal. To be published by *International Journal of Public Theology*.

41 Barnard, M. 2013. De missionaire tragikomedie. *Woord en dienst*, 62(9), 34. Transl. and paraphrased from Dutch by Johan Cilliers.

42 Cf. Cilliers, J. 2015. God in Granite? Aesthetic-Theological Perspectives on the Monumentalisation of Religion. *Scriptura*, 114(1): 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.7833/114-0-1041>

43 See my discussion in Johan Cilliers. 2016. *A Space for Grace. Towards an Aesthetics of Preaching*. Stellenbosch: AFRICAN SUN MeDIA, 137-38.

of xenophobia? Or washed up on a beach in Turkey, fleeing from Syria?⁴⁴ Perhaps we indeed have to go back into the inky night, the void, the great silence, the judgment of God – if we profess to preach about the enduring presence, the faithfulness of this God towards creation? Perhaps the provocation and the pro-missio of God's Promise must first shatter and redirect my own comfortable societal and theological constructs? It is, after all, by living and dying that one becomes a theologian, as Martin Luther said.⁴⁵ Sadly enough, we more often than not resist this living-and-dying-as-theologian. Indeed, we are our biggest paradox. *I am.*

Perhaps our preaching should be taken out of its admirably formulated and avidly defended constructs, to be reborn out of the *kairos* of the marginalised, out of the crises of those on the edges, out of the cries of those on the borders of life and society.⁴⁶ Perhaps this is where we will encounter the presence of the Faithful God; where we will see signs of God's Promises fulfilled, and being fulfilled: in the inky night; the void; the great silence; the judgment of God – where the executed Criminal, crudely hanging from piece of wood, lingers? Perhaps we need to re-visit not only the paradoxes of life, but re-encounter the Paradox whom we call God *within* these paradoxes?

Preaching promise as anticipation

The movement of God often takes place incognito; the Cosmic Migrator often is hidden, *sub contrario*. And yet, the happenstances of this movement and migration do not happen haphazardly. There is a direction, a *telos*, grounded in the faithfulness of God. In a certain sense, we can anticipate this movement and migration. We can learn the *art and hermeneutics of expectation*. We can be taught the wisdom of seeing-what-and-where it matters.

Preaching the Promise of God as anticipation is indeed about seeing, about vision, about pro-vision.⁴⁷ Normally the term provision refers to the act or process of supplying or providing something, for instance when a supply of food and other things are needed. It however also implies something that is done in advance to prepare for something else that is still to happen. It is to see what is coming, and to act in the light of that; it is pro-vision that secures provision. It is seeing the images of the present-yet-hidden God, and to imagine it; it is *fides quaerens imaginem* (faith in search of images, and imagination).⁴⁸

44 These words are written against the background of several catastrophic, global forms of forced migration that have taken place during 2015. Europe experienced its worst migration of people since the Second World War. Thousands flocked from war-torn countries such as Syria, to the shores of especially Greece, Italy and Hungary. The world was shocked when pictures of a drowned three-year-old Syrian boy, Aylan Kurdi, was recovered on the beach in Bodrum, Turkey – a fate shared by his mother and brother when their ship capsized en route to the Greek island of Kos. In West Africa, millions of people were uprooted by the violent actions of Boko Haram, with about 1,4 million Nigerians being forced to flee their country. South Africa has been plagued by unprecedented and widespread incidents of xenophobia already since 2008. An estimated 62 people were murdered (12 of them South African citizens) and 25 000 people (some with refugee status, legal immigrants, illegal aliens and even people with South African citizenship!) were forced to flee their homes and livelihoods. Many reasons for this extreme form of social ostracism have been offered. Whatever the case, it is an extraordinary and ironic turn of events, taking place in a country renowned for its dismantling of apartheid, a period during which many freedom fighters found refuge in exactly the same countries whose people were being forced to leave South Africa in bus loads (Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Somalia, etc.), their homes being burnt down and their shops looted and pillaged. The precise number of people being killed or displaced in the recent xenophobic events of 2015 has not yet been released.

45 "I did not learn my theology all at once, but I had to search deeper for it, where my temptations took me. ... Not understanding, reading, or speculation, but living – nay, dying and being damned – make a theologian." Luther, M. *Tischreden* (Luther's *Table Talk*, 6 vols. In the Weimar Edition), 1:146; *D. Martin Luthers Werke, Kristische Gesamtausgabe* (58 vols. Weimar: Böhlau, 1833-), 5:163.

46 Cf. Allan, R.J. 2015. Preaching as Spark for Discovery in Theology. In: D Schnasa Jacobsen (ed.), *Homiletical Theology. Preaching as Doing Theology. The promise of Homiletical Theology*, Vol. 1. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 129-52.

47 Cf. my discussion in Cilliers, J. 2012. *Die optiek van homiletiek: Prediking as om-raming van perspektief*. *NGTT*, 53(3&4): 52-69.

48 See my discussion in Cilliers, J. 2012. *Fides quaerens imaginem: The quest for liturgical reframing*. *Scriptura*, 109: 16-27. <https://doi.org/10.7833/109-0-121>

Preaching God’s Promise entails pro-vision, born out of anticipation, not only in the light of that which is still to happen (i.e., the fulfilment of God’s promises), but to discern that which has already happened (i.e., God’s fulfilled promises). It is indeed about discernment, about seeing deeper than the surface, about interpreting that which might seem like a contradiction and paradox, to be in fact a sign of God’s Promise of enduring Presence.

I am reminded of the writings of the somewhat enigmatic author Nassim Nicholas Taleb, who argued that change, even change that might seem interruptive or disruptive at the time, could in fact be embraced as the beginnings of new life. A candle might be put out by wind, he says, but wind can also create a new fire – which he interprets as a symbol of new life.⁴⁹ He poses the question: How do we react to risks, to surprises, unexpected events, dramatic changes, even shocks that have far-reaching effects that rearrange the order as we know it? Sometimes, he says, some of these events might be completely strange, like the appearance of a black swan – and it is impossible to be prepared for such a strange happening. The question is, however, how we react to this black swan, i.e., how we see it. For Taleb, the challenge is to accept these strange twists and turns of history, to ride the wind, so to speak, so that you may be strengthened by this. We are fragile, he would admit, but we must also learn the art of being “antifragile” – a term that he coins himself – of seeing, and interpreting, and reacting to the inexplicable phenomena of life.⁵⁰

Obviously, these sentiments of Taleb could be criticised and misunderstood. Taleb is, for instance, not advocating a lifestyle of martyrdom-seeking; nor does he fall prey to a new “banality of optimism”. What he does is to call for a form of vision that sees deeper, forward, if I may call it so, a call for anticipatory pro-vision. Preaching, in my opinion, takes place within this tension of fragility and antifragility; it is to fully accept the brokenness of life, but simultaneously to point imaginatively towards an alternative: a future that has already dawned amongst us, as the *adventus* of God’s continuous coming-towards-us.⁵¹

This movement between being fragile and antifragile could in more traditional terms be called *hope*. Hope is to anticipate and imagine, pro-visionally, the future. In the words of Daniël Louw:

*The root of the Hebrew word for hope has the connotation of a bowstring, or an interrelated quivering web of meaningful connections; hope is like the trembling of a cord; it moves and pushes one forward towards the future. Hope is to stretch oneself out towards what is becoming and to anticipate the content of expectation in advance.*⁵²

The Promise of God, that creates hope, is something completely different than the promises that operate in optimism, or are broken in pessimism. The promise of God is of a different order; it points towards a lifestyle, i.e., a faith that says: *Even if...* there is nothing, *yet* I will glorify God, like the prophet Habakkuk did.⁵³ It represents a stance that says: I will live within, and with, the paradoxes of life, *as if...* God is faithfully present, even if I experience the contrary, because God *is* present. In my opinion, preaching of the Promise of God perpetually moves within this tension of *even if... as if*.

49 Taleb, N.N. 2012. *Antifragile: Things That Gain from Disorder*. New York: Random House, 1ff.

50 Taleb, *Antifragile*, 44ff. See also Taleb, N.N. 2007. *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*. New York: Random House.

51 Cf. Cilliers, J. 2009. Time out. Perspectives on liturgical temporality. *NGTT*, 50(1&2): 26-35.

52 Louw, *Wholeness in Hope Care*, 502. Or, in the words of James Childs: “It is a promise from God, sealed in cross and resurrection, a basis for hope. The power of this gracious promise energises our efforts to anticipate this divine future by addressing our own complicity and seeking the changes that serve all people.” Childs, J.M. 2003. Enabling Grace. In: A Resner, Jr. (ed.), *Just Preaching. Prophetic Voices for Economic Justice*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 43.

53 Habakkuk 3:17-19.

Preaching of the Promise of God fosters sensitivity for the unexpected; it creates anticipation of the revelation of the White Dove of God's blessing. One of our South African poets, Sheila Cussons, articulated this event of the graceful in-breaking of the unexpected in a beautiful poem, entitled *Die Sagte Sprong* (The Soft Leap).⁵⁴ It is of course impossible to do justice to the poem with any translation, but in essence Cussons believes that grace – although she never uses the word – comes when you least expect it; it is an illumination of the mind, as light as a feather, fleeting, but precise – and if you experience this touch of grace as being feather-light, and yet it lingers for so long, how powerful would it not be if grace exerts a firmer grip on you? Grace comes when you do not expect it; it is something that strikes your consciousness in its deepest life; it is something like a soft leap, that fills you with joy, amazement, recognition – and if this is so moving and life-changing, how much more if grace no longer leaps softly, but becomes a graceful insurgence, Cussons wonders?

Life is filled with paradoxes. But in-between these paradoxes and within these paradoxes we experience the soft leaps, the light touches, sometimes the firmer grips, of grace, i.e., of the Promise of the enduring faithfulness of the Present God. Perhaps this Presence is the most fundamental of all Paradoxes – the Paradox that grants us life within all other paradoxes.

To live with this Paradox of all Paradoxes within, and from time to time, against life's paradoxes, signifies a particular form of hope. It provokes us to see, and to move (perhaps even dance!), from time to time. In fact, there seems to be a definitive relationship between hope and dance. Joan Erikson wrote the following poem only weeks before her husband's death:⁵⁵

Hope

*The word "Hope" the learned say
is derived from the shorter one "Hop"
and leads one into "Leap".
Plato, in his turn, says that the leaping
of young creatures is the essence of play –
So be it!
To hope then, means to take a playful leap
into the future – to dare to spring from firm ground –
to play trustingly – invest energy, laughter;
And one good leap encourages another –
On then with the dance.*

To dance is to hop in hope. It is to leap – like a young creature – into the future. *It is to leap forward because of the soft leap of grace that has filled your being.* In the well-known words of Rubem Alves: "To hope is to hear the melody of the future. Faith is to dance it."⁵⁶

Preaching God's Promise is to invite one to dance, sometimes only as an affirmative shuffle; sometimes as a provocative tango; perhaps as a joyful hip-hop of hope – but always to move; because you see the future in the present. It lives in anticipation; it has pro-vision, and therefore

54 Cussons, S. 1979. *Die Sagte Sprong*. Kaapstad: Tafelberg, 7.

55 Quoted in Capps, D. 1995. *Agents of hope. A pastoral psychology*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 176.

56 Alves, R.A. 1972. *Tomorrow's Child: Imagination, Creativity, and the Rebirth of Culture*. London: SCM, 195.

provides a different set of keys that unlocks the cell, and brings an end to bars, or at least reveals its ultimate powerlessness.

Writing these words, I was reminded of an iconic artwork by nobody else than former President Nelson Mandela, entitled *Bars and Key*, or also, *Freedom*.⁵⁷ This artwork simply consists of four black lines that Mr. Mandela drew slowly and deliberately with his fingers to represent the bars of his cell, together with an exact bronze replica of his cell key. It seems so simplistic, so stripped of grandeur, yet it depicts so much. Here we indeed have a *masterful expression of paradox*: bars that indicate confinement and a key that can unlock – and it is exactly in their juxtaposition that the promise of freedom lies.

This artwork affirms the dignity of human life: it cannot be kept behind bars. Mr. Mandela movingly describes the systemic onslaught of the jail he was in; not only the reduced space of his cell (6 by 2 feet), but in particular the reduction of humanity to a number – 466/64.⁵⁸ However, as we know, the system could not suppress the dignity of Nelson Mandela.

As such, the artwork provokes: it not only depicts the systems that seek to incarcerate human dignity, it fundamentally interrupts and provokes these systems. We do not only see the bars, but the keys also – signifying the ultimate end of these and all bars. This artwork moved me, because it represents the aesthetical depiction by a human being who believed that those on the margins, those who had been forcefully removed, those who had no other option than migration, has hope, always hope.

Four lines and a key – but it opens up vistas of new beginnings. It sees forward. It anticipates, even if the anticipation took 27 years towards its fulfillment.

“I always knew that someday I would once again feel the grass under my feet and walk in the sunshine as a free man.”⁵⁹

Surely a moving “sermon” in itself?

Surely a masterful expression of paradox, but also profound depiction of promise?

Perhaps a soft touch of grace – or perhaps even a firmer grip – for “such an unlikely lot”, like us?



57 Online at: <http://nelsonmandelaart.co.za/product/bar-and-key/> (Accessed: 13 February 2016).

58 Mandela, N. 2000. *Long walk to freedom*. Randburg: Macdonald Purnell, 369-70.

59 Mandela, *Long walk to freedom*, 376-77.

Keynote *Addresses*
& *Responses*



To not be Afraid to say it – Preaching as Promise and Presence of Prophetic Faithfulness

2

Allan A Boesak¹

I

Writing in 1980, in a preface to a collection of his own sermons, Helmut Gollwitzer, prophet of the first hour of the Confessing Church fighting Hitler and the Nazification of the German Evangelical Church, and the person who did me the unforgettable honour of writing a foreword to my own first collection of sermons to appear in German, Gollwitzer said that preaching is

... a singular form of speech, developed from its earliest days by the Christian Church to hand down the history of the great hope, the history of Israel and its God, the history of Jesus of Nazareth, the history of the spiritual explosion of the Resurrection Community.²

Those who commit themselves to being a preacher in this great tradition will discover, Gollwitzer writes, that

... in no other form of speech are things taken so seriously, is our whole existence so challenged, even put at risk. In no form of speech does our word itself so much take the form of action, of intervention in the history of the hearers, as in this.³

For every preacher this must sound thoroughly intimidating, or hopelessly idealistic, perhaps because we have forgotten what we are doing when we stand in the pulpit to preach, or just that we have come to take preaching so frighteningly lightly. “Most sermons these days”, is Paul Lehmann’s critique, “are notably irrelevant”:

[s]ermons – even carefully crafted ones – are nearly always event-less. They are a compound of either the obvious and the trivial, or the learned and the commonplace – or both – on the move from the latitudinous to the platitudinous. Everybody likes to hear what everybody knows – and effectively dismisses as not worth bothering about.⁴

But the sermon, I have discovered very early in my ministry, is an event in which the preachers give something away themselves, making themselves vulnerable, because in preaching one clothes one’s person, one’s convictions, one’s faith, in the very defencelessness of the gospel itself, surrendering to the concreteness of the gospel because the gospel is about the concreteness of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, the concreteness of the life of God’s people in the world, and

1 Allan Boesak is the inaugural chair of the Desmond Tutu Center for Peace, Reconciliation and Global Justice at Butler University and Theological Seminary, Indianapolis, IN.

2 Gollwitzer, H. 1980. *The Way to Life. Sermons in a Time of World Crisis*. Transl. D Cairns. Edinburgh: T&T Clarke, xi.

3 Gollwitzer, *The Way to Life*, xi.

4 Lehmann, P. 1987. Foreword. In: AA Boesak, *The Finger of God. Sermons on Faith and Responsibility*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, ix.

the concreteness of the reign of God.⁵ It is because of that history, of that great hope affirmed in and through what Johann Baptist Metz called “the subversive memory” of Christ.⁶ And, that is why it puts one’s very existence at risk. It is because Helmut Gollwitzer chose for that great hope in that great history of the struggle for the freedom to belong to Jesus Christ, to stand where Christ stood, namely with the despised, the unchosen and persecuted, and against the chosen, the powerful, and those deemed worthy in Hitler’s Germany.

Gollwitzer saw the power of Hitler’s words as they mesmerised a whole people and captivated the German Church. Yet, he also saw how the power of the Word of God can challenge the power of evil when words themselves become action, when we take the risks that Christ took for the sake of that salvific intervention in history. Gollwitzer discovered this because he was not afraid to follow the full consequences of his prophetic faithfulness in the struggle against Hitler. His preaching itself became a commitment to the struggle for justice, truth, and prophetic faithfulness and, in so doing, it became the faithful presence of the promises of God. Preaching in what Gollwitzer calls “a world shaken by deadly convulsions”,⁷ he held on to Christ, the centre of his faith and the hope of the world, and this brought him to painful but righteous choices, struggle and sacrifice, and his discovery of the inseparability of faith and costly discipleship. It is the discovery I myself had made, namely that when we say “Jesus”, we have to say “justice”. That is the heart of prophetic preaching seeking to be faithful to the promises of God.

In his superb definition of prophetic preaching, Richard Lischer, writing on the prophetic preaching of Martin Luther King Jr., says it is preaching that consists in

... speech and symbolic actions that follow the implications of God’s holiness and revealed acts to their most concrete, vivid, and public conclusions. What is whispered in closeted places of fear and suffering, the prophet proclaims from the rooftops. Prophecy begins with the present state of things – King’s refrain was, “Let us be dissatisfied” – and ends in the imagination of an alternative future.⁸

So prophetic preaching, as I understand Lischer, is not just speech, it is speech *and* symbolic action. Hence the deliberate choice of the word “following”. I understand that to mean that prophetic preaching happens not just in the pulpit amidst praise and worship and quiet meditation, but on the streets, amidst the havoc, pain and confusion wrought by poverty and hopelessness, where the senseless violence of the poor on the poor reflects the senseless violence of systemic, policy-sanctioned destruction of the poor. In this context of unholy suffering, the prophetic preacher insists that the holiness of God should not just be acknowledged in the sanctuary but followed in every area of life, and that God’s holiness is revealed not just in acts of sanctification in the sanctuary where God is worshipped but in acts of liberation and justice in the dreaded places of fear and trepidation where the powers believe they hold sway. The preacher believes that those acts of liberation and justice are not vague, spiritualised and privatised, but in fact concrete, vivid and public.

What is whispered in “closeted places of fear and suffering”, the prophet shouts from the roof tops? That is true. The pain of those who suffer dare not be silenced. Their cries, we have learned from Calvin, are the cries from a wounded God’s very own heart. To attempt to silence those cries because they might offend the powerful and comfortable is an assault upon the holiness of God. But what

5 Boesak. *The Finger of God*, ix.

6 Metz, J.B. 1980. *Faith in History and Society*. Transl. D Smith. New York: Seabury, 90.

7 Gollwitzer, *Way to Life*, xii.

8 Lischer, R. 2010 *Anointed with Fire. The Structure of Prophecy in the Sermons of Martin Luther King Jr.* In: T George, JE Massey, & R Smith Jr. (eds), *Our Sufficiency is of God. Essays in Honor of Gardner C. Taylor*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 231.

the prophet also shouts from the rooftops is what is whispered in those other closeted places: places of power and wealth, behind the closed doors of corporate board rooms and sacralised chambers of political power. Those places where a few make decisions that control and destroy the lives of millions half a world away; where endless war equates seamlessly with endless profits and where in matters of life and death there is no such thing as humbled hesitation or holy ground.

The prophet shouts from the rooftops that the world as it is: *wrong*. That the powers of this world are not invincible, that their word is not unchallengeable, that the present state of things is not irreversible, nor God-ordained; that discontent with evil is not abnormal or extreme or laughable, but rather a response to God's love of justice; that an alternative future is not just imaginable, but possible and urgent. And even though in the eyes of the powers the possibility of such a different world is absurd, this is what it means to uphold and proclaim God's promises of freedom, justice and an alternative future to the people of God and the world. Prophetic preaching is exposing what is truly absurd in the eyes of God and, therefore, has no right to existence:

For God's foolishness [absurdity] is wiser than human wisdom, [which is exposed as truly absurd in the face of God's wisdom, love, and mercy], and God's weakness [absurd in the face of the power of the powers of the world] is stronger than human might. (1 Corinthians 1:25)

Prophetic preaching is seeking to be the faithful presence of God's promises for God's people in a world shaken by deadly convulsions. And these are the unshakable, unchangeable promises of a God who hears the cry of God's people, who sees their misery, who knows their suffering and comes down to rescue them from the hand of their slave masters. This is the promise of covenantal justice and freedom that has held Israel fast from the days of Moses to Isaiah and Jeremiah; from Amos to Micah; from John the Baptist to Jesus of Nazareth. That is the tradition anchored in the great hope Gollwitzer speaks of, and it is the presence of those promises that keeps God's people from despair.

II

Let me now turn from the words of Gollwitzer and Lischer to the words of Pope Francis. "The joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus." These are the opening words of the pope's courageous and inspiring Apostolic Exhortation of late 2015, *Evangelii Gaudium*.⁹ This joy, is a gift of grace and mercy, but it is fragile, confronted, and, the pope goes on to say, "with a great danger in today's world, pervaded as it is by consumerism." That danger is "the desolation and anguish born of a complacent yet covetous heart, the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience."

The pope's words combine deep pastoral concern with prophetic truth telling. The use of the word "consumerism" is not random. Embedded in the extraordinary global power of what is called "the prosperity gospel", it has indeed become "the gospel", albeit a false gospel, of consumerism. It is the religious heart of today's global, neo-liberal capitalism, central to what the pope calls "an economy of exclusion".

George F Will, the influential, conservative American columnist, derisively denounces the pope as one who "comes trailing clouds of sanctimony", embracing "fashionable", but "demonstrably false and deeply reactionary ideas" with the "indiscriminate zeal of a new convert." This pope may be "flamboyant", but he fails to understand the "spontaneous creativity of an open society in which

⁹ Pope Francis. 2015. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* of the Holy Father FRANCIS to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World. Rome: Vatican Press, 3 (para. 1&2).

people and their desires are not problems but celebrated as one of [the American] nation's premises."¹⁰ The pope nonetheless defines those unfettered and celebrated desires as coming from a "desolate and anguished heart." That heart, I think the pope is saying, is desolate because it has lost the joy of the gospel, does not respond to the love of Jesus Christ, has disdained the enrichment of human solidarity and lost itself in the pampering of its own desires. It has hardened itself against the cries of the poor, the weak and the vulnerable, in so doing hardening itself against the pathos of God.

That heart is anguished because it resists what it knows Yahweh requires, namely to love mercy, to do kindness and to walk humbly with one's God. It is anguished because its endless, feverish pursuit of "frivolous pleasures" is an empty endeavour, alienating itself from the suffering and needs of others, caught up in the self-centeredness of instant gratification. That heart is complacent, bloated with self-satisfaction, yet it is covetous, restless with greed, in the unyielding grip of always wanting more, relentlessly pursuing that at the expense of others. Since it cannot please God, this heart seeks to placate God by "tithing mint, dill, and cumin", but constantly misses "the weightier matters of the Law: justice, mercy and faith." That heart cannot find joy, so it deceives itself with the false comfort of a "blunted conscience".

Twenty-one years ago theologian and social activist Jim Wallis already saw that which is alarming the pope today. He agonises about the state of politics in the United States and despairs at what he sees.

*Our most basic virtues of civility, responsibility, justice and integrity seem to be collapsing. We appear to be losing the ethics derived from personal commitment, social purpose and spiritual meaning. The triumph of materialism is hardly questioned now... We are divided along the lines of race, ethnicity, class, gender, religion, culture and tribe... Our intuition tells us the depth of the crisis we face demands more than politics as usual. An illness of the spirit has spread across the land...*¹¹

This "illness of spirit" is not just visible in the United States. It is global. Observing the world as we know it today, Wallis did not know how true and relevant his words would remain. Today, half the world has to live with the terror of an endless "war on terror", inflicted upon millions of innocents by imperial powers and their lackeys in the Middle East and the global South, the matching brutality of stateless groups now operating from West Africa to Afghanistan, and the distressing sight of millions of displaced persons and refugees. They are the inevitable, if unacknowledged, result of wars for profit and vainglorious, utterly destructive attempts at "regime change"; the victims of what journalist Naomi Klein, in a splendid work,¹² calls "disaster capitalism"; "shock and awe" economic strategies, and trade agreements designed for Western corporatist gain. They are the victims of policies of "structural adjustment" former World Bank Vice-President for Africa Edward Jaycox, has called "a systematic destructive force in Africa".¹³ Wallis is fully vindicated. These policies, all deliberately designed to benefit the rich North, are now affecting the global North in disturbing, but not altogether unexpected ways.

Racism, xenophobia and a violent, virulent form of homophobia are running rampant, undisguised, and unapologetically across Africa, including South Africa, and many countries across the globe. In the United States, state-sanctioned, racialised violence against unarmed persons of colour continues unabated. We stand aghast at the shameful spectacle of the inhumane treatment of desperate

10 Will, G.F. 2015. Pope Francis's Fact-free Flamboyance. *The Washington Post*, September 18.

11 Wallis, J. 1994. *The Soul of Politics*. New York: The New Press; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, xv

12 Kleinm, N. 2007. *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. New York: Picador.

13 See Keet, D. 1994. Systematic Destruction: IMF/World Bank Social Engineering in Africa. *Track Two Magazine* (February), Cape Town, 10-11.

refugees in the hands of people smugglers on the Mediterranean Sea, and at the borders of many European countries. It is what the pope calls “the globalisation of indifference”.

All this constitutes a deep human crisis, which the pope also recognises as a result of the “rejection of ethics and a rejection of God”.¹⁴ For the pope, God is rejected because God is

*... outside of the categories of the marketplace... [As a result], God can only be seen as uncontrollable, unmanageable, even dangerous, since [God] calls human beings to full realization and to freedom from all forms of enslavement.*¹⁵

Just more than fifteen years ago, German theologian Jürgen Moltmann understood what this means: the crisis we are facing is much more than a human crisis, he argues that

*[o]ur social and political frigidity towards the disadvantaged, the poor and the humiliated is an expression of our frigidity towards God. The cynicism of modern political and economic manipulators is an expression of our contempt for God. We have lost God, and God has left us, so we are bothered, neither by the suffering of others which we have caused, nor by the debts we are leaving behind for the coming generations.*¹⁶

Elsewhere I have made an effort at responding to Moltmann’s valuable insights in this way: In our inner life as in our political responsibility in the public square, we need to rediscover God.¹⁷ And we cannot discover God in the images we tend to find ourselves reflected in. God is not the mirror of our own deepest desires. Neither can we discover God as a distant stranger, a neutral Observer of human actions and, therefore, of human suffering and misery, aloof from and untouched by human pain. God is not the Silent Observer who leaves us to our own devices in order to preserve the maturity of our mind, to respect the integrity of our human reason – postmodernism’s reward for our “independence” from God. We need to discover God in the consequences of our decisions and choices. We must learn, in the words of Moltmann, to discover and “revere God in the victims of our own violence,” as the victims of human greed for world domination.¹⁸

III

I have engaged Pope Francis quite extensively because I have deep appreciation for his prophetic stance on the questions of socio-economic justice, inequality, human dignity, his critique of globalised neo-liberal capitalism and his call for ecological justice – what the ecumenical movement used to call a theology of justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.

That this pope has taken up the cudgels with the powerful forces of the rich and privileged across the world, has spoken up for the global poor and the destitute, the global landless and the homeless, the global oppressed and exploited and dares to name the global indifference with this state of affairs as the evil it is, is a cause for rejoicing and deep gratitude to God. The pope almost speaks with the cadence of a black Baptist preacher when he asks:

Do we realize that something is wrong in a world where there are so many farmworkers without land, so many families without a home, so many labourers without rights, so many

14 Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 48 (para. 57).

15 Ibid.

16 Moltmann, J. 1999. *God for a Secular Society*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 16.

17 The following two paragraphs draw on my 2005 work, *Tenderness of Conscience: African Renaissance and the Spirituality of Politics*. Stellenbosch: AFRICAN SUN MeDIA, 221.

18 Moltmann, *God for a Secular Society*, 20 [my emphasis – AAB].

persons whose dignity is not respected? Do we realize that something is wrong where so many senseless wars are being fought and acts of fratricidal violence are taking place on our very doorstep? Do we realize something is wrong when the soil, water, air and living creatures of our world are under constant threat? So let us not be afraid to say it.¹⁹

It is these last words that help us further in our reflections on our subject today. For the last thirty years my own preaching has been greatly influenced by the Belhar Confession of my own denomination. In fundamental ways, Belhar has become a defining, prophetic presence for us in our witness to and in the world, in the process becoming a witness against ourselves. By far the most well-known words in the confession are the words found in Article 4:

We believe that God has revealed Godself as the One who wishes to bring about justice and true peace on earth; that in a world full of injustice and enmity God is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged, and that God calls the church to follow God in this... that the church must therefore stand by people in any form of suffering and need, which implies, among other things, that the church must witness against any form of injustice, so that justice may roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream; that the church as the possession of God, should stand where God stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged; that in following Christ the church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others. Therefore, we reject any ideology which would legitimate forms of injustice and any doctrine which is unwilling to resist such an ideology in the name of the gospel.

For Belhar, following the Reformed tradition as a whole, it is clear: God's preferential option is for the poor, the destitute and the wronged. Those of us who call upon the name of Jesus must stand with those, because God stands with them in *any form of suffering and need*, and against *any form of injustice*. Every form of injustice is a form of exclusion. Because of the choices God makes, because of where Christ stands, we are, Belhar says, *obligated* "to give ourselves willingly and joyfully to be of benefit and blessing to one another." What Belhar is pleading for is the courage, compassion, and commitment to interrupt the works of evil in the world by the undoing of injustice and by doing the deeds of justice, peace and love required by Yahweh. These are the promises of God of which we are called to be the faithful presence in the world.

So, if the pope rightly calls for a resounding "No!" against an "economy of exclusion", the pope must also denounce a theology and an ecclesiology of exclusion. Women, especially poor, rural women, especially women of colour, and persons from the LGBTI+ community are as much targets and victims of abuse, exploitation and exclusion as are the poor. They are as vulnerable (in the global South often the most vulnerable), as destitute (in the global South often the most destitute), as wronged (in the global South often the most wronged) and we must not be afraid to say it.²⁰

Despite the vilification and vitriolic attacks from the rich and privileged, all respected studies, from Thomas Piketti's masterful work²¹ to the latest Oxfam report on inequality and income distribution

19 Pope Francis. 2015. Speech at the World Meeting of Popular Movements, address at Expo Fair, Santa Cruz de la Sierra, July 9, 2015. Online at: <http://www.news.va/en/news/pope-francis-speech-at-the-world-meeting-of-popular-movements> (Accessed: 25 September 2015).

20 See Pollack, L.M. 2005. Whose Gay Community? Social Class, Sexual Self-Expression, and Gay Community Involvement. *The Sociological Quarterly*, (46), 437-456. Pollack argues that [certainly in the rich North, and specifically in a city like San Francisco] "the visible and political gay community has been characterised as an increasingly middle-class, white institution" and that this middle-class nature "requires economic and psychological resources that are not available to the working class, and thus, may limit the expression of sexual orientation for the working class... Thus it is important to incorporate class differences when addressing the social and the political dynamics of sexual orientation."

21 Piketty, T. 2014. *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

prove the pope has read the global situation correctly. The combined wealth of the world's richest 1% has overtaken that of the other 99% in 2016. More than half of the wealth in the world is in the hands of just 62 individuals, more than is owned by the entire 3.5 billion of the world's population. One in nine people do not have enough to eat and more than 1 billion people live on less than \$1.25 a day. The so-called economic recovery of the last few years was in essence only a recovery for the rich: the richest 1% have seen their share of the global wealth increase from 44% in 2009 to 48% in 2014 and has climbed to more than 50% in 2016. In concrete terms, members of the global elite had an average wealth of \$2.7m per adult in 2014. By comparison, 80% of the world's population had an average of a mere \$3,851 per adult. In a time of economic crisis and calls for more austerity for the working classes, the wealth of the richest 80% doubled in cash terms between 2009 and 2014.²² This is a world shaken by deadly convulsions.

Essential for the Belhar Confession is the indivisibility of God's justice. That is its power, its judgment and its blessing. Belhar sees the scourge of exclusion as inflicted upon *all* who are oppressed, exploited, and robbed of their dignity. Unlike the sexual abuse of children, the pope has not made gender-based violence a cause for grave concern and urgent action. Yet, globally 1 in 3 women will experience physical and/or sexual violence by a partner or non-partner. "Violence against women is a global health problem of epidemic proportions," says the World Health Organization,²³ and the UN calls it "a pandemic in various forms".²⁴ Women and girls, the UN report states, "represent 55% of the estimated 20.9 million victims of forced labour world-wide, and 78% of the estimated 4.5 million forced into sexual exploitation."²⁵

These are shattering statistics and we know they become most devastating when we look for and discover the human face of such abject misery, unnameable pain and indescribable violence. To follow Christ means to stand where God stands, and because God is a God of justice – compassionate, *indivisible* justice – unless justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream for battered, oppressed, exploited, silenced and excluded women, it will not roll down for the economically excluded poor, the landless farmers, or the penniless unemployed.

Neither has the pope, even on his visit to Africa, uttered a single word about the brutal exclusion of LGBTI+ persons, the assault upon their dignity as children of God made in the image of God, and the daily threats to their very lives. The tragic paradox of the unprecedented growth of Christianity in Africa and the global South today is that it is largely driven by a particularly virulent form of Christian neo-fundamentalism not indigenous to Africa but derived from the United States. It is a neo-colonialist, ideologist religiosity, a toxic mix of scriptural selectivity, violent homophobia, and unrelieved patriarchal power.

The latter Christianity's justification of war and violence in the name of Jesus, its religious exclusivism coupled with unbridled political ambition in its so-called dominion theology and its prosperity gospel grounded in the embrace of capitalist consumerist ideology open up new forms of spiritual enslavement for the people of a continent not yet fully recovered from the enslavements of the past. Its impact on African societies and the African church in the matters of justice and equality for

22 See online: www.oxfam.org/en/pressroom/pressrelease/2015-01-19 (Accessed: 23 September 2015).

23 See online: www.who.int/gender_based_violence/en (Accessed: 18 September 2015).

24 See online: www.unwomen/en/what-we-do-ending-violence-against-women-facts-and-figures (Accessed: 18 September 18, 2015).

25 www.unwomen/en/what-we-do-ending-violence-against-women-facts-and-figures.

women and the dignity of LGBTI+ persons is no less than disastrous.²⁶ Uganda is only the most well-known and most obvious example of what has become a growing African scourge.

This is what the pope calls “the globalization of indifference”. Furthered and justified not by the market fundamentalists of global corporatism, but by the Church of Jesus Christ, thriving on theologies and ecclesiologies of exclusion, it calls into question the very essence of our theological and pastoral integrity. What the pope said in Bolivia with regard to the harm done to people and the ecosystem as they are being “punished” by the greed and the callousness of the rich in their “unfettered pursuit of money” is equally true of the harm done to women and LGBTI+ persons. “Behind all this pain, death, and destruction”, the pope said in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, “there is the stench of what Basil of Caesarea called ‘the dung of the devil’”.²⁷ The pope is intentional in this strong language and rightly so. That our theologies and our preaching are shamefully complicit in these daily tragedies should not make us afraid to say it.

Moreover (and we have seen this from Nazi Germany to apartheid South Africa and xenophobic post-apartheid South Africa; from Rwanda to a Western world lethally obsessed with Islamophobia), behind the carefully cultivated hatred, the deliberate dehumanisation, the calculated demonisation and the callous exclusion of the other lies the temptation of the deification of the self; and behind all self-deification lurks the necessity of the annihilation of the other. And, behind all of that lies the unavoidable necessity of the language of self-absolution. It is without question “the stench of the dung of the devil.” Not only should we realise that something is wrong. We should not be afraid to say it.

IV

Before the US Congress the pope, in a single astonishing sentence, offered absolution to the United States for its history of dispossession and dehumanisation, genocide and slavery:²⁸ “It is difficult to judge the past by the criteria of the present”, the pope said to sustained applause.²⁹ I shudder to think of the effect of such words on white South Africans, the vast majority of whom, from former President FW De Klerk on down, still cannot acknowledge that apartheid was wrong, let alone sinful, idolatrous and evil, disastrous for black people, and most of all harmful to themselves.

From one point of view it can be argued that the pope is right. Wide international ratification of the Human Rights Charter and the Geneva Conventions cause us to frown on the savage and inhumane treatment of persons and whole peoples, on genocide, massacres and whole-scale oppression. But do we in fact *do* better? Slavery was more easily tolerated two centuries ago and the genocide of whole peoples in the Global South did not even register until the holocaust in Hitler’s Germany. We have ratified international treaties. Child labour is forbidden in the global North, but the same countries have no moral qualms about the child labour in Africa and elsewhere that produces the tanzanite, gold and cobalt so essential to Western comforts and “civilised standards”. The West is full of human rights rage at the barbaric beheadings carried out by ISIS, but there is no such outrage at the beheadings by their ally Saudi Arabia. The evidence, from the Democratic Republic of the Congo where rape is a weapon of war; to Afghanistan where war means acid in the faces of girls who

26 See Elna Boesak’s as yet unpublished research for her Master’s studies at the University of KwaZulu Natal: “Channeling Justice? A Feminist Exploration of North American Televangelism in a South African Constitutional Democracy.” For the impact of neo-fundamentalist theology on the situation of LGBTI+ persons, see i.a., Boesak, A.A. 2015. *Kairos, Crisis, and Global Apartheid. The Challenge for Prophetic Resistance*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, Chapter 4.

27 Pope Francis, Speech at the World Meeting of Popular Movements, 4.

28 See Zinn, H. 2003. *A People’s History of the United States, 1492-Present*. New York: HarperCollins.

29 See: Pope Francis. 2015. Transcript: Pope Francis’s Speech to Congress. *The Washington Post*, September 24. Online at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/social-issues/transcript-pope-franciss-speech-to-congress> (29 September 2015).

seek education and drones targeting peaceful communities; to daily Israeli brutalities in occupied Palestine, would suggest: not so much, or not at all.

So the question remains: which criteria would that be? It is not as if one can safely argue that the criteria used to judge the present – the denial of rampant, unrepentant racism, the lust for endless war for the sake of endless profits, the fascination with drone warfare, the arrogant justifications and the lies about civilian deaths, the normalisation of torture, the idolatry of money, the casual indifference to the suffering of others – are demonstrably better than the criteria of the past.

At the World Meeting of Popular Movements in Bolivia, the pope did much more than just slate “all forms of colonialism, old and new”. He also repented for the “many grave sins [which] were committed against the native peoples of America in the name of God”, and asked the Church “to kneel before God and implore forgiveness for the past and present sins of her sons and daughters.” But because the pope knows the Church had not only sinned against God, but also against the people, he went on, “I humbly ask forgiveness, not only for the offenses of the Church herself, but also for crimes committed against the native peoples during the so-called conquest of America.”³⁰

One cannot help but be moved by such humble, uplifting courage. Here the pope is speaking of the crimes of the colonialists against the native peoples, but pointedly also of the shameful complicity of the Church in those crimes. He was not afraid to say it, because the pope knows, as well as we all do, that the effects of and ongoing generational trauma from the violence of the past continue to cast a deep and dark shadow over the lives of historically-oppressed and enslaved communities. The pope knows, and we know it too, that the unrepented sins and unaddressed wrongs of the past are not forgotten, they are *unremembered*, by which I mean deliberately covered up, trivialised, and normalised for ideological purposes by a version of history and an interpretation of the present unredeemed by truth.³¹ But if they are unremembered, they cannot be forgiven.

In Bolivia, the pope was not afraid to say it, and in doing so, he interrupted the deadly indifference which denies the past, refuses remorse and repentance, fails to ask for forgiveness, and nullifies the possibility of healing, a reality tragically evident to all with eyes to see. Before the US Congress he let that opportunity go by. What a difference such a sentence would have made before that immensely powerful political body, the collective representation of America’s volatile denialism and hardheartedness on these matters.

V

How do we uphold God’s promises in a world shaken by deadly convulsions, where the vast majority of God’s people are outcasts, leftovers, deprived of the joy of the gospel, the good news that Jesus has indeed come to proclaim the kingdom of God, to bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour? (Luke 4:18, 19). I would like to suggest that we begin by doing as Jesus asks and Bonhoeffer discovered he had to in order to understand faithful discipleship: repent, and believe the good news. We are in no position to offer comfort, compassion and justice to a suffering, bleeding humanity overwhelmed by a petrifying indifference, if we do not believe that there *is* good news they should hear. Or is it that the good news for the poor is such a shattering judgment on our own lack of prophetic faithfulness that we dare not say it?

30 Pope Francis, Speech at World Meeting of Popular Movements, 4.

31 See my treatment of the concept “unremembering as ideological tool” in *The Tenderness of Conscience*, Chapter 4.

We should work much harder to develop a theology, ethics and hermeneutics of liberation, healing, and inclusion, that will be able to counter all forms of domination and subjugation, imperial and global, ecclesial, personal and in the public square. We should learn to resist the temptation to see the global realities through the eyes of the powerful and privileged, but rather through the eyes of the suffering, the weak and the vulnerable, the dehumanised and the demonised, the outcasts and the excluded. Our theology – and hence our preaching – should be anchored in a theology attuned to the cries of the poor and oppressed because I believe John Calvin was right: the cries of the oppressed are the cries from the very heart of God. Whereas the pope makes a distinction between the voice of God and the cries of the poor, Calvin is much more radical. “It is then the same,” Calvin says, “as though God heard Godself when God hears the cries and groaning of those who cannot bear injustice.”³² God presents Godself as the poor and the oppressed.

We must be much more alert in our awareness of the devastating role religion continues to play in global wars and local conflicts, and we must be much more vigorous in our testimony and work against violence in all its forms. We cannot preach as if we were not living in an imperial reality. Empires create not only lethal realities of domination and subjugation. They also, Walter Wink reminds us, create myths; and foremost is the “myth of redemptive violence”. Instead of acknowledging the violence it uses because it is needed for continued domination, subjugation and exploitation, the empire “enshrines the belief that violence saves, that war brings peace, that might makes right.” Consequently, violence is not only necessary; it is the only thing that “works”. “If a god is what one turns to when all else fails,” Wink argues, and he is absolutely right, “violence certainly functions as a god. It demands from its devotees an absolute obedience-unto-death... It, and not Judaism or Christianity or Islam, is the dominant religion of our society today.”³³ How can we know this and be afraid to say it?

At the heart of the gospel is the living, breathing vibrancy of audacious hope. And it is that “great hope” Gollwitzer reminded us of; it is the hope “that does not disappoint.” (Romans 5:2) We intervene in the history of the hearers by the proclamation of this hope. I do not mean hope as some vague theological, philosophical concept or religious construct. I speak of hope as African Church father Augustine did when he spoke of hope as a mother who has two daughters: Anger and Courage.³⁴ Anger at the way things are, and courage to see that they do not remain the same. The anger of hope means that one refuses to accept something that is wrong, to put up with what is driving one to despair. The courage of hope means to have the firm resolve and commitment to pull oneself to one’s feet and to attack injustice, wherever it may be found, even if one has to pay a price for doing so. To proclaim and live hope is to have the anger and the courage that is needed to interrupt the endless flow of indifference that is engulfing the world. There is no hope without anger and courage, and we must not be afraid to say it.

That we should say it is as important as *how* we say it. Do we say it with truth, with courage, with compassion; do we say it with faithfulness to those who suffer? “Let us not be afraid to say it” means that the pope knows, and we know, that because the perpetrators of these wrongs are powerful and rich and privileged we are tempted to speak in a language guaranteed not to give offence. We speak a language couched in such caution, in such ambiguity, such fear, that it becomes almost meaningless. It is the kind of preaching that unforgettable prophet of South Africa Beyers Naudé,

32 See Calvin, J. 2010. *Habakkuk 1:2. Commentary on the Twelve Minor Prophets*. Transl. J Owen. Charleston, SC: BiblioLife; see also Boesak, A, *Kairos, Crisis and Global Apartheid*, 11-13

33 Wink, W. 2012. *The Powers That Be: Theology for a New Millennium*. New York: Galilee Doubleday, 42.

34 I consider this matter in more detail in Boesak, A.A. 2014. *Dare We Speak of Hope? Searching for a Language of Life in Faith and Politics*. Grand Rapids MI and Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, Chapter 2.

called “opposition by evasion”.³⁵ He means opposition to God by evasion of the truth, obedience and our prophetic calling.

We must not only break the silence. We must speak a different language. Our language must be a prophetic, liberating, transformative, healing, inclusive language, the counter language to the language of distortion and perversion, of hate and violence, discrimination and demonisation; of subjugation and domination, of exclusion and extremism. It must be a language counter to the imperial language of pre-determined mendacity, pre-emptive legitimation and post-facto justification.

Let me close with this thought: years ago I discovered the Danish pastor Kaj Munk, like Bonhoeffer in Germany prominent in the resistance against Hitler on the streets as well as in the pulpit. Speaking of the testimony of the church and its preaching in his own dangerous times, Munk said that

*[w]hen fire and murder are unleashed upon the people of the earth, it is our task to denounce in the name of the God of love, everything which we know to be the work of the devil. When the deck is loaded, when cowardice heaps praises upon that which before was recognized as despicable, then it is the task of the church to realize that the signs of the church have always been the dove, the lamb, the lion and the fish, but never the chameleon.*³⁶

Remembering this is the promise and presence of prophetic faithfulness.

35 See Naudè, B. 1963. Flame of Fire and Sledgehammer, in his *My Decision*. Johannesburg: The Christian Institute, 14-16.

36 Quoted in Boesak, A.A. 1984. *If This is Treason, I am Guilty*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans/Geneva: WCC, 47.

Is the Voice of the Church Compromised in South Africa?

3

Sipho Mahokoto¹

Response to Allan Boesak's address: *to not be Afraid to Say it: Preaching as Promise and Presence of Prophetic Faithfulness.*

Introduction

It is an honour and privilege to respond to and engage with a public theologian and a prophetic church leader, such as Boesak. I must say, I have known him since the years of the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. He attended the funeral of the famous Cradock Four² – Matthew Goniwe, Fort Calata, Sicelo Mhlawuli and Sparrow Mkhonto, who were murdered and their bodies burned by police in the eighties. Boesak's paper is very moving and highlights a number of significant issues that require our attention as individual Christians and churches. But it also underlines our failure as churches and individuals in not only failing to prophetically address these issues, but also our failure in living up to the standards required from us by the Word of God. Of course, like Christians, non-Christians struggle with moral issues and this will be dealt with in my response to this paper. But Christians need to respond what is often called "a prophetic" way, without fear of favour. And this is why "prophetic preaching" also became significant during the years of the struggle against apartheid.

Preaching during the struggle

It was the likes of Allan Boesak and Emeritus Archbishop Tutu who were the ones that spoke out against apartheid, who were not afraid to preach against the injustice of the system. This was in line with what Boesak proposes in his paper, namely "to not be afraid to say it". The preacher is listened to and is taken seriously by the community of believers because he or she acts as the mouthpiece

1 Dr Sipho Mahokoto is senior lecturer in Christian ethics in the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch University. At the time of the conference he served as senior programme coordinator of EFSA (Ecumenical Foundation of Southern Africa), liaison officer and scribe of the National Church Leaders' Consultation. He is also a minister in the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA).

2 Cradock is my hometown and I have known these leaders personally. They were brutally murdered by the apartheid government at Blue Water Bay in the vicinity of Port Elizabeth. This brought fear and shock to the Lingelihle community in Cradock where we all resided. I remember that from the day we heard of their assassination. Everyone in Lingelihle was ordered to wear a black cloth on the left arm until after their funeral. This was a sign of the black community's mourning the death of the four men.

of God, sent by God to deliver a message of hope and promise from God to God's people. Boesak highlights the significance of a preacher with reference to the words of Helmut Gollwitzer:

They will discover that in no other form of speech are things taken so seriously, is our whole existence so challenged, even put at risk. In no form of speech does our word itself so much take the form of action, of intervention in the history of the hearers, as in this.³

In South Africa, many sermons during the apartheid era were indeed prophetic and challenging, focusing specifically on the justice of God and the injustices of the time. They were delivered to broken, wounded and marginalised black Christian communities. Preaching in black communities in South Africa during apartheid also addressed the pain and suffering endured by those communities and their longing to find and understand God's presence in their predicament. Sermons were not event-less, but more focused in the misery of the people. However, prophetic preaching played a significant role in those years, not only by addressing misery, but also in reviving hope and ensuring the faithful of God's presence in the midst of misery. This is also what Boesak relates to when he speaks about Helmut Gollwitzer, who chose to belong to Christ, to stand where Christ stood, with the despised, the unchosen and persecuted, to stand against those that were chosen by the powerful, those deemed worthy in Hitler's struggle for world domination.

This was also the case in South Africa. Preachers such as Boesak chose to stand where God stood, with poor and marginalised South Africans against the white dominance. Today we are still faced by the question of how, in a democratic South Africa, do we still preach to the poor and downtrodden who remain in our midst? How do we make ourselves uncomfortable in and with our superior positions, our richness, in and with the inequalities in the contemporary South African society? Do sermons today challenge us to a point whereby we feel uncomfortable when we see the expanding gap between rich and poor and other sad realities of life around us? The realities of life in South Africa today calls for more than just prayer, it also calls for prophetic preaching, for us "not to be afraid to say it". Boesak made this point clear when relates to Gollwitzer's prophetic preaching when he that saw the power of God can challenge the power of evil, when words themselves become action and when one realises the extent of the risk that Christ took to save the world. There's a saying, "actions speak louder than words". This seems to be true, as indicated by Boesak in his paper with his reference to Richard Lischer's definition of preaching. This is true as prophetic preaching is more than a mere speech; it is both a speech and a symbolic action. Hence I referred earlier to making ourselves uncomfortable, leaving our comfort zones, our pews where we listen to the Word of God and listen to God anew from those zones of discomfort at the margins of society.

In these uncomfortable areas we may just hear God differently and more clearly. It is here where we may experience the pain of those who suffer and realise that we dare not remain silent. In the cries of the suffering we may hear the cries from the heart of a wounded God. If anyone tries to silence these cries because they might offend the powerful and comfortable, Boesak says, this will be an assault upon the holiness of God. Hence my next and the final comment that concerns the question why the voice of the church is so silent in contemporary South Africa and whether it has been compromised, unlike the way it was under apartheid, when in many churches spoke up against the system.

3 Gollwitzer, H. 1980. *The Way of Life. Sermons in a Time of World Crisis*. Transl. D Cairns. Edinburgh, T&T Clarke, xi.

Is the voice of the church compromised in contemporary South Africa?

The question on the absence of the voice of the church is often heard in South Africa today. The question is often coupled with another significant one, namely “Who speaks on behalf of the church in South Africa?” South Africans, including the media, are so used to listen to the likes of Archbishop Tutu and think that, whenever he addresses the media concerning challenges within the country, he speaks on behalf of the church. And, when the Tutu’s are silent, then the church is silent too. If he does not say anything, then the church is quiet. The South African Council of Churches (SACC) that represents about 26 member churches and can surely speak on behalf of the churches it represents. But, the silence of the SACC, too, causes many to ask where the church is.

The questions above arise from the many challenges that South Africans (Christian and non-Christian) face in all spheres of life today. Boesak reminds us that the church must never be blind to or silent on any injustice or any unjust status quo. The church’s prophetic voice should challenge any unjust status quo. The prophet’s voice should ring out from the rooftops proclaiming that the world as it is today, is *wrong*; that the powers of this world are not invincible; that their words are not unchallengeable; that the present state of things is neither irreversible, nor God-ordained, as Boesak says.

Among the challenges that South Africa face today and that we often hear of, is the challenge of moral decay. This issue is also alluded to in Boesak’s paper in his reference to Jim Wallis’ views on the (moral) state of affairs in the USA. According to Boesak, Wallis laments the fact that in the USA “... most basic virtues of civility, responsibility, justice and integrity seem to be collapsing. We appear to be losing the ethics derived from personal commitment, social purpose and spiritual meaning.” And Wallis concludes that “[o]ur intuition tells us the depth of the crisis we face demands more than politics as usual. An illness of the spirit has spread across the land.”⁴ The illness of spirit is global, Boesak adds. I must say this is the case in South Africa and it is visible everywhere in society.

It is exactly this reason that in December 2012 church leaders issued a statement titled “The church speaks...for such a time as this...” This was accompanied by a covering letter signed by Archbishop Thabo Makgoba on behalf of the National Church Leaders’ Consultation (NCLC).⁵ According to Ernst Conradie, the statement was conveying a message warning President Jacob Zuma that South Africa was sliding into a state of “moral decay” and observed that South Africans are yearning for leadership to restore hope amid growing unhappiness about a generation of leaders, who seem to have largely lost their “moral compass”.⁶ The concern of the church leaders regarding moral decay in South Africa also emphasises the fact that churches are faced with the challenge of unity in order to influence behaviour and morally-good citizenship in society. This statement was issued just before the Mangaung conference of the ANC in December 2012.

4 See Wallis, J. 1994. *The Soul of Politics*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, xv.

5 The National Church Leaders’ Consultation is a meeting of senior Christian church leaders that has been hosted by the Ecumenical Foundation of Southern Africa (EFSA) since January 2009 in Stellenbosch, initially under the leadership of Presiding Bishop Ivan Abrahams of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA). At the consultations church leaders meet to discuss common concerns, especially with regard to socio-political and economic issues in the country. On the last day of these meetings a press statement is formulated on the resolutions accepted during the meeting. The present chairperson of the NCLC, Archbishop Thabo Makgoba, was elected in 2011, when Bishop Ivan Abrahams accepted a new position as General Secretary of the World Methodist Council in the USA. Amongst other things, it must be noted that the NCLC does not replace the church leaders’ forum meetings organised by the SACC. The NCLC only offers a different platform for discussing the burning issues of the day by church leaders themselves.

6 See Conradie, E. 2013. Notions and Forms of Ecumenicity: Some South Africa perspectives. In: EM Conradie (ed.), *South African Perspectives on Notions and Forms of Ecumenicity*. Stellenbosch: AFRICAN SUN MeDIA, 13.

The above statement addressed various groups of people in South African society, not only political leaders, but also church leaders, economists and trade unions, as well as the poor. The church leaders declared:

In faithfulness to our Lord, and in looking at South Africa post-Marikana and pre-Mangaung, we now speak out, in a moment that does indeed have the qualities of a 'Kairos moment', a special moment where we discern that God is speaking to us in a particularly urgent tones, a moment that requires transformational leadership and action. We could have opted to remain silent, as we are sometimes urged to be silent in evil times (Amos 5:13 and Ps. 37:7), but our silence at this crucial moment may be interpreted as consent or contentment, and for that reason and from a spirit of love, we now speak...⁷

South Africa is facing many other challenges that arise from this state of moral decay. These are racism, xenophobic attacks, sexual and gender-based violence (such as the rape of women and children), many other forms of violence and a general lack of justice and reconciliation. These are also the issues that Boesak highlights in his paper with reference to the LGBTI+ community, who are targets and victims of abuse, exploitation and exclusion, as are the poor. A challenge church leaders in South Africa recently referred to was how to respond to so-called Pentecostal pastors encouraging congregants to eat snakes or grass and drink petrol in the name of religion! This does not only pose a threat to Christian religion, but is an insult to the God of this religion. The church must raise its voice on such social ills.

In an appeal for prophetic preaching and priestly roles of the church, the director of UNAIDS South Africa, Catherine Sozi, challenged the church leaders during the NCLC in Johannesburg in October 2013. In her presentation titled "More than a prayer: Your response to sexual violence and HIV",⁸ Sozi observed that, whilst we have known all along that women and girls still face a higher risk of HIV infection and that violence (specifically sexual violence) fuels the epidemic in the case of women and girls, our actions are a cause for concern. She mentioned that during her visit to the Eastern Cape three weeks before the consultation, she attended a traditional ceremony that was held after a month-long workshop that taught adolescent girls the values of looking after themselves and the promotion of abstinence. Sozi states that during this process it became evident that one of the teenage girls was being repeatedly raped by her uncle, at their homestead. Sozi further observed:

As many survivors do, she and her mother turned to her church for support, but found it lacking in many ways. For one, both felt that they were being blamed for the actions of the uncle – the same sentiments followed at the police and court. There are many such examples. A question often asked by victims of sexual violence – who do we turn to? Do I turn to my priest? Would he be receptive if I turned to him for support? How will he react when he hears the rapist is my husband? Those who have been sexually assaulted suffer in silence due to the stigma associated with the crime.⁹

Sozi's presentation appealed to the church leaders to not only reflect on these realities, but to also act upon such challenges. She warned church leaders that some of these perpetrators and victims may be Christian and members of our own churches!

7 Online at: <http://www.sacc.org.za/Dec2012/The church speaks.pdf> (Accessed: 28 November 2012).

8 See Sozi, C. 2013. More than a prayer: Your response to sexual violence and HIV. Unpublished paper read at the Consultation of the Church Leaders on the 15 October 2013, Johannesburg. Available on request from the office of the National Religious Association for Social Development (NRASD).

9 See Sozi, More than a prayer, 3.

Indeed, it seems South Africa is sliding deeper into a state of moral decay. The above are only evident signs of moral decay in the country. At the consultation, church leaders present acknowledged that they have not fulfilled their role in helping the country towards unity, reconciliation and social justice. For a very long time the voice of the church in South Africa was silent, especially regarding so many life threatening issues in society.

The churches can no longer remain silent in cases of misery and the suffering of God's people and creation. The church is called to preserve life, to be a peacemaker, and to serve justice in the world where there is a huge gap between the rich and the poor. As mentioned, all of this touches on the significance of the church's vocation in society, especially its prophetic role on issues of peace, reconciliation and justice, as well as its priestly task of caring for the needy and those who suffer injustice. The Belhar Confession explains these tasks very clearly, especially its articles on reconciliation and justice. Even more, Belhar concludes that the church must stand where God stands, against injustice and with the wronged; that in following Christ the church must witness against all the powerful and privileged, who selfishly pursue their own interests and thus control and harm others.¹⁰ Boesak, too, emphasised this point by saying that, for the Belhar Confession, the indivisibility of God's justice (and that is its power, its judgement and its blessing) is essential. The question for URCSA members is why it is so difficult for their Church to embody its own confession? URCSA still struggles to embrace unity, reconciliation and justice. It also struggles with the question of homosexuality, especially whether people from this community may be allowed to practice as ministers within this church.

The Belhar Confession is a dead confession if it is not lived and practised. The prophetic message of Belhar on justice and reconciliation must not only be embraced and preached by Christians, it must be lived and practiced in our daily lives. The challenge within URCSA – and perhaps also in South Africa in general – is the lack of a connection between values and reality. It does not help URCSA to acknowledge the values and the prophetic message of the Belhar Confession on unity, reconciliation and justice if in its life and practice the church remains divided along racial lines. The same can be said about South Africa.

The responsibility of the church towards humanity and God's creation, especially regarding its call for justice, peace and the integrity of creation, is well articulated in a publication spearheaded by the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa and the Evangelical Reformed Church of Germany. In the book, *Dreaming a Different World. Globalisation and Justice for Humanity and the Earth. The Challenge of Accra Confession for the Churches*, these churches declare:

We are shocked by stories of injustice worldwide and disturbed by accounts of ecological destruction; we are moved by experiences of oppression, violence and being violated; experiences of exclusion and marginalization, often of minorities; experience of human trafficking and modern-day slavery; experiences of vulnerability and neglect, lack of education, employment, protection, health, dignity, more often than not the experiences of women and children.

These churches further state that they:

[t]herefore ... lament – with the cries of your afflicted people and the wounds of your suffering creation. Together, from North and South, we are comforted by the gospel, by the common faith we share and the common tradition in which we stand, by your Word and Spirit. Being claimed by you, we long together for your reign of justice and peace, for your presence and

10 See Botha, J & Naudé, P. 2011. *Good News to Confess: The Belhar Confession and the road of acceptance*. Wellington: Bible Media, 22.

*your salvation – for freedom from these disturbing realities, these harsh inequalities, this cultural domination, this abysmal disparity, this injustice, this destruction; we dream of your promises of shalom. We cry and plead, we sigh and pray together for our broken and threatened world. Praying, we commit ourselves together to care for your creatures and your creation.*¹¹

Through its prophetic voice, the church must “not be afraid to say it”, to say no to these social ills in our communities. The weakness of the church and the lack of its voice in South Africa is compromised because some church leaders – including the first deputy president of the SACC, Rev Frank Chikane and others – were or are affiliated to political parties while they are either in national church positions or still serving as ministers in their respective denominations. This is also coupled by the lack of trust amongst church leaders, exactly because of this.

Not so long ago, in April 2015, I circulated an email to all national church leaders in South Africa during the spate of xenophobic attacks in the country and the so-called “Nkandla Gate”¹² asking the following question: What are we doing as church leaders to demand accountability? One senior church leader wrote back to me and said:

Dear Siph,

Yours is a most difficult question to answer:

- 1. It is difficult because as church leaders we have lost the unity of vision and purpose which we once had;*
- 2. It is difficult because in the absence of that unity of vision and purpose, some of our erstwhile colleagues have abandoned ship and been co-opted by those in power;*
- 3. It is difficult because many pseudo-church leaders have mushroomed up all over the place and been immediately absorbed into “chaplaincy” positions at national, provincial and local level, in the president’s, premiers’ and mayors’ offices, where they are regarded as the official voice of the church;*
- 4. It is difficult because many among the church leaders have become politically aligned, and in that way have compromised the group as a whole;*
- 5. It is difficult because many of us no longer work off the same traditional moral standard, but rather have shifted from that standard to one that fits in with the demands of “the modern world”;*
- 6. It is difficult because some of us are not prepared to put Christ, His Teaching as well as the demands of the tried and tested teachings and practice of the Christian church down the centuries, above the demands of political correctness, but prefer to be in tune with the times (I could give examples, but that would be to state the obvious!); and*
- 7. It is difficult because we will not be able to agree as to WHO to hold accountable, with regard to WHAT they should give an account!*

Nevertheless, I support you in raising the question, and would support you in moving for a major meeting of church leaders of long standing, namely those who are tried and tested, not the Johnny-come-latelys who seem to be in favour!

11 See Boesak, A.; Weusmann, J. & Amjad-Ali, C (eds). 2010. *Dreaming a Different World: Globalisation and Justice for Humanity and the Earth. The Challenge of the Accra Confession for the Churches*. Stellenbosch: Globalisation Project, 80-81.

12 *Nkandla* is in KwaZulu Natal Province where the house of President Jacob Zuma is situated. This residence was at the centre of a scandal of an alleged misappropriation of millions of Rands worth of apparently unwarranted “security upgrades” paid from government coffers.

The above response highlights many things related to the compromised voice of the church in South Africa. It also underlines that our ecumenism is at stake and that the church will find it very difficult to speak prophetically in this situation ... perhaps individual church leaders can still do.

Conclusion

The church is called by God to be the church of significance that carries a huge responsibility of being an instrument of reconciliation and fostering social justice of God in the world. Thus, the church cannot neglect its vocation in the world. The disunity of the churches in South Africa strongly reflects the weakness of their *koinonia*. The weakness of their *koinonia* also reflects the reality of their ecumenism challenge. The end result of these weaknesses hinders the strong voice and the credible witness and service of the church in society. The church must avoid a situation of being absorbed by politics and state as it may easily lead to a state of being immoral. The challenge with moral decay is that it kills the spirit of human values and the values of *Ubuntu*.¹³

The notion of *Ubuntu* is an African concept that might also enrich ecclesial discourses that seek to understand the close relationship between reconciliation and justice. It refers to the idea that a human person is a person through other persons. *Ubuntu* is – if viewed in Christian theological terms – to look at Christ through the eyes of the other. Archbishop Desmond Tutu writes:

*Ubuntu means that in a real sense even the supporters of apartheid were victims of the vicious system which they implemented and which they supported so enthusiastically. Our humanity was intertwined. The humanity of the perpetrator of apartheid's atrocities was caught up and bound up in that of his victim whether he like it or not.*¹⁴

Tutu is of the opinion that restorative justice is one kind of justice that is characteristic of traditional African jurisprudence. He points out that the central concern is not retribution or punishment, but in the spirit of *Ubuntu* it is the healing of breaches, the redressing of imbalances and the restoration of broken relationships.

In his definition of *Ubuntu*, the late Russel Botman links it to hospitality and compassion. As he puts it:

*[i]t is Ubuntu to love and care for others, to be kindly towards others, to be hospitable. It is Ubuntu to be just and fair to be compassionate and to help others in distress. It is Ubuntu to be truthful and honest so that people know that one's word is one's honour. It is Ubuntu to be the Church in Africa.*¹⁵

Botman's definition reminds us not to separate our understanding of *Ubuntu* and compassionate justice because *Ubuntu* is to love and care for others. Botman underscores that we live by the

13 *Ubuntu* is always defined as: "Umntu, ngumntu ngabanye abantu", meaning, "A person is a person through other persons."

14 See Tutu, D. 1999. *No Future without Forgiveness*. New York: Double Day / Random House, 35. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5842.1999.tb00012.x>

15 See Botman, H.R. 1995. Dealing with Diversity. In: D Buchanan & J Hendriks (eds), *Meeting the Future: Christian Leadership in South Africa*. Randburg: Knowledge Resources, 169. Piet Naudé also cites Albert Nolan's book *God in South Africa*, where Albert Nolan underscores that *Ubuntu* is the most important African concept to depict the shift from being "objects of" to being "subjects in" society. Naudé further notes that Malusi Mpumwana also seeks equivalence between *Ubuntu* and *imago Dei* as God is reflected in love for the other, especially with regard to the practice of social love marked by hospitality and accommodation of the other. Furthermore, Naudé reflects on the work of Russel Botman, who links the concept of *Ubuntu* to Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Christological definition of community: "Christ exists as community. The question 'who is Jesus Christ for us today?' reveals itself as the question of the very existence of the inquirer and it is the question about love for one's neighbour, says Botman. He concludes that the 'who' question provides a link to *Ubuntu* as a communitarian notion of being-in-community." See Naudé, P, *Neither Calendar nor Clock*, 181.

promise of the transformation of the human race, the creation of wholeness, sharing and justice in the “household of God”. For him, a household is a place of dialogue and the members within the household are a community where dialogical communication frequently flows between people of different genders, ethnic origins, economic status, or religious orientation.¹⁶ Within the household of God, the members of the household resort to dialogue when dealing with conflict for the sake of encouraging peace, true reconciliation and justice. This is what the church is called and stands for: to be the household of God and the bearer of hope. Within this household of God that embraces *Ubuntu*, the members of this household welcome each other in a hospitable way. Perhaps this is also what Boesak also proposes in a nutshell, a church that embraces *Ubuntu* and that is also not afraid to say no to exclusions and injustices. The remaining question we need to ask ourselves is that of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, namely whether we still of any use as church leaders and individual Christians in our unfriendly world.

¹⁶ See Botman, *Dealing with Diversity*, 168-169.

Preaching in a Time of Protest? On Solidarity, Justice, and the Flourishing of All

4

Nadia Marais¹

Response to Allan Boesak's address: *To Not be Afraid to Say It: Preaching as promise and presence of prophetic faithfulness.*

It is a vibrant, albeit complex, time in South African history, to be *in* South Africa – let alone to be South African. At the end of last year protests at tertiary institutions grew into a nationwide movement and under the banner #feesmustfall members of that movement stood at the very gates of South African democracy itself – parliament – to demand justice for those who “know Apartheid only from hearsay”.² The protests, as you may well know, continue into this year and highlight a variety of related challenges – not only opposition to increases in university tuition fees, but also the outsourcing of university personnel, violence on campuses (by security companies, police, as well as by perpetrators of what is being called “rape culture”), and the (un)availability of university accommodation. These are some of the events to the background of my listening to Allan Boesak's address today and which, for me, raise a number of questions in response to his portrayal of preaching as promise and presence of prophetic faithfulness.

A first question has to do with the meaning of the notion solidarity as, in the midst of the events I refer to, it is not altogether clear how churches should position themselves. Last year, the National Church Leaders' Consultation last year came out in support of the #feesmustfall movement. However, many churches have joined in the recently formed #colourblind movement, which has responded to (also recent) incidents of violent racism on university campuses by praying publicly for unity, peace, and reconciliation. According to a newspaper article in the *Mail & Guardian*, the expectations that student protesters have of churches vary: some regard the public prayers for peace as a “silencing tactic” and question what they regard as the lack of churches' support for #feesmustfall; others (including a number of theologians) support the role that churches are playing in working toward the de-escalation of violence on campuses and participate in such initiatives as the #prayerwalk events on various campuses.³

At home, the complexity of the notion of “solidarity” would become even more evident during a recent sitting of student parliament here at Stellenbosch University, where a vote of no confidence was brought against two Students' Representative Council members because their solidarity with the #feesmustfall movement was questioned. Coincidentally, the meeting took place in a local Dutch

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2 Botman, H.R. 1993. *Discipleship as Transformation? Towards a Theology of Transformation*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of the Western Cape, Bellville, South Africa; Botman, H.R. 2007. *A Multicultural University with a Pedagogy of Hope for Africa*. Unpublished address at the occasion of his installation as Rector and Vice-chancellor of Stellenbosch University, 11 April.

3 Pilane, P. 2016. Protest, politics and prayers at South Africa's universities. *Mail & Guardian*, February, 26. Online at: <https://mg.co.za/article/2016-02-25-protest-politics-and-prayers-at-south-africas-universities> (Accessed: 7 November 2015).

Reformed Church that, afterwards, again raised serious questions regarding the role of churches (particularly the Dutch Reformed Church) in student protests.

At least for me, this lead to the question – and a first question that I wish to address to you, Professor Boesak – as to what is meant by solidarity, keeping in mind the complexity of churches' role in this particular context of protest. It would appear as if many students expect that the church should not in any way critique the manner of, or motivation for, these protests lest they be accused of undermining the movement – and that the only role that can be foreseen for churches is that of unquestioning support. The question, then is perhaps not so much *whether* churches should be in solidarity with the oppressed, but whom of the many groups of protestors that claim to be “oppressed” and, therefore, to whom such solidarity is owed – and, of course, what solidarity would now, in the midst of these particular events, require.

A second question has to do with those who do the work of confessing justice. Professor Boesak, you referred to “the promise of covenantal justice and freedom that has held Israel fast from the days of Moses to Isaiah and Jeremiah; from Amos to Micah; from John the Baptist to Jesus of Nazareth.” Yet here, in this “great tradition”, I do miss the voice of such female theologians such Mary – and even more specifically her confession by way of the *Magnificat* that has lent important phrases and cadences and emphases to the formulation of the Belhar Confession. Her role in signalling the faithfulness of God, justice for the poor and the oppressed, courage to speak when so few female confessions of God is heard in the biblical text (or to not be afraid to say it!) surely warrants deeper reflection. Gustavo Gutiérrez, for example, would himself be “especially interested in the paths taken by Mary’s language – and silences – about God”.⁴ I wonder about this because it seems as if women (but also other groups that you refer to, such as the LGBTI+ community) are often regarded as the passive recipients of justice, as those who require justice, but not as those who actively participate in confessing justice and, even more particularly, the God of justice.

Again, already last year it became apparent that in our current context of protest female voices are of the utmost importance, seeing as female student leaders played a pivotal role in the #feesmustfall movement (including in negotiations with management and government and in the mobilisation of fellow protesters). One such a person is the Nigerian-South African student Lovelyn Nwadeyi, who, in a recent speech here on the Stellenbosch campus, spoke about the courage to do justice and to have compassion for those who are excluded. Nwadeyi’s speech – that has been published widely and recently been described as “the speech that won’t go away” – is reminiscent of Mary’s Song, the confession that won’t go away. My second question to you, professor Boesak is, thus, whether confessions by women, such as Mary and Hannah (and dare I say Lovelyn!), could not and should not play a more prominent role in the naming of injustice and in proclaiming the good news of the God of justice, as those who participate in doing theology.

A third question has to do with your call to “speak a different language” that you explained to be a language that is “prophetic, liberating, transformative, healing, inclusive language.” This, I think, is what theologians like David Kelsey, Serene Jones, Mercy Oduyoye and Denise Ackermann would perhaps call the language of “human flourishing”. I for one, would certainly agree that (in the words of Belhar and yourself, professor) we are “to give ourselves willingly and joyfully to be of benefit and blessing to one another.” David Kelsey would express exactly this view when he describes “flourishing” as being a blessing to our neighbours, and “blossoming” as “manifesting the type of beauty of which a given life is capable.”⁵

4 Gutiérrez, G. 1991. *The God of Life*. Transl. MJ O’Connell. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 165.

5 Kelsey, D. 2007. *Eccentric Existence: A Theological Anthropology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Westminster John Knox, 315.

Of course, the rhetoric of blessing – as you yourself pointed out – is not altogether unproblematic, in that it is also a favourite of prosperity preachers (one need only look up #blessed on social media to see how widely, and indiscriminately, this one word is used!). Therefore, I wonder and would like to put to you a third question, Professor Boesak, whether the “different language” that we are to speak does not also involve the working out of a theological grammar that includes the rhetoric of human and ecological flourishing? If it is indeed true, as you say, that language shapes our worlds of meaning, then how we *imagine* the good news of the gospel – in addition to our “preaching” of the good news, our “believing” of the good news and our “doing” of the good news – surely belongs to the task of prophetic faithfulness?

I can ask more questions – among which would be the curious reason why you refer to ecological justice, but do not include also Pope Francis’ second encyclical, *Laudato Si’*. However, for now, perhaps the questions regarding the meaning of the church’s solidarity, the lack of female confessing voices, and the rhetoric of flourishing is enough. Let me, therefore, thank you for a deeply challenging and fascinating address. As we, in South Africa and in the many contexts represented here, grapple with manifold forms of injustice, oppression and exclusion in our worlds, let me end with a confession: I wonder – all the more so in the light of current events in South Africa – whether the work of making peace is not included in the absurdity that you referred to. I also wonder whether now (when there is widespread disillusionment regarding the reconciliation and peace that was negotiated before the transition to democracy in 1994 and during the TRC hearings from 1996 to 1998) is not the most important time in our history to grapple with what it means to be makers of peace.

Working for peace is, of course, a risky business since it can all too easily become synonymous with a passive acceptance of injustice – and, in the process it may become the very opposite of anger and courage and hope; it can be abused, by silencing the voices of protest; it can be dangerous, by manipulating communities into superficial courteous relationships; it can be dishonest, by privileging relationships that lack both authenticity and integrity. Ultimately, working for peace can become the very thing that *shalom* is not, if it does not have in mind the fullness of life, the flourishing, of *all*.

And yet, I am reminded of another of Jesus’ sermons – this time not in a religious establishment, but beneath the open sky – where the most unlikely of people would be called blessed: the poor, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the persecuted. And then, yes ... also those who work toward peace. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.

On not only Speaking, but Performing the Truth

5

Marnus Havenga¹

Response to Allan Boesak's address: *To Not be Afraid to Say It: Preaching as promise and presence of prophetic faithfulness.*

... it is only as ... a real and available practice, that the Christian evangel (and, in particular, the claim that Christ crucified has been raised from the dead) has any meaning at all; only if the form of Christ can be lived out ... is the confession of the church true; only if Christ can be practiced is Jesus Lord... it is this presence within time of an eschatological and divine peace, really incarnate in the person of Jesus and forever imparted to the body of Christ by the power of the Holy spirit, that remains the very essence of the church's evangelical appeal to the world at large, and of the salvation it proclaims ...

David Bentley Hart²

... Christian existence is first and foremost an activity – a performance if you will ...

Stanley Hauerwas³

... it is not so much her writings as her life itself which is her doctrine ...

Hans Urs von Balthasar (on St. Thérèse of Lisieux)⁴

In the introduction to his *The Politics of Discipleship*, Graham Ward holds that the church cannot longer simply be “polite” and tiptoe around the issues people face all over.⁵ The world is in disarray; things are not right; and, writes Ward, the church should accordingly “speak up and speak out”, name what is wrong, and proclaim, with boldness and urgency, the truth of the Gospel – for all to hear.⁶ This is also the message of Allan Boesak in his paper, *To Not be Afraid to Say It: Preaching as promise and presence of prophetic faithfulness*.

According to Boesak, things are indeed not as they should be. On the contrary, we live in a world, he says, that is marred by racism and homophobia, inequality and injustice, violence and xenophobia, unbridled consumerism and “disaster capitalism”; a world in which only the lives of those who are rich and powerful seem to matter; a world in which, as Jim Wallis has writes,⁷ an “illness of spirit has spread across the land.” And, because of this present state of things, Boesak contends that we are (once more) in need of what could be called prophetic preaching – preaching that (in Boesak’s words)

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2 Hart, D.B. 2003. *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1-2.

3 Hauerwas, S. 2004. *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Non-Violence*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 76.

4 Urs von Balthasar, H. 1953. *Thérèse of Lisieux*. Transl. D Nicholl. London: Sheed and Ward, xxi.

5 Ward, G. 2009. *The Politics of Discipleship: Becoming Postmaterial Citizens*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 22.

6 Ward, *The Politics of Discipleship*, 23.

7 See Wallis, J. 1994. *The Soul of Politics: Beyond Religious Right and Secular Left*. New York: Orbis, xv.

“shouts from the rooftops that the world as it is, is wrong”; preaching that cries out that people’s current realities are not “God-ordained”; preaching that speaks, with defiant hope, of an “alternative future”, where God’s freedom, peace and, above all, justice reign supreme.

Boesak goes on to say that one person who, to his mind, has engaged in precisely this type of prophetic preaching that is so sorely needed in our world in recent times, is Jorge Bergoglio or, as he is better known, Pope Francis, the 266th and current pontiff of the Roman Catholic Church. With this view I completely agree.

Since being elected pope – or Bishop of Rome, as he prefers to refer to himself (also out of ecumenical concern for the Orthodox Church)⁸ – Francis has indeed deliberately and unapologetically been challenging the powers and principalities of our day. He has boldly spoken out against injustice, inequality, racism and xenophobia, while offering an alternative, God-inspired vision for humanity and creation. Francis, as Boesak points out, has not been afraid to take up “the cudgels with the powerful forces of the rich and privileged” and have stood up “for the global poor and destitute, the global landless and the homeless, the global oppressed and exploited”, incessantly declaring that these realities are contrary to the will of God. When it comes to prophetic preaching, it is indeed therefore important and fitting to look at Francis’ *words* – as Boesak suggests we do in his paper.⁹

What has fascinated me, personally, about Francis’ papacy thus far, though, has not necessarily only been the prophetic words that he has been uttering (to which Boesak’s paper often refers), but also the fact that people – from all walks of life (whether they are Roman Catholic or not, or even religious or not) – have seemingly been prepared to *listen* to these words. It indeed appears as if the message Francis is preaching is not falling on deaf ears, as is the case with so many other religious talk in our secular, post-Christian world, but his message is actually being *heard* (and even heeded) by people all over – which, I think, is quite significant, especially as his message, while powerful and timely, is not necessarily that unique or novel.¹⁰

What I would then like to ask – in light of Boesak’s paper and also in the light of the broader theme of the conference – is: Why is it that Francis’ prophetic message (which features so prominently in Boesak’s paper) is touching ground in such an extraordinary and somewhat unexpected manner today? Why are so many people prepared to listen to what he, in particular, has to say? Why is the media giving so much exposure to his utterances (resulting in his words going viral)? Why is his sermon to the world (which can arguably be seen as nothing other than good Roman Catholic, and indeed Christian, social teaching), capturing so many people’s imaginations and finding resonance all over?

Earlier this year while in the United States, I had the opportunity to meet Elizabeth Dias, *Time Magazine*’s correspondent for religious matters (who accompanied Pope Francis on his recent trip to Cuba and the US), and in a conversation with her, I asked these exact questions. After giving it a moment’s thought, she answered by saying that the reason, she thinks, why people (especially those

8 See, e.g., Boff, L. 2014. *Francis of Rome and Francis of Assisi: A New Springtime of the Church*. Transl. D Livingston. New York: Orbis, 42; and also Rosales, L & Olivera, D. 2013. *Francis: A Pope for our Time: The Definitive Biography*. West Palm Beach, FA: Humanix, 187-88.

9 See Boesak, *To Not Be Afraid to Say It*.

10 Many of the things Francis is currently saying was also, for example, said by his predecessor, Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI). If one looks at Benedict’s papal exhortations and encyclicals – especially his last official encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate* (Charity in Truth) – it is seen that he also strongly spoke out against many of the ills of our time, while pleading for social and economic justice, equality and peace. See, e.g., Schlag, M. 2015. The Historical Development of Christian-Catholic Humanism. In: M Melé and M Schlag (eds). *Humanism in Economics and Business: Perspectives of the Catholic Social Tradition*. Berlin: Springer, 29 and Dorr, D. 2012. *Option for the Poor and for the Earth: Catholic Social Teaching*. New York: Orbis, 368-93.

without any ties to the Roman Catholic Church, or to Christianity, for that matter) are taking note of and, in fact, *listening* to Francis' words, has to do, amongst other things, with the fact that the pope is not only preaching a specific message, but is also embodying this message in a very pertinent manner. Francis, she said, is not only speaking about justice, liberation, healing and inclusion, but is, in fact, enacting these things at the very same time. He is not only proclaiming truth, but also performing this truth. His homily – the message that he preaches to the world – is not only spoken words, but also embodied *acts*. And this almost surprising continuity between what he says and what he does is, in Dias' opinion, what is giving integrity to his message and making people receptive to his words – especially those who are usually cynical of, even antagonistic towards, religious talk.

In many ways I think Dias (who has travelled extensively with Francis and has good insight into his papacy) is right. What Pope Francis has been saying and what he has been doing (whether cameras were rolling or not – something Dias emphasised emphatically in our conversation), have indeed been intrinsically linked to one another. This has captivated the world. As he has been preaching his prophetic message, he has chosen to live in a humble single room in the Vatican guest house, with only the most necessary of amenities (instead of the very lavish, traditional papal residence), from where he has supposedly been moving around at night meeting with and feeding the poor and hungry outside the walls of the Vatican. Wherever he has spoken, he has also met with and embraced the sick, vulnerable and marginalised. Most of us, for example, have seen the images of him taking a child with cerebral palsy into his arms, or of him hugging and kissing a man with neurofibromatosis. In a similar way, he has met with and physically embraced Syrian refugees and war victims, inmates and people on death row; and, when a child recently cried in one of his homilies, he took the child in his own arms, and told the audience that it is in these cries that we hear the voice of God. These acts, to name just a few, have been part and parcel of Francis' *sermo* – and I indeed think that this continuity between word and deed, as Dias has suggested, has been one of the main reasons why people have been prepared to lend their ears to what he has to say.

With Francis, *prophetic preaching*, therefore, goes *prophetic living*. He is not only committed to *truth-telling*, but also to *truth-doing*. And in this, he is evidently imitating what we see in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Francis is, after all, a Jesuit, so the *imitatio Christi* is an important part of his theology.¹¹ Christ's message – as evident in Scripture – is also not restricted to the words leaving his mouth. No, as Incarnate Word – as Word who became flesh – everything Christ *does*, the very “motion and content of his life, lived both towards the Father and for his fellows”,¹² forms part of the message he is proclaiming about the coming Kingdom of God. What Christ says and what Christ does cannot be divorced from one another. The form (*Gestalt*) of his life, to use Balthasar's language,¹³ is inseparable from the good news he announces. He is “what is spoken, even as he does the speaking.”¹⁴ His whole earthly existence (which includes both words and deeds) can be seen as a grand, embodied performance, revealing his salvic truth to the world.¹⁵

11 Cf. 1990. *Our Jesuit Life*. St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 96.

12 Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, 325.

13 Urs von Balthasar, H. 1982. *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics I, Seeing the Form*. Transl. E Leiva-Merikakis. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 151-153, 463-526. It is important to note that this “form” of Christ's life is not static, but indeed highly dramatic. Balthasar writes: “God's revelation (i.e. the form of Christ) is not an object to be looked at; it is his action in and upon the world, and the world can only respond, and hence ‘understand’, through action on its part.” See Urs von Balthasar, H. 1988. *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory I, Prologomena*. Transl. G Harrison. San Francisco, CA: Ignatius, 15.

14 Vanhoozer, K. 2005. *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-linguistic Approach to Christian Theology*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 193.

15 For more on how Christ's life and ministry can be seen as a “performance”, see, e.g., Ford, D. 2011. *The Future of Christian Theology*. Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 23-42, 178; Ward, G. 2005. *Christ and Culture*, 43-9; and also Urs von Balthasar, H. 1992. *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory III, Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ*. Transl. G Harrison. San Francisco, CA: Ignatius, 13-262. Balthasar's work (in this regard) has been very influential on both Ford and Ward.

I think this is then our challenge as preachers who long to preach prophetically today – especially if we want to take the message of Christ “to the streets” (as Boesak suggests we do): to also *imitate* Christ¹⁶ (as Francis is doing), in not only preaching the truth, but *living* this truth we are speaking of in our everyday lives. We should indeed not only proclaim the coming Kingdom of God, but should, in fact, at the same time act-out the Kingdom wherever we are. We should not only speak about the gospel, but “participate in Christ’s work ... in word and deed.”¹⁷ We are not only called to rehearse with our mouths, but to enact with our very lives “the shape of Jesus’ masterful performance.”¹⁸ As Vanhoozer writes,

*The Christian way is fundamentally dramatic, involving speech and action on behalf of Jesus’ truth and life ... it concerns the way of living truthfully, and its claim to truth cannot be isolated from the way of life with which it is associated.*¹⁹

This is especially important when it comes, for example, to something like the Belhar Confession – which also features prominently in Boesak’s paper.²⁰ I think it happens too often in South Africa today that the content of the Belhar Confession is preached, but not necessarily lived out in a tangible way; that its words are proclaimed to the world, but that these words are not seen in action.²¹ This is regrettable, for the call of the Belhar Confession is not only that we should speak of and confess unity, reconciliation and justice, but that this unity, reconciliation and justice should be made visible by the people of God.²² Belhar takes embodiment (and the notion of incarnation) very seriously; it asks that we physically “stand where God is standing” (the is, with the poor and the destitute); that we “give ourselves (our whole selves, not only our words) willingly and joyfully to be of benefit and blessing to one another”²³; that we do not only speak of, but do “the deeds of justice, peace and love that is required by Yahweh” (as Boesak writes in his paper). In uttering Belhar’s words, we are indeed thus called to live and embody these words – otherwise Belhar, as Boesak contends, becomes a “witness against ourselves.”²⁴

In saying all of this, I am not suggesting that we should fall into the trap of some form of naïve pietism, legalism or Donatism – all of us, as Paul writes, “fall short of the glory of God” and is in desperate need of grace (Romans 3: 23). The truth of God is also not dependent on our doings. I am simply saying that we – as preachers – should realise that, just as our speech (as the philosophy of language has taught us and Boesak also mentions in his paper) can be seen and understood as symbolic acts, so

16 According to Ward, this is indeed the central calling of all Christians (whether they are preachers or not): to imitate Christ. Following Christ, he writes, is fundamentally a “mimetic practice”. See, e.g., Ward, *Politics of Discipleship*, 278; Ward, G. 2016. *How the Light Gets in: Ethical Life I*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 217; Ward, *Christ and Culture*, 29-59; and also Ward, G. 2013. Performing Christ: The Theological Vocation of Lay People. *Ecclesiology*, 9(3): 323-334. <https://doi.org/10.1163/17455316-00903004>

17 Vanhoozer, K. 2014. *Faith Speaking Understanding: Performing the Drama of Doctrine*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 19.

18 Vander Lugt, W. 2014. *Living Theodrama: Reimagining Theological Ethics*. Burlington, IN: Ashgate, 76.

19 Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 15.

20 Boesak himself played an important role in the genesis of the Belhar Confession. See Plaatjies-van Huffel, M-A. 2013. Reading the Belhar Confession as a Historical Document. In M Plaatjies-van-Huffel & R Vosloo (eds), *Reformed Churches in South Africa and the Struggle for Justice: Remembering 1960 – 1990*. Stellenbosch: AFRICAN SUN MeDIA, 238-240.

21 Cf. Tshaka, R. 2010. *Confessional Theology: A Critical Analysis of the Theology of Karl Barth and its Significance for the Confession of Belhar*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 238.

22 Cf., especially the section Embodying the Confession, in Smit, D. 2009. What does it mean to live in South Africa and to be Reformed? In: RR Vosloo (ed.) *Essays on Being Reformed: Collected Essays 3*. Stellenbosch: AFRICAN SUN MeDIA, and Smit, D. 1984. In a special way the God. In: DJ Smit et al. (eds), *A Movement of Truth: The Confession of the Dutch Reformed Church 1982*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 55.

23 See The Belhar Confession. In: Naudé, P. 2010. *Neither Calendar nor Clock: Perspectives on the Belhar Confession*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 219-223.

24 On this point see also Boesak’s chapter, The Inclusivity of God’s Embrace: Kairos, Justice, the Dignity of Human Sexuality, and the Confession of Belhar, in Boesak, A.A. 2015. *Kairos, Crisis, and Global Apartheid: The Challenge to Prophetic Resistance*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan; and Tshaka, *Confessional Theology*, xiv, 228-229.

our acts can also be seen and understood as instances of symbolic speech.²⁵ We should recognise that our bodies, and not only our words, are “heavy with meaning”²⁶; that “everything we do ... speak.”²⁷ And this is why our “whole existence (is) challenged, even put at risk”, when we answer God’s calling to become preachers of the Word, as Gollwitzer suggested, and Boesak quotes in his paper.²⁸

I think many people today are wary and suspicious of others standing in front of them telling them what to do or, almost worse, what the truth supposedly is. Whether its politicians or religious leaders or preachers, people are tired of empty words and promises that are merely pipe dreams; things that are heard, but not necessarily seen.²⁹ So let us, as prophetic preachers, follow Francis and ultimately Christ (the One who we are called to imitate in our daily lives) in embodying, enacting and performing the liberating truth of which we speak in our sermons – so that the world may not only *hear*, but also *see* the good news of God, and believe.

25 Cf. Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding*, 15.

26 Ward, *Politics of Discipleship*, 222, 251. Cf. also Butler, J. 1993. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. New York: Routledge, 27-56.

27 Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 221.

28 Cf. Gollwitzer, H. 1980. *The Way to Life, Sermons in a Time of World Crisis*. Transl. D Cairns. Edinburgh: T&T Clarke, xi.

29 Recent empirical data, from all over the world, suggests that public trust in politicians are at an all-time low. See, e.g., Ward, *Politics of Discipleship*, 64. Church attendance (especially among the youth) has also long been on the decline, which, according to some, has to do with young people’s distrust of (and, indeed, cynicism towards) religious institutions, their leadership and the idea that someone can tell another person what to think or what to believe. See: Flory, R & Miller, D.E. 2010. The Expressive Communalism of Post-Boomer Religion in the USA. In: PS Collins-Mayo & P Dandelion (eds), *Religion and Youth*. Burlington, IN: Ashgate, 11-2.

The Reign of God – A Holistic Vision of Human Health

6

Debra J Mumford¹

Throughout the history of Christianity, social justice has served the wind beneath the wings of many churches and individuals. When the prophetic teachings of the Christian faith are fully understood and internalised by the faithful, including the teachings of the biblical prophets and Jesus himself, many of the faithful become motivated to apply their faith to situations and circumstances in the world around us.

Jesus and the biblical prophets remind us that marginalisation and oppression of the poor are against the will of God. Seeing the suffering and pain of the many inspire some to do everything they can to eradicate it. The very existence of poverty and inequality requires people of faith to question the validity of systems and structures that maintain them. Historic battles in which people of faith have fought include child labour laws, abolition of slavery, equal pay for equal work, women's suffrage, civil rights (for race, ethnicity and sexual orientation), just to name a few. While striving for social justice can be meaningful and fulfilling work for the people of God, I contend it has its limits.

First of all, social justice cannot change hearts. For example, despite all of the laws passed to ensure that people of different races are treated equally in the public square, some people will always believe that some races are superior to others.

Social justice does not always encourage personal responsibility. Advocates of social justice often see victims one dimensionally. They fail to remember that the marginalised can be victims of injustice and contributors to their own demise or the demise of others at the same time.

Social justice often does not demand personal accountability. Very often advocates of social justice take a macroscopic view of society by focusing on systems and structures. Therefore, they sometimes overlook life at the micro level and the impact of personal decisions on one-on-one human relationships. Every person has the potential to impact the lives of others in our communities (for good or for ill) through our own personal behavioural choices.

Social justice sometimes becomes a spectator sport. Some people join faith communities that are active in social justice struggles, only to sit on the side-lines and watch the pastor or other leaders fight the fight. Sometimes they watch because they would rather write a cheque to fund the work than actually join the fight. Others may not think they have a place in the struggle. We have put some civil rights leaders such as Nelson Mandela, Mother Teresa, Caesar Chavez and Martin Luther King, Jr. on such high pedestals that some people do not feel they have a place in the struggle. Some people

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may think they are not smart enough, dedicated enough, gifted enough or inspirational enough to lead or be instrumental in a movement. Therefore, they opt out of the struggle altogether.

Social justice often has no ultimate vision. Advocates of social justice often spend time fighting one battle after the next. They fight battles that need to be fought and won for the good of the people. However, they do not have time or take time to conceive of an ultimate vision. Some may believe their ultimate vision is implicit in their work – a world without injustice. But I contend that it is hard to catch a vision of a negative. And, is the absence of injustice a vision or just a really, really good idea?

The work of social justice is good and necessary, but God may be calling us to something more. God may be calling us to embrace a vision, an image of what the world can be and who we can be as a people. This vision must encompass social justice but not be limited by it. By closely attending to the Gospels, such as Matthew, we may just be able to grasp the vision that Jesus is calling us to embody.

Jesus and the *basileia* of God

In the fourth Chapter of Matthew, after a season of preparation, being baptised by John, being declared a beloved Son by God and after resisting Satan's temptations, Jesus went about preaching the gospel of the *basileia* and healing every sickness and disease. But what is the *basileia* of God? And is there a relationship between the *basileia* and healing?

We know that *basileia* can be translated kingdom or reign. But, even with that translation, we do not have a clear understanding of what the reign of God actually is. Matthew offers details about what the *basileia* of God is in the Sermon on the Mount, then throughout the entire Gospel. In the Sermon on the Mount, we find a new way of being starting to take shape. From the beginning, Jesus unveils the connection between human relationships with God and human relationships with one another. In the first section of the Gospel we read blessed are those who mourn, are meek, are merciful, are peacemakers and are pure in heart. We observe that each of these behaviours has a dual purpose: each facilitates good relationships among the people, and each pleases God.

Further into the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus admonishes the crowd not to insult one another or commit adultery. He makes it clear that these behaviours not only displease God, but they are also detrimental to human relationships. In the fifth Chapter, Jesus tells people that when they are offering gifts at the altar, if they remember that their brother or sister has something against them, they should leave their gifts at the altar, go and be reconciled with the sisters or brothers. Then, they can come back to give their gifts. Their offerings to God are unacceptable to God as long as they are not in right relationship with one another.

In Chapter 6, at the very centre of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches the crowd how to pray. Jesus taught them that if they would forgive their sisters and brothers when their brothers and sisters sinned against them, God would forgive their sins. Therefore, our first observation about the reign of God, is that human spiritual well-being is integrally linked to our relationships with one another. If we cannot learn to treat each other in a Godly way, if we cannot learn to love each other unconditionally the way God loves us, if we cannot learn to treat each other with dignity and respect, (even people we do not like with every fibre of our being), then we cannot please God. In addition, by highlighting the intersectionality of human behaviour and divine affirmation, Jesus' vision of the reign of God reminds us to take responsibility for the ways we behave in the world. Jesus's vision of the reign also reminds us that we must hold each other accountable for our actions. Our actions

have consequences not just for ourselves but for our families, friends, and for people we do not even know.

Throughout other Gospels, as well as in Matthew, we find that when the people opened their minds to hear and understand the good news, God changed their hearts. Zacchaeus the tax collector, for example, vowed to change his ways after he had an encounter with Jesus.

However, there is something else going on in Jesus's vision of the reign of God that we discover not only in his words but through his actions. Throughout the Gospel of Matthew and the other Gospels as well, Jesus spends much of his time healing. Notice that Jesus does not do his healing in lofty places. He does not heal in the palaces of the Herodians or lavish accommodations of the Roman emperors. He takes his healing powers to the streets. In city of Cape Town terms, he not only heals in Constantia, but on the Cape Flats as well. He takes his healing powers not just to Hyde Park, Melville and Auckland Park, but also to Ivory Park and Orange Farm in Johannesburg.

In Matthew's day, just like today, the majority of the wealth was concentrated in the hands of the dominant few. The poor were mostly unskilled workers who lived at the mercy of wealthy landowners and elites. In their poverty, they often struggled to have enough to eat, which often led to poor nutrition and then to sickness and disease. Though the study of medicine was not nearly as developed as it is now, there were physicians in those days. However, only the elite or the wealthy could afford them. By healing the physical bodies of the poor, Jesus was making a profound statement. For Jesus, good health was not a commodity only available to the rich. Good health was a right, and therefore needed to be available for all, even the poor and marginalised.

When Jesus healed the poor of their illnesses and diseases, he replaced their hopelessness with hope. Whereas, before they met Jesus, contracting sickness and disease was a death sentence, after their encounter with Jesus, sickness and disease no longer determined their fate. In addition, Jesus healed the Gerasene Demoniac in Matthew 8 of what we would today consider his mental health challenges. Good mental health mattered to Jesus as well.

Feminist theologian and biblical scholar Elisabeth Schussler-Fiorenza helps us to understand what is happening theologically. In the *basileia* of God, salvation is not just for the soul. In the *basileia* of God, salvation encompasses the mind and the body, as well as the soul. The *basileia* vision of Jesus is one in which all of God's people are whole, healthy and strong.² In the *basileia* of God, if my mind or my body is in bondage, I am not experiencing the fullness of God's salvation.

The womanist understanding of the reign of God, according to Emile Townes, is a radically relational world in which there is a deep interconnection between body and spirit that enables all people, no matter their race, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation to be whole.

When Jesus took to the streets to provide health care for the poor, he was demonstrating to us that social justice, like responsibility and accountability, is integral to the fulfilment of the reign of God. When we ensure that all people are treated justly in all things, we fulfil God's will for all people.

2 Schussler-Fiorenza, E. 1985. *In Memory of Her*. New York, NY: Crossroad, 123. The title of the book comes from the story in all four of the Gospels in which a woman anoints the feet of Jesus just before Judas betrays him in the Gospel of Mark 14:9. In the passion account, for some reason, the woman who anoints Jesus is forgotten while the two men who betrayed him are not. Throughout the book, Fiorenza argues that in order for women to be seen as equals in the church today, they must reclaim their biblical history. She argues that some women served as equal disciples in the early Jesus movement or "the way" and that women were victims of misogyny of church fathers who wrote them out of early biblical history.

Though the reign of God ensures that all people are treated justly in all things, further in the text we discover that God has a particular penchant for the poor even beyond healing them of sickness and disease. In Matthew 25, Jesus reminds us that the reign of God has jurisdiction not only in our earthly lives, but also in the life to come. Here we read about the Day of Judgment in which Jesus will separate the sheep from the goats. On this day, judgment will be conferred on every person according to the way they treated the poor. Jesus stated:

Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

³⁵ *for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me,*

³⁶ *I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.*

According to these verses, the eternal fate of those who claim to follow Christ is directly tied to the way they treat the poor. In fact, the treatment of the poor is so central to Jesus that he went on the say that whatever people did to the “least of these” they are also doing it to Him. Mistreatment of the poor means one was, in essence, mistreating Jesus. The poor for Matthew are those who do not have their basic needs met such as having sufficient food to eat, water to drink and clothing to wear. The least of these also included those who are in prison. In Matthew’s day, prisons did not provide the prisoners with basic provisions like food.³ They depended on the generosity of family, friends and faith communities to meet these needs.

Therefore, in the *basileia* of God human relationships with one another not only were directly tied to the state of relationship with God on earth, but the consequences for not meeting the needs of the least of these had implications for the afterlife as well.

***Basileia* of God and health**

So what is going on here? What is the bigger picture that is emerging? What is God doing through the ministry of Jesus? I believe that the World Health Organization gives us language that will help us grasp the vision Jesus is casting for us. After years of serving diverse populations across the world and collecting medical data on illness and disease since its founding in 1948, the World Health Organization has drawn at least two major conclusions. Firstly, every person on earth needs to have access to good and comprehensive healthcare in order to live full lives.

Secondly, 70% of all deaths worldwide are caused not by biological illness.⁴ Rather, these deaths are caused by the conditions, circumstances and situations that we humans create for ourselves and for one another.

3 Luz, U. 2005. Matthew 21-28: A Commentary on Matthew 21-28. In: H Koester (ed.), *Hermeneia*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 279.

4 WHO. 2015. What We Do. Geneva: The World Health Organization. Available online at: <http://www.who.int/about/what-we-do/en/> (Accessed: 12 August 2015). The WHO deems these diseases non-communicable. They posit that by addressing social justice concerns and highlighting the consequences of personal behavioural choices, this percentage can be greatly reduced.

Beginning in 1982, the WHO made the case in its *Global Strategy for the Health of All by the Year 2000*, that health problems and socioeconomic problems are intricately linked.⁵ Evidence of this contention could be found in the disparities of health outcomes between people in developed and developing countries. For example, while between 10 and 20 out of 1000 infants born in developed countries died (at the time of this report) in their first year while nearly 100 to more than 200 died in developing countries. The reasons for the disparities were not simply lack of access to healthcare, though this was one important factor. Rather the disparities were caused by the abject poverty in which people in many developing countries were (and still are) living that manifests itself by lack of nutrition, clean water, education, literacy and employment.

Lest we believe that health disparities only exist between developing and developed countries, we must also be aware of the health disparities that are prevalent throughout the United States between regions, states, cities and indeed neighbourhoods. According to the 2014 annual report of the United Health Foundation, Hawaii is the healthiest state in the union while Mississippi is the least healthy.⁶ Hawaii has a low prevalence of smoking and obesity, a low percentage of children in poverty and low rates of preventable hospitalizations, cancer deaths and deaths related to cardiovascular disease. Among Hawaiians, 70% graduate from high school. The annual unemployment rate is 4.8%. The median household income of Hawaiians is \$61,408 which is above the national average of \$51,939.⁷ Mississippi, on the other hand, has high rates of obesity, physical inactivity, diabetes, children living in poverty and low birth rate infants. Mississippi also suffers from low high school graduation rates, limited access to primary physicians and dentists and high incidences of infectious diseases.⁸ Only 68% of Mississippians graduate from high school. The annual unemployment rate is 8.6%. The median household income of Mississippi is \$40,850, well below the national average of \$51,939.⁹ From this comparison we see that with lower levels of income (higher levels of poverty) come greater disparities in health.

However, we do not have to limit our exploration of disparities to different regions or states. Large health disparities can also be found within cities in the United States. According to the Center for Health Equity in Louisville, Kentucky, residents of the St. Matthews neighbourhood have an average life expectancy of 83.6 years, while residents of California-Portland have an expectancy of 67.8 years.¹⁰ This is a 15.8 year gap! Among residents of California-Portland there are also much higher rates of: abuse of alcohol and drugs, diabetes, heart disease, cancer, HIV and Aids, strokes, homicide and suicide. It will come as no surprise to find that 42.6% of people in the California-Portland neighbourhood live in poverty while 9.6% of residents of St. Matthews live in poverty.¹¹

5 WHO. 1981. *Global Strategy for the Health of All by the Year 2000*. Geneva: World Health Organization, 19. In this report, the WHO posits that health for all people cannot be attained by the implementation of healthcare for all. There must also be coordinated efforts between the social and economic sectors to provide for national and communal development, food, industry, education, housing, public works and communication.

6 Schenck, A.; Andrusis, D.P & Bartram, J. 2014. *America's Health Rankings: A Call to Action for Individuals and Their Communities*. Minnetonka, MN: United Health Foundation, 9. In this report, the United Health Foundation posits that human health outcomes are comprised of a matrix of four factors: behaviours, community and environment, clinical care and public policy. The report provides a snapshot of the state of health of each state in a given year.

7 Schenck et al., *America's Health Rankings*, 95.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid. p. 108.

10 Arno, C.A. & Rock, P. 2014. *Louisville Metro Health Equity Report*. Louisville, KY: Center for Health Equity, 15. This report provides details of the divergences in social determinants of health among Louisville's twenty four neighbourhoods. Neighbourhoods that have higher rates of poverty and lower rates of employment and education tend to have worse health outcomes. One important factor that the report included was a map of neighbourhood access to healthy food. Some neighbourhoods are at least two miles away from a grocery store. Therefore, residents without personal transportation have a difficult time purchasing healthy food.

11 Arno & Rock, *Louisville Metro*, 30.

In its 1998 report, *The Solid Facts*, the WHO began to use the phrase *social determinants of health* to designate social factors that contribute to or impede human well-being.¹² This report provided rationale for the beginning of a campaign in Europe to bring awareness of the relationship between health and economic and social policies. The report recognised that individuals are responsible for their health. However, policy at all levels of government and workplaces (public and private) play vital roles in creating “opportunities for health”.¹³ In this report, the WHO made the following declaration:

*Medical care can prolong survival after some serious diseases, but the social and economic conditions that affect whether people become ill are more important for health gains in the population as a whole. Poor conditions lead to poorer health. An unhealthy material environment and unhealthy behaviour have direct harmful effects, but the worries and insecurities of daily life and the lack of supportive environments also have an influence.*¹⁴

The WHO contends that these disparities in health should not exist. They believe there is no biological reason for a person in one part of the world (or in one part of a country, state or city) to have a higher life expectancy than someone in any other part of the world. Since biology is not the cause, health equity can likely be achieved by changing the social determinants of health.¹⁵ The list of social determinants of health included in the report are (not including personal behaviours and access to healthcare): levels of stress; early childhood environment; work environment; employment and job insecurity; positive and supportive friendships/relationships; addiction of alcohol and other drugs; access to healthy food; and healthy transport systems (cycling, walking and public transportation).¹⁶

Twenty one years into democracy and six years after the general election of new health leaders, South Africa is still striving to attend to the health of all of her people but especially to “the least of these”. The goal of the National Health Insurance policy of South Africa first introduced in 2012 and designed to be implemented over a period of 14 years, is to provide healthcare for all citizens. The priorities of the plan include increasing overall life expectancy, decreasing maternal and child mortality, combating the spread of HIV/Aids and “decreasing the burden of tuberculosis”.¹⁷

The re-engineering of the health care system was inspired by social determinants of health such as unsafe sex and sexually transmitted disease; interpersonal violence; alcohol, tobacco smoking, maternal and childhood malnutrition; and decreased physical activity amongst other factors.

Personal responsibility and accountability

In their 2013, “U.S. Health in International Perspective: Shorter Lives, Poorer Health”, the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences contends that United States lags behind other high income countries in their health outcomes. They highlight the need

12 Wilkinson, R & Marmot, M. 1998. *The Solid Facts*. Geneva: The World Health Organization, 8. In this early report, the WHO begins to identify and make connections between health outcomes and social determinants of health. The social determinants included are: stress, early life, social exclusion, work unemployment, social support, addiction, food and transportation. In later reports, the WHO identifies more determinants with more detailed analysis of each.

13 Ibid. p. 6.

14 Ibid. p. 8.

15 Marmot, M.; Frei, S.; Bell, R.; Houweling, T.A.J. & Taylor, S. 2008. *Closing the Gap in a Generation: Health Equity Through Action on the Social Determinants of Health*. Geneva: The World Health Organization, 26. The WHO declares in this report that social justice is a matter of life and death. In one section of the report they make suggestions of how power, money and resources can be better allocated internationally to result in better health outcomes for all. Suggestions include progressive taxation, debt relief, gender equity in education and training and access to sexual and reproductive health education.

16 Marmot et al., *Closing the Gap*, 9.

17 Gray, A.; Vawda, Y. & Jack, C.L. 2013. Health Policy and Legislation. In: A Padarath and R English (eds), *South African Health Review 2012/13*. Durban: Health Systems Trust, vii.

for comprehensive health strategies, in addition to universal healthcare, to positively influence individual behaviours and social factors, make improvements in physical environment and affect changes in public policies and social values. As it relates to personal behaviours, the report contends that 40% of all deaths in the United States are associated with four health behaviours: tobacco use, unhealthy diet, physical inactivity and problem drinking.¹⁸

In 1964, Luther Terry the Surgeon General of the United States released a report that presented scientific data that smoking was hazardous to human health. Since the report was made public, the percentage of Americans who smoke dropped from 42% to 18% in 2014.¹⁹ Though much progress has been made, there are still forty two million Americans who smoke and 1 billion people smoke worldwide. According to the WHO, 6 million people die worldwide from tobacco smoke every year; 5 million directly from smoking themselves. Another almost 600,000 die from second-hand smoke. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, smoking causes more deaths annually than HIV, illegal drug use, alcohol, motor vehicle injuries and gun related incidents combined.²⁰ Conditions caused by smoking include cancer (lung, liver, colorectal, et cetera), cardiovascular disease, respiratory disease, stillbirth, pre-term deliveries, low-birth weight and rheumatoid arthritis.²¹ The addictive nature of nicotine makes quitting smoking very difficult. In the *basileia* of God, the people of God should do everything we can to convince people that smoking is not God's will for their lives and health.

Drug use and excessive drinking are dangerous not only because of the damages drugs and alcohol (used to excess) can wreak on the body, but also because they impair human ability to make rational and responsible decisions. According to the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, 17.6 million people suffer from alcohol abuse or dependence. 20 million people have used illegal drugs within the past 30 days. An estimated 48 million people use or abuse prescription drugs, including painkillers, sedatives and stimulants, for nonmedical reasons.²² As a result, drug and alcohol abuse contribute to medication errors and poisoning, motor vehicle accidents, sexually transmitted diseases and injection drug related diseases such as Hepatitis B and HIV and Aids.

In 2003, the United States achieved the dubious distinction of becoming the number one country in the world in average caloric consumption per person – 3,770 calories per day. Not only do we eat too much, we eat too much of the wrong foods.²³ Only one person in four eats the daily recommended amounts of fruits and vegetables per day. The other three out of four of us consume diets high in saturated fats and low in nutritional value.

18 Gray et al., *Health Policy*, vii.

19 Komaroff, A. 2015. *Surgeon General's 1964 Report: Making Smoking History*. Boston, MA: Harvard Health. Online at: accessed September 22, 2015; Available from <http://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/surgeon-generals-1964-report-making-smoking-history-201401106970> (Accessed: 22 September 2015). The report communicated the belief that smoking caused lung cancer and heart disease. At a time, when 42% of Americans smoked, that kind of news as a bombshell. Luther himself was a smoker at the time. The report was released on a Saturday to minimise the report's effect on the stock market. The report and subsequent studies that substantiated the report's conclusions, have made a tremendous impact to the rate of smoking in the United States and worldwide.

20 CDCP. 2014. *Health Effects of Smoking, Atlanta, GA*: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Online at: http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/health_effects/effects_cig_smoking/ (Accessed: 22 September 2015).

21 CDCP, *Health Effects*.

22 NCADD. 2015. *Alcohol and Drug Information*, New York, NY: National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Inc. Online at: <https://ncadd.org/for-the-media/alcohol-a-drug-information> (Accessed: 22 September 2015).

23 Woolf, S.H. & Aron, L. 2013. *U.S. Health in International Perspective: Shorter Lives, Poorer Health*. Washington, DC: National Academy of Sciences, 145. The purpose of this report was to determine why the health outcomes of people in the United States were far worse than the health outcomes of other high-income nations such as Austria, Canada, Denmark, Japan, Spain and the United Kingdom. The report found that in addition to lacking universal healthcare, some behaviours set the United States apart from their counterparts including diets high in caloric intake and saturated fats and lower rates of physical activity and exercise.

In a study conducted by the Stanford School of Medicine, researchers found that not only do people in the US eat poorly, we also do not exercise. They found that people who reported engaging in no physical activity increased almost 20% in both women and men from 1994 to 2010.²⁴ Bad eating habits, combined with little or no physical activity proves to be a deadly combination because it often results in coronary heart disease, strokes, diabetes, hypertension and colorectal cancer just to name a few. Many of these conditions are preventable if we make better food choices and get active.

The *basileia* of God as holistic vision

As one can surmise, health is a comprehensive term. As a result, the WHO defines health as not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, but the complete state of physical, mental and social well-being.²⁵ Even if our bodies are free of biological disease or illness, social determinants of health, or social factors that contribute to or are detrimental, can render us unhealthy. Humanity cannot be completely healthy until we provide all people have opportunities to thrive in all human social interactions. Therefore, I believe if we add spiritual wellbeing to the WHO's definition of health, we actually have the equivalent of the *basileia* of God. Our Jesus influenced definition of *basileia* is "the complete state of physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being". In other words, I believe that the *basileia* of God, which Jesus embodied during his earthly ministry, is actually a holistic vision of human health.

Implications for preaching, the church, and the world

Over the past nine years in which I have been teaching preaching in Louisville, I have been asked many times, every year by anxious students, "what is the purpose of preaching?" It an important question, perhaps even a daunting one. There are many preachers over the years who have weighed in on the question:

Walter Burghardt (Jesuit priest) writes that: "The purpose of preaching is to throw light on the lives of the faithful so they can unite in the mystery (resurrected Christ)."²⁶ According to Gennifer Brooks (United Methodist preacher and homileticians), "[t]he purpose of [preaching] is to call hearers to recognise their sin and encourage or command them to follow the teachings of Christ in order to ensure their salvation." For our own Chuck Campbell, the purpose of teaching is akin to performing "homiletical exorcisms, i.e., to raise the dead in mind and conscience and empower the church to live faithfully in the face of death."²⁷ Sermons are not to be preached against people but against powers that hold people captive. They now have victory over all of those powers through the person and work of Jesus Christ. According to Mary Donovan Turner, Disciple of Christ preacher, the purpose of preaching is disruption: "...to disrupt life so that a space can be created, a space in which the Holy Spirit can work, a space in which the community can rethink, revisit priorities, or receive."²⁸ Marvin McMickle, seminary president, homileticians and long-time pastor writes wrote that the purpose of preaching is to remind the church of its prophetic responsibilities.²⁹

24 Bach, B. 2014. *Lack of Exercise, Not Diet, Linked to Rise in Obesity, Stanford Research Shows*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford School of Medicine. Online at: <https://med.stanford.edu/news/all-news/2014/07/lack-of-exercise--not-diet--linked-to-rise-in-obesity--stanford-.html> (Accessed 25 September 2015).

25 WHO. 2015. About WHO. Geneva: The World Health Organization. Online at: <http://www.who.int/about/en/> (Accessed: 1 August 2015).

26 Burghardt, W. 1987. *Preaching: The Art and the Craft*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 11.

27 Cf. Campbell, C.I. 2002. *Before the Powers. An Ethic of Preaching*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox.

28 Turner, M.D. 2004. Disrupting a Ruptured World. In: J Childers (ed.), *The Purposes of Preaching*. St. Louis, KY: Chalice, 135.

29 Cf. McMickle, M. 2005. Where Has All The Prophets Gone? *Ashland Theological Journal*, 37: 7-17.

What we can discern from these definitions is that the purposes of preaching are many and varied. As Jana Childers write in her book, *The Purposes of Preaching*, a steady diet of any one of these purposes can be detrimental to the spiritual development of a congregation by meeting only one of its many needs.³⁰ The needs of any given congregation and indeed, the needs of the world in which we live, are many and must therefore, approached from many different angles. However, I believe that if we use Jesus' vision of the *basileia* as our guide, these many purposes can not only be addressed and fulfilled, we also gain the benefit of motivation. Perhaps one reason why people who call ourselves Christians and a reason why some have vowed never to call themselves Christians is because we lack vision – an understanding of what we can be and what our world can be as a result of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

I contend if we as homileticians teach our pastors, preachers and leaders of faith to seek to embody Jesus' *basileia* vision of what we as a people can do and be, and what the church can do and be, then each of the purposes or preaching highlighted above can be realised.

Therefore, I agree with Walter Burghart. The *basileia* of God must throw light on the lives of the faithful by highlighting personal responsibility and accountability and the need for personal spiritual practices. Preaching must also throw light on lives of those who are both faith-full and faith-less; thereby, highlighting where they are lacking what they need to be made whole.

I agree with Gennifer Brooks that the purpose of preaching is to call hearers to recognise their sin and encourage or command them to follow the teachings of Christ in order to ensure their salvation. In the *basileia* of God we recognise that salvation is a holistic term. Therefore, recognising salvation means that the people of God in the *basileia* of God are discontent with any conditions, circumstances we create for each other that prevent all of God people from being the whole people whom God created them to be. In the *basileia* of God, people who are victims of violence of war or domestic violence, for example, are not experiencing the fullness of God's salvation and therefore are not experiencing fullness of the *basileia* of God.

I agree with Chuck Campbell that we need to perform some homiletical exorcisms. We do need to preach against the powers that hold people captive even when or maybe especially when we ourselves are wielders of those powers. We need to identify and work to eradicate powers that hold people captive wherever those powers are found. Whether those powers are operating on a personal level with addiction to nicotine, alcohol or drugs or on a systemic level with such manifestations as sex trafficking, we can allow the *basileia* vision of Jesus to lead us in our efforts.

I agree with Mary Donovan Turner that preaching should sometimes disrupt life so that a space can be created, a space in which the Holy Spirit can work, a space in which the community can rethink and revisit priorities, or receive. I believe that the *basileia* vision of God can lead us in our work to not only disrupt but also help put our lives back together again after particular disruptions occur. Rethinking and revisiting our priorities makes more sense when we have an ultimate vision towards which to strive.

I agree with Marvin McMickle in his contention that the purpose of preaching is to remind the church of its prophetic responsibilities. While this may seem like the simplest definition of preaching's purpose it may be one of the most challenging. It is challenging because the church is not separate from the world. Since its founding more than two thousand years ago the church has not only been in the world but it has been led by people who are of the world. People who not only are saved

30 Childers, J (ed.), *The Purposes of Preaching*. St. Louis, KY: Chalice.

by grace through faith, but also are people who still sin and fall short of God's glory and so many ways. Though we strive to be like Christ, we all fall short of the goodness and righteous that Christ embodies. Therefore, we regularly need to be reminded that we church leaders who are training other church leaders – we who are people of faith teaching other people of faith – have prophetic responsibilities to all of the people created by an awesome God. Perhaps the *basileia* vision of God can serve as a guide for us as we seek to fulfil our prophetic responsibilities.

As teachers of preaching in the twenty-first century it is imperative that we continue to do what we have been doing for years: providing all of our students with the essential tools and approaches to effectively preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the world. In addition, we need to do more. We need to inspire our students to realise a vision of what the world can be, what our nations can be, what our communities can be, what our churches can be and what we can be as the people of God.

Perhaps Jesus' *basileia* of God can serve as the vision. I have defined Jesus' *basileia* of God is the complete state of physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being for all people created by God.

Let us strive in our personal lives to embody the *basileia*. Let us strive as a corporate body of teachers of preaching to embody the *basileia*. Let us strive inspire others in ever society and every sector of the world to understand, embrace and strive towards the *basileia*. And most of all, let us not rest until we have realised the *basileia*. *A luta continua*.

What about Human Health in Preaching?

7

David Plüss¹

Response to Debra J Mumford' address: *The Reign of God: A holistic vision of human health.*

Dear Debra, thank you so much for your very inspiring paper! You inspired me to deepen my reflections on human health in preaching. We are used to considering health issues in spiritual care and counselling and we pray for sick persons and the suffering during the intercession after the sermon or in a time of lament in the first section of the worship. However, in our sermons, concrete human health issues are rather neglected. We find them in sermons of the late Enlightenment – and tend to ridicule them.

I very much appreciate your analysis on social justice as a quite prominent subject of our preaching, when we try to translate and to articulate Christian hope. We could add the topics of peace and the integrity of creation. These are vital aspects of the *basileia theou* and we should never stop reflecting on them in our sermons and translating them in the small worlds of our parishes and communities. But you are right: These motives are often presented in a double negative way:

- ⌘ as absence of injustice,
- ⌘ as containment of war activities,
- ⌘ or, as limitation of the demolition of the creation.

Through this double negation they lack a positive energy. They lack vital and bodily visions and sensations. And they neglect the parish members as responsible actors, they lack calling forth the advocacy of the hearer. They risk remaining negative and abstract concepts.

Human health, on the other hand, is a very corporal, vital and subjective issue. We hope for ourselves and we wish each other to bodily and mental health for as long as possible. Health is fundamental for our identity as free and responsible persons. It seems to be the precondition of our self-being, our ability to communicate, to live in relationships and in our pursuit of happiness. Health is also a central topic of God's blessing. We hope and we pray that the blessing prevents us from harm and illness, that our cups overflow and that we experience the goodness and mercy of the Lord also in the forms of mental and bodily health.

Also in the Gospels, as Debra mentioned, there is a strong connection between the *basileia theou* and healing. The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew is followed by a number of healings. The cleansing of the lepers, the healing of the paralysed or of people suffering from fever, the restoring of sight to the blind and the healing of demoniacs are all central biblical signs of the arriving *basileia theou*.

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If this is the case, then why are healing and health not central topics of our sermons, nor of our homiletic theory? May I suggest three possibilities?

- ⌘ Because of the complex and ambiguous health concepts in the Bible.
- ⌘ Because of the rather inwardly and spiritualistic tendencies and concepts of Protestant theology.
- ⌘ Because of our own sensitivity regarding the dialectic between illness and health. We do not want to preach a “health gospel” similar to the prosperity gospel.

Let me motivate the above three possibilities with the help of three short theses:

Let us start with the *Bible*: Healing and human health are central concepts of the gospel and a sign of the coming reign of God. But healing and health are not to be identified with the *basileia theou*. They are signs, and as signs, they are ambiguous. In Luke, Jesus comprehended his sending as to the sick not to the healthy (Luke 5:31), although sickness and health are meant by Jesus also in a spiritual and moral way.

As the central sacrament of God’s presence among us and as a model of the authentic human being, Jesus is not depicted as a healthy, virile and strong person. He is rather presented as a sensitive and compassionate human with a strong sense of mission that leads him and which is strongly connected with suffering. Illness and suffering are central topics of his mission – and of the Christian role model in the history of Christianity.

This is also similar examples of other men and woman of God in the Bible: Moses with his speech disorder, the limping Jacob after his wrestling with the One he could not conquer, the sick prophets or the misery of Job. The sickness of these biblical figures is not at all a sign of alienation or absence of God. Quite the contrary: it is a sign of God’s presence, glory and blessing albeit in a quite challenging way!

From the perspective of some theological and *ethical reflections*, for Luther, Zwingli and Calvin, healing of the sick and human health are no central theological topics. They conceptualised the essence of Christian hope as *fiducia*, as trust in God’s love and his mercy for the sinner. In Protestant theology, faith is conceived as a matter of our heart, not of our body.

Furthermore, in the contemporary Protestant theology, health is not considered as absence of illness, but as the ability to live with our disabilities, limits and diseases. Human health is not only the precondition of personal communication and responsibility. These are also expressions of human health.

So health is not an isolated status of life, but rather a multiplex, related quality:

- ⌘ It is related to and connected with limits and illness. We are always healthy and ill at the same time. We have different forms, qualities and grades of healthiness at the same time and in relation to our multiple sufferings and limits.
- ⌘ Health is related to our ability to be a personal self and to take responsibility for our actions – not least in relation to our own state of corporal health.
- ⌘ Health is also strongly related to our ability to communicate, to cultivate and to stay in relationships.

- ‡ And, human health is connected and expressed in the manner in which we behave as moral persons and responsible citizens towards others.

All these multiplex relationships of health are founded on and nourished, oriented and healed by the relationship to God in Jesus Christ. Because “one does not live by bread alone”, nor by bodily health “but by every word that comes from the mouth of God”. To live from the word of God, breath by breath, to live as people that are called by our names: Where are you Adam, Debra, David? To live in a responding and responsible manner in relationship with the living God and with humans is not only an expression of spiritual health but of human health in a deep and comprehensive way.

Furthermore, theology has to resist all forms of idolisation of human health. Corporal health is not an isolated value to cherish and to make the centre of our lives. It must not be given a religious power. Many of our compatriots in Western societies have chosen manifold and changing ideologies of healthiness as their religion.

Also, from a more *ethical perspective*, human health is not only, but also a manner of human behaviour and responsibility. Health is also a moral issue. One can and one should care about one's health. One can and one should prevent the risks of diseases and accidents. One can and one should live and eat and work in a way that does not harm oneself and one's body and mind.

And, as Debra correctly pointed out, human health is a societal and political issue, an issue concerning laws and insurances. The *basileia theou* is not of this world but it is strongly connected with the societal and political structures of this world.

What does this mean for our preaching? From a more practical and homiletical perspective:

I strongly agree with Debra that human health could be and should be more prominent in our sermons because the Christian hope is more than an inward and spiritual issue. It is also an issue of our bodies. The body is, according to Paul, the temple of the Holy Spirit and in communication with others in the body of Christ. It is the Pentecostal theology that reminds us of the healing forces and bodily dimensions of the *basileia theou*.

With Debra, but beyond the Pentecostal concepts, I agree that we should also discern between a socio-political and an individual dimension of human health. Both reflect and express central dimensions of the coming of the *basileia*.

I also believe that we should not isolate and idealise human health in our sermons. Not only because of people living with disabilities or ill people in our parishes, but because we all are living with disabilities or ill in different ways and to certain extents and because health, as a theological concept, is not the mere absence of disease, but because, as Paul says, “God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong” (1 Corinthians 1:27). If this is the case, we do not only preach about human health when we talk about healing or physical vitality, but also, or even more so, when we talk about our ability or disability to live in relationships and to cultivate them. As such, human health is an implicit matter of numerous Protestant sermons.

Two very short points to conclude:

- ⌘ There is not only a risk of idolisation of human health, but also – and especially in Protestant sermons – a danger of idolisation of suffering and weakness!
- ⌘ And, finally, and again I agree with Debra, we should not hesitate to treat human health in our sermons also as a moral issue. There is a strong connection between the arriving *basileia theou* and our behaviour towards our health.

Paradoxical Hope in the Promise of Preaching among Refugees in the Church of Denmark

8

Marlene Ringgaard Lorensen¹

The South African context provides visiting homiletics scholars with an outstanding perspective for exploring the potential – and risks – of preaching. The theme of this conference, Preaching Promise within the Paradoxes of Life, carries with it connotations with the Danish theologian and philosopher Søren Kierkegaard's reflections on paradox and the German theologian Martin Luther's understanding of the concept of *promissio*. Instead of referring exclusively to the works of these classic theologians, this essay will address the theme via insights gained from an empirical study of refugees from the Middle East in their struggle to live their lives in light of the proclamation heard in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark.²

This essay proposes that the paradoxical hope of the interviewed refugees can be seen as an alternative way to embody classical theological descriptions of hope, paradox and promise. The significant element in the hope of these refugees – and the preaching they hear in this particular church – is a painful awareness and experience of trauma and tragedy. In spite of their experiences of human helplessness, the refugees that were interviewed express an eschatological hope that recognises and criticises the present situation of migration, yet also re-envision and finds peace in alternative visions of their place in the world. They find peace in visions of being pilgrims rather than refugees, of being welcomed rather than expelled, and of having a citizenship in heaven regardless of whether they obtain citizenship on earth.

The above eschatological hope recognises the paradoxes in human life, yet it also points us toward what Søren Kierkegaard describes as the absolute paradox of the gospel. Kierkegaard distinguishes between the Socratic, philosophical and the Christian paradox. To Socrates the paradox consisted in the understanding that the eternal truth related to an existing human being. The Christian paradox is that truth in and of itself is a paradox because God becomes a human being and dies on the cross. The latter is what Kierkegaard calls the absolute or ultimate paradox. In contrast to the Socratic paradox, the Christian paradox cannot be understood by human reasoning. As Kierkegaard puts it in his *Philosophical Fragments*: "This, then, is the ultimate paradox of thought: to want to discover something that thought itself cannot think."³

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2 The interviews referred to in this essay formed part of study conducted in the Apostles' Church, in Copenhagen in 2014. The project was entitled Reassembling Democracy. Ritual as Cultural Resource. It was financed by the Norwegian Research Council and was conducted in collaboration with professor of in New Testament studies at the University of Copenhagen, Gitte Buch-Hansen. For further analysis of the fieldwork see Buch-Hansen, G, Felter, K.D. & Ringgaard Lorensen, M. 2015. Ethnographic Ecclesiology and the Challenges of Scholarly Situatedness. *Open Theology* 1. Open access, online at: www.degruyter.com/view/j/opth.2014.1.issue-1/opth-2015-0009/opth-2015-0009.xml.

3 Kierkegaard, S. 1985. *Philosophical Fragments*. Kierkegaard's Writings, VII. Transl. and ed. H and E Hong. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 204.

The paradoxical hope of the refugees presented in the pages below also tends to transcend the boundaries of rational human reasoning. However, this hope was expressed by way of analogies and comments on photographs that they took in preparation for our interviews with them. The empirical study of preaching through the lens and voices of refugees is an alternative way of doing homiletics compared to a traditional hermeneutical approach and is an approach that is in line with the understanding that preaching is a dialogical event in which preachers and congregation exchange roles.⁴ This latter methodological choice is, furthermore, motivated by the recent turn towards “other-wise”⁵ listeners and readers that suggests that the discipline of homiletics will benefit from listening to listeners, who are shaped by different cultures and situations than either homiletic scholars or preachers.⁶

The use of the term “other-wise” is based on contemporary developments in biblical exegesis and homiletics in which scholars and preachers increasingly begun to interpret biblical texts in conversation with “real readers” and “other-wise listeners”, rather than reflecting in solitude on the role of the “implicit reader” characteristic of narrative exegesis and preaching.⁷ The joint exegetical and homiletical turn toward actual readers and listeners may be interpreted as the recognition of the epistemological potential of the encounter with the Other, as analysed by the French philosopher, Emmanuel Lévinas. Lévinas even describes the wisdom that can emerge from the encounter with “the face” of the Other as an epiphany.⁸

Inspired by the location and context of this conference, I have begun to interpret the present empirical study of refugees in the Church in Denmark through the lens of Desmond Tutu’s theology of healing and forgiveness. Although I have been working on this project (refugees in the Church of Denmark) for some time, I am struck by the transformation that occurs when such a study is interpreted in light of South African history and theology. Crucial to the theology of Desmond Tutu is the South African concept of *Ubuntu*.⁹ Tutu’s interpretation of the concept infers the understanding that we all interconnected in the sense that each one of us is diminished when some of us are humiliated. In other words, we all suffer when others are oppressed – whether we recognise it or try to remain ignorant of it. As Tutu puts it:

In one way or another, as a supporter, a perpetrator, a victim, or one who opposed the ghastly system, something happened to our humanity. All of us South Africans were less whole than we would have been without Apartheid. Those who were privileged lost out as they became more uncaring, less compassionate, less humane and therefore less human. ... Our humanity is caught up in that of all others.¹⁰

Tutu speaks in terms of a theology of participation that echoes Paul’s description of the body of Christ: “...but God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care

4 Cf. Ringgaard Lorensen, M. 2014. *Dialogical Preaching: Bakhtin, Otherness and Homiletics*. Arbeiten zur Pastoraltheologie, Liturgik und Hymnologie 74. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

5 The hyphenated spelling of “other-wise” emphasises the double meaning of the word in English as explained in the essay.

6 Cf. Buch-Hansen, Felter & Lorensen, *Ethnographic Ecclesiology*.

7 See McClure, J.S. 2001. *Other-wise Preaching: A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice; West, G. 2007. *Reading Otherwise: Socially Engaged Biblical Scholars Reading with their Local Communities*. Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature.

8 Lévinas, E. 1991. *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 51 (Originally published as *Totalité et infini: Essai sur l'extériorité*, 1961); Lévinas, E. 1981. *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 5 (Originally published as *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence*, 1974).

9 For systematic theological analyses of *Ubuntu*, see Forster, D. 2010. African relational ontology, individual identity and Christian theology. An African theological contribution towards an integrated relational ontological identity. *Theology*, (SPCK 113) 874: 243-253.

10 Tutu, D.M. 1999. *No Future without Forgiveness*. London: Random House, 154.

for one another. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it” (1 Corinthians 12:24-26). South African Anglican priest and Director of The Institute for the Healing of Memories, Michael Lapsley, expresses a similar understanding in his lecture on forgiveness when he claimed that: “We are all in need of healing, because of what we have done, what we have failed to do, and what has been done to us.”¹¹

Based on their work on healing and forgiveness in South Africa and internationally, Tutu and Lapsley both emphasise that in order to become whole and to forgive each other, human beings need to acknowledge their interhuman connectedness. This theological interpretation of interrelation or *Ubuntu*, stems from the theological-anthropological understanding that we are connected because we are created in the image of God. However, we also play parts in each other’s lives through our common sinfulness, self-absorption and exploitation of each other.

This paradoxical theological anthropological situation has, of course, been expressed by Martin Luther in his famous description of the human being as *simul justus et peccator* in his lecture on the Letter to the Romans in 1515/16. In which he rather claimed that: “The saints are always sinners in their own sight, and therefore always justified outwardly. But the hypocrites are always righteous in their own sight, and thus always sinners outwardly.”¹² With this paradoxical situation of being both righteous and sinners at the same time in mind, the following observations may stimulate further reflections on how theologians, preachers and globally-interrelated human beings may learn from both the tragedy and the promise of the recent history of South Africa, as well as from the paradoxical hope of contemporary refugees in Europe as explained above. As a basis for these reflections I provide an analysis of the different kinds of paradoxes that characterise life in South Africa and Denmark.

Paradoxes of life in South Africa and Scandinavia

In a certain sense, South Africa is internationally known for some extreme paradoxes that characterise the country and its people. The country has an abundance of mineral resources and natural beauty, yet a large part of its inhabitants live in poverty in townships, are illiterate and have a low average life expectancy.¹³ The population of South Africa is composed of people of all colours and a variety of cultures. It is a country in which racial conflicts and tragedies have been countered with commissions of truth and reconciliation. The country has shocked and inspired the international community in the ways in which the ideology of apartheid has been critiqued and opposed with a theology of forgiveness and laughter-provoking sermons by preachers such as Desmond Tutu.

Compared to the South African context, Scandinavian countries appear almost the opposite. The populations of Sweden, Norway and Denmark are rather homogenous in terms of ethnicity, religious and political affiliations and there is a relatively small gap between rich and poor. Scandinavia is known for its free education and health care to all its citizens. Danes share approximately half of their earnings with others via income tax.¹⁴ In addition, international surveys indicate that Denmark

11 Lecture at the Societas Homiletica Meeting, Stellenbosch, March 2016. See also Lapsley, M. & Karakashian, S. 2012. *Redeeming the Past: My Journey from Freedom Fighter to Healer*. Maryknoll: Orbis.

12 The quote is part of Luther’s commentary on Romans 4:7 in which he uses the term “inwardly” to indicate human self-understanding in contrast to God’s perspective, which he describes as “outwardly”. In Luther’s interpretation human beings can only be righteous as a fruit of God’s imputation of righteousness and never due to human merits. Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, Volume 25: Lectures on Romans, Glosses and Schoilia*, ed. Hilton C Oswald, St. Louis: Concordia, 1972.

13 According to the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network report, South Africa is ranked as 116th out of 157 countries in a comparison of key factors, such as, GDP per capita, social support, life expectancy, freedom to make life choices, generosity and perceptions of corruption. The comparison serves to measure social progress and “happiness”. See online: http://worldhappiness.report/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2016/03/HR-V1_web.pdf (Accessed: 26 May 2016).

14 Danes have also been sharing their wealth outside of Danish borders in the sense that until recently Denmark was globally one of the countries that earmarked the biggest part of its GNP to foreign aid.

has the world's highest social mobility, it scores as one of the least corrupt countries in the world and the Danish people continue to be ranked among the happiest in the world.¹⁵ Those of us who live in a well-functioning society, like that of Denmark, indeed have reason to be grateful.

However, as reactions to the present refugee crisis indicate, the generosity, mutual trust and optimism that characterise Danish society does have its boundaries. Visiting Africa for the first time has led to me to reflect on some of the hidden paradoxes beneath the apparently perfect surface of my own well-functioning country. This has painfully reminded me how we are all bound together – Africans, Europeans, people of all continents. We are bound together by our common humanity, by being created in the image of God, yet we are also bound together by our exploitation and oppression of each other.

When Danes (like myself) hear about the South African history of apartheid or the continuing racial conflict in North America, we find it difficult to understand how groups of people can oppress each another in such inhuman ways. In our homogenous society, we are not used to such conflicts as the majority of Danes are ethnically native to the region. We do not have settlers as opposed to native people in reservations, nor do we have groups of descendants of slaves (in prison¹⁶). However, if we scratch the surface of this apparent harmonious co-existence, one finds Denmark own tragic history of racism and slavery.

Some of the most beautiful buildings in the capitol of Copenhagen¹⁷ were built from the wealth produced via the slave trade and the labour of Africans who were captured and shipped from present-day Ghana to the West Indies where they were forced to work on sugar plantations.¹⁸ We rarely talk about Denmark's historical involvement in the slave trade and when we do, we usually focus on being the first country in the world to ban the transatlantic slave trade, in 1792. We tend to ignore the active role the Danish king and the trading companies played in the triangular slave trade. From 1670 to 1802, almost 100 000 slaves were transported across the Atlantic on Danish ships! For Danes it is indeed preferable to remember only that we were the first to abolish the slave trade, but it is crucial to recognise that as one of the apparently best-functioning societies, we played our part in the cycle of oppression and exploitation of other people. As Desmond Tutu¹⁹ and Michael Lapsley²⁰ have shown, both victims and perpetrators are in need of healing and reconciliation.

However, these paradoxes do not only characterise the past. Actually, in the form of hidden paradoxes (of the good life in Denmark), they have become more explicit in this past year as Denmark has made the front pages in international newspapers because of the state's rejecting attitude towards refugees. Although the reasons for this are complex, it seems as if the traditional high level of care for the citizens of Denmark is part of the reason why many are cautious of letting more refugees into the country. The common perception seems to be that as a people we must choose between holding unto our high level of responsibility to and trust in our neighbours fenced in by national borders,²¹

15 In 2016 the United Nations World Happiness Report announced that Denmark once again ranked as "the happiest country in the world" cf. http://worldhappiness.report/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2016/03/HR-V1_web.pdf (Accessed: 26 May 2016).

16 Cf. Alexander, M. 2010. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York: The New Press.

17 The areas of Frederiksstad and Christianshavn.

18 I refer here specifically to the Danish colonisation of the West Indian islands of St. Croix, St. Thomas and St. Jan from 1672 to 1733. The number of slaves there were approximately 30 000 around 1800. Bugge, K.E. 2013. *Grundtvig og slavesagen*. Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 17-23.

19 Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*, 154.

20 Lapsley, *Redeeming the Past*.

21 For an overview of the present situation of border control and border fences see online: <http://www.businessinsider.com/map-refugees-europe-migrants-2016-2?r=UK&IR=T&IR=T> (Accessed: 31 May 2016).

or whether we should open up our borders and give up on our traditionally high levels of social responsibility and care.

In their joint work, *Preaching Fools: The Gospel as a Rhetoric of Folly*,²² Charles Campbell and Johan Cilliers use the metaphor “circling the wagons” to describe protective patterns of reaction when people sense a threat from outsiders in liminal situations. The term has been used as part of a postcolonial critique of white settlers moving out into new territories while protecting themselves against the liminality of the foreign place and people. The present situation in Europe where several countries have established border controls (some even border fences) carries with it connotations of such a mechanism of defence. However, the present situation in Europe also differs significantly from the historical incidents of “circling wagons” in North America and South Africa, where the term was coined. In Europe, the border control was established by the native inhabitants (of Europe) in reaction to the migrants or “settlers” from the outside.

There are great differences of opinion among the Danes as to what Denmark ought to be doing as a state in relation to the present refugee crisis. However, there is growing consensus that the present situation problematises the traditional relationship between politics and theology in the Lutheran context. One of the Danish bishops described the so-called refugee crisis as a “game changer” for the church in Denmark.²³ It is a game changer in the sense that it challenges the traditional division of roles and responsibility between church and state. Since the Reformation, there has been such a distribution of roles in which the state has taken care of the health, education and general welfare of its citizens and the church has focused on their spiritual well-being, primarily through proclamation of the gospel and distribution of the sacraments.²⁴ The present time of increased migration is, however, also a game changer with regard to how sermons are being heard and it might even be a game changer in the way we do homiletical research.

Empirical study of refugees in the ELCD

The congregation that my colleague Gitte Buch-Hansen and I studied is called the Apostles' Church and it is situated in the centre of Copenhagen. This congregation sets itself apart from most other in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in DK because of its mix of members from different ethnic and religious backgrounds. In the past ten years, the number of migrants and refugees have risen in DK to an extent that half the people who worship in the capital Copenhagen on Sunday mornings are migrants. Most of these migrants have, however, established their own “migrant churches” and although several of them use ELCD church buildings, language barriers and cultural and theological differences tend to keep the different congregations apart.

Interestingly, the Apostles' Church has broken down these barriers of separateness. When we conducted our research, one-third of the congregation were refugees from Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan, and two-thirds were ethnic Danes.

22 Campbell, C. & Cilliers, J. 2012. *Preaching Fools: The Gospel as a Rhetoric of Folly*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 60-62.

23 Interview with Henrik Wigh-Poulsen held September 2, 2015. Online at: <http://www.dr.dk/radio/ondemand/p1/mennesker-og-tro-2015-09-02#1/> (Accessed: 12 May 2016).

24 Cf. Knudsen, T. 2000. *Den nordiske protestantisme og velfærdsstaten*. Århus: Universitetsforlaget, 20-64. For an analysis of the relationship between church and state in northern European contexts, see also Østergaard, U. 2011. *Lutheranism, Nationalism and the Universal Welfare State*. In: K Kunter and JH Schjørring (eds), *European and Global Christianity: Challenges and Transformations in the 20th Century*. Göttingen/Oakville, CT: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 78-99.

23 Cf. Lausten, M.S. 1987. *Reformationen i Danmark*. København: Akademisk Forlag.

Some of the insights from the empirical study that are of particular interest to preaching are:

1. the eschatological hope expressed in the preaching and by the refugees that recognises human tragedies, yet express alternative visions that transcend pessimism and optimism;²⁵
2. how the presence of the refugees nudge traditional members of the ELCD on toward listening to the gospel anew and reconsider their own role as church;
3. the potential of role exchange between hosts and guests as well as between preachers and listeners.

Although the congregation in the Apostles' Church has emphasised that the preaching is one of the most important parts of the life of the church,²⁶ the nature and impact of the preaching in the Apostles' Church cannot be exhausted through a study of sermons alone because it is the congregation's appropriation that is the at the heart of the matter. In response to our research in the church one of the pastors, Niels Nymann Eriksen²⁷ explained that he is inspired by Søren Kierkegaard's analogy between the church and the theatre in order to describe the true relationship between congregation, preacher and God in preaching. Kierkegaard criticises the traditional tendency to focus on the preacher as if he or she is an actor on stage which the congregation, like an audience, can praise or judge for his or her performance. In contrast to this understanding, Kierkegaard claims that the preacher is rather like the prompter who whispers the lines to the actor in case she or he forgets. The congregation is far from a passive audience; in fact, the listener is the true actor standing before God:

*The prompter whispers to the actor what he is to say, but the actor's repetition of it is the main concern – is the solemn charm of the art. The speaker whispers the word to the listeners. But the main concern is earnestness: that the listeners by themselves, with themselves, and to themselves, in the silence before God, may speak with the help of this address.*²⁸

This understanding of preaching as a reversal of the anticipated roles with the focus on the congregation's interaction rather than the preacher's performance, leads me to share insights from interviews conducted with some of the listeners to preaching in the Apostles' Church.

The empirical research that provided the interviews and photographs was gathered by way of three months of participatory observation in worship services, shared meals, Bible studies and a weekend camp with the congregation. Based on these observations we interviewed ten men and women of Iranian, Afghan and Kurdish descent. Several of the interviews were conducted with the help of a translator who translated from Farsi into Danish or English. Our dialogue with the Danish part of the congregation took place as conversations during our fieldwork as well as at formal meetings where we presented our research and received their responses and further reflection on it.

Although some of the refugees that we interviewed were very well educated, others, particularly the young Afghans, were illiterate. In order to reduce the imbalance between us and the interviewees, we gave them each a disposable camera and asked them to describe their relation to the church by way of pictures. These photographs became the backbone of our interviews as we used them as points of departure for our conversations.

25 I am grateful to Johan Cilliers for analysing how both pessimism and optimism can sabotage hope in his presidential address at this conference.

26 For further analysis of the preaching in the Apostles' Church see: Ringgaard Lorensen, M. 2016. Preaching as Repetition – in Times of Transition. *The International Journal of Homiletics* (1); 34-51. Online at: http://www.qucosa.de/fileadmin/data/qucosa/documents/19759/IJM_2016_1_Lorensen.pdf (Accessed: 17 March 2016).

27 Eriksen also described the inspiration from Kierkegaard in a lecture: Eriksen, N.N. 2014. *Inspirasjon til forkynnelsen fra Søren Kierkegaard*. Online at: <https://vimeo.com/108088953> (Accessed: 16 February 2016).

28 Kierkegaard, S. 2008. *Purity of Heart is to will one Thing*. Radford: Wilder, 96-97.

Paradoxical promises – seen through eyes of faith

One of the pictures submitted shows the vaulted, white church ceiling of Trinitatis Kirke (Trinity Church) in Copenhagen. This picture indicates how the promise of the gospel is experienced in the life of an Afghan male refugee in his late twenties. We had asked all our interviewees take photographs that will reflect what the church meant to them. The Afghan man showed us this picture of a church ceiling and instructed us to turn the picture upside down in order to see it as a ship. He encouraged us to “see the eyes of all the people who sit in the boat” and he continued, “... in the congregation of Jesus there was room for people of different religions because it is about love. It is the religion of mercy.” The man explained that since he had started reading the Bible, it had struck him that Christianity is a religion of mercy – Jesus commands that we forgive even our enemies!

The young refugee's belief that there is room for everybody in the boat seems paradoxical in face of the lives of most refugees right now. Through the past year we have all witnessed how thousands of refugees have tried to cross the Mediterranean in small, ramshackle boats that do not have room for all its occupants. His belief stands in contrast to his experience as a refugee in the process of applying for asylum because having survived the journey to a new country is far from a guarantee of being granted permission to stay.

The young man's reflections on the church attest to the paradoxical way in which many of the refugees whom we have come to know perceive the world. Turning the church ceiling around so it becomes a boat that can carry everybody is a paradigmatic example of the reversal of hierarchies, values and roles that is at the core of the gospel and that is often forgotten by those of us who belong to well-established majority churches and cultures in Christian societies. As shown in what follows, this paradoxical vision through the eyes of faith also gave new sight to the ethnic Danish members of the Apostles' Church who have been part of the Christian church for generations.

Refugees breaking the chain of oppressed becoming oppressors

One of the people we interviewed was an Afghan man,²⁹ who had lived as a refugee in Iran for 27 years. He was treated miserably during that time by the Iranian authorities and never obtained a residence permit. Because he had entered the country illegally, he had close to no rights. He was not even allowed to marry his Iranian wife or buy a bike! His conversion led to even greater persecution – he is, for example, deaf in one ear as a result of being beaten up in Iran.

The Afghan man told us that one of the reasons he decided to flee Iran was because he was afraid of ending up like his oppressors. I must admit that I did not understand the importance of the Afghan refugee's fear of becoming like his oppressors before I began studying the South African context and the work of Desmond Tutu in particular. In his book *No Future without Forgiveness*, Tutu describes this vicious cycle of oppression and revenge where some of those who opposed and were victims of apartheid ended up “...becoming what they most abhorred. Tragically, they themselves frequently became brutalised and descended to the same low levels as those they were opposing.”³⁰ In addition to the South African situation, Tutu points to the experience of the African American community where many have taken over their oppressors' destructive treatment and ended up destroying “those who are like this self they have been conditioned to hate.”³¹

29 The Afghan man is around 50 years old. The interview was conducted in English with the aid of an Afghan interpreter.

30 Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*, 155.

31 Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*, 155.

The danger of the oppressed becoming oppressors is known from a number of different contexts, not least in the cases where Europeans fled their rulers and home countries in order to gain freedom of religion or to escape famine and war. In my analysis, the fear that the new migrants will end up oppressing the native people and their culture is at the heart of the present reluctance toward receiving large numbers of migrants among many Europeans – and we sure have our reasons to be aware of this sad logic.

The story of how the oppressed becomes oppressors, unfortunately did not end when the Afghan man fled from Iran to Northern Europe. At the refugee centre in Denmark the Afghan refugee was attacked several times by other refugees because of his conversion to Christianity. On the first night of our field study, we were told that he had had been attacked and his throat cut open at the refugee camp. When he came out from the hospital he was too afraid to go back to the refugee centre and ended up sleeping in the church.

During our interview, the Afghan man told us that although his application for asylum had been rejected twice, he was at peace because he felt as if he had already been granted a citizenship through the gospel.³² This belief in a heavenly citizenship could seem paradoxical in light of the many persecutions and the inability to obtain a residence permit in the countries he had fled to. However, it was characteristic of the people we interviewed that the gospel and the lives of the Christians they had encountered provided them with hope and reassurance.

Another picture that was taken by an Afghan refugee shows an open Bible in Farsi on a lap. This picture testifies to the young Afghan's paradoxical belief, as he explained, that his favourite passage in the Bible is Matthew 7:7-10:

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he?

This man has recently had his application for asylum rejected.

It is important to note that most of the refugees we interviewed had recently converted to or were in the process of conversion from Islam to Christianity. Many of the new refugees in the church attend a catechesis course with a view to baptism. At the same time, they are in the process of applying for asylum in Denmark. The growing number of asylum seekers who convert to Christianity has given rise to public speculations about pro forma conversions,³³ because baptism can give a refugee from the Middle East an advantage in the application process for residency. Conversion from Islam to Christianity heightens the danger of deporting refugees to their home country. Although conversion can be a potential advantage in the asylum process, our empirical study indicated that the chances of being persecuted, because of conversion is greater than the chances for asylum. Among the people we interviewed several of them told us that they had been persecuted because of their conversion – one woman's children had even been persecuted back in Iran because she had converted in Denmark.

Our interviews and participant observation indicate that the asylum seekers' motifs for seeking baptism and being part of a Christian community are complex and cannot be reduced to a mere strategic choice. In our interpretation, the refugees' conversion is primarily related to their

32 This Afghan man obtained residence permit in Denmark 2015.

33 Cf. Hemmingsen, L. 2014. 16-årig gemmer sig i kirke for "skandaløs" afgørelse. Jyllands-Posten Inland, 20-12-2014. Online at: <http://jyllands-posten.dk/inland/ECE7300839/16-%C3%A5rig-gemmer-sig-i-kirke-for-skandal%C3%B8s-afg%C3%B8relse/> (Accessed 21 March 2016).

experiences of trauma and homelessness. Their use of the Bible and creative analyses of church architecture, in order to give hope to their lives, indicate this. Yet, neither we, nor the pastors of the Apostles' Church can ignore that we are in the midst of a highly-politicised debate.

Preaching as a paradoxical promise in the Apostles' Church

Preaching to these refugees, who put all their hope in the promise of the gospel and who are in the process of converting from Islam to Christianity, as well as applying for asylum, is a rather paradoxical matter. Our studies show that the pastors in the Apostles' Church tend to embrace a theology of the cross rather than a gospel of security and prosperity. In fact, they never encourage the refugees to convert and they are very careful, warning the refugees who ask to become part of a catechesis class aiming at baptism about the dangers of persecution and even death that are related to baptism for them. The link between baptism and death echoes that of Martin Luther's understanding:

For they are baptized into death ... For although they are baptized unto eternal life and the kingdom of heaven ... they do not all at once possess this goal fully, but they have begun to act in such a way that they may attain to it—for Baptism was established to direct us toward death and through this death to life.³⁴

The promise of baptism, in Luther's understanding, is that God obliges Godself to stand by God's word regardless of the baptised person's despair. The belief in God's promise of standing by God's word in spite of lived experiences did indeed characterise the baptised refugees. Furthermore, several of them embodied the understanding of resurrection to a new life through death. One example of this came from an Iranian woman who described her process of converting from Islam to Christianity in a way that captured quite literally the experience of dying in hope of a new life. She described her conversion as an organ transplantation in the sense of a long, demanding process as she said:

I know that, for many Danes, it is fine to go to church once a week, listen for an hour and then go home. But that is not enough for me to live on. ... It is as if I have had my inner organs removed – my heart, my lungs, my blood – and now I need new organs and new blood in order to live. That is why I need substantial food – spiritual food.³⁵

The woman emphasised that she was dependent upon the sound proclamation of the preachers in the Apostles' Church in order to survive as a new Christian in a new country. She was very grateful of the nourishing teaching and preaching of this church, but she also emphasised her need for reiterating and embodying the preaching that she heard. She repeated and embodied the proclamation she had heard through leading Bible classes, reading Bible texts aloud during worship service, cooking for the congregation and helping out wherever she could. She told us that she sees herself as a missionary.

This vulnerable Iranian woman's sense of being a missionary in her new faith corresponds quite well with the understanding of preaching in the Apostles' Church in the sense that the congregation is bound together by vulnerability rather than self-sufficiency, as well as by an emphasis on the role exchange between preacher and listeners of preaching.

34 Martin Luther's Works, Vol 25, 312. Online at: <https://reformation500.wordpress.com/2012/11/25/martin-luthers-understanding-of-baptism/> (Accessed 19 February 2016).

35 For further details and analysis of the interview with this Iranian woman see Lorensen, Preaching as Repetition, 48-50.

Sermon “Through their wounds we are healed”

In a sermon on the parable of the blind man on the road to Jericho, one of the preachers in the congregation, Niels Nymann Eriksen, describes calls it one of the church’s characteristic flaws that those disciples who consider themselves as part of the inner circle tend to prevent people who are in need and marginalised from reaching out to Jesus.³⁶ Eriksen refers to the disciples’ active rebuke of children earlier in Luke³⁷ as well as to the more passive prevention in the story of Zacchaeus in which the crowd prevents him from seeing Jesus.³⁸

In his sermon, Eriksen describes the healing of the blind man as a double healing, because the healing of the wounded man at the side of the road also has a healing effect on the crowd. The man who was healed started praising God and the people who saw it also started praising God. The healing of the blind man becomes Jesus’ way into the hearts of the crowd.

The preacher furthermore links the story to the worship service, which is also basically a movement from asking for mercy to praising God. Every Sunday the worship service begins by saying the words from Luke 18, “Lord have mercy on me.” In that sense, worshippers who live their everyday lives at a comfortable distance from the roadside try to sit down on the road, next to the blind man, at the worship service.

In the preacher’s interpretation, the crowd needs to be reminded of the vulnerability, powerlessness and dependency that lie in being human. He refers to the work of Catholic philosopher and humanitarian Jean Vanier who founded the community called L’Arche for people with developmental disabilities and those who assist them.³⁹ The preacher leaves it up to his congregation to draw the parallel between the people living at L’Arche and the refugees in the Apostles’ Church when he quotes Vanier’s claim that “[t]hrough their wounds we are healed” and the question: “Could it be, that the person whom you reject is the one who will bring you healing?”⁴⁰

It may sound as if the preaching in the Apostles’ Church is very political. However, the Church testifies to an intricate relationship between contemplation and political action. In a diagnosis of the present time, the preacher problematises the tendency of contemporary Christian communities to: 1) either close in on themselves in an interpretation of the gospel that does not take the questions of today seriously, or 2) busily to occupy themselves in demonstrating their relevance through political engagement that is not rooted in God’s revelation. Eriksen interprets Bonhoeffer’s *Gemeinsames Leben/Life Together* as an example of how political engagement can grow out of spiritual immersion and theological work.

From host to guest, from generous to vulnerable community

In addition to interviewing and getting to know the refugees we met several times with the group of pastors and volunteer leaders of the church and discussed our study. At a meeting we were asked to present our initial findings for these leaders and volunteers. They were curious to hear about our research as they did not think they were good enough as hosts as they ought to be. We shared our insights into of how vital the church is for the refugees. During our fieldwork we were impressed with

36 Luke 18, 31-43. Sermon delivered on 8 February 2015. Online at: <http://apostelkirken.podbean.com/> (Accessed: 11 February 2016).

37 Luke 18:15-17.

38 Luke 19:1-10.

39 Canadian Catholic philosopher and humanitarian Vanier, in 1964, founded an international federation of communities spread over 35 countries.

40 Vanier, J. 1992. *From Brokenness to Community*. Mahwah: Paulist, 1.

the great care that the pastors and volunteers of the Apostles' Church extended toward the refugees. Embedded in the amazing work the group of leaders and volunteers did in order to be good hosts to the newcomers, we did however also present what we saw as a problematic relationship, namely the relationship between host and guests.

We had discovered that the refugees cooked, cleaned and helped wherever they could in order to return the favours of their generous hosts, but they never made it to the central tasks in the life of the congregation, such as distributing the Eucharist. We suggested that, although hospitality creates a relationship between guest and host, there is a risk that hospitality may establish a hierarchy and generate dependency if it is a one-way relationship between a generous host and a passively-receiving guest. Since then the church council has worked hard on letting the hosts at the Lord's Table represent the diversity of the congregation. One of the Iranian refugees described that being invited to *serve* at the Eucharist was the greatest *gift* she had received.

The change of roles between guest and host was not limited to physical acts of service. After our discussion, we asked the group, which consisted of ethnic Danish and one British person, whether the presence of the migrant group made a difference to them as a congregation. Some of the volunteers responded that they tend to listen to the reading of the biblical texts and the sermon differently when they hear it in the company of refugees, who have been exposed to religious persecution and severe personal loss.⁴¹

In addition, one of the pastors explained that he feels closer to God when he is with people who are vulnerable. It turned out that the ethnic Danish part of the congregation shared the sense of becoming a more whole congregation and feeling closer to God as they worshipped with people who were considered vulnerable.⁴² Such experiences of vulnerability and role exchanges between hosts and guests, preachers and congregation seemed to motivate the ethnic Danish "hosts" in the congregation to start moving from a hierarchy of generosity to real community as they realised that true community is not something one can offer out of generosity, but is something one can receive qua our mutual vulnerability.

I believe the above interpretations the responses received may help us all to understand what it means to be, as well as to preach, about the body of Christ. The understanding of the refugees and the preaching in the Apostles' Church of vulnerable connectedness as the body of Christ resembles what the Russian dialogue philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin describes as the grotesque body: "the 'grotesque body' ... is a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed: it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body."⁴³ The insights from our fieldwork among the refugees in the Apostles' Church suggest that we perceive the body of Christ as a grotesque body that transcends its own boundaries. In contrast to the Renaissance ideal of the "classic body" that distinguishes itself by being harmonious in its self-sufficiency and thus closed off from surrounding bodies, the grotesque body lives because it is vulnerably connected to others or – in the words of Desmond Tutu, "caught up in the bundle of life."⁴⁴

41 Meeting with the leadership group of the Apostles' Church, 5 September 2014.

42 Several homileticians have analysed the surplus of meaning and interpretation that tends to emerge in situations of liturgical worship. Cf. Deeg, A. 2012. *Das äußere Wort und seine liturgische Gestalt Überlegungen zu einer evangelischen Fundamentalliturgik*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht; Gaarden, M. 2015. *Prædikenen som det tredje rum*. Frederiksberg: Anis Forlag (English version (forthcoming), *The Third Room of Preaching*. Louisville, KY: John Knox Westminster). Nielsen, B.F. 2014. Erlebnis Predigt im Ritual des Gottesdienstes. In: A Deeg (Hrsg.), *Erlebnis Predigt: Eine Veröffentlichung des Ateliers Sprache e.V., Braunschweig*. Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 141-161.

43 Bakhtin, M. 2014. *Rabelais and his world*. Transl. H Iswolsky. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 317.

44 Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*, 196.

The Paradox of Strangeness and Familiarity – A Response to Marlene Ringgaard Lorensen

9

Albrecht Grözinger

I want to make only three short remarks on the paper of Marlene Lorensen. My response comes from a similar context. I was born in Germany and have lived and taught in Switzerland for the past twenty years. On the one hand Denmark, Germany and Switzerland are very, very different countries; on the other hand they are also very close and similar. Especially in the context of what we currently call the European refugee crisis. Denmark, Germany and Switzerland are in economic terms among the richest countries in Europe, with high standards of living and a highly developed social systems. Therefore, all three countries are sought-after destinations for refugees who presently come to Europe and, in this regard, Germany plays a prominent role. I would like to further problematise three issues that Marlene referred to:

4. The question: To whom do we preach?
5. The question of the relationship between political discourse and the sermon.
6. The question of the paradox of strangeness and familiarity.

To whom do we preach?

Marlene impressively described and analysed a very specific phenomenon and situation, namely the sermon addressed to refugees seeking asylum. However, the so-called normal situation of preaching is different. In general, in many parts of Europe, we have very diverse communities that listen to sermons. Amongst them we have people, who try to make the daily lives of the refugees easier. We have perhaps the mayor, who has the task of securing accommodation for the refugees and who often reaches the limits of the possibilities open to him or her in this regard. We have people, and we know that for sure, who do not wish refugees to continue flocking to our countries. We might even have a woman, who has experienced violence at the hands of a refugee. What does this heterogeneity imply for preaching? Unfortunately, I have no conclusive answer. Perhaps there is generally no conclusive answer at all. Be that as it may, the question of how we should deal with the refugees, also presents us again at a very elementary level with the issue of the heterogeneity of our congregations. This, in itself, could be a helpful exercise.

The relationship of political discourse and the sermon

To me it was quite noticeable how Marlene often alternated between a political and a homiletic discourse in her presentation. She, for example makes it clear at one point that she is neither a politician, nor that she wishes to discuss what Denmark ought to be doing as a state in relation to the present refugee crisis. Shortly afterwards, she states that one cannot ignore that the Danes find themselves in the midst of a highly-politicised debate. Currently, in my opinion, one cannot preach

in any of the abovementioned three countries without reminding oneself of the histories of our present contexts. These histories were often characterised the inescapable tension between political and religious discourses. I can, for instance, clearly remember a similar situation earlier during my lifetime. It was the time when terrorists of the so-called Red Army Faction subjected Germany to a wave of terror. During that time, the sermon was almost always heard, or at least listened to, in a dualistic way and with a basic set of questions to the background: What does the preacher say theologically and (or but) what does the preacher mean politically?

I think the situation is similar today. Whether we like this or not, every word from the pulpit is heard in terms of a supposed or real political message. Homiletically speaking, we are once again confronted with the basic problem and challenge of the so-called “political sermon”.

As mentioned above, it is noticeable that Marlene Lorensen constantly switches between these two discourses (political and religious) in her presentation – so much so that one, or at least I, was not always clear in what discourse one is finding oneself at a specific moment! This is to say, in Marlene’s paper we have again been confronted with this basic, homiletical tension. Preaching and politics are two different discourses, but they are related to each other – at least from the perspective of the sermon. However, the fact that they are related to each other is not the homiletic problem, but rather how they are related. Given history of Germany, I have always had a certain reservation against political sermons, as a matter of course. In history in general, certainly in our (German) history, there has always been plenty of misuse of the political sermon – I think here of the sermons calling for crusades centuries ago, but also, of course, more recently the war sermons during the First World War and the sermons of pastors who were sympathisers of the Hitler regime in Germany. Currently we are again faced with the problem of and challenges presented by preaching concrete political sermons. I ask just one question here, illustrating this complexity and challenge: What help and insight does the mayor of a small town – finding her or himself at the end of possible resources for offering decent lodging to refugees and given his/her experiences in this search on behalf of the refugees – get from a sermon, in particular a sermon that seeks to stay true to the biblical tradition hospitality toward the stranger (refugee)?

The question of the paradox of strangeness and familiarity

I come to the third and what is to me, the most important point. Marlene’s lecture ends with a vision that moves from host to guest, from generosity to vulnerable community.

I think with this vision we come to the most central and urgent problem of preaching in the context of the European refugee crisis. It is also the focus of the theme of our conference here in Stellenbosch as it was of our previous conference in Madurai (India). At both, we in a sense discussed the issue of vulnerability. On an individual level the influx of the refugees to Germany and Switzerland is a personal experience, highlighting the relationship between “myself” and the “other”. It is about the fear of the unknown, but also about human compassion, about the basic wish to help people in need – in this case, the refugees from abroad. And, for many people, it is a (complex) combination of both elements.

To me, the situation of the refugees also presents us with the challenge of and the opportunity to preach meaningfully in the current European context. Ultimately, all worship and all preaching refer to the fundamental experience of the self and the other – also beyond all current times and circumstances.

Here, I am reminded of Karl Barth, who referred to the concept of God as the concept of the “totally other”. Barth wanted to remind churches and theologians that the experience of God is more and different than just the experience of one’s own religious feelings. God comes from afar and as a stranger. The Bible speaks of this coming on almost on every page. But – and this is the paradox – this “afar” and “alien” God also comes close to *me*. In fact, Augustine said that this afar and alien God comes closer to me than I can even come to myself! This is the paradox of the experience of God and it is at the same time the paradox of each Christian worship and the paradox of each helpful sermon. I do hope that this deep, theological and homiletical experience of paradox will be a good companion for us on the road to addressing – what is for many anxious and courageous Europeans and their preachers – a daunting challenges.

Michael Lapsley¹

I want like to reflect with you on a verse that does not appear in Scripture. The verse reads: “The time has come to forgive and to forget.” I was involved in a Healing of Memories workshop, the kind of work I do in South Africa, when a pastor stood up and said, “We must forgive and forget.” I said to him, “Pastor, why do you say that?” He answered: “Because it’s in the Bible.” I asked: “Please show me the passage.” He’s still there, turning the pages, looking for that particular verse.

In South Africa, at the time of our transition to democracy, the last white president used to speak of the need to forgive and forget in such a holy tone that it sounded as if it was not, at least it should be in the Scriptures! But as I have listened now for many years to the stories of people in pain, again and again I have heard them say, “Of course we’re supposed to forgive and forget, but the problem is, I cannot forget.” That raises the question about whether we should, in fact, forget.

When I was in Australia, a couple of years ago, it was at the time of the remembrance of D-Day more than 60 years ago, and so it was in the headlines in the Australian press. And, when I travelled to the United States after that, again it was headlines about D-Day. So many countries of the world were filled with remembrance of the sacrifices of 60 years ago and how they shaped our history. But it was also interesting to see how the politicians sought to use memory to justify the present. So yes, remembering, but remembering to what end?

It was about that time that President Reagan died. I must say, as a South African, I was a little surprised to find that he had become a saint. But I suppose my memories as a South African were slightly different. I remembered that he had opposed sanctions and that Congress had voted for sanctions and eventually overruled Reagan. Those sanctions meant that we died less in South Africa, that our struggle came to its culmination more quickly.

But we are people of faith, people who read the Good Book and so, of course, it needs to be to Scripture that we should turn to discover what the Bible tells us about memory. I have one of those clever computer programs where you can punch in any word from the Bible and it will give you all the appearances of that word. It is very interesting, if you punch in the word “forget”, in most cases in Scripture is has two little words in front of it: “do not”. There are many examples of the call to remember in the Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament. Again and again the prophets say to the Jewish people: “The reason you are misbehaving now, the reason you are morally lost, is because you have forgotten the God who accompanied you on the journey from slavery to freedom. Remember!

¹ Michael Lapsley is a South African Anglican priest and social justice activist. He is a founding member and director of the Institute for Healing of Memories in Cape Town.

Remember when you were slaves in Egypt, remember the God who talked with you, who walked with you on the journey.”

Next time that somebody tells you that we as Christians are supposed to forget, tell them they are talking nonsense. Because, like Muslims, like Jewish people, we Christians belong to one of the great remembering religions.

What kind of memory does Scripture encourage us to have? It is redemptive memory. It is the memory of good that comes out of evil; it is the memory of life that comes out of death. Redemptive memory, because of course, nations, communities and individuals often have another kind of memory, destructive memory. There are many conflicts in the world in which grandparents pass hatred on to grandchildren. Yes, they remember – in Ireland they speak of Battle of the Boyne, in the 16th something or 17th something. I remember in Bosnia, people saying, “We’re going to attack that village over there, because of what they did to us in 1492.” So the question for us is how do we move from destructive memory to life-giving memory?

I want to suggest to you that if something terrible has happened to an individual, to a community, or to a nation, there is one of two journeys. Either we travel a journey of victim-survivor-victor (something has been done to us, we are victims; if we physically survive we are survivors; to be a victor is to become a subject of history once more.) To become what the Bible speaks of is to become co-creators, co-workers with God. That is the redemptive path. There is another path – the path of victims who become victimisers. One of South Africa’s great and wise leaders, Chief Albert Luthuli, once said: “Those who think of themselves as victims eventually become the victimisers of others.”

When September 11 happened, New York, the United States, was a victim. It had the sympathy, the compassion, and the support, of the broadest possible group of humanity, transcending so many barriers, so many divisions. But what did the victim do? The victim went on to become the victimiser. And the victim did not mind if it was the same people who did it, but there was need for revenge. And so the cycle continued. But equally that is true for us as individuals, and often in conflicts, both sides think of themselves as victims; both sides justify what they do to the other in the name of what was done to them.

So the question is, how do we break that cycle? I want to suggest to you today that breaking the cycle of victim-victimiser-victim is a question of detoxification; it’s a question of getting the poison out. It’s a question of dealing with not what we think about the past, but *of what we feel toward the past*. It is about traveling a journey beginning with the step from knowledge to acknowledgement. Often in families, communities and nations there is a guilty secret everybody knows, but it cannot be spoken about – so there is no acknowledgement. There’s nobody saying: “I’m sorry. It was wrong.”

But what of forgiveness? Often from pulpits, preachers tell their congregations that they must forgive, and forgiveness is spoken of as something glib and cheap and easy. The preacher does not admit that she or he finds forgiveness costly, painful, and difficult. And that it is a journey and a choice.

Have you ever heard about Bicycle Theology? No? Bicycle Theology is where I come, I steal your bicycle and six months later I return and I say to you: “I am the one who stole your bicycle. I am very sorry. Please will you forgive me?” And because you’re a good Christian person, you respond: “Yes of course, I forgive you” – *and* I keep the bike! Often, we in the church preach Bicycle Theology. We reduce forgiveness to saying sorry and we do not return the bike. Unlike in Bicycle Theology, restitution and reparation are part of the journey of forgiveness.

I have often said that, on my own journey, I am not full of hatred, I am not bitter, I do not want revenge, because I realised that if I was filled with hatred and bitterness, I would be a victim forever: they would have failed to kill the body, but they would have killed the soul. So sometimes after I speak, somebody jumps up and says, "You're such a wonderful example of forgiveness!" Which surprises me slightly, since I had not mentioned the word forgiveness.

You see, I received a letter bomb in April of 1990, three months after the release of Nelson Mandela from prison. I know that the last white president was morally and politically responsible, but I do not know who made the bomb. I do not know who posted it. So in a sense I have not yet forgiven anybody, because there is nobody yet to forgive. But perhaps, when I return to Cape Town, the doorbell will go, and someone will be there who says, "I am the one who sent you the letter bomb. Please will you forgive me?" I would have a prior question: "Do you still make letter bombs?" He says, "No, actually, I work at the local hospital." My response would be to say, "Yes of course I forgive you, and I would prefer that you spend the next fifty years working at that hospital rather than be locked up in prison." Because I believe more in restorative justice than the justice of retribution.

Often when we say justice, we mean retribution, if not revenge.

So, perhaps we would have tea together, then I might say, "Of course, you cannot return my hands, you cannot return the eye I lost, you cannot fix my eardrums, but you could assist me for the rest of my life with someone to help me, as a consequence of what happened to me." That would not be a condition of forgiveness; it would be a form of reparation and restitution, in the ways that are possible.

So my work is part of an institute for healing of memories, listening to the pain of the people of South Africa and increasingly to the pain of the people of the world. Providing spaces where human beings can begin to acknowledge what has happened to them, have it heard, revered, recognised – and begin to let go of that in the past that would destroy them and take from the past that which is life-giving.

But just to ask, finally, what does God promise us on the journey to healing? My own discovery was that God did not step in and say to me: "That's a letter bomb. Don't open it." But when the bomb went off, I felt God's presence with me. To me, the great promise of Scripture had been kept: "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of age." God's promise is to accompany us on our journeys. And that's the promise we claim today also.

Remarks on the Presentation by Fr. Michael Lapsley



Frank Thomas¹

I wish to present my response to this marvellous and, indeed, healing presentation in four parts. First, thank you so very much for the message and the challenge you put to us about to realise the depth of the true meaning of forgiveness. Not only did you teach us the true inner workings of forgiveness, you also challenged our own lives and our own belief systems on this essential concept of life. Thank you for tackling one of the deepest questions of human living and for creatively harnessing your experience, so that, if we accept your invitation, we can also deal with one of the hardest truths of life in a constructive way, namely to realise that in order to move on with one's life, one needs to forgive.

Not only is this forgiveness a profound issue in personal relationships, but it is also an issue amongst groups and nations. I come from the legacy and the current experience of the tremendous difficulty of race in America. America has not come to grips with the pain and tragedy of its racial past. Someone once said that if you press a whole school of fish underwater and three pop up and live, you have not solved a problem on the basis of the three that managed to survive and do well. The majority continue to languish and often die. You are very right about the power of acknowledgment. America still struggles with its acknowledgment of its racial past and present.

I must admit that challenging the racial issue seems to be such a challenge that I have all but given up on the related challenges of reparations and restitution. I could settle for the simple acknowledgement of the truth and not the massive denial of historical and present racism and systemic structures that produce the most good for the most people of European descent.

Secondly, this is a homiletical conference with the theme of paradox and the promise, so I hope you do not mind if I filter your remarks through a homiletical lens. Your remark on how often preachers tell their congregations that they must forgive, and that forgiveness is spoken of as something glib and cheap and easy. I wonder why this is so. Why do preachers speak of forgiveness as something glib and cheap? What is in it for us? What does it benefit the preacher? Why do we choose to support this narrative?

You question the fact that often the preacher does not admit that she or he finds forgiveness costly, painful and difficult; that it too is a journey and a choice. In not admitting such things, there is disconnection between what the preacher lives and experiences and what the preacher preaches. And one, may rightly ask, why would the preacher preach something that is disconnected from their authentic experience?

¹ Frank A Thomas serves as the director of the PhD Program in African American Preaching and Sacred Rhetoric and the Nettie Sweeney and Hugh Th. Miller Professor of Homiletics at Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis, Indiana.

To me, this is the difficulty with many of the sermons I hear and also sometimes deliver myself! It is not real. It does not match up with the authentic experience that the preacher is living and, therefore, because the preacher is every man or every woman, it does not reflect the authentic experiences of the people. Do preacher then really not want to help heal the memories of people? How can we ask the people to go to a place of the healing of memories if we, as preachers, will not go there? This leads to my fourth comment.

What is the kind of preaching that heals memories and promotes forgiveness? For me, as a preacher I want to preach the kinds of sermons that help people do the real work; help people do this kind of inner and soul searching work. Maybe this kind of preaching is based on in getting in touch with an authentic experience of the text and the authenticity of one's own experiences in order to reach what is authentic in people. Maybe to help the sermon have this effect, to do this kind of work, I have to do this kind of work myself! It is probably much easier to work on theology, much easier for me to pontificate homiletical methods and theories than do this kind of work...

I want to thank you for our presentation. This is the kind of preaching that I long for and the kind of work that I sometimes rather avoid... However, I am so thankful when a preacher or a presentation gently reminds me not to and invites me to go where I would rather not, but need to, go.

Paper Presentations



Preaching as Poetic Thinking (*fides quaerens imaginem*) within the Framework of an Aesthetics of Life and the Beautification of Lifestyles (*fides quaerens vivendi*)

12

Daniël Louw²

One could argue that preaching is an attempt to signify life and to find the vocabulary to articulate the meaning of our being human by means of symbols and metaphors that stimulate creative and imaginative thinking. Creative preaching “produces” and “designs” signs, *chiffre* (Jaspers, 1932) as directives that shape different modes of being and qualify lifestyles as embodiment of the content of the Christian faith.

Aesthetic signs should, thus, be viewed as part of practical theological reflection.³ Symbolisation and aesthetic signification are integral ingredients of Christian reflection in the articulation of meaningful perspectives for life and significant religious experiences of divine presence. Art and religion should thus be viewed as asymmetric bipolarities⁴ in processes of religious interpretation and signification.

In this regard, it is hypothesised that homiletics is essentially an artistic and poetic endeavour within the realm of a practical theological aesthetics.

Verbalisation can be rendered a fundamental challenge in creating spaces for the homiletic event; i.e. for providing the “synapse” between the presence of God and the human quest for meaning. Verbalisation and wording are creative and imaginary “tools” in the communication event of preaching in order to explain the meaning of a praxis of faith. Wording in preaching is about faith seeking terminology for the communication of the gospel: *fides quaerens verbum*.

Words and communication are attempts to transcend the immediacy of experience; its aim is to take human life further than merely the phenomenology of facts. In this sense meaningful communication is about the aesthetics of spirituality – the attempt to move experiences and objects into imaging and hope-giving visions. Words become building blocks, markings (*Bauklötze, Signale, Wegweiser*⁵) for imaginative meaning creation. At the same time, words should take aesthetic awareness⁶ and observation seriously. Words probe into the transcendent dimension of life by means of aesthetic symbolisation, thus, the emphasis on a poetic gaze.

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3 Gräß, W. 2007. *Ästhetische und religiöse Erfahrung/ Kunst und Religion/Produktionsästhetik/ Receptionsästhetik*. In: W Gräß & B Weyel (Hrsg.) *Handbuch Praktische Theologie*. Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 737.

4 Gräß, *Ästhetische und religiöse Erfahrung*, 738.

5 Steinmeyer, A.M. 2011. Ikonische Innovationen. Überlegungen zur Predigt im Horizont kultureller Lebenswelt. In T Klie, M Kumlehn, R Kunz, T Schlag (Hrsg.), *Lebenswissenschaft Praktische Theologie?! Praktische Theologie im Wissenschaftsdiskurs*. Band 9. Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 264.

6 “Ästhetisches Bewusstsein, auch und gerade im Angesicht von Werken der Kunst, ist ein Bewusstsein von Gegenwart – eine gegenüber der sonstigen Kenntnis des Hier und Jetzt gesteigerte Aufmerksamkeit für das Involviertsein in biographische und historische Zeit”, Seel, M. 2012. *Transzendenzen der Kunst*. In: T Erme & P Schütz (Hrsg.), *Der religiöse Charme der Kunst*. Paderborn/München/Wien/ Zürich: Ferdinand Schöningh, 39.

Wording in preaching also refers to the attempt to transform and change everyday lifestyles into modes of being that embody and exemplify faith within different setting and contexts. In this respect, one can say that preaching is involved in the shaping and structuring of meaningful expressions of faith so that *habitus* becomes a mode of preaching as well. Attitude and aptitude then function as liturgical exemplifications of the relevance of Christian faith; wording becomes action; verbalising becomes being; communication becomes incarnational and inhabitational. In this sense, preaching is involved in the praxis of life events. Homiletics can then be described as the poetics of aesthetic lifestyles. Wording in preaching becomes faith seeking meaningful lifestyles: *fides quaerens vivendi*; it operates within imaginative expressions of symbols and metaphors. Wording, as a process of symbolisation and a metaphoric articulation of life events, is closely related to imagination: *fides quaerens imaginem*.

Fides quaerens imaginem: artistic viewing in praxis thinking

Artistic viewing supersedes the limitations of merely phenomenological experiences and observation. Art probes into the fourth dimension of life wherein time and space are transformed into a visual and spiritual togetherness that brings about a kind of integration (wholeness) and interconnectedness between object and viewer. For this “spiritual interconnectedness” one needs imagination. Images are then moved through imagination into poetic seeing.

To imagine is closely related to the art of seeing and the aesthetics of humane living (Louw 2013:3).



The John Lennon memorial, Central Park New York⁷

In the now famous song *Imagine*, John Lennon dreamt about a different and perhaps better world “Imagine no possessions; I wonder if you can; No need for greed or hunger; A brotherhood of man; Imagine all the people sharing all the world.”⁸

7 John Lennon memorial, Central Park New York (Strawberry Fields) with title of his very famous song *Imagine*. Gift from Yoko Ono and City of Naples on what would have been Lennon’s 45th birthday. Design from a Roman mosaic in Pompei. Authorised copyright, Central Park Conservancy. Online at: <http://www.centralparknyc.org/visit/things-to-see/south-end/strawberry-fields.html> (Accessed: 5 January 2013).

8 Louw, D. 2013. *Icons. Imaging the Unseen. On Beauty and Healing of Life, Body and Soul*. Stellenbosch: AFRICAN SUN MeDIA, 3.

John Lennon's song gained iconic status. It captured the imagination of a new Generation X, disillusioned by the artificiality and materialism of a capitalist society. Imagination helped him to "see" more. It opened up the mind of youth to start imagining a new or different world.

Art hinges on the mystery of the human spirit, the yearning for freedom beyond the limitations of what already exists and has been achieved. The poetic gaze in art opens up vision and probes into the transcendent real of life; it articulates the human quest for freedom and meaningful living.

Perhaps the reason why Beethoven cherished freedom and virtue? The subject rumbled through his mind so that finally Fidelio became

*...the greatest of all hymns to liberty, as the victims of injustice struggle up from their dungeons towards the light. "O happiness to see the light", they say, "to feel the air and be once more alive. Our prison was a tomb. O freedom, freedom come to us again."*⁹

It is the conviction of Wilson that, what should be explored in encounters with human beings, is the capacity for imagination within the parameters of freedom. "The use of imagination and intellect brought man his greatest vision: of the idea lived at a level of intensity and purpose that is impossible for the mere animal."¹⁰

More and more the dimension of imagination is being explored in praxis thinking. De Gruchy adds the dimension of transformation and the notion of aesthetic in human actions, i.e., our ability to transcend the visible through imagination.¹¹ Browning calls the aesthetic perspective the visual dimension of practical moral thinking.¹²

Besides the performance-action paradigm (liberating practices of transformation), the connection practice-praxis includes the creative interplay between wisdom and imagination (*fides quaerens imaginem*). Practice and action are exponents of practical reasoning (*phronesis*) (Browning, 1991)¹³. More than merely human activity is at stake in practical theological thinking. Praxis is about the undergirding theory in human actions; it refers to the significance and how of human orientation within the relational dynamics of everyday life. It includes an ontological dimension, as well as a teleological dimension.¹⁴ In Greek thinking, praxis is fundamentally viewed as an expression of "form" in order to connect "essence", "design" and function within concrete moments of observation and decision-making.¹⁵

Imagination can be rendered as a vital, spiritual element in practical reasoning; it is a component of what can be called the spirituality of "mind energy". According to Bergson, spiritual energy is "mind-energy", manifested in intuition.¹⁶ Praxis is a combination between spiritual energy and action. "Activity seeking expression is the concept of Mind-Energy."¹⁷ The point in Bergson's argument is that life is composed by series of positions, thus, the notion of transition and mobility in daily life

9 Clark, K. 1974. *Civilisation. A Personal View*. London: British Broadcasting Corporation and John Murray, 305.

10 Wilson, C. 1966. *Introduction to the New Existentialism*. London: Hutchinson, 164, 165.

11 De Gruchy, J. 2001 *Christianity, Art and Transformation. Theological Aesthetics in the Struggle for Justice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 3-4.

12 Browning, D.S. 1991. *A Fundamental Practical Theology*. Minneapolis, MA: Fortress, 105.

13 Practical theology poses the question about the reason or intention of human actions, as well as the norms and values that direct actions and influence decisions. Don Browning (*A Fundamental*, 9-10) refers to this dimension of practical theology as the question about practical reason. In the context of the Christian faith it is the question about *phronesis*: wisdom as the driving force behind the actions of communities of faith.

14 "The word teleology means the view of things as adapting means towards purposive ends", Stace, W.T. 1960. *A Critical History of Greek Philosophy*. London: MacMillan, 101.

15 Stace, *A Critical History*, 277.

16 Bergson, H. 1921. *Mind-Energy. Lectures & essays*. London: MacMillan, vii.

17 *Ibid.*

experiences; the human being as a mobile of series of positions; "...let us restore to movement its mobility, to change its fluidity, to time its duration."¹⁸

As praxis principle, life is about a mindfulness and vital consciousness that points to a unifying, spiral dynamics and coherence factor: *l'energie spirituelle*. Practical reason (*phronesis*), or the praxis of thoughtfulness, is not about a Cartesian a priori principle,¹⁹ but about a consciousness of life (*elan vital*) that penetrates the essence of daily life experiences by means of actions – "...thought is directed by action";²⁰ praxis thinking is in essence about a kind of ontology of life – a life science.

The notion of "life science"²¹ implies a shift from mechanistic causality (explanatory model)²² to explosive evolvment (vital model).²³ Life is an evolutionary process of becoming²⁴ due to the factor of indetermination inherently to matter.²⁵ Even the human soul is a complex system of becoming and imaginative creativity. "Soul" as a completing complex of becoming – *Komplexerganzung*.²⁶

L'energie spirituelle and practical reason (*phronesis*) are both components of poetic speech; aesthetic thinking and a hermeneutics of life that is engaged in the deciphering of signs.

Poetic imaging: the signification of signs

Ut pictura poesis could be viewed as poetic imaging. Poetic speech is an essential factor in the understanding of life²⁷ and the structuring of being. Poetics "paint" life within the human quest for meaning. Thus, the challenge in preaching to signify life, or in terms of aesthetic thinking, to "paint life". *Pictura poesis* indicates that life is more than reasoning and seeing; life is poetic imaging; a silent poem to be interpreted. Applicable in this regard is the Ciceronian formula: *poema loquens picture, pistura tacitum poema* (poetry is a spoken painting; painting is a silent poem).²⁸ Poetry is art and art is poetry: *ut pictura poesis* (literally "as poetry, so painting").

In 1992 Ellen Dissanyake wrote a book entitled *Homo Aestheticus: Where Art comes from and Why*.²⁹ Her basic assumption is that art can be regarded as a natural general proclivity that manifests itself in culturally learned specifics such as dances, songs, performances, visual display and poetic speech. Art

18 Bergson, H. 1946. *The Creative Mind*. New York: Philosophical Library, 14, 17.

19 Radical instability and absolute immutability are therefore mere abstract views taken from outside of the continuity of real change, abstraction which the mind then hypostasises into multiple *states* on the one hand, into *thing* or substance on the other" (Bergson, *Creative Mind*, 184).

20 Bergson, *Creative Mind*, 46.

21 The life sciences comprise the fields of science that involve the scientific study of living organisms – such as microorganisms, plants, animals and human beings – as well as related considerations like bioethics. While biology remains the centre piece of the life sciences, technological advances in molecular biology and biotechnology have led to a burgeoning of specializations and interdisciplinary fields. Some life sciences focus on a specific type of life. For example, zoology is the study of animals, while botany is the study of plants. Other life sciences focus on aspects common to all or many life forms, such as anatomy and genetics. Yet other fields are interested in technological advances involving living things, such as bio-engineering. Another major, though more specific, branch of life sciences involves understanding the mind – neuroscience. The life sciences are helpful in improving the quality and standard of life. They have applications in health, agriculture, medicine, and the pharmaceutical and food science industries. (Life science. 2016. Online at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_life_sciences (Accessed: 30 July 2016).

22 Bergson, H. 1944. *Creative Evolution*. New York: The Modern Library, 43-47.

23 "We do not think real time. But we live it, because life transcends intellect" (Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 53); "...life is like a current passing from germ to germ through the medium of a developed organism" (Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 32). Existence is about a consciousness of tendency and intuitive activity of change – to exist is to change (Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 10).

24 Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 179.

25 *Ibid.* pp. 127-39.

26 Selz in Driesch, H. 1925. *The Crisis in Psychology*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 68.

27 The formula of Horace, in Huyghe, R. 1981. *Art Forms and Society*. In: R Huyghe (ed.), *Larousse Encyclopedia of Byzantine and Medieval Art. Art and Mankind*. London: Hamlyn, 20.

28 In Huyghe, *Art forms*, 20.

29 New York: Free Press.

makes life special, because making art involves taking something out of its everyday and ordinary use context and making it somehow special – the ordinary becomes extraordinary.

Aesthetic observations and experiences make the presence present (*Vergenwärtigung der Gegenwart*³⁰). It represents experiences of transcending factuality and phenomenology, not to conquer time and to ignore the fact that our existence is encapsulated by time (temporality of life), but to intensify experiences in time and place; religious experiences that supersedes factuality (*Man könnte von einer inversen Transzendierung sprechen*).³¹

One can even argue that aesthetics contributes to a widening of horizon that opens up new perspectives on the sacred dimension of life. It even opens up spaces and different (new) relations with the divine; it penetrates the realm of the incomprehensible and non-disposable. It also discloses indicators that can guide human beings in their search for meaning³² and quest for resilience, strength and trust. Aesthetics and arts create images for human self-transcendence and freedom³³; it can be called the epiphany of poetic hearing and artistic seeing; it probes into the beyond and the realm of the ultimate. In fact, art and poetic seeing “save” human beings from deadly helplessness.³⁴

Aesthetic experiences in religion, contributes to a kind of self-critique³⁵ due to the fact that it creates transcending experiences that helps one to find distance and helps religious reflection to become free from fixation and the nurturing of zombie categories that have become inappropriate to translate the awareness of divine presence within historical and cultural contexts.

It is indeed a fact that in modern culture art has been excluded from church life. However, it does not mean that art does not represent a religious and spiritual dimension.³⁶ It was the conviction of the English producer Peter Brook that meaningful images change the life of human beings, thus, the need for theatre. On stage an image creates experience and makes impressions real (an event). Images become signs, tracks in the mind.³⁷ In terms used by philosopher Karl Jaspers, images as *chiffre*.³⁸ Images should be signified in order to trace down human attempts to signify life. This is why Niemeyer wants to talk about the eyes of wording and language (*“Auge der Sprache”*).³⁹ Words make seeing possible, art makes seeing invisible (poetic seeing); i.e., seeing the unseen. Thus, the question whether preaching should only compile and arrange fixed ideas⁴⁰ (dogmatic fixation) (service to zombie categories) or try to link spiritual reflection creatively and imaginatively to worldly events.

In this regard, one can argue that aesthetics opens up new avenues for inspiring, spiritual reflection.

30 Seel, *Transendenzen*, 37.

31 Seel, *Transendenzen*, 39.

32 See Gräß, W. 2012. Kunst – die ansprechende Sprache der Religion. In: T Erne & P Schütz (Hrsg.), *Der religiöse Charme der Kunst*. Paderborn/München/Wien/Zürich: Ferdinand Schöningh, 53-67; art creates new spaces and changes spaces and leads to “...einer Sinn erschließenden Erfahrung erweitern” (53) (art as a kind of extension – “verruiming”).

33 “Die religiöse Transzendenz der Kunst stellt somit einen Modus der Realisierung einer Grundform der menschlicher Selbsttranszendierung dar” (Seel, *Transendenzen*, 47); the religious charm of art can be called a kind of the epiphany of artistic thinking and seeing.

34 Willikens in Willikens, B. & Schütz, P. 2012. Auf der Suche nach dem religiösen Charme der Kunst. In: T Erne & P Schütz (Hrsg.), *Der religiöse Charme der Kunst*. Paderborn/München/Wien/Zürich: Ferdinand Schöningh, 265.

35 Seel, *Transendenzen*, 45.

36 Gräß, *Ästhetische und religiöse Erfahrung*, 738.

37 In Steinmeyer, *Ikonsche Innovationen*, 268.

38 Jaspers, K. 1932. *Philosophie*. Dritter Band. Metaphysik. Berlin: Julius Spinger; Jaspers, K. 1962. *Der Philosophische Glaube angesichts der Offenbarung*. München: Piper.

39 Steinmeyer, *Ikonsche Innovationen*, 255.

40 Steinmeyer, *Ikonsche Innovationen*, 261.

Aesthetics in theory formation: the poetics of the homiletic event

In the book *Wie Kunst die Welt erschuf*, Nigel Spivey asserts that art is not merely the ability to craft (*Handwerkliches Können*);⁴¹ not the endeavour to beautify. Art emerges from the dynamics between human's creative ability and imagination/fantasy. The explosion of creativity in art is a mode of signifying life.⁴²

According to Thomas Aquinas, integrity (*integritas*), harmony (*consonantia*) and clarity (*claritas*) can be described as the principles of beauty. They can also be interpreted as wholeness, proportion and luminosity.⁴³ The poetic question and the quest for beauty kindles a quest for congruency between viewer and an object. Within this dynamics, aesthetics can be described as the attempt to move images into the realm of imagination.⁴⁴

With reference to the art of Salvador Dalí,⁴⁵ the following remark supports the notion of the interconnectedness between imaging, imagination and aesthetics: "...one is moving in the realm of fantasy, of the stream of consciousness, of dreaming reason, in short, where art becomes life and life becomes art."

In her book *Image and Spirit*, Karen Stone describes art as a spiritual voice, as a process of imaging.⁴⁶ "Art at its best makes concrete what language and especially religious language cannot: that intangible, private or communal moment when we encounter being." Art as a spiritual endeavour probes into the depth dimension of being; "...that is, the ontological, the essence of experience beneath and beyond the surface appearance of things."⁴⁷

Aesthetics,⁴⁸ implies more than the "beautiful"; it indicates an intensified awareness that stirs imaginative imaging and poetic creativity. Aesthetics⁴⁹ interpenetrates reality and goes beyond or beneath the surface of things by means of creative imagination. As a hermeneutical event, aesthetics interprets reality from the perspective of creative reshaping and illuminative imaging.

The fact that a work of art has some aesthetic intent or effect does not mean that the image is necessarily attractive to the eye of every viewer. "Remember that *aesthetic* refers to heightened sensory awareness. It is the opposite of *anaesthetic* – that is, a dulling or loss of consciousness – not the opposite of ugly."⁵⁰

41 Spivey, N. 2006. *Wie Kunst die Welt erschuf*. Stuttgart: BBC, 14.

42 Spivey, *Wie Kunst*, 24.

43 Skwaran, K.M. 2012. *Integritas, Consonantia e Claritas. Reflections on Selected Sculptures and "Drawings with Colour"*. In: *Willem Strydom*. Stellenbosch: Rupert Museum, 3.

44 Botha, A. 2012. *Beauty and Truth: An Aesthetic Appreciation of Paul Emsley's Art*. In: A Botha, *Paul Emsley. US Woordfees/ Wordfest Artist 2012. Retrospective Exhibition*. Stellenbosch: Sasol Art Gallery, 5.

45 Miller, C.; Ess; Glöckner, S. & Kollmeier, C. 2012. *Dalí. Die Ausstellung am Potsdamer Platz*. Berlin: Dalí Berlin Ausstellungsbetriebs-GmbH, 34.

46 Stone, K. 2003. *Image and Spirit. Finding Meaning in Visual Art*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 9-11.

47 Ibid. p. 11.

48 Johan Cilliers points out that aesthetics is a multidimensional concept which at least includes concepts such as judgment of beauty, experiences of sensibility, evaluative observation, and imagination (anticipation and transformation). The concept has become attenuated in most discourses. See, Cilliers, J. 2012. *Dancing with Deity. Re-Imaging the Beauty of Worship*. Wellington: Bible Media, 51-52.

49 Aesthetics describes the relation between form and content during the process of styling; between expression/celebration and faith; between ecstasy and belief. It is constantly in search of criteria for the *Gestalt* of the praise of God. Albrecht Grözinger (1987. *Praktische Theologie und Ästhetik*. München: Kaiser, 1323-134) describes aesthetic experience as the practical theological endeavour which is in search of those corresponding experiences (*Entsprechung*) between the content and form of the Christian faith. Aesthetics describes a dialectic movement between presentation and withdrawal/concealment (132), between the *form* of the revelation and the *Being* of God.

50 Stone, *Image and Spirit*, 34.

The tension between beauty and ugliness is inevitably part of aesthetics in art, but aesthetics entails more than the search for beauty.

The concept of aesthetics is slippery for the human mind; it evades any attempt to capture or define its meaning in rational categories. However, one can say that aesthetic experiences operate within the tension between sensual encounters/subjective attraction (being struck by...) and creative imaging; it coincides with the human attempt to make a qualitative assessment regarding the value, meaning and significance of phenomena observed. It refers to a kind of qualitative scrutiny within the act of evaluative decoding.

Max Dessoir founded the *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* that he edited for many years. He published the work *Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* in which he formulated five primary aesthetic forms: the beautiful, the sublime, the tragic, the ugly and the comic (Max Dessoir in Sublime (Philosophy) Wikipedia, 5). One can even add the therapeutic form of healing. All of these forms are related to the perception of the viewer and the value attached to the object by the subject. Although aesthetics is primarily a subjective category, it is always determined by culture and the opinion of other people. It implies a kind of social or cultural consensus within the realm of intersubjectivity.

Schulte-Susse links aesthetics with the theory of perspective (perspectivism).⁵¹ The theory of perspective addresses the question of how to represent a three-dimensional object on a two-dimensional surface, or how to represent a three-dimensional object via a material form or sculpture, so that the representation and image of the object, the idea within the object, corresponds with the proportions of the immediacy with the act of seeing, feeling and experiencing. Aesthetics is associated with the intention and value assessment of the subject in relationship with the viewed or observed object.

Reiner Matzker relates aesthetics to the act of mediation within the tension between subject (impression and interpretation) and object, or the implicit idea as related to an object or something perceived and observed. To mediate always implies an act of signifying, some-thing is signified.⁵² Mediation operates within the connections between form (*eidos*; essence, meaning) and matter (*hylē*; ontic dimension). In the act of mediation and representation the projection of what is observed and seen implies virtuosity: skill, competence and know-how, i.e., artistic proficiency.

The mediatory function of a medium is to communicate, to inform, to disclose, and to make something knowable. Aesthetics becomes an instrument (medium), an image (means) about something (content). It transcends its own limitations in the direction of signification. In this regard aesthetics implies acts of symbolisation (to symbolise, from the Greek *syμβάlein* – to link to halves) and processes of meaning-making.⁵³ Aesthetics then expands the horizon of interpretation of human beings; it creates a grammar of mediation. For Plato the mediation points in the direction of a copy of a kind of original image or existing idea. For Aristotle the mediation is in itself a process of signifying in the sense that it functions as a memory (*Anamnese*) of reality.⁵⁴

The important point is that in aesthetics there is a constant interplay between reality, image and significance, and particularly in the sense that through mediation aesthetics becomes the attempt

51 Sculte-Susse, J. 2010. Perspektive/Perspektivismus. In: Karlheinz Barck et al., *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe*. Band 7. Stuttgart/Weimar: Verlag JB Metzler, 758-778.

52 Matzker, R. 2008. *Ästhetik der Medialität. Zur Vermittlung von künstlerischen Welten und ästhetischen Theorien*. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt-Taschenbuch-Verlag 2008, 10.

53 Matzker, *Ästhetik der Medialität*, 10.

54 Ibid. pp. 11-12.

to represent some-“thing”. This representation presupposes a kind of competence or skill that one can call “art”. Through aesthetics a value is attached to the product which invites the viewer to linger and to ponder, to grasp the some-“thing”. This moment of significant articulation implies an act of evaluation that one can call “mediation as an act of beautification”; the mediation signifies the product as a “piece of art”.⁵⁵ In the act of mediation, the viewer assigns artistic significance to the object. As a piece of art, the object invites the viewer to attribute “meaning”; to imitate (Plato: art as *mimesis*) the image; to reveal and to make apparent (Aristotle: art as hermeneutics).

In the light of the previous discussion, one may argue that aesthetics in preaching mediates values and meaning within the realm of religious thinking. In this regard, aesthetics as a theological category, construes meaning and links faith to the reality of God, to the presence of God and the significance of God for life experiences. Aesthetical preaching as a theological event portrays God and paints God by means of symbols and metaphors; preaching “charms” God.

Preaching: the charm of practical theological aesthetics

Preaching as a public-homiletic reflection on the encounter between human beings and God takes place within a cultural contextual, and civil dynamics of life.⁵⁶ Thus the challenging question: How should theological reflection in homiletics respond to our age of virtual reality? Is it possible to incorporate imagination, imaging and poetic and artistic reflection in a practical theological approach to homiletics? There is still a kind of sceptic reservation about imaging in theologising.⁵⁷ Thus, the thesis of Hoeps that art should be “charming” (attractive option) for doing theology in praxis.⁵⁸

The advantage of the religious charm of art (“*religiöse Charme der Kunst*”) points out the following: Images in art provide a complex network of translation and hermeneutic interpretation that exceeds the limitations of the audible and the vocal.⁵⁹

Images in the Christian faith help to take part in the incommensurable playfulness of human expressions and acknowledgements within creative divine reflections on the presence of God in this world. Images create a unique constellation of metaphorical speech⁶⁰; it is about a kind of mysterious mirroring (“*rätselhafte Spiegelbilder*”).⁶¹

The metaphoric of images assist human beings to acknowledge transcendent experiences and creates a kind of spiritual wellbeing that leads to motivation and initiative.

55 Ibid. p. 23.

56 “Im Horizont kultureller Lebenswelt ist homiletisches Nachdenken in die offene Frage geworfen, was predigt ‘als teil der Kultur in die Gesamtkultur einbringt’” (Steinmeyer, *Ikonische Innovationen*, 254).

57 “...weil der Theologie oft selbst unschlüssig ist, was sie – zumindest in ihren systematischen Diskursen – mit Imaginationen, mit Phänomenen des Bildlichen und mit künstlerischen Reflexionen anfangen soll” (Hoeps, R. 2012. *Bildtheologie jenseits der Inhaltsdeutung. Zwischen christliche Bildkonzepten und Kunst der Moderne*. In: T Erne & P Schütz (Hrsg.), *Der religiöse Charme der Kunst*. Paderborn/München/ Wien/Zürich: Ferdinand Schöningh, 91.)

58 Hoeps, *Bildtheologie*, 92.

59 Ibid. pp. 91-94.

60 “Zwar in anderer Weise als Texte operieren doch auch Bilder mit einer Art von Metaphorik, von der alle Rede über Gott geprägt ist, in einer Anschauung zu, in der die Evidenz der Sichtbarkeit mit der Ungründlichkeit des Scheins verschränkt ist” (Hoeps, *Bildtheologie*, 91).

61 Hoeps, *Bildtheologie*, 94.

Homiletics as an act of communication, a practical theological act of communicative presencing within the “*praesens*” of life⁶² should be supplemented by images that concretise the presence of God. In this respect, art helps the human mind to experience and imagine new and different perspectives.⁶³

The point is that art can open up new and different perspectives and spaces that the senses cannot “see” and detect.

By means of symbolisation, the hermeneutics of art probes into the mystery of life; it is a spiritual act of transcending the facticity of human direct and observed experience, superseding the mundane by means of an awareness of the sublime.

Preaching creates culture (*colo* – to care and to transform reality into a second cosmos)⁶⁴ and is in this respect a cultural endeavour.

Preaching as a theological mode of doing art, “paints” portraits of God (meaningful God-images). To verbalise the divine presence, preaching creates in the act of communication divine portraiture.

Preaching: painting the portrait of an “ugly God”?

Ugliness is associated with the deformation of form and the destruction of composition as well as with reference to disability and disfigurement. Ugliness operates within the mutuality of light and shadow (the shadow-side of beauty); ugliness frames beauty within painful associations.

For St. Augustine, beauty was the consequence of the benevolence and goodness of God’s creation, and as a category, had no opposite. The ugly, lacking any attributive value, was formlessness in its absence of beauty.

For Aristotle the function of art forms was to create pleasure, and he first pondered the problem of an object of art representing “the ugly as producing ‘pain’” (Sublime (Philosophy) Wikipedia, 3).

Ugly is not necessarily the opposite of beauty or merely the absence of form, asymmetry, disharmony, disfigurement and deformation, or even the various forms of the repugnant (the ungainly, death and the void, the horrendous, the vacuous, the sickening, the felonious, the spectral, the demoniac, the witchlike and the satanic).⁶⁵ Ugliness rather frames beauty within the context of the shadow side of life. As such ugliness is an aesthetic category and a kind of perception that wrestles with the danger of corruption that can destroy a sense of dignity and justice. Instead of wholeness and integrity, ugliness as a spiritual category points in the direction of disintegration and disorientation rather than merely formlessness.

62 “Praktische Theologie analysiert und reflektiert die Kommunikation des Evangeliums in der Gegenwart” (Gretlein, C. 2012. *Praktische Theologie*. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, v).

63 “Denn in ihrem ‘kulturell variable, kreativen Bezug zur Welt suchen die Sprache der Kunst nicht deutungsmächtig in einer auf Einheit zielende Teleologie zu vereinnahmen. Sie Vermögen vielmehr, erfahrene Kontingenz zu gestalten” (Steinmeyer, *Ikonsche Innovationen*, 254).

64 “Predigt ist ein kreatives Gespräch, in dem wir, wie mit Bewegungen eines pflugs, miteinander Linien schaffen” (Steinmeyer, *Ikonsche Innovationen*, 267).

65 “Too much to allow us to carry on saying that ugliness is merely the opposite of beauty understood as harmony, proportion, or integrity” (Eco, U. 2007. *On Ugliness*. London: Harvill Secker, 16).

According to Umberto Eco, all the synonyms for “ugly” contain a reaction of disgust if not violent repulsion, horror or fear:⁶⁶

In truth, in the course of our history, we ought to distinguish between manifestations of ugliness in itself (excrement, decomposing carrion, or someone covered with the sores who gives off a nauseating stench) from those of formal ugliness, understood as lack of equilibrium in the organic relationship between the parts of a whole.⁶⁷

With reference to spirituality, *spiritual ugliness* resides in the disorientation and disintegration of *ethos*: the quality of a human being’s being functions. Spiritual ugliness is related to disintegration within the realm of meaning and significance. As a threat to human dignity, spiritual ugliness can be related to inhumane experiences of discrimination and stigmatisation, perceptions of stereotyping and prejudice; dispositions of rejection, failure, disappointment; immoral behaviour or corruption, fraud, rape and violence. Spiritual ugliness creates the nausea of insignificance due to the loss of wholeness. The organic relationship between the parts of the whole has been destroyed and fragmented in a chaotic way (to produce non-sense). The disturbance in wholeness leads to inhumane experiences of being robbed of human dignity as a result of the abuse of power.

Spiritual ugliness unmasks theological *kitsch*. Christian kitsch, for example, is created when a golden cross with rubies and diamonds replaces the “*skandalon*” of Jesus’s cross (the ugliness of suffering) with a royal relic (the instant beauty of monarchical clergy); the dirty cloth of the Suffering Servant of God, is turned into the sumptuous scarlet cloak of a pope.

Through spiritual kitsch the meeting place between God and human beings within the frail realm of life and death is replaced with the baroque and rococo constructions of a cathedral. The representation of heaven looks like the palace decoration of a Bavarian king or a Russian tsar. Christian religion becomes the kitsch of royal extravagance.

Within the Christian tradition, church architecture was often determined by the connoisseur taste of kings and emperors. The design of churches and cathedrals followed then the fashion of the current culture. When applied to church buildings, the design can be called “kitsch” because the interior of the building is more appropriate for the king than for ordinary Christian worship. With reference to the theological meaning of a Christian sacred space, the design and architecture can be called “church kitsch”.

The wooden structure of a Lutheran church in the Massai village of Emeshiye, Tanzania, is a stark contrast to the Berlin Cathedral. In the case of Emeshiye, the wooden structure is built for and by poor people not for kings by wealthy people. Instead of kitsch, the building is an icon of bare necessity and poverty.

66 Eco, *On Ugliness*, 16.

67 Eco, *On Ugliness*, 19.



Lutheran Church Emeshiye, Tanzania – divine simplicity. Not kitsch, but beacon of hope.
Photo: DJ Louw

One can say that art and aesthetics is about “*chiffre*”; the art of artists emerges where one is aware of the transience and the painful realities of vulnerability, suffering and death. These existential realities bring home that there is still space for “spiritual aesthetics” and “religious art”. But then our understanding of an aloof, apathetic, omnipotent and immutable theistic God (theological kitsch) will have to make place for a pathetic, weak, vulnerable and suffering God. How can iconic viewing assist Christian spirituality in this regard within the context of the playful forms of post-modernity?

Does the beauty and power of the Christian God perhaps reside in the ugliness and vulnerability of a passionate God?

The attempt to link human suffering and sorrow to the pain of the suffering and dying Christ, has become known in the tradition of the Christian faith as *imago pietatis*; the “abstract” realm of divine suffering was articulated and imaged by the depiction of “*The Man of Sorrows*”; Christ with the wounds of the crucifixion. The important theological and anthropological point to grasp is that the suffering of Christ included his whole being and body.

Even the nakedness of Christ is an intrinsic part of his humiliation and sorrow.



Naked Christ (circa 15-15:30)

The Catholic Church found it of great importance to render the Bible and the narratives alive and pertinent. In the Late Middle Ages large-scale religious plays were enacted both inside and outside the church building. Dramatic effects in pictures and sculptures were used for the sake of leaving churchgoers with a profound as possible impression. In this case the naked Christ projects radical humility. Circa 1500-1530, Permission: National Museum, Copenhagen. Photo: DJ Louw.

The notion of the “*The Man of Sorrows*” (Latin: *via dolorum*; German: *Schmerzensmann*) can be traced back to the depiction in Isaiah of the suffering servant (often interpreted as the messiah) as being despised and rejected by men and acquainted with grief. In his letter to the Corinthians Paul relates the sorrow of the cross to sheer folly and divine weakness.

Paul links God to the event of suffering and introduces the “weakness of God”; the *logos* of the cross (*logos tou staurou*). This notion of power is marked as “foolishness” (a variant of the aesthetic category of ugliness). The power of human beings (*ousia*) is challenged by the “weakness of God” which is stronger than human strength (1 Corinthians 1: 25). Why? Because it affirms God’s identification with the vulnerability of suffering human beings. It opposes destructive domination and affirms constructive opposition. God becomes the helpless innocent victim of the Roman soldiers. The sacredness and divinity reside in the cry of protest: “My God, My God why have you forsaken me?” With the act of forgiveness, Jesus as the icon (*eikon*) of God, not of Roman power, became an innocent and helpless victim of Roman imperialism.



Township Crucifixion (Daniël Louw)

Crossroads, Cape Flats (Township Crucifixion). The necklaced Christ as victim of the Roman soldiers (Apartheid policy makers) within the hell of township life. (Daniël J Louw, 1991). In the painting the dying Son of God, were killed by the injustice of all forms of oppressive imperialism. Divine ugliness becomes a mode of public beautification.

Foolishness reframes God into “beauty” by means of sheer ugliness.

God is not a cosmic force, a worldly power, a physical or metaphysical energy or power source that supplies energy to the world, who designs it, starts it up and keeps it going, and who occasionally intervenes here and there with strategic course corrections, a tsunami averted here, a cancerous tumour there, a bloody war quieted over there.⁶⁸

But how should God be linked to the everyday experiences of life? Can one call ordinary lifestyles and behavioural expressions of faith as artistic, aesthetic embodiments of divine engagements in life?

Preaching as the shaping of meaningful lifestyles

In Jewish writings, the Hebrew *hālak*, corresponding with the Greek *anastrephō*, describes in a figurative way, life as a “way”, a mode of walking in the way of God (positive), or walking in sin (negative). In a figurative sense, the verb *anastrephō* denotes the meaning of human behaviour: to walk, to conduct oneself, to live in a particular way.⁶⁹

The way of life is about a designation for conduct of life. In this regard *peripateō* is used in a figurative sense as a description of a qualitative approach to life; an indication that one should conduct one’s way of life in the paths of justice indicated by God’s commandments.

It obtains an outstanding significance as a term for denoting way of life; the nature and the manner of the way of life make it clear as to what governs a man in his being and acting.⁷⁰

68 Caputo, J.D. 2007. Spectral Hermeneutics. On the Weakness of God and the Theology of the Event. In: JD Caputo & G Vattimo, *After the Death of God*. New York: Columbia, 65.

69 Ebel, G. 1978. *Anastrephō*. In: C Brown (ed.), *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*. Vol. 3, Exeter: Paternoster, 933.

70 Ebel. 1978. *Anastrephō*, 944.

In the New Testament *anastrephō* describes a way of life as new communion in Christ; to turn away from a previous way of life to a new life of obedience, piety and holiness (2 Corinthians 1:2; 1 Peter 1:15, 17; 3:16). Christian conduct is determined by fellowship with God and translates “knowledge into practice”.⁷¹ Fellowship with God implies a very specific praxis, namely to walk with God within the trajectories of life. Lifestyle denotes a kind of *hodos*, a kind of way. In a figurative sense, *hodos* as lifestyle describes the way one has to follow in order to reach a goal; “...*hodos* can acquire the meaning of the means and way of reaching or carrying out something, measures, procedure, the style and way in which one does something and in which one lives.”⁷²

The Christian lifestyle denotes a praxis *methodos* wherein one has to make decisions between *arete* (virtues that describes a good life) and *kakia* (badness). In order to comply with the criteria for a “good life” one has to walk the way of God; a way that is determined by the saving activity of God (Psalm 67:3) and explained in the commandments (Genesis 18:19).

Life in theology is in essence theonomous. It means that Yahweh is the author of life (Jeremiah 17:13; Psalm 36:9). “Yahweh formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed divine breath into the lifeless body so that he became a living being (*nēpeš hayyâ*).”⁷³ The implication is that the whole physical, emotional and intellectual life of a human being stems from God.

The Greek notion of life which is aloof and contemplative (*theōrētikos*) is foreign to Hebrew thinking. The ideal of Israelites was a life of active involvement, a life expressed by hunger and thirst, desires and lusts.

To the Israelites, as to the oriental in general, the sheer vitality, concreteness and diversity of life were a course of the utmost delight (1 Ki. 3:11; Prov. 3:16; Job2:4); life synonymous with health, well-being and success (Mal. 2:5; Prov. 2:19; Ps. 56:13; Eccl. 9:9).⁷⁴

The homiletics of singing: towards a liturgy of life

Can homiletics as sub-discipline in practical theology be rendered as a “life science”?

It is often argued that practical theology⁷⁵ is about analysing and reflecting the communication of the gospel within the present realms of life. Instead of “zombie categories” (Ulrich Beck) (categories that represent a historic context that is not any more appropriate for recent cultural contexts), practical theology should be transformed as the theory of communicating the gospel in terms of existential life issues.⁷⁶ In this regard, the concept “life”⁷⁷ is emerging more and more as theme in practical theological

71 Ebel. 1978. *Anastrephō*, 934.

72 Ebel. 1978. *Anastrephō*, 935.

73 Link, H-G. 1976. Life (bios). In: C Brown (9ed.), *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 2. Exeter: Paternoster, 478.

74 Link, *Life (bios)*, 478.

75 “Praktische Theologie analysiert und reflektiert die Kommunikation des Evangeliums in der Gegenwart” (Grethlein, *Praktische Theologie*, v).

76 Grethlein. *Praktische Theologie*, 143-92.

77 In this regard, the link between the human spirit (*Geist*), and the quest for meaning and care (*Sorge*), become important topics in practical theological reflection (Lauster, J. 2007. *Leben. Genetischer Code/Lebensphilosophie/ inneres Leben/ ewiges Leben*. In: W Gräß & B Weyl (Hrsg.), *Handbuch Praktische Theologie*. Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 142-143). “Es ist eine Grundeinsicht theologischer und philosophischer Überlegungen zum Lebensbegriff, den Geist als jene Dimension zu begreifen, in dem das Leben selbst zum Bewusstsein gelangt” (Lauster, *Leben*, 142); “Die Sorge um das eigene Leben ist darum ein primärer Ort für die Erfahrung von Transzendenz” (Lauster, *Leben*, 143).

reflection. Together with religious experiences and spiritual awareness (transcendent experiences⁷⁸), the interplay between life and meaning have become important ingredients of practical theological reflection on divine presence within the existential dynamics of daily life events.

Communication implies inter alia helping people how to live and to cope with the demands of daily living (*Helfen zum Leben*),⁷⁹ thus, the reason why hope features time and again as eventual framework for meaningful living. Hope represents the spiritual notion that life is about more than merely human achievements. Life includes the experience of “the ultimate” – “*Jenseits*” as driving force in our “*Diesseits*”. Life is the striving towards a kind of fulfilment that connects sustainability with eternal images – “*Mehrwert des Lebens*”.⁸⁰

Furthermore, life is becoming a kind of keystone concept in order to describe the praxis implications of theology in contemporary society. In an introductory article on the edition of practical theology as a kind of life science, Martina Kumlehn argues for practical theology as a kind of life science (*Lebenswissenschaft Praktische Theologie?!*).⁸¹ The argument is more or less the same as my conviction that practical theology and caregiving are in essence engaged in life events with the view of healing and wholeness: *cura animarum* as *cura vitae* (Louw, 2008). Life then as a qualitative and relational category that implies the systemic interplay between natural/cosmic forces, biological and physiological factors, structural and technological infrastructure; existential challenges as embedded in the trajectories of daily life; spiritual matters as related to the ultimate realm of life, as well as religious experiences. In this regard, life should be viewed as a networking category including the notion of transcendence and the human quest for meaning (significance) and dignity within the framework of values, belief systems, moral questions, convictions and philosophical constructions.

Kumlehn refers to practical theology as a science that should give attention to promoting a kind of “religion of life” (*Religion des Lebens*).⁸² The presupposition is that there exists a close connection between life and religious experiences. Practical theology should, thus, be engaged in life issues; it should try to enhance the quality of life and focuses constantly on human well-being, health and healing (*Heil*). With reference to Pierre Bühler,⁸³ the challenge is how to understand life and create a hermeneutics of life in close connection (symbiosis) with the natural sciences, health sciences and technology.

Conclusion

According to Korsch⁸⁴, life as object of practical theological reflection, implies a metaphoric understanding (hermeneutics) of daily life events in order to open up new future options for human

78 The notion of transcendence points to the invisible realm of meaning, religious experiences and awareness of a kind of ultimate destiny that supersedes merely observational experiences. Due to internet and the media, transcendent experiences have become popularised (“Die Transzendenzerfahrung wird popularisiert”) (Grethlein, *Praktische Theologie*, 177); Lauster, *Leben*, 143.

79 “Da sie Menschen zu einem neuen Alltag befreite, aber zugleich eschatologisch ausgerichtet war, nenne ich diese Kommunikationsform *Helfen zum Leben*” (Grethlein, *Praktische Theologie*, 167).

80 Lauster, *Leben*, 146-147.

81 Kumlehn, M. 2011. Einleitung: Praktische Theologie als Lebenswissenschaft?! In: T Klie, M Kumlehn, R Kunz & T Schlag (Hrsg.), *Lebenswissenschaft Praktische Theologie?! Praktische Theologie im Wissenschaftsdiskurs*. Band 9. Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 4.

82 Kumlehn, *Einleitung*, 4.

83 Kumlehn, *Einleitung*, 5.

84 The basic thesis of Korsch is that life is about self-fulfilment; *Leben ist Selbststeigerung*. “[D]iese verfasstheit des Lebens betrifft sowohl die materiellen Erscheinungsformen organischer Art – als auch die Metaphorik, die den Lebensbegriff so universal anwendbar macht für zukunfts offene Selbstorganisationsprozesse” (Korsch, D. 2011. Life science – gelebte Religion – Theologie als Lebenswissenschaft. In: T Klie, M Kumlehn, R Kunz & T Schlag (Hrsg.), *Lebenswissenschaft Praktische Theologie?! Praktische Theologie im Wissenschaftsdiskurs*. Band 9. Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 342.)

self-realisation and meaningful hoping. Life is in essence not “beautiful”. Life, despite human vulnerability, threat and tragedy, should be beautified.

The beautification of life, develops along zigzag patterns of irony and paradox. In order to create a sense of hope and meaning in life (spiritual beautification), human beings need vision and poetic, creative thinking. It is the task of imaginative preaching (*fides quaerens imaginem*) to provide categories, terminology, symbols and metaphoric speech so that a liturgy of life can assist Christian spirituality to embody and exemplify the gospel. It is in this respect that *fides quaerens vivendi* (faith seeking lifestyles) points to *habitus* (human soulfulness) as new modes of “walking with God”, “living with God” (*anastrephō, peripateō, hodos*).

Fides quaerens vivendi describes praxis patterns of “divine life” and existential expressions of faith that contribute to the enfleshment of Christian values and virtues. With reference to the *charisma* of the Spirit, the sanctification of *habitus* and lifestyles is about inhabitational theology: the fruits and gifts of the Spirit illustrated in the unique lifestyle of the gospel. *Fides quaerens vivendi* is thus closely connected to a pneumatology of life.

Homiletics is challenged to become the art of poetic speech. The theological implication is to paint God in words and verbalising (*fides quaerens verbum*) in such a way that the link between human vulnerability, the daily exposure to unpredictability and tragedy, becomes meaningful and hopeful. It is proposed that the portraiture of an “ugly God” creates a God-image that brings about authentic Christian being. It is in this regard that practical theology as life science is about the endeavour to create a public mode of doing theology. *Fides quaerens vivendi* illustrates the credibility of the Christian faith by means of sanctified lifestyles.

The basic argument is that the “ugliness” of the Man of Sorrows can beautify life; i.e., it may open up new visions for meaningful lifestyles.

Aesthetic preaching is the overture into public liturgy as the art of gossiping the gospel and singing the hallelujah: the weakness of a suffering God. Through this ugly and blurred lens of iconic viewing, one discovers the bright side of meaningful living. One can then start singing like Louis Armstrong: *O, what a wonderful world!*

*I see trees of green...red roses too
I see 'em bloom...for me and for you
And I think to myself...what a wonderful world.*



Bright Blessed Seascape (Daniël Louw)

Bright blessed seascapes. And I think to myself...what a wonderful De Kelders! Near Gansbaai, South Africa. Painting by Daniël J Louw. In the distance on the horizon is the Cape Peninsula with Table Mountain. The painting was painted on New Year 1997 as an indication that despite the crime and violence in South Africa, we should still bear in mind it is the Cape of Good Hope!

The promise of Performing the Gospel – Preaching as Theo-dramatic Paradox

13

Ian A Nell¹

Introduction

David Ford starts his 2011 publication *The Future of Christian Theology* by asking the following question: “How might Christian theology in the twenty-first century be creative and wise?”² He finds part of his answer in the promise of the dramatic and, therefore, performative aspects of Christian theology. According to Ford, it is because of the close relationship that one finds between drama and the popularity of narratives, but also due to many other features that drama and these narratives have in common. He describes how drama, like life in general, develops and unfolds over time:

*It can have plots and sub-plots; major and minor characters and events; clashes of people, ideas, and perspectives that may or may not be resolved; loose ends and mysteries; intensive dialogues, soliloquies, and cries; prose, poetry, and song; wisdom and foolishness; tragedy and comedy. It is able to convey the dynamic particularity of human existence, with its physicality, surprises, initiatives, contingencies, necessities, tensions, and multileveled complexity.*³

In Ford’s short description above, one already senses a number of “promises” concerning a “dramatic” approach to Christian theology. It is especially what he calls “the dynamic particularity of human existence” that gets the attention of scholars interested in the close connection between promise and preaching, the theme of our conference. However more is at stake here than only a promise of a dramatic approach for preachers. Ford helps us by identifying even more promises:

*It may present large overviews of life or delve into the intimate interiority of one character, but its core perspective is that of characters and events in interaction, irreducibly social. As it unfolds, a drama invites us to become engaged, to inhabit its world, and to look forward its yet open ending.*⁴

If one reads Ford’s words with the lenses of promise, preaching and paradox, the keywords to the conference, his invitation to engage the drama of life and to inhabit another open-ended world is more than music to the ears of a homiletician. The invitation letter to this conference reads that

... preaching is always somehow connected to a vision of “a good life”. In this aspect, it might be a challenge to reclaim even “prosperity” as a positive term in preaching – connecting it with God’s promise and with the hope for a better life.

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2 Ford, D.F. 2011. *The future of Christian theology*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 23. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444393477>
3 Ford, *The Future*, 23.
4 Ford, *The Future*, 23.

With this in mind, the basic research questions of the paper may read as follows: What is meant by the promise of performing the gospel when seen from a preaching point of view and in what ways can a theo-dramatic approach help a preacher to cope with the paradoxes of life in specific contexts? These questions will be answered by first giving some clarification on what is understood by “the promises of a theo-dramatic approach to preaching”. Second, attention will be given to the ways in which performance and preaching are interrelated. In the final section of the paper, I will take a closer look at the way in which the previous insights can help to gain some understanding of the paradoxes involved in all of this by analysing a sermon of South African theologian John de Gruchy. De Gruchy preached this sermon in a very “paradoxical time” in the history of South Africa, just after the release of Nelson Mandela, but before the first democratic elections.

A promising approach

The promise of a theo-dramatic approach to theology as a kind of meta-theoretical perspective can be traced back to the influential work of Hans Urs von Balthasar (1988). Von Balthasar referred to God as the most important “character” in the Christian drama and from there developed the concept of “theo-drama” (the God (-human) drama). Von Balthasar’s main argument relates to the way in which God’s involvement in the world can be best described – by making use of dramatic categories. In this regard the Christian theo-drama has an Author, who is also the main character on the stage. According to Quash (2005), who also makes use of the insights of Von Balthasar and Hegel, the plot of the drama starts with creation, moves to the story of Israel, continues with the later prophets and reaches its climax with the Gospels’ accounts of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The next act is the era of the early church and the New Testament also refers to a final act with an eschatological view of God’s consummation of all. This overarching narrative, from creation to the culmination of history, can be seen as the meta-theoretical framework for Christian understanding and identity formation over the past two thousand years. In this regard Von Balthasar makes use of Hegel’s distinctions between drama, epic and lyric and shows the role of each, but also points to the fact that drama can be seen as the most important of the three because of the overarching role it plays.⁵

Quash sees drama, epic and lyric as very useful – in the light of the conference theme, “promising” – categories to describe different kinds of theologies and even ways in which people believe.⁶ One has to understand, however, that these concepts function as ideal types in the sense that one cannot compare them to any actual theological position, but they do help one to identify certain tendencies. The epic functions in the form of a monologue and tries to describe, as objectively as possible, God, humans, events and ideas. An epic approach works with the objective side of things as well as with comprehensive structures and does not leave much room for paradoxes, ambivalence, irony and different levels of meaning. The lyric, on the other hand, is subjective and interested in self-expression in the current moment. Between God and humans there is an intense relationship with many ups and downs. Feelings and personal and subjective truth – often in the shape of personal confessions – are central here. In this regard, individual perspectives and unconscious motives according to different worldviews are on the foreground in a lyrical perspective as it seems as though an overarching structure of meaning is not possible.

The strength of a *dramatic approach* is found where the other two approaches is found lacking as the dramatic approach is in a position that embraces the objective and subjective, while at the same time

5 Ford, *The Future*, 23.

6 Quash, B. 2005. *Theology and the drama of history: Cambridge studies in Christian doctrine*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511487811>

keeping the idea of a plot intact without suppressing complexity, diversity, motives, ideas and the personal. It is the result of the fact that the focus is on the characters and events that interact with each other that prevents a loss of balance to either the side of the inner and personal of the lyrical or to the side of the impersonal and objective of the epic. Ford summarises it in the following way:

Human freedom is fulfilled in involvement with God and Gods' purposes, and this means constant discernment of vocation and responsibility within an unfolding drama whose central act is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.⁷

According to Johnson and Savidge, more specific promises of a theo-dramatic approach, especially as it relates to homiletics, can be condensed to three words: incarnate, communal and presence.⁸ The first promise relates to the fact that we are all as living human beings *incarnated* characters in the theo-drama. It is this personal embodiment that helps one also to understand the important focus on Christ becoming a human person. Through Christ, God became incarnated and figuratively “pitched his tent amongst us” (John 1:14). Preaching points the finger to this main character in the drama⁹ and accepts the invitation to join Him on stage (Vanhoozer 2005).¹⁰

The second promise for preaching relates to the *communal* and points to the fact that the actors participating in a play normally do so in front of a living audience. This communal and relational aspect of the theo-drama also reflects the reciprocal relationship between the Triune God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Preaching lives from and is inspired by the mystery of the Trinity, especially in the sense of the relationship between persons and community, which, according to Volf, is indeed “after our likeness”.¹¹

The third promise a theo-dramatic approach offers preaching concerns the relationship between the actors and the audience in the sense of mutual interaction and influence resulting in a certain *presence*. These interactions and influences also create the possibility of the presence of God, opening the opportunity for the transformation of the world through grace and love.

Even at first glance, one can already sense the paradoxical nature of all three of these concepts (incarnate, communal and presence) if one uses the following dictionary definition a “paradox”, namely “a situation or statement that seems impossible or is difficult to understand because it contains two opposite facts or characteristics.”¹² From the discussion above, one can see the paradoxes: God is Spirit and eternal, but becomes *incarnate*; an individual person is drawn into and participates in a *communal activity*; and God is elusive, yet through his Spirit, *present*.¹³ Ellul even refers to the radical character of paradox when he writes that paradox “is something situated beside or outside the *doxa* (opinion). The paradox is free of all *doxa*, but at the same time calls the *doxa* into question.”¹⁴ Looking at theo-drama through the lenses of promise and paradox one can see in what ways it can help preaching to move into the challenging world of situating (performing) things outside the normal opinion and in that sense calling what seems obvious into question and making

7 Ford, *The Future*, 27.

8 Johnson, T & Savidge, D. 2009. *Performing the sacred (engaging culture): Theology and theatre in dialogue*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 11.

9 Cilliers, J. 2004. *Die lewende stem van die ewangelië*. (The living voice of the gospel). Stellenbosch: AFRICAN SUN MeDIA.

10 Vanhoozer, K. 2005. *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-linguistic approach to Christian theology*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 193.

11 Volf, M. 1998. *After our likeness: The church as the image of the Trinity*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B Eerdmans.

12 Paradox. Cambridge online dictionary. Online at: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/paradox> (Accessed: 15 December 2015).

13 Cf. the work of Terrien, S. 2000. *The Elusive Presence: Toward a New Biblical theology*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock.

14 Ellul, J. 1985. *The humiliation of the word*. Transl. JM Hanks. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B Eerdmans, 24.

the impossible possible. This brings us to the next section in which the promising relation between performance and preaching will be the focus of attention.

The promising relation of performance and preaching

The rich diversity of preachers, personalities and styles of preaching is as fascinating as the plurality of humankind. What one can say without fear of contradiction is that any person with the courage to venture into a pulpit finds him-/herself in the “promising sphere” of the “performative”. But, because performance relates to persona, styles of preaching and the authenticity of the preacher, the performative also evokes a number of questions and may lead to contestation. The promise can, therefore, also be unfulfilled or it can become unsatisfactory. It is not without reason that hypocrisy is one of the most serious accusations levelled against the church by those outside it, specifically when referring to the role and actions of preachers. At the same time, the need exists for dynamic and energetic preachers and one often finds the requirements of being “dynamic” and “passionate” preachers high on the lists of searching committees of churches and denominations.¹⁵

It is within this paradoxical situation that some thoughts may be helpful to inform the promise of the performative in the preaching event. It is obvious that there are a number of aspects on which one may focus,¹⁶ but keeping the analysis of De Gruchy’s sermon in the last part of this paper in mind, I want to focus on what Wilson describes as “the Life and Death of Now”.¹⁷ Wilson explores the temporal element of performance and focuses on the theological implication of the “now” in the preaching. I am of the opinion that one finds in the aforementioned an important key that may help to unlock a better understanding of the paradoxical nature of the preaching event, as hopefully also will become clear in the discussion of the sermon by De Gruchy.

Wilson starts his Chapter with the following conviction:

Performance is a temporal phenomenon, an act located in time. Preaching as performance normally focuses on the present moment, on orality and aurality, memory, delivery, bodily enactment, and articulation of meaning in the “now” before a congregation. Performance is a more robust word than delivery and may be better able to account for both divine and human activity in preaching. Performance is in a moment: until the notes of the musical score have been sounded, there is no music.¹⁸

Wilson explores four perspectives on the present moment or “the now that is oriented to the past, present, and future, as well as to the death of now and of the self that is needed in performance.”¹⁹ In such death, “preaching participates in the new life of Christ.”²⁰ Taking these four perspectives as a framework, a short description of each will be given. Before I get to the description, a word or two by way of introduction is necessary. On the wall of a building in Oranienburger Strasse in Berlin, Germany, one finds a painting of the face of a human person with the following enticing words above the face: “How long is now”. The words are without a question mark, which already points to the paradoxical nature of the “now”.

15 Childers, J. & Schmit, C (eds). 2008. *Performance in preaching (engaging worship): Bringing the sermon to life*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 13-14.

16 Cf. in this regard, 12 different perspectives on performance and preaching in Childers and Schmit, *Performance in preaching*.

17 Wilson, P.S. 2008. Marks of faithful preaching practice. In: T Long and L Tubbs-Tisdale (eds), *Teaching preaching as a Christian practice*. London: John Knox, 37.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid. pp. 37-52.

20 Ibid. p. 37.



How Long is Now (mural graffito, Berlin)

One of the ways to look at the “now moment” is to move away from a one-dimensional understanding of time as a straight line with the now as a point on the line and the past and the future on either sides of this point. A more imaginative way to look at time and the now is to see it as a wave in the ocean moving towards the coastline.²¹ The wave has an origin, be it the wind or because of sea currents and, therefore, one finds a continuous moving and an ever-changing present. The crest of the wave is the highest point of the wave with a trough behind and in front of the wave and two rising angled surfaces on both sides. Underneath the surface not much of the wave is visible and it is only as the wave approaches the coastline and breaks on the rocky cliffs that one can actually see the result.

According to Wilson,²² and linked with the thoughts of Von Baeyer and Rossing, this three-dimensional aspect of the current moment helps one not to think statically about time and the now, but as a movement or an ever-changing present. It also helps to approach different aspects of the now in new ways. The wave in other words consists of a

*front sloped in the direction it is moving, a curl or breaking crest, and a backside. The backside of the wave looks to the past, the front side looks to the future, and the break is the event of the oral delivery, the part of the wave that normally gets most attention in performative studies.*²³

With the above in mind, what follows are some points on the different dimensions of the now in the preaching performance.

21 Von Baeyer, H. & Rossing, T. 1986. Rainbows, snowflakes, and quarks. *American Journal of Physics* 54(7): 670-671. <https://doi.org/10.1119/1.14493>

22 Wilson, *Marks of faithful preaching*, 39.

23 *Ibid.*

Now and the past

In the discipline of performance studies, Pelias and VanOosting speak about “aesthetic communication” and show that studies in performance relate inter alia to the interpretation of texts and more specifically focus on the performative and aesthetical nature of human discourse.²⁴ According to Wilson, preachers normally focus on the interpretation and hermeneutics of texts because of their education and training and, therefore, their attention is normally on the back of the wave, with the result that a considerable part of the performance takes place in the event of looking back.²⁵ The performative in these situations depends on good and sound interpretation of texts.

Lash links the focus on the past of the performance of interpretation to the faith community when he writes: “The fundamental form of the Christian interpretation of scripture is the life, activity and organization of the believing community.”²⁶ A great deal depends on looking back into history to try and understand something about the history and interpretation of these texts from the past and their *Wirkungsgeschichte* through the ages. Wilson therefore writes: “Much of what happens in the now is orientated toward the past, as in plain pulpit activities of recalling, rereading, reciting, re-enacting, reminding, repeating, reemphasizing, and recapitulating.”²⁷

Now and the present

Reflection on the now is in essence paradoxical because we do not possess the necessary means to do that and because of the fact that now also does not have any duration. Therefore, Wilson writes:

*Now is of course a largely human construct, the product of how we are conditioned to think, and every now is composed of many other nows – not just the nows we recall: the starlight we see is now from millions of years ago; the now of thunder comes to us seconds after the now of the lightning; the texts that we plan to read originate in a former now and will be encountered in a future now.*²⁸

For preaching it is important to take into consideration the layered character of the now and once again not to think of the now as a dot on a straight line. In light of a theo-dramatic approach with the focus on the performative, the now can take on many different forms, such as a changing stage, a thickening plot, the appearing and leaving of characters, a congregation participating as an audience and a living God acting as the main character inviting us to partake in the drama of life.

It is in this regard that Bartow refers to the now as “turning ink into blood” where the *actio divina* encounters the *homo performans*.²⁹ Cilliers goes even further and links time to space: “In preaching, we do not only celebrate the realities of time and space, but especially their coincidence (i.e., meaningful interaction) as *kairos* in God’s presence”.³⁰ The now in preaching therefore culminates in this *kairos* of God’s presence and interaction with human beings.³¹

24 Pelias, R. & VanOosting, J. 1987. A paradigm for performance studies. *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 73(2): 219-231, (219).

25 Wilson, *Marks of faithful preaching*, 39-40.

26 Nicholas Lash, N. 2005. *Theology on the way to Emmaus*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 40.

27 Wilson, *Marks of faithful preaching*, 42.

28 Wilson, *Marks of faithful preaching*, 41.

29 Bartow, C.L. 1997. *God’s human speech: A practical theology of proclamation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B Eerdmans, 53.

30 Cilliers, J. 2015. *A space for grace: Towards an aesthetics for preaching*. Stellenbosch: AFRICAN SUN MeDIA, 155.

31 Wilson (*Marks of faithful preaching*, 42) also warns against theological problems with the instant and now: “Attempts to limit performance in preaching to the present now also run into theological difficulties: too much emphasis is put on the performance of the preacher and not enough on the performance of God. The encounter of the *actio divina* with the *homo performans* has its primary location in the now, yet in fact it may happen as much along the way to the pulpit in sermon preparation as it does in the pulpit when performance is public.”

Childers sees the now not only as an incarnational moment, but as part of a process of the Word becoming human where one can describe it as a performance that moves through time where much happens before the actual performance of the sermon.³² The crest of the now in the sermon, therefore, includes many things happening on the back side of the wave in terms of preparation and the necessary attention needs to be extended towards the past by way of reviewing, remembering and reframing.

Now and the future

With the inclusion of the word “promise” in the theme of this conference one is indeed looking towards the future and at the front of the wave of time, in anticipation and hope. Micks (1970) describes Christian worship as “the future present” and therefore interprets it as one of the most important phenomena of worship.³³ Nowhere else does one find the promise and hope of now and the future more vividly described than in Jesus’ own proclamation of the radical breaking into the present of the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:15). Wilson states that “every moment announces the transforming presence of God. The preacher also proclaims the arrival of God’s future, and in so doing performs that future in Christ’s name.”³⁴

One of the best ways to understand the performance side of the now and the future in the preaching event is to look at it in the light of the Trinitarian concept of *perichoresis*, understood as the mutual indwelling or dance of the persons of the Trinity. Migliori makes use of this concept to point to the way that the preacher and the Holy Spirit work together in giving birth to the sermon with anticipation and hope.³⁵ And Wilson offers a Christological perspective on the future-orientated process of the sermon:

*In effect what happens in the sermon is that the preacher and the congregation participate in the new creation promised by Christ and realized even in the moment. God inaugurates in the now a new realm of the future in which justice, kindness, and humility reign.*³⁶

Introducing the role of Christ, we move in the direction of the next aspect of the now and preaching, namely the death of now and of the self.

The death of now and of the self

According to Wilson,

*[p]erformance requires death. The most significant performance of preaching is Gods’ act, the actio divina. The preacher, like any performer, gives over himself or herself to the performance, that is, to God.*³⁷

This is also the mystery of the preaching event and it is not without reason that Calvin understood this moment in a sacramental way. He understood the words of the preacher as the offering of signs where, in the act of preaching, the Spirit of God uses the words of the preacher as means of God’s

32 Childers, J (ed.). 2001. *Birthing the sermon: Women preachers on the creative process*. Atlanta, GA: Chalice, 53-55.

33 Micks, M. 1970. *The Future Present: The phenomenon of Christian worship*. New York: Seabury.

34 Wilson, *Marks of faithful preaching*, 44.

35 Migliori, D. 2004. *Faith seeking understanding: An introduction to Christian theology* (Third Edition). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 70.

36 Wilson, *Marks of faithful preaching*, 46.

37 Wilson, *Marks of faithful preaching*, 47.

grace. In a mysterious way, the Spirit therefore transforms the words of the preacher into signs of grace in the space between the mouth of the preacher and the ear of the hearer.³⁸

When Purves (2007) speaks about the crucifixion of ministry, it can be applied in the same way to the performance of preaching.³⁹ Giving yourself to God in preaching means crucifying and dying to the self to live for God. In that sense the well-known concept of Christ's *kenosis* emptying Himself (Philippians 2:6–11) is helpful for what is also supposed to be happening in the performance of preaching. It is a dying of the ego to become open to the other and ultimately to the *Other*. Wilson summarises:

*The preacher must enter death through performance: the performance end, the ideas, emotions, and gestures are released, and for the preacher the sermon is over.*⁴⁰

Preaching as theo-dramatic paradox: A case in point

Much of what has been said thus far will in this final section be explained with reference to a specific sermon. In the combination of preaching and performance in the light of “the now”, something of the theo-dramatic paradox becomes visible. Making use of the dramatic categories of drama, the different paradoxes can be named as a paradoxical stage providing space for a plot full of paradoxical performances by characters acting within these paradoxical contexts.

A paradoxical stage

The sermon by John de Gruchy⁴¹ was delivered on November 11, 1990 in the Rondebosch United Church in Cape Town, exactly 10 months after the release of Nelson Mandela from prison. It was thus in the liminal and, therefore, paradoxical period between the old and the new dispensation in South Africa – one may say between the already and the not yet of the new South Africa.⁴² This was a time of promise and expectation, but also of uncertainty about what to do with the past. It was during the previous week that the National Church Leaders Conference was held in Rustenburg in the old Transvaal. More than 250 church leaders from 80 different denominations attended and De Gruchy was invited to be one of the speakers. According to De Gruchy the conference “was a historic event, and I am sure that it will have a very significant impact on the life of both the church and the nation.”⁴³

38 Leith, J. 2010. *John Calvin's doctrine of the Christian life*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 20.

39 Purves, A. 2007. *The crucifixion of ministry: Surrendering our ambitions to the service of Christ*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

40 Wilson, *Marks of faithful preaching*, 49.

41 John de Gruchy is emeritus professor in Christian Studies at the University of Cape Town and most respected South African theologians of the past five decades. His work has left an indelibly positive mark on both the South African and the international theological landscapes.

42 De Gruchy writes on the back cover of his latest book: “Theology is about life in its complexity and ambiguities, pain and joy, ugliness and beauty, lies and truth, oppression and struggles for justice. But theology specifically seeks to discern meaning with these paradoxes of life from the perspective of informed faith, realistic hope and self-giving love” (De Gruchy, J. 2014. *A theological odyssey: My life in writing*. Stellenbosch: AFRICAN SUN MeDIA).

43 De Gruchy, J. 1990. Unpublished sermon preached at Rondebosch United Church, Cape Town, November 11th.

De Gruchy describes the intention of his sermon and points to the fact that he did not want to tell the congregation about the conference, but rather to reflect on the confession of guilt, which took place during the conference. In De Gruchy's words:

It all began with the paper read by Professor Willie Jonker of the NGK⁴⁴ in which he confessed both his own guilt, and that of his Church, for their role in creating and supporting apartheid. This was followed by a wonderful moment in which Archbishop Desmond Tutu embraced Professor Jonker in an act of forgiveness.⁴⁵

This was a paradoxical act for two people on different sides of a table that kept them apart for many years, but also a moment full of promise.

A plot of paradoxes

De Gruchy continues to explain that the focus was on “the importance of the confession of sin and guilt both in our lives as individual Christians and as a church.”⁴⁶ From this it is clear what the theme of his sermon would be, also in the light of the three passages from Scripture that he read: Psalm 51, James 5:13-16 and Luke 7:36-50, namely the importance of confession. But then he started his sermon in a paradoxical move of pointing to the importance of worship:

Our Sunday worship rightly begins with praise. Praise of God the creator and redeemer, praise of God; the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ... Our chief end, so the Westminster catechism reminds us, is “to glorify God and enjoy God forever”.

De Gruchy started the second paragraph of his sermon with the following revealing words:

God does not first, like some earthly potentate, demand of us that we prostrate ourselves in humiliation before him. That we crawl on our knees to his throne. Confession of sin arises out of our praise. The liturgy begins with praise and then very naturally it leads us to acknowledge and confess our sins.⁴⁷

De Gruchy thus surprised his audience with this paradoxical statement and explained that it is precisely this awareness of God and his majesty as revealed in the cross that awakens in us an awareness of our sins.

These paradoxical statements in the introduction to the plot of De Gruchy's sermon gave structure to the rest of his argument. On the second page he discusses how we often undertake soul-searching to find the hidden recesses of our lives and some secret faults and sins. This, according to De Gruchy may become pathological: “We start and end with our sins. Whereas the purpose of confession, awakened by the Holy Spirit, is to bring us to the fullness of the life of God.”⁴⁸ On the following pages of his sermon De Gruchy uses different examples to illustrate this central paradoxical truth of a life of faith, and makes the link to the Scripture passage from Luke 7:36ff – the story of Jesus being

44 NGK stands for the *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk*, the Afrikaans for the Dutch Reformed Church. In the English-speaking world the abbreviation NGK was often used to refer to this denomination, which forms part of the broader Reformed family of churches in South Africa.

45 De Gruchy, Sermon, 1.

46 De Gruchy, Sermon, 1.

47 De Gruchy, Sermon, 1.

48 De Gruchy, Sermon, 2.

anointed with oil by the woman whom the Pharisees had condemned as sinful. As we know, Jesus allows her to anoint his feet, much to the disgust of the Pharisees. De Gruchy states:

Her act of love was out of gratitude for being accepted just as she was by Jesus. It was an act of penitence. "Then Jesus said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven. ... Your faith has saved you; go in peace'" (Luke 7:48).⁴⁹

De Gruchy explains that this is the way in which the gospel operates because Jesus accepts us as we are. In doing so, Jesus also enables us to see our need and to become what he can make us. On the third page of his sermon De Gruchy writes: "Our greatest sin will always be ingratitude – a lack of thankfulness expressed in the way in which we live." Referring to Romans 5:8, he points to the fact that this is the way that God demonstrates his love for us. In the rest of his argument he discusses a number of topics, inter alia pointing to the fact that sin has primarily to do with relationships in that it destroys our relationships with God and with others. He discusses three different ways in which we may confess our sins and even points to the interesting differences – one may say paradoxical practices – between the ways in which Roman Catholic and Reformed people understand and participate in acts of confession.

Toward the end of his sermon, De Gruchy once again makes an interesting observation: "But true confession may also go beyond simply saying 'I am sorry', it may require something even more costly."⁵⁰ He refers to a cartoon that appeared in the daily newspaper, the *Weekly Mail*, but with this we move to a number of interesting characters that become part of the plot as the sermon reached its climax that is also the focus of the next section.

Characters acting in a paradoxical context

De Gruchy describes the cartoon referred to above as follows:

In the Weekly Mail this week there was a cartoon reflecting on Professor Jonker's confession and Archbishop Tutu's act of forgiveness. It portrayed a Catholic confessional. In the one side sat the NGK, in the other sat the Archbishop. The Archbishop was depicted as pronouncing what acts of penitence now needed to be done: "Sinning against your brother ... well that's ah ... 20 hail Mary's ... ah ... land redistribution ... ah...". Funny as the cartoon may be, it really is making a vital point.⁵¹

De Gruchy then explains that "confession means a willingness to put right, as far as we can, what our sins have made wrong." Later, in the 1990s, Archbishop Tutu was instrumental in leading the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to give perpetrators under apartheid the opportunity to put right what sins have made wrong. Many people today feel that the process was not completed and some commentators see the unrest and even current student protests in South Africa as a result of the fact that we had a process of reconciliation that was without justice and not followed by restitution. Once again it is nothing less than a paradoxical context that we found during the 1990s and a context we still find ourselves in today.

De Gruchy ends his sermon by referring to the wonderful story of Zacchaeus in the New Testament.⁵² In a short retelling of the story he describes how Jesus stopped to speak to Zacchaeus the tax

49 De Gruchy, Sermon, 5.

50 De Gruchy, Sermon, 5.

51 De Gruchy, Sermon, 5.

52 De Gruchy, Sermon, 5-6.

collector, who was sitting in a tree watching Jesus passing by. Jesus not only stopped to speak to him, but also gave Zacchaeus back his dignity and made his life whole again by forgiving him his sins and faults. De Gruchy then he ends his sermon by quoting Luke 19:8:

Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times that amount." Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house ..."

In what could be interpreted as the "death of now and of the self" in the character of Zacchaeus, the final paradox of the sermon is exemplified.

De Gruchy's sermon illustrates in different ways the many paradoxes at work in all dimensions of performing the now. He links his thoughts to the back of the wave of time, creates some hope on the side to the front of the wave with a future full of forgiveness and finishes with the crest of the wave breaking through the death of now and of the self by making use of the story of Zacchaeus.

Conclusion

The promise of performing the gospel understood in the light preaching as theo-dramatic paradox provides an exciting and inspirational approach to the act of preaching. Seen through the lenses of the past, present and future, a multi-dimensional frame of interpretation can be developed in which the death of now and of the self can be seen as the culmination of the performance of preaching, pointing towards the mystery of God. The promise of this approach becomes clear in the different dimensions of theo-drama as illustrated through the sermon performance of De Gruchy, not as a blueprint or model for preaching, but for opening up creative and promising new possibilities in theory construction on preaching.

Do Men and Women Preach Differently? Gender Differences in German Sermonic Language use – A Quantitative Empirical LIWC Analysis

14

Jantine Nierop¹

This essay serves as a report on the results obtained from a research project² in which quantitative empirical analysis was done of 224 sermons using Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC), a text analysis software program designed by the American social psychologist and language expert James W Pennebaker and his colleagues in Austin, at the University of Texas. An example is given of the ground-breaking possibilities of computational linguistic research in homiletics. The key issue at stake is the question whether men and women preach differently. With the help of LIWC, gender differences in German sermonic language use were explored – previous research on the topic made use of qualitative methods. The results of this first large-scale empirical analysis of sermons of men and women are discussed by first referring to previous research on gender differences in German sermonic language use, followed by a discussion of the methods employed in the present study and a discussion of its results and conclusions.

Previous research on gender differences in German sermonic language use

In 1991, Birgit Klostermeier-Wulff was the first to undertake a detailed analysis of gender differences in language use by male and female preachers. Making use of qualitative research techniques, she studied 22 sermons by men and 26 sermons by women. In the evaluation she drew the following conclusions:

- Women spoke more personally than men.
- Women used the pronouns “I” more and “we” less than men.
- Women were more likely to ask questions and less likely to answer them than men.
- Women more often used social-emotional skills than men and less theological competencies than men.
- Women tended more to comfort and less to teach than men.
- Women more often emphasised the importance of community than men.³

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2 The author wishes to acknowledge the grant by the Brigitte Schlieben-Lange-Programme of the Ministry of Science of the German State of Baden-Württemberg that made this project possible.

3 Klostermeier-Wulff, B. 1991. Geschlechtsspezifische Verkündigung? Beobachtungen an Frauen- und Männerpredigten. *ZGP* 4: 30-35.

Four years later, in 1995, Isolde Karle referred to Klostermeier-Wulff's study and called for caution in homiletical research on the topic of gender differences.⁴ Thematising gender differences, Karle felt, may reconstitute old clichés about supposed typical male and female preaching styles. As an example of such stereotyping of women in the pulpit, Karle cited the words of the homiletics teacher Ernst-Rüdiger Kiesow on the specific virtues of female preacher. In Kiesow's opinion the female voice typically is a "motherly" voice.⁵

Karle formulated called on homiletics to urgently

... find out how constructions of masculinity and femininity find their expression in different preaching styles and thus (re)produce in an interactive way the system of gender dualism.⁶

Homiletical research should enhance the freedom of preaching styles of both men and women by critical reflection and rational distancing.⁷

Wiebke Köhler considered a task of homiletics to constitute a large body of empirical data on sermons by women. She was of the view that, until large-scale empirical analysis has been done, one is left with mere speculation and researchers should refrain from drawing any conclusions.⁸

For reflections on the role of the binary gender system in practical theology as a whole, Andrea Bieler took words of Michael Foucault (1969) as her point of departure:

As soon as it was realized that all human knowledge ... is contained within structures ... man [sic] ceased, so to speak, to be his own subject, to be simultaneously subject and object. ... It is discovered that what makes man [sic] possible is in fact a set of structures, structures which he can, admittedly, conceive and describe, but of which he is not the subject, or the sovereign consciousness.⁹

According to this point of view, the binary gender system is not a natural phenomenon, but as a (social) structure, the effect of historically specific power relations. As a consequence, Bieler identified deconstructing the binary gender system in religious practices by empirical analysis as an important task of practical theology.¹⁰

Susanne Wolf-Withöft observed a huge gap between homiletics and gender studies. In order to bridge this gap, she referred to the words of Judith Butler (1992) on feminism:

If feminism presupposes that "women" designates an undesignatable field of differences, one that cannot be totalised or summarised by a descriptive identity category, then the very term becomes a site of permanent openness and resignifiability.¹¹

Wolf-Withöft connected Butler's view on feminism with her own proposal that sermons may serve as creative "plays of signs" that liberate both men and women from gender stereotypes.¹²

4 Karle, I. 1995. Zur Unterscheidung von Prediger und Predigerin. *Pthl* 15: 293.

5 Ibid. p. 292.

6 Ibid. p. 303 [my translation – JN].

7 Ibid. pp. 303-305.

8 Köhler, W. 1996. Homiletik – feministisch?! Predigerin und Hörerin als überfälliges Thema der Homiletik, in: *WzM* 48: 138, 148.

9 Foucault, M. 1999. Who Are You, Professor Foucault? (Interview with P. Caruso, 1967). In: J R Carette (ed.), *Religion and culture. Michel Foucault*. New York: Routledge, 93.

10 Bieler, A. 1999. Das Denken der Zweigeschlechtlichkeit in der Praktischen Theologie. *PTh* 88, 283-84.

11 Judith Butler, J. 1995. Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of 'Postmodernism'. In: S Benhabib, J Butler, D Cornell & N Fraser (eds), *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange*. New York: Routledge, 50.

12 Wolf-Withöft, S. 2004. Homiletik und Gender. Beobachtungen zu einer phänomenalen Lücke. *PT* 39, 171-73.

Like Köhler and Bieler, Kornelia Sammet called for more systematic empirical research on the role of gender in ministry.¹³ According to Sammet, in order to minimise the risk of repeating old clichés, this research requires specific methods which will prevent that the category of “gender” from constituting a subjective category of the men and women examined.¹⁴

Köhler later reiterated her call for large-scale empirical research.¹⁵ However, she now emphasised that such empirical research should not be limited to analyses of female sermonic language use, but it should also include thematised male sermonic language use. In other words, homiletical research should not only focus on women as “the other”.¹⁶ Acknowledging the fact that the existing power imbalances between men and women constitute typical perceptions of reality, Köhler quoted Pierre Bourdieu’s view that,

*[m]asculine domination, which constitutes women as symbolic objects whose being (esse) is a being-perceived (percipi), has the effect of keeping them in a permanent state of bodily insecurity, or more precisely of symbolic dependence. They exist first through and for the gaze of others, that is, as welcoming, attractive and available objects.*¹⁷

Although the focus of this essay is German sermonic language use, an exception should be made here by referring a similar study done in the United Church of Christ in the USA by Anna Katharina Röllmann. Röllmann made a qualitative analysis of 10 Easter sermons by men and 10 by women. Based on her analysis of the sermons, she concluded that:

- women kept more closely to the biblical texts;
- women used more narrative stories;
- women used more images from nature and lifeworld;
- women were speaking more personally;
- women were referring more to the concrete congregation and less to the worldwide church.¹⁸

Present study (Methods and results)

In this study, a survey is done of gender differences in German sermonic language. At first, 224 German sermons (110 sermons by men, 114 sermons by women) were collected. All of them were delivered between 2010 and 2015. In order to best satisfy the *ceteris paribus* assumption (that is, all other things being equal) the study selected only took so-called sermons for lay-readers that were not written for a special congregation. The sources of the collected text corpus were threefold:

- the series *Er ist unser Friede. Lesepredigten*,¹⁹
- sermons from the *Prädikantenpfarramt der Evangelischen Landeskirche in Württemberg*,²⁰
- sermons from the *Ludwig-Hofacker-Vereinigung* (association with a pietistic profile) (both men and women 15%).²¹

13 Sammet, K. 2005. *Frauen im Pfarramt: Berufliche Praxis und Geschlechterkonstruktion*. Würzburg: Ergon, 150.

14 Ibid. p. 151.

15 Köhler, W (unter Mitarbeit von René Enzenauer, Indra Hesse, Renata Jung und Daniel Ruf). 2006. “Wir haben ja jetzt eine Pastorin, sie predigt ganz gut.” Protestantische Predigtkultur aus der Genderperspektive. In: E Garhammer, U Roth & H-G Schöttler (Hrsg.), *Kontrapunkte*. München: Don Bosco, 258.

16 Köhler, *Wir haben eine Pastorin*, 255.

17 Bourdieu, P. 2001. *Masculine Domination*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 66.

18 Röllmann, A.K. 2014. Und das Word ward weiblich? Unterschiede in Predigten von Frauen und Männern der United Church of Christ (USA) und ein möglicher Umgang mit den Ergebnissen. *Materialdienst des Konfessionskundlichen Instituts Bensheim*, 65, 32-34.

19 Engemann, W. (Hrsg.) (ab 2012), Schwier, H. (Hrsg.), 2011-2016. *Er ist unser Friede. Lesepredigten*. Leipzig: EVA.

20 Online at: www.predigtvorlagen.de

21 Online at: www.predigtvorlagen.de

The text analysis program Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) was used to do an extensive linguistic analysis on each individual sermon. This program was developed in the mid-1990s by James Pennebaker and colleagues at the University of Texas. LIWC analyses text files on a word-by-word basis using an internal dictionary. The present study used the German translation of the LIWC2001 dictionary, developed 2003.²² Equivalence and robustness of the German translation were proofed and “the results show that most of the LIWC categories display high equivalence to their English counterparts. ... The findings indicate the usefulness of the LIWC for analyzing German texts.”²³

LIWC categorised the words used in the 224 sermons into 22 linguistic groups (for example, pronouns, verbs and tenses), 32 psychological categories (such as affect, cognition, social words) and 7 personal categories (for example, work, home, leisure). It also calculated the percentages of words in a sermon according to the above categories. However, it must be noted that as a word counting program only, LIWC failed to capture the context and was, therefore, unable to allow for the use of words in cases of irony, sarcasm or metaphors.²⁴

Afterwards, statistical analysis was done of the results of LIWC using Mann-Whitney U tests to identify differences between the sermons of men and women. The Mann-Whitney U test is a non-parametric test that is useful for determining whether the mean of two groups are different from each other. In social sciences, the significance level is usually set at $p = 0.05$. A significance level of $p = 0.05$ indicates a 5% risk of concluding that a difference exists where in fact does not. However, due to the exploratory character of the study it was accepted that differences between men and women have less than a 10% probability of occurring by chance alone ($p = 0,1$).

With LIWC, significant gender differences in sermonic language use were found in nine language categories and four punctuation categories. The data table below shows the categories where differences between men and women were found. Examples of words in the different categories are also given as well as the level of significance and an indicator (plus/minus) showing whether women use relatively more or less words from each category.

22 Brand, C.; Horn, A.B.; Mehl, M.R. & Pennebaker, J.W. 2003. GERMAN LIWC 2003: Ein deutsches Diktionär zu den basislinguistischen, psychologischen Prozess- und Relativitätskategorien des LIWC. Technical Report. Austin, TX: University of Texas, Department of Psychology.

23 Wolf, M.; Horn, A.B.; Mehl, M.R.; Haug, S.; Pennebaker, J.W. & Kordy, H. 2008. Computergestützte quantitative Textanalyse Äquivalenz Robustheit der deutschen Version des Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count. *Diagnostica*, 54, 85. <https://doi.org/10.1026/0012-1924.54.2.85>

24 Pennebaker, J.W. 2011. *The Secret Life of Pronouns. What Our Words say about Us*. Dexter, MI: Bloomsbury, 8.

1	word count		p < 0,1	-
2	optimism	(e.g. hope, confident, positive)	p < 0,05	+
3	friends	(e.g. buddy, friend, neighbour)	p < 0,05	+
4	insitght	(e.g. think, know, consider)	p < 0,05	-
5	tentative	(e.g. maybe, perhaps, guess)	p < 0,1	+
6	inclusive	(e.g. and, with, include)	p < 0,05	+
7	exclusive	(e.g. but, without, exclude)	p < 0,05	-
8	metaphysical	(e.g. God, heaven, coffin)	p < 0,05	-
9	religious	(e.g. altar, church, mosque)	p < 0,1	-
10	Comma (,)		p < 0,1	+
11	Colon (:)		p < 0,1	-
12	question mark (?)		p < 0,05	+
13	exclamation mark (!)		p < 0,05	-

The SPSS-data table below depicts the mean of the two groups, men (1) and women (2) for the above 13 categories.

	VAR00002	N	Mittelwert
word count	1,00	110	1502,55
	2,00	114	1432,96
optimism	1,00	110	0,7051
	2,00	114	0,8566
friends	1,00	110	0,1394
	2,00	114	0,1737
insitght	1,00	110	2,5289
	2,00	114	2,3446
tentative	1,00	110	1,2013
	2,00	114	1,3154
inclusive	1,00	110	6,8526
	2,00	114	7,1482
exclusive	1,00	110	2,3935
	2,00	114	2,2018
metaphysical	1,00	110	3,8210
	2,00	114	3,3839
religious	1,00	110	3,5005
	2,00	114	3,1039
Comma (,)	1,00	110	7,4586
	2,00	114	8,0255
Colon (:)	1,00	110	1,1662
	2,00	114	1,0541
question mark (?)	1,00	110	0,5498
	2,00	114	0,6919
exclamation mark (!)	1,00	110	0,4632
	2,00	114	0,3721

For the next fictitious example, a sermon of 1465 words is presupposed. The table below shows the absolute number of words men (m) and women (w) will use on average from each of the categories 2 to 9 in the first table above.

2	optimism	m: 10 words	w: 13 words
3	friends	m: 2,1 words	w: 2,5 words
4	insight	m: 37 words	w: 34 words
5	tentative	m: 18 words	w: 19 words
6	inclusive	m: 100 words	w: 105 words
7	exclusive	m: 35 words	w: 32 words
8	metaphysical	m: 56 words	w: 50 words
9	religious	m: 51 words	w: 45 words

When one takes the category “religious words” as a subcategory of the category “metaphysical words”, the average difference between a 1465 word sermon of a man and a 1465 words sermon of a woman is 21 words (1,4% of the total number of words).

Discussion

It is important to note that, unlike in previous studies, in many categories no gender differences at all were examined in German sermonic language, for example in the categories: first person singular; first person plural; social processes; affective processes; negative emotions; positive emotions; family references; body references; achievement references; power references; and money references. It is also important to note that all gender differences examined amount to less as 1% – the biggest difference (0,4%) being in the categories of “religious words” and “metaphysical words”) and the smallest (0,1%) in those of “friends” and “tentative words”. As stated above, in a fictitious sermon of 1465 words, the difference between a sermon by a female preacher and that by a male preacher would be on average 21 words, that is, only 1,4% of the total number of words.

Although these differences are small, they should still be interpreted. On the basis of the research by Pennebaker on the typical use of language, two possible explanations is offered here for the gender differences examined²⁵ found in the sermons, namely that as men are prone to using more “insight words”, “exclusive words” (making distinctions), “metaphysical words”, “religious words”, colons and exclamation marks, this may be indicative of a propensity to discuss more explicitly theological topics in an analytical and demonstrative way. Women, on the other hand, use more “optimism words”, “inclusive words” (making conjunctions), “tentative words”, commas and question marks because they tell more stories of hope that are cautiously interpreted.

Conclusions

At the beginning of this paper, the question was raised whether women and men preach differently. According to the findings of this study, for Germany, this question may be partly answered in the affirmative. A quantitative empirical analysis of 224 sermons using LIWC showed that in 13 language and punctuation categories small, yet significant, differences can be observed between the sermons

25 Pennebaker, *The Secret Life*, 80-82, 295-96.

by the men and women investigated. In many other categories, however, no gender differences were found. Thus, in some ways men and women preach differently, while in many other ways they do not.

A possible explanation for the gender differences in German sermonic language may be that men follow a more analytical preaching style, while women follow a more narrative preaching style. However, further qualitative and quantitative research on this topic is needed.

In order to enhance the freedom of preaching styles of both men and women, teachers of homiletics should thematise gender differences from a particular perspective. Through critical reflection on socially-constructed gender roles and a process of rational distancing from these (Karle 1995) new creative possibilities will arise. Men should be encouraged to experiment with a more narrative preaching style, as women should with regard to a more analytical preaching style. These experiments and other practical exercises may be steps on the way to this far-reaching goal, namely that both men and women may preach as individual human beings.

More than Words – A Multimodal and Socio-material Approach to Understanding the Preaching Event

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Tone Stangeland Kaufman and Hallvard Olavson Mosdøl¹

Introduction

This essay is based on an ongoing, empirical study in the Lutheran Church of Norway (CofN) called Preaching to Young and Old.² The overall project explores how preaching events are *enacted* in worship services, where children of a given age were especially invited and how these events are *experienced* by children and adult listeners ranging from regular church attendees to those who rarely attend church.

We generally understand preaching as an event. Therefore, it is not only created by the spoken words, but experienced through interactions and encounters in the actual, situated entirety of the worship service. This includes enactment and actions as well as material objects or artefacts. In this particular essay, however, the preaching event refers to *the minutes when a preacher is addressing the congregation*. Our unit of analysis is the preaching event analysed through a multimodal and sociomaterial lens.

In what follows below, we investigate and compare two cases with seemingly salient similarities. Nevertheless, the preaching event was experienced rather different by listeners in the two congregations that formed part of the study. This made us ask: What is the difference that makes a difference?

Context

The Church of Norway is a mainline folk-church belonging to the Lutheran tradition. CofN has an episcopal-synodal structure with 1284 parishes, 106 deaneries and 11 dioceses. Three out of four Norwegians (75%) are members of CofN (2013). These numbers are down 10% from ten years earlier (2003). In Norway, 3% of the population attends church services or other religious meetings more than once a month. Baptism of infants fell from 96% in 1960 to 62% in 2013. The focus of church life is Sunday morning worship, most commonly celebrated at 11 am.

For more than ten years, there has been an ongoing government-funded Christian education reform in the CofN.³ According to the curriculum of this reform, Christian education should be provided for every child and adolescent between 0 and 18 who is baptised in the CofN. The reform has resulted

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2 The Norwegian working title is "Forkynnelse for Små og Store", abbreviated FoSS.

3 On the following website a linke to the English version of the Plan for Christian Education Reform, see online <http://www.gammel.kirken.no/?event=doLink&famID=11495> (Accessed: 26 February 2016).

in numerous new positions for Christian educators and in the development of new activities and measures aimed at a certain age group. These activities usually culminate in a worship service. Our research project investigates some of these services from a preaching perspective.

Academic context

While preaching literature tended to be more prescriptive than descriptive, the empirical turn also reached this field. At the same time, the discipline of homiletics has seen a turn to the listener.⁴ In a review David Rietveld surveys and compares some contributions to the phenomenological vein of homiletics.⁵ Homiletics in Continental Europe has taken an empirical and often quantitative approach, focusing on what listeners “do” with sermons. North American homileticians have emphasised the work on rhetoric, structure, practice, narrative et cetera as resources for preaching and the study of homiletics. However, the turn to the listener has also been prevalent in this context.⁶

Pointing out some tensions and gaps in empirical homiletic research, Rietveld emphasises the dialogicity of the sermon.⁷ Most homileticians would contend that preaching to some extent involves the listener. Nevertheless, while some contributions argue that preaching is a “modified form of dialogue” (Pleizier) or a “pseudo-conversational discourse”, but really a monologue (Carrell), others make the case that the listeners are *the* authors of preaching (Gaarden and Lorensen). This paper aims at contributing to this discourse by offering a third option: Looking at preaching as *triological* where meaning making takes place in the encounter between the preacher, the preaching event in the situated worship service with its many artefacts and material actors at play and the listener.

Empirical research in homiletics has primarily focused on how adult listeners experience preaching. While some studies have employed a specific theoretical framework,⁸ others have taken a grounded theory approach.⁹ A few recent Scandinavian contributions have explored worship services employing sociocultural and sociomaterial lenses as part of their analytical framework, but they have neither specifically focused on the preaching event nor on children as participants in worship or as listeners.¹⁰ We have not come across empirical research that looks into the specific phenomenon of simultaneously preaching to children and adults analysed through a sociomaterial and multimodal framework.

Our study draws on Marianne Gaarden and Marlene Ringgaard Lorensen’s work.¹¹ We appreciate their understanding of the preaching event as an encounter between the preacher, the preached

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- 4 McClure, J.S., et al. 2004. *Listening to the Listeners: Homiletical Case Studies*. St.Louis, MO: Chalice; Austnaberg, H. 2012. *Improving Preaching by Listening to the Listeners: Sunday Service Preaching in the Malagasy Lutheran Church. Bible and Theology in Africa*, Frankfurt: Peter Lang; Gaarden, M & Ringgaard Lorensen, M. 2013 *Listeners as Authors of Preaching. Homiletic*, 38(1).
 - 5 See Rietveld, D. 2013. A Survey of the Phenomenological Research of Listening to Preaching, *Homiletic* 38(2). <https://doi.org/10.15695/hmltc.v38i2.3867>
 - 6 McClure, *Listening to the Listeners*.
 - 7 Rietveld, *A Survey*, 43.
 - 8 Austnaberg, *Improving Preaching*. McClure, *Listening to the Listeners*.
 - 9 Gaarden, M. 2015. *Prædikenen som det tredje rum* [The sermon as the third room]. Fredriksberg: Anis; Pleizier, T. 2010. *Religious Involvement in Hearing Sermons: A Grounded Theory Study in Empirical Theology and Homiletics*. Delft: Eburon. Yet, as Gaarden and Lorensen note, it can be questioned whether or not Pleizier actually conducts his research according to a grounded theory paradigm.
 - 10 Gustavsson, C. 2015. *Delaktighetens kris: Gudstjänstens pedagogiska utmaning* [The crisis of participation: The pedagogical challenge of the worship service]. Skellefteå: Artos; Idestrom, J. 2015. *Spåren i snön* [Tracks in the snow]. Skellefteå: Artos & Norma. Idestrom, J. 2016. *Mediators of Tradition: Embodiment of Doctrine in Rural Swedish Parish Life. Ecclesial Practices. Journal of Ecclesiology and Ethnography* (forthcoming).
 - 11 Gaarden, M. 2013. Den empiriske fordring til homiletikken [The empirical claim to homiletics]. *Tidsskrift for praktisk teologi* 2; Gaarden, M & Lorensen, M. 2013, *Listeners as Authors of Preaching – Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives. Homiletic* 38:1; Gaarden, M. 2014. *Den emergente prædiken* [The emergent sermon]. University of Aarhus.

sermon and the listener in the situated worship service. Although building on the contributions of our colleagues, our study has a wider approach: Theoretically, whilst acknowledging the inner dialogue that Gaarden and Lorensen speak of, our interpretive repertoire takes the wider material and the multimodal dimensions of preaching into account. Empirically we expand the unit of analysis in the overall study to include both children and adult listeners and the entire worship service, not only the preached sermon (though not in this paper). Methodologically interviews and focus groups are supplemented with participant observation, video recordings and photographs of the worship service, as well as the transcribed preached sermon and the sermon manuscript. Locating ourselves in the recent empirical trajectory of homiletic research,¹² our research explores the complexity of the preaching event when preaching to heterogeneous groups, taking a sociomaterial and multimodal approach.¹³

Theoretical perspectives

A sociomaterial sensibility

We bring an analytical sensibility to the sociomaterial dimension as part of our interpretive repertoire. More specifically, we draw on the socio-material approach named Actor-Network Theory (ANT).¹⁴ A central component in ANT is that agency is not reduced to humans. Rather, material objects play a pertinent role as actors in the formation of the collective and social. The ANT approach understands an actor as “anything that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference.”¹⁵ Human and non-human objects alike are seen as actors in an on-going performing and reshaping of the ecclesial collective as they produce meaning by and through their very coexistence and interaction with other actors.

This means that our analytical radar is sensitive towards the significance of the material dimension of worship, and towards how artefacts and material objects are in use and play a part as actors in the empirical field.

Multimodality

Multimodality is a theoretical perspective that understands communication and representation as something more than oral or written language. In a variety of disciplines there is an increasing interest in the role of image, speech, gaze and posture, and how the use of space and different artefacts are contributing to the communication event.¹⁶ Kress and Van Leeuwen define multimodality as “the use of several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic product or event.”¹⁷ From this perspective

12 McClure et al., *Listening to the Listeners*; Austnaberg, *Improving Preaching*; Gaarden & Lorensen, *Listeners as Authors*; Pleizier, *Religious Involvement* and a number of others.

13 Fenwick, T.; Edwards, R. & Sawchuk, P. 2011. *Emerging Approaches to Educational Research: Tracing the Sociomaterial*. London: Routledge; Latour, B. 2005. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, Clarendon lectures in management studies. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen. 2001. *Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication*. London, New York: Arnold, Oxford University Press; Jewitt, C, et al. 2009. *The Routledge Handbook of Multimodal Analysis*. London: Routledge; Fenwick, Edwards and Sawchuk, *Emerging Approaches*; Latour, *Reassembling the Social*.

14 For a helpful introduction to ANT, see Fenwick, Edwards and Sawchuk, *Emerging Approaches*, 94-128; Latour, *Reassembling the Social*; Law, J. 1994. *Organizing Modernity*. Oxford: Blackwell. The concept of *Actor-Network* mirrors an understanding of action and agency that is central to ANT. The actor is not a stable entity whose intentions can be used as an explanatory cause for action.

15 One way of describing the ANT approach is that it is a way of reassembling new entities not yet gathered together in the understanding and articulation of the social. And here the researcher needs to have an open mind to be able to see how any course of action will thread a trajectory through completely foreign modes of existence. Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 71.

16 See Jewitt, *Handbook of Multimodal Analysis*.

17 Kress & Van Leeuwen, *Multimodal Discourse*, 20.

language is regarded as a major player in communication. However, the underlying assumption is that meaning is constructed, distributed, received, interpreted and reconstructed through a number of communicative modes. Modes are to be understood as resources doing different sorts of communicative work.

The different modes should not be regarded as fixed in how they contribute in their mediating functions, but as situated. Kress defines mode as a “socially and culturally given resource for making meaning.”¹⁸ This theoretical position indicates a fluid understanding of the communication event, and the interaction between modes is of huge interest in multimodal analysis. As communicative beings we try to orchestrate meaning through our selection and configuration of modes. Non-verbal elements are not semiotically innocent, and contribute as integral parts in the communication event. This multimodal “ensemble” should be understood as closely interwoven through their complexity of interaction, representation and communication.

Two case studies: St Olaf and St Sunniva

Similarities

We want to look into two cases with seemingly salient similarities. Both congregations have well-equipped buildings and a number of staff. Staff and lay people have been working systematically with local Christian education plans that include participation in the liturgical life. The two services we will look into are aiming at four-year-old children.

Written invitations were sent to all the baptised four-year-olds in the parish and their families. They have been invited to come to receive *Min kirkebok*, a book for younger children including narratives from the Bible and Christian songs. This indicates that the congregations consisted of a rather complex group that particular Sunday. The challenge was how to preach when the assembly includes people from four to eighty years old and the knowledge of biblical narratives – and the motivation for coming – differs considerably among those in the pews? Hence, Theo Pleizier’s assumption that preachers and listeners have a shared intentionality of preaching does not necessarily hold true in a Norwegian folk church context.¹⁹

Multimodal data

Although the services in St Sunniva and St Olaf have a lot in common, we were struck at how different they were experienced by our research participants. This was disclosed during the analysis of the empirical material drawing on field notes from participant observation, video recordings, sermon manuscripts and qualitative interviews with twelve children and eight adults in the two congregations.²⁰ In our analysis we ask: What are the differences that make a difference in these two preaching events? To be able to answer this question we employed our sociomaterial and multimodal lens when investigating how the preacher orchestrated or managed the given and elective resources or modes at his or her disposal. We particularly explored the following categories: How did the preacher in St Olaf and St Sunniva respectively “establish” the room prior to the sermon? How may we describe the preacher’s use of voice, gestures, gaze and facial expressions? What kind of

18 Kress & Van Leeuwen, *Multimodal Discourse*, 54.

19 Pleizier, *Religious Involvement*, 39-56.

20 Some of the interviews were conducted as focus group interviews, whereas others were individual interviews. Our main strategy was to interview children in focus groups, as we had good experiences with that from our pilot study. Adults would have been interviewed individually. However, for practical reasons this was not always possible and one interview with adults in St. Olaf was also a focus group interview.

language dominated the sermons – towards what genres did they lean? Finally we analysed the ways in which the preacher invited the congregation into dialogue,²¹ what sort of artefacts they brought into the sermon and how these material objects were at play as actors.²²

How the sermon was enacted – St Olaf

St Olaf church is a modern church from the early 1990s. At the entrance people are greeted by ushers and the four year olds are registered. The nave is decorated with paintings made by the four year olds the day before (they were invited to a gathering as part of the Christian education program). There are approximately 150 people in the quadratic nave. The room feels lively, even chaotic.

The reading was followed by the sermon. A female preacher, in her late forties, placed herself in the middle of the sanctuary and recaptured what took place in the gathering yesterday. She is a volunteer, shared that the four year olds had been invited to hear about “lost sheep” and explained that “losing and finding” was the theme of the weekend. The preacher stood in the middle of the sanctuary with no manuscript and a portable microphone so her hands were free.

The preacher radiated a kind of friendly authority. She began staging the narrative and physical space that she was to use. We got the feeling that she had prepared and planned how she would like it to be and how the congregation was to be involved in the narrative. She instructed the congregation to remain silent when the church musician made what she called “the quiet-sound”. She called for a practice run and when the sound was played, the entire congregation suddenly fell silent. “Then we need a road”, she explained, putting down a piece of clothing in the chancel. The children were invited to come up and sit “on *this* side of the road.” A number of children and adults moved forward. This refurbishing of the room including the preparation of the narrative went surprisingly smoothly given how chaotic the service was experienced until this point.

In an engaging way, the preacher told the story about Zacchaeus and how Jesus came to Jericho, where everyone wanted to see him. Zacchaeus had to climb a sycamore tree in order to be able to get a view of the events. While preaching, she used her voice and gaze to indicate that she addressed everyone in the room. When she told how Zacchaeus put tax money into his own pockets, she illustrated this with bold gestures, holding up some golden coins and putting them into her pockets. She deliberately involved the congregation in different ways. When Zacchaeus is running, the congregation was invited to “run” (meaning that they make running sounds with their feet) and she asked them to repeat certain sentences after her, such as, “Zacchaeus, come down, I must stay at your house!” Her way of collectively involving the church attendees in the narrative drew the congregation into the story.

The genre of the sermon was narrative. Although the story was familiar to many, the preacher added small details like “people were looking at Zacchaeus with *angry* eyes” and she described his clothing in a graphic way (“he had a *red* cloak”). Her language was action-oriented. She primarily used short sentences with a verb such as “saw”, “ran”, “shook his head”, “climbed”, “found”, “sat down”, et cetera. When reading her written sermon as part of our analysis, her language appeared almost naively simple. She repeated herself, using the same sort of words and phrasing, but in slightly

21 The term dialogue here carries the everyday meaning. As we have drawn on Ringgaard Lorensen's work on Bakhtin and preaching. It should be noted that this use of dialogue can be included in a Bakhtinian approach to dialogue. Yet, it should also be distinguished from other, more specific, Bakhtinian understandings of dialogue.

22 We are aware that this analysis should be supplemented with a more comprehensive analysis of material objects as actors in the entirety of the situated worship service and with a more comprehensive analysis of the experiences of church attendees. This will be attended to as part of the broader project.

different ways. Her sermon ended with Jesus saying, “Today salvation has come to this house, because I am here to seek and find. And today I found you, Zacchaeus.” Then she added: “Jesus finds us. Like the shepherd found the sheep (pause). And now (referring to the children) you may find your seats.”

Reflections

What sort of resources did the preacher in St Olaf bring into play? One significant mode is the way she initially staged the narrative and physical space she is to use. The piece of clothing was an artefact that served as a road in the narrative as well as a marker in the physical room. The instrument making the quiet-sound as well as the musician, who played precisely according to her timing, were further artefacts and resources that she brought into play. Using ANT as a lens for our analysis, we see the piece of clothing or road as a significant actor as it causes the children to sit in a certain place and possibly kept them still, paying attention to what’s going on “on the other side of the road”. The melodica, on which the quiet-sound is made, was an auditive, non-human actor closely related to another human actor, the church musician. It is obvious that he added to the experience of the preaching event. Similarly, the golden coins and the way the preacher used gestures to illustrate “big pockets full of golden coins” were contributing to interaction between the preacher, the attendees and the preaching.

Another mode is a given one, namely the actual sanctuary. In this case, the sanctuary allowed proximity between the preacher, the children and the rest of the congregation. There was barely space between the back row of the children on the floor and the first row of pews (chairs). All these modes, we contend, as well as the way the preacher orchestrated them, played an important part in how the preaching event was experienced by the listeners. The gestures, gaze, voice and energy of the preacher as well as her deliberate use of a language aimed at four-year-old children were additional modes that secure the listeners’ attention. The well-prepared and collective way of involvement created an atmosphere where one got the sense that the majority of the congregation felt included in the event.

How the sermon was experienced

When we interviewed children aged eight to eleven in St Olaf, they were generally very positive.²³ The children reported that they enjoyed the way the preacher talked and “it is easier to remember when you do something as well.” When asked about the content of the sermon, one of them responded: “It is better with hundred friends than hundred dollars”, and “it is better being together with people than rich and lonely.” An eight year old was asked how she found the story. “Good!”, she replied. When encouraged to elaborate, she said: “Zacchaeus found himself, in a way. And he gave away (the stolen money) to others.” We continued by asking if part of the story was boring, to which she answered bluntly: “No!”

Moreover, the children were fascinated by the way the preacher told the story, emphasising the golden coins and the big pockets. They also reflected on how this must be a “very good” sermon for the four year olds, obviously having listened to the sermon with this target group in mind.

The responses from the adults in St Olaf were equally positive. A lady in her eighties, one of the regulars (without grandchildren in the service), said she heard the familiar story “in a new way”. She was intrigued by the way the preacher communicates. “There is something with her voice, a certain

23 We interviewed six children; one individually (the eight year old) and five (ten and eleven year olds) in a group interview. We made an attempt to interview four year olds, but it did not succeed.

tension ... she doesn't bring in too many points ... She speaks in a very slow, simple and distinct way ... You get more out of her." The woman explained that she and her friend have been discussing the sermon. They were concerned about "really seeing people, and not only those who have their lives together ... We talked about how certain cliques are formed, and how important it is to mingle not just with the same people and to welcome new people."

One of these older interviewees emphasised how she can continue reflecting on the story. "It is not a fixed message to be served and simply received. We don't get the finished interpretation, but we can feel the story and sit and reflect on it."²⁴ Using the term "reflect" a number of times, she expressed her idea that the sermon also has something to offer those who have heard the story numerous times before. This very Sunday there were things "I had never thought of before." Another interviewee pointed out how she appreciated getting new perspectives or angles on the well-known story and that the preacher contributed to this in the way she performed. Drawing the line to the Zacchaeus story, a middle-aged man with a four year old reported that he appreciated the way this congregation "includes children and everyone." Moreover, he found that this service, aimed at four year olds, actually moved the entire congregation, as the preaching event captured the children.

How the sermon was enacted – St Sunniva

St Sunniva church is impressive with its high ceilings and stained glass windows. This particular Sunday had a festive character and on their way into the church the children were registered and handed balloons. Most of them seated themselves with their families in the upper part of the nave, approximately 60 meters from the entrance to the high altar. Around 250 people were seated in the pews.

The service was introduced from the high altar. The priest, a young man in his thirties, seemed a distant figure when observed from the nave. After the gathering and a baptism, the sermon started with the gospel procession. A band plays jazz while the procession moved a third of the way down the nave. The gospel reading was from John 12:20-33 (If not the seed falls into the soil and dies ...).

After the procession, the priest started delivering the sermon from the centre of the sanctuary. He held a text in his hand and, although he did not use it very often, his one hand was thus occupied. When he discovered some children were sitting on the stairs leading up to the sanctuary, he invited them to move closer. "Everyone can join in" and "you may bring mummy or daddy", he said. The preacher radiated a calm presence, but he seemed taken by surprise by what happened next. For the next three minutes, the church turned into a small pilgrimage of children, who accepted his invitation without hesitation.

It seemed like the priest did not have a plan for handling this part of the sermon. He struggled to get control while the people were moving ("should we try to sit?"). When he was finally able to continue, more than fifty children surrounded him. It was interesting to observe what kind of game changer this turned out to be. From now on, the priest's attention was solely on the children (they were waving their balloons, waving to their parents in the nave and generally looking curious). The priest bent down to his knees and talked about "the secret" (Jesus had to die to rise again). When he asked if anybody wanted to "hold the secret" (a seed the priest hides in his own hand), a small boy stepped forward. The priest engaged with the little volunteer in an individual dialogue. The boy answered in

24 Her response and the responses of numerous others supported the categories suggested by Gaarden and Lorensen in order to understand three different interactions taking place during preaching, namely associative, critical and contemplative. Gaarden and Lorensen, *Listeners as Authors of Preaching*.

a low voice and it was difficult to hear what he said. The priest responded, also nearly whispering. His gestures, voice and facial expressions were calibrated towards the children around him. When some of the balloons burst, he was able to orchestrate a response, turning to the congregation for a second, but soon he was back into a kind of introverted mode.

The sermon can be described as a sort of meditation. It was packed with nouns: “secret”, “seed”, “soil”, “friends”, “eastern” and “heaven”, “flowers”, “service”. The priest spoke metaphorically about “life” and “death”, using short, dense sentences. From the children’s response (the level of running and jumping in the sanctuary) there was a growing sense that communicating with them was getting challenging. When another balloon burst and some of the keen four year olds started exploring the inner part of the sanctuary on their own, the preacher indicated that it’s time to move on.

He then said that “now everyone is welcome to plant a seed and bring it home.” But first “we are going to sing a song about what happens when a little seed is put into soil.” He turned to the band and the band members stared playing, but it seemed that hardly anyone knew the song. The priest and a female catechist demonstrated some gestures to accompany the song, but only a couple of children joined in; none of the adults in the congregation did. Eventually the children queued up at the “planting stations” in the sanctuary. This part of the sermon lasted six minutes and during that time, the congregation in the nave started talking while the band kept on playing. The atmosphere turned into an informal social setting – until the session was followed by intercession.

Reflections

What sort of resources did the preacher in St Sunniva bring into play in the sermon? It was interesting to observe in what way his friendly openness to the children (“please come closer”), combined with his lack of a plan to orchestrate this when it happened, influenced the preaching event. It took three minutes to set the scene and when the children were eventually seated, it was like some sort of “glass wall” had been erected between the nave and the sanctuary.

From that moment on the priest focused entirely on the children, communicating this in multimodal ways: He hardly looked at the congregation in the nave, his voice was low – directed toward the children close to him and he used gestures that were hard to recognise from the nave. This way of relating to the children had an impact on the congregation and how they experienced the preaching event. When we analysed the facial expressions of people in the nave it seemed obvious that a large part of the adults turned into observers. This was not only due to the preacher’s performance, but also to the shape of the church. Initially, it seemed like the priest was aware of what kind of challenge the room represented as he chose to lead the gospel procession deep into the nave. However, this awareness of distance seemed to lessen when the children moved forward.

Some significant artefacts introduced early in the service were the balloons handed out. They were probably meant to add a festive spirit, but as they were burst they diverted attention. Using ANT as a lens for our analysis, we see the balloons, the seed and soil as actors in the sermon as they involved large groups of the children, but not the adults. The planting session was experienced as “nice” by most of the children, but it was executed in a way that required a lot of time and waiting one’s turn. As a result, not only the people in the nave, but also the waiting children were turned into observers for a considerable time.

How the service was experienced

When we interviewed the priest he expressed he was “really satisfied” with the sermon. He felt that a “special atmosphere” had been created. “But, I have to admit that I had not really thought of how to handle fifty children.” He indicated that he tried to compensate by drawing the children closer. He felt this strategy was successful. What he had not considered was how the sermon was experienced from the nave. One of the regulars, a female medical doctor in her fifties, was to the point in her response: She described the sermon as “limited”, maybe interesting to the children, but not to her. She felt the sermon was rather “thin and tedious”.

However, it was interesting to observe that the sermon was also experienced in *different* ways. While the above interviewee found the planting session “boring”, a young mother was very pleased with the service. “The service was full of life”, she said. She had a strong feeling that the service “was for the children”, and during the sermon she felt “touched”. She had no problem with the “glass wall” that was erected between the chancel and the nave. From the conversation it became clear that she was the mother of the boy who got the seed. Her positive reaction may be understandable in light of her relation to him (“he normally doesn’t dare do such things”). Through her son she had a relational peephole into the preaching event. Her son’s being in this particular position was an actor that offered her a particular perspective in spite of the constraints created by the way the preacher addressed the challenge of the long sanctuary. In this way, she was able to be intensely present, which contributed to her meaning making.

We spoke to several children whose responses varied as well. “It was very funny”, a six-year-old girl said. When asked what she remembers, she mentioned “the drawing” (there are drawing supplies in the church to use during the service). She said it was hard to see what happened from where she sat. One of the boys who were directly involved in the service explained how he contributed during the intercession and collection (“that part was fun”). When asked about the sermon, he responded “there was nothing in the sermon that has anything to do with my life”. He is nine years old, and thinks the planting session was aimed at the younger children. Another boy was able to reconstruct a lot of the sermon, but concluded that he “could not really see the point.” This lack of interest could be due to the genre used by the preacher. Even though the sermon could be characterised as simple, it contained many “big words”. There was no narrative. The sermon was short, rather abstract and did not connect with the children’s experiences. The seed and soil metaphor and its implicit link to the Christian story in the way it was presented seemed to have struggled to move the congregation.

Summary of the findings

When we compare the two preaching events in St Olaf and St Sunniva the following emerges: The preacher in St Olaf managed to orchestrate an ensemble of modes that opened up; the way she arranged the room related to the congregation, it determined her choice of words and executed the event. The preacher in St Sunniva tried the same, but his sermon was experienced as a more even more exclusively aimed at the children and adults in close proximity to him. This was partly due to some strategic choices he made combined with the dimensions of the church building that created distance rather than intimacy.

More than words...

Taking a multimodal and homiletic approach to the study of worship services offers a multitude of ways to create meaning for different model participants.²⁵ The services at St Olaf and St Sunniva may be understood in light of this perspective. The preaching events enabled a number of different, but adequate, reception options for young and old, regular and non-regular church attendees alike. In accordance with the findings of the case by Gaarden and Lorensen, listeners may be seen as authors of their own emerging sermons, as long as a *third room*²⁶ is established by the preacher and his or her way of managing the modes or resources at his or her disposal.

The material actors attended to in this paper contributed to facilitating such a third room in which various forms of interactions may take place – such as associative, critical or contemplative interactions, to use Gaarden and Lorensen's terminology.²⁷ However, in opposition to their view, we contend that this should be termed a *triological interaction*, as there is not only a dialogue taking place between preacher, listener and the delivered sermon. The preaching event is also dependent on a number of mediating artefacts or material objects that may be understood as actors playing a significant part in how this interaction is experienced. Hence, we do not see the listener as the sole author of preaching, but rather as a co-author, as there are many additional actors playing a part in the interaction in which meaning is created.

In this essay we made a case for the preaching event involving more than words; that is, more than what is said and heard. A number of additional modes should be included in the unit of analysis in order to understand preaching as a practice. Thus, what is actually enacted during the preaching event should also get our attention as homileticians. We acknowledge the significant roles played by material actors in enabling opportunities for and constraints to meaning making in preaching and it would have been impossible to realise this by looking solely at the verbal dimension of preaching.

The preaching events we have analysed constitute extreme cases in terms of the deliberate use of artefacts and material objects and its particular focus on four year olds. Nevertheless, we contend that the sociomaterial and multimodal dimensions of preaching should also be attended to in more verbally-oriented preaching events. We argue that our theoretical and methodological approach, including the extended unit of analysis, better enables one to disclose new dimensions of preaching, thus granting a deeper understanding of the preaching event and how listeners experience preaching. By doing so, one expands approaches that have thus far dominated homiletic studies.

25 Øierud, *Inkluderende gudstjenestekommunikasjon*, 187.

26 Gaarden & Lorensen, *Listeners as Authors of Preaching*. Gaarden further develops this term in Gaarden, *Prædikenen*. However, although close to the term "third space", Gaarden has so far chosen to translate the Danish term "rum" with "room". Moreover, her use differs from postcolonial approaches to theories on third spaces drawing on Homi Bhabha. See for example Pui-lan, K. 2015. Postcolonial Preaching in Intercultural Contexts, *Homiletic*, 40(1), 9ff.

27 Gaarden & Lorensen, *Listeners as Authors of Preaching*.

Kerygmatic Scavenging

Gerald C Liu¹

Two sets of questions guide this essay. First, what do we mean by “preaching” and “proclamation?” In the argument ahead, the terms function as coterminous in that they both describe public theological communication that promote the love of God and neighbour in the world. Second, what and whom do we see as “preachers” and “proclaimers”? What and whom do we hear? From where? Psalm 19 tells us that “[t]he heavens are telling the glory of God; and the sky proclaims his handiwork.” In Exodus, the Earth does too – a burning bush expresses God’s call to Moses.² According to Scripture, existence preaches and proclaims. Therefore, the Bible provides more than source material for sermons. The Bible implies that preaching and proclamation occur wherever there is life.

Psalm 19 continues:

Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.³

A contradiction, however, seems to appear. On the one hand, speech gushes forth with every passing day and every evening announces knowledge. On the other hand, there are no words and no voice is heard, “yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.” What sounds like contradicting verses actually precisely describes the paradoxical ways in which knowledge of God manifests in the world’s proclamations. The voice of God makes itself known through the lyricism of nature that includes, but does not depend upon, human language.

In his *Homiletics*, Karl Barth outlines how faithful preaching is controlled by the “double movement” (*doppelten Bewegung*) that God *has* revealed Godself and *will* reveal Godself. God speaks through the sermon. The sermon is *God’s statement*.⁴ For Barth, “[p]reaching must conform to Revelation.”⁵ Or, more accurately translated, the sermon must be revelatory. Put in yet another way, homiletic invention begins in prayer, not exegesis. The preacher receives the Logos of God to which the Bible bears witness as the substance of proclamation rather than her own theological rhetoric and argumentation based upon clever scriptural interpretation.

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2 Exodus 3:4.

3 Psalm 19:3-4.

4 Barth, K. 1991. *Homiletics*. Transl. G Bromiley & D Daniels. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 47; “Die Predigt muß offenbarungsmäßig sein,” Barth, K. 1966. *Homiletik: Wesen und Vorbereitung der Predigt*. Zürich: EVZ, 32.

5 Barth, “Die Predigt muß offenbarungsmäßig sein”, Barth, K. 1966. *Homiletik: Wesen und Vorbereitung der Predigt*. Zürich: EVZ, 32. *Homiletics*, 48-49.

A skilled preacher opens herself to the truth of Jesus Christ and the “whence” (*Woher*) of that event from the time of Jesus of Nazareth through the Pasch and until the second coming. Within Barth’s kerygmatic framework, it is as if God preaches to us directly before we preach to others. Barth writes that “[p]reaching, then, takes place in listening to the self-revealing will of God.”⁶ Yet Barth envisions scriptural and revelatory preaching as prepared in a transition from one site where there is not much to hear – the pastor’s desk – to another where the principle sound is the preacher’s voice – a sanctuary’s pulpit during the moment of preaching. Surely homiletic creativity and inquiry can also begin elsewhere.

Is the study of Scripture the only place where the self-revealing will of God can be heard? As mentioned above, even Scripture tells us that heaven and Earth proclaim the glory of God. Furthermore, proclamation from the revealed Word of preaching that Barth describes began long before the advent of pulpit speech Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος (John 1:1). The proclaimed Word resounded on Earth at the world’s inception. Genesis 1:3 recounts that “[t]hen God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light.” God proclaimed Creation into existence. If all of that is somehow mysteriously true, the God that Barth identifies as the locus for proclamation and the primary revelation of Scripture self-reveals in the soundscapes given by God in the world fashioned by God.

Therefore, preachers must develop a wide homiletic mode of hearing. They must listen for the self-revealing God in the soundscapes of the world. Simangaliso Kumalo, in his response to Bishop Martin Modéus, rhetorically asks: “Therefore, who is preaching during the worship event?” Kumalo answers: “The answer is God through all, the preacher, the symbols, and the congregation, with the help of the Holy Spirit.”⁷ I am radicalising the “through all” by situating it within congregations and beyond. Preachers must learn to discern and declare the present, but perhaps undetectable, whispers and reverberations of God in everyday sounds as well as in pulpits. Preachers must attend to the sounds of daily life as sounds of *proclamation*. Existence constantly preaches to us. At the very least, it continuously voices what God has given.

But how do we make sense of such an enormous claim? In *Congregations in America*, sociologist of religion and director of The National Study of Congregations Mark Chaves identifies three overlapping realities of congregational culture that engage more people and use more resources than either congregations’ social services or their political activities. The three are: 1) the worship events they hold, 2) the transmission of religious knowledge and 3) the celebration of the arts.⁸ Though varied in expression, “worship events” and “the transmission of religious knowledge” arguably are self-explanatory. By the “arts”, Chaves does not distinguish between “high” and “low”, “fine” or “popular” arts. Rather, he refers to a set of shared creative practices not wholly captured by discourse.

For example, someone who attends a congregation will experience and perform live music there more than in a concert hall; view and produce visual art more than in a museum or gallery; see and enact drama more than in a theatre. The practices of preaching and praying also are sonic, optical and kinaesthetic arts of congregational life. In short, artistic activity is the material content that carries the religious meaning of worship inside sanctuaries. Yet this essay contends that the arts of worship also regularly occur beyond the walls of congregations and within the public sphere. If the arts give worship its shape, how might we learn from artistic invention to embolden the art of preaching?

6 Barth, *Homiletics*, 50.

7 Kumalo, S. 2013. “Who is preaching: The preacher or symbols and rituals?” In: J Hermelink & A Deeg (eds). *Viva Vox Evangelii – Reforming Preaching*. Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 82.

8 Chaves, M. 2004. *Congregations in America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 14.

Taking the empirical research of Chaves and expanding its implications with the open description of proclamation here, consider a musical illustration to clarify the homiletic mode of hearing that this essay proposes. In 1952, a generation after Barth published his homiletic notes, John Cage already had been working as a professional composer for approximately fifteen years.⁹ He was quite well known, though not financially secure. Patrons, including Cage's former teacher Henry Cowell, invited Cage to perform any piece of his choosing at an outdoor amphitheatre in the Catskill Mountains of New York to raise contributions to the Benefit Artists Welfare Fund. They probably could not have imagined that Cage would unveil a seemingly silent work that would redirect the attention of listeners to a world of given music. Indeed, a Pierre Boulez sonata – *Premier Sonata* – was the intended showcase piece for the evening.

For the penultimate performance, pianist David Tudor took the stage, sat down at the piano bench and opened a score to debut a work from Cage, incorrectly listed as follows:

4 pieces by John Cage

4' 33"

30"

2' 23"

1' 40"¹⁰

Setting his stopwatch at the piece's beginning and opening and closing the instrument's fallboard as well as turning pages to mark transitions between movements, Tudor never pressed a key. Not a single note sounded from the keyboard. Tudor thus quietly and brazenly introduced one of the twentieth century's most controversial and most influential musical compositions – 4'33".¹¹ The performance stunned the audience with its apparent silence. Yet, what listeners failed to notice were the missing notes provided by nature: Oak, maple, hemlock and shagbark hickory trees introduced an ambient chorus of rustling leaves. Raindrops against the roof added percussion during the second movement. Nearby critters chimed in with ornamentation. The murmurs of confusion from the audience provided further improvised figures until the finale. When Tudor stood to indicate completion of the piece (after four minutes and thirty-three seconds had passed), Maverick Concert Hall, a rugged barn-like structure with an upper panelling of windows reminiscent of honeycomb, had been transformed into a gateway for music without boundary or distinction from life.¹²

9 Pritchett, J. 1996. *The Music of John Cage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 6.

10 The mistake is titling the piece as four separate pieces rather than as one work with four movements. Revill, D. 2014. *The Roaring Silence. John Cage: A Life*. New York: Arcade, 11. For a scanned image of the original program, see Gann, K. 2010. *No Such Thing as Silence: John Cage's 4'33"*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 6.

11 Emphasising the charity-driven context in which 4'33" debuted, Kyle Gann debunks the myth that 4'33" brought monetary gain to Cage: "[T]he piece wasn't commissioned. The concert was a benefit for a good cause. The money people paid to hear David Tudor play did not go to Cage, or even to Tudor." Gann, *No Such Thing as Silence*, 13. Likewise, Alex Ross writes emphatically: "The Maverick concert was a benefit; Cage earned nothing from the premiere of 4'33" and little from anything else he was writing at the time." Ross, A. 2010. Searching for Silence. *The New Yorker* 86(30) (October 4): 52-55, 58-62 original pagination. Online at: <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/10/04/searching-for-silence> (Accessed: 4 March 2016). Ross continues with astonishment, "He had no publisher until the nineteen-sixties ... From the mid-fifties until the late sixties, he lived in a two-room cabin measuring ten by twenty feet, paying \$24.15 a month in rent. He wasn't far above the poverty level, and one year he received aid from the Musicians Emergency Fund. For years afterward, he counted every penny. I recently visited the collection of the John Cage Trust, at Bard, and had a look at his appointment books. Almost every page had a list like this one:
.63 stamps, 1.29 turp., .25 comb,
1.17 fish, 3.40 shampoo, 2.36 groc,
5.10 beer, 6.00 Lucky
'I wanted to make poverty elegant,' he once said."

12 The re-creation here of Tudor's premiere performance of 4'33" is indebted to Gann, *No Such Thing as Silence*, 1-4. See also Silverman, K. 2010. *Begin Again: A Biography of John Cage*, New York: Knopf, 118-19.

However, adoration did not gush from those in attendance. Instead, they sat stunned, perplexed and, frankly, pissed in reaction to what they had heard. Earle Brown, as reported by Cage biographer David Revill, remembers, “A hell of a lot of uproar ... it infuriated most of the audience.”¹³ It is now oft-quoted lore that one audience member, who was an artist, shouted with vehemence: “Good people of Woodstock, let’s run these people out of town.”¹⁴ Kenneth Silverman puts his own twist on the shock value of 4’33” by writing that the piece made it into Walter Winchell’s gossip column, “which also reported scandalous news of the genitally reassigned Christine Jorgensen.”¹⁵ Few could have imagined that the piece would become Cage’s most famous work and a landmark in the history of musical composition.¹⁶ Perhaps none would have surmised its homiletic promise.

The fact is that 4’33” implies that all sound is music. For Cage, the world is never silent and always musical. His assertion made through a composition of extreme musical withdrawal is scientific fact – absolute silence exists only in a void and requires conditions completely absent of life. Even outer space howls, hisses, rumbles and chirps. This includes the galaxies made audible by the gravitational waves detected by the LIGO observatories of Washington State and Louisiana.¹⁷ Engineers have neither achieved total silence nor encountered it, artificially or otherwise. Cage experienced that first-hand when he visited an anechoic chamber (a chamber designed to produce silence) at Harvard University before composing 4’33”.¹⁸ He reported to the engineers there and then that he could hear both a high pitch (his nervous system) and a low one (his circulation).¹⁹ Sounds encounter every human, including those without the ability to hear. The vibrations of timbres are perceptible by touch. Pulsing hearts and expanding and contracting lungs produce embodied rhythms from within.

For Cage, the ubiquity of sound redefined music. Soundscapes undetermined by human intention and authorship exemplified a radical musical freedom active in the world. And I sense a manifestation of divine generosity in that freedom. The giving of God that Cage’s music instantiates does not, however, begin with 4’33”. If life began with a bang, it manifested musically. Before there were ears to hear, music of miraculous proportion like the crackle of light, the hiss of the air and the lapping

13 Revill, *The Roaring Silence*, 166.

14 Revill, *The Roaring Silence*, 165-66. See Gann, *No Such Thing as Silence*, 8. See also, Ross, *Searching for Silence*. A video of David Tudor remembering this disruption in the performance is available online at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HypmW4Yd7SY> (Accessed on: 4 March 2016).

15 Silverman, *Begin Again*, 119.

16 Pritchett, J. 2001. John Cage, In: S Sadie and J Tyrrell, *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (Second edition). New York London: Grove Macmillan, 4:798. “4’33” has become Cage’s most famous and controversial creation.” *The Encyclopedia of Popular Music* calls 4’33” “far and away his most famous.” “Cage, John” *Encyclopedia of Popular Music*. Colin Larkin (ed.). 2009. Muze Inc. and Oxford UP, Inc. Online via Vanderbilt University. 7 September 2010. Online at: <http://www.oxfordreference.com.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t270.e3990>. In “Expanding Horizons: The International Avant-garde, 1962–75”, however, Richard Toop writes, “To the end of his life, Cage insisted that his most important contribution was the ‘silent’ piece 4’33”, but in terms of influence on musical practice *Cartridge Music* (1960) may have stronger claims.” Troop, R. 2004. In: N Cook and A Pople (eds). *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Music*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 465. Robert P Morgan also notes, “While 4’33” may well exemplify Cage’s musical philosophy more purely than any other composition (he still considers it his most significant work), it brought him to a difficult impasse. Either he could give up composing entirely, on the ground that if all sounds can be viewed as music, musical ‘composition’ is hardly necessary – or he could devise methods for preserving the activity of composition (and performance) as redefined by this conception of radical intentionlessness. Cage, of course, chose the latter course....” Morgan, R. 1991. *Twentieth-Century Music: A History of Musical Style in Modern Europe and America*. The Norton Introduction to Music History. New York: Norton, 363.

17 See: Gravitational Waves Detected 100 Years after Einstein’s Prediction. Online at: <https://www.ligo.caltech.edu/news/ligo20160211>.

18 For an approximate dating of Cage’s visit to the anechoic chamber at Harvard of 1951-1952, see Gann, *No Such Thing as Silence*, 160-66.

19 Cage, *Silence*, 8.

of water against land filled the world.²⁰ Before bone pipes whistled from the Upper Palaeolithic, the polyphonic wild made music without discernible beginning or end.²¹ The world has an immeasurable acoustic history and a limitless variety of sonic ubiquity that eludes precise definition. Everyday soundscapes lavished then, as they do now, a sonic benevolence of overwhelming magnitude. That overwhelming giving in all of its musical variety vocalises the claim of Psalm 19 that Earth and sky and every day and night tell the glory of God. The musical ubiquity of sound constitutes an ongoing proclamation of infinite scale. They flourish as a natural revelation instantiating what God has given.

Let me be clear, I am not here arguing for a natural theology or making pantheistic or panentheistic claims. The things of the world are not God. God is without being, as French Catholic philosopher Jean-Luc Marion has argued extensively in his writings.²² Neither is God flowing within and outside of things. Rather, all things bear witness to God. Paul and John Calvin have things to say in this regard. In Romans 1:20, Paul writes,

Ever since the creation of the world, God's eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things God has made.

Calvin, riffing on Psalm 104:2ff, in *The Institutes* V.1, writes

But upon his individual works he has engraved unmistakable marks of his glory, so clear and so prominent that even unlettered and stupid folk cannot plead the excuse of ignorance.

One might point out that the statements of Calvin and Paul concern the visual. That limit suggests the need for exploring other sensory modes as able to help us draw theological conclusions from traces of reality. It also could be said that for both Paul and Calvin, what God has made and what humans construct differ significantly. That is a fair distinction, but I want to suggest that, even when we craft the utterly humanistic or even effect evil and produce sin, our heretical actions nevertheless take up and transgress what God has given.

Returning to the argument at hand, if we release our preconceived notions of what constitutes preaching and pay closer attention to the musicalities that fill the world, do we begin to notice proclamation happening in every place? And how does such a wide-angled homiletical perception of the world's material content inform the teaching and research of Christian preaching? The world proclaims the glory, judgment and mercy of God in the midst of the human condition and its relationship to the desires of God. Noticing, interpreting and dialoguing with the homiletic witness of the world in all of its variety and complexity are crucial endeavours for becoming thoughtful and relevant preachers for Christ.

20 Note that "music" imperfectly describes the sonic phenomena discussed here and in the following pages. In some cultures, "music" as a word does not exist. Instead, local terminology in other cultures often designates musical activities or artefacts. Nattiez, J.-J. 1990. *Music and Discourse: Toward a Semiology of Music*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 54-55. The plural "musics" is perhaps more accurate, as it acknowledges the variety of musics in the world. Yet the customary form of "music" will be maintained here and throughout to avoid confusion for the reader. For more about "musics," see also Nettl, B. 2005. The Universal Language: Universals of Music. In B. Nettl (ed.), *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Thirty-One Issues and Concepts*. New ed. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 42-49.

21 Morley, I. 2013. *The Prehistory of Music: Human Evolution, Archaeology, and the Origins of Musicality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 35-36. Morley reports that the earliest reputed musical pipes were found in Europe. They are the earliest-known musical instruments and "come from contexts associated with Aurignacian (c.43,000 – 28,000 years ago), Gravettian (c.28,000 – 22,000 years ago), and Magdalenian (c.17,000 – 11,000 years ago) technological complexes in Europe, and there are a few from Solutrean (c.22,000 – 17,000 years ago) contexts. All of these are associated exclusively with modern *Homo sapiens*. There also are several from contexts associated with Mousterian technology (c.200,000 – 40,000 years ago), called Middle Palaeolithic in Europe and Middle Stone Age (MSA) in Africa."

22 Marion, J.-L. 2012. *God without Being: Hors Texte*. Second ed. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226505664.001.0001>

Engaging Cage's notorious and landmark piece to extend the implications of Chaves' empirical research enables the construction of an argument for prayerful listening or attention to the world. Again, this argument pertains to listening *and attention* because the proposed hermeneutic is not limited to those who can physically hear. Our living bodies always pulse with rhythm and sounds everywhere produce vibrations. If the material content of worship "inside sanctuaries" is the arts, a theological appropriation of an artistic innovation like 4'33" gives us an aesthetic resource alongside the claims of Scripture to consider how all kinds of soundscapes within ritual spaces and outside of them reverberate as musicalities of sacred proclamation.

I want to conclude by providing one ethnographic glimpse to exemplify how we might attend to the diversity of public proclamations and incorporate them into our homiletic research, teaching and learning. I turn, however, not to what the heavens and earth are saying, but rather toward one marginalised voice and its capacity to manifest words of God. In the summer of 2015, with grant support from the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion, based at Wabash College in Crawfordsville, Indiana, I documented soundscapes with visual and audio recordings of environmental sounds and subject interviews from three sites of apprehension and transgression in New York City: 1) The Muslim American Society Youth Center of Benson Hurst in Brooklyn, 2) New York City's Louis Heaton Pink Houses in Brownsville, Brooklyn, and 3) Tompkinsville Park in Staten Island. The sites were selected as they related to injustice – specifically Islamophobia and the killing of unarmed black men. At the Louis Pink Houses, Akai Gurley, an African-American father of a two-year-old, died from a ricocheted bullet misfired by the service weapon of Peter Liang, an Asian-American rookie police officer who since has been convicted for his actions. At Tompkinsville Park, Daniel Pantaleo, a white police officer, strangled Eric Garner, an African-American father of six, after approaching him for illegally selling loose cigarettes. Pantaleo was never charged. The Muslim American Society Youth Center opened on September 12, 2001, and a police station currently sits directly across from the Center building. I examined the social spaces acting as a proxy for my preaching and worship students who express commitment to social justice but do not have actual exposure to sites of injustice. My goal was to document snapshots and sound bites from the sites of study to develop classroom tactics for better preaching and worship that calls for acts of justice. Here, I want to highlight fieldwork from one site – the Louis Pink Houses – to suggest how the soundscape there functioned as a kind of proclamation.

The Louis Heaton Pink Houses are a sprawling assemblage of low-income buildings that encompass an entire city block in the Brownsville neighbourhood of Brooklyn, New York. Graffiti covers apartment stairwells, each easily accessible to the public because the entrance doors remained unlocked. Loud music blares from hallways that waft with marijuana smoke. Children play tag and wrestle on courtyard lawns. Adults congregate on benches and some of them do so while visibly consuming alcohol and drugs. Community garden plots decorate outside spaces, but the topsoil is barren. A Catholic parish stands only a block away, perhaps undertaking unseen transformational work. Yet, for the most part, the built environment evokes urban desolation and desperation. The housing complex made United States national news headlines when Gurley (28) died on November 20, 2014, from a ricocheted bullet fired from the service weapon of then 27-year-old Liang, who had been a police officer for fewer than 18 months.

Liang was performing a late-evening "vertical patrol" at the Louis Pink Houses – walking up to the rooftop and down to the garden level in the housing project stairwells. He should not have fired his gun. (You cannot simply pull the trigger because you are scared of the dark!) He should have done everything after that reckless and fatal mistake to save Gurley's life. Yet, upon finding Gurley shot, instead of administering CPR, he debated with his partner for four minutes whether or not to inform

his superiors. Liang left Gurley's girlfriend, Melissa Butler, screaming for help from neighbours and via phone to paramedics. Liang was indicted with charges of second-degree manslaughter, criminally negligent homicide, second-degree assault, reckless endangerment and two counts of official misconduct. His partner, Shaun Landau was granted immunity for testifying against him. Liang was convicted of manslaughter and official misconduct and in a strange turn of events, sentenced to no jail time. The trial angered many Asian Americans, who saw Liang exploited as a scapegoat unfairly associated with officers like Daniel Pantaleo, Darren Wilson and Timothy Loehmann.²³ The trial also angered family and friends of Akai Gurley and supporters of the Black Lives Matters movement, who saw Liang's reduced sentence as another failure in achieving justice for unarmed black men killed by police recklessness.²⁴

During my visit to the Louis Pink Houses, I opened a conversation with some residents with reference to the lethal misconduct of Liang and death of Gurley. One in particular, Malik, repeatedly described the houses as a "piece of shit" during our exchange. His unfiltered and brutal encapsulation, I want to suggest, functions like a paradoxical proclamation. We do not have the full transcript here of my interview with Malik. Still, that phrase – "piece of shit" – states with graphic force the social ruin and violence Malik has endured as a resident of the Louis Pink Housing Projects. It also, however, voices lament that insists upon *the need for a new reality* indicative of everlasting peace and mercy that only God can bring. As an African-American male made in the image of God, Malik's explicit words of expulsion and abandon also present a homiletic provocation in as much as they vent his despair. They are an inverse outcry that echoes the prayer that Jesus taught to his disciples or that at least challenges others to act who believe in the divine imperative of that prayer – "thy will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven." Malik's words warrant homiletic attention and reform.

Malik's words do not glorify God akin to how the Psalter speaks of heaven and Earth bearing witness to God. Neither do they exactly conform to revelation in a Barthian sense. "Piece of shit" is in no way synonymous with "Jesus Christ is Lord." However, Malik resembles Christ insofar as the *imago Dei* of Genesis holds true and his proclamation echoes the voiceless voice of God in the world and brutally reformulates the forsaken cry of Jesus at the cross – "*Eli, eli, lema sabachthani?*"²⁵ Malik's words resurrect those words of death from the New Testament into a pithy restatement that begs the question not so much of where God is, as to what God is doing to remedy a situation like his. His words offer a particular translation of the divine generosity once amplified by Cage's *4'33*". They make an unmistakable judgment upon life in the Louis Pink Houses where Akai Gurley died from four minutes of selfish inaction and lethal neglect by Liang and his partner, Landau. For homileticians who agree with Barth that the sermon must be revelatory and revelation comes from the Logos as incarnated in Jesus of Nazareth, who rose and will come again as the Christ, they must also realise that a glimpse of who Jesus is appears in Malik. In addition to seeing themselves as continuing the

23 Wilson shot and killed Michael Brown, an African-American male eighteen year old, in Ferguson, Missouri on 9 August 2014. Loehmann shot and killed an African-American male twelve year old, Tamir Rice, in Cleveland, Ohio. Rice was playing with a toy gun in a park. Neighbours thought it was real and called the police. Loehmann shot Rice within two seconds, before his patrol car had come to a complete stop, and killed Rice.

24 A google search of "Akai Gurley" yields numerous articles explaining the crime and subsequent judgment. Yet, to grasp how multi-layered the killing of Gurley by the ricocheted bullet from the service weapon of Peter Liang is, see Jay Caspian Kang's New York Times article, *How Should Asian-Americans Feel about the Peter Liang Protests?* Kang criticises the outrage of the Asian-American community because Liang is guilty and an otherwise politically-disengaged community has expressed outrage over the rights of one accused of killing an innocent young black man. Yet, Kang still seems to underestimate the racialised dynamics evident in the original indictment as decided by Brooklyn District Attorney Ken Thompson, a rising African-American public official as well as the unpredictable conviction by Supreme Court Justice Danny Chun, the first Korean-American judge in New York and the presiding judge in the case. See Kang, J.C. 2016. *How Should Asian-Americans Feel about the Peter Liang Protests?* New York Times, 23 February 23. Online at: http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/23/magazine/how-should-asian-americans-feel-about-the-peter-liang-protests.html?_r=0 (Accessed: 8 March 2016).

25 Matthew 27:46.

legacy, love and future of the Messiah, homileticians must also reimagine the preacher as Malik and reconceive of preaching as found in his version of “My God, My God, Why have you forsaken me?” Malik and his words also deliver a message and image of God in the world. Malik’s words hint at the revelatory.

We do not, however, need to visit blighted neighbourhoods in Brooklyn in order to hear devastating claims that paradoxically yearn for the promises of God. In the United States, titles like *Preaching Justice: Ethnic and Cultural Perspectives*; *Preaching the Presence of God: A Homiletic from an Asian American Perspective*; *They Like to Never Quit Praisin’ God: The Role of Celebration in Preaching*; *God Comes Out: A Queer Homiletic, Preaching as Weeping, Confession and Resistance*; *Women Preaching: Theology and Practice Through the Ages* present histories and methodologies that diversify homiletic literature with respect to race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, political theology, religious pluralism and beyond.²⁶ *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art* has stressed the importance of congregational analysis, *Otherwise Preaching: A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics* has called us to develop homiletic ethics with intimate consideration of the face of the other, and *Listening to Listeners: Homiletical Case Studies* took us even closer into assemblies stating directly what they thought they were hearing in sermons.²⁷ Still, more attention to how public forms of proclamation might not only inform our very understanding of what preaching is, but also complexify and clarify its task with respect to identity politics, social justice, peace and helping to fortify the faithful and prepare for the coming reign of God. What Malik says does not simply represent divine promise not yet fulfilled, but rather promise unfulfilled. To begin to envision where God might be leading us in order to communicate the promise of God as perceivable and believable by neighbours like Malik, we must also pay attention to the implicit theological demand of voices such as his, voices we otherwise never would consider.

Delivering a voice like Malik’s (live or in recorded format) into the classroom is one method for informing students about what is at stake in learning to become better preachers. Hearing him not only gives definition to a site of social tragedy known perhaps only through news headlines. Attuning our homiletic examinations to his articulation also raises questions about how preachers can define divine realities (or the need for them) in the midst of human suffering, injustice and complicated matters of race. But how does one lead such site visits without risking homiletic voyeurism? I am not quite sure; but for now, the need for homiletic scavenging seems worth the risk.

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- 26 Smith, C.M. 2008. *Preaching Justice: Ethnic and Cultural Perspectives*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock; Eunjoo M Kim. 1999. *Preaching the Presence of God: A Homiletic from an Asian American Perspective*; Prussia, PA: Judson Frank A Thomas. 2013. *They Like to Never Quit Praisin’ God: The Role of Celebration in Preaching*. Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim; Olive Elaine Hinnant. 2007. *God Comes Out: A Queer Homiletic*. Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim; Christine Marie Smith. 1992. *Preaching as Weeping, Confession, and Resistance* Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox; Eunjoo M Kim. 2009. *Women Preaching: Theology and Practice through the Ages*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock.
- 27 Tisdale, L.T. 1997. *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress; McClure, J.S. 2001. *Otherwise Preaching*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice; and John S McClure, Ronal J Allen, Dale P Andrews, L Susan Bond, Dan P Moseley, G Lee Ramsey Jr.

Performing Messiah in the Midst of Paradoxes – Preaching Prophetically in Public

17

Elsabé Kloppers¹

Introduction

According to the aesthetic approach in homiletics,² the sermon is an open work of art, which means that the “meaning” of a sermon is not fixed, but that (usually departing from a biblical text or texts and the symbols of the Christian tradition) possibilities are presented to the listeners to interpret, to *assign* meaning, to *construct* a message from the “signs” presented and thus to complete the sermon. A composer also could do exegeses of texts, stories or themes from the Bible, interpret them, assign meaning to them or construct a message from them – and hearing in the inner ear, could set the text to music. Performers would analyse and interpret the music and the text and, *listening* to the performance while performing, they would assign meaning to it and reveal something of their encounter with the work. They would tell something to the hearers – thus performing a narrative, opening up a possible message.³ The audience, *participating by listening*, could assign meaning to what is heard. Because of the religious text, story, symbols or themes from the Bible, but also because of certain “signs”, associations and possibilities presented by the music, such a work could *be heard* as something more than a narrative; as something with meaning beyond this world. It could be heard as a “sermon in sound”, communicating faith to people in the public sphere, whether in a church or in a concert hall⁴ – including those who would never listen to, or be touched by a spoken sermon.

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2 In the German context, Gerhard Marcel Martin introduced and explained to homiletics the concept of “the open work of art” in Martin, G.M. 1984. *Predigt als “offenes Kunstwerk”? Zum Dialog zwischen Homiletik und Rezeptionsästhetik* [The sermon as an open work of art? Towards the dialogue between homiletics and reception aesthetics]. *Evangelische Theologie*, 44: 46-58. Ernst Lange already emphasised the role of the listener in the sermon discussions in the *Ladenkirche* in Berlin from the 1960s. In the English language domain, Fred Craddock played a major role in emphasising the role of the preacher as listener in Craddock, F. 1971/1979. *As one without authority*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon.

3 Note the significant title of the book by the well-known conductor Harmoncourt, N. 2009. *Musik als Klangrede. Wege zu einem neuen Musikverständnis* [Music as speech in sound. Ways to a new understanding of music]. Salzburg: Reizidenz.

4 Music works with religious themes are performed in many venues and concert halls, as well as in church buildings or cathedrals, where they could have a setting within the liturgy. The usual place of the sermon is in a church as part of the liturgy, but sometimes a sermon could also be situated outside the liturgy and it may function in a manner as described in Matthew 10:27 – as if proclaimed from the roofs, meaning that a sermon could be heard as a sermon in unexpected places: “In ihrer Form ist sie an die Kirche gebunden. Der Sache nach freilich ist sie viel zu wichtig, um nicht überall dort auch zu geschehen, wo Menschen die Begegnung mit sich selbst und untereinander erleben können.” Wilhelm Gräb on the sermon in an interview on his book *Predigtlehre* in 2013. Available online at: <http://religionsphilosophischersalon.de/keys/wilhelmgraebpredigtlehre> (Accessed: 3 March 2016).

The South African Messiah

Under the heading, Divine Music Coming to Soweto, Edward Tsumele⁵ announced a performance that would be given in the Holy Cross Anglican Church, Orlando West, Soweto, on 13 April 2008. Giving reasons why people should attend, he declared that, “[c]lassical music ... calms the nerves and demonstrates that good music, like other refined art forms, is *divine*.” Describing the music to be performed as “spiritually uplifting”, Tsumele went on saying that “[i]f you still believe, as I did, that this type of music is boring, I urge you to attend the 25th Anniversary of the South African Messiah, *Celebrating a singing nation*.”

The South African Messiah or Africa’s Messiah is an interpretation of Messiah by George Frederic Handel (1685-1750). The South African version features the parts that are sung in the eleven official languages of the country. Renowned musician Michael Masote⁶ completed the first version, *Black Messiah*, in 1983 and the South African Messiah in 1996, when Afrikaans had been added to the libretto, in the “spirit of inclusiveness” of the “new South Africa”.⁷ This reference hints at a history of Messiah performances preceding the current performances of the South African Messiah – a history fraught with political intrigue and hardship, since for most of the twentieth century, Messiah had been performed on different sides of the racial divide.

Messiah performed by black choirs during apartheid

In April 1959, several performances of Messiah in the City Hall in Johannesburg attracted widespread publicity and attention – an estimated 11 000 people attended.⁸ Performances of Handel’s Messiah had already been a regular feature of musical life in the city in the nineteenth century, but what was unusual about these performances was the identity of the singers: they were all black Africans. These performances were so successful that they initiated a series of annual performances stretching over a decade. In a study within the field of musicology, Christopher Cockburn described and analysed the events surrounding these performances and interpreted them within the paradigm of apartheid that, at that time, had a significant influence on the lives of people in South Africa.⁹ Aspects of this narrative and the contextual analysis of events are given here as background, in order to move further and show how these performances could be heard and experienced as *sermons in sound* within the public sphere.

Before the 1950s, choirs in townships around Johannesburg regularly performed the Hallelujah Chorus from Messiah. Other choruses from Messiah had also become familiar as they were prescribed for choir competitions. For the performance of Handel’s Messiah in the Johannesburg City Hall in 1959, a number of choirs from the townships were combined to sing together. They rehearsed at their churches and other venues and then came together for full rehearsals. The choir and the

5 Tsumele, E. 2008. Divine Music Coming to Soweto. *Sowetan*, 8 April. Online at: <http://www.sowetanlive.co.za/sowetan/archive/2008/04/08/divine-music-coming-to-soweto> (Accessed: 29 March 2016).

6 Michael Masote was born in 1941 in the Johannesburg suburb of the then Sophiatown, where he spent his early childhood until his family was forcibly removed from the suburb to Soweto, in 1955. While in Sophiatown, his siblings were members of the local Methodist Church choir that assembled at the Masote home for their regular rehearsals. It was during these sessions that Masote was captivated by the beauty of choral and classical music. After a visit by Jehudi Menuhin to Sophiatown, Masote took up violin lessons in Johannesburg. The police often stopped him en route to his lessons, suspecting that he was carrying a gun in his violin case! In 1977 Masote was imprisoned for defying a law prohibiting public gatherings – that was after he had assembled with fellow orchestra members for rehearsals. He went on to study music in London after he was turned down by institutions in South Africa. Only in 1998 did a South African institution, the University of South Africa (Unisa), awarded him a BMus degree – the first black South African to obtain such a degree. Online at: <http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/pebble.asp?relid=7831> (Accessed: 20 December 2015).

7 Tsumele, *Divine Music Coming to Soweto*.

8 *Transvaler*, 18 February 1960.

9 Cockburn, C. 2008. Discomposing Apartheid’s Story: Who owns Handel? In: G Olwage (ed.), *Composing apartheid: Music for and against apartheid*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 55-78.

soloists were black, but as there were no black orchestras available at the time, the members of the orchestra and the conductor were white. They performed to black as well as to white audiences, albeit segregated. Review after review described the performances in terms such as “moving” or “inspiring”. The quality of the performances themselves were not the only reason for this as a contributing factor certainly would have been the realisation of the many difficulties the participants had to face, such as travelling long distances, negotiating passes, dealing with hassles caused by the security police.

The performance of the black choirs: Assigning value

The possible reasons for the popularity of performances of Messiah by combined black choirs in 1959 could at first have been the element of novelty it presented, but in subsequent years other values began to emerge. The “greatness of the work” had much to do with its meaningfulness. The programme notes for the 1959 performance reflect a long tradition of the appreciation of the (Western) masterwork: “Generations throughout 200 years have lived and died in the firm faith that Messiah embraces all that is good and great in music.”¹⁰ Messiah was also described as “the common property of all mankind.” Belonging to all, meant the work would be universally accessible and could be performed and appreciated everywhere. These performances provided the opportunity for black and white people to work together and so defy the barriers placed on them by the apartheid system. Later the apartheid laws and regulations became so severe that a black choir could not perform with a white orchestra! In fact, it could be seen as an illegal political gathering. This brought the performances in the Johannesburg City Hall to an end. However, the performances then found a home in St Mary’s Anglican Cathedral.

Performing Messiah, listening to Messiah ... and hearing Messiah: Being empowered and identities being changed

Many of the choir members performing Messiah in the times of apartheid, came from disrupted worlds. Many of them experienced forced removals, were subjected to pass laws, were not allowed to move freely and may not mix freely with others. Many of the singers felt inferior to others because of their race and skin colour and the master narrative of inferiority imposed on them. Now they suddenly could feel the power of being performers of an important work. Recognising the “inherent qualities and values embedded in Messiah” (quoted above), they realised they had something of value to offer. They were now worthy people, curators of “one of the greatest icons of classical music” (as described in program notes). They could experience themselves as heralds, as people bringing the good news, as preachers. Through the (biblical) words they sang and the liberating sound of their voices, they could be bearers of hope and healing.

Performance, performers and listeners

A reviewer remarked the following after a performance of the Hallelujah Chorus by black choirs in 1964: “It is a long time since I have heard this chorus sung with such conviction, feeling and discipline.”¹¹ The reviewer thought the choir members at that stage were really singing as one – thus listening to themselves and the others and “music lovers went mad with delight.”¹² The performers

10 Quoted in Cockburn, *Discomposing*, 64.

11 Review by PS, *Messias voortrefflik uitgevoer* [Messiah performed excellently]. *Die Transvaler*, 13 April 1964, quoted in Cockburn, *Discomposing*, 56.

12 In a review of an earlier performance, in *The Star* 1963, quoted in Cockburn, *Discomposing*, 56.

as well as the audience were changed by these performances. The performers/participants became true listeners and the listeners became participants “appreciating” and showing their appreciation by “going mad with delight”. However, if these performances were only about “delight”, the guardians of apartheid would not have considered them as being such a threat.¹³

The performances were certainly seen as having the ability to change the hearts and minds of the people in the same way a sermon may change the hearts and minds of people. In this regard Ralph Kunz’s premise is relevant, namely that singing hymns and other religious or spiritual works have theological meaning – also when not performed in church, but in other settings – and that in a unique way such singing could testify to faith in God as “[g]ood art speaks for itself.”¹⁴ These views are shared by others, such as the theologian cum choral director Jochen Arnold, who argues that the oratorios and cantatas and other big choral works, even if performed and heard beyond the milieus of the church, open space for people to meet Christ, provided that the “aesthetic and theological quality are consistent.”¹⁵

Understanding one’s existence through a (sung or spoken) and being transformed

As all good art, music offers impulses to hear, to participate. The same may be said of the sermon as an open work art: it opens space for the listener to participate and to make sense of the sermon. According to Gräß, the sermon should bring about a process of autonomous religious symbolising in the listeners.¹⁶ For Meyer-Blanck, religious speech is a form of art as music is a form of art. Both want to enable the experience of life as a whole. The task of both is to open the possibility for people to listen – to hear “God’s Word” and to come to faith through hearing.¹⁷ Both, music and the word or the spoken sermon, may contribute to understanding our existence *coram Deo*. As music should be performed, so should a sermon – it should be spoken, in order to be heard. A sermon also becomes a sermon only where there are people who listen and participate – as in the performance of work of

13 For the South African Government in the days of apartheid, black Africans had concerned themselves with their “own culture”. For the government Handel was “Western” and, therefore, not part of the black culture. They viewed these performances with suspicion, but paradoxically, the performances were viewed with suspicion also from the other side – from the Africanist position – where Western music was seen as “the culture of the colonialists”. Black involvement in these performances was seen as upholding rather than challenging the status quo. Cockburn (*Discomposing*, 65) describes these performances metaphorically, saying that they “could be seen as discomposing the story which apartheid wished to write.”

14 “Erstens ist jede Kultur, die zur Besinnung und Betrachtung leitet, Gegenkultur oder Gegenstück zum Geschwätz, Geplapper, Geschnatter, Gekreisch und Gegacker, das auf Pausenhöfen, am Börsen, in Parlamenten und in den Medien herrscht. Und zweitens ‘spricht’ gute Kunst für sich.” Kunz, R. 2012. Fragment – Mosaik. *Festschrift 50 Jahre Evangelische Singgemeinde 1962 – 2012*, 57-59. Kunz’s colourful description shows the superficiality of certain forms of communication in certain domains, compared to sublime forms of communication via (good) art and music. His reference to “parliaments” has special relevancy within the context of the regulatory acts and legislation of the South African government in the context of apartheid.

15 Arnold, J. 2012. Die Kantate als Gottesdienst – die Kantate im Gottesdienst. Johann Sebastian Bachs Kantaten als liturgische Gestaltungsaufgabe [The Cantata as worship – the Cantata in worship. Shaping the liturgy with the Cantatas of Johann Sebastian Bach]. In: P Bubmann & B Weyel (Hrsg.), *Praktische Theologie und Musik* [Practical Theology and music]. Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 91-107.

16 Gräß, W. 2013. *Predigtlehre. Über religiöse Rede*. [The study of the sermon. On religious speech.] Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 35-36. <https://doi.org/10.13109/978366624278>

17 Meyer-Blanck, M. 2006. Kirchenmusik und Predigt [Church music and preaching]. In: G Fermor & H Schroeter-Wittke (Hrsg.), *Kirchenmusik als religiöse Praxis. Praktisch-theologisches Handbuch zur Kirchenmusik* [Church music as religious praxis. Practical-theological handbook for church music]. Leipzig: EVA, 142-147, (143) and Kloppers, E. 2003. *Verkondiging deur musiek? ’n Aspek van kreatiewe geloofskommunikasie* (Proclamation through Music – An Aspect of Communicating Faith Creatively). *HTS Theological Studies*, 59(1): 65-84 (arguing against a one-sided “Word-answer” scheme in the Dutch Reformed Church of Africa). <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v59i1.648>

music. Thomas Troeger emphasises that the word “performance” means more than being passively entertained; it rather means “to carry through to completion”:

The act of completing a piece of music belongs to the listeners as they attend to the sound and receive the Spirit moving through the music. The same is true of sermons that proclaim the Word of God: they are completed only when they enter the hearts of the listeners who then embody the Word in the world.¹⁸

Hearing a “message” – completing the sermon

Entering the work of art, a music work, a sermon, the performers/listeners/ participants could assign meaning to what they hear. Depending on their own circumstances at the given time, they could *construct a message* from a piece of music, or from a sermon or from any other work of art. Messiah thus could be *heard* as a unity, forming an extended sung sermon. Similarly, the various numbers, based on biblical texts, could be heard as smaller sermons – each “sermon” speaking differently to different people, depending on their context, their circumstances at a given time. Wilfried Engemann stresses the importance of a sermon that takes cognisance of the given situation of the listeners, as well as keeping in mind the public direction and concern of the sermon.¹⁹ He distinguishes three forms of sermons that take cognisance of the situation: political, pastoral and diaconal. Pastoral preaching is done in the presence of fear. Diaconal sermons is about doing something about the situation of people and political sermons speak in the face of madness – which would have been very relevant in the time of apartheid. For Engemann the sermon is the expression of God’s partiality to and partisanship for life against death, for freedom against oppression, for salvation against sin and for peace against violence.²⁰

Hearing Messiah as a work of art, a musical work, or a sermon during the time of apartheid, the participants (performers and listeners) could have been “constructing a message”. Hearing what? A pastoral sermon – speaking amid the fear? “Comfort, ye, comfort, ye my people”²¹; “Surely, He hath borne our griefs and with His stripes, we are healed.”²² “He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief...”²³ “He was cut off out of the land...”²⁴ People who knew all too well what it was like to be despised and rejected, who was cut off out of the land, would hear and would be reminded: “Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows!”²⁵ “The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light...”²⁶ “Ev’ry valley shall be exalted...”²⁷

Have they heard a political sermon? A call to act defiantly in the face of madness? “Lift up your heads.”²⁸ “Let us break their bonds asunder, and cast away their yokes from us!”²⁹ True political preaching in a context of suffering, oppression and disenfranchisement? Voicing a warning: “He that dwelleth in heaven shall laugh them to scorn; the Lord shall have them in derision.”³⁰

18 Troeger, T.H. 2010. *Wonder reborn. Creating sermons on hymns, music and poetry*. New York: Oxford University Press, 81. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195398885.001.0001>

19 Engemann, W. 2011². *Einführung in die Homiletik* (Introduction to Homiletics). Tübingen: Francke, pp. 294-315, 444-454.

20 Engemann, *Einführung*, 295-296.

21 Nr 2, Isaiah 40:1-3.

22 Nrs 21 and 22, Isaiah 53:4-5.

23 Nr 20, Isaiah 53:3 and 50:6.

24 Nr 28, Isaiah 53:8.

25 Nr 21, Isaiah 53:4-5.

26 Nr 10, Isaiah 9:2.

27 Nr 3, Isaiah 40:4.

28 Nr 30, Psalm 24:7-10.

29 Nr 37a, Psalm 2:3.

30 Nr 37b, Psalm 2:4.

Have they heard prophecy?³¹ People were performing and listening to Messiah in spaces previously reserved for whites only; performing and listening to music that had (and still has) the power to change people, to music that was breaking down barriers of race, breaking through a world of bearing passes and through distinctions such as “superior” and “inferior”. These people could be hearing and experiencing prophecy through their actions. John de Gruchy describes the challenging and thus prophetic and redeeming power of art as follows:

*The beautiful serves transformation by supplying images that contradict the inhuman, and thus provide alternative transforming images to those of oppression. We are, in a profound sense, redeemed by such beauty, for art does not simply mirror reality but challenges it's destructive and alienating tendencies, making up what is lacking and anticipating future possibilities.*³²

The harmony, the beauty in the music, could be heard prophetically as anticipating a future where different races would find a way of living together, of understanding one another and of appreciating differences. It could speak of truly finding harmony and of “coming home” out of an unforgiven and inhospitable landscape. Giving hope, giving comfort: “He shall feed his flock like a shepherd...”³³ Leading to faith and trust: “I know that my Redeemer liveth.”³⁴

In performing the Messiah the voiceless received a voice. With full voice and full conviction they could continue: “And He shall reign for ever and ever, Hallelujah!”³⁵ Political and prophetic preaching: Word and music enabling people to stand up, to speak out against oppression, to act in the face of madness – and to be the prophetic voice anticipating a new future through their singing.

Choral work as homiletical genre? Messiah as sermon?

Messiah celebrates the whole of Christ's work, from its anticipation in the prophecy of the Old Testament, through his life, suffering, death and resurrection, to his future coming. Even if internal cohesion could be determined, it still consists of various autonomous biblical texts set to music. No additional “verbal exposition” is offered. The question from a homiletical perspective would be whether it is necessary to (always) add something verbal, to “speak in words”, or to explain a text in order for a musical work or for biblical texts to be regarded as a sermon, to become a “sermon”? Could homiletical theory formed from the aesthetic perspective allow space enough for music to speak on its own and for biblical texts to speak in themselves? The understanding of the biblical text remains open, which means “meaning” could be “formed anew in every future”.³⁶ The task of the exegete-preacher is to let the *text* speak as a force in present, addressing people at a specific moment. The exegete-preacher approaches a biblical text with a certain expectation to observe something of truth and faith and some understanding of the truth of the human existence in the text.

31 For “prophetic preaching” I build on the premise of Helmut Schwier, who stresses that whether a sermon could be seen as prophetic, political or pastoral does not depend on the intentions of the preacher, but depends on its reception, which is guided by the Spirit. Often it can be recognised as such only in retrospect. Schwier, H. 2013. *Als Ausleger der Propheten predigen. Homiletische Anmerkungen zu Hans Walter Wolffs Predigten* [Preaching as interpreter of the prophets. Homiletical remarks to the sermons of Hans Walter Wolff]. In: J Gertz & M Oeming (Hrsg.), *Neu aufbrechen, den Menschen zu suchen und zu erkennen* [Breaking open anew, to search for and discern the people]. Neukirchener: Neukirche-Vluyn, 113-128. (128).

32 De Gruchy, J. 2001. *Christianity, art and transformation: Theological aesthetics in the struggle for justice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 199-200.

33 Nr 17, Isaiah 40:11; Matthew 11:28-29.

34 Nr 40, Job 19, 25, 26.

35 Nr 39, Revelation 19:16; 11:15.

36 Bultmann 1957/2002, 264, quoted in Schwier, H. 2010. “Zur Sache der Texte.” *Bibel, Predigt und Hermeneutik aus exegetischer Sicht* [“To the matter of the texts.” Bible, sermon and hermeneutics from an exegetical perspective]. In: A Deeg & M Nicol (Hrsg.), *Bibelwort und Kanzelsprache. Homiletik und Hermeneutik im Dialog* [The word of the Bible and the language of the pulpit. Homiletics and hermeneutics in dialogue]. Leipzig: EVA, 11–29, (13).

Coupled with this is the expectation of stepping into God’s conversation with the world through the conversation with the text.³⁷

I would argue that the biblical text could also work autonomously – like a poem that could be understood differently by various people, depending on their context and frame of mind, and that each person could be touched existentially, even if in different ways. A biblical text (or a libretto of a work with a religious theme) could be heard differently by various people. Through their encounter with it, they could observe something of faith and truth – and could also step into God’s conversation with the world. Here Handel himself could be taken as an example. He was so inspired by the libretto, by the biblical texts speaking to him, that he became exegete-composer (and preacher) composing his Messiah in only twenty-four days! It is said that he referred to a sense of divine inspiration: “I think I did see all Heaven before me and the great God himself.”³⁸

A personal “interview” as illustration

October 2015. A colleague and I are having coffee in my office. We have grown up on different sides of the racial divide, but had similar experiences of Reformed worship – mine in the old Transvaal and his in the Western Cape. Choosing philosophy and not theology, his freshest memories of active worship stretches back many years – to a time before women were allowed in the pulpit. Amused by the fact that he is speaking to a female colleague, who is also an ordained minister of religion, he asks: “Do you also wear a preaching gown – and enter the church with the elders, while the congregation sings: “Gee dat u Gees die leraar sterk”? Noticing how well he remembers the hymn after so many years, I ask in a more serious tone: “If you think of worship when you were a child, what do you remember?” No hesitation:

The music, the singing... the Hallelujah Chorus! My mother sang in the church choir. They sang beautifully. I often was at their rehearsals – a warm and wonderful atmosphere. Other church choirs also sung the Hallelujah Chorus, but our choir sang it the best – the others knew it.

In his eyes he is nine years old again, hearing the music, experiencing the sense of community, feeling his pride of the choir, experiencing something transcendental. I want to keep the moment, but interrupt again: “The best? It should not be about competition between church choirs?” Distracted for a second, he snaps back:

No, not competition, but commitment. Singing the Hallelujah Chorus and singing it good, was about our identity – about whom we were and whom we wanted to be. Being serious about our faith, being proud of what we have and sharing it with others in the best way possible. I remember the Hallelujah Chorus and other parts of the Messiah better than I remember any sermon I ever heard. My sisters and I still sing the Hallelujah Chorus spontaneously when we’re together, when preparing a meal or something. Breaking into singing: “King of Kings ... forever and ever! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!” We always remember our mother when singing it...

A shadow moves across his eyes. Back to the present, back to reality – his mother was brutally murdered a few years ago. A brief moment, then he continues softly. “It was such a comfort, hearing

37 Schwier, *Zur Sache*, 29.

38 Horatio Townsend, citing Hawkins, L.M. *Anecdotes, Biographical Sketches and Memoirs*. Vol. 1 (1822). In: *An Account of the Visit of Handel to Dublin (1852)*, 93. Online at https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/George_Frideric_Handel (Accessed: 29 March 2016).

it in those days. It made worship beautiful. It made the church a place where you wanted to be. I wish I could have given something of that experience to my children...”³⁹

The past, the present, the future

*Eine Musik wie Händel's Messias ist mir gleichsam
eine compendiöse Verkündung des gesamten Christentums.
Friedrich Schleiermacher – Weihnachtsfeier 1806*⁴⁰

In this essay, I have argued that the performance of Handel's Messiah has an ambivalent reception history in South Africa. During the years of apartheid it was performed by black choirs in white areas – separately for black and for white audiences. This is the paradox: On the one hand the performances were seen as a means of *protesting against*, and breaking through the barriers of the apartheid system, while others saw it as *entrenching apartheid* by performing a work that is “Western” in origin and seeing it as the norm to which blacks should conform – a norm set by whites. Accordingly, Messiah was performed “against the odds”. From the concept of aesthetics within homiletical theory, where the role of the listeners is emphasised, I argued that in the text as well as in the music, performers (also as listeners) and listeners (as performers) heard protest, prophecy, comfort, hope and many other aspects of faith that are usually expressed in a spoken sermon. Accordingly, Messiah could be heard as a “sermon in sound”, indicating a transcendental world beyond the harsh realities of the day, but also prophetically bringing transformation about and indicating possible liberation in this world. Participants (performers and listeners) would hear the inherent political call to act in order to change their circumstances and those of others living in South Africa. As a work, “accessible to all”, it could be heard as a sermon in various circumstances and contexts. Choirs and audiences in the time of apartheid heard a prophetic message in the music and text of Messiah, relating it to their context of oppression. My colleague mentioned above, experienced a sense of community, of *koinonia*, when Messiah was performed by their church choir – referring especially to the sense of beauty it brought to worship and to his life, intuitively comparing it to a sermon, saying he remembered the “message” of Messiah better than any sermon.

Contemporary audiences and performers, singing and hearing Africa's Messiah in eleven languages, know that in South Africa the prophecy was fulfilled, in part – but that many difficulties remain. The prophetic preaching needs to continue. The political and ethical challenges, inherent in Messiah, still need to be brought to life through performance, through listening – and through truly *hearing*. Whether performed in public venues or in churches, in essence it is a form of public preaching – taking into account Engemann's premise that in principle the character of any sermon is public and bearing in mind the three aspects of the concept “public” that Engemann distinguishes: the factual presence of the hearers of a sermon; the meant presence of the surrounding society; and a concept of “public”, “publicness” or presence that has in mind all humans and humanity *coram Deo*.⁴¹

Performing and listening to Messiah remain as relevant as ever. In countries over the world it comes alive through performances, no matter how secularised the world around it has become. Messiah may be “Western” in origin and Christian in conception and orientation, yet it has an accessibility that invites people from all identities and backgrounds to listen – and to be changed. Could the

39 Professor Michael Cloete, professor of philosophy at Unisa.

40 To me a music such as Handel's Messiah is a comprehensive preaching of the whole of Christianity. In Schleiermacher's sermon for Christmas 1806.

41 Engemann, *Einführung*, 444-454.

“inherent qualities” of this work suggest something of hope to a world embroiled in turmoil? Could it speak of faith and trust in a God who is omnipotent and powerful – and who “shall reign for ever and ever”? Could it speak to people of all religions, with beauty so profound that they too would be set free and be enabled to enter a new world, where all hear the music and sing to the music of one God?

Collaborative Preaching: A Conversation to Open Up both Text and Participant

18

Pia Nordin Christensen¹

Theological perspectives on the role of experience in theology

One of the consequences of the secularisation in Denmark is the growing lack of a religious language. However, this does not prevent people from having experiences filled with what can be called a surplus of meaning. In this essay I argue that it is a homiletical task to interpret in a theological context. This interpretation can be done by means of “collaborative preaching”. The focus of this essay is on the praxis of preaching in the tension between theology and experience and (when thinking of the role of experience in theology in a Danish context) has less to do with who God is, than with “where God happens”.² In order to explain these statements, the essay will begin with the views of two Danish scholars on the role of experience in theology, namely Svend Bjerg and Dorthe Jørgensen.³

The concept of experience⁴ is a complex matter. In this paper I expound the concept as described by Svend Bjerg, who defines experience as a trinomial as impression (an unreflected experience) – communication (active) – experience (a reflected experience).⁵

An impression will depend on reflexion in order to be transformed into an experience. The impression has to become your own. Bjerg introduces communication (the linguistic aspect) as a necessary link connecting (pre-linguistic) impression and experience (language). However, language is not only verbal, but also visual, auditory and tactile. Impressions are transient, whereas an experience may stay with you forever. All people have life experiences, but experiences of faith are available to those who know the language of faith. That is why we need further qualifications when it comes to experiences of faith. Bjerg takes his cue from Eberhard Jüngel’s understanding of faith as “a new experience with experience”. The experience of faith renews the experience of life as the word

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2 In this essay the term “experience theology” will be used to refer to the role of experience in theology and it should not be mistaken with any implied assumption that theology can be reduced only to experience.

3 For an introduction to the thought of Jørgensen, see Jørgensen, D. 2015. Experience, Metaphysics and Immanent Transcendence. In: D Jørgensen, G Chiurazzi & S Tinning (eds), *Truth and Experience: Between Phenomenology and Hermeneutics*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 10-29; Jørgensen, D. 2015. Sensoriness and Transcendence: On the Aesthetic Possibility of Experiencing Divinity. In: SA Christoffersen et al. (eds), *In Transcendence and Sensoriness: Perceptions, Revelation, and the Arts*. Leiden: Brill Academic, 63-85.

4 Experience Theology should also not be confused with so-called Natural Theology (that does not communicate) and the notion that God can be known only via human reason or experiences of nature, without the support of Scripture or Tradition.

5 Bjerg, S. 2006. *Tro og erfaring*. København: Anis. In Danish we have two different words for the English word “experience” (*oplevelse* and *erfaring*). Bjerg distinguishes between experience which is reflected upon or not reflected upon, which is closer to the terms impression/perception in English.

of God and the experiences of humans interact; thus faith paves the way for a new qualification of experience.

Bjerg points to elementary life experiences as a space where the talk of God is meaningful. Life is renewed when it is redescribed in the light of faith, because faith has more to say about one's experiences than one is able to say oneself. Therefore, a sermon based upon experience theology will proceed in a phenomenological manner by first stating what an experience was and then redescribing the experience in a biblical manner.

According to Bjerg, redescription is how the worlds of humankind and God are brought and kept together, but also renewed. For this reason, experience theology occupies itself with experiences where God (the whole) happens in the experience of the individual (the part). Experience of faith is, therefore, understood as experiences with "surplus of meaning". The transition from a life experience to experience of faith presents a theological challenge today because many people seem to have experienced something "more", but do not have any language to express it. It also raises the question whether God meets us only through language, or whether this meeting can take place in another manner as well? Are we able to describe experience of this "more" theoretically in a way that theoretical reflexions and practical experiences may mutually inspire each other? Dorthe Jørgensen seems to think so.

Philosophical aesthetics: The teaching of sensitive cognition and beautiful thinking

Jørgensen developed a metaphysics of experience based on a hermeneutic of phenomenological thinking. Against this background Jørgensen views experience of transcendence as an experience of a surplus of meaning, based on sensitivity, characterised only by being sensitive, by feeling, by being suggestive. The question is whether and what theology may gain from entering into dialogue with the aesthetics of experience, will "beautiful thinking" offer one something that may be used in homiletics?

Philosophical aesthetics is the teaching of sensitive cognition and beautiful thinking. And, beautiful thinking is not about beauty, but about the experience of a beauty, which may form another perspective not be beautiful, even hideous!

However terrible the Cross may seem from a human point of view, viewed from a Christian aspect it is the most beautiful; thus it forces the Christian to encompass a notion about beauty which also holds the most terrible aspect. A Christian aesthetics must be able to contain the Cross...⁶

Like Bjerg, Jørgensen distinguishes between impression and experience. An aesthetic impression is transient and only serves as impetus for an experience. In other words, the aesthetic experience is the interpretation of an aesthetic impression which is sensitive, connected to insight and which happens but cannot be forced to happen.

Aesthetics must be seen as a new way of thinking about thinking. The concept was introduced by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgartner in the eighteenth century. Baumgartner discovered that one's capacity for feeling, one's sensitive and suggestive character could lead to cognition. Beauty is not a

⁶ Jørgensen, D. 2014. *Den skønne tænkning. Veje til erfaringsmetafysik. Religionsfilosofisk udmøntet*. Århus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 709.

quality of something, but the *experience* of beauty and accordingly it is experiences that open up the horizon and lets one sense that reality holds multiple layers of meaning. Such experiences may help to create meaning because they are experiences of being part of a whole, but without any specific interpretation. An aesthetic experience is basically an experience of beauty, and aesthetic and religious experiences may be understood as different interpretations of the same experience with more than one meaning. Jørgensen's concern is to link experiences of beauty with the underlying "more". In pointing toward a need of a renewed focus on the religious experiences of people, Jørgensen draws our attention to the fact that theology may profit from the metaphysics of experience.

Jørgensen wishes enable theology to interpret contemporary experiences of immanent transcendence and, therefore, aims at developing a theological aesthetics. Jørgensen's understanding of transcendence experiences as experiences of extended meaning opens up the possibility of a theological interpretation:

Our experiences of extended meaning on the other hand, tell us that there is "more", and the word "God" is the theological name for this "more". Thus it is in experience, in our experience of interdependence with that world, which theological is created by God, for example in the experience of beauty, that God becomes real to us. God is present in the experience, and only in that, whereas the experience is wide in return. It holds much more than can be sensed physically and understood by the brain. The human experience also holds everything felt, perceived, sensed; issues for which we have developed both aesthetics and theology in order to explore it.⁷

Now, if experience is interpreted in a religious manner, Jørgensen sees the individual human being as co-creator in a dialogue between the call (God) and he who answers the call (the person). In this Jørgensen approaches the thinking of the French philosopher of religion Jean-Louis Chrétien, who works with a structure of divine call and human answer in everything:

The structure of call and answer brings a surplus of meaning in experience – something which wants to be understood and yet avoids it.⁸

That which is experienced in the experience of extended meaning remains hidden in spite of the revelation. The experiences are real, but in a secular world people must have help to interpret them. Jørgensen herself has not drawn any homiletic consequences of beautiful thinking. But I seem to find some suggestion her following statement:

The point of beautifying the thinking is ... not to cast overboard the idea of concept, but to think of it in a more sensitive manner which will move already established meanings and thereby letting phenomena and ideas meet in new constellations of concepts.⁹

From the above an awareness of that which surrounds us will follow. Beautiful thinking supports the argument for the sermon based on experience. The preacher may let herself be disturbed by being observant of the "middle world" that demands sensitive thinking and that lets us experience matters of extended meaning. The preacher may also be aware of not speaking only to the cognition of the brain or use sensitive experiences, but also to reflect on experiences of extended meaning that, in religious interpretation/understanding, are experiences of being gripped (by God), experiences of extended meaning, or of the closeness of God. As experiences of extended meaning are ambiguous,

7 Ibid. p. 807.

8 Ibid. p. 744.

9 Ibid. pp., 816-817.

we have the possibility to interpret such experiences in a theological context as God calling us. Furthermore, experiences of the beautiful demands attention as experiences of extended meaning often reveals themselves in the very simple, in the present moment:

Perhaps even in the most everyday situations the world may open up to experiences, and some meaning of another order, i.e. extended meaning, may emerge...Extended meaning is available for the person who seizes the moment where the sun breaks through the clouds or the door is half open...If your gaze is open the poetic surplus in the world will be accessible.¹⁰

Jørgensen is ambitious in her combination of philosophy and theology which means that she is both criticised and appreciated. To the background of the core question of whether God can only be met God in language or whether God can also be experienced prior to language, Jørgensen argues that from the perspective of experience theology, the linguistic philosophy of the twentieth century alone is not enough. She points toward a crucial problem of our time, namely that we lack a *religious* language due to secularism. Therefore, it is our task as theologians to interpret experiences of extended matter in a theological context as far as it makes sense. One place to do so, I believe, may be in “collaborative preaching” meetings.

The theoretical background to collaborative preaching

The background to a homiletic practice where the congregation is invited to participate in so-called collaborative preaching is a paradigm shift in the empiric change that occurred in the occurring in the 1970s both regarding exegesis and homiletics. The relationship between preacher and congregation changed with the advent of the so-called “New Homiletics”, starting with Fred Craddock’s *As One without Authority*.¹¹ Craddock was inspired by the idea of indirect communication of Kierkegaard and the move in focus from the deductive to the inductive sermons and from sender-orientated to receiver-orientated sermons. This paradigm shift meant that message and form were no longer understood as separate phenomena. The listener was no longer seen as a passive hearer, but as taking part in the sermon event. However, “New Homiletics” required that the listeners share a common experience horizon.

“Other-wise Preaching” emerged as a corrective to “New Homiletics” in that it pointed out that there will always be an asymmetry and strangeness, both in relationship to one another (the listeners) and in relation to God. Several scholars have discussed this issue – not least John McClure in his book *Other-wise Preaching. A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics*.¹² In answer to the question of how is one may then be able to preach on the basis of experience when people in reality do not share experiences, McClure introduced “collaborative preaching”, a concept that may provide an answer.¹³ Even though people cannot overcome the strangeness between themselves, they are able to inquire after each other’s experiences. “Over-wise preaching” implies that one lets oneself be disturbed by the other being close. However, this is a constructive disturbance, because the other sees something which one does not see oneself.

In her dissertation *Preaching as a Carnavalesque Dialogue – Between the “Wholly Other” and “Other-wise Listeners”*,¹⁴ Marlene Ringgaard Lorensen points to the importance of authentic dialogue.

10 Ibid. p. 567

11 Craddock, F.B. 2001. *As One without Authority*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice.

12 McClure, J.S. 2001. *Other-Wise Preaching. A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice.

13 For a solid introduction to collaborative preaching, see McClure, J.S. 1995. *The Roundtable Pulpit. Where Leadership & Preaching Meet*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon.

14 Ringgaard Lorensen, M. 2012. *Preaching as a Carnavalesque Dialogue – between the “Wholly Other” and “Other-wise” Listeners*. Unpublished PhD dissertation, Faculty of Theology, University of Copenhagen, 66.

Unlike in a pedagogic dialogue (where the listener is only scaffolding for the preacher), in authentic dialogue, a constant change of roles between preacher and listener is evident. At the same time, precision in the dialogue is determined by “the ability to overstep the otherness of the other without transforming this strangeness to one’s own.” Conversation in collaborative preaching meeting can be seen as an expression of authentic dialogue, where such an exchange of parts takes place, which is evident in the pastor’s being both host and guest.

At the same time, the dialogue between listener and preacher should be seen as an interactive dialogue. The listeners are understood to be active co-authors, as the sermon primarily is not the actual sermon, but the sermon that emerges in the dialogue between the two parties and that neither pastor nor listener can control. In this dialogical interaction a room, which Marianne Gaarden¹⁵ calls the *Third Room*, comes into being.

There is a decisive difference, therefore, in what the pastor imagines the listeners to think and hear and what will appear when they are actually asked about this. McClure’s collaborative preaching works as an inductive method where the participants, on a weekly basis, systematically brainstorm the coming week’s text. They isolate and interpret themes in the text, share concrete stories and experiences and ponder what the gospel demands of people. The collaboration implies that the congregation is both heard and educated. On the one hand, the preacher acts as host, but on the other hand, he or she the equal of the participants as the purpose is to give the congregation their own voice in the pulpit. It is not scaffolding that occurs, but a real conversation that, according to McClure, ought to have an ethical purpose. In 2012, McClure revised and simplified the form of collaborative preaching by emphasising the importance of a weekly face-to-face small group session of three or four participants which will frequently be replaced with new participants in order to obtain variety.¹⁶

Collaborative preaching in a Danish context

Since February 2014, I have practiced collaborative preaching in the parish where I serve.¹⁷ It all began with an invitation to a pastoral care group and, when that worked well, the invitation was extended to other members of the congregation. There are several ways of conducting collaborative preaching. The most important requirement is that the conversation must be about the text. In reality, this means that the conversation is about experience in relation to the text because participants interpret the text in the light of their own lives. It is obvious that the way each participant makes his or her own meaning is by relating to their own experiences – this supports sermons appealing to experience. I did not promise to use the group conversation in my sermon. To me that would be amount to a democratisation of the role of the preacher. Nevertheless, the participants ended up to contribute to my sermon in significant ways. The conversations, thus, not only move the participants from the congregation, but me as a preacher as well. Currently, our total group consists of 20 people, aged 23 to 81, and a meeting normally consists of five to six participants.

Collaborative preaching in operation

As an illustration of how the above-mentioned meetings work, I will share the conversation from one held on 15 September 2015 on the narrative of the woman in the house of the Pharisee (Luke 7:36-50).

15 Gaarden, M. 2015. *Prædikenen som det tredje rum*. Frederiksberg: Anis.

16 Link: <http://johnsmcclure.com/tag/roundtable-pulpit/>

17 Further developed in Christensen, Nordin, P. 2014. *En samtidig homiletik – en refleksion over egen prædikenpraksis*. Kritisk Forum for Praktisk Teologi nr.

That day the participants were Anne (69 years old), Hans (74), Fred (53), Vibe (67) and Inge (81). The conversation centered on sin and forgiveness, but the group also discussed a documentary about a prostitute, “Bonnie”, that was recently aired on Danish TV. In what follows below, I draw on and interpret statements made during the meeting that I found particularly useful in preparation for my sermon.

At once one of the participants remarked that it was not the Pharisee, but a woman, disregarded by everyone, who was aware of whom Jesus was. The Pharisee ignored the woman, because he knew her kind, but Jesus let the woman touch him. This act made the Pharisee contest Jesus’ authority, while the woman anoints the Anointed. Looking back at the documentary on the prostitute (Bonnie), the group discussed how these women were regarded then and now:

For Jesus it’s not an issue. But it’s a problem for the Pharisee. And it was not only then, also in our own time that we sometimes are very quick to put each other in their place. (Anne)

Prostitution is a multi-layered phenomenon and involves more people than only the woman (prostitute) herself. There is no denouncement among the participants of the woman. In the documentary Bonnie did not see herself as a sinner in contrast to the woman who stood crying behind Jesus. Hans points out that Bonnie claims that her customers see her as a human being and points to the importance of her being seen and acknowledged. Hans admits that he himself tends to overlook the prostitutes in his own neighbourhood. Today, in our context, prostitutes are not regarded as women living in sin. The conversation centered on interpreting sin as acting morally wrong or hurting other people, or as a sin of omission, for example, in the form inattention or preoccupation with other things:

Sometimes you know very well that you should have either said something or done something in a certain situation. And yet, I didn’t do it – why didn’t I do something? That’s the greatest sin, I think. A sin of omission. What is otherwise regarded as sin, that’s the extra-marital relations – or people of the same sex – or a young or older person...It’s up for a discussion... (Hans)

Anne asked if we do not often mistake sin for morals and referred to the Fall as the core to understanding sin:

.....the fundamental narrative about eating of the tree of knowledge and making yourself God. That is for me the essence of the notion of sin. Because, if we acknowledge that we actually are not God – if we should forget it for a moment (laughter) – then there is actually a meaning to taking Communion. Then Communion has a meaning. Otherwise Communion for me doesn’t seem to have a meaning. I mean, if it’s only about my kneeling down and apologising because I happened to say something without thinking. I mean, that could be managed without Communion. (Anne)

Fred emphasised that no person is without fault and pointed out that this is a basic condition that defines us as human beings. This knowledge makes Communion meaningful for the participants to the collaborative preaching. It seems appropriate to interpret the descriptions and experiences of the participants in the light of a theological anthropology, expressed in Luther’s expression *simul justus et peccator*. Very few contemporary Danes will spontaneously describe their life in dogmatic terms, but the interpretation of the biblical text in the group, in dialogue with their own experiences and the documentary they have seen, seems to have contributed to a wider theological view, as they emphasised that Bonnie does not see herself as a sinner and does not ask for forgiveness. Fred

pointed to the text and to the woman's care for Jesus as an act that enabled her at the same time to see herself, be seen and be changed:

I also imagine that at the moment when she is near Jesus she suddenly sees herself. And that's where the tears come from. It becomes plain what she has exposed herself ... She has loved much. It's kind of funny, isn't it? Because it's kind of upside down. That it becomes so clear for her just when she washes his feet. It must be very intimate to wipe someone else's feet with your hair. You could hardly get any closer to someone. It really crosses a line. So I really believe it gives her a kind of insight. And he sees that. He sees that she has seen. And I think that the forgiveness he gives her she is ready to accept ... To me it's one of the most beautiful texts in the whole world. I really think – the first ten times I heard it or read it – I cried my heart out. I find it so beautiful. (Fred)

Jesus' look is like a touch. The invisible in the visible is seen by Jesus and understood by the woman who is redeemed. The group describes the action of the woman as intimate, crossing lines and beautiful. In the encounter with Jesus the change occurs and she sees herself in a new light. Fred's description of his own reaction to the text seems to imply that the text communicates an aesthetically sensitive experience even before it is interpreted. I also interpret Fred's interpretation as a "new experience with experience", but it's not me as pastor who gives voice to this new experience. Fred himself vocalises it vocal in the meeting with the text and the other participants. In the situation the so-called "third room" came into being. In the encounter between the text and each other a dialogical interaction took place and something new was created that seemed to go beyond that which each participant brought to the conversation with regard to experiences and understandings. In short, the conversation created a "surplus of meaning".

At the end of the meeting the participants talked about what they do if they suffer mental pain. Hans told us that he goes to church. This is what he said and how the other members responded to it:

- Hans Sometimes ... I have thoughts or something where I don't feel alright with myself. But then, when I've been to church and have listened to the texts, it does something to me. It felt right. So I have a belief that there is a place where I can go ...
- Fred Well, if you had turned your back (on the church), then you will have a problem. Because then there is no place to talk about it. Not everybody wants to go into therapy.
- Hans But that's your faith. The faith that when you go to church, then there's a possibility that you may get an answer. In reality you're your own worst enemy ... it can be hard to forgive yourself for the things where you may have done wrong.
- Pia So if you come to church, listen to the texts and the sermon and have Communion, then somehow it becomes that dialogue?
- Hans Yes. It may be part of a hymn, the text for the day, it may be something said from the pulpit or something else.
- Fred
Hans And there you must be in a state where you dare to go to Jesus with your body. Exactly. That just what I do by leaving my home and go to the church building. I wash, shave and brush my teeth...and put on some nice clothes.

At first, Hans described a life experience. When he is not feeling good about himself or something in his life, he goes to church. Listening to the texts moves him. His life experience is re-described (repeated) and renewed in the light of his faith. Faith has more to say about his experience than he is able to express himself. As the woman comes to Jesus hoping for deliverance, Hans comes to the service. Before going, he smartens up. It is not all about the intellect. The body must be ready as Fred stated, and Hans agreed. Sin is about the entire being.

Is prostitution “just” a job? In Bonnie’s own world it is, yet it is clear that she bears many scars from her job. The interpretation of text by the collaborative preaching group emphasised the paradox, the ambivalence, in being at the same time both a sinner and justified. Likewise, the participants were aware of the part the body plays in relation to understanding and insight.

Benefits to participants of attending the collaborative preaching event

I may have my own thoughts about what the congregation will get out of our meetings, but what are their own thoughts? When asked them, they talked about the issues that matter to them and it can summarised in 18 points. The meetings:

- ⌘ offer the possibility to reflect on the text together;
- ⌘ help in better comprehending the entire service the following Sunday. The worship is experienced more entirely;
- ⌘ stimulate interesting dialogue;
- ⌘ help us to share the same text from the perspective of our different backgrounds;
- ⌘ help to unfold the text and this is personally beneficial;
- ⌘ give the opportunity of listening to the other participants and thus gain new understanding;
- ⌘ make one more open and responsive when one goes to church;
- ⌘ are satisfying opportunities to participate in forming values for all of us;
- ⌘ give one the opportunity to listen to the thoughts of others: “Oh! Are you really able to think like that....?”
- ⌘ create more questions than they offer answers, which is good;
- ⌘ allow for questions to be raised and this creates openness and the possibility for reflection;
- ⌘ create greater sensitivity to the text;
- ⌘ do not demand that one comes prepared or to achieve any specific goal;
- ⌘ make one aware that it is the present that matters. We do not have a goal to reach;
- ⌘ make it clear that one does not even need to say much, one benefits from just being present;
- ⌘ create a more serious awareness of the text because it stays with you during daily life;
- ⌘ create a space where one discusses matters that you normally do not talk about;
- ⌘ create an opportunity to dialogue with people who are very different from one another.

In light of the responses of the participants, for them collaborative preaching is a rewarding experience. They express in diverse ways a joy in reflecting on the text together with others in an

environment that was seen as open and with no specific goal. In exchange for their thoughts and interpretations of the text, they gain access to new and unfamiliar insights into it from others:

We come with each our own history and each our individual personality. That makes it important that the sermon doesn't just appeal to one kind of person. There is so much more in the text ... I find that really exciting. And the process of diving into the text gives something to oneself as well. There's a challenge that makes you consider some matters yourself, makes you pause and reflect. It may not be that which you yourself have been thinking that ends up with being the most important matter in the text. Actually, very often it's what some of the others have come up with that I find really exciting. I think that gives me a greater responsiveness when I'm going to church. (Anne)

Participants' involvement in the service is much better because they come prepared for what the sermon is about on the particular Sunday. The service (sermon, the hymns and the music) is experienced as much more coherent, or in the words of one of the participants:

... it's much more of a whole. I think I'm more prepared to, how shall I say, relax or take it in ... into the service. (Anne)

For me as the pastor, it is important to realise that the participants, like me, experience that the text stays with them all through the week and sharpens their awareness of it in relation to everyday life. In all I understand the participants to feel that in the collaborative preaching sessions we have created a community of interpretation that in reality is an expression of the common priesthood.

In the Lutheran understanding, the pastor is only pastor by virtue of the common priesthood. He or she has a special calling, but only as a part of the common priesthood. Therefore, the pastor does not side with the gospel vis-à-vis the congregation, but with the congregation vis-à-vis the gospel, and must from that perspective attend to her duty as preacher, serving the Word. The consequence of all baptised Christians being pastors (1 Peter 2:5) is interpreted in different ways in the Lutheran tradition. One has the right to draw one's own conclusions away from pastor and bishop, or one can choose to believe that the responsibility of preaching and pastoral care is the duty of all who are baptised. In Denmark, Kierkegaard and Grundtvig represent the two positions, whereas in an American context they are represented by Fred Craddock and Charles Campbell respectively.

In collaborative preaching we are each other's pastors as Dean Rudolf Arendt states:

We celebrate something which we call a service in order to be reminded that the service doesn't finish when we leave the church, but continues in our daily work and our being with other people.¹⁸

The participants in the group in our congregation do not expect to be quoted from the pulpit. However, they are curious to hear how I expound the text on the Sunday following the meeting. Several of the participants did not use to go to church on a regular basis, and in this way, the workshop also helps to "create" a congregation.

18 Arendt, R. 1996. Det almindelige præstedømme – og det særlige præsteembede. *Haderslev Stiftsbog*, 42-43.

Benefits of collaborative preaching for the pastor

Why take time to establish collaborative preaching sessions? I often come across three reasons why some colleagues are reluctant to do likewise:

- ⌘ “I love to do the pondering and ‘nerding’ with the sermon myself.”
- ⌘ “I do not want to be disturbed. I need to focus and stick to my own thoughts.”
- ⌘ “We have so much to do and I simply can’t find the time.”

One can easily understand these objections, but it might in fact be fruitful to let oneself be disturbed and it may be very rewarding to take time for such a dialogue. The dialogue shows one how the text speaks to us right now – and if the text actually does just that! The participants have often wondered whether the latter is true before sessions, but never after an hour’s dialogue. This is because the dialogue opens up both the text as well as the participants. It is a necessary dialogue when we realise that we may share words and activities, but we do not have the same experiences from them; something which “other-wise preaching” rightly criticised the New Homiletic on. There will always be a strangeness both in our relation to each other and in our relation to God and that is why it makes sense to try to interpret the text jointly, using the experiences each of us have. It is useful for the preacher to listen to other voices and other experiences. He or she may gain new insights, sermons become more based on experience. I also find that collaborative preaching gives the participants a share of ownership both of the sermon and of the service as such. They come because they are curious about life, the text and their faith. And, next Sunday, they are eager to hear how much further the pastor has dived into the text. McClure’s purpose with collaborative preaching was to involve and give authority to the laity. It may sound very solemn to Danish ears, but this is what actually happens. It is far from being as structured as McClure advises, but nevertheless, experience that our dialogue moves both the participants and myself.

It is my experience that a pastor may benefit from taking the practical consequences of experience theology and involving the congregation in sermon preparation. Collaborative preaching is not only a fruitful exercise because it opens up both the text and the participants, but also as it may serve as a source of inspiration for the preacher. It reveals the participants’ awareness of the surplus of meaning in daily life experience and gives them ownership of the text, the sermon and the entire worship service. We are, after all, ministers and spiritual advisers to each other; we are, what I call, a common priesthood in function.

Studying the listener? The paradox of the individual in sermon reception research and a reassessment of preaching as caring for the community of faith

19

Theo Pleizier¹

Introduction

Since homiletics took its empirical turn, the listener became even more important than before. Put in terms of the object-subject distinction: from object (“address”), the listener became the subject (“author”) in preaching. The listener as “(co-)author” of the sermon became a leading metaphor in homiletics during the empirical turn.² It seems, however, that reception research has become biased towards the individual listener. This essay challenges this supposed bias. On the positive side the communal dimension of the practice of listening as it appears in empirical studies is explored. This approach fits a larger field of interest in community practices in practical theology. To give one example, in reacting to a therapeutic phase in pastoral theology, Charles Gerkin calls for “renewed attention to communal aspects of pastoral care”, because the congregation is the “primary context and agent of care for the people of God.”³ Gerkin’s suggestion could be assessed as a “turn to the community”, to which the renewed interest in ecclesial practices and embedded ecclesiologies in current practical theology testifies.⁴ The question of how sermon listening could be a form of “embodied ecclesiology” is the focus of the following sections. First, some aspects of communality are presented as they appear in empirical research (section 2). Furthermore, the concept of social religiosity is used to enlarge the framework of reception research in homiletics (section 3). Next, some indicators for communal-religious meanings are introduced, based upon so-called “secondary analysis” (section 4). These thoughts offer some clues as to how preaching may be seen as a caring environment (section 5) and some suggestions are made for broadening our scope of research in homiletics.

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2 The metaphor finds its origin in reception aesthetics. For earlier articulations of the subjectivity of the listener as “second preacher” (Möller) or as writer of an “auredit” (Engemann) see Möller, C. 1993. *Der Hörer als zweiter Prediger. Zur Bedeutung der Rezeptionsästhetik für die Homiletik*. In: R Ehmann (Hrsg.), *Predigen aus Leidenschaft. Homiletische Beiträge für Rudolf Bohren zum 75. Geburtstag*. Karlsruhe: Verl. Evang. Presseverb. für Baden; Engemann, W. 1993. *Semiotische Homiletik. Prämissen, Analysen, Konsequenzen*. Textwissenschaft, Theologie, Hermeneutik, Linguistik, Literaturanalyse, Informatik Bd. 05. Tübingen: Francke.

3 Gerkin, C.V. 1997. *An Introduction to Pastoral Care*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 92-93.

4 Illustrative are the new journal *Ecclesial Practices* and the Swedish volume by Fahlgren, S. & Idestrom, J. 2015. *Ecclesiology in the Trenches: Theory and Method under Construction*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock.

Individuality and commonality in research

When one reviews empirical research in homiletics, the paradox emerges that preaching as profound communal practice has predominantly been studied from the perspective of the individual.⁵ Reception studies conceptualise listeners as individuals and research methodologies rarely depart from the idea that preaching and worship are corporate practices. Research is guided by questions such as: What makes a good sermon – for you? How do you create religious meaning from this sermon? What does it mean for you to listen to sermons? How do certain characteristics of sermons correlate to responses of particular respondents groups among listeners? These questions have guided both quantitative and qualitative research designs in the study of sermon reception. Interviews and surveys, the most commonly used methods in this kind of research, understandably take the individual as basic unit for analysis. Yet, this happens at the expense of the listening community.

The above observations, however, do not imply that the congregation is completely absent. In *Believing in Preaching* (2005) the issue “how preaching shapes the faith community” is addressed. Yet, the answer is still given with reference to the characteristics of individual listeners. The researchers conclude that there are individual faith listeners, those who understand the sermon as addressing the congregation as an aggregate of individual listeners and communal identity listeners.⁶ A few other studies should be mentioned. In a large German study (1980) samples of listeners are determined by styles of preaching and particular characteristics of the congregation; Hennie Pieterse (1991) studied the relationship between congregational types and styles of listening; and the large American study *Listening to Listeners* (2004) added congregational culture explicitly in the interview structure.⁷ In these studies the congregation appears as the *context* of preaching and its culture and type may influence the way people listen to sermons. In other words, in those cases where the community of faith is operationalised empirically, it functions as a variable to distinguish between individual listeners – with some exceptions, though, as will be clear in the next sections.

Before exploring some of the issues that surround the relations between the individual and the community (of faith) in the preaching event, a brief history of empirical (audience) research in homiletics needs to be given. First there was communication science. War propaganda during the two world wars on the European continent and the rise of mass media stimulated the construction of theories of communication. Shannon and Weaver’s mathematical model became the dominant paradigm in which communication was understood as sending a message from a sender to a receiver.⁸ Homiletically phrased, the question was put as: “Does the sermon hit the target (the audience)?” Or, from a more audience-centred perspective: How could preachers adapt to their audiences in order to be heard? The gospel is seen as information, as earlier empirical studies indicate.⁹ Soon, however, homileticians realised that the empirical study of preaching should not be conceptualised cybernetically, but rather that listener is an interpreting subject. In comes the hermeneutical paradigm. Listeners are “reading the sermon” and craft their own interpretations and meanings from it. From here it was a short step to the awareness that sermons are skilfully crafted pieces of art and

5 Cf. the instructive literature review on sermon reception in Rietveld, D. 2013. A Survey of the Phenomenological Research of Listening to Preaching. *Homiletic*, 38(2): 30-47.

6 Mulligan, M.A. & Allen, R.J. 2005. *Believing in Preaching. What listeners hear in sermons*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 128-129.

7 Daiber, K-F; Dannowski, H.W.; Lukatis, W.; Meyerbröker, K.; Ohnesorg, P. & Stierle, B. 1982. *Predigen und Hören. Band II. Kommunikation zwischen Predigern und Hörern. Sozialwissenschaftliche Untersuchungen. Predigen und Hören. Ergebnisse einer Gottesdienstbefragung. München*: Kaiser; Pieterse, H. 1991. *Gemeente en prediking* [Congregation and preaching]. Halfway House: NG Kerkboekhandel; McClure, J.S.; Allen, R.J.; Andrews, D.P.; Bond, L.S.; Moseley, D.P. & Ramsey, G.L. 2004. *Listening to Listeners. Homiletical Case Studies*. Vol. 1. 4 vols. Channels of Listening. St. Louis, MO: Chalice.

8 Shannon, C.E.; Elwood, C & Weaver, W. 1949. *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

9 Bartholomäus, W. 1972. *Evangelium als Information: Elemente einer theologischen Kommunikationstheorie am Beispiel der Osterbotschaft*. Zürich, etc.: Benziger.

that listeners are not just “readers”, but contribute to the meaning of the sermon. Following the lead of reception aesthetics, listeners become co-creators of meaning or co-authors of the sermon. Following Martin’s seminal article on preaching as an “open work of art”,¹⁰ the way listeners interact with sermons is conceptualised with help of spatial metaphors, such as *Deutungsraum* (interpretative space),¹¹ “meditative environment”,¹² or “third room”.¹³ Like (postmodern) pieces of art, sermons are seen as open spaces that facilitate individual meaning-making. Though the spatial metaphor suggest commonality, in its conceptualisation, the listener has become rather lonely – a meaning-making individual in a pluralist universe.

May it be time to challenge the assumption of the listener as individual or, at least, to start the discussion in homiletics about its pros and cons? Several reasons could be given for this, each of them worth exploring in more depth: congregational worship is the natural habitat of preaching; preaching is a social act; contemporary homiletics has stressed the fact that the preacher reads the text “on behalf of the congregation”¹⁴; as a communicative event, preaching constructs community. Is it possible to articulate an understanding of preaching in which not only the individual hearer’s faith is shaped, but that also acknowledges how preaching sustains and nurtures the congregation *as a community*? Perhaps pastoral theology helps to sharpen the focus here: What is needed to develop a theory of preaching in which preaching constitutes a form of pastoral communication, the sermon as a means of caring for a community, rather than the enumeration of (religious) meanings created by individuals?

Empirical method in theology and the reassessment of social religiosity

The epistemological basis for many empirical studies is the individual. Surveys are done and interviews conducted to reconstruct the experiences, attitudes, cognitions, emotions, volitions or expectations of participants in (religious) practices. Two additional methods transcend the individual focus, namely participant observation and focus groups.¹⁵ Interactions between group members (focus groups) or group behaviour (participant observation) create a promising field of study. Participant observation is a way of generating insights into cultures and cultural patterns; focus groups also contribute to the mutual understanding of the participants. Yet, the qualitative interview, despite its focus on the individual, also opens avenues to move beyond personal meanings and individual opinions or experiences. Two aspects in research come to the fore. First, methodically the researcher must be open for aspects in the empirical data that move beyond the individual framework. Here methods of analysis are as important as methods for generating data – this issue will be returned to the next section. Second, theologically we have to be aware of how the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity silently governs our analyses.

It may be a typical Protestant idea that individuals should tell a religious story about their lives and that they are supposed to be active participants in faith practices. The human mind becomes

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- 10 Martin, G.M. 1984. Predigt als “offenes Kunstwerk”: zum Dialog zwischen Homiletik und Rezeptionsästhetik. *Evangelische Theologie*, 44(1): 46-58.
- 11 Wittekind, F. 2009. Predigt als Deutungsraum. Zum Wortverständnis protestantischer Predigt. *International Journal of Practical Theology*, 6(1). <https://doi.org/10.1515/ijpt.2002.6.1.25>
- 12 Pleizier, T. 2010. Religious Involvement in Hearing Sermons. A Grounded Theory Study in Empirical Theology and Homiletics. *Eburon Academic*, 188-190.
- 13 Gaarden, M & Ringgaard Lorensen, M. 2013. Listeners as Authors in Preaching. *Homiletic*, 38(2): 45.
- 14 Lose, D.J. 2003. *Confessing Jesus Christ. Preaching in a Postmodern World*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 189-190.
- 15 De Roest, H. 2015. The Focus Group Method in Practical Ecclesiology: Performative Effects and Ecclesiological Rationale. *Ecclesial Practices*, 2(2): 235–254. <https://doi.org/10.1163/22144471-00202005>

aware of God's presence and accepts (or rejects) the promises of God in Christ.¹⁶ The interest in the human mind entails a focus upon individuality and reflexivity. The reflexivity of the self is pivotal in the "inner dialogue with significant others" through which the individual tries to understand events in life. By taking the whole idea of religious autobiography and placing it in the relationship with God, the late German practical-theologian Henning Luther, provides a subtle articulation of the Protestant position in which the individual understands the self *coram Deo* – both in judgment and in love.¹⁷ Deeply embedded in the Christian idea of religion is the human self and her reflexivity. It is not very surprising that conceptually "intrinsic religion" is understood as "mature religion" as defined by Gordon Allport¹⁸ and is to be preferred to extrinsic religiosity or "immature religion". Since intrinsic religion is conceptually connected to "true belief", the methodical interest in the individual by empirical research has a theological foundation. Or, as Cohen and Hill state: "Religious motivations that are socially centred can be seen as detracting from individualistic, intrinsic religious identity."¹⁹ This is strengthened by the fact that, in social-scientific and psychological research, the dimensions individual-social and intrinsic-extrinsic have become conceptually related. If social religious orientations are explained as extrinsic religious motivations, the individual and the intrinsic are conceptually connected. Recent research in psychology of religion, however, has challenged this view. Following the "push toward a more social approach to religion", Van Camp, Barden and Sloan argue that we have to recognise that important collective components in religious traditions are "internalized and important dimensions of religiosity" while research has neglected the social aspects "other than its extrinsic benefits".²⁰ On the basis of two quantitative studies, these authors developed a social and individual religiosity scale and identified

*... an independent social intrinsic religiosity, which allows a broader, more specific and more comprehensive assessment of the religious experience of diversely religious and diversely motivated range of individuals.*²¹

The research interest in individual versus social religiosity has a bearing upon the study of sermon reception. It should open up researchers of preaching to reassess the individual in relation to "other minds" and to value collective components, interpersonal commitments and the importance of places of worship. In other words, the centrality of the believing mind, the religious experiences, cognitions, emotions and behaviours of individual believers, churchgoers and sermon listeners call for another methodical angle, namely asking: How do listeners relate to "others" while listening to a sermon and what corporate commitments are constructed in the preaching event? These "others" may not necessarily be those present at the worship service. The worshipping listener is part of a larger community of faith that comprises the "cloud of witnesses" and the generations to come.²² For instance, listening "for others" is an important indicator for communal-religious meanings in hearing sermons.

16 Immink, G.F. 2005. *Faith: A Practical Theological Reconstruction*. Studies in Practical Theology. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 156-177.

17 Luther, H. 1992. *Religion und Alltag. Bausteine zu einer praktischen Theologie des Subjekts*. Stuttgart: Radius.

18 Allport, G.W. 1967. *The Individual and His Religion: A Psychological Interpretation*. New York/London: Macmillan. For a critique of the intrinsic-extrinsic distinction, see Kirkpatrick, L.A. & Hood, R.W. 1990. Intrinsic-Extrinsic Religious Orientation: The Boon or Bane of Contemporary Psychology of Religion? *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 29(4): 442-462. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1387311>

19 Cohen, A & Hill, P. 2001. Religion as Culture: Religious Individualism and Collectivism among American Catholics, Jews, and Protestants. *Journal of Personality*, 75(4): 709-742, (713).

20 Sloan, L.; Barden, J & Van Camp, D. 2016. Social and Individual Religious Orientations exist within both Intrinsic and Extrinsic Religiosity. *Archive for the Psychology of Religion*, 4-6.

21 Sloan, Barden & Van Camp, *Social and Individual Religious Orientations*, 22.

22 A reassessment of the classical ecclesiological distinction between the "visible church" and the "invisible church" may be helpful at this point.

Indicators for communal-religious meanings

In my own PhD research,²³ I focussed upon listening to sermons as *religious practice*. One of the findings resonate with the interest in social and communal components as discussed above. In the research design I took the qualitative interview with individual listeners as unit for analysis. In coding and conceptualising the material, however, I found several community-related components and aspects. Attending to interview fragments in which listeners relate to fellow-believers, to the church community as a whole, or to the way regular churchgoing shaped their faith, I found that the individual listener shows an awareness for fellow-listeners and that this awareness is both religiously qualified and intrinsic to the practice of hearing sermons. The following three concepts may function as indicators that point to communal meanings in individual responses to sermons, namely third-person engagement, experiencing common faith and anamnetic listening.

Indicator One: Third-person engagement

John drove an elderly lady back home from church. In the interview he said:

That's something the lady said on the way back home. She said "I lost a son when he was 17." She told us how sad that was. "But I have seen that I have been carried through and have been able to lay it in God's hands." Yes, I thought, yes, she recognized it too. In the sermon. I really liked that.

It may count as received knowledge in sermon reception research that, in interacting or "dialogising"²⁴ with the sermon, listeners look for connections with their personal life stories. Listening to sermons is "lived religion"; listeners make sense of life with help of religious discourse. The first example illustrates this twice: Both John and the elderly lady interact with the sermon personally. Yet, engaging with the sermon is also something social, as this example demonstrates. John also interacts with the *listening experience of a fellow-believer*. The way he engages with the sermon is not primary in the first-person singular: "I recognise this in my life", but also in the "third-person singular": "She recognised it too." This example is only one of many such as: listeners who talk about members of the congregation: I wish he or she had heard this sermon; parents reporting that they felt overwhelmed when they started thinking about their children when the preacher addressed God's love for little children; how the sermon made them feel grateful for those believers who passed away; or, listeners who simply explain that sermons should encourage them to care for others in the congregation. Apparently, there is a way of hearing sermons that goes beyond the individual life story and is not understood adequately when we conceptualise it only in terms of first-person involvement. *Third-person engagement* opens up a line of thought that invites researchers to think about social intrinsic religiosity: listeners feel part of a community of faith, they take care of each other and they share life stories. The fact that listeners refer to "others" points to a dimension in reception research that goes beyond the individual hearer. When people respond that this sermon was not so much about them, but that they suppose it was a blessing for someone else, we should not dismiss this too quickly, but should appreciate it as an expression of belonging to the community of faith and how the sermon contributes to creating relationships within the congregation.

23 Pleizier, T. 2010. *Religious Involvement in Hearing Sermons. A Grounded Theory Study in Empirical Theology and Homiletics*. Delft: Eburon Academic.

24 See for this concept in Schaap-Jonker, H. 2008. *Before the Face of God. An Interdisciplinary Study of the Meaning of the Sermon and the Hearer's God Image, Personality and Affective State*. Berlin: LIT; Gaarden & Lorensen, *Listeners as Authors*.

Indicator Two: Experiencing common faith

In one of the interviews in the *Listening to Listeners* project, Helen says:

We have one woman in our church right now who is a mediator on a peacemaking team. Everyone just thinks it's wonderful what she's doing, and we all want to be part of that. ... What we couldn't do ourselves, and I'm not sure I am ready, but it's nice to know we have someone out there [the preacher] representing us in that way.

The researchers add to this interview-fragment the following comment: “Preaching occurs within a congregation that has a distinctive communal identity. The sermon contributes to the shared commitments of the congregation.”²⁵ Community is valued as a community of interpretation and as “representation” preaching communicates a – supposedly – shared religious identity. Another incident of communal listening can be found in the interview with Cassandra. She says that “[a]ll preachers, I think, should be about delivering the message of God in such a way that we can all grasp it and understand it.”²⁶ There is a sense of mutuality, that the sermon meant for “all of us”. Comparing these and other expressions in interviews point to a deeper trait in hearing sermons, namely that the sermon builds a religious world, with Scripture texts, metaphors and references to the human condition. In this world, listeners experience recognition and they identify with the metaphors, narratives and theological motives that occupy the world of the sermon. They also disagree, start conversations or discussions, or experience together that something is at stake here that concerns them as believers, as a community of faith, or as the people of God. Preaching gives voice to the practice of faith of this local community in the here and now. The concept of “experiencing common faith” points to another paradox in the individual-communal dimension of the preaching event. Individual meaning-making is a hallmark in pluralist societies such as in Western Europe. In homiletics, the metaphor of the “open space” has been employed to do justice to the facts of pluralism and the values of freedom. Plurality of voices and interpretations, however, are not at odds with the idea that in communication – also in religious communication such as preaching – commonality is negotiated, shared and expressed. Perhaps homiletics needs further concepts to articulate how, in plural societies, preaching may be unifying, tapping into the larger tradition of the Christian faith and shaping a community of people that understands itself as followers of Christ.

Indicator 3: Anamnetic listening

Weekly preaching has its heights and depths, but also its trivialities. About heights and depths listeners tell a lot in the interviews – what makes a good sermon, what leaves one disappointed, when a sermon really touches one, or how one feels about mediocre preaching. One of the trivialities, however, is as obvious as it is unnoticed: If every sermon is part of a larger pattern of preaching, so is listening to the sermon. The regular listener to sermons experiences worship and preaching as a practice. One of the aspects of practices is that they consists of regularly recurring activities. As James Nieman puts it, “[p]ractices are common by existing in and across time. ... The regular and repeated performance of practices offers a way for individuals to display who they truly are in relation to others.”²⁷ As preaching continues through time, so does listening. It is a complex task to look into this practice-dimension in empirical research. Asking about preaching as such gives abstract or general answers in interviews; but an interview about one particular sermon gives an impression that is too incidental. For the analysis of conversations with listeners, we have to focus on

25 McClure, J.S. et al., *Listening to Listeners*, 43-45.

26 McClure, J.S. et al., *Listening to Listeners*, 61.

27 Nieman, J. 2008. Why the Idea of Practice Matters. In: T Long & L Tubbs Tisdale. *Teaching Preaching as a Christian Practice: A New Approach to Homiletical Pedagogy*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 22-24.

those utterances in which listeners express aspects of the *practice* of listening. One aspect that points to continuity through time could be what I have called “anamnetic listening”.²⁸ Listeners report that they need to hear the gospel again. They tell that preaching helps to support them in their Christian lives or to encourage them to keep in touch with the Christian story. The way sermons work on a deeper level goes beyond recognising whether the sermon connects to the lives of listeners or whether they are able to create meaning from it. As one of the listeners declared: “You need Christ. That message should be told over and over again.” The idea expressed in this sentence occurs in multiple ways. Take, for instance, how listeners in the *Listening to Listeners* project talk about the purposes of preaching.²⁹ Aspects such as “explaining the Bible”, “deepening the relationship with Christ” and a listener saying “I’m proud that our preacher *every Sunday* issues somewhere in that sermon a gospel call” [emphasis mine – TP], point toward a dimension in listening that concerns both continuity and the remembering of the gospel and the bigger biblical narrative. It resembles the anamnetic dimension in Holy Communion; we keep remembering Christ and the Word of God. Hearing sermons, therefore, has longer “duration” than just as it would have had as just a series of highly illuminative moments. This aspect of listening is connected to the bigger story of the Christian faith and the practice that listeners participate in binds them to those who went before and those who will follow them. It connects the listener to a much broader community of faith than his or her local congregation. Hearing sermons is like tuning into a conversation that is going on from for ages and shall continue for ages to come, forever. It roots the individual listener’s experience in a bigger communal framework of salvation history.

Preaching as pastoral communication?

Listening to a sermon is a very personal activity. Yet, the three concepts above show that the preaching event also assumes, creates and sustains relationships. These relationships concern the present body of believers as “third-person listening” demonstrates. In listening to the sermon, connections are created between listeners and these connections have a caring dimension: listeners share life stories or they wish for other churchgoers to have a redeeming listening-experience. Preaching can also help listeners to connect to the larger Christian story. This has two sides: (1) Anamnetic listening points to the phenomenon where listeners reconnect to their own connection to the Biblical narrative. Anthropologically, anamnetic listening is the connection of the listener to his or her own religious self: I need to hear again about Christ, I need to hear again these stories from the Bible. The sermon is not a source for “new” information, it is also a source for renewal and transformation of the self. This is not to be equated with the connection listeners make with their own life stories. This reconnection to the religious self functions as a means to remain faithful. The assumption is that when one does not hear this over and over again, one is in danger of losing one’s religious self. The sermon, therefore, is a means for listeners to care for their own souls, to maintain their religious identities in feeling connected to the larger Christian story. (2) Experiencing a common faith connects the listener to the religious identity of this particular community (congregation) (“This is why I come to this church”), but is also understood by the listener in a much broader sense, namely this is what we believe as Christians. Homiletic literature uses notions like “witness” or “confession” when referring to this phenomenon. Preachers are custodians of a mystery that is at the heart of the Christian faith and every sermon is a means to help the community of faith to enjoy the gospel and to stand in awe of it. Thus, besides being an opportunity for listeners to maintain their religious identities in reconnecting to the Christian story, preaching is also a place where a common religious identity is cared for. These aspects of preaching, that the sermon assumes a common identity and

28 Pleizier, *Religious Involvement*, 257-261.

29 McClure, J.S. et al., *Listening to Listeners*, Volume “Believing in Preaching”, Chapter 1.

takes care of it; that the sermon creates caring relationships between listeners; and that the sermon cares for the listener in that it may sustain his or her religious self, provide a new understanding of preaching as pastoral communication.

Discussion and perspectives for research

The three indicators of communal religious meanings could be used as conceptual hypotheses to broaden the area of sermon reception research. Methodically, secondary analysis³⁰ may be helpful in exploring the boundaries of existing research. I may, for an example, look an interview fragment from an empirical project conducted in Denmark and published by Marianne Gaarden and Marlene Ringgaard Lorensen, which may be similar to my own research. They refer to a listening experience of a 46-year-old inmate, accustomed to going to church:

Sometimes ... I move into another story about how the text actually is supposed to be understood. Sometimes I feel like I am in contact with those who wrote it [and it is as if they are saying]: "Hey listen, this might be what the text says, but that's not how it should be understood."³¹

This listener creates a dialogue between the sermon and the way she or he got used to understanding the Bible. The authority of Scripture is put into relational language. His conversation not only includes the tradition she or he has been raised in, but she or he feels that it even creates a virtual dialogue with the biblical writers themselves! It makes one realise that the dialogue with the sermon has communal aspects that go beyond individual life experience. Comparing empirical data to concepts that have emerged in the field create new avenues for reflection and broadens the scope of research. Analysing data from different angles challenges our paradigms, brings in new perspectives, and creates ample opportunities for researchers to discuss methods, approaches and theoretical views. Broadening the study of sermon *listeners* to sermon *listening* and to the *listening community* enables one to explore the rich field of sermon reception research in more detail and with more nuances. It also opens up possibilities to relate homiletics to other fields such as communication studies, psychology of religion and pastoral care.

30 Whiteside, M.; Mills, J. & McCalman, J. 2012. Using Secondary Data for Grounded Theory Analysis. *Australian Social Work*, 65(4): 504-516. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0312407X.2011.645165>

31 Gaarden & Lorensen, *Listeners as Authors*.

Preaching in Urban Spaces – Observations on the Dialogue between Urban Sociology, Urban Theology and Homiletics

20

Ruth Conrad¹

Cities are strategic locations in societies and places of great dynamism. Social changes become especially obvious in cities. Different developments are superimposed upon each other and they form heterogeneous spaces and create lasting paradoxes. Whenever one reflects on the promise of Christian preaching for the twenty-first century, one must take the urban paradoxes in account, because increasing global urbanisation with its economic, ecological, political, social and religious consequences is one of the greatest transformations of the incipient century² and a core structural element of the modern lifeworld. If one takes “lifeworld” to mean the context in which Christian faith has its place, then urbanisation constitutes a “systemic feature of significance for modernity”, whose “effects on the inner situation of the religious consciousness”³ are therefore of considerable importance for the sermon. A detailed analysis of the phenomenon of urbanisation is therefore a key factor in describing the “homiletic situation” and its social dimension. I wish to discuss this context in three sections. (1) The homiletic situation as a social situation – or, the sociological perspective in the homiletic process. This section establishes the methodological foundations of the essay and its position in the history of research. (2) The reception of the social and religious paradoxes of the city in homiletics around 1900. This second step takes a detailed look at developments around 1900 because parallels have been drawn in urban studies between the urbanisation of Europe in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the current global developments.⁴ I think that the discourse on the urbanization paradoxes of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, as well as the opportunities and challenges for homiletics and preaching at that time can give the current discussions about an urban homiletic more depth. (3) Challenges and contours of a contemporary urban homiletics. Here I will relate the historical-systematic perspectives and the categories derived from these to contemporary homiletic issues.

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2 *The Habitat Agenda* from 1996 states that “rapid urbanization, the concentration of the urban population in large cities, the sprawl of cities into wider geographical areas and the rapid growth of megacities are among the most significant transformations of human settlements. ... Urban areas will strongly influence the world of the twenty-first century, and urban and rural populations will be increasingly interdependent for their economic, environmental and social wellbeing. Among the economic and social factors influencing this process are population growth and voluntary and involuntary migration, real and perceived employment opportunities, cultural expectations, changing consumption and production patterns and serious imbalances and disparities among regions.” See *The Habitat Agenda Goals and Principles, Commitments and the Global Plan of Action*. Online at: <http://unhabitat.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/The-Habitat-Agenda-Goals-and-Principles-Commitments-and-the-Global-Plan-of-Action-2003.pdf>; Nr. 99 (Accessed: 27 May 2016).

3 Barth, U. 2003. Säkularisierung und Moderne. Die soziokulturelle Transformation der Religion [Secularisation and Modernity. Socio-cultural Transformation of Religion]. In: U Barth (Hrsg.), *Religion in der Moderne*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 127-165, (146).

4 Cf. Davis, M. 2006. *Planet of Slums*. London/New York: Verso, 11.

The sociological perspective in the homiletic process, or, the homiletic situation as social situation

The term “homiletic situation” was coined when it became unclear how sermons should react to the specific challenges presented by the big city – around 1900 and again in the late 1960s and 1970s, especially by Ernst Lange (1927-1974).⁵ Lange uses this succinct formula to describe the situation in which both listeners and preachers find themselves; the situation which calls forth the sermon and to which the sermon refers. Lange suggests two main methods for obtaining a better understanding of this situation. First, the personal situation of the listeners in the local area must be considered, taking into account their socio-economic and psychological circumstances. For this the preacher needs both psychological and sociological knowledge as well as a willingness to actively participate in the listeners’ lifeworld.⁶ Second, this knowledge of a particular community is deepened by “knowledge of the social field of forces and relationships in which the listener is located”, i.e. the macro-economic and political conditions. Thus, both the “local situation” and the “broader homiletic climate” play their part here.⁷

With this approach, Lange revisits ideas from practical theology around 1900. Especially relevant here is the programme of the “modern sermon” (“moderne Predigt”), as developed by theologians such as Friedrich Niebergall (1866-1932), Otto Baumgarten (1858-1934), Paul Drews (1859-1912) and Martin Schian (1869-1944).⁸

The starting point was the perception of a decline in the public importance of the church and the sermon. This loss of public relevance was partly blamed on the church’s lack of knowledge on real life and real living conditions. The programme of the “modern sermon” was, therefore, linked to a fundamental methodological change in practical theology, the first “empirical turn”. The idea was that practical theology would in future “be conducted in a more descriptive-inductive than systematic-deductive manner.”⁹ For this purpose, practical theology was expanded to include disciplines based on empirical methods – the psychology of religion, religious ethnology, and Protestant church studies. The psychology of religion investigated the individual, psychologically-describable conditions in which faith was constituted and the forms in which it was exercised. Religious ethnology and church studies examined the socio-cultural conditions of these processes.

These “descriptive-inductive” methods had two focal points: first, statistical data was interrogated for possible causalities. Second, methodological categories such as “observation”, “perception” and “description” became crucial. Here the emphasis was less on methodological rigour than on social and religious perceptual sensitivity. Or, in the words of Ernst Lange, “participation”.

Practical theology around 1900 developed its investigative approach on the basis of the social and religious consequences of urbanisation. This will be examined more closely below. At this point, however, it is worth taking a look at the urban sociology of the time, as there are interesting methodological analogies to be found here. In the winter of 1899/1900, after his studies and a long period of work as a reporter, Robert Ezra Park (1864-1944), one of the main proponents of the

5 Cf. Kubik, A. 2011. Was ist eine homiletische Situation? [What is a homiletic situation?] *International Journal of Practical Theology*, 15:94-115. <https://doi.org/10.1515/ijpt.2011.028>

6 Lange, E. 1976. Zur Theorie und Praxis der Predigtarbeit [Theory and Practice of Preaching]. In: *E. Lange. Predigen als Beruf. Aufsätze*. R. Schloz (Hrsg.), München: Kaiser, 9-51, (37).

7 Lange, *Theorie und Praxis*, 37f.

8 See, e.g. Gräb, W. 1996. Die Predigt liberaler Theologen um 1900 [Preaching of Liberal Theologians around 1900]. In: FW Graf & HM Müller (Hrsg.), *Der deutsche Protestantismus um 1900*. Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 103-130.

9 Drews, P. 1901. “Religiöse Volkskunde”, eine Aufgabe der praktischen Theologie [Religious Ethnology – a Challenge for Practical Theology]. *Monatsschrift für die kirchliche Praxis*, 1:1-8, (1).

Chicago School of Sociology, visited Berlin. There he attended lectures by Georg Simmel, whose description of the social character of city dwellers – with the terms *Distanziertheit* (detachment or reserve), *Gleichgültigkeit* (indifference) and *Blasiertheit* (a blasé outlook or attitude) – is considered crucial to the epoch.¹⁰ In 1903, Park obtained his doctorate in Heidelberg, where figures such as Max Weber and Ernst Troeltsch were active at the time, as was the above-mentioned practical theologian, Friedrich Niebergall. After his return, Park initially moved into politics, before taking up a permanent position at the University of Chicago. There he established a method that, based on the “experience of reportage”,¹¹ focused on the ethnographic study of the concrete lifeworlds of different social groups and milieus. Everyday life, forms of community and the social interaction of specific groups in the city were described and analysed (“core ethnographies”). The central elements were exploration (on foot), observation (“the art of looking”), conversations and detailed mental notes (“As one walks ...”).

*“Go into the district”, “get the feeling”, “Become acquainted with people”: the fundamental premise of Chicago sociology is contained in these instructions, banal as they seem to us today, to leave the study rooms and go out on to the uncertain terrain of “real life”.*¹²

Here one finds linguistic and methodological parallels to the approach taken in practical theology. Niebergall, for example, demanded “awareness of what is really real, with a never-ending removal of all blindfolds.”¹³ And a student said of Park:

*Robert Park had told Allan that he was an intelligent young man with closed eyes. Allan was working at getting them open, but it was hard to satisfy Mr. Park. Around the seminar table, whenever Allan or some of the other graduate students ventured an opinion, they risked having Mr. Park look at them owl-eyed and inquire, “Vas you dere, Cholly?”*¹⁴

The approach was also referred to as “lifting the veil”.¹⁵ And the method is similar to the participation called for by Lange.¹⁶

Psychology and sociology, and participation in the style of the ethnographies were the methodological references cited to describe the “homiletic situation”.

If contemporary homiletics and the contemporary sermon in Germany are considered from this perspective, an interesting observation can be made. This is that images of the listener are largely constructed using categories from psychology or the psychology of religion. The concern here is the “inner” person. There is much less inclination to ask questions that might broadly be termed sociological or in particular “micro-economic”. In other words, questions about issues of the “broader homiletic climate”, such as world peace, the impending environmental crisis, or global, social injustices. Instead questions are asked about the immediate social environment, questions such as: In what family constellations do the listeners live? What are their occupations? How much

10 Simmel, G. 1964. The Metropolis and Mental Life. *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*. Transl. and ed. KH Wolff. New York: The Free Press, 409ff.

11 Cf. Lindner, R. 1996. *The Reportage of Urban Culture. Robert Park and the Chicago School*. Tr. Adrian Morris. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

12 Lindner, *Reportage*, 2.

13 Niebergall, F. 1909. *Wie predigen wir dem modernen Menschen?* [How to Preach the Modern Human?]. Erster Teil. Eine Untersuchung über Motive und Quietive. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 101.

14 Lindner, *Reportage*, 10f.]

15 See Lindner, R. 2004. *Walks on the Wild Side. Eine Geschichte der Stadtforschung*. [Walks on the Wild Side. A History of Urban Research]. Frankfurt/New York: Campus, 116.

16 Cf. König, R. 1984. Soziologie und Ethnologie [Sociology and Cultural Anthropology]. *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*. Special Issue 26: Ethnologie als Sozialwissenschaft, 36-68, 17-35, 24. In ethnology, according to König, participant observation is “not the quiet observation that looks ahead to see how best to approach its object; here nothing is foreseeable, indeed the crucial skill of the observer is to let himself be surprised.”

do they earn? What do they have to spend their earnings on? How high are their rents? Do they have debts? What level education do they have and on what educational pathways have they acquired it? Do they live in areas with urban or rural structures? Do they have a house or a flat?

Here there is evidence of a split between individual faith, on the one hand, and the social background of the individual, on the other. As a result, religious and social elements often remain separated in homiletics.¹⁷ The preacher projects his own experience onto others, unintentionally generating a kind of middle-class homiletics. The ever-present interaction and interpenetration of religious and social elements is at risk of becoming homiletically invisible.

This, however, was exactly the methodological starting point, around 1900, for discussions about the specific homiletic challenges reflected in the city. The general process of social modernisation and the religious and social paradoxes arising in this process were discussed within an overall focus on urban phenomena. And from here, they became part of homiletics.

The reception of the social and religious paradoxes of the city in homiletics around 1900

It was the social question and its religious consequences that initiated the above-mentioned empirical turn in practical theology and homiletics. Industrialisation led to a substantial (domestic) migration to cities with industrial production sites and jobs. In combination with a strong population growth, there was an enormous growth of cities.¹⁸ Industrialisation and urbanisation led to considerable social distortions. The social question is an urban issue. Especially the issue of housing became one of the “most urgent and pressing problems of working life.”¹⁹ Public segregation and disintegration made the social costs of the industrial transformation processes visible. Various milieus with their own cultural and religious codes developed: the workers, the economic and educated bourgeoisie and the emerging middle classes, especially white collar workers.²⁰ The ambivalence of wealth and poverty, of advancement and dependence, characterised life in the city.

This development had a direct effect on religious and church life in Germany. The Protestant church was not successful in securing the long-term integration of industrial workers. The church largely lost the working classes. One of the reasons for this was the close connection between the church and the ruling classes. This alienation between the working class and the church is reflected, for example, in the number of people officially leaving the church. In Berlin, according to Paul Drews, around 17,000 workers left the church between 1906 and 1908, 10,000 of them in 1908 alone.²¹ Another reason suggested for this is that people moving from the country to the city tend to lose their religion in the process. In rural contexts, church membership and attendance of church services were always partly a matter of custom, habit, social obligation and mutual control. In the city, this tradition lost its hold on people.²²

17 Cf. Tisdale, L.T. 1997. *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 19: “While contemporary homiletics has not ignored the listeners in the preaching event, preaching texts have tended to focus more attention upon the universals of human experience or upon the psychological needs and filters individual hearers bring to the preaching event, than they have upon congregations as corporate communities with distinctive subcultural identities.”

18 For the heterogeneity of urbanisation in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century-Europe see, e.g., McLeod, H (ed.). 1997. *European Religion in the Age of Great Cities 1830-1930*. London/New York: Routledge.

19 Nipperdey, T. (1990) 1998. *Deutsche Geschichte. 1866-1918*. [German History. 1866-1918]. Vol. 1: Arbeitswelt und Bürgergeist. München: C.H Beck, 313.

20 See Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte*, 374f.

21 Drews, P. 1909. Die Kirche und der Arbeiterstand [The church and the working class]. In: *Die Verhandlungen des zwanzigsten Evangelisch-sozialen Kongresses, abgehalten in Heilbronn, vom 1. bis 3. Juni 1909*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 106-129, (106).

22 See, e.g., Niebergall, *Wie predigen wir*, 104.

At the same time, however, the church was losing contact with the urban educational and cultural elites. These groups cultivated a form of religiosity outside the church and outside of its content and forms. The rise of religious pluralisation was also causing problems for the church. New actors were entering the religious market of the city, undermining the church's dominance – free churches, religious societies and so on. The pluralisation of religious-cultural forms of expression and the increasingly diverse forms of community became constitutive of urban religiosity. In the city, people could choose services and preachers, in the country they could not.

The programme of “modern homiletics” should be understood as a reaction to the increasingly diverse and paradoxical nature of urban lifeworlds. To understand the specific nature of this programme, it is helpful to consider two differentiations made by its proponents. In my opinion, it is these two differentiations that make the programme interesting and relevant even today.

First: Differentiation between sermons in terms of their intention and form

The plurality of the city demands a plurality of sermon intentions and forms. I will briefly present the three most important types:²³

The *social sermon* was directly concerned with the socio-economic situation of the industrial workers. This type of sermon can be roughly divided into three patterns of theological argument:

1. In the tradition of an ethical “Kingdom of God” concept, critical positions were adopted towards economic and socio-political developments and calls were made for structural reforms. A noteworthy exponent is Friedrich Naumann (1860-1919), who evoked the above-mentioned issue of housing in prayer services.²⁴
2. Usually, however, the sermon was meant to encourage a social ethos and a focus on the common good. In other words, no socio-political positioning, especially no affiliation with social democracy and a strict separation of religion and politics. At the same time, however, there was an emphasis on the fact that the gospel also has a social dimension. The preacher, it was argued, must “not proceed in an abstract, individualistic way, he must not leave social sins uncensured, he must announce the gospel as the power which, while unable to resolve the social *questions*, can nonetheless give the courage to resolve the social *question*.”²⁵
3. Usually, however, the social question was recoded into a religious question. Because social deprivation was an indication of spiritual deprivation, the main concern was to turn baptised but unbelieving church members into true Christians. The social sermon then becomes “a variation on the individual sermon on faith and repentance.”²⁶

23 See, e.g., Schian, M. (1904) 2012. *Neuzeitliche Predigtideale* [Modern ideals of preaching]. In: R Conrad & M Weeber (Hrsg.), *Protestantische Predigtlehre. Eine Darstellung in Quellen*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 137-156.

24 See for example his meditation on Isaiah 5:8: “Of course Isaiah was speaking from his time, and for his contemporaries, and it would be quite possible for his ‘woe to you’ to have lost its relevance today. But the conscience of any person with a strong moral sense says, in this case, that Isaiah is right. He is right, because even today there are people living among us for whom ‘there is no more room’. This restriction of space is a violation of life. See how pale the children are who grow up in cramped hovels! ... Oh come, Isaiah, rise from your stony grave and help us, who are living today, in the fight against injustice! Our preachers should not preach politics, but should illuminate real life with the light of God. Often it seems as though murder, adultery and theft were the only sins worth fighting against. But what about greed? What about the selfish exploitation of God's natural gifts? Does no prophet have anything more to say here?” Naumann, F. 1907. *Gotteshilfe. Gesamtausgabe der Andachten aus den Jahren 1895-1902* [God's Help. All Sermons from 1895-1902]. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

25 Schian, *Predigtideale*, 139f. Here a comparison with “Christian” or “evangelical” sociology in the area of urban sociology around 1900 would be interesting. So-called “Big C” sociology was also defined by moral preconceptions in the description of the city. In keeping with this, the main themes were Charity, Crime and Correction. Here too, there was a danger of mixing social reform with moral education.

26 Wintzer, F. 1990. *Evangelische Predigt seit dem ersten Drittel des 19. Jahrhunderts* [Protestant Preaching from the First Third of the Nineteenth Century]. In: K Elm & H-D Loock (Hrsg.), *Seelsorge und Diakonie in Berlin. Beiträge zum Verhältnis von Kirche und Großstadt im 19. und beginnenden 20. Jahrhundert*. Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 293-306, (299).

Revival sermons were part of a programme based on the conviction that social problems can only be lastingly overcome if society as a whole returns to Christianity. Until then, the revived faith helps people to bear earthly injustice as something given by God. Behind the programme of the revival sermon is a fundamentally wary attitude to the city. For the revivalist and penitential sermon, the city is the expression (and the distillation) of modern phenomena of decadence and decline. The countryside is the place of true religiosity and attachment to the church.

Paul Drews, as an advocate of the “modern sermon”, suspected that it was this kind of sermon that was helping to alienate workers from the church.

*If one had encountered a Christianity that had perhaps preached less passivity, more activity, then the question is whether the hatred of Christianity would have been so strident, so fierce and so drastic at the outset, and would have become so firmly entrenched.*²⁷

The origins of the revival sermon lie in English Methodism. The proponents of the “modern sermon” basically approved of its intentions. However, they rejected its “Americanising” form and its purely external connection with the modern lifeworld, combined with simultaneous theological rejection of this world: “All aspects of modernity are used: manner of speaking, style, city life, science, railways, and a thousand other things. But how are they used? Merely as illustrative, allegorical material for the revelation of inner, spiritual truths.” The “modern sermon”, however, aimed not just to latch onto or make use of modern thinking and modern life; it wanted to permeate them with religion. In short, it was not modernity that was to be made religious again, but religion that was to be made modern. It was not the city that was to become Christian, but the Christian faith that was to become urban. Otherwise religion would remain “an island, cut off from real, practical life”.²⁸

The *apologetic sermon* was a response to the pluralisation of religions, world views and scholarly discourses found in the modern city. It aimed at justifying the Christian faith and its claims to truth in the modern discourse on truth.²⁹ It too was often defined by ideas of integration and homogeneity which were critical of modernity and highly moralistic.

As well as this differentiation between intentions, and thus the manner in which content was developed and structured, a further distinction was made in the programme of “modern homiletics”.

Second: Differences in the situation of the congregation

What is meant by this? The congregation was meant to be perceived as a historical entity. The sermon is given in a concrete historical situation and not in an ahistorical vacuum. The truth of the Christian faith is always encountered in a particular historical situation. Proponents of the “modern sermon”, therefore, argued that the sermon does not announce eternal truths that are opposed to modern life, but takes a more joyful position towards modern spiritual life and permeates its own time with religion.

Admittedly, “the congregation today” is still too abstract a formula.

The important thing is not to see the congregation merely as a congregation of our time in general; nor is it simply a matter of studying the “modern consciousness”; instead we need to address this particular congregation, indeed these particular classes, these particular members of the congregation, in such a way that the Word has an effect on them in particular.

²⁷ Drews, *Kirche und Arbeiterstand*, 111.

²⁸ Schian, *Predigtideale*, 141.

²⁹ *Ibid.* p. 138f.

That a village preacher – properly understood! – must deliver village sermons, and a city preacher – again cum grano salis! – city sermons, this needs to be discussed here.³⁰

Thus the congregation belongs not only to a specific time, but also to a specific place, for example, the city.

However, not all city congregations are the same. Urban lifestyles vary. The social stratification is diverse. The religious questions and the social challenges are not uniform. If the congregation, in its specific socio-cultural and thus always unique form, is the point of orientation of the sermon, then there can no longer be any general theory of the sermon. There is only ever the concrete, local specific case. The consequence of the urbanisation and pluralisation of social and religious lifeworlds is that “the age of the universally valid theory and practice of preaching is over.”³¹

This suppression of the universal or general in favour of the local and particular also places a higher premium on the person of the preacher. Everything depends on his/her social perceptiveness, his/her willingness to participate, and his/her own religious experience. S/he must be convincing as a person. Just as there is no substitute for the specific congregation in the sermon, the same goes for the individual preacher. Homiletics holds up the individual congregation and the personally convincing speaker against the city as a phenomenon of mass and complexity.

Specific and concrete intentions, a focus on the individual congregation and a valorisation of the preacher’s personality – these are homiletic perspectives that crystallised in response to urban paradoxes around 1900. What fruit do they bear today? Where and how can they be further developed and adapted? I will now look for these categories in contemporary homiletics, developed in Germany in response to nineteenth and twentieth century urbanisation. And, I want to connect the specific perspectives of the German-language homiletics and the Liberal Theology with the international homiletic discourses.

Challenges and contours of contemporary urban homiletics

One may begin, once again, with the social paradoxes. Current global urbanisation is determined by various factors: The migration of the industrial sector away from Western European and American cities (now called post-industrial cities) to the new industrial production locations in the mega-cities of the Third World; the neoliberal economic paradigm, i.e., the deregulation of the financial services sector; privatization of public functions and services such as social housing market for immigrants and poorer groups (segregation)³² and increase of informal ties in employment systems. The social paradoxes in the city may prove to be one of the decisive future issues of humanity. This is why Pope Francis has declared the re-evangelization of the cities, combined with advocacy for the poor, to be one of the central tasks of Christianity. “Just as the commandment ‘Thou shalt not kill’ sets a clear limit in order to safeguard the value of human life, we also have to say ‘thou shalt not’ to an economy of exclusion and inequality.” Because of the exclusion, those people “are no longer

30 Ibid. p. 151.

31 Niebergall, F.1917. *Wie predigen wir dem modernen Menschen?* Zweiter Teil. Eine Untersuchung über den Weg zum Willen [How to Preach the Modern Human?]. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 80.

32 See Smith, N. 2002. New Globalism, New Urbanism: Gentrification as Global Urban Strategy. In: N Brenner and N Theodore (eds), *Spaces of Neoliberalism. Urban Restructuring in North America and Western Europe*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 80-103. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8330.00249>

society's underside or its fringes or its disenfranchised – the are no longer even a part of it. The excluded are not the 'exploited' but the outcast, the 'leftovers'.³³

Thus today's urban sermon is once again a social sermon. Preaching, therefore, needs a theory of moral leadership as advocacy. Sermons have to stand up for the most vulnerable parts of city population. Stanley P Saunders and Charles L Campbell have tried to show what changes occur to Christian teachings if they are not read from the perspective of rich suburbanites, but from that of impoverished, excluded and homeless city-dwellers.³⁴ They leave the office and spend time among the homeless people and teach on city streets in Atlanta. Here the preacher's participation in the lifeworld of the listeners is free from hierarchical tendencies. This is not about pastoral "means of stabilizing authority over events or over the people affected", but about "the opening of a new world and the 'astonishment' that is necessarily associated with this."³⁵ According to the Lutheran understanding, the speaker's legitimacy cannot be derived from his social and economic standing. Instead, his willingness to participate in advocacy explains his personal charisma and justifies his moral leadership.

This, however, brings a second aspect into play: the participation of the preacher cannot be global or general. It is always local and therefore specific. It relates to the specific congregation, in its particular place. Even if urbanisation is a global trend, its specific homiletic form is always local. Urban Homiletics is a kind of local homiletics. Sermons need to consider the specific social set-up of the congregation. Every city, every district, every congregation has – even in the global age – its own spirit.³⁶ There is, therefore, no alternative to nuanced single-case analysis – in homiletics as in other disciplines.³⁷ The "inner logic of the cities" justifies the "inner logic" of every sermon. In short: think globally, preach locally. Leonora Tubbs Tisdale summed this up as follows:

Even among four congregations of similar size, located in the same geographical region and appearing (on the surface) to be similar in makeup, the pastor can encounter four very diverse subcultural idioms and ways of viewing and responding to the world. ... Pastoring four churches is a lot like having four children or (to use a less maternalistic image) four friends – each with his or her own distinctive personality.³⁸

The sermon is a contextual speech, the result of "participant observation", and the preacher is, as it were, an ethnographer of the congregation.

Then, however, the preacher may be forced to revise his own view of things. Preachers from mainline churches, according to Tisdale, often "value intellectual acumen, a liberal socio-political stance, competitive achievement, and a passive/dependent relationship between students and teacher." But, then they come "into a parish setting in which practical skills, a conservative socio-political stance, collaboration in working with others, and a strong leadership style are valued."³⁹

33 Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* of the Holy Father Francis to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful on the Proclamation of the Gospel in today's World. Online at: <http://www.vatican.va/evangelii-gaudium/en/files/assets/basic-html/index.html> No. 53 (Accessed: 27 May 2016).

34 See Saunders, S.P. & Campbell, C.L. 2000. *The Word on the Street. Performing the Scriptures in the Urban Context*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock.

35 König, *Soziologie und Ethnologie*, 26.

36 See Bell, D.A. & De-Shalit, A (eds). *The Spirit of Cities. Why the Identity of a City Matters in a Global Age*. Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press.

37 See Berger, P. 1999. *The Desecularization of the World. Resurgent Religion and World Politics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B Eerdmans, 18.

38 Tisdale, *Preaching*, 16.

39 Tisdale, *Preaching*, 8.

As a contextual, local sermon, then, this is always a form of intercultural communication as well. Urban Homiletics includes a theory of cross-cultural communication. Sermons have to take into account that different kinds of Christian communities, worship-practices and beliefs come together in modern cities and sometimes within one and the same congregation.

But it is not only within the congregation that the sermon has to mediate socio-cultural differences. As a public speech, it is also always part of the public discourse and dispute between religions which characterises the city. It is a form of public theology. Homiletics thus includes a theory of religious tolerance. Sermons need to respect other religions and at the same time need to be firmly rooted in the Christian faith. The question of tolerance in public religious speech becomes particularly relevant in situations of religious and ideological pluralism. And perhaps the programme of the apologetic sermon is not as outmoded as it seems, if it is conceptually linked with the idea of tolerance. Tolerance, after all, “does not [mean] the avoidance of argument or the avoidance of conflict; instead tolerance regulates the argument and the conflict. ... Tolerance is an ethos.”⁴⁰ Also a homiletic ethos. As a contribution to the public discourse of religions, a sermon in the spirit of tolerance serves to publicly ease the tensions arising from plurality and different claims to truth. It is the public expression of a theology that is focused on and capable of dialogue. Thus the (re-)establishment of Christian hegemony cannot be the aim of a sermon focused on public peace-making.

So an urban homiletics aimed at tolerance is an answer to what the urban sociologist Nezar AlSayyad has described – not altogether unproblematically – as the “fundamentalist city”.⁴¹ What he means is cities that exclude inhabitants with religious-ethnic dispositions different from those of the majority; cities that demand a high degree of conformity to the majority religion; cities that interfere in the private lives of their inhabitants, and are dominated by men in the public sphere. For all its one-sidedness, the concept heightens the awareness of the challenges facing a liberal urban homiletics: it is anti-fundamentalist, anti-authoritarian, tolerant of plurality, and contains an element of religious criticism – distinguishing as it does between problematic forms of religion and good, beneficial forms.

This brings me to my conclusion: a contemporary urban homiletics in the tradition of liberal theology cannot – as shown by the historical overview and the insights into the current situation – take an anti-urban approach. Theology and the sermon need to “penetrate” the social and religious paradoxes of the city. There are two models for this. These are not alternatives, but complement each other. *First*, homiletics must be in dialogue with those theologies that arise and become established in urban contexts (urban theology). Chris Shannahan recently offered an empirical reconstruction of five such concepts: urban liberation theology, urban black theology, reformist urban theology, globalisation urban theology and post-religious urban theology.⁴² This then offers a starting point for further discussion of the homiletic connection between the image of the church, the concept of the congregation, the social-urban lifeworld and the intention behind the sermon. Urban theology could be the link between urban sociology and homiletics. *Second*, this means that homiletics also needs a theology of the city. In other words, it needs a theological idea of the city, and an idea of what a good

40 Grözinger, A. 2004. *Toleranz und Leidenschaft. Über das Predigen in einer pluralistischen Gesellschaft* [Tolerance and Passion. Preaching in a Pluralistic Society]. Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 140.

41 See AlSayyad, N. 2011. The Fundamentalist City? In: N AlSaayad & N Massoumi (eds). *The Fundamentalist City? Religiosity and the Remaking of Urban Space*. London/New York: Routledge, 3-26.

42 Shannahan, C. *Voices from the Borderland. Re-Imagining Cross-cultural Urban Theology in the Twenty-first Century*. London/New York: Routledge.

life in the city might be. Based on the cities of the Western world, Philip Sheldrake recently proposed just such a theology of the city.

The meaning and future of cities is arguably one of the most important and challenging issues of our time. As we shall see, there is a widespread sense that we need some kind of compelling urban vision that moves us beyond the limitations of a purely instrumental or utilitarian response to the issue.

A vision means

... a sense that the human city is, or can be, more than an efficient socioeconomic mechanism or convenient but impersonal administrative system conceived by policy-makers and shaped by detached urban planning. In other words, if we accept the need for vision we inevitably point towards frameworks of values based upon some kind of worldview, an understanding of human existence and a horizon of ultimacy.⁴³

In this double interconnection, the sermon can be conceptualised as a discursive contribution to the construction of the socio-cultural space of the “city” and can take effect as such. The city is then no longer merely the pre-existing space to which the sermon responds. Instead it is the product and the producer of the spatialisation of social and religious paradoxes, in which public religious speech has always played a part.

43 Sheldrake, P. 2014. *The Spiritual City. Theology, Spirituality, and the Urban*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118830475>

The Emerging Life within Preaching Experienced from the Pew – Paradox or Promise?

21

Marianne Gaarden¹

It is often taken for granted in homiletic discourse and literature that the preachers' role is to provide an understanding of the gospel to listeners at a semantic and cognitive level. How can the preacher proclaim the gospel so that the congregation understands God's promise within the paradoxes of life? What can the preacher say from the pulpit in order to make the churchgoers come to an adequate understanding of who God is, what Gods offers and requires of us, or how God operates in this complex world full of paradoxes and suffering? How can the preacher make the congregation comprehend the good news of the gospel in a sermon? Or, in essence, how can the preacher make the community understand the gospel? It is taken for granted that the preacher, like the teacher, can use words as a tool in order to create an understanding. But what if it is not the case?

Qualitative research investigating the processes of listening to sermons challenges some of the most commonly accepted homiletical/rhetorical axioms as the listeners' *understanding* of the gospel does not seem to be the that important.² From the perspective of the pew the preaching event is not primary about understanding the gospel or the sermon. The encounter between the listeners' inner experience and the preachers' outer words facilitates, what I call, a *third room* in which the listeners, in internal dialogue, create a surplus of meaning that was previously not present in either the preacher's intent or the listener's frame of reference. Thus, the semantic meaning is not embedded only in the preachers' words but is emerging from the entire situation. The preacher cannot control the production of meaning, but must rather surrender to the preaching event. Thus the preacher is not the creator or "carpenter" of the third room, but the third room is depended upon the preachers' willingness to serve as the tool.³

This emerging life within preaching can be viewed as a problem or a premise; a challenge or a relief; a paradox or a promise. After having spent so much time, making such an effort and working so hard to communicate your understanding, in the homiletical lecture or in the sermon – or writing

- 1 Marianne Gaarden serves as theological consultant and is responsible for the homiletic training of ministers in the diocese of Elsinore in the Church of Denmark.
- 2 Empirical studies in a Danish church tradition, influenced by dialectical theology, assuming that there is no such a thing as a point of contact between God and human, humans' experiences, has often been met with resistance. The core of the resistance is the assumed subjectivity embedded in the theological notion of no point of contact between human and God. But, the subsequent distinction between a theocentric and an anthropocentric perspective is ignoring the epistemological starting point that theological discourse is bound to human reasoning. By acknowledging our own participation in doing theology, the distinction between a theocentric and an anthropocentric perspective breaks down.
- 3 I primarily rely on the results of my PhD research entitled *Den emergente prædiken* (The emergent sermon), an empirical study of listening to sermons in the Danish Church – also to be found in Gaarden, M. 2015. *Prædiken som det tredje rum* (The Sermon as the third room). Frederiksberg: Anis. The results are compatible with the findings in a similar current research project "Forkynnelse for Små og Store" (Preaching to young and old) by a research group from MF Norwegian School of Theology in Oslo and of the comprehensive North American empirical study *Listening to the Listeners to Sermons Project*, under the leadership of Ronald Allen from 2001-2002.

this paper – it can very frustrating when one realises that communication is just not a transferal of meaning by a source sending a message through a channel to a receiver. I will, however, suggest that it constitutes a *premise*, a *relief* and a *promise* in a life full of problems, challenges and paradoxes. In this essay I explain why.

The liberating promise and the challenging premise of preaching⁴

Since Wittgenstein's statement in his philosophy of language that words do not have isolated meanings in themselves, but primarily in a *context*, the traditional notion of communication as a one-way transfer from an active speaker to passive listener has theoretically been deconstructed several times. In practice, however, the transfer model continues to be quite resistant, popping up everywhere in contemporary homiletics – probably because of the lack of an alternative communication model or a communication theology that fully explains the preaching event. The communication paradigm seems to be very persistent and hard to overcome in practice.

The results of empirical research on listening to sermons indicate, however, that the premise for preaching – and I will argue for teaching and lecturing as well – is that the speaker cannot transfer meaning to the listeners. Listeners interpret the speakers' words and create meanings in their process of reasoning. This process of meaning-making can, on one hand, not be controlled by the speaker. However, on the other hand, it is depended upon the speakers' person. To further explain this transfer model and its presupposed premises, I will refer to empirical research on how churchgoers listen to sermon.⁵

The ethos of the preacher

If I do not have sympathy with the preacher, the sermon can be good or bad, it does not make an impact upon me.

The most notable is that listeners attribute to the preacher a crucial role in their sermon and worship experience with reference to their experiences of the preacher's *authenticity* and *attitude* toward the listeners.⁶ The preacher is perceived as being authentic when s/he has integrity, is personally committed, engaging and true to her/his own faith. It does not seem to be so important whether the churchgoers can identify themselves with the preacher's theological perspective, faith or church tradition as the listeners do not take over the preacher's point of view. If the preacher has an open-mind, respectful and non-judgmental attitude towards the congregation it supports the listening

4 The inspiration behind my empirical research grew out of the listener-centered approach to preaching and listening embedded in The North American movement The New Homiletic and Other-wise preaching with their embedded sub-assumptions about the listening process. These assumptions are typically based on theoretical understandings that are articulated within a theory and then applied to interpreting the listener's experience. The traffic travels one way on the bridge of interpretation – the theory is used to explain what happens when people listen. However, the researcher seldom attends to what actually happens in the act of listening from the perspective of the listener. Indeed, for a whole generation Fred Craddock spoke about sermons being "open-ended" in order to allow the listener to draw out the meaning of the sermon. But, even Craddocks' inductive communication strategy presupposes that the preacher has the power to give the listener permission to create their own meaning. I argue that the preacher is not in possession power of assigning the listeners such freedom – they have that freedom in advance. Craddock and many of his theoretical successors are presupposing the transfer model – just in a more subtle way.

5 I also presented these findings briefly in a paper "The emerging sermon" presented at the Annual conference of the Academy of Homiletics in San Diego, USA in 2014.

6 I briefly touch upon the importance of the ethos of the preacher for the interaction with the listeners in Gaarder, M. 2013. *The Living Voice of the Gospel needs a Preacher. Viva Vox Evangelii – Reforming Preaching*. Studia Homiletica, 9. Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 181-192. A more extended analysis given in Danish in Gaarden, M. 2013. *Prædiken som subjektiv meningsproduktion. Forholdet mellem prædikant og kirkegænger* [The sermon as subjective production of meaning. The relation between preacher and churchgoer]. In: KH Johansen & JB Rønkilde (eds), *En gudstjeneste – mange perspektiver* [One worship – many perspectives]. Frederiksberg: Forlaget Anis, 111-142.

process, whether the listeners agree or not with the preacher's actual interpretation of the text. The preacher's theological stance and academic knowledge of course has impact on the churchgoers. However, these are subordinate to their desire for an authentic and committed preacher with an open-minded attitude toward them (the congregation). Theological skills and knowledge is appreciated as long as it is communicated in a way that is understandable for the churchgoers.⁷ Thus, the personal connection with the preacher is directly related to the impact of the sermon.

The reciprocal relationship between preacher and congregation

I can feel when the preacher has something at stake and is moved by the texts – then I'm moved too and dare to risk anything as well.

The experience of an attentive and authentic preacher activates an honest and authentic response within the listener. The churchgoers interviewed in the study I refer to here indicated that they are more likely to be moved when they sense that the preacher her/himself is moved by the text. Thus, the preacher's commitment and personal faith affect the listeners' commitment and interaction with the sermon. The preacher who invests in the sermon implicitly invites the churchgoers to do the same. While the listeners' understanding is beyond the preacher's control, it seems that the preacher's engagement and passion enables a reciprocal response from and relationship with the listeners.⁸

Listening as an internal dialogue

Listening is like descending into a reflexive room in which I have a dialogue with what is going on in the worship ... and why should I participate in that dialogue if the person communicating not speaks from his heart or have something on his mind?

The reciprocal relationship imbedded in the entire worship creates the frame for the listeners' interpretation of the content of the sermon. The listeners' understanding is based upon an internal dialogical interaction activated by the words of the sermon. The preacher can thus be described as an interlocutor, a theological reflector stimulating the internal dialogue. The inner dialogue is not only constituted by the preacher's voice, but can best be described as a polyphony of voices around themes from the listener's personal life. This dialogical interaction is constitutive of the churchgoers understanding and experience of the sermon. On the one hand, the preacher has no control over the listeners understanding of the sermon and, on the other hand, the preacher is stimulating this understanding.

Sometimes I exit into another story about how the text should be interpreted ... and I think that is how it should be understood.

I identified three different types of internal dialogue that I called associative, critical and contemplative interaction.⁹ These three different interactions rarely appear in isolation. Normally listeners dynamically move back and forth between the different kinds of interaction. Typically, the preacher's

7 It is worth noting that the minister's sex, age, appearance, number of years in the ministry or authority established through ministry were not topics discussed by the churchgoers.

8 The Listening to Listeners to Sermons Project produced similar results: They "discovered that sermon listeners hear more and hear better when they believe they can relate to their preacher in meaningful ways."

9 For a more detailed explanation of the three dialogical interactions see: Gaarden, M. & Ringgaard Lorensen, M. 2013. Listeners as Authors in Preaching – Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives. *Homiletic*, June. Online at: <http://www.homiletic.net/> (Accessed: 12 February 2016).

words activate associations within the listeners that they relate to their own life experiences and preconceptions.¹⁰ These associations are fundamental for the listeners' understanding. It is these associations that the churchgoers subsequently refer to when they talk about the sermon. Only to a limited extent do the churchgoers remember the actual words of the sermon. An interesting phenomenon found in associative interaction is that the worshippers themselves create new questions in their minds – although this may not have been the preacher's intention.¹¹

I also like when there are other ideas in the sermon, which I do not agree with, as it provides an opportunity for me to reflect.

The critical dialogue is activated when the preacher's interpretation and understanding of the text is not consistent with the listeners' interpretation of it. The clash between the words of the sermon and the churchgoers' inner convictions and pre-understandings activates a critical interaction giving birth to new understanding. It seems as if understanding and recognition comes to fruition in the critical response. A critical interaction is not at all identical with a negative perception of the preacher, or a lack of willingness to interact with the sermon. Rather, the churchgoers expressed that they appreciate being *disturbed* in their pre-understandings – for some churchgoers that even motivated them to attend the service! A preacher's different and, for the listener, challenging interpretation of the text is encouraging and stimulates the listeners' personal understanding by means of the critical dialogue.

It is as if I hear the words and I think I know what has been said, but afterwards I cannot remember anything.

The associative and the critical interactions seem to be the most frequent, or at least easiest to identify. There are, however, also indications of a third mode of interaction I called contemplative interaction. It seems to be difficult for the listeners to explain what happens during the sermon, because one dimension of what they are experiencing is merely a state of being without thought and beyond words. The listeners think they have heard the sermon, but they cannot recall what they heard. Typically they could respond: "I like the sermon, but I cannot remember it." In such instances, it is easier for listeners to explain what the contemplative interaction has done to them – leaving them with a sense of peace, relaxation, stillness and silence. From a phenomenological perspective, worship is full of words, text readings, hymns, prayers and, of course the sermon itself. So I interpret the silence the listeners as referring to referencing their state of being.

10 The research project in Norway made similar observations to that of the North American Listeners to Listeners of Sermon Project: "Listeners are prone to take even single words and phrases and place them alongside some ordinary experience in their everyday life. They are experimenting with a theological world and worldviews on the spot, trying on metaphors images and ideas like garments, adopting some and rejecting others."

11 The internal dialogue can be seen and interpreted in the light of Bakhtins' theories of dialogicity presented in Ringgaard Lorensen, M. 2014. *Dialogical preaching. Bakhtin, otherness and homiletics*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

The listeners' situated point of departure

The sermon only makes sense for me when the preacher relates to some things that I can recognise to from the life I live.

The churchgoers rarely identify with the preacher's interpretation of the text as they are situated in different contexts in front of the text and with different point of views.¹² The internal dialogue is based on the churchgoers' current life situation and personal experience, thus the starting point for the listening process and creation of meaning naturally is the listener's own life. The importance of the listener's current situation cannot be overemphasised in their understanding and interpretation of the biblical text.¹³

The sermon that is heard is merging with the life experiences that the listeners are bringing into church. The sermon can add something external that may confirm or move the churchgoers from their starting point, but in order to do so, the sermon needs to make sense by relating to the listener's own experiences. Typically, it is just one single issue or theme in the current life situation that dialogues with the sermon material. It can be only one little fragment of the sermon, or it may be a fragment from the worship that enables such interaction. Thus, the accent is on the situated subject creating meaning in dialogue with what is heard on the basis of their own life. Consequently, the words of the sermon are not attributed meaning until they are used in relation to the churchgoers' personal experience. The listeners' experiences within a congregation obviously vary widely, and thus sermon reception within a single congregation varies.

The sermon as inter-subjective production of meaning

Fragments of the sermon, mixed with other impressions from the entire worship are used in a dialogical reasoning process in which the fragments are put together in new ways in order to make sense of the listeners' experiences. Based on the churchgoers' personal experiences, they generate new meaning in dialogue with the words of the sermon removed from the preacher's semantic understanding and implemented in the churchgoers' universe. The external words can disturb and provoke the churchgoers' preconceptions with the result that new insights and realisations suddenly can emerge and create new meaning – often quite far from the preacher's intention. In this way, the sermon can be seen as an inter-subjective production of meaning.¹⁴ According to the empirical research, this new meaning created by the churchgoers can be very evangelical and include deep theological insights that the preacher does not intend and has not articulated.

12 The Danish exegete Gitte Buch-Hansen uses an exegetical interpretation key distinguishing between the world behind the text, the world within the text and the world in front of the texts. If the preacher highlights the world behind the texts, the preacher's role is that of an expert teaching his congregation the correct understanding of the Bible. If the emphasis is on the world within the text, the preacher's role is as a poet or storyteller creating new meaning in the text. If the accent is on the world in front of the text, the preacher's role is that of a pastoral caregiver inviting her congregation to create meaning in dialogue with the text. Cf. Buch-Hansen, G. & Poulsen, F (eds). 2015. *Biblen i gudstjenesten* [The use of the Bible in the worship]. København: Københavns Universitet.

13 An example of the importance of a situated starting point is Nigerian female sex workers in Copenhagen who have been interviewed about their understanding of the Bible. They identify with the Exodus story and understand their past in Nigeria as the time of slavery in Egypt. Now they are in the desert where their stamina is tested by the Lord. The temptation is to give up prostitution through which they, however, are financially able to support their broken families back in Nigeria. For those who remain on the Lord's way – how incomprehensible this way may seem to us – the gospel is the Promised Land that is not their home country, but a legal residence in Denmark and an ordinary job. The interviews were conducted by Sigrid la Cour Sonne as a part of her (unpublished) thesis titled "I am because we are". *Nigerianske sexarbejdere på Vesterbro og deres forhold til Biblen* (Copenhagen University, 2015).

14 The empirical research can be illuminated by the communication theory of Pearce. See, Pearce, B. 2007. *Communication and the making of social worlds*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell. Pearce's theory belongs to the social constructionist paradigm where communication is understood as production of meaning. Social worlds are experienced through the subject, who is interpreting the perceived reality. Pearce's communications model is called "Coordinated management of meaning" (CMM).

The emerging sermon

The result of the listeners' production of meaning is thus the creation of a new semantic meaning of the sermon. This new sermon content is not identical with the preacher's intended meaning, but it cannot be ascribed to churchgoers' experience alone. It is definitely dependent on the participants, but at the same time there is a surplus of meaning that cannot be explained only with reference to the contribution of participants.¹⁵ There is something else that emerges in the situation. The new sermon is more than the sum of listeners' experience and the words of the preacher, or, to put it another way, the logic of the process seems to be $1 + 1 = 3$.¹⁶

The Third Room of preaching

The Third Room is the way in which I attempt to concretise my understanding and interpretation of the inter-subjective creation of meaning in the sermon reception: The encounter between the churchgoers' inner experience and the preacher's words is situated in the liturgical setting of the worship. It constitutes a "room" (space) for the production of new meaning. Thus, a surplus of meaning emerges right on the spot in a liminal and ritually-shaped space I call the *Third Room* of preaching. It is activated by all the participants, both listener and preacher, yet neither of them control or occupy the room, they rather engage in and surrender to it. Of course, the situation – the entire worship with readings, prayers and, indeed, music, hymns and chorus all facilitate the creation of the Third Room in which the new sermon can emerge. Furthermore, the process may even continue after the worship. Facing life events, the words of the sermon may suddenly reappear and giving new meaning as an interpretation and understanding of a current situation in life.

In this understanding of the sermon, the preacher must surrender to the preaching event and give up the idea of controlling the production of meaning related to the sermon. According to the empirical research, the preacher cannot use words as tools to create to ensure a specific understanding among the listeners without being the tool him- or herself. Thereby, the preacher's ethos becomes part of the preaching event.¹⁷ This is the premise of preaching as seen through the empirical lenses.

This empirical understanding of the emerging life within preaching challenges the implicit communication theory in homiletics that assumes the purpose of preaching is a semantic transport of the preachers' understanding of the gospel to the listener. In fact, it radically rejects the notion that preaching is primarily a process in which the listener receives and comes to understand what the preacher says. The empirical approach shifts the focus from preaching to preacher, from cognitive understanding to creation of meaning, from transference of meaning to participating in the incarnation of the gospel. The sermonic event offers this opportunity by establishing the Third Room

15 This surplus of meaning is more than the hermeneutic phenomenological approach presented in the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur's 1976 work *Interpretation theory: Discourse and the surplus of meaning*, as it can transcend a cognitive level and can be experienced as a contemplative state of being. The concept of a surplus of meaning is closer to the Danish philosopher Dorthe Jørgensen' definition: "...the concept of 'immanent transcendence' is, indeed, very meaningful because it refers to a specific experience, and an experience that anyone may have, namely when we feel as if the world suddenly opens up and allows a *surplus of meaning*, i.e. intensified meaning, to open up." See, Jørgensen, D. 2010. The experience immanent transcendence. *Transfiguration: Nordic Journal of Religion and the Arts*, 11, 33-50.

16 This logic $1 + 1 = 3$ is the core of emergence theories. The word *emergent* derives from the Latin word *emergere* (to rise up or out). In philosophy, system theory, science and art the concept of emergence denotes the way complex systems and patterns can arise out of a multiplicity of relatively simple interactions. New features can be formed or occur in a complex system that cannot be explained by the individual's properties. The whole is more and greater than the sum of the single parts. Thus emergence appears as a result of a process whereby larger entities, patterns and regularities arise via interactions among smaller or simpler entities that themselves do not exhibit such properties.

17 From a phenomenological perspective, the ethos of the preacher of great importance in the listeners' optics. Without even being prompted on it, the informants used more than 20% of their interviewing time to talk about their perception of the preacher and whether they liked or disliked the preacher. The same focus on the preachers' person is found in similar empirical research projects.

in which a surplus of meaning may emerge, or a contemplative state of being in dialogical interaction with the preachers' authentic voice and an internal polyphony of voices.

The liberating aspect of preaching from the perspective of the pulpit

The focus on the preachers' authenticity and personal faith can for many Lutherans be a stumbling block in a North European preaching context influenced by the dialectical theology. Preachers are aware that the gospel should be the focus of the sermon and not the preachers' person, as it is not the preacher who inspires faith, but Holy Spirit.¹⁸ Therefore, there is a tendency to consider the importance of the ethos of the preacher as theologically problematic – even though the preachers by experience know their ethos is crucial for the preaching event.¹⁹

At a first glance, this focus on the person speaking in the pulpit can be perceived as an unpleasant and intimidating overextension of ministry. However, the deeper analysis of the interviews revealed, as explained, that it is not the person per se that is interesting to the listeners, but the relationship. I want to argue that it should, in fact, be a relief to the preacher that the emergent life within the preaching event is based on the relation depending, not on him or her, but on the participants and that it is embedded in the entire worship situation – and not only on and in the preacher's personality.²⁰

Contemporary North American homiletics, however, attribute an important role to ethos in the preaching event by way of the preacher's authentic testimony.²¹ Nevertheless, the ways in which North American homiletics continue to rely upon the preacher's personality or rhetorical ability to engage the listeners in the preaching event is not sufficient to understand the surplus of meaning emerging in the sermon. The person of the preacher is certainly important in the production of meaning for the listener, but the ways in which North American homiletical theories indirectly tend to let the ownership of the meaning of the sermon remain in the pulpit is problematic. One finds steps that move away from this understanding in the New Homiletic, like in Other-wise preaching and in the emerging school of thought that sees preaching as a conversation. However, it remains a question whether they do have a sufficiently-developed eye for the emergent surplus of meaning in the sermon that cannot be predicted, controlled or conducted, as the ownership does not belong in the pulpit.²² Even though the listeners will always use their personal experiences to create meaning of the sermon, the ownership does not belong to them either. The ownership of the sermon does not belong to the preacher, nor to the listeners, but emerges in the Third Room as the inter-subjective production of meaning.

18 The Evangelical Lutheran understanding of preaching as formulated in The Augsburg Confession, the primary confession of faith of the Lutheran Church, can give rise to a theological distinction between divine and human agency in preaching. The sermon and the entire worship are carried out by God, because "through the Word the Holy Spirit is given, who works faith, where and when it pleases God."

19 The dichotomy between empirical findings and theological understanding of preaching in Lutheran preaching is analysed in Gaarden, M. 2013. Den empiriske fordring til homiletikken [The empirical challenge to homiletics], *Tidsskrift for Praktisk teologi*, 2:3-20.

20 I have to confess I do not know how African, South American and Asian homileticians will address question of the preachers' ethos.

21 For example Thomas G Long, Anna Florence Carther and Robert Reid.

22 For example, one of the significant exponents of North American Other-wise preaching, John McClure, is right when he highlights the weak point in New Homiletics' appeals to assumed common human experience, as people have specific and individual experiences. See McClure, J.S. 2001. *Other-Wise Preaching. A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice. McClure argues that in the collaborative sermon the preacher can avoid the hegemonic experience by identifying the real experiences within a face-to-face encounter with the listeners. But, to operate with the notion of *hegemonic experience* as John McClure writes in *Other-wise Preaching*, presupposes that ownership of the production of meaning still belongs in the pulpit for which there is no empirical evidence.

The preacher as an authentic servant of the Third Room

The goal is still to be authentic, to have integrity and to preach from personal faith experience as required by churchgoers. By investing oneself honestly with respect for the different experiences and pre-understandings of the listeners, the preacher can participate in creating the event in which the surplus of meaning emerges within the listeners' dialogue. This is not done by explaining how the churchgoers are to *understand* the gospel, but by showing what it means for the preacher him or herself to *trust* that the meaning will emerge in the Third Room.

It would be wonderful for preachers if they had a recipe or a checking list for how to form the sermon rhetorically and theologically in order to create the Third Room. Preachers, may indeed have an advantage if they are well-educated theologians, experienced exegetes with knowledge of church history and traditions, trained systematic theologians and if they have a good sense of and ability to interpret the paradoxes of the present time. It is also a plus to be rhetorical trained, in order to preach in a focused way, to communicate theological ideas clearly and maybe persuasively using analogies, illustrations, narratives, images and logical argumentation – such rhetorical skills are well described in much contemporary homiletic studies. In addition, there is inspiration to be gained by having the listeners penetrate one's theological understanding of the gospel in a collaborative preaching workshop. Of course, there are necessary exegetical and theological knowledge presupposed for all preachers – all are essential and good tools for the preacher to learn – yet, the preacher is applying the tools to *create* the Third Room – the preacher *is* the tool to be held!

The paradox is that the preacher is not the carpenter (creator) of the Third Room, but the Third Room is depended upon the preachers' willingness to serve as the tool. The tool is the servant of the gospel, willing to give up the idea of being in control. Therefore, what the preacher can do, in addition to acquire theological and rhetorical skills, is to relinquish the ego and be obedient to God in order to serve as the tool.²³ This can be experienced as both a challenge and a relief. Often preachers struggle so hard to be good preachers that they are afraid to fail by not being theologically profound and eloquent enough, by not being able to fulfil the expectations of the congregation and by not being accepted as the preaching voice he or she is. Another paradox is that this fear may strengthen the ego to the extent that it prevents the preacher to serve as a tool for the Third Room. So, being conscious of the fact that s/he is not the carpenter, but the tool, can remove some of the fear and anxiety in the preacher of not being a good enough voice for the living gospel – which, I argue, should come as a relief to the preacher.

The promise of preaching from a theological perspective

From a positivistic position, language is understood as a vehicle that transport theological truths from the Bible to the listeners. Here the preacher is easily seen as the carpenter and theology is understood as ontology in which the preacher speaks independently of her or his own position and personality. The embedded communication theory is, as explained, the transfer model. In contrast, the empirical position relates to an experience of the importance of the preacher's personal engagement and faith. Here the preacher participates in the preaching event whole language creates rather than transports meaning. Thus, theology is more likely to be understood as epistemology, a process in which the preacher is participating as a tool – relaying on the Carpenter in order to proclaim Gods' promise within the paradoxes of life.

23 The Danish philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard writes that the non-authentic preacher strives to be the master of Christianity rather than being its servant.

In accordance with the empirical research, the gospel itself is to be understood as a network of potential meanings that continuously need to be incarnated anew. From this perspective, the gospel is something dynamic and alive. God, too, is not a substantial and transcendent reality about which we can preach, something external to ourselves, but a reality in which human beings – listeners as preachers – are always and already participating. The key word related to the promise of preaching is *participating* – we are not alone in the pulpit. When human beings participate in God, we cannot be viewed as autonomous and limited individuals, but rather as relational and related beings embedded in a situated context. Therefore, human beings cannot speak about God without already being or participating in God within a web of reciprocal relations.

The former South African archbishop Desmond Tutu describes the mutual relation between people with the African concept of *Ubuntu*. He writes that

*[w]e live in a network of interdependence with our fellow human beings and with the rest of God's creatures. In Africa, we call the recognition of our interdependence Ubuntu ... It is the essence of being human. It's about the fact that my humanity is caught up in and inextricably interwoven with your humanity.*²⁴

The South African homiletician Johan Cilliers explain *Ubuntu* as follows:

*Ubuntu rather defines the individual in terms of relationships. It represents a sort of web of reciprocal relations in which subject and object are indistinguishable. Therefore not "I think, therefore I am", but rather "I participate, therefore I am".*²⁵

This South African concept of *Ubuntu* defines well how we are relational and related beings.

Homiletically, this concept of God implies that the preacher must regard her/himself as participating in God. It is not possible for the preacher to speak of or experience God as external to her/his own being. The preacher cannot stand outside her/his own existence pointing towards God as a transcendent truth, but s/he must talk about God from her/his experience of already being embedded in God. It is noteworthy that the description of human beings as embedded and participating in God is not identical with a direct access to God through the gospel as an eternal truth. Instead, the gospel is to be seen as dynamic words that constantly have to be interpreted by human beings in order to come alive. The preacher cannot speak of an evangelical reality without participating in the creation of this reality. The gospel has to be incarnated again and again in the listeners' lives and the preacher is participating in this process as a tool – and it is the master who decides how to use the tool.

Homiletically, this implies that the preacher him/herself is to be seen as a participant in the incarnation of the gospel in the churchgoers' lives. Empirical analysis shows that it enhances churchgoers' interaction with the sermon when the preacher puts him/herself speaks from her heart and shares what the words of the gospel do in him/her. As mentioned, the role of the preacher is that of an

24 My translation from the Danish version of *God has a dream* by Desmond Tutu. English version: Tutu, D. 2004. *God Has a Dream: A Vision of Hope for Our Time*. New York: Doubleday.

25 Cilliers, J. 2010. In Search of Meaning between Ubuntu and Into: Perspectives on Preaching in Post-apartheid South Africa. In: L Mogens & Henning Thomsen (eds), *Preaching. Does it make a Difference?* Studia Homiletica 7. Frederiksberg: Aros, 77-78.

interlocutor and a theological reflector with his/her own interpretation of the text, contributing – as one out of several voices – to churchgoers' production of meaning.²⁶

26 When the preacher's role is merely to offer his or her voice as co-authors for the churchgoers' own sermonic discourses, it indirectly raises the question of how we can teach homiletics in the most appropriate way. I have been working with that question since the North American homiletician Charles Campbell raised it in response to my presentation of my first empirical findings at Societas Homiletica's biannual meeting in Wittenberg in August 2012. Like the preacher cannot transfer the meaning to the listeners the teacher cannot transfer the meaning to the students. Beside well-prepared and profound lectures in front of students in an auditorium, how can we create a room for reflection for the students? I suggest that traditional homiletical teaching can benefit from an additional level of formation moving from sermon formation towards preacher formation.

Claritas Scripturae in Luther – A Liberating Preaching Proposal

22

Klaus A Stange¹

Introduction: Preaching of prosperity theology

“Do you need more harmony in your marriage? Write a note telling your history. Put the note in the box. I will put it under my matrimonial bed and my wife and I will sleep above it. Your matrimonial life will be blessed! Or, are you financially troubled? Bring your wallet and I will anoint it so you will be successful! While at it, pay your tenth in our church – here, the tenth is cheaper!”

If all of us have not heard such appeals, surely we have heard of them. These are classic appeals from the world of the so-called prosperity gospel that is common in Brazil and on the African continent. It is preaching reflects what Luther called a “theology of glory” as opposed to a theology of the cross.² Aspects of this preaching takes one back medieval times, when one was assured that it is possible to merit God’s favour. It smacks of a utilitarian relationship with God, of the gospel as law, grace as obligation, faith in terms of tenths and offerings. It is a kind of preaching that reflects either the *desperation* of the human beings, who realise that they will never be able to completely please God, or the *hubris*, the self-confident pride of human beings in their abilities to do so. As a theology of glory, this is a theology of self-love.

The preaching of the prosperity theology generates and functions in a doctrinal framework. This prosperity preacher uses the Bible, talks about God, makes statements on human nature and on many other important theological themes. However, this theology and the preaching that reflects and promotes it, distorts Christian perspectives, it is fundamentally false, even if it in places and in some of its practices seem to echo Christian faith. How does it do this? Below follow four examples.³

One way in which the work of God, of Jesus Christ and of the Holy Spirit is distorted in prosperity theology and preaching is by inserting a market logic of “*do ut des*” (give and take) into the work of the Triune God. Sociological research and research in the field of science of religion shows that elements of such a logic of “*do ut des*” is not new and has been to a greater or lesser extent a feature of all the major religious systems, whether ancient or more recent.⁴ However, preaching that follows this logic is a legalist preaching. Its point of departure is that the believer only receives grace to the extent that he or she satisfies the requirements of the law. In the case of prosperity theology, the law

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2 Cf. Lutero, M. 1987. A disputa de Heidelberg [The Heidelberg Disputation]. *Obras Selecionadas* 1:35-54.

3 These examples are taken and adapted from Schwambach’s Chapter Pós-modernidade e Modelos Neopentecostais de Igreja Como Desafio à Eclesiologia Luterana. In Schwambach, C. 2015. *Reforma e Igreja: Estudos sobre a Eclesiologia da Reforma na História e na Atualidade*. São Bento do Sul: União Cristã, 211ff.

4 Campos, L.S. 1999. *Teatro, templo e mercado*. Organização e marketing de um empreendimento neopentecostal. Petrópolis/São Paulo/São Bernardo do Campo: Vozes/Simpósio/Umesp.

always requires a so-called tenth or an offering, besides any other sacrifices. As such, the blessings of God are commodified. God's grace, God's promises, the God's kindness and mercy are always connected to the fulfilment of requirements. The gospel of unconditional grace is absent. It still preaches about God, it has a biblical content, but it also always prescribes what is needed to receive the blessings of God, indeed, to receive salvation!

In the preaching of prosperity theology, the constitutive character of the Word of God as law, therefore, perverts the gospel. In the words of Campos, preaching the prosperity theology advertises the promises of God, announces God's cures, the freedom God gives, exorcisms and miracles that God will do; it is no more than an offer of a religious product in the name of God. This product awakens the need for consumption and satisfy it.⁵ Filled with self-love, relentless in the search for happiness, the believer focuses on the "wonder-ful" product promised by God via the preacher.⁶ But, the promises are not really promises, at least not in the Lutheran understanding of *promissio*⁷ and the gospel that is announcement is not really the good news in the biblical meaning of the word.

Put differently, in the preaching of the prosperity theology, the word of God – mediated in Word and Sacrament (visible and invisible) – is reduced to magical speech, where religious "products" are turned into "sacraments".⁸ The water of baptism and the bread and wine of the Eucharist have almost none of its true meaning left. Other objects are "sanctified". The water of the Jordan River is blessed, as are scarfs, oils, rocks, salt, armchairs, flowers... An infinity of objects are bestowed with magical powers having the ability to mediate the presence – and with it the blessing – of God. A cure is mediated by the touch of the pastor's hand and God and his blessings become accessible human beings...

With the above in mind, it is ironic much of the following text, written by Luther almost 500 years ago, seems to echo the contemporary prosperity gospel context in Brazil:

When the author of confusion discovered that the Almighty was raising up His own Church ... he erected his counterfeit temple ... he saw that Jehovah sanctified His Church by making use of external means, as in baptism, the ministry of the word, the Eucharist, and the keys. And because Satan is perpetually rivalling and imitating the Almighty ... he also adopted external modes of conferring holiness: he invented the custom of consecrating and blessing water, salt, herbs, candles, bells, pictures, Agnus Deis, palliums, altars, cloaks, shaven heads, and what not! ...⁹

In the preaching of the prosperity theology, too, material things get magic power and the Triune God is always available, however, stripped of His sovereignty becomes manipulable. And, fundamentally, in the preaching of prosperity theology, not only our understanding of the Triune God, but also of human beings, Christian anthropology, becomes distorted. Humanity is at the centre around which everything revolves. Paradoxically, on the one side, humanity is recognised as fragile, under threat of demons, disease and every kind of evil and misfortune.¹⁰ The solution is not contrition and forgiveness, offered freely by Christ, but exorcism. The focus is not on the experience of a

5 Campos, *Teatro, templo e mercado*, 221, 239.

6 Campos, *Teatro, templo e mercado*, 199, 272.

7 Cf. Bayer, O. 1989. *Promissio. Geschichte der reformatorische Wende in Luthers Theologie*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.

8 Campos, *Teatro, templo e mercado*, 121, 142, 153, 223, 352.

9 Martinho Lutero. 1992. *Obras selecionadas* 3:424-425.

10 These threats relativise the reality of the sin, of humanity's part in its fate. The evil that affects us – from headaches to failures in love, unemployment and poverty – is not due to our sinfulness, but to demons and evil forces. Campos, *Teatro, templo e mercado*, 336.

life transformed by God (justification and sanctification), but on a cry to experience God's direct intervention to solve of day-to-day problems. Eternal Life is but an afterthought, what is important is the good life here and now.

However it is expected that the human being should believe and that the latter will “determinate the blessing”,¹¹ in other words, the human being determinates whether God bestows God's gifts and what the extent of it will be! One, therefore, has the power to “force the hand of God” into blessing one. But, in cases where the gifts or blessings do not realise, the faithful are left with anger, frustration and disappointment since it could only mean that their faith was not strong enough...

There is no denial the importance of hermeneutics in preaching. In light of the above characteristics and consequences of preaching within the circles of prosperity theology and in opposition to it, what follows below is to revisit Luther's views on the Scripture, specially his concept of the *claritas Scripturae*,¹² as it is suggested that the dimension of the external and internal clarity of Scripture that Luther speaks of, may be in need of being rediscovered, appreciated anew and reapplied in the context of Brazilian Protestantism given the growth and popularity of prosperity theology in that context.

Claritas Scripturae in the Bible

The concept of *claritas Scripturae* is not only a dogmatic/systematic postulate; it is a recurring theme in the Bible. The classic text on it is 2 Corinthians 4:(1-2)3-6.¹³ In this text, the apostle Paul explains that the clarity of Scripture is like an illumination of the heart. As God, in the beginning, from nothing (*ex nihilo*) created the light, God in the same way lights the human heart.

Luther on claritas Scripturae

Martin Luther understood and expounded the theme of the clarity of Scripture. For Luther, the clearness of the Scripture is first and fundamentally not a statement of fact, is not a reference to experiences that theologians or the church have had regarding the Word, but it is a *principle*, something that is accepted, an assumption. Therefore, the clarity of the Scripture, is primarily a statement of faith. Only after of being accepted in faith, can clarity of Scripture be experienced. Faith comes first, then experience.¹⁴ In other words: the principle of the clarity of Scripture is the point of departure from which Luther thinks and teaches.

Luther's understanding of the concept of *clarity the Scripture*, should also be seen in light of events in his life. Luther was not only in a theological stand-off with the Roman curia, but was also confronted by humanists, such as Erasmus of Rotterdam and by Enthusiasts, such as Sebastian Franck. What the above three opponents had in common was that they all agreed that the Holy Scripture is essentially obscure. Saying that Holy Scripture is obscure is the same as saying that the Scripture does not have clarity in itself and, importantly, that is it is not possible correctly interpret Scripture without the help of an intermediary. So, the Roman curia implied that Scripture could only be correctly and

11 Cf. Campos, *Teatro, templo e mercado*, 311.

12 The analysis of Luther's understanding of the concept draws strongly on that of Eber, J. 2006. *Schriftverständnis von Martin Luther* [Martin Luther's understanding of Scripture]. In: H Stadelmann (Hrsg.), *Den Sinn biblischer Texte verstehen*. Gießen: Brunnen, 16-81; Rothen, B. 1990. *Die Klarheit der Schrift* [The clarity of Scripture]. Göttingen: Vanderhoeck & Ruprecht; Beisser, F. 1966. *Claritas Scripturae bei Martin Luther* [Clarity of Scripture in Martin Luther]. Göttingen: Vanderhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966. <https://doi.org/10.13109/9783666551215>

13 Also see Rom. 10:18; 11:33; 15:4; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Cor. 3:14; 4:3ff.; Isa. 40:13; 1 Cor 2:12.

14 Rothen, *Die Klarheit der Schrift*, 82-83.

definitively interpreted in light of tradition and under auspices of ecclesiastical authority that, of course, culminated in the pope.¹⁵

Erasmus, his *Diatribes on the Freedom of the Will*, also states that Scripture are obscure.¹⁶ For him, the experience of a biblical scholar is similar to someone entering a cave; the deeper he goes in, the darker it becomes around him. The study of Scripture necessarily guides the one to worship God and that is most one may expect. Franck, a representative of the Enthusiasts,¹⁷ understood human beings to have a “divine flame” inside them. God speaks with humans over this flame, directly into their hearts. But, this was a spiritual feeling that was independent of the text of Scripture. Divine revelation was also something totally private and impossible to verify by any institution or dogmatic system. In this sense, for Franck, the one that was enlightened on the inside will be united to an eternal and necessarily invisible church.¹⁸

The internal clarity of Scripture

Luther does not deny the existence of “obscurity” in Scripture. However, for him, the obscurity in Scripture is in first a *theological reality*, not a grammatical one. From his Augustinian anthropology as point of departure, Luther recognises the humanity’s total depravity and deficiency because of the sin, that which also separates humanity from God.¹⁹ In this sense, it is impossible for the humans to understand Scripture’s messages without being enlightened by the Holy Spirit.

If one speaks of the internal clarity, no one sees one iota in Scripture, but one that hath the Spirit of God. All have a darkened heart; so that, even if they know how to speak of and set forth all things in the Scripture, yet, they cannot feel them nor know them; nor do they believe that they are the creatures of God, or anything else... For the Spirit is required to understand the whole of Scripture and every part of it.²⁰

The internal clearness of the Scriptures refers to the thinking and the mediation of enlightenment by the reader him/herself. Internally, the reader recognises the truth. It is an enlightenment of and in the heart by the faith. The Holy Spirit mediates this all. However, Luther does not explain any clear, methodological way what exactly occurs. He just says that, when a person has internal clarity, there persists an objective condition (there is one God) and a subjective consequence (I am the creature). Therefore, internal clearness concerns an “*est*” and a “*pro me*”.²¹

However, one must note that for Luther, what he says about the clarity of Scripture – in the sense of a heart being enlightenment (internal clarity) cannot be dissociated from a grammatical reading of the Bible, what Luther calls “external clarity”. That is, Luther distances himself theologically from the

15 Luther argue against this in 1520. See Lutero, M. 1989. À nobreza cristã da nação alemã, acerca da melhoria do estamento cristão. *Obras selecionadas* 2:280ff.

16 Hayden-Roy, P. 1990. *Hermeneutica gloriae vs. hermeneutica crucis: Sebastian Franck and Martin Luther on the Clarity of Scripture*. University of Nebraska – Lincoln, Digital Commons, German Language and Literature Papers. Online at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/modlanggerman/24/> (Accessed: 19 December 2015).

17 In German also known as *Schwärmer*.

18 Hayden-Roy, *Hermeneutica gloriae*, 57-58.

19 *Ibid.* p. 58ff.

20 Lutero, M. 1993. De servo arbitrio [On the Bondage of the Will]. *Obras Selecionadas*, 4: 25f. [my translation – KAS].

21 Rothen, *Die Klarheit der Schrift*, 85-86.

Enthusiasts, who supported the idea of direct communication from God to the humans²² without the mediation of the external Word.

The external clearness of the Scriptures

For Luther, Scripture is essentially clear: “Scripture is itself completely right, of easy access, totally transparent. It interprets itself and proves, judges and enlightens everything, for everybody.”²³ These words of Luther would prove foundational for the understanding of Scripture in Protestant and Evangelic dogma. When Luther appeared before the Worms’ Assembly, he reasserted the centrality of the Scripture as the font of all the biblical truth.

Therefore, Luther’s scriptural principle was not unanimously accepted in his time. Erasmus questioned how it was possible for Luther to say that Scripture interprets itself and, at the same time he critiques whole generations of scholars, denouncing their interpretations of the Bible? History has shown that the Bible can and has been interpreted in many, different, ways. Would not this testify to the fact that there is no clarity in Scripture? Is it not so that, in the end, every one determines his or her own interpretation of the texts?²⁴

In his answer, taken from *On the Bondage of the Will*, his argument against Erasmus and starting from an exposition of 2 Corinthians 3-4,²⁵ Luther explains his view in more detail and defines the clarity of Scripture as first of all, a principle. Here he also talks about the “twofold” clarity the Scripture – external and internal:

The clarity of the Scripture is twofold; even as the obscurity is twofold as well. The one is external, located in the ministry of the word; the other internal, located in the understanding of the heart. If one speaks of the internal clearness, no one sees one iota in the Scriptures, but one that hath the Spirit of God. All have a darkened heart; so that, even if they know how to speak of, and set forth, all things in the Scripture, yet, they cannot feel them nor know them: nor do they believe that they are the creatures of God, nor anything else... For the Spirit is required to understand the whole of the Scripture and every part of it. If you speak of the external clarity, nothing whatsoever is left obscure or ambiguous; but all things that are in Scripture, are by the Word brought forth into the clearest light and is proclaimed to the whole world.²⁶

Therefore, the external clarity of Scripture consists in a public proclamation of the God’s Word to the whole world. External clarity is about the content of the Word. That which reflects the external clarity of Scripture has no double meaning for Luther. The Word is clear; everybody can assimilate it. Where the Holy Spirit is present and acts, there cannot be anything obscure in Scripture. If there is, it is just because the people do not yet know how to correctly apply the letter and grammar of Scripture. Or, if there are texts with some obscurities in them, there will be clarity in other texts in Scripture that will clarify them or the issue in question in a way that does not make necessary any

22 “Nichts ist schädlicher, als dass man sich vermisst, man glaube und man könne das Evangelium wohl; wie die selbstzufriedenen Geiste tun, welsche meinen, wenn sie eine Predigt oder zwei gehört oder gelesen haben, so haben sie den Heiligen Geist mit Federn uns mit allem gefressen, verstehen es nun alles, erdichten und erträumen sich selbst einen Glauben, da es doch allein Gottes Werk ist...” Luther, M. 1963. *Luther Deutsch – Die Werke Martin Luthers in neue Auswahl für die Gegenwart*. Band 9. K Aland (Hrsg.), Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 33.

23 Cf. Rothen, *Die Klarheit der Schrift*.

24 Callahan, J.P. 1996. Claritas Scripturae: The Role of Perspicuity in Protestant Hermeneutics. *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 39(3): 353-372.

25 Luther will support his thesis with other biblical texts as well, such as, Rom. 10:18; 15:4; 11:33; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Cor. 3:14; 4:3ff.; Isa. 40:13; 1 Cor. 2:12.

26 Lutero, *De servo arbitrio*, 25ff. [my translation – KAS].

resort to ecclesiastical tradition or ecclesial lordship as the final authority on the obscurity. Scripture is its own interpreter, because of the working of the Holy Spirit.

This indeed I confess, that there are many places in the Scriptures obscure and abstruse; not from the majesty of the thing, but from our ignorance of certain terms and grammatical particulars; but which do not prevent a knowledge of all the things in the Scriptures. For what thing of more importance can remain hidden in the Scriptures, now that the seals are broken, the stone rolled from the door of the sepulchre, and that greatest of all mysteries brought to light, Christ made man: that God is Trinity and Unity ... Take Christ out of Scripture, and what will you find remaining in them? All the things, therefore, contained in the Scriptures; are made manifest, although some places, from the words not being understood, are yet obscure.²⁷

For Luther, external obscurity has many faces, such as contempt for the preaching ministry, persecution, sects, false doctrines and false promises that clouds the clarity of Scripture. On the other hand, if the external obscurity of Scripture threatens the church, then it is because of the internal obscurity of those in the preaching ministry and of the church's leadership.²⁸

We hold the case thus: that the spirits are to be tried and proved by a twofold judgment. The one, internal; by which, through the Holy Spirit, or a peculiar gift of God, any one may illustrate, and to a certainty, judge of, and determine on, the doctrines and sentiments of all men [sic], for himself and his own personal salvation concerning which it is said. (1 Corinthians 2.15) "The spiritual man judgeth all things, but he himself is judged of no man." This belongs to faith and is necessary for every, even private, Christian. This, we have above called, "the internal clarity of the Holy Scripture". ... The other, then, is the external judgment; by which, we judge, to the greatest certainty, of the spirits and doctrines of all men; not for ourselves only, but for others also, and for their salvation. This judgment is peculiar to the public ministry of the Word and the external office, and especially belongs to teachers and preachers of the Word. Of this we make use, when we strengthen the weak in faith, and when we refute adversaries. This is what we before called, "the external clarity of the Holy Scripture". Hence we affirm that all spirits are to be proved in the face of the church, by the judgment of Scripture ... that the Holy Scriptures are a spiritual light by far more clear than the sun itself, especially in those things that pertain unto salvation or necessity.²⁹

One sees that, in Luther's view, where Scripture is clear to someone (in the sense of internal and external clarity), it means that it is the effect of on that person Scripture and he/she therefore understood it. Where this occurs, the person recognises who is he/she is, namely a sinner and then listens to the God's Word of grace. In this sense, the *claritas Scripturae* is not some characteristic that Scripture possesses and that may be proved or refuted empirically, but God's spiritual, recreative effect via his Word and Spirit.

27 Lutero, *De servo arbitrio*, 24.

28 Rothen, *Die Klarheit der Schrift*, 87.

29 Lutero, *De servo arbitrio*, 65-68 [my translation – KAS]. Luther refers to a sequence of biblical texts that he examines regarding this, namely Deut. 17:8-11; 1 Tes. 5:21; 2 Ped. 1:19; Psa. 19:9; 119:105; 143:10; Rom. 1:2; 3:21; 2 Cor. 3:7 and 4; 2 Ped. 1:19; Filip. 2:15s; Joh. 5:39; Act. 17:11; 2 Tim. 3:16; Luc. 21:15; 2 Ped. 1:19. Luther shows how he sees the clarity of Scripture prevailing in the history of the church (70-74). For a historical analysis of the concept of the clarity of Scripture from the Reformation to Pietism, the Enlightenment until Modernity, see Callahan, *Claritas Scripturae*, 353-372.

Perspectives with a view to preaching

The approach above worked on the hypothesis that the Luther's concept of Scripture, specifically his concept of the *claritas Scripturae* may open up perspectives on preaching, also in the Brazilian Protestantism context.

A first perspective relates to the pneumatological dimension Luther saw in preaching. It is task of every preacher to take up the challenge of communicating the gospel in his or her own time and context; this challenge remains the same in our postmodern context.³⁰ There exist a variety of scholarly studies in the field of communication theory and neuroscience that may be very relevant to contemporary preachers as well.³¹ However, there may also develop a preoccupation in preachers with considering the prejudices, culture, education, the biopsychosocial luggage, the environmental influences, religious and denominational luggage, ultimately, every set of experiences/ information/ predispositions and prejudices that influence people and with hermeneutic and communication processes.³² There is no doubt that every one of these aspects can and must be considered in the hermeneutics of biblical texts, but they cannot be seen – from a theological perspective – as absolutely crucial; they are, at most, relatively important. This is due to the fact that the real existence and cognitive rupture of human beings are not detected in the socio-political, linguistic, cultural or hermeneutic sphere, but – as we have seen in Luther – in the Spiritual sphere.

The real barrier that prevents understanding God and Scripture is not a cultural, linguistic or socio-political one, but a purely spiritual one, namely sin. It is sin that clouds human understanding at a deep level. Only the Holy Spirit is able to overcome this spiritual barrier.³³ Therefore, despite every effort by the preacher to overcome communication barriers, from Luther's understanding of *claritas Scripturae* there is a theological/pneumatological dimension that transcends every human hermeneutic and communication effort.

The Reformer's distinction between *claritas externa* and *claritas interna*, in its relation with the contemporary hermeneutics exercises in the Brazilian Protestantism, may offer a balance between reducing the understanding of biblical texts to its anthropological and immanent elements only,³⁴ thereby suppressing its strictly theological (transcendental) dimension. In this sense, more elaborated hermeneutics methods are, theologically speaking, cannot mediate knowledge to the same degree as the *claritas interna* of Scripture. Of course, hermeneutic methods are useful and necessary, but they act within the sphere of the *claritas externa* of Holy Scripture – that is, they concern the “letter” and cannot dispose of the Scripture's “spirit”.³⁵

As one affirms the theological/pneumatological dimension of the preaching, so one may affirm that the Reformer's distinction between the *claritas interna* and *claritas externa* of Scripture and

30 A short introduction to the implications postmodernity for the preaching – both in terms of form and content – can be found in Marinho, R. 2008. *A arte de pregar* [The Art of Preaching]. São Paulo: Vida Nova, 41-94. In a perspective that considers the scope and influence of the media in our time, Luiz C Ramos introduces us ways for a human preaching in Ramos, L.C. 2012. *A pregação na idade mídia* [Preaching in the age of media]. São Bernardo do Campo: Editeo, 161-238.

31 An interesting approach that takes neuroscience as point of departure can be seen in Stephens, G.J.; Silbert, L.J. & Hasson, U. 2010. Speaker-listener neural coupling underlies successful communication. *Proc Natl Acad Sci, USA*. Online at: <http://www.pnas.org/content/early/2010/07/13/1008662107.full.pdf> (Accessed: 19 December 2015). See also Fields, D.R. 2010. Of two minds: Listener brain patterns mirror those of the speaker. *Scientific American*. Online at: <http://blogs.scientificamerican.com/guest-blog/2010/07/27/of-two-minds-listener-brain-patterns-mirror-those-of-the-speaker/> (Accessed: 19 December 2015).

32 In Germany, Lutheran churches have appropriated a sociological analysis study that maps German society and offers important grants for the church to communicate better with the society. The study known as *Sinus-Studie*, can be accessed at: <http://www.sinus-institut.de> (Accessed: 19 December 2015).

33 Claus Schambach. Apostila de Hermenêutica. Material não publica. (Guide to Hermeneutics. Unpublished material.)

34 This was the Sebastian Franck's proposal, as we have seen above.

35 Wenz, A. 1995. *Das Wort Gottes – Gericht und Rettung*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 300-306.

should admit that it does not limit, but indeed opens up space for the preacher to appropriate tools from the anthropological sphere, be they contributions from the human sciences, philosophy, hermeneutics, new communication theories and modes, et cetera.³⁶ It must, however, be clear that all these contributions from the side of human knowledge are part of the anthropological dimension of preaching and should not be confused with or be superimposed on the pneumatological dimension (*claritas interna*). If so, one runs the risk of reducing Christian preaching to a mere anthropological event that does not take into consideration biblical and theological hermeneutics. Christian theology starts from the Holy Trinity reaching out and meeting humanity where they are. In this, the Holy Spirit does not exclude, but involves the complex hermeneutical processes at the anthropological level. Therefore, the humanly unavailable and methodologically or technically infeasible, as well as the hermeneutic understanding processes are pierced and transfigured by the dimension of the “spiritual understanding” of the text.

36 Space does not allow any detail exemplification of the possibilities, but Fabian Vogt’s work, that in his work “Predigen als Erlebnis” discusses the results of an excellent research that seeks to appropriate narrative preaching as a way of a contextual and proper preaching to reach and communicate the gospel to the people outside of its ambit. See Vogt, F. 2009. *Predigen als Erlebnis*. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner. One may also mention, for example, the contributions of the so-called New Homiletics. For more on this, see Souza, M.B. 2007. A nova homilética: ouvintes como ponto de partida na pregação cristã. (The New Homiletics: Listeners as starting point in Christian preaching). *Estudos Teológicos* 47(1): 5-24.

Promises as Paradoxes? Preaching, Receiving and Believing God's Promises – Being Deceived or Decisive?

23

Maarten Kater¹

Introduction

Thinking about and reflecting on the theme of Preaching Promise within the Paradoxes of Life, some lines from a Robert Browning poem came to mind. Why? Because of the “grand Perhaps” one reads of in it: deceiving or decisive?

*And now what are we? unbelievers both,
calm and complete, determinately fixed
today, tomorrow and forever, pray?
You'll guarantee me that? Not so, I think!
In no wise! all we've gained is, that belief,
as unbelief before, shakes us by fits,
confounds us like its predecessor. Where's
the gain? how can we guard our unbelief,
make it bear fruit to us? – the problem here.
Just when we are safest, there's a sunset-touch,
a fancy from a flower-bell, some one's death,
a chorus-ending from Euripides –
And that's enough for fifty hopes and fears
as old and new at once as nature's self,
to rap and knock and enter in our soul.
Take hands and dance there, a fantastic ring,
round the ancient idol, on his base again –
The grand Perhaps! We look on helplessly.
There the old misgivings, crooked questions are –
This good God – what he could do, if he would,
would, if he could – then must have done long since:
If so, when, where and how? some way must be –*

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*Once feel about, and soon or late you hit
some sense, in which it might be, after all.
Why not, "The Way, the Truth, the Life?"²*

As I understand paradoxes of life, underneath it (for me) there seems to be an urgent question regarding the preaching of promises.³ The question is, Do God's promises belong to the 'grand Perhaps' mentioned in Browning's poem? Put differently: Is the bridge that spans the gap (as the deep abyss of life's paradoxes), between promise and fulfilment, just like this "grand Perhaps"? Because, if so, some among our audience may be correct in accusing us: "Preacher, you actually did deceive me when you told us about this or that promise of God and assured us that these words surely will be fulfilled. But, I'll tell you the truth: God did not yet, and, I fear He will never will act on that promise! You promised me joy, and yet all I have is suffering and distress. Pastor, would you like to tell me if and how God's promises work?!" Of course, this problem is (pastorally) multi-faceted. In this short paper I just want to discuss some grounds for more certainty than a "grand Perhaps" – or at least a special kind of "grand Perhaps". First, there are two fundamental reasons for claiming the certainty of God's promises without denying the difficulties and tensions that surround them within the many paradoxes of life.

Two reasons for a special "grand Perhaps"

These two reasons first connect with the following strong conviction: How happy we are does not require us to retreat *from* the real world as we preach God's promises, but "withdraw *to*" it. Seen from this perspective promises are windows onto that real world. William Willimon expressed it beautifully in relation to Sunday worship and I am convinced that this is true, especially for preaching God's promises. Preaching God's promises, then, is, "to withdraw to the real world where we are given eyes to see and ears to hear the advent of a Kingdom that the world has taught us to regard as only fantasy."⁴

I want to mention just two fundamental reasons for the conviction that God's promises are not deceitful but, to the contrary, that they are decisive. I put them in a kind of pulpit metaphor and add some illustrations from the sermon to the Hebrews. So, my thesis related to preaching God's paradoxical promise is that *God's promises are decisive, although they do have the character of paradox, and often seem to be deceitful.*

2 Robert Browning's long "Bishop Blougram's Apology" is made over wine after dinner to defend himself from the criticisms of a doubting young literary man, who despises him because he thinks the bishop cannot be true to his convictions in conforming to the doctrines of the Catholic Church. He builds up his defines from the proposition that the problem of life is not to conceive ideals which cannot be realised, but to find what is and make it as fair as possible. The bishop admits his unbelief, but being free to choose either belief or unbelief – neither can be proved wholly true – chooses belief as his guiding principle, because he finds it the best for making his own life and that of others happy and comfortable in this world. Cf. Hawlen, S. 2002. *Robert Browning*. Abingdon/New York: Routledge, 90-91.

3 In dealing adequately with "paradoxes", one at least has to face the major problem of exploring the wide semantic field of so many different kinds of paradoxes. E.g.: (1) By "paradox" one usually means a statement claiming something that goes beyond (or even against) popular belief (what is usually believed or held). Paradoxes form a natural object of philosophical investigation ever since the origins of rational thought. Cf. online at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/paradoxes-contemporary-logic> (Accessed: 3 February 2016); (2) something (such as a situation) that is made up of two opposite things and that seems impossible, but is actually true or possible, or (3) a statement that seems to say two opposite things, but that may be true. Cf. online at <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/paradox> (Accessed: 3 February 2016); and (4) a seemingly absurd or contradictory statement or proposition that, when investigated, may prove to be well founded or true, or: A person or thing that combines contradictory features or qualities. Cf. online at: <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/paradox> (Accessed: 3 February 2016).

4 Willimon, W. 1985. *What's Right with the Church*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 121.

For this concept of decisiveness two reasons are offered, namely that, on the one hand, we preach from a Christological pulpit but, on the other hand, we also preach from an eschatological pulpit.

Preaching those promises in the midst of the paradoxes of life will result in truly *pastoral preaching* when seen from this double perspective on the pulpit.

The Christological pulpit

The tension in the poem above reaches its climax in the last sentence: “Why not ...?” The poet asks us why (and why not more) “grand Perhaps”?! I want to suggest that the *person* of Christ is the first Christological reason for God's promises being decisive and not deceiving. Second, there are many reasons for this to be found in the *work* of Christ.

Christ's person

The uniqueness of Jesus' concrete existence – his *co-* existence with us – deals with: “the way in which he lived uniquely as *the frontier of the familiar and the transcendent*.” He is – in person – the doorway between the familiar and the transcendent, or the window we look through from the familiar into the transcendent. That is what a Christocentric realism is all about (and I mean all of them: ontological, epistemological and semantic realism). The “Yes” (in Christ) and the “Amen” (through him by us) of God's promises (2 Corinthians 1:20) is given in the reality of this once-and-for-all person.⁵ So, then, a promise of God looks in a certain sense like this unique person. There is an analogy between the person of Christ and the promises we preach.⁶ We see just the familiar (Hebrews 2:8b: “we do not see everything subject to him”) in all the paradoxes of life; Jesus is a “nobody”!). However, we nevertheless see through this familiar “in here” via God's promise into the realm of the transcendent, which is both “out there” and “in here” (Hebrews 2:9a: “But we do see Jesus ... now crowned with glory”; Jesus as an “everybody”?). That is to say, do we realise that transcendence that comes from God's side and enters into our familiar here and now?⁷ This happens by means of ...? Just words! Hebrews 1:1: God has spoken *in* his Son.⁸ Those words are illocutionary and performative as well.⁹

Very important is our conviction that Jesus not just *was* our “window” on God, but that He actually *is* this “window” as the *Christus praesens*. That is what the letter (better: sermon) to the Hebrews is about. Our heavenly Priest actually is the guarantee for the decisive character of all God's promises.

We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 6:19, 20).

5 The words *hapax* and *ephapax* are prominent in Hebrews on crucial moments in this sermon: 6:4; 9:7, 12, 26-28; 10:2, 10.

6 They are both like (in some aspects) and unlike each other (in other aspects) as their term “analogy” implies.

7 Cf. Bauckham, R. & Heart, T. 1999. *Hope Against Hope. Christian Eschatology at the Turn of the Millennium*. Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 44-71. They start with the paradox of the tragedy to show, what they call “The Wager on Transcendence”.

8 According to Lane, W.L. 1991. *Hebrews, 1-8* [WBC 47A]. Dallas: Word, 11, this ‘in his Son’ has “qualitative” force. Cf. also Webster, J. 2009. John, One who is Son. In: R Bauckham, et al. (eds), *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 69-94, (81). Webster underscores that *in* the Son, “with its mutually defining theocentricity and Christocentricity, introduces the key elements of finality and comprehensiveness which ground the apostle's exhortation.”

9 Cf. Wolterstorff, N. 1995. *Divine Discourse. Philosophical Reflections in the Claim That God Speaks*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511598074>;

Wilson, P.S. 2002. Textual Perspectives: Preaching as an Event of Hope. In: G Immink and C Stark (eds). *Preaching: Creating Perspective*. Studia Homiletica 4. Utrecht: Societas Homiletica, 50-59, esp.58-59; for the distinction between performative and illocutionary words see the two classics: Austin, J. 1962. *How to Do Things with Words*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press; Searle, J. 1969. *Speech Acts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139173438>

Christ's work

Paul's "Yes" and "Amen" surely is given in by the *finished work* of Jesus Christ. When he died every promise must have seemed to be dying along with him. But, when Christ was resurrected from the dead the opposite is true: every promise has been anchored in that finished work. In Hebrews Christ is shown again and again as the active Priest in heaven interceding on behalf of his people of all ages and throughout the world. In some sense we are, therefore, and should understand ourselves to must suppose ourselves to be the people of hope, who were freed on Easter Sunday. This because of the "not yet" and seen from the perspective of Jesus's death after he cried: "It is finished." Hence, we *are* located in the living Christ on Easter Sunday.

Believing is a kind of looking through a window from within (the familiar with all its paradoxes) to the outside (the transcendence of the reality of God and God's kingdom). This is the pneumatological aspect of dealing with promises as paradoxes. Regarding the fulfilment and the reality which correspond to God's promises there are many voices that say "no", but the Spirit teaches us to look beyond those circumstances. The Spirit teaches us to look through the window that has been opened in Christ Jesus and through him we see the unseen, albeit we now "...see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known" (1 Corinthians 13:12).

How fortunate we are that there is another way to approach the issue, from that "outside" from which we are receiving so many beautiful revelations from the sunny land of the fulfilment of Gods' promises. We will briefly describe them when we turn to the second reason for knowing the decisive meaning of what is promised by God and to be sure that we are not deceiving others by preaching God's promises.

The eschatological pulpit

Eschatological thinking does not imply thinking from the here and now to the future, but the opposite: thinking from the future into the here and now. Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead – as the ultimate eschatological fact – is the great break-in of the future into the present. Now there really is a "yet", although there still remains a "not yet".¹⁰

However, although some of God's paradoxical promises remain "not yet" until the Parousia, some of the promises as paradoxes – the "reversals" as Jeremias calls them – actually are in the process of initial fulfilment.¹¹ They are on the way of being "filled full" and so will be fulfilled. Preaching God's promises is to acknowledge Gods *timing*. But, "not yet" is totally different from "not"! The bridge that spans the gap between promise and fulfilment is given once and for all in the resurrection of Christ. The day of the resurrection is the decisive day (D-day).

10 Cf. Thiselton, A. 2007 *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine*. Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge: Wm. B Eerdmans (esp. Chapter 22): Eschatology: The Ultimate and Definitive Hermeneutical Horizon of Meaning). Cf. also Engemann, W. 2002. On Man's Re-entry into His Future. The Sermon as a Creative Act. In: Immink and Stark, *Preaching: Creating Perspective*, 25-49.

11 Jeremias, J. 1963 (revised edition). *The Parables of Jesus*. London: SCM, 221-22: "Conditions are reversed: what is hidden becomes manifest (Matt. 10:26); the poor become rich (Luke 6:20); the last are first (Mark. 10:31); the small became great (Matt. 18:4); the hungry are filled (Luke 6:21); the weary find rest (Matt. 11:28); those who weep laugh (Luke 6:21); the mourners are comforted (Matt. 5:4); the sick are healed, blind receive sight, lepers are cleansed, deaf hear (Matt. 11:5); prisoners are freed, the oppressed relieved (Luke 4:18); the lowly are exalted (Matt. 23:12; Luke 14:11; 18:14); the humble bear rule (Matt. 5: 5); the members of the little flock become kings (Luke 12:32); and the dead live (Matt. 11:5)."

The “not yet” of biblical and Christian eschatology does ask for *believing* when *receiving* God's promise. That is what the life of hope is about.

Presumption is a premature, self-willed anticipation of the fulfilment of what we hope from God. Despair is the premature, arbitrary, anticipation of the non-fulfilment of what we hope from God. Both forms of hopelessness, by anticipating the fulfilment or by giving up hope, cancel the wayfaring character of hope. They rebel against the patience in which hope trust in de God of the Promise.¹²

As the sermon to the Hebrews shows, there is the necessity of believing with patience and endurance, otherwise believers will fall short of participation in what God had promised (4:1). Therefore, one may say that Hebrews 10:35, 36 is the starting point of Hebrews 11.

What do we see inside when we have our windows open in order to live from what we see on the outside? From the outside we see the cloud of witnesses in the stadium we are in – through the entrance of faith – running the race marked out for us (Hebrews 12:1). While running, the race sometimes seems to be full of paradoxes: joy while all our limbs are getting tired... Nevertheless, our Perfecter and Pioneer is the guarantee of that joy. Indeed, we *have* come to...? “The city of the living God ...”, et cetera (Hebrews 12:22-23). That's why liturgy as a whole, our worship services, are so important. In our liturgies we experience how paradoxes of life are solved, not by our solutions, but by God's decisive acts.¹³

As in the first (Christological) reason, in this second reason there is a pneumatological aspect as well. The Holy Spirit – the Spirit of the living Christ – is the first fruit (*aparchè*) or partial foretaste in the present of what lies in greater abundance in the future (Romans 8:23). The Spirit is the “pledge”, the “down payment” (*arraboon*) of that which will come in the future (2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:14).

In sum, promises as paradoxes? Yes, indeed. This is contrary to popular opinion, but that is what paradoxes literally are about. However, here is nothing fantastic in the sense of nonsense in these promises, albeit that they are beyond our comprehension, our logic and imagination.¹⁴ Why are they not deceiving us, but decisive? At least for two reasons: (1) they are anchored in the person and work of Christ, (2) they are “yet” reality in and by the resurrection of Christ from the dead, although their paradoxical character correlates with the “not yet” of their fulfilment. So, then, by preaching God's promises this tension of the paradoxes in the promises gradually – as power in weakness! – is decreasing until the day of the “all in all” as promised.¹⁵ In the end, there is every reason for *A Celebration of Contradictions in the Christian Life* (Parker J. Palmer). “If you seek your life, you will lose it, but if you lose your life, you will find it”, as Jesus says. That's the ultimate wisdom we are to teach as

12 Moltmann, J. 1967. *Theology of Hope*. Transl. J Leitch. London: SCM, 23.

13 Cf. De Klerk, B. 2013. *Viva Vox Evangelii*. The Reforming of Preaching: A Liturgical Approach. In: J Hermelink and A Deeg (eds). *Viva Vox Evangelii – Reforming Preaching*. Studia Homiletica 9. Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 280-294.

14 See for the analogy – i.e., that they are both like and unlike the other – of fantasy and hope, see Bauckham & Heart, *Hope Against Hope*, 72-108. The latter authors deal with *imagination* as an important way to deal with the paradoxes of life and the paradoxes of God's promises; see also, Troeger, T. 2007. *Seeing Visions and Dreaming Dreams: The Imaginative Power of Preaching Hope*. In: C Vos, LL Hogan and J Gilliers (eds). 2007, *Preaching as a Language of Hope*. Pretoria: Protea, 59-72; as well as, McIntosh, M.A. 2004. *Discernment and Truth. The Spirituality and Theology of Knowledge*. New York: Crossroad, esp. 82-124. Space does not allow for illustrations from Hebrews, but I fully agree: “Hebrews is continuously imagistic; the writer is as much a poet as a theologian” (quoted from *Dictionary of Biblical Images*. 1998. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 376).

15 Cf. Bauckham & Heart, *Hope Against Hope*, 106: “In this sense, then, the relationship between the crucified Jesus and the risen Lord constitutes the basic pattern for the wider relationship between the old order and God's new creation; and ‘the power of the resurrection’ is a suitable way of describing that activity of God's Spirit in the church and the world which issues from the event of Jesus' rising and continues in constant events of divine disruption of this world, in healings, in ‘miracles’ of all sorts, in deliverance from evil powers, in the gradual subversion of the dominion of darkness and death and its replacement by the forces of light and life.”

we preach. The promise within the paradoxes of life is the real fountain of praise, the decisive song of God's ultimate fulfilment:

*My soul magnifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.*

...

*He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;
he has brought down the mighty from their thrones
and exalted those of humble estate;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.*

(Magnificat, Luke 2: 46-55)

The doctrine of the Two Natures of Christ as Homiletical Theology and Applied to Sermon Reflection

24

Maria Harms¹

The sermon as Word of God and word of humankind

A sermon is a creation made by the Word of God that is proclaimed in the sermon but it is also human words spoken by the preacher. I wish to argue that the sermon is, in fact, at the same time both fully Word of God and fully the word(s) of a human; they are distinct, but co-exist substantively and in reality.

Deliberate reflection on sermons by preachers is rare in the Danish literature despite the fact that an examination of the operational theology may bridge the gap between a static theological position and the sermon itself. This, in turn, may enable the preacher to be more theologically intentional in his or her preaching.

Within reflections on sermons one may identify two positions that are, on the surface, quite different in their conception of the sermon. However, in reality both are rooted in the same idea, namely the two natures of the Word/words in the sermon.

One position only sees the sermon as the Word of God. Inspired by God, the sermon has a unique and exclusive character, meaning it cannot be processed as other texts. Even if preachers do not explicitly refer to their sermons as the Word of God, one sees this the rejection of the possibility that a sermon may be subject to analysis by others. This position affords and maintains a high the status to and of the sermon. However, in reality it places a restriction of the essence of the sermon. This position may even be seen as be an expression of sin, since it does not recognise that the sermon is also human words and not only the Word of the Creator, that is, not also the words of the created (humankind). This thinking may also appear to be docetic in nature, because only on the surface does the sermon appear to be the word of a human. In reality, however, it only becomes a channel for the Divine and the preacher endows his own words with a special status, namely that the words themselves are, in fact, not created themselves.

The other position, as I see it, understands the sermon to be only human words. As human words, the sermon cannot be the subject of theological criticism and, to my mind, also boils down to a simplification of what a sermon is. The danger with this position is that seeing the sermon as purely human words leaves no possibility for the intervention of something from the outside, from the

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beyond.² Instead, it is the connection between the preacher and the congregation that will facilitate a kind of opening to what may lie beyond. Again, this can be interpreted sinful, in that beneath it is the assumption that it is the human word that initiates the transformation in human beings that may result from hearing what others call the Word of God and whom is the only source of salvation. This position may, therefore, be an example of ebionism since only the word of a human is needed. One may also argue that this position shows arianic tendencies, since the word in the sermon is also afforded special status even though it is not similar in nature as the Word of God.

These above two positions, in different ways aim at the same thing: to get some control over the sermon. The sermon that is seen exclusively as the Word of God is exalted and afforded such high a status that the preacher may reject any discussion or critique of it. The sermon that is seen as mere human words may be domesticated by the preacher as her or his own idea of the Christian message, and thus beyond a critical analysis by others. Neither of these positions are satisfactory since both seem to make true reflection on the sermon illegitimate.

It is my thesis that the doctrine of the two natures of Christ, according to which Christ is simultaneously truly God and truly human, may serve as an analogy for a homiletic theory on the relationship between God's Word and the human words in the sermon. The doctrine of the two natures is a way to express the closeness of Christ's divine and human natures despite fundamental differences between them. It may prove fruitful when applied to the great proximity between the divine Word and the human word in the sermon, again despite the fundamentally different status of the two.

A preacher's view on the relationship between the divine Word and human words in the sermon will influence the way he or she reflects on a sermon. This, in turn, means that an understanding of the two natures of the W/word in the sermon has particular implications for sermon reflection. The sermon is entirely God's Word and hence the burning obligation to preach. At the same time, the sermon is fully the word of a human and, like all human words, the sermon is subject to scrutiny and evaluation. From this perspective on the sermon – as a creation composed of God's Word and human words – reflection may flow where the preacher can use her or his theological knowledge in analysing a sermon.

The doctrine of the two natures as homiletical theory

Martin Luther's Christmas sermon from 1521 on The Prologue from the Gospel of John may offer an example of the way the church in the past dogmatically tried to define the divine in the way it has juxtaposed the two natures of Jesus Christ.³ To me, Luther's sermon is a natural starting point since evangelical Lutheran theology is the theology of The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark and thus a fitting and familiar basis for Danish preachers to approach the issue of the nature of the word/s of a sermon. The status of the Prologue in John's Gospel is also highly regarded as a key biblical text in the history of the New Testament scholarship.

In his sermon, Luther ponders on the nature of the divine Word and its relation to the human word. Humans are created beings, while Christ is not created. "From these words of Moses it is clearly proved that God has a Word, through which or by means of which he spoke, before anything was

2 An example could be a preacher, refusing to use the word "Amen" after a sermon, claiming it is too grand a word to use when ending one's own words.

3 Luther, M. 1960 (1521). *Evangelium in der hohen Christmeß* [Principal Christmas Service]. In: HH Borchardt & G Merz (Hrsg.), *Evangelienpredigten der Kirchenpostille* [Gospel sermons from the Church postil]. *Martin Luther. Ausgewählte Werke* (Dritte Auflage), Ergänzungsreihe, 4. Band. München: Chr. Kaiser.

created; and this Word does not and cannot be anything that was created.”⁴ The Divine Word brings the totality of the divine nature with him. “His word is so much like himself, that the Godhead is wholly in it, and he who has the word has the whole Godhead.”⁵ The eternal Word is of a divine nature and reason, while humans have a created nature, reason and (especially important here) ... words. Luther rejects theological positions that existed in parts of the early Church, such as the Arian view of subordination and the Sabellian modalistic view. In contrast, Luther argues that “... the true Christian faith goes through all of this, teaches and confesses separate persons and an undivided nature.”⁶ The human being cannot enter into the divine because he or she cannot cross over between created and creator, therefore, the human word cannot usurp the Word of God. However, in the Incarnation, God makes the divine and human nature fully present at the same time.

According to Luther, the human nature of Christ has no use, if not for his Divine nature, while God cannot be found anywhere else than in this human, who is the only access to the Divine. “For his humanity would profit us nothing if the divinity were not in it. Yet, on the other hand, God will not and cannot be found, save through and in his humanity.”⁷ Through the Incarnation, God transcends the human. In relation to the sermon, one may say: The word of humans in the sermon is of no use if it were not for God’s word in the sermon. But, at the same time, God’s word is not to be found anywhere else than in this human word. A sermon can neither be proclaimed nor believed with the help of human qualities. “Neither the Gospel nor any sermon on this Light can come of itself or from human reason; but they must be sent by God” and, “[t]herefore, I say it is near at hand and within us, but of ourselves we cannot apprehend it; it must be preached and believed.”⁸ Humans must reject everything that affords status and identity and, like a snake that changes its skin, crawl into the gospel. These are the main points of the homiletic theology I find in Luther’s Christmas sermon.⁹

An analysis such as this one must address the differences in thinking from the time of Luther and our own, especially because Luther has a metaphysical way of thinking, a thinking in substance, with the consequent risk of confusion between the substances in the two natures. Both Docetism and Arianism are real dangers if one lets the two natures come apart in the homiletical work. If there is a tendency towards one position in the theology of Luther, I believe he runs the risk of approaching Docetism in his use of *Communicatio idiomatum*.¹⁰

4 Luther, *Evangelium in der hohen*, 141. “Aus dem Text Mose folget und schliesst sich klärllich, da Gott ein Wort habe, durch welches er sprach, ehe denn alle Kreaturen gewesen sind, und dasselbe Wort mag und kann keine Kreatur sein.”

5 Luther, *Evangelium in der hohen*, 144. “Also ists in Gott auch, das ist sein Wort ihm ebenso gleich, daß die Gottheit ganz drinnen ist und wer das Wort hat, der hat die ganze Gottheit.”

6 Luther, *Evangelium in der hohen*, 147. “... die Wahrheit christlichen Glaubens geht mitten hindurch, lehret und bekennet unvermischte Personen und unzerteilte Natur.”

7 Luther, *Evangelium in der hohen*, 158. “Denn die Menschheit wäre kein Nutz, wenn die Gottheit nicht drinnen wäre, doch wiederum will und kann Gott nicht gefunden werden denn durch und in dieser Menschheit.”

8 Luther, *Evangelium in der hohen*, 163. “Also kann das Evangelium oder keine Predigt von diesem Licht von sich selbst oder aus Menschenvernunft kommen, sondern Gott muss es senden” and “[e]s ist nahe bei und in uns, aber es wird nicht begriffen von uns selbst, es muss gepredigt und geglaubt werden.”

9 An extension of my understanding of Luther’s view on the sermon can be found in his preface to the Church Postil. See Luther, M. 1994 (1521). Eyn Kleyn Unterricht, was man ynn den Euangelien suchen und gewarten soll [A teaching of what to find in the Gospels]. In: Anon. *Teologiske tekster: Et udvalg af klassiske dogmatiske tekster*. Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag. Here Luther describes the main content of the gospel as naming Christ as a gift bestowed on humanity. The gospel must be preached to bring Christ to humans. “Denn Evangelie predigen ist nichts anders, denne Christum zu uns komen odder uns zu ihm bringen.” (To preach the Gospel is nothing but bringing Christ to us or us to him.)

10 Here I agree with Prenter, R. 1955. *Skabelse og genløsning* [Creation and redemption]. Copenhagen: Gads, 376. In *communicatio idiomatum*, the two natures, although they are separate, can communicate with one another. Luther uses this in his theology of the Eucharist to assert the real presence of Christ. In my opinion, it makes sense to include it in a preaching theology of the two natures of the word. *Communicatio idiomatum* is a way to assert the true relationship and connection between the two natures in Jesus Christ, but it does run the risk of the divine nature taking over the human nature.

Dialectical Theology has made an effort to find a theological solution to the epistemological difference between metaphysical thinking and cognitions after the linguistic turn. Therefore, I draw on two texts here. The first is an article by Eduard Thurneysen, *Die Aufgabe der Predigt*.¹¹ The second a sermon by Thurneysen and Karl Barth called *The Freedom of the Divine Word*.¹² From the linguistic turn came the insight that language cannot be understood as neutrally descriptive, but that it influences what it describes.¹³ In theology, the consequence will be that humans cannot think apart from language and, therefore, not believe apart from language. Still, language is the language of a created creature, having no identity other than being human – as opposed to the divine Word.¹⁴ Thurneysen's article focuses on negativity, as in the key sentence: "The point of the sermon is the death of everything human. The sermon is not to build up, but to break down."¹⁵ His sermon, however, appears more dynamic with its focus on the Word of God as a living thing moving in and into the world.¹⁶ The eagerness with and passion by which the Word is shown to do this is found in a metaphor where the Word compared to an army invading a foreign country. Contrary to Luther's thinking, Thurneysen/Barth offers a valuable new interpretation of the sermon, rethinking the sermon in new categories, such as events and relationships instead of the substance. An example is the way they use verbs instead of nouns to characterise the Word, thus combining an understanding of human beings coming into existence through language with the notion that the relationship to God is mediated by the Word.¹⁷

The historical struggle in understanding the Doctrine of the Two Natures comes as no surprise as this doctrine contains a different kind of complexity than a more simple understanding of the incarnation. For Luther, it is fundamental that Christ is not a "god-human", but "God-in-human". In the sermon, we rediscover the importance of understanding the relationship between these two natures of the word.

The Doctrine of the Two Natures and homiletic theory in sermon reflection

I wish to argue here that from Luther's understanding of the two natures of the word, one may propose a third position on or understanding of the sermon where it is entirely word of humans and fully Word of God. The sermon consists of human words and is, therefore, deficient – the words of a created creature. However, the sermon is also the place where God's eternal, non-created Word has decided to let itself be known. In this way, the transcendent force of the Word of God is recognised, while the qualitative difference between the human word and the word of God is maintained. On proclamation Luther writes: "... so as not by any means to reject the man Christ, and yet so as to declare his divinity", meaning that the sermon should proclaim the divinity of Christ without rejecting his humanity.¹⁸ In relation to sermon reflection, this means that the preacher must

11 Thurneysen, E. 1971. *Aufgabe der Predigt* [The purpose of the sermon]. In: G Hummel (Hrsg.), *Wege der Forschung* Vol. 234. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.

12 Thurneysen, E. & Barth, K. 1930. *Kom, Skaber Aand*. [Come, Creator Spirit]. Copenhagen: Hagerups.

13 The expressions come from the anthology by Rorty, R (ed.). 1967. *The Linguistic Turn. Essays in Philosophical Method*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

14 Cf. Luther's example of the difference between the human her/himself and her/his picture. Luther, *Evangelium in der hohen*, 145.

15 Thurneysen, *Aufgabe*, 114. "Der Tod alles Menschlichen ist das Thema der Predigt. Darum treibe man in der Predigt nicht Aufbau, sondern Abbau." "The point of the sermon is the death of everything human. The sermon is not to build up, but to break down."

16 More on Barth and the movement by the Word into the world as a perpetual motion, see Nielsen, B.F. 2014. I begyndelsen var Ordet [In the beginning was the Word]. *Bibliana*, 6(1): 65-83.

17 A more theoretical elaboration is found in Barth, K. 1966. *Homiletik, Wesen und Vorbereitung der Predigt* [Homiletics, the nature and preparation of the sermon]. Zurich: EVZ.

18 Luther, *Evangelium in der hohen*, 167: "dass er ja den Menschen Christum nicht verwerfe und doch seien Gottheit ausrufe."

recognise that the sermon is the word of God without rejecting that it is also her or his own human words and vice versa.

By only perceiving the sermon as the word of God, the sermon position might, according to this analysis, risk moving into territory where Christ is not the only source of salvation and humans see themselves as creators. According to Luther, the acceptance of the forgiveness of sins is a battle in the human being.¹⁹ I would argue that a resemblance of this battle can be seen in the reluctance by preachers to realise that the sermon is their own words. The position claiming the sermon as only human words can also contain a struggle against the gospel, when the preacher refuses to realise, that the sermon as the Word of God is beyond the preachers grasp. To Luther, no sermon can come into being through human qualities alone, because there is no identity between a speaker and his or her words, they are not the same. However, between God and his Word exists identity.²⁰ This could be a key to view the difference between the preacher and the sermon, relieving the pressure of sermon reflection.

Since the sermon is an oral genre, it is impossible afterwards to recreate what happened in it, neither by reading, nor by viewing it.²¹ There is always a distance between the sermon and the preacher's reflection on it. This means that no reflection can overcome the actual sermon, it being the Word of God and human words.

The human word is a contemptuous word, according to Luther.²² The preacher, who is preoccupied with his own sermon, is not narcissistic but might, in fact, be humbled by the difference between human words and the Word of God. The position that focuses on the sermon as only Word of God needs more humility because the sermon is also just the preacher's words. The position that claims the sermon is created with human words also needs humility in understanding that the sermon is more than words created by the preacher. To explain the difference between the preacher's words and the divine Word, we have Luther's example of the difference between looking at a river or at its source.²³ It is a risk in sermon reflection that the preacher may presume that not the sermon, but her or his own relationship with God is scrutinised. When Luther compares the human being with a rabbit on the run and finding a shelter in a burrow, or a snake crawling into the safety of a hole, he uses images that might lessen this fear in the preacher.

Because the two natures of the word appear in the sermon and it is not just the word of the preacher, the sermon can be studied as something foreign to the preacher, something other. I found valuable reflections on how to understand and interact with this "otherness" in the research of Alexander Deeg.²⁴ In *Das Äussere Wort*, Deeg on xenology, particularly the works of Bernhard Waldenfel. Deeg highlights three approaches to that which is foreign: The first sees it as something exotic; the second tries to usurp it; and the third dares to meet the foreignness in a dialogue that neither wants to rule it, nor keep it at a distance, thus facilitating a real meeting. Deeg uses this model to describe the Word from the beyond that cannot be controlled, neither by the church as an institution, nor by the individual. The model can illustrate my thesis on the use of the two natures of the Word in sermon

19 In this sermon, the focus of Luther is to reject what he sees as heretical notions of the nature of Christ. However, Ivarsson makes a compelling argument that in the teachings of Luther, even when the correct understanding of the Word is preached, it is human nature to reject it. Ivarsson, H. 1956: *Predikans uppgift* [The task of the sermon]. Lund: CWK Gleerups, 23-26.

20 Luther, *Evangelium in der hohen*, 142.

21 In a recording one hears recorded words, not the actual words.

22 Luther, *Evangelium in der hohen*, 143.

23 Ibid. p. 158.

24 Deeg, A. 2012. *Das äussere Wort und seine liturgische Gestalt* [The outer word and its liturgical form]. Vandenhock & Ruprecht, 328-348.

reflection because the different ways of approaching the foreign correspond with the previously mentioned sermon positions. A sermon seen only as the Word of God is viewed as an exotic being – the first understanding of the unfamiliar. The perspective that sees the sermon as only human, will domesticate the sermon. However, the understanding of the sermon as living in the tension between it as the Word of God and a human word can be found in the third approach, namely meeting what is foreign and other in a genuine interaction. Thus, one can illustrate the encounter between the two words in the sermon, in sharing a great degree of closeness despite being of completely different natures and without dissolving their characters into something new.

Three contemporary examples of sermons reflections

I studied three contemporary examples of sermon reflection to show how they related to the tension between the sermon as Word of God and word of human as well as to my hypothesis on the Doctrine of the Two Natures as a homiletic theory. I chose The David G Buttrick Certificate Program in Homiletic Peer Coaching at Vanderbilt University, *Claiming Theology in the Pulpit* by Burton Z Cooper and John S McClure and, finally, *The Four Voices of Preaching* by Robert Stephan Reid. In two examples, I find a bias towards the sermon as human words.

Homiletic Peer Coaching is a two year programme that includes lectures and coaching at Vanderbilt, as well as self-study and field work.²⁵ The method includes dialogue between coach and preacher where the group acts as a reflective team and it also includes dialogue between the group and preacher, guided by the coach.²⁶ One of the basic ideas is that it constitutes an inductive process. The group is not to advise or analyse, but encourage questions seeking to clarify what is most important for the preacher. Homiletic Coaching promotes solidarity by pointing toward something bestowed on the coach and peer group. One might say that it copies the idea of Luther of the protection of the preacher in the gospel, working toward making the sermon the object of reflection and not the preacher. There is respect for the fact that the sermon is not just a communication of the text, but a possibility for a word from the beyond – the sermon as the word of God. This is supported by the way each session begins and ends with prayer as an invocation of something external.

Still, Homiletic Coaching maintains a strong focus on the sermon as the words of a specific individual considering resources from the preachers background. The significance of the human word is evident, since the success of the method is dependent on a working group's dynamics. The very care for the vulnerable words of another human being increases the focus on the sermon a word of humans. It is debatable whether it is implicated in the method that individuals can face one another without ulterior motive, ultimately without succumbing to the sin of trying to create the other person in his or her own image. A clarification of the concept of sin is, therefore, relevant for this method to guard against a gnostic understanding of the sermon, making salvation something from within, when the preacher becomes the best preacher possible to her or himself. The Doctrine of the Two Natures may guard against this notion, but also the Lutheran understanding of the always present potential of sin in not acknowledging that the words of humans, whether spoken by coach or preacher, are just words of a created creature. I admit that the elements of Homiletic Coaching does tend toward seeing the sermon as the word of God, but also that the method has a clear bias towards the sermon as the word of humans.

25 See online: www.homileticcoaching.com

26 Part of the curriculum is an explanation of the reflective team by Marianne Gaarden. A more comprehensive discussion of reflective team is found in Gaarden, M. & Ringgaard Lorensen, M. 2015. *Das Reflektierende Team: Im dritten Raum fürs Predigen lehren* [The Reflecting Team: In the third room to teach preaching]. In: P Meyer & K Oxen (Hrsg.), *Predigen lehren: Methoden für die homiletische Aus- und Weiterbildung*. Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 269-275.

Burton Z Cooper and John S McClure present in *Claiming Theology in the Pulpit* a theological model to help preachers systematically examine their theological positions and sermons, creating a theological typology to help creating coherence between a preachers' theological profile and her or his operative homiletics.²⁷ The major focus on classic theological themes may appeal to a preacher with a high regard for the sermon as the Word of God. The very insistence on a theological method results in a focus on the sermon as more than just words of a human. The sermon as Word of God is also highlighted because the preacher must respect as the basic theological premise that something from the outside has authority over the preacher's sermon and the preacher's words, making the sermon contain something foreign to the preacher.

On the other hand, Cooper and McClure's method respects the sermon as word of a human, because it falls to the preacher to decide which of the many theological categories he or she will accept as authorities on their sermon. The responsibility to find a consistent theology and the way the preacher has to take the congregation into consideration while writing the sermon, all points toward the sermon as the word of a human being. It seems, therefore, that this method understands the necessary balance between the sermon as Word of God and word of human. A preacher may, for example, choose freely between the different teachings of atonement (sermon as the word of human), but cannot choose to reject atonement as part of a theological typology (sermon as the Word of God).

In *The Four Voices of Preaching*, Robert Stephan Reid aims at creating an anthropology of preaching, finding four voices of preaching that are dominant expressions in a sermon, the teaching, the encouraging, the sage, and the testifying voice, each maintaining implicit assumptions on the nature of language and authority.²⁸ A voice can find authority in two different ways; in the idea of the shared truth of a community, or in the idea of the individual having access to the larger truth. Another difference is how much the preacher through his or her appeal can give rise to a specific response in the listener or conversely how much the listener can attribute meaning to the message. According to Reid, every voice has an implicit way of appealing to the listener that influences the way the listener responds.²⁹ An authentic sermon comes into being when the way of appeal is organically linked with the message in the sermon. Reid's ways of letting modern communication theories interact with the philosophical and theological tradition show great attention to the importance of the Word of God in preaching.

Nevertheless, the overall perception of Reid's position points toward the sermon as word of the human being. The relationship between the preacher and the listeners is always a rhetorical relationship, creating a focus on the preacher's voice as human words, because the audience's response is dependent on the preacher's voice to call out their own voices. Only when this rhetorical relationship is understood and accepted does the sermon become authentic. I do acknowledge the importance of Reid's work, particularly because of his honest desire to reinterpret preaching in light of the idea of the rhetorical relationship – this breathes new life into the interpretation of testimony in preaching.

27 Cooper, B.Z. & McClure, J.S. 2003. *Claiming theology in the Pulpit*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox.

28 Reid, R.S. 2006. *The Four Voices of Preaching*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 22.

29 Reid, *The Four Voices*, 199.

Conclusion

How to preach and preach better sermons is closely linked to the Word that is preached in the sermons. The way preachers reflect on a sermon, cannot be disconnected from the reflection on it being Christ, the divine Word, they preach in their sermon, while moving the lips of humans.

This study has identified the Doctrine of the Two Natures of the Word as a guiding principle in a theology of preaching and in sermon reflection. The two natures of Christ cannot be separated from his redemptive work, and early Christologies that did recognise the two natures were at a risk of weakening the incarnation. The claim of the Doctrine of the Two Natures and of the closeness of the divine and human natures, despite the fundamental differences between them, may help explain how the two fundamentally different words in the sermon relate to each other.

The view acknowledging the two natures of the word in the sermon, comes to the realisation that a preacher has no power over her or his own sermon, implying that the sermon as fully Word of God and completely human words. As such it contains an otherness, something foreign to the preacher. This essay proposes that seeing the sermon as fully Word of God and entirely word of humans may facilitate an authentic encounter with the sermon, neither to be revered nor to be domesticated and thus creating the possibility of a true sermon reflection.

Through the above analysis of three modern examples of sermon analysis, the conclusion was reached that there is a bias toward seeing the sermon as word of the human being. It is important to understand the theology of sin in the different approaches to preaching reflection. The appreciative approach seems to be so significant that it may overshadow the knowledge that any preacher only have access to words of a created creature. Perhaps the very act of choosing a method may emphasise one's ownership of the analysis and, consequently, the understanding of the sermon as the words of humans. Since it is always easier to criticise a method than to create one, one should give recognition to those that expose themselves to critique by being more one-sided.

There is a qualitative difference between the sermon as the Word of God and word/s of humans. I call it "difference", since it leaves the possibility of existence in close proximity. The absolute qualitative difference between God and man, which Luther focuses on while explaining the nature of the divine Word, is followed by God's expression of the highest kind of contact, the Incarnation. Thus, the Doctrine of the Two Natures combines the absolute difference with the greatest of proximity. Transferred to sermon reflection, it follows that the concept of proximity respects the preacher's strong commitment to preaching, love of the gospel and knowledge of the responsibility to be undertaken. On the other hand, the concept of difference respects the sermon as something foreign, not to be boxed in and ultimately not within the power of preachers since it is within God's sphere.

Understanding the relationship between the Word of God and word of humans in the sermon is at the heart of understanding what preaching is. Hence the obligation to reflect on the practice of sermon reflection recognising both current homiletic research, while retaining the knowledge of and need for classical theology.

The Paradox of the Preacher – The Great Tension in Homiletics and Preaching

25

Literaty Zoltan

Where God and humans meet, one inevitably encounters paradoxes. Any contact between the two worlds results in apparent conflicts, among which incarnation itself is perhaps the most salient. But there is another example of such tension as well: preaching. Preaching encompasses two radically different worlds or, more precisely, two radically different personalities and by the miracle of preaching, the acts of God and the acts of humans become a single, inseparable unit. This merger poses an almost irresolvable paradox to the human mind.

In this essay, I wish to shed light on the paradoxical persona of the preacher in the context of our age. The main problem with approaching the preacher's role is that it can be done both empirically and theologically. It is crucial, however, that the miracle itself does happen – that is, the different interpretations converge toward a common goal. So, at the end of this essay – after introducing and analysing the paradox, I will propose some possible solutions to this apparent dilemma.

Preaching is a verbal act where the context is provided by a sacral-liturgical and a rhetorical situation at the same time. This dichotomy results in two possible viewpoints from which preaching can be expounded, one theological and the other communicational. Theological practice views the preacher in the light of compressed biblical truths, both descriptively and prescriptively. From the viewpoint of communication, however, the ideal preacher may be described based on empirical data. At first, these two approaches may seem paradoxical – and rightly so.

In a broader context, this paradox determines not only the preacher's role, but the communication of the whole church. In the 1970s, Moltmann already alluded to the dual crisis of church and theology, calling them the "*crisis of relevance*" and the "*crisis of identity*";¹ respectively. These crises are closely connected to each other: the more the church tries to remain relevant in the modern age, the faster it loses its identity and vice versa – the more the church tries to keep its identity by conforming to its traditions (which are not necessarily grounded in theology), the less it will be able to reach contemporary people. The formula seems to be clear: the church either gives up on its traditions, or on the people, but it cannot keep both.

The crisis of relevance has more than one cause. According to Klaus Douglass, one cannot elude the problem of language. After many centuries of stagnation, at the end of the twentieth century, the church had to change its communication in order to reach its audience. To paraphrase Tillich: While Luther made enormous efforts to speak the language of the people of his age, his successors do everything to revert to Luther's language. The other cause of this crisis of relevance is the individualisation and

1 Moltmann, J. 1973. *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*. Augsburg: Fortress, 7.

pluralisation of modern societies. Nothing is self-explanatory anymore: everything seems possible everywhere, including religion, and topics which once everyone was involved in disappeared. This means that there are hardly any topics left that can move everyone, there are hardly any forms left to that everyone can conform and that there are hardly any answers that can satisfy everyone.² Due to the latter situation, preaching as an act of ecclesiastic identification is bound to set boundaries. The church service and the sermon in it are the most potent communication forms the church can use to reach its audience. As such, preaching has to be textual, biblical and according the creed while remaining interesting, exciting and communal. The preacher must, therefore, reckon with this dichotomy during the sermon he or she delivers, as it must be both theologically recognisable and sound, but also, from the viewpoint of effective communication, interesting.

First, regarding the theological demands on the preacher, According to the Second Helvetian Creed, the preacher's person cannot guarantee the authenticity of the sermon, as "bad servants of the church must be listened to as well" (Chapter XVIII). Jesus himself mentions this when he advised his audience to accept the teachings of the Pharisees, but do not follow their example (Matthew 23:3). Paul also knows those who preach with false motives, but he still approves of their ministry (Philippians 1:18). So, according to the creed, authentic preaching is based on the purity of the teaching, not on the sanctity of the preacher, as it was held by the Donatists in the fourth century.³ In other words, preaching of the Reformed tradition must have be firmly rooted the creed and not in preacher's moral discipline, which is only secondary in this regard. The reformers of the sixteenth century followed the creed very closely, but when it came to the question of ethics, they had to make certain compromises.

That's why the Lutheran church introduced the practice of "visitations" to control the life-style of the ministers: 10% of them were suspended during a round of these visitations.⁴

This is what Laszlo Ravasz was writing about when he declared that leaving the authenticity of the preaching to preachers' moral codes was never a comfortable task "since [from] the beginning of the world, priests always had questionable morals."⁵

So, from the perspective of theology, it is all right, as is reflected in the famous Reformation saying: *predicatio verbi Dei est Verbum Dei*. Bohren borrows this saying when trying to define what lies at the heart of preaching, even emphasising the "est":

Everything comes down to these three letters. I have no other intention ... [but to] to explain these three letters to our age. If I can make it clear, then I shed light on the miracle of preaching.⁶

So, the roots of the importance of identity go back as far as the sixteenth century, when the demand for theological correctness was greater than the demand for unquestionable morals. Because of this, identity and authenticity were separable. Being theologically above reproach was the only criterion for correct preaching. Should we approach this question from the side of logos, making the preaching dependable on the morals of the preacher, both the preaching and the preacher would

2 Douglass, K. 2001. *Die neue Reformation: 96 Thesen zur Zukunft der Kirche* [The New Reformation. 96 Theses for the Future of the Church]. Stuttgart: Kreuz-Verlag, 2001. 27.

3 Augustine of Hippo. 2014. *The Writings of St. Augustine against the Donatists*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 134-135.

4 Hézer, G. 2005. *Pásztorálpszichológiai szempontok az istentisztelet útkereséséhez* [Pastoral-psychological aspects in pursuit of worship]. Budapest: Kálvin Kiadó. 41.

5 Ravasz, L. 1915. *A gyülekezeti ígéhirdetés elmélete* [A theory of church preaching]. Pápa 265.

6 Bohren, R. 1971. *Predigtlehre*. München: Kaiser, 51.

suffer as a result. As per the creed, the only benchmark is the Word of God – so, if the preacher is a *Verbi divini minister*, then – both in the sense of theology and in the sense of identity – the *Verbum Divinum* is more important than its vessel, the minister. This situation should be easily and totally understandable in a contemporary polemical context, where dogmatic arguments between different churches are the most key factors – much more so than the ethos, the communicational factors. But such ideas were not limited to the sixteenth century. Neo-Reformed theology represented by Karl Barth also tried to reduce the role of the preacher in the act of preaching.⁷ Barthian theology was an answer to theology that idealised the image of the German national preacher and very conscious of “the (hu)man in the mirror” of various philosophies: according to Positivism, humans were capable of continued development; according to Liberalism, humans were ceaselessly pursuing their freedom and Romanticism over-emphasised peoples’ national sentiments. Barth’s answer to this theology was his famous resounding “No!” The basis of his homiletics was *Deus dixit*, or, in his own words: “God alone must speak.”⁸ The act of humankind is the act of God through consecration. The individual must disappear to allow God to act via the act of the preaching. The preacher can, at most, be the messenger, but then only through obedience in faith.⁹ When it comes to the preacher, Barthian theology acknowledges only one merit, that of staying in the background!

Barthian theology provides an answer to certain nineteenth-century homiletic theories that can safely be labelled personality-oriented homiletics. The most apparent characteristic of the Great American School-movement is the significance of the preacher’s personality. According to Beecher, the preacher is necessarily also a teacher, but also even more than that. A teacher only communicates a certain thought or truth, but the preacher also shares his personality with the audience. The preacher is an artist, but not in the sense of shaping content and matter, but in the sense of revealing his soul.¹⁰ Beecher is of the opinion that only moral truths are capable of becoming part of the human soul, not physical or scientific truths. Unlike hope, fear, joy, love or faith, things like numbers, weight and physical dimensions cannot touch the audience. The preacher is the personal embodiment of truth. Scripture is just ink on a paper; the Word of God only comes alive through the preacher, as was the case in the times of the prophets and the apostles.¹¹ All true preaching contains something of the preacher’s personality. “Christ is *in* you.” The truth represented by the historical Jesus is now the truth in yourself. There is a strong Kantian influence in this thought, in the sense that the “object” (that is, the world outside the subject, including God) can only be the truth to the extent that it is internalised through the subject and the consciousness.

In the nineteenth century, one of the most influential American writers on homiletics summarised the essence of preaching as “communicating the truth to a person by another person.”¹² This sentence also summarises the core of his homiletics. His system stands on two pillars: truth and personality. Both are referred to when one talks about preaching. Even the greatest truth, he says, cannot be called preaching unless it is communicated between two people. But the reverse is true as well: no matter how brilliant something is that someone says to me, it cannot be called preaching if there is no truth in it. Preaching is exposing the truth through personality.¹³

7 Resner, A. 1999. *Preacher and Cross, Person and Message in Theology and Rhetoric*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 58-65.

8 Barth, K. 1963. *The preaching of the Gospel*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 15.
See more: “Revelation is a closed system in which God is the subject, the object and the middle term”, p. 12; “Preaching is the Word of God which he himself has spoken”, p. 9.

9 Barth, K. 1991. *Homiletics*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 71-75.

10 Beecher, H.W. 1872. *Yale Lectures on preaching*, Delivered before the theological department of Yale College, New Haven, Conn., as the first series in the regular course of the Lyman Beecher lectureship on preaching. New York: JB Ford, 2.

11 Beecher, *Yale Lectures*, 3.

12 Brooks, P. 1877. *Lectures on preaching*. Delivered before the Divinity School of the Yale College in January and February 1877. New York: JB Ford, 5.

13 Brooks, *Lectures on preaching*, 5.

This nineteenth-century homiletics has been resurrected today when the preacher's (real or perceived) moral purity comes before faithfulness to the creed; when biblical preaching is seen as less important than authentic Christianity. Instead of theological precision, the audience is moved by the preacher's ability to integrate theological truths into his own life and to communicate this transformation to them. Abstract truths take second place to impressions and experiences. The person of the twenty-first century is motivated by the preacher's personality and not by dry dogmatic exhortations. Boredom is a greater threat than theological mistakes.

The same applies to authenticity, which is seen as absolutely essential. Today it is almost impossible to imagine a situation where a teaching (no matter how faithful to the creed it may be) is accepted by the public if it is communicated by an unauthentic preacher. In fact, the reverse is true. Craddock cites the following six examples of or reasons for the communicational approach becoming just as important as the theological.

1. One is the early situation of American Christianity, or more precisely, the imperfections of the tenets preached by the Social Gospel Movement. While intense theological debates raged in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Europe, in the USA, the Social Gospel Movement's motto was "Deeds, not words!"¹⁴ The latter wanted to give social meaning to Christian ethics, which is a noble attempt, but unfortunately it also led to a devaluation of words and preaching in general. This process went hand in hand with the general social experience that words lost their power. This, naturally, influenced homiletic thought.

The starting point for the study of homiletics has been radically shifted. All considerations of structure, unity, movement, use of text and so forth, must wait upon the prior consideration of what words are and what they do.¹⁵

2. Citing Ebeling, Craddock traces the second reason of renewal to traditional religious speech.

Unfortunately, the church has no retirement program for old words that fought well at Nicaea, Chalcedon, and Augsburg. They are kept in the line of march...¹⁶

3. The third and arguably most important experience that, according to Craddock, enforces change was "the effect of television". He holds that visuality created a crisis of confusion between the functions of the eyes and the ears. Thanks to television, the role and place of orality changed dramatically. Both the hearing and the speech of people got tied to images. In the 1960s, many have thought that the efficiency of preaching depends on whether the preacher can preach the way the people "see today".¹⁷ Craddock went against this change by wanting to restore the role of orality, since, he felt that the emptiness of words is not the same as their essence. Words seem empty because they are used in the wrong way.
4. The fourth argument concerns temporality, that is, the question of the preacher moving to a temporary home – a tent – from his castle. The church must, again, make the transition from space to time, accepting volatility.

14 Craddock, F.B. 2006. *As One without Authority*. St Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 6.

15 Craddock, *As One*, 7.

16 *Ibid.* p. 8.

17 *Ibid.* p. 9.

5. The fifth argument¹⁸ for change is transforming the aforementioned relationships between preacher and audience. The earlier approach assumed that the preacher has the full authority of the creed behind him and an audience is always eager to be taught. Such passive listening to the Word is often comfortable, but not necessarily effective. Craddock thinks that democracy has already reached the pulpit: people want to have an active part in things relevant to them, and preaching is no exception.
6. Finally, there is the question of communication. Speaking may be easy, says Craddock, but communicating something is much more difficult. Communication always struggles with the question of effectiveness and since communication is a part of preaching, the effectiveness of preaching must be constantly reconsidered.

From the above, one sees that for a preacher in the above paradigm, authentic communication correlates with authentic living. All the trust the preacher enjoys from the audience heavily depends on communication. And, this trustworthy communication stems, primarily, from authentic living and not from dogma.

The paradox, therefore, is that, from a theological perspective, the truth of God's Word does not depend on the preacher's way of life, however, from the perspective of communication, authentic living is the first criteria. If one is to ask today whether a sermon with its theological truth counterweighs the inauthentic ethos of a preacher, then the answer is always, no. The reason for this is quite straightforward, namely that in a twenty-first-century context, theology is something that is lived, experienced and carries the weight of life. This theology actually "walks the talk" and comes to life in the life of the preacher.

How, then, may one dissolve the paradox so that the preacher preaches within an everyday context? Below follow a few suggestions.

Erudition

Among the many ways to dissolve the above paradox, is by way of skill and knowledge. According to 2 Timothy 2:15, a good preacher is someone "who correctly handles the word of truth" (NIV). The verb "handle" in the original Greek translates is ὀρθοτομέω that literally means "to cut straight", or to "rightly divide". The word denotes the act of a surgical intervention where the surgeon uses his scalpel for medical reasons. For the preacher, therefore, it is indispensable, in a manner of speaking, to use the sharp knife of the Word in a healing and reconstructive manner. He/she is required to scrub, to cut straight into the text, to find the message and implant it into the soul of the audience. Hence the need for a qualification when one is to become a preacher, in other words, to be a professional. In the sixteenth century, the understanding of the pastoral self was pushed towards the brink of a paradigm shift once an increasing number of pastors began to find themselves right outside of their once hermetically-sealed monasteries in the midst of the trials and tribulations of everyday life. The ensuing identity crisis they suffered was quite understandable as the overall dramatic changes left them far behind in a world that soon became obsolete. Thus, a new type of pastor was needed, one who was efficiently trained in theology. The reformers understood this from the beginning and did everything they could to foster the new identity of the pastor in their changing times. As history knows it, their efforts were not in vain, as they finally ushered in the anticipated paradigm shift: The Catholic idea of the "pious priest" was successfully challenged into

18 Ibid. p. 11.

the Protestant scholar-priest alternative. Cloister cells with prie-dieus were soon relocated to study halls in libraries equipped with books. In this process of intellectual development, a new species of pastors emerged (and remained dominant until the middle of the nineteenth century): the *sacerdos literati*.¹⁹ In Hungary, even the meaning of our liturgical vestments is found in this idea, for at the time the pulpit robe was not an ecclesiastical garment customarily worn by ordained ministers, but a gown worn only by the scholarly class! So, concluding the above, as a preacher it became necessary to be academically qualified in order to maintain a well-grounded theological argument when it came to defining the three basic pillars of the preacher's personhood: a) personality, b) office and c) calling.

Personality

For this section I refer to the typology model based on the study of Fritz Riemann, who investigated the personality traits of preachers.²⁰ According to this model, there are four types of personalities. Riemann postulated that based on the first 6 years of their childhood development, every person will develop one of four types of personalities: schizoid, depressive, obsessive or hysterical.

Driven to find the absolute truth in life, the schizoid type of preacher will relentlessly pursue and unveil the issues of life and faith. He is determined to know and to understand; all else is but a secondary concern. Traditions remain on the periphery as the discovery of truth is the only way that leads to God. Such a preacher requires a critical and independent audience who is able to find solutions to their own problems. The source of these preachers' identity rests within their inner freedom even if they remain in their convictions. They are not lenient towards the spirit of their age, but will fight against the emptiness and unsubstantiality of the church. Their genuine nature will either inspires awe or create a stumbling for their audience.

The depressive type of preachers tend to avoid conflict and are inclined to foster a childlike faith within themselves. Their primary motivation is not to change circumstances, but rather to get them accepted by believers. The content of their sermons will likely revolve around the empathetic and caring God and will include the theme of suffering that needs to be endured. Also, they will probably not urge their hearers to practice individual responsibility, but they will instead rather comfort them. Their greatest asset is empathy.

The intolerant behaviour of the obsessive type of preachers many times functions as a self-defence mechanism, as they are easily irritated by the fact that others pursue forbidden things while they themselves abstain from these. They are loyal to traditions and they value institutions. They are people of confession and guardians of true faith. Their sermons are, therefore, logical, well constructed, give food for thought and are convincing.

The hysterical type of preachers want to make sure they have the maximum impact on their audience. They are well aware of and enjoys their talents. From a homiletical perspective, the basic characteristics of preaching (for example, faithfulness to the text, to the Scripture, to the creeds, etc.) are, for them, less important and function only as if they were customary accessories. In their sermons, the content of truth is usually outweighed, even endangered, by their style and intended impact. On the other hand, however, their sermons are eloquently delivered and stirs the heart. Strongly-suggestive preachers will also be found in this category. Their sermons are always fascinating experiences and they themselves are role models to many. Most famous and popular preachers are from this type.

19 Hézser, *Pásztoralpszichológiai*, 42.

20 Riemann, F. 1974. Die Persönlichkeit des Predigers aus tiefenpsychologischer Sicht. In: R Riess (ed.), *Perspektiven der Pastoralpsychologie*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 153-166.

Although the above-mentioned types have only been applied to preachers thus far, one should not forget that the audience is not exempt from the typology model either. Members of the audience will fall into one of the four categories too. Therefore, it is vital for preachers to remember that they will themselves likely fail in meeting all the different expectations of their entire audience. Nevertheless, self-knowledge is an essential asset for the pastor. With improved self-reflection skills, a preacher may contribute a great deal in learning how to listen and decipher the words, feelings and expectations of an audience. Consequently, this will further contribute to the development of a communication where the personality and the life of the preacher are openly discussed. I find this to be a great opportunity for the preacher in easing his or her frustrations. In Hungary, there are new and developing models that aim at supporting and serving pastors in the development of self-reflection skills.

Office

The role of the pastor often encompasses the tasks of the ecclesiastical office. The office of the pastor requires awareness of the preacher unless they wish to overload themselves. There are many and sometimes impossible expectations from pastors that come from their environment, but this is equally true of preachers.²¹ People who help others always have an image of how they want to see themselves performing their office. For preachers, it is important to handle their roles consciously and with control. According to the Jungian archetype theory, pastors find themselves between two worlds: It is expected of them to be saints, but also to remain wholly human at the same time. The “both-this-and-that” state of being again evokes the paradox discussed above. It is very challenging to meet all the expectations of those who “want change without change”. Preachers have to be aware that they cannot live up to all of these expectations and that this state of being is like an always-double-sided coin. The pastoral office incorporates at least three different archetypal elements: prophet, rabbi, and priest. That is, prophet as in being the divine messenger of God addressing socio-political instability; the rabbi as in being the wise sage who explains life; and priest as in being the liturgist taking the lead in the cult. Together these three elements constitute the office of the pastor.

Calling

The term “calling” refers to a spiritual notion. It denotes the personality of the new-born preacher who experiences the will of God through the call. This is vital because aside from their scientific competencies and self-reflection skills, pastors will also have to utilise the potential of their regenerated hearts. Each and every homiletical book published since Augustine’s *De Doctrina Christiana* agrees that without spirituality, no one can become a preacher or a teacher of God’s Word. Spirituality is the experience of walking together in freedom with the Holy Spirit. In spirituality one experiences the freedom that is indispensable to the ministry of the preacher. One of the key notions of *Predigtlehre* is maintaining the freedom of the preacher. This notion embraces freedom of all kinds: It includes the freedom from the audience, the freedom from the pastoral self, the freedom of the gospel, and the freedom from the congregation. “If homiletics is about protecting the freedom of the preacher, then the miraculous nature of the sermon is secured and its arrival guaranteed.”²² It is important that preachers maintain their freedom from their audiences, in other words, that their ministry is not being defined by church expectations.²³ However, the preacher also has to remain free from himself: “If homiletics provides the preacher with freedom, then it will attempt to free

21 Thilo, H.-J. 1971. *Beratande Seelsorge*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 31.

22 Bohren, *Predigtlehre*, 54.

23 *Ibid.* pp. 444-448.

the preacher from his own prison.”²⁴ Accordingly, it will also attempt to free the preacher, who is entrapped in the spirit of a church officer. However, one must not forget that the preacher also happens to be a church officer and, whenever a preacher speaks, so does the officer. “Church officers are usually nice guys [sic]”, says Bohren. He continues, that he fears that

*...we have sacrificed countless souls on the altar of niceness and I am against niceness that sacrifices humans. Nice is not to be confused with self-discipline. Niceness deconstructs the human, but self-discipline will conquer it. Therefore, the opposite of niceness is not negligence, but freedom. Nice preachers are not free and they do not wield liberating powers. Niceness will always feel a bit like prison or captivity, which can take on many forms. One might be held captive by exegesis, by dogmatics, or by oneself. And such captivity, once displayed in the pulpit, will become immediately evident to the whole church, as the Gospel will suffocate and choke in these chains in front of their very eyes. The audience might actually hear a sermon on the gospel, but the gospel itself will remain silent. This is what I mean when I say niceness sacrifices humans: when it becomes more important for the preacher to preach well than to liberate the audience and have them rejoice over the gospel.*²⁵

The freedom of the pastor is best experienced in the freedom of the gospel. As Paul puts it: “Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible” (1 Corinthians 9:19-23). In other words, our calling requires obedience and by it we transition into a servant-like condition. God commands and the preacher follows. The freedom of the Holy Spirit is always realised within our relationship with God, that is, within the Lord-servant relationship. This is the eternal paradox for preachers: They are free as long as they remain servants; the preacher as *Verbi divini Minister*. When these two conditions remain in balance, the audience will experience preaching that is authentic both theologically and rhetorically.

24 Ibid. p. 203.

25 Ibid. p. 403.

The Paradox of the “Little Leaven” (1 Corinthians 5:6) and the Power of Truth, Peace and Justice

26

Dimitra Koukoura¹

Peace: The fragile good and constant wars

Peace is the greatest good. It ensures life and favours the individual and the collective progress of people in society. It, therefore, seems irrational that throughout history, wars have never stopped. Many people are often not even aware of the atrocities of war. After twenty-five centuries, Greek philosopher Heraclitus' (544-484 BCE) words still rings true, that “[w]ar is the father of all and king of all, who manifested some as gods and some as men, who made some slaves and some freemen.”² Such are the deadly conflicts that are due to arrogance and vanity of the powerful, or the perversion of the mind that uses religious cues to motivate terrorist attacks. The casualties of war are not only innumerable human lives which are lost, but also property, cultural monuments, cities, entire countries and the natural environment that are destroyed. In the past, conventional weapons sacrificed people and levelled their accomplishments. From the ruins, however, there would always flow some hope for new life. However, modern chemical and biological weapons and radioactivity, if they do not completely destroy creation, can permanently disfigure it. The results of modern warfare are indeed the stuff of nightmares – teratogenicity, mutations, reproductive difficulties, et cetera.

Despite the horrors of war, they continue to break out as the causes of war have not been and are not eliminated. And most will agree that peace a coveted good, but also that it is extremely fragile. This becomes all the more apparent as the mighty ruthlessly exploit the weak, as global wealth accumulates in the hands of a few and as fanaticism spreads death in the name of religion. Arrogance, selfishness, greed, hypocrisy and corruption take hands in a circular dance that obliterates human efforts to the opposite; justice and peace are their first victims.

The contemporary landscape

In the wake of two world wars, over seven decades, it was only the continued will of the world community that prevented a third global war and a nuclear holocaust. However, they did not prevent regional conflicts, the imposition of tyrannical regimes, ecological and cultural destruction, ethnic cleansing or the persecution of religious communities – Christians in particular. Organised efforts

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2 Heraclitus. *The Complete Fragments. Commentary and the Greek text.* Transl. and commentary W Harris, Middlebury College, no. 25. Online at: <http://community.middlebury.edu/~harris/Philosophy/heraclitus.pdf> (Accessed: 15 January 2016).

by international agencies to secure peace,³ declarations of political and religious leaders,⁴ the activities of civil society groups and non-governmental could, in most cases, only hope to limit the consequences of conflict. They seem powerless to prevent or end it in spite of the fear that is created by current events in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, North Africa and the Middle East and the levelling of villages and cities, rape committed as a weapon of war, and the starvation and disease that follows in the wake of armed conflicts, not to mention the forced displacement of thousands, often ending in drowning in the waters of the Aegean Sea and the Mediterranean Sea. There indeed seems to be a continuous traveling caravan of impoverished people on a never-ending route of hardship to only be buried in the ruins of its history.⁵ From many of these travellers today have Central European countries as their destination, with Mediterranean countries as halfway stations along the way. Behind all of this lies the wish to survive hellish circumstances often created by religious fanaticism and the hypocrisy of the powerful in their countries of origin.

The justice and the fight against poverty: conditions for peace

A crisis of human values is considered by many to be the cause of the recent economic crisis that affected communities in the Northern Hemisphere. Nevertheless, an economy without a social face, one that annihilates the human person, is due precisely to a crisis of moral values. Without justice there can be no peace. Nowadays, apart from pronouncements by international organisations and the spread of democracy, justice coincides with other major decisions, such as the fight against poverty, the elimination of the unequal distribution of wealth, the possibility of weak countries to exploit their natural wealth themselves, fair wages and the protection of employees, et cetera.

God of peace and justice

Peace and justice are also major themes in the Bible and often intertwined in it. Psalms assert, amongst others, that “[r]ighteousness and peace kissed each other” (Psalm 84 [85]:11), while urging one to “[k]eep your tongue from evil, seek peace and pursue it” (Psalm 33 [34]:15). The prophet Isaiah states that “[t]he works of righteousness will be peace” and foretells that “righteousness shall ensure rest and confidence forever. His [God’s] people will dwell in a city of peace” (Isaiah 32:17-18). Later Hezekiah replies to Isaiah that “[t]he Lord’s word you [Isaiah] spoke is good. For there will be peace and righteousness in my days” (Isaiah 39:8). Moreover, other prophets warn the apostate princes of Israel and the indifferent peoples of the land that the coming king would be a “counsel of peace” (Isaiah 9:5, Zachariah 9:9) and will bring peace (Nahum 2:1). According to the prophet Ezekiel, the result of the struggle of God for his servant David is peace and justice and that God “...will also make a covenant of peace with David, and utterly destroy the evil wild animals from the land. They shall dwell in the desert and sleep in the forests” (Ezekiel 34:24-25).

3 See, for example, the WWC’s Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV): Churches Seeking reconciliation and Peace. Online at: <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/international-affairs/peace-and-disarmament/peace-concerns/the-decade-to-overcome-violence-dov-churches-seeking-reconciliation-and-peace> (Accessed: 13 January 2016); and “The Message of the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation” (July 2011, Kingston Jamaica). Online at: <http://www.overcomingviolence.org/en/resources-dov/wcc-resources/documents/presentations-speeches-messages/iepc-message.html> (Accessed: 13 January 2016).

4 The *Bosphorus Statement*. Istanbul, 25 June 1992. <http://www.bsec-organization.org/documents/declaration/summit/Reports/Bosphorus%201992.pdf>

5 See for example media reports on the Pope’s to visit Lesbos with Orthodox to highlight plight of refugees. Online at: <http://www.catholicnews.com/services/englishnews/2016/pope-to-visit-lesbos-with-orthodox-to-highlight-plight-of-refugees.cfm> (Accessed: 9 January 2016). Or, for reports on the desperate situation with refugees in Serbia. Online at: <http://www.balkan.eu.com/dramatic-situation-refugees-serbia> (Accessed: 2 January 2016).

At the birth of Christ, an army of heavenly angels glorifies God and praises the peace that God brings to the world and the salvation that came to the people. Christ came into the world to guide the steps of human beings in the path of peace, says Luke (1:79) and to reconcile them with God the Father. For this reason, those who bring peace to humanity (the peacekeepers) will be called children of God, according to Matthew (5:9), while Paul emphasises that God's people should avoid envy, arguments and insults, which become causes of conflict. Paul also points out that the root of evil is avarice and he urges Christians to pursue justice, piety, patience and gentleness (1 Timothy 6:4-12).

The message of peace and its testimony

"And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near" (Ephesians 2:17). Shortly before Christ's voluntary passion he left his disciples, his own peace. He, furthermore, ordered them not to get upset and not to hesitate, in order to courageously offer the testimony of the gospel as a ministry of reconciliation (II Corinthians 5:18). This is the way in which the "little leaven" works in society and for humans its logic constitutes a paradox follows a paradox. The peace of Christ is so far beyond every human imagination that only a select few (Matthew 22:14), who experience Christ in their hearts (Philippians 4:7), derive strength from the same Christ in their struggles toward peace and justice. Those who live by the power of the Spirit and follow it (Galatians 5:25) are recipients of the Spirit's gifts. Love, joy, peace, tolerance, kindness, goodness, faith, meekness, abstinence are the fruits of free collaboration of believers with the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit. If someone compares these fruits with the causes of war and conflict is quite easy to recognise in them an antidote for the poison of hatred, malice, greed and infidelity – an antidote, for in one word ... sin.

Peace is a gift from God. The acceptance or rejection of this gift always depends on faith in the God of peace. This same faith reflects on the respect for every human being who is made in God's Image and on the physical creation that was also gifted to humans so as to reside therein.

Peace begins in the mind and the inner world of human beings and manifests itself in the narrower and the wider circles of their behaviour and choices. When people have the peace of God within themselves, their radiance is widespread and their witness becomes more effective with their words, works, activities and their struggles.

The transmission of the message of peace and reconciliation

The gospel of peace and reconciliation is preached, it is heard; it is taught and received (Matthew 11:1). When those who listen are also active members of a society, big or small, and if they believe the truths of the gospel, their minds are illuminated, their passions are pacified; the course of their life changes and their steps are guided by the commands of God. These people are the "saints" of God – those loyal to God's will. They are the little leaven that acts beneficially in troubled societies – sometimes in paradoxical eloquent silence and sometimes in resounding prophetic voices.

A question often asked in the field of Homiletics when referring to issues of peace and justice is how Christian homily may bring about the fruit of peace and justice in a disappointing global environment, such as that of today? The answer is not simple as a homiletic process, as in all communication processes, a variety of factors are involved that are both essential and interrelated.

Determining factors in communication

Recipients: In the parable of the sower, Jesus paints a picture of the mapped out the receptivity of those who hear God's word. In the parable only a quarter of the field was fertile and yielded fruit. The rest of the field yielded nothing. This is also analogous to responses to the word of God when preached: some close their ears to the truth (II Timothy 4:3-4); some "have blocked incoming calls" due to indifference; yet others resist everything that threatens their selfishness and vanity. However, there surely are also those who pray to Christ to illuminate their minds so that they may understand the teaching of the gospel and keep its commandments.

The common linguistic code: The existence of a shared linguistic code between speaker and listener is essential for creating an effective circle of communication and feedback.⁶ In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul, gives a definition and describes the function of such a shared linguistic code.⁷ He asks how others will understand one, if one does intelligible words – it will indeed be like talking to the air (I Corinthians 14:9). Every language analyses the experience and emotions of its linguistic community by using, a specific vocabulary within a specific system of rules of grammar and syntax.⁸ The speaker encodes his or her message with this vocabulary and grammatical system and the listener or interlocutor in turn decodes them to ascertain their meaning. This does not mean that a shared linguistic code necessarily prevent misunderstanding, misinterpretation of non-truths. Of course in the latter case, neither the linguistic code itself, nor the recipient of the message are to blame for the failure of communication. In the words of I Corinthians 13:1, these are examples where the speakers do not have the love of God and indeed resemble a "clashing cymbal" (I Corinthians 13:1).

The linguistic code of the Bible

In the first Christian communities, the linguistic code used for preaching Hellenistic Koiné. The "verbs of eternal life" (John 6:68) that the disciples of Christ heard, were clothed in a simple garb. It was a language that was the result of a natural evolution of Ancient Greek and it was widely known and used in the Eastern Mediterranean basin.⁹ In the same epoch, from the renowned cultural centre of the time, Alexandria, sprang the current of Atticism, which was imposed on the written word and in all literary genres.¹⁰ It was felt that high literature (*Hochliteratur*) required "high language" (*Hochsprache*), this case an imitation of the ancient Attic dialect. Similarly, an appropriate style was needed with the use of appropriate rhetorical figures. Christian texts were written in a "low language" (*Kleinesprache*). They belonged to "low literature" (*Kleinliteratur*) thus were disposed of in advance, because for intellectuals the "high meanings" of concepts such as "Truth" and "God" were only to be expressed in high language, according to the "proper" (decorum), which is a principle of the rhetoric of Aristotle.¹¹

The rhetorical figures of the Scriptures, which have been identified by thorough studies,¹² result from natural eloquence. In no way do they demonstrate consistent apprenticeship at the schools of rhetoricians and sophists¹³ of the Hellenistic times, nor the application of logical argumentation. The

6 Cf. Martinet, J. 1973. *Clefs pour la Sémiologie*. Paris, 12-53.

7 *International Encyclopaedia of Communication*, Oxford University Press, 1989, Vol. 3, Models of Communication, 36-43.

8 Martinet, A. 1970. *Cours de linguistique générale*. Paris: Armand Colin, 20.

9 Cf. Browning, R. 1983. *Medieval and Modern Greek* (Second edition). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

10 Hunger, H. 1969/70. On the Imitation (Μίμησις) of Antiquity in the Byzantine Literature. *Dumbarton Oak Papers*, (23-24), 17-38.

11 Aristotle. 1982. *The Art of Rhetoric*. Transl. JH Freese. Cambridge, MA: Loeb Classical Library.

12 Bullinger, E.W. 1994. *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible: Explained and Illustrated* (Nineteenth edition). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

13 Clarke, M.L. 1971. *Higher Education in the Ancient World*. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 11-12, 33.

Apostle Paul clearly states: “And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” (1 Cor. 2:4-5).

Preaching and rhetoric: After the Edict of Milan (313 CE) the great preachers and teachers of the One and Undivided Church in the Greek-speaking East initiated fruitful dialogue with the intellectuals of their time. Their goal was missionary and was aimed at the successful acceptance of the gospel message. The communicative approach, however, presupposed a common linguistic code between the two groups. For the teachers of the gospel this meant an imitation of the ancient Attic dialect and a style adorned with figures of speech – such as those suggested by Gorgias in the fifth century BCE. Consequently, Isocrates worked with his epideictic orations and later restored the Second Sophistic movement.¹⁴ The arguments of the teachers was still, however, is based on Scripture; it interprets the Scriptures and expresses the Apocalyptic Word, as the saints of God experienced it through the energy of the Holy Spirit. The Cappadocians Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian¹⁵, Gregory of Nyssa and the Antiochian John Chrysostom¹⁶ studied in schools of the major orators of the time, all of them emerged as great students and Gregory the Theologian. But if one compares the orations of Gentile teachers and their Christian pupils, one will find a substantial difference. Not in form, but in content. Orators seek the truth by the power of reason, while the teachers of the Church interpret it with the personal experience of the Holy Spirit.

Nowadays, many preachers emerge as impressive orators and are successful not only among religious audiences, but also in public discourse.¹⁷ Not infrequently, inherent natural eloquence, further cultivated by study, especially the study of the indelible rules of rhetoric, produces a convincing speaker, one that delights, moves and urges. Stylistic choices affect all levels of language: phonetics, morphology, syntax, the choice of vocabulary, the voice, the intonation. All these possibilities are available to speakers in order to convey their message/s. of course, the choices made between these different possibilities will also depend on the current trends in each era – style is an art and in all its forms, art reflects it time. In a time of so many impressive orators and preachers it is also important to guard against being seduced by the vanity of orators, who seek their own glory instead of his or her own.

The preacher

In Psalm 105 [106]: 2-3, the psalmist asks: “Who shall tell the mighty deeds of the Lord, Who shall make all His praises heard?” He proceeds to immediately supply the answer, namely, “... those who keep His judgment, and do righteousness at all times.” The magnificence of God’s power is completely disproportionate to the imperfection and weakness of even the most gifted preacher. However, there is no church without the proclamation of the resurrection of the dead and there is no ecclesiastical community that does not address people toward their edification, exhortation and consolation (1 Corinthians 14:3).

14 Bowersock, G.V. 1969. *Greek Sophists in the Roman Empire*. Oxford: Oxford Univeristy Press.

15 Radford Ruether, R. 1969. *Gregory of Nazianzus. Rhetor and Philosophus*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

16 Festugière, A.J. 1959. *Antioche païenne et chretienne. Libanius, Chrysostom et les moines de Syrie*. Paris: Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d’Athènes et de Rome.

17 See for example the following report on the death of Schuller:

“Schuller, who died of cancer Thursday at age 88, enjoyed the admiration of a global following that numbered millions, even while his many critics branded him superficial, phony and mercenary. At its peak, his Orange County-based ministry operated the Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove and the “Hour of Power” television program, which put Schuller’s grinning face and folksy humor before an estimated 20 million viewers a week”. Online at: <http://www.ocregister.com/articles/schuller-656806-church-cathedral.html> Crystal Cathedral (Accessed: 19 January 2018).

For, if people do not hear, how will they believe and if they do not believe, how will they become members of Christ's body, how will they become subsequent partakers of Christ's Mystical Supper so as to be forgiven their sins and that they themselves be recipients to eternal life? (Romans 10:14).

There is also no church without the preaching of the kingdom of God, God's love, hope, peace and justice. Therefore, one may say, there is no church without preachers. It has already been noted that many elements are involved in the transmission of the gospel message. All of these elements – the transmitter, the receiver, the message, the subject, the communication channel and the linguistic code – may play a role in successful or unsuccessful communication. This does not mean that in the case of a sermon, the preacher does not bear the greatest responsibility. The preacher carries out the work of Jesus and the Apostles, namely to teach the truth, denounce falsehood, to build the faith of the members of the community and to encourage them to perform works of peace and justice.

How can preachers become worthy of their mission? How can they cease to be boring or wordy? How can they cease to mimic prosecutors, commentators of international news agencies, political leaders in the middle of an election campaign? All these situations are at best fed a plethora of anecdotes and, at worst, they become the reason to "vilify the name of the Lord" (Romans 2:24).

The art of preaching

Art, in its ancient Greek meaning, is a good that is taught and may be learned. Orators and sophists proved this with general studies program (the *trivium* and *quadrivium*), first followed in Athens in the fifth century BCE and gradually spread to the rest of the West. The so-called *artes liberales* of the Middle Ages formed the core of the modern university.

In a similar way, a preachers studying theology take further knowledge, observe other experienced speakers and themselves diligently practice how to preach. Such students also care to understand their cultural context and the needs of the recipients of the message they bring. These are also fundamental and familiar to those who teach homiletics and to their students. However, it is not enough to transform the world, or to activate the "little leaven" so that truth exposes fraud and dispels falsehood. The psalmist also adds the following to the characteristics of preachers worthy of talking about the marvels and paradoxes of the Lord: "How blessed are those who keep justice, who practice righteousness at all times!" (Psalm 106:3).

Thus, studies are necessary, natural gifts enhance a preacher's work, but something more is necessary: both the preacher's absolute faith in Christ, who is the Truth, as well as a receptiveness to the Spirit of God that leads to the truth (John 14:17).

History has witnessed charismatic preachers who turn into demagogues, consequential teachers in the pulpit that, instead of building, destroy by inconsistent words and works. However, history has also witnessed, enlightened religious leaders who create truth and justice and their work reflects peace and progress. These religious leaders do not all have the same external characteristics or manner, nor the same geographical scope – some are fiery orators who convert crowds to the truth of Christ. Others are sober and silent, who in low tones resurrect life from ruins. Others are affectionate pastors and teachers who stand by the pain and agony of their children in pain and agony, consoling them with their words and comforting them when their souls are in despair. As true disciples of Jesus, these leaders not infrequently are prosecuted for justice's sake, because they are not of this world and the world hates their works.

The truth clears away webs of lies and fraud, the power of which makes prevalence of peace and justice impossible. This is true of all epochs, also in our own troubled and confused times, where humanity is threatened by weapons of mass destruction, often due to incitement by fanatical religious leaders!

In such times, the paradox of the “little leaven” remains. Those committed to witness to the gospel never lose their power effect change because they believe in what Christ himself affirmed, namely that “[i]n the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33).

Paradox and truth

In the second decade of the twenty-first century, the word of the Cross remains scandalous for the Jews and foolishness for all those trying to understand this, the great mystery of godliness (1 Timothy 3:16), with the help of human logic (1 Corinthians 1:23). It presents an embarrassing obstacle to the powerful of the earth who have been dominated by the lure of profit and power. The powerful are also not only the few holders of global wealth in bank accounts, but also all those below them who imitate, struggling to look and become like them. Moral individual and societal values that would be the consequence of faith in God that would peace, dignity and progress are forgotten or ignored in the wake of hypocrisy, exploitation, injustice, fanaticism and blind destructive fury. For this reason, the role of the little leaven today seems even more paradoxical, if the preaching of the truth is compared to the spreading of lies. The Greek word “paradox”, after all refers to a statement or proposition that seems self-contradictory or absurd, but in reality expresses a possible truth or truth contrary to expectation or incredibility.

The promise of preaching in a world of paradoxes, which is the theme of this conference is to provide a solid foundation of hope and the certainty that God has the first and last word in human history, the God who is “the Alpha and the Omega”, the One “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (Revelations 1:8).

Political Preaching with a View to Life's Contradictions

27

Isolde Karle¹

Political preaching in Germany

In Germany, the political sermon has more or less been forgotten in recent times. If for no other reason, this is due to its extremely turbulent history. During the Second World War, for instance, a basic patriotic attitude along with the hope of German victory spread throughout the church. While the majority of pastors did not intend to be explicitly political, they supported the Hitler regime with their advocacy of a strong national state. No fewer preachers, moreover, openly supported German war efforts. Paul Althaus, for example, in a sermon interpreted the campaign against France in 1940 as God's work and paid tribute to the *Führer* and his soldiers. Althaus believed to have felt "the powerful step of God in history".² Conversely, there were also sermons that criticised the war and the killing of the sick and – but rarely – the killing of Jews.

After the Second World War, the political sermon played a role primarily in the context of the discussion of German rearmament. Karl Barth, Martin Niemöller and Ernst Lange spoke out particularly clearly and forcefully against rearmament and in support of global ecumenical reconciliation and all preached explicitly politically. In the years that followed, the Vietnam War, terrorism in Germany and the resistance to nuclear power plants were all publicly-discussed problems that were also addressed from the pulpit.

A pivotal theological impetus for the political sermon in the 1970s and 1980s was provided by Jürgen Moltmann and Dorothee Sölle, both of whom are to be seen as among the most important Protestant representatives of political theology.³ Both figures emphasised theology's political relevance and pushed Christianity towards societal critique and change. It was first and foremost the peace movement in the 1980s that motivated political sermons on a broad base. Following the NATO double-track decision (1979) and the stationing of atomic rockets in Germany, many theologians cited the Sermon on the Mount and in their sermons called on Christians to be peacemakers. Their demands were high: swords should be made into ploughshares (Micah 4:3) and armaments should be unilaterally and preferably completely renounced ("living without armaments", *ohne Rüstung leben*).

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2 Diestelkamp, A.J. 1993. *Das Tier aus dem Abgrund. Eine Untersuchung über apokalyptische Predigten aus der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus* [The Beast from the Abyss. A Study on Apocalyptic Sermons during the National Socialist Time.] Dessau: Zeitungsverlag Anhalt, 245.

3 Moltmann, J. 1964. *Theologie der Hoffnung* [Theology of Hope]. München: Chr. Kaiser; Moltmann, J. 1984. *Politische Theologie – Politische Ethik* [Political Theology – Political Ethics]. München: Christian Kaiser. Cf. also Sölle, D. 1982. *Politische Theologie* [Political Theology]. Stuttgart: Kreuz; and Jean Baptist Metz, et al. (Hrsg.). 2011. *Politische Theologie. Neuere Geschichte und Potenziale* (Theologische Anstöße 1) [Political Theology. Recent History and Potentials.] Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener.

Admittedly, this was a period marked by a demeanour of moral outrage that not infrequently found itself expressed in the pulpit, leading many listeners to reject this type of preaching. Questions of politics were elevated to a creedal status and often in an absolutist manner that seemed to close down any discussion. Some even proclaimed a *status confessionis*, that is, the exceptional case of a doctrinal issue on which the integrity of the church community and the Christian faith are at stake.

Without the peace movement, prayer demonstrations for peace and peaceful demonstrations in general, a non-violent revolution in East Germany in 1989 would hardly have been imaginable. At the same time, the Protestant church's significant role during German reunification did not lead to the strengthening of the church or the faith as many had hoped. "With the collapse of the political systems of the late twentieth century in Europe, the tradition of the political sermon became increasingly silent."⁴ In the following decades sermons preached from German pulpits tended to be limited to the individual and spiritual inwardness. Such themes were innocuous. Furthermore, to many preachers the political situation appeared far too complicated for explicit pronouncements.

A sermon is public speech that should reflect on and deal with the conflicts of life and cannot detach the individual from his or her social, national or global context and surroundings. The political sermon is, therefore, urgently needed by a true-to-life and context-sensitive church today.⁵ The international refugee crisis in recent months has reminded us of this fact once again. How do we want to speak in sermons about human life, without ignoring fears about the refugees or the need to help them? How are the refugees themselves to be treated, not as the *objects* of distant observers, but instead as the *subjects* of their own experiences? How do the aspects of a living environment and global context come into play? And, how can the biblical proclamation be emphasised as a prophetic, transformative, as well as affirmative power?

Against this background I wish to inquire about what a political sermon actually is and what reasons may be offered for maintaining the political dimension of preaching – even in a functionally-differentiated society such as ours. At the same time, some hazards of and opportunities for the misuse of political sermons also need to be reflected upon. This will be followed by suggestions toward a more nuanced conception of the political sermon.

Why preach politically?

Every sermon is implicitly political, because every sermon is *public* speech. A sermon intends to incite its hearers to reflection and a change of behaviour amidst a complicated and often contradictory world. Yet, not only is the sermon's political nature revealed by its public nature: "A sermon is political due to its concrete *partisanship*."⁶ God takes sides "for human life and against death, for freedom and against oppression, for humanity's salvation and against its undoing, for peace and against violence."⁷ This partisanship of God leads the preacher to also take sides. In a sermon on the

4 Oxen, K. 2015. "Nur noch kurz die Welt retten?" Die politische Predigt von heute als Herausforderung für die homiletische Aus- und Fortbildung ["Only Saving the World?" The Political Sermon Today as a Challenge in Homiletic Education]. In: H Schwier (Hrsg.), *Ethische und politische Predigt. Beiträge zu einer homiletischen Herausforderung. Eine Veröffentlichung des Ateliers Sprache e. V., Braunschweig* [Ethical and Political Sermon. Contributions to a Homiletic Challenge]. Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 184-195, (185).

5 Schleiermacher already emphasised the necessity of political preaching. He writes: "Es kann aber auch Umstände geben in denen der Geistliche bewegt wird das Interesse das die Gemeinde bewegt und grade ein politisches ist, darzustellen in dem Zweck es religiös zu stimmen. ... Es giebt in dem politischen äußere und innere Verhältnisse, beide können ein allgemeines Interesse gewinnen, so daß der Geistliche es für nöthig findet sie auf die Kanzel zu bringen." In Schleiermacher, F. 1850. *Die Praktische Theologie nach den Grundsätzen der Evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhange dargestellt*. [Practical Theology Based on the Protestant Church's Principles and Shown in Context]. J. Fereichs (Hrsg.), Berlin: De Gruyter, 209-210.

6 Engemann, W. 2011. *Einführung in die Homiletik* [Introduction to Homiletics]. Tübingen: UTB, 296.

7 *Ibid.* p. 296.

gospel, the concrete circumstances and challenges of life cannot be glossed over, neither in terms of questions discussed in the media, nor of those questions regarding life and its design that may arise in the congregation itself.

The political sermon “allows for human responsibility for the world. It is the expression of the hope that it is necessary and promising to take responsibility in this world.”⁸ It deals with contemporary questions, it informs knowledgeably about problems, it offers convincing arguments for one's own judgment and attempts to reach the conscience of its hearers:

... the church is to be intolerant of the delusion that one must perfect the human being, that one may destroy the creation ... that one must expel foreigners in order to keep one's home.⁹

Political preaching, therefore, leads to the rediscovery and revival of the ancient concept of sin. It discusses the extent of structural sin that is, on the one hand, beyond us but, on the other hand, not possible without our participation. Sin can, therefore, not simply be defined as a general truth, but instead represents a truth in particular contexts of experience. Sin constitutes a destructive and comfortless life-context in conjunction with hopelessness, alienation and lovelessness.¹⁰ It is the task of the sermon to illuminate this context. Sin is “to refuse to promote other life or to contribute to the prevention, obstruction, or destruction and extermination of other life.”¹¹ At the same time, the communication networks of sin are often difficult to grasp. They make us sinners, particularly in this global context, without our knowledge, for instance in the way we contribute daily to the extinction of animal and plant species. Thus, it concerns not merely the moral accountability of the individual, but also the sensibility for the supra-individual dynamics that unfold in the contexts of sin.

Political and ethical preaching often tends to devote attention to the individual failures in human behaviour. This is due to the close relationship between Christianity and morality. Yet, this is also due to the fact that it is much easier to describe the negative than the positive, that which is bad and not which is good. To view life in light of “the promise” (Ernst Lange) means to also view the listeners as actors of good and also to reckon with their positive experiences and not just with their failures. Not only sin, but also the communication network that can be defined by faith, hope and love constitutes a dynamic and strong reality in the lives of believers. Sigrid Brandt formulates as follows: Faith, hope, and love

symbolize their general meaning normally not in meager words; instead, they seek lively forms of communication which encounter and seize human beings in their fullness ... They affect and change us. They change our mental constitution, our cognitive propensities and perspectives as well as our forms of bodily and communal existence. Hence they are catalysts of change in the world.¹²

Whoever wants to preach the gospel will in this sense preach politically and will strive to contribute to such a healing, existentially-impactful and transformative context of communication.

It is clear that these basic reflections assume not a narrow, but a broad concept of the political. According to Aristotle, life in the polis aims at the common and the just in the public sphere. Politics is thus everything that relates to the polis. It is not about party-political statements and also not

8 Ibid. p. 299.

9 Ibid. p. 301.

10 Brandt, S. 1997. Sünde. Ein Definitionsversuch [Sin. An attempted definition]. In: MH Suchocki & M Welker (Hrsg.) *Sünde. Ein unverstandlich gewordenes Thema* [Sin. An incomprehensible topic]. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 13-34, (28).

11 Ibid. p. 29.

12 Ibid. p. 24.

about providing religious instruction for politics on what it needs to do or refrain from doing; instead it is about fundamental considerations inspired by the biblical and Christian understanding of humanity and the world as God's creation. The political sermon, therefore, understands itself ultimately as something *religious* and not as a political speech.¹³ It concentrates on the conception of life that it derives from its deliberation on the biblical tradition and directs its attention to questions of public life and the common good.¹⁴ Because "Christian faith exists within the world. Here it has to prove itself. And for this purpose the sermon's proclamation provides motivation, encouragement, and food for thought."¹⁵

Hazards of the political sermon

Despite the above plea for the context-sensitive political sermons, certain dangers of and opportunities for the misuse of political preaching should not be ignored.

The political sermon may be mistaken completely for what it is not, as in the case of Paul Althaus' sermon above in which the actions of the Hitler regime were interpreted as the work of God. From our contemporary perspective, we will all agree that Althaus' view was completely wrong, indeed abhorrent. However, in terms of contemporary questions of sexuality and private lifestyles, for instance, the issue proves to be more complex. Within Christianity we have no consensus on what constitutes "correct" Christian morality. Particularly evangelical and fundamentalist Christians assume that abortion due to an unwanted pregnancy is contrary the will of God in all cases, while the majority of social ethicists and Christians in Germany see the matter differently. The assessment of same-sex partnerships as equal to and the question of whether same-sex couples should be regarded as the equivalent of heterosexual married couples are likewise contested issues. As vehemently as the one side argues for its same-sex partnerships' legal equivalence on biblical grounds, the other side argues against it. This question even has the potential to break up ecumenical bodies, such as the Lutheran World Federation. In 2013, the Lutheran Church in Ethiopia has severed all bilateral ties with the Lutheran Church in Sweden and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, because of the latter churches' acknowledgement of homosexuals they do heterosexuals.¹⁶ In Africa, the discussion on homosexuality is particularly emotional and controversial.

Niklas Luhmann draws attention to the fact that moral communication has the tendency to function polemogenously. This means that through "over-engagement of participants",¹⁷ it all too frequently leads to arguments and conflicts. This is especially true if moral communication is perceived as overbearing and is accompanied by contempt. In such cases it may lead, not to fact-based debate in which different viewpoints can be expressed and evaluated, but instead degenerates into strong convictions formulated in a creed-like way – only this or that is right and everything else is beyond the pale of Christianity.

13 Schleiermacher points out that one always has to talk about politics from a religious perspective, "denn der Geistliche stellt ja nicht politisches auf, sondern faßt nur die Politik religiös auf." Schleiermacher, *Practical Theology*, 211.

14 Hoffmann, M. 2011. *Ethisch und politisch predigen. Grundlagen und Modelle* (Gemeindepraxis 4) [Ethical and Political Preaching. Basis and Models]. Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 155; Käßmann, M. 2011. Essay. Politisch predigen [Essay. Preaching Politically]. In: C Dinkel (Hrsg.), *Im Namen Gottes. Kanzelreden*. [In the Name of God. Sermons]. Stuttgart: Radius, 13-17.

15 Käßmann, *Preaching Politically*, 16.

16 Oberdorfer, B. 2016. Irritierte Gemeinschaft. Ökumenehermeneutische Implikationen der Homosexualitätsdiskussion im Lutherischen Weltbund [Irritated Society. Ecumenical and Hermeneutical Implications of the Debate on Homosexuality in the Lutheran World Federation]. *Evangelische Theologie*, 76(1): 68-78.

17 Luhmann, N. 1996. Paradigm lost: Über die ethische Reflexion der Moral. Rede anlässlich der Verleihung des Hegel-Preises 1989 von Niklas Luhmann. Niklas Luhmanns Herausforderung der Philosophie: Laudatio von Robert Spaemann [Paradigm Lost: On the Ethical Reflection of Morals]. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 7-48, (26).

A demeanour of moral outrage and indignation is generally detrimental to homiletic communication. The preacher in this case does not cooperate with the image of the listener; he or she confronts the listener not benevolently, but patronizingly. Those who think differently are devalued and the image of the speaker is portrayed as morally superior, as if he or she knows everything and resists other perspectives and judgments. As listeners, through such discourse we feel “not really capable to subjectively comprehend the view which is being held. Its relevance and validity are firm; it is not made dependent on our agreement ... It is suggested as proof, where a demonstration of its plausibility would be necessary.”¹⁸

It is, therefore, fundamentally important to be aware of the consequences of moral communication in a political sermon as well as of the dangers and risks involved in communicating absolute convictions – especially in terms of future action and further communication.

The problem with communicating absolute moral convictions lies not merely in the way that it drastically reduces complexity. It is also that a situation is then perceived only from the viewpoint of “Act this way!” and hence irrespective of the circumstances and consequences for oneself and for others. For homiletic communication, it is recommended that the listener be included in the speaker’s moral orientation from the outset, that the preacher remains distrustful of his or her own motives and perspectives (including the blind spots in them). For these reasons political sermons ought to apply caution, should be accompanied by factual knowledge and a sensitivity to a plurality of perspectives and points of view.

This is not to say that there are no situations in which absolute moral convictions and thus a clear commitment are not necessary. However, such an approach makes sense only in selected cases. The resistance to apartheid in South Africa or to the Hitler regime and their atrocities were clearly situations demanding confession; situations in which the use of the political sermon as criticism of political systems of injustice was evident and compelling. Yet in democratic, pluralist societies of our time, such cases are not always as apparent.

Let me give one example: I am from Stuttgart where, in recent years, an intensely emotional debate arose on whether and how a new train station should be built. There are many strong arguments on both sides. Exactly because of this, it would be highly questionable whether one should turn such an issue – that should be decided by way of democratic decision-making – into a matter of religious confession. Yet, this is exactly what happened in Stuttgart! A worship service was even held in the palace garden, organised by the project’s opponents. The service included the blessing of trees that were in danger of being chopped down to make way for the new development! The opponents of the project openly called upon the regional bishop and the church to put up active resistance to the project. But why should the church view itself responsible for the construction or not of train stations? I think that in such cases not religious arguments, but common sense arguments and those of experts are needed. The Bible provides no guidelines on the construction of train stations. To elevate such technical issues to religious-moral issues leads not to clarification, but instead to the overheating of an already contentious situation, with verbal abuse from both sides. The majority of issues we have to decide do not have a confessional status; they are merely evaluated differently according to different opinions. In a public speech that is the sermon, therefore, it is necessary to proceed with care and not allow it to be exploited for every social cause and not to speak on any

18 Stetter, M. 2015. Wie sagen, was gut ist? Überlegungen zu drei Verfahrensweisen ethischer Predigt [How to say what is good. Thoughts on three procedures of ethical sermons]. In: H Schwier (Hrsg.), *Ethische und politische Predigt. Beiträge zu einer homiletischen Herausforderung. Eine Veröffentlichung des Ateliers Sprache e. V. Braunschweig*, Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 159-183, (160).

controversial issue in an exclusivist manner, but to instead include other perspectives, allow for nuances, discuss objections, and to unfold a political issue in a nuanced and informed manner in discussion with the listener.

Along with the risk of becoming morally-committed sermons, there are other dangers as well to political sermons. A political sermon that, for example, argues on moral grounds quite often implies that the solution to a problem is very clear – which generally is not the case. Many contemporary problems that confront us are, particularly in our globalised context, more or less impossible to solve! There are no simple formulas with which they can be solved. The refugee crisis or climate change are mega-problems that know no simple solutions. In light of the complexity of these problems, it is difficult to identify concrete courses of action and solutions.¹⁹ However, the difficulty of admitting one's helplessness and inability to provide solutions may lead to the temptation to exert vague pressure to act via moral appeals.²⁰ Yet, this does not provide further help. Instead it usually merely leaves one with a guilty conscience.

A further problem caused by moral outrage over “the powers that be” is that it is not the congregation that is present that is being addressed, but instead those who are *absent!* Thereby the absent (the powerful, the CEOs, the politicians) have no opportunity to answer to the accusations made against them. Second, and even more precariously, this type of sermon also fails those who are present. A sermon must always be addressed to those who are actually there. It has to undertake a discussion about *their* lives, by offering concrete perspectives that will lead *them* to reflection and occasionally also motivate them to change their behaviour. Asking too much of one's listeners, offering problematic simplifications and ethical instructions can in principle not be followed will not take one any further. They do not reveal how a problem can be understood and handled in the communication-network of faith, hope and love.

However, the fact that it is easier to spot the negative than the positive also applies to the political sermon. What, then, is an effective political sermon and when should it be seen as necessary?

Between engagement and reflective detachment: Nuanced perspectives on the political sermon

The term “political sermon” normally makes one think of a sermon that offers concrete guidelines for action. Yet, the political sermon can also take other forms that, from my perspective, are no less central. Indeed, given the complexity of the problems that often face us today, these forms of the political sermon are in most cases more productive. I wish to discuss two types of political sermons specifically.

An important type of political sermon for our contemporary situation is one that *makes space for lamentation*, for example in the wake of the recent terror attacks in Paris, or the all-too-familiar shooting rampages, or a natural catastrophe. It would be inappropriate following the terror attacks in Paris to lecture on politics from the pulpit, to offer advice on how to prevent future attacks. In the media, politicians themselves must constantly react with such overzealous actionism – that is,

19 Cf. Oxen, *Nur noch kurz die Welt retten?*, 186.

20 Cf. Preul, R. 1989. Der Wandel der Kommunikationsbedingungen des Evangeliums seit der Reformation als Problem der Praktischen Theologie [The Change of the Conditions of the Gospel's Communication since the Reformation as a Problem in Practical Theology] In: Id., *Luther und die Praktische Theologie. Beiträge zum kirchlichen Handeln in der Gegenwart (Marburger Theologische Studien 25)* [Luther and Practical Theology. Contributions to Ecclesiastical Practice Today]. Marburg: Elwert, 8-24, (24).

acting for the sake of acting – even when this only veils their own helplessness and the limits of their control of the situation. A sermon – and a worship service – should not tap into this alarmism, but should rather focus on the grief that many people experience, to acknowledge the horror, the fear that beset many – without offering answers too quickly. Exactly because of the rich Christian tradition of expressing feelings of lamentation that endures such irruptions of radical contingency and, in such moments, turn to God.

A second central dimension of the political sermon is its contribution to its hearers' ability to form judgments on difficult questions. A judgment-forming political sermon will not inevitably conclude in concrete imperatives, but instead promises to first *contribute to reflectiveness* by way of good arguments:²¹ “with its sense for the contrarian, the alternative, and the arguments which violently shake a standpoint at its foundations”²² that which was perhaps previously accepted without much thought. It is about a nuanced understanding of the situation, about a convincing sociological explanation of it. Here the preacher is absolutely entitled to name consequences that he or she sees as arising from a situation. Heinz Tödt formulates this with reference to the person of the preacher thus: “I cannot but draw these consequences from the gospel. Does your conscience lead you to similar conclusions?”²³ Although consequences are pointed out here, it is not done in the mode of a moralistic, arrogant declaration, but instead in that of a conversation, a consideration and the acknowledgment of other possible perspectives.²⁴

In this sense, a good political sermon will always be located *between activism and reflective detachment*.²⁵ A preacher cannot afford to remain only at a distance, detached from the contradictions of life and thus only able to comment on them from afar and, at best, ironically. However, he or she also cannot afford to sink into “over-engagement” that ends the discussion instead of opening it up. Humour is often a helpful rhetorical device, for “humour and laughter are ... involved in the events of the world, while simultaneously standing beyond them.”²⁶ Humour makes it possible to distance ourselves from problems that oppress us and, therefore, it enables us to look at them anew. One frees oneself from negative emotions in order to devote oneself afresh to finding an active solution to the problem.

Most importantly for the political sermon is that the preacher appears *credible* and gives the listener the impression that he or she can be *trusted*. “The perception of the listener that the speaker is positively disposed towards him or her, interested in his or her situation, and able to empathically participate in it and ... understand it”,²⁷ produces trust. It produces trust if the speaker knows how to present himself or herself competently and observes his or her fellow human beings as well as media coverage in a way that is both nuanced and concise. “The church must here and now, based on the knowledge of the facts, be able to speak the Word of God, the Word of power, in the most concrete

21 Conrad, R. 2014. *Weil wir etwas wollen! Plädoyer für eine Predigt mit Absicht und Inhalt*. Evangelisch-Katholische Studien zu Gottesdienst und Predigt 2 [Because we want to make a change! A Plea for preaching with intent and content]. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 138.

22 Stetter, *Wie sagen, was gut ist?*, 178.

23 Tödt, H. 1985. *Die politische Predigt. Wer nur zuschaut und schweigt, macht sich schuldig* [The political sermon. Those watching and remaining silent become guilty]. Online at: <http://www.zeit.de/1985/24/die-politische-predigt> (Accessed: 22 February 2016).

24 In the distinction between lamentation, understanding of the situation and instruction I follow Daiber, K-F 1991. *Verschrankung der Orte. Politische Predigt* [Interlocking of Places. The Political Sermon]. In: K-F Daiber (Hrsg.), *Predigt als religiöse Rede. Homiletische Überlegungen im Anschluss an eine empirische Untersuchung* [Preaching as religious speech. Homiletic thoughts based on an empirical study]. München: Kaiser, 172-185, (176).

25 Cf. Stetter, *Wie sagen, was gut ist?*, 172.

26 Zijderfeld, A.C. 1976. *Humor und Gesellschaft. Eine Soziologie des Humors und des Lachens* [Humour and Society. A sociology of humour and laughter]. Graz/Wien/Köln: Styria, 202.

27 Stetter, *Wie sagen, was gut ist?*, 180.

way possible.”²⁸ These are the words – from as far back as 1931 – of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the most famous and powerful German political preacher of the twentieth century. The twenty-first century has not changed this challenge. This is why the sermon can never only have the inner world of the individual, but the social world in its view as well.

28 Quoted from Bethge, E. 2004. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Theologie – Christ – Zeitgenosse. Eine Biographie* [Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Theology – Christian – Contemporary]. Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 44.

Preaching as Church Discipline – A Case from the Norwegian Church Struggle during World War II

28

Egil Morland¹

At an early stage of the German occupation of Norway during World War II, the Church of Norway was accused of freezing out some of its church members, due to their membership in the National Socialist Party (NS) and the latter party's collaboration with the occupying forces. This article will look at how the church leaders dealt with this. There is indeed a difference between practicing doctrinal discipline as an ordinary function of teaching and preaching compared to practicing church discipline because a certain behaviour is considered being in conflict with basic Christian principles of spiritual fellowship and church unity that consequently qualifying for a formal decision to declare some members presence as not welcome in worship services.

One should note that, as a matter of principle, deliberations like these lead to two different consequences. In one scenario, one finds the rejection of individuals from fellowship, based on the threat they represent to the bigger self's integrity. Such an outcome would depend on whether the situation constitutes a *status confessionis* or not. One may call this a Lutheran approach. In the other scenario, local or national churches defend a system that in itself denies the conviction of all peoples' equal dignity and their likeness of God – “a travesty of the gospel”, as was said of apartheid when it was declared a heresy (*World Alliance of Reformed Churches*, Ottawa 1982) – and consequently such churches are at risk of being expelled from the ecumenical community.

After giving a comments on the realities in Norway during the period under discussion, it will be shown how differently the church leaders responded to the accusations of freezing out some of their churches' members during, but also *after* the war. Finally, and this is the main purpose for dealing with the subject, some findings will be made from the sermons of this time and it will be asked whether they support the conviction that some church members were no longer allowed to belong to the fellowship of their local congregations.

Brief introduction to the situation in Norway during World War II

Norway wished to remain neutral and thus not to partake in the war, however, it was attacked by Germany. An invasion took place on April 9, 1940 and the occupation ended just short of five years later, on May 8, 1945. Norway capitulated in June 1940, but it never accepted a peace treaty with Germany. This was mainly due to the fact that the government managed to flee into exile to England, from where it exercised authority, produced paroles, and via neutral Sweden and the long

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and sparsely habituated Norwegian coast line, established contact with and exercised authority over the slowly-growing resistance movement. Furthermore, the government, through the Radio Norway that was based in London, managed to counter the propaganda in the censored broadcasting and newspapers in the homeland. This despite of the fact that in principle all the private owned radios were confiscated.

At the outbreak of the war, the Church of Norway was a State church to which nearly 100% of the population belonged. It, however, had a rather low standing in the eyes of the self-styled cultural intelligentsia. The Christian belief and – consequently – the Norwegian Church suffered attacks from cultural radicalism, inspired by Freudianism and Darwinism, and was ridiculed by the media. The Church was also weary from within after decades of controversies between liberal and conservative theology.

This changed during the war. Gradually the Church regained respect from the whole nation. Already by October 1940, bishops and lay leaders from mission organisations in the State Church agreed to form a forum for consultation, in order to meet the challenges they were expecting, based on a somewhat limited understanding of ecclesial unity.² It turned out to be of the utmost importance that the first main battle the Church chose to fight was on the Nazi authorities' violation of the individuals' rights and on the integrity of the Supreme Court. It was not about church privileges. The growing controversies culminated on Easter Day 1942, when more than 92% of the clergy laid down their offices as ministers of the State, by reading the pamphlet *The Foundation of the Church. A Confession and a Declaration*.³ They renounced their state salaries, but continued to serve their congregations in all matters that did not require authorisation from the state. During the rest of the war, this free folk church would only accept clergy that signed the above declaration. The Nazi-response came quickly. The clergy's action was declared a riotous act, followed by a threat that very soon events will occur that will have decisive consequences for each and every one.⁴ The Church stood its ground, but payed a high price for it; 25% of the ministers of the Norwegian Church were either banned from preaching, expelled from their congregations, detained or imprisoned, or sent to KZ-camps in Germany.⁵

Soon after Easter of 1942, the "Nazi Church" was established, claiming to be the correct representative of the Norwegian State Church. New dioceses were established and "bishops" appointed. A not-too-competent clergy was called upon and sent to compete with the existing Church (in general even inside the same church building!), but at alternate times. The congregations, however, knew their Shepherd's voice and the NS Church failed in reaching out to the nation. In its sermons were mostly preached to empty benches.

As it turned out, the pulpit became the last remaining place from where one could hear a free word in civilian Norway during the war.⁶ This was possible because the occupying authorities at an early stage, organised society according to the so-called *Führer* principle, and with a corporatist conception of political rule. Only the Church, although affected, remained the same.

2 Austad, T. 2005. *Kirkelig motstand. Dokumenter fra den norske kirkekamp under okkupasjonen 1940-45 med innledninger og kommentarer* [Church Resistance. Documents from the Norwegian Church Struggle during the Occupation 1940-45, with introductions and commentaries]. Kristiansand: Høyskoleforlaget, 43-48.

3 Austad, T. 1974. *Kirkens Grunn. Analyse av en kirkelig bekjennelse fra okkupasjonstiden 1940-45* [The Foundation of the Church. An Analysis of a Church Confession from the Occupation Time 1940-45]. Oslo: Luther. See also: Morland, E. 2014. *Forkynnelsen i en kampsituasjon. En analyse av Henrik Aubert Seips prekener 1940-45, 2014* [Preaching in a Combat Situation. An Analysis of the Sermons of Henrik Aubert Seip 1940-45]. Bergen: University of Bergen, 238.

4 Austad, *Kirkelig motstand*, 157.

5 Morland, *Forkynnelsen*, 293.

6 Tunold, S. 1945: "Guds ord er ikke bundet" ["God's Word is not chained"], *Norsk Kirkeblad*, 1.

As in other Western countries, Norway experienced high unemployment and controversies raged between the political left and right in the turbulent pre-war times. The State gave growing attention to social needs, as did the Church of Norway (the “State Church”). However, it lacked, the tools to develop sustainable social ethics, which would have enabled the church to meet the new challenges. In the 1930s a national socialist party *Nasjonal Samling* (NS) took part in the elections, but to no avail. With some exceptions, they rarely gained the support of more than a few percent of Norwegians. However, because of the German invasion, this party came to power as the only legal political party.

A number of committed Christians became members of the NS – the Nazi Party. They had a firm conviction that threats to Western culture, and to religious and political freedom as a whole, came from the Bolshevik dictatorship and ideology to the east. Besides, they did not necessarily welcome the German occupation – some even expected a strong nationalist party would be the best strategy to get rid of the Germans. They often reminded the church of the fact that the NS Party respected fundamental Christian values, albeit within the realms of a totalitarian state.⁷

The freezing out of Church members

Given the above image of a church united in its stance against the German occupation and where clergy almost unilaterally accused Nazi authorities of violating human rights and interfering in the preaching of God’s Word, it is no wonder that Christian members of the National Socialist Party soon complained to the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs about being “frozen out” from their respective congregations. This happened as early as the fall of 1940.⁸

The Norwegian Nazi government consequently instructed bishops to prevent this, accompanied by threats of what may happen if the instructions were not followed. The Nazi government appealed to the church on a seemingly spiritual basis, calling the “freezing out” as an example of intolerance and hatred, and not befitting of a Christian mentality.⁹ The bishops, however, in their answer claimed that they had not heard of such harassment and assured that there was open access to both Church and the Lord’s Table.¹⁰ Despite this, the NS network *Christian Union* (*Kristen Samling*) was established in an effort to strengthen morale amongst likeminded Norwegians and to encourage them to come together for spiritual support outside of the official services.¹¹

The bishops’ answer came as no surprise. They even called for reports should it happen that people were denied access to Church or Table *on political grounds* “as the government’s letter presupposes”.¹² As far as I know, there were no formal decisions made by any legal representative of the Church on grounds of members of the NS Party not welcomed in the local churches. The situation, however, was tense. “Everybody” knew of those who sympathised with the occupying forces, not to mention those who fraternised with them in the hope of having favours returned. Old friends stopped greeting one another. This was a two-lane-street: Who was to blame for the freezing out, if – as reported in some places – those who welcomed the “New Order” provoked fellow-congregants in church?¹³ Some

7 Morland, *Forkynnelsen*, p. 140.

8 Morland, E. 2016. Landssvikoppgjæret og kyrkjeturkt mot Nasjonal Samling [The Treason Trial and Church Discipline against National Union], *Nytt Norsk Tidsskrift*, Universitetsforlaget, Oslo, No 1-2, p. 61.

9 Austad, *Kirkelig motstand*, p. 91.

10 Schübeler, L. 1945. *Kirkekampen slik jeg så den* [The Church Struggle as I saw it], Lutherstiftelsens Forlag, Oslo, 51-71.

11 Morland, *Landssvikoppgjæret*, 62.

12 Schübeler, *Kirkekampen*, 59.

13 Terboven, J. 1940. *Nyordningen i Norge*, Stenersen forlag, Oslo, p. 12. *The New Order* was an expression often used by the German representative, Terboven, who possessed the real power in Norway during the war.

would, for instance, wear NS symbols on their person, while others even made a Hitler salute before kneeling at the altar ring to receive the Sacrament!¹⁴

These complaints might have been an issue before Easter 1942, but following the events that took place during these dramatic days, the “problem” solved itself: From now on the existence of two “Norwegian” churches, divided by their attitudes towards the Norwegian NS government, and implicitly, to the German occupation, were competing for the support of the people. Every Sunday seemed like a virtual referendum on the ideological and political situation!

To sum it up, thus far: The allegations of freezing out NS members came early, but was rejected, even on principal grounds, in spite of the fact that this actually did happen, whether the devotees’ attitude toward the “traitors” or as a result of personal feelings of hostility. Later on, the issue became of hypothetical interest, because the two churches went their separate ways due to their views on and their relation to the NS government.

However, the Church’s official and principal attitude on this problem changed, without anybody apparently being aware of or making an issue of it. Toward the end of the war and in legal proceedings after the war, the bishop of Oslo, Eivind Berggrav, who was at the front of the Church’s struggle against the state, argued that according to Christian ethics and teaching it was right to “freeze out” the NS members from churches. The basis for this was that the party, in Berggrav’s opinion, was in itself a conspiracy against the Norwegian people and consequently it was correct to look at membership (of the NS) as treason. Therefore, he argued, the church also acted correctly in acting toward NS members according to church discipline.¹⁵

The question then arises of whether arguments such as those listed above were formulated in retrospect to the events and, therefore, were in contradicting former attitudes? Alternatively, did the church leaders consistently mean the same thing, so that the original denials were only formally true, whilst the practice reflected a consistent theological consideration?

In a lengthy article on this issue (partly written in 1943 during Berggrav’s internment under the regime and published only in 1945), the bishop encouraged a Christian attitude to prevail during legal proceedings after the war.¹⁶ By referring to the New Testament concept of “settlement between brethren”, also called *Church discipline*, Berggrav took as point of departure for the process 2 Thessalonians 3:15: “yet do not consider him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.” For Berggrav, this the biblical ideal for the *civil* judicial process. This looks like a risky argument, because the fundamental question now was in what way society could anchor the process in people’s concept of justice, of right and wrong. Berggrav wanted to apply the biblical exhortations as the basic pattern for the post war trials to take, which is something different from finding a solution to the Church’s “eternal” dilemma of determining when the time has come for *Christians* to go their separate ways. The justice process, on the other hand, involved questions about punishment, reconciliation and the return of civil rights to the convicted.

In his article, the bishop Berggrav supported the notion that being a member of the Nazi Party was a criminal act in itself and should duly lead to conviction before any extenuating circumstances may be considered. The very existence of this party represented a conspiracy, in fact a two-fold conspiracy against fellow members of the Church as well as against the fatherland. “What have these Nazi sympathisers done?”, he asked rhetorically. The implied answer being: To be a member was in itself

14 Hartvig, C. 1945. *Den norske kirke i kamp* [The Church of Norway in Struggle], Land og Kirke, Oslo, p. 72.

15 Berggrav, E. 1945. *Folkedommen over NS* [The People’s Verdict against NS], Oslo: Land og Kirke, 10.

16 *Ibid.* p. 18.

the treacherous act. Treason was not limited to opinions or subjective convictions, but was in itself an act.

The fundamental status of these people as guilty of treachery, ruled out the possibility of being “not guilty”. The status categories started at guilty, ranging from being an accomplice to being guiltier and guiltier. The passive members provided a moral basis for the active ones and in that way legitimised the violence and suppression.¹⁷

Historians have since then debated this issue. Hardly anyone disagrees with the moral reasoning. As we have experienced in the debates on terrorism, however, whether indictment and verdict may presuppose actions beyond convictions, or whether convictions – not to mention instigating illegal actions – in this sense constitutes an action, one has not reached satisfactory answers. By the way, no other country, relative to its population, saw more people indicted and judged in a judicial process after the war than Norway.¹⁸

Now – in 1945 – the bishop was ready to use this assessment to give a clear answer to the former complaints. He even confirmed that this was an actual question from the very beginning of the occupation. One cannot but note his choice of words. The churchgoers’ answer was not in words, but “in practice”. Those who sympathised with the New Order, were “in practice” excluded from the congregations. “Did we do the right thing, then?”, he asks further, admitting that there was not agreement on the issue: “There were Christians who said no. They were not many. Those of us who answered differently had considered the whole issue on a Christian basis.”¹⁹ It is remarkable that the bishop here refers to the letter referred to above during the occupation, but leaving out the answer – the denial of the accusations – he gave at that occasion.

Again, why did they not say so from the beginning? Probably partly because of tactics and formalities. The problem remains, however, in so far that, if the ethical deliberations lead to such a conclusion, the consequences is not a matter of our choosing. If disagreement between fellow-Christians actualises the big complex of church discipline, one has to act on the outcome of this discussion accordingly. The answer may be practical, but it has to rest on a principal reasoning.

Preaching legitimising freezing out

The aforementioned difference between doctrinal teaching (in a broad sense) and church discipline, nonetheless, finds a meeting point and common ground in the preaching. Let us turn to some of the (representative) sermons delivered during World War II and ask whether they directly or indirectly may have legitimised the freezing out of church members who were also members of the Nazi party, something most Norwegians regarded as treason.

I have studied the majority of these sermons from other – although not entirely different – angles.²⁰ My study focused on the concept of “actual preaching”. Did the sermons during war times qualify as such? Did they support the inherent theology in the confessional document, *The Foundation of the Church*, issued on Easter Day, 1942? Based on the rather rich material in *The Church Struggle’s Central Archive*,²¹ one may also narrow these questions down according to the topic at hand by asking: Does

17 Ibid. pp. 10-12.

18 Krogslund, N.D. 2012. *Hitlers norske hjelpere* [Hitler’s Norwegian Helpers]. Oslo: Historie og kultur, 18.

19 Berggrav, *Folkedommen*, 5.

20 Morland, *Forkynnelsen*.

21 *Kirkekampens Sentralarkiv*. Oslo: National Library.

one find phrases or at least indications in the sermons that may lead to an attitude in the audience resulting in the freezing out fellow-Christians from the congregation?

There is a parallel here to one of the questions in the analysis of the sermons, namely whether the war itself – that is, the war as phenomenon – featured within the scope of the sermons. The answer is evident: It did. In about half of the sermons there was a direct reference to the war; in the majority of the rest, there were allusions and a variety of indirect references to it. There also appears to be a pattern applicable to the question of the freezing out of fellow-Christians. At first sight, one may only find an indirect mention of the issue. However, upon listening more carefully, one may find the whole issue laid out just under the surface.

My main exponent of these sermons is Henrik A Seip, brother-in-law of bishop Berggrav and a Rural Dean in the city of Skien Telemark, where the NS-party leader Quisling grew up. Seip did never use words such as “Nazi members”, “political parties”, “collaborators” and definitely not “traitors” in his sermons – but, only not directly. Over time, however, and clearly more often towards the end of the war, Seip refers to God’s relation to humanity as a kind of blueprint for the appropriate relation between Christians and their enemies – literally speaking – in the sermons. He combined this with a noticeable use of the words “love” and “like”: “Do you really think God likes us?”, he asked a number of times. “Far from it”, he replied. There is not even a neutral area between God and humanity. We are/were his enemies (Colossians 1:21; Ephesians 2:3b; Romans 5:10).²² Though God does not *like* us, God, surprisingly enough, *loves* us. This is the very condition for being a Christian. This act of love – that God, the holy and pure, seeks fellowship with the sinner – contradicts the most fundamental, naturally-given moral principles.

Seip then drew the following parallel: Man [sic] should act in the same way to his brethren. Did the Dean do this in a general way only, as in dealing with all kinds of disagreements between Christians, or did he also do it with regard to a more *specific* way, namely toward the enemies of the country’s independence and freedom? Like his brother-in-law, bishop Berggrav, Seip pondered this issue for a long time. He even produced a booklet on it and talked about it repeatedly both in lectures and from the pulpit.²³ Let us look at some examples from Seip’s thoughts on the subject.

On the 10th of June 1945, congregations celebrated Thanksgiving services in all the churches across Norway. Seip used this opportunity to give instructions for the proper attitude in the judicial process – that *had* to come – by pointing in the opposite direction, at the victors: “Have we allowed him [God] to cleanse our hearts of evil, also those who have harmed us and betrayed their country?”²⁴

Even on the occasion when the church published its *Pastoral Letter* against the authorities’ violations, in February 1941, Seip combined words that described tribulation and persecution (“in a time of testing”, Luke 8:13b) with the struggle with sin – and love for the enemy. In fact, every time he dealt with this subject, he made it an issue for his own (and his assembly’s) relation to God:

*In the time of testing they fall away, says Jesus. This “in the time of testing”, which is when affliction or adversity come upon us, or when someone are mean to us, inflicts injuries on us, or take valuables that are dear to us – it easily happens that the word we just then need, disappears from us.*²⁵

22 Seip, H. 1945. *Den kristnes kjærlighet til fiender* [The Christian’s love for his enemies]. Skien: Medieforum, 14.

23 Morland, *Forkynnelsen*, 302.

24 *Ibid.* p. 285.

25 *Ibid.* p. 230.

Note that this was preached on Sunday Sexagesima (The parable of the sower). Here we see a rather insightful example of Seip's understanding "those (seeds that fell on) the rock" as *us*, while he identifies those who "take the word away" as *them*. "They" represent the "testing". The examples, like this one, of differentiating between "them" and "us" are present in many sermons from those years. One can only imagine how this affected those who were on the wrong side of the conflict! There was really no need for clear references to not freezing people out from the congregation. It sufficed to understand the meaning of the words: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (Luke 8, 8)! The congregations developed fine-tuned hearing during these years. A number of pastors had "reporters" visiting the services, but it proved difficult to agree on what had actually been said, or to rule out if the words really were intended to be applied to the "traitors".

There is a demarcation line here somewhere between preaching and politics. Few pastors wanted to cross that line, although one must consider the fact that the biblical terminology about enemies and evil would appeal to the clergy in a situation such as this. The external adversity leads to an internal struggle in one's heart, in order to connect with Jesus' spirit. To express reality, preachers used words metaphorically. Just think of the word "enemy". Even love for the enemy presupposes a *real* enemy!

This is not to be understood as a misplaced kindness toward the traitors. On the contrary, the Seip expected "a hard and strict settlement" (words from his Thanksgiving sermon) with the traitors and he send clear signals of not being soft in this process.

Although the admonitions in the sermons are targeting the individuals and their consciousness and are not primarily addressed to the law enforcement, there are no reasons against hearing such a double meaning in many of the sermons.

There are examples of a more direct targeting of the "enemy" in some of the sermons from other pastors. One of the books that were published immediately after the war, containing a number of war sermons, was titled *But God's word is not chained*, referring to 2 Timothy 2:9.²⁶ In one of these sermons, on the Sunday when the *Pastoral Letter* was announced (February 1941, Luke 8 – The Parable of the Sower) in a broadcasted service, the pastor exhorts, "Take care of the seed, which is Norway's greatest asset!" Then he adds, "But *Satan* is looking for this seed, Jesus says."²⁷ This is correct, according to the Word. Only Jesus did not refer it to "Norway's greatest asset". In this sermon the Devil's wish to remove the seed was even contrasted to the "love of the fatherland, freedom and independence".²⁸

It is indeed a striking feature in quite a number of these sermons that Satan or the Devil – God's mighty antagonist – was understood to be the main actor in the Nation's suffering and struggles. It was not limited to the church's battle for its integrity. In one of the famous sermons from this time delivered in in the cargo room of a ship full of arbitrarily-imprisoned people en route to a detention camp, the pastor said: "The whole world is for the time being badly bothered by the Devil ... It is not possible to serve the Devil without becoming his victim."²⁹ The text was Matthew 15:21-28 (second Sunday of Lent). It did indeed speak about an evil spirit, but not about the Devil, and certainly not about the Third Reich!

26 Hartvig, C et al. 1945. *Guds ord er ikke bundet* [God's word is not chained]. Oslo: Aschehoug.

27 Ljostveit, K. 1945. Ta vare på sæden! [Take care of the seed!]. In: H Christie et al. *Guds or der ikke bundet*. Oslo: Aschehoug, 17.

28 Ibid. p. 16.

29 Skjeseth, K. 1945. Kristen, Vi gir oss Gud i vold [We put our trust in God]. In: H Christie et al. *Guds or der ikke bundet*. Oslo: Aschehoug, 23.

We may assume that anybody who listened to sermons like these or to other sermons that mentioned “people who are mean to us” (Seip), would make the audience apply to themselves. Those who were on the “wrong side” even more so. One will find that the majority of sermons were of the latter kind, indirect and vague, yes, but there was little need to “translate” the pastor’s word.

With some rare exceptions, pastors did not offer reasons for freezing out church member, namely the Nazi ideology of treating some peoples and races as inferior to others. They could have. From the very beginning of the war, Jews were treated as a pariah in Arian German-Norwegian society, announcing the severe persecution that ended with the deportation of all remaining Jews to the Nazi KZ-camps in Poland in November 1942. Despite the fact that the Church voiced a strong and ideologically-based protest against the marriage laws of 1941 that banned marriages between “Norwegians” and people of Jewish and Sami heritage, this Christian view of man did not constitute the decisive marker in the controversies with the Nazi authorities. Although the confessional document *The Foundation of the Church* committed the church to “stand together with the persecuted” (Article III), the perspective was limited to those who, within the church and in the concept of a Christian nation, were suffering.

Conclusion

To conclude, we see in the sermons discussed an obvious parallel between them and the reasoning in bishop Berggrav’s more theoretical and principal deliberations. Why is that so? The only explanation to this that I can see is that they both built on the notion that the Church of Norway and the Norwegian people formed the same body. They comprised the same entity, but did not mean that the Church aspired to impose upon the State’s responsibility in the judicial process.

Knowing that the vast majority of ordained clergy laid down their offices as ministers of the State, while without interruption, continuing their ministry as called pastors to shepherd their congregations, they personified in themselves the choices the people were faced with. There was really no need for communications church leaders “instructing” the parishes to freeze out some of their members. It simply happened *in practice*. Looking back, the bishops would then say that this practice was in accordance with the correct biblical principle of “[i]f he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector” (Matthew 18:17).

When it comes to the matter of loving one’s enemies, despite the necessity to let them (the enemies) atone for their misdeeds, there is also something else that is noteworthy and, in fact, of great importance. The ideal of love towards one’s enemies presupposes God’s action toward humanity *in Christ*, meaning that it is a word to those who already have experienced being in the enemies’ place. My findings obviously do not represent a universal view on loving one’s enemies. On the contrary, Seip downright says that Christendom represents an exclusive precondition for obtaining such an *attitude* (ethics of conviction). Although one would think that this does not necessarily exclude that people of different beliefs or non-beliefs, when dealing with the treatment of traitors, could reach the same conclusion (ethics of consequence).

Still the church has to contemplate the theology underlying this whole issue: When the deliberations lead to the conclusion that Christian people have to part ways, there is no longer a choice to make.

“Around Capes of Good Hope God’s Wind Never Subsides” – Preaching Promise as Hope against Hope

29

Friedrich De Wet¹, Ferdinand Kruger and Ciske Stark¹

Introduction

During summer 2015, famous American novelist Marilynne Robinson published an essay on the overwhelming power of feelings of fear in the Western world, specifically the USA (Robinson, 2015).² She described how this fear subtly enters a society’s reality and settles into the lives and minds of both ordinary people and political leaders. Feelings of fear are smoothly taking over feelings of trust. They seldom give way to feelings of anger, caused by loss – more specific, loss of economical certainty – loss of safety, or loss of hope for the future. These feelings of fear are part of the so-called “spirit of the times” and can be compared to a dangerous virus which, when undetected, in time affects the whole body, in this case, the whole of society. Robinson also criticises the USA arms lobby as a symbol of the camouflage of hidden fear. In Western Europe, the fear has many faces and seems to be the result of complex of phenomena, such as, political conflicts with Russia/Ukraine, expected economic downturns in Asia, the ongoing guerrilla warfare in Syrian and the Middle East, the atrocities committed by ISIS and other Islamic fundamentalist groups, terrorist movements in Africa, the so-called “tsunami” of immigrants into Europe, distrust in the leadership of and effects of actions and decisions of the European Union, the growing gap between the rich and poor globally, increased unemployment, lack of perspective and the worldwide ecological crisis. All of these more-or-less evidence-based phenomena are constantly the subject of multi-media exposure.

The overwhelming presence of fear which Robinson refers to has been mentioned previously by many others as well.³ Especially at the closing of 2015 and the start of 2016, many reviews of the year mentioned a growing uncertainty, fear and anger worldwide. In the US, President Barack Obama explicitly referred to these feelings in his address after the terrorist attacks in January 2016 in Paris and called his fellow citizens not to adopt fear as compass for their lives. In Germany, Bundespräsident Angela Merkel pressed the Germans to live out of compassion instead of fear. The interesting focus

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2 Robinson, M. 2015. Fear. *The New York Review of Books*. September, 24. Online at: <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2015/09/24/marilynne-robinson-fear/> (Accessed: 7 January 2016). In her article, Robinson also refers in passing to her lecture at the Societas Homiletica Conference in Wittenberg, Germany, 2015.

3 Cf. Buchanan, M. 2012. Preaching in the city of man. In: CB Larson (ed.), *Prophetic preaching*. Peabody, MA: Hendrikson; Kelsey, D. 2012. Picturing God theologically in a fragmented world. In: LL Hogan and T Pleizier (eds), *Preaching as picturing God in a fragmented world*, Studia Homiletica 8. Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, Zoetermeer, 21-35 (22); Long, T. 2009. *Preaching from memory to hope*. Louisville, KY: John Knox, 115.

of Robinson is that she does not only address uncomfortable feelings of fear, but connects them, not surprisingly, with growing anger and, even with a growing loss of religious life orientation. According to her, where religion (speaking specifically about Christianity) evaporates in society, it gives way to fear because “*fear is not a Christian habit of mind*”.

There is no need to elaborate on Robinson’s view, but one may take her observations as point of departure in reflecting on the theme of this conference, Preaching Hope within the Paradoxes of life. The question in this essay is: If Robinson is right and feelings of fear are dominant in our cultures, how do these feelings reveal themselves both in South Africa and in the Western-European (particularly the Dutch) contexts? And, if feelings of fear really characterise our two societies despite not representing part of a Christian habit of mind, how can preaching deal with it?

Given the conference theme of preaching hope and promise within the paradoxes of life, this essay focuses on the two concepts of promise and hope. Hope as an unseen, but concrete and motivating result of promise, albeit a vulnerable result of it, easily betrayed and easily disappointed and, therefore, hope as an aspect of self-giving Love, related to the very Being of God.⁴ Hope releases a current-voltage curve in which a new future can become visible and preaching that deals with the paradoxes of hope and fear simultaneously takes into account within the vision, eschatology.⁵ Müller elaborated further on hope related to creativity and indicated that the paradoxical act of preaching also deals with the power of language in creating a new narrative in society.⁶ Preaching should not only describe and name the reality of paradoxes, but should also be influential in creating a different and hopeful reality, an aspect that Müller describes as wholeness.⁷ We should acknowledge the existence of a tension field in this regard. Although preaching aims to open up new perspectives and to portray new horizons on understanding the purpose of life, it should be acknowledged that people often mistrust sermons – especially sermons on hope in an “unseen” future that only increase frustration. Or, in sermons on the expected future at the end times, because these only increase a fear that it is manipulative in essence. Preachers themselves also often lose hope – and this may well seep into the content of their sermons! Eschatological hope and promise in this essay has to do with the fact that sermons should be able to offer the living God, the sole source of our hope, to people.⁸ Homiletically, hope therefore has to do with both the focus and function of the sermon. It is strongly related to the aspect of trust and authenticity of the one who promises and it functions as an antidote to despair.

To explore a concept of promise-related hope which can be of inspirational resilience in a world of fear, biblical texts may help in identifying elements of concept. In what follows the focus will therefore shift to Christian hope as found in Romans 8 and Philippians 1-2 as a way toward addressing the homiletical challenges of preaching in a paradoxical era of promise and hope against hope. Since this issue is being approached from a homiletical perspective, a practical theological methodology framework will be used, namely that of Richard Osmer.⁹ Osmer mentions that any practical theological investigation could gain in utilizing the concept of a hermeneutical spiral (circle) in clarifying the four distinct, but connected, tasks of this kind of theology. In asking specific

4 Hogan, L. 2008. Preacher as Lover. In: RS Reid (ed.), *Slow of Speech and Unclean Lips, Contemporary Images of Preaching Identity*, Eugene, OR: Cascade, 42, 54.

5 Long, *Preaching from memory*; 112; Wilson, P.S. 2008. Marks of faithful preaching practice. In: T Long and L Tubbs-Tisdale (eds). *Teaching preaching as a Christian practice*. London: John Knox, London, 185-192 (186.)

6 Müller, J. 2009. Mense, verhale en strukture: Armoede narratief benader. In: FG Immink and C Vos (eds), *God in 'n kantelende wêreld*. Pretoria: Protea, 20–32, (29).

7 Müller, *Mense, verhale en strukture*, 23.

8 Wilson, *Marks of faithful preaching*, 186; Burns, L. 2009. *The nearness of God*. His presence with His people. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 222.

9 Cf. Osmer, R. 2008. *Practical Theology: An introduction*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 30-34.

questions, such as, what is going on, why it is going on, what should be going on and how should we respond, practical theological investigation should lead towards an interpretative spiral. In light of Osmer’s spiral, the first part of this article will address the question whether feelings of fear are dominant in our culture and what affects they have. In this section, it was attempted to give effect to the acts of priestly listening and sagely wisdom (*phronesis*). In what follows below the ways in which Christian life and, therefore, Christian preaching is founded by the notion of hope in Christ will be discussed. In order to do so, two biblical passages will be scrutinised, namely Romans 8 and Philippians 1 to ascertain what the central elements of Christian hope may be, in an effort at prophetic discernment, as Osmer describes it. Finally, some concluding remarks will be made regarding the quest for preaching in a context of fear.

Hope against hope in different contexts

In our globalizing world it is of utmost interest to describe the praxis regarding the paradox between fear and hope from different perspectives. We will utilise social research and some opinion leaders’ voices in order to identify what is going on in both the South African and Western European context. We start with analysis because of the often experienced contradiction between reality and hope. As Moltmann stated. ‘Exactly because of the promise and hope, the as yet unrealised future of the promise stands in contradiction to the given reality. The historic character of the reality is experienced in this contradiction, in the front line between the present and the promised future’ (Naudé, citing Jürgen Moltmann, 2015, 280). This is why we start with the ‘given reality’ of our culture.

South-African Context: Manifestations of hope as a means of moving a society forwards against the flooding tide of serious challenges

Hope proves to be no unfamiliar concept to South Africans in how they elect to deal with seemingly unconquerable problems. Boyce and Harris¹⁰ conclude that perhaps no single sentiment better encapsulates the spirit with which South Africans have embraced the possibilities of the new political dispensation than the spirit of hope. “Hope” is integrally present in the South African public text, not only through themes such as the New South Africa, but also in the context of HIV and AIDS – related texts with “hope” or its counterpart “hopelessness” appearing with astonishing frequency.¹¹ Even politicians are feeling the need to speak prophetic about hope. Prominent leaders like presidents Mandela and Mbeki, as well as Archbishop Tutu deployed hope as a socially valued “emotion” with the eye on taking the nation to a new level of positive nationalism through campaigns such as “Rainbow Nationhood” and “African Renaissance”. President Mbeki, for example, publicly promoted an “Age of Hope” as a deliberate communication strategy aimed at increasing social cohesion.¹²

Swart refers to recent calls in post-apartheid South African society for a revival of the so-called “kairos consciousness”.¹³ The Kairos Document of old (1988) proclaimed a message of hope anchored in expectations surrounding the faithfulness of God during the critical last years of the apartheid dispensation. Against the background of a gradual new critical positioning of particular ecclesial institutions *vis-à-vis* the post-apartheid South African state (as embodied in the formation of Kairos Southern Africa (2011) with endorsement by organisations like the South African Council

10 Boyce, G. & Harris, G. 2013. Hope the beloved country: Hope levels in the new South Africa. *Social Indicators Research*, 113:583-597, (584).

11 Olivier, J. 2006. Where does the Christian stand? Considering a public discourse of hope in the context of HIV/AIDS in South Africa. *Journal of Theology for South Africa*, 126:81-99, (82-83).

12 Ibid. p. 89.

13 Swart, I. 2013. Revival of a kairos consciousness: Prolegomena to a research focus on religious and social change in post-apartheid South Africa. *Studia Hist. Ecc.*, 39(2): 85-111, (89).

of Churches, the Church Leaders Consultation and The Evangelical Alliance of South Africa), a series of soul-searching letters were written to the ANC government, clearly echoing the sentiments of the classic Kairos Document. In a letter with title “The church speaks... for a time as this...” – strategically addressed the ANC prior to its Mangaung National Conference in 2012 – it is noticeable how an attempt is consciously made to rekindle the functioning of hope. In “The church speaks...” the dynamic generated by hope is placed *vis-à-vis* some troubling developments.

The argument in the letter is developed along the following lines: As sustained hope in God’s faithfulness made the defeat of colonialism and apartheid possible, the dream of a just, non-racial and prospering democracy should not be allowed to become lost in the shadows of the temporary eclipse caused by the current generation of leaders who are promoting an increasingly corrupt political, business and societal culture and who are also contributing to more and more racial alienation and growing cynicism among the country’s people. In the South African context persevering hope is challenged by the frequently-asked question, namely to what extent the better life that was optimistically promised during the initial stages of the new democratic dispensation has in fact realised. Nell refers to the fact that embodied prophetic preaching, for example, was evident during and also after the apartheid era and was present in the preaching of church leaders like inter alia Beyers Naudè. He also indicated that space should be created for what he calls “theodramatic horizons”.¹⁴ The issues of meaning and meaninglessness are certainly on the agenda of people because of dramatic issues playing themselves out in society and in the political arena. Phenomena like xenophobia, the decreasing value of the South African currency, demands for good infra structure, the decline in service delivery and also the issues of corruption and poverty are challenging within a South African context. The phenomena described contribute towards an attitude of hopelessness and phenomenological questions regarding the meaning of life.

In pondering the question to what extent life is better for the “average” South African in the current context, Forster refers to patterns that emerged from the Better Life Index- analysis done in 2011 by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).¹⁵ Some of the most noticeable patterns that merged from this analysis proved to be the following:

- ⌘ Although it seems that the health of the “average” South African is better today than in 1994, diseases like TB and HIV and AIDS still pose significant challenges to the South African population;
- ⌘ although the educational status of the “average” South African has improved at almost all levels (from adult literacy to early child development), South African learners continue to perform very poorly in comparison to learners from other nations;
- ⌘ although South-African Police Service data shows that violent crimes are decreasing, the so-called “trio crimes” (house robbery, business robbery and vehicle hijacking) seem to remain on the increase;
- ⌘ although South Africa showed some promising prospects in relation to economic growth and the inflation trajectory between 1994 and the start of 2004, since 2004 there has been a deterioration in economic growth, dropping from 4.6% per annum in 1994 to 1.9% per annum in 2013. Inflation has increased from 1.4% in 2004 to 5.7% in 2013. This can be attributed to, among other factors, pressure on the economy as a result of protracted

14 Nell, I. 2010, Prophetic preaching in search for meaning: A South African perspective. In: M Lindhardt and H Thompsen (eds), *Preaching does it make a difference*. Studia Homiletica 7. Aros, Frederiksberg: Aros, 89-105, (91-93, 101).

15 Forster, D. 2015. What hope is there for South Africa? A public theological reflection on the role of the Church as a bearer of hope for the future. *HTS Theological Studies*, 71(1):1-13, (5,6).

strikes in the mining sector, the weakening of the national currency and growing concerns about corruption in government and the nationalisation of private assets;

- ⌘ some of the most concerning trends prove to be the high unemployment rate of 25.5% (resulting in many South Africans continuing to live in poverty) as well as the disturbing fact that South Africa still seems to have the highest rate of inequality in the world; the 2015 World Bank Report on global inequality estimates South Africa to have a GINI coefficient of 63.4 – the highest in the world! As long as troubling trends like these continue, crime and political instability is likely to remain prevalent in South Africa.

Above elements that emerged from the Better Life Index-analysis confirm that there can be no simple answer to the question whether the “average” South African is experiencing a better quality of life now when compared to what it was in 1994. It is clear that South Africans still have to face serious challenges regarding the expectations of hope for a better life that were generated in the early days of this country’s fragile democracy.

Boyce and Harris (2013) attempt to identify trends in national hope levels using the 2009-round of the Human Sciences Research Council’s South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS). Their aim is to contribute towards empirical data on population-wide hope levels worldwide, by investigating national hope levels in as ethnically diverse and economically divided a setting as South Africa. The analysis revealed the presence of countervailing effects that made it difficult to get a clear indication regarding what sort of relationship, if any, might exist between race and average hope levels in the South African setting. The researchers could not find any confirmation for the assumption that blacks would generally have lower levels of hope than whites, given the high rates of unemployment and poverty that blight many black communities. The researchers concluded that the loss of political power and the sense of a stifling of opportunities for advancement due to affirmative action policies aimed at redressing racial imbalances in the tertiary education sector and labour force may have combined to make whites feel less hopeful about their future, despite the lasting effects of their previously advantaged position. On the other hand, blacks might perceive increasing opportunities available to them and people like them in the new South Africa, despite the impact of high unemployment-rates.¹⁶

However, it was found that significant geographic and social differences in citizens’ living environments had a substantial impact on their average hope levels. There appeared to be a continued negative association between hope levels and membership of groups that have historically been relegated to the margins of South African society, such as rural dwellers and women. Self-perceptions of marginalisation also appeared to be related to hope. Respondents who perceived themselves to be lower down in society’s pecking order were likely to report lower average hope levels than those who rank themselves more highly.¹⁷

In light of the above, there seems to be a “hope-shock” in South Africa currently. After undergoing two decades of development, the young South African democracy is still fragile and recent disturbing tendencies are creating serious concerns about its future stability. Hope does not seem to have a solid footing for seeing the initial expectations through. It is seriously confronted by the shadows of hopelessness, despondency and the slowly-dawning realisation that the initial promises are not likely to materialise as expected. The waves of hopelessness around the “Cape of Good Hopes” are impetuous and turbulent. In finalising this essay, a delicate focal point within a South African

16 Boyce & Harris, *Hope the beloved country*, 590.

17 Boyce & Harris, *Hope the beloved country*, 594.

context emerged, namely the quest for decolonisation. On a critical note, one could ask if it is a mere new imperative for justice because of injustice in the past, or is it the result of a new ideology that emerged due to selfish ambitions of a particular group of people. Is the quest for decolonisation a mechanism and also a voice that is calling for meaning in a praxis of fear? The issue at stake could also be described as a search for meaning in the midst of a seemingly meaningless praxis. This essay is not primarily dealing with the latter issue, but our intention is to indicate that new issues regarding race, language, names of prominent buildings and also other aspects are suddenly appearing in the public domain. The most obvious aspect at stake is whether this could be regarded as winds of change, or is it just winds that are blowing with retroactive effect? Hope within a South African context is not a matter of course...

The dynamic elements of the tension field that calls for hope where there seems to be no solid ground for hope

After discussing contexts in which the functioning of hope – as a means of potentially taking South Africans forward – is pursued, a few initial remarks should be made regarding the dynamics that are perceived to be at work in a tension field where there seems to be no solid ground for hope.

The need for hope seems to be generated in action fields where substantial problems are present, with no sustainable solution in sight. As Forster reasons, complex world-wide issues such as global warming and the global economic crisis, as well as more locally-centred problems, such as disruptions caused by economic inequality, lack of service delivery, or corruption in the South African context are extremely difficult problems to engage effectively.¹⁸ When we have to deal with problems like these, we realise that they cannot be immediately solved by merely attending to proximate causes. Often the real cause of a problem lies further away, and so does the perceived solution.

In this long journey toward a destiny beyond the horizons of an overburdening here and a paralysing now, hope is still called upon to play its proven role. Hope is called upon to function as a resilient, energy-generating aspect of our human nature, against being held captive by our fears and against the inclination of becoming despondent and negligent towards our living environment – as if there is no other option than to accept that there is nothing to live for any more. De Gruchy sees hope as participating in those actions and attitudes that anticipate a transformed world.¹⁹ Hope should serve as an antidote to the despair that leads to resignation and the inability to seek the common good, but at the same time with a sensitivity for not participating from the point of view of a falsely utopian ideology that is imperialist in character. The imperialist knows that giving false hope to people, can potentially mislead them into opening up themselves and their resources for their own self-serving interests. When hope is called upon, it should never be done with the motive of misleading, but with the eye on releasing the distinct energy of the life humanity is destined for already in this broken present.

The journey of hope also seems to be a much more soul-searching and far-reaching walk than might have been initially anticipated. Hope offers no easy way out of a situation. According to Forrest, Johnston and Poulsen between 1991 and 2008, the number of South African-born persons in Australia increased by 175%, to an estimated 136,201 or 2.4% of Australia's overseas-born population.²⁰ The major factors behind this remarkable diaspora seem to be perceptions regarding the likelihood of

18 Forster, *What hope is there for South Africa?*, 3.

19 De Gruchy, J. 2013. The humanist imperative in South Africa. *S Afr J Sci.* 2011; 107(7/8), Art. #804, 3 pages. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajs.v107i7/8.804>, 196.

20 Forrest, J.; Johnston, R. & Poulsen, M. 2013. Middle-class diaspora: recent immigration to Australia from South Africa and Zimbabwe. *South African Geographical Journal*, 95(1):50–69, (51–52).

being exposed to violent crime as well as concerns over job discrimination due to black empowerment – and corrective action – policies of the ANC government. It should be asked to what extent “hoping” that repatriation to another context will offer a new, trouble-free life for oneself and one’s family; will it not eventually prove to be an illusion and will it not leave one with a sense of an unfinished task towards the society where your roots lie? Hope asks much more self-sacrifice than we are necessarily inclined to commit to. There is a huge difference between superficial optimism on the one hand and the self-sacrificing element of hope as embodied in the Christian faith on the other hand. As Moltmann reminds us:

Many enthusiastic liberation movements have perished because of their superficial optimism. Without that “hope against hope” which is born out of readiness for suffering and the cross, resistance and assurance can find no firm ground...²¹

The intense activity involved in “hope against hope” is anchored by Moltmann in the Christian freedom. Christian freedom is born out of the resurrection of Christ and is alive in resistance to the vicious cycle of law, sin and death. Christians do not merely believe in freedom. Their faith is their liberation – from fear for hope, from self-seeking for love, and from the enslavement of evil for resistance to evil.

West-European context

There were days when colonists from Western Europe sailed down the coast of Africa, eventually to also reach the Cape of Good Hope. The impact of these times linger in many ways even in contemporary South African society. The mechanisms of the colonial system has indeed shaped South African society long after it officially ended. At the time, the colonists were seen as brave pioneers, settlers, immigrants, but they were also adventure-seekers and ramblers, from the underprivileged classes of Dutch (as in the case of South Africa) and other European societies.

Although people increasingly recognise that a great part of wealth in European history originates from objectionable colonizing practices, this history does feed into notions of “glorious” former times, when Europe was a global power and with immense social, economic and political influence – to say nothing of being the foremost agent in evangelising the “rest” of the world. In light of the latter, one might understand some feelings of loss, perhaps even fear, among some Europeans. These one may detect on different levels and in different areas and it is, of course, also much broader and more complex than a mere sentimental and romantic idea of the once so powerful “old lady”, Europe.

This section is limited to five different areas of contemporary Europe life where feelings of loss specifically touch on social and economic life, while also influencing the future of church and the world as such.

The arrival of Muslim *immigrants* in the shape of the seemingly unstoppable stream of refugees from the Middle East and right-wing politicians identifying them as threats to “our” Christian cultural heritage and democratic and liberal ways of running our societies. This creates a fear of losing the (European) Christian tradition and losing societies” freedom. Till recently, mostly only right-wing politicians were protesting against Muslim immigration, but following the sexual harassment of a large group of German women during Sylvester 2015 in Cologne a group of (mainly) immigrants,

21 Moltmann, J. 1974. Liberation in the light of hope. *Ecumenical Review*, 26(3): 413-429. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1758-6623.1974.tb03156.x>

many more people began to share these feelings. The public discourse on these issues also sharpens and is giving way to all kinds of feelings of not only fear, but also resentment and anger.

The impact increased *terror attacks* after 9/11. A growing culture of safety precautions and the media exposure on the attacks in Paris and elsewhere increases feelings of being threatened and unsafe.²²

The *economic crisis* after 2009 has more or less ran its course, but it led to a large shift in the service levels in society. Still more unemployment and lower pensions in the wake of the relocation of many economic activities to countries with less protection of the workforce and lower (or no) basic salary requirements. The European welfare state is facing challenges with the realisation that with the growing older population in Europe governments cannot keep up the high levels of health care for everyone. This makes people uncertain and fearful. In the Netherlands, a largely liberal policy on euthanasia gave rise to the fear that matters of life and death and of the ways in which society is structured and run are becoming more and more based on economic considerations!

In the Netherlands members of mainline Christian churches belong to the more *traditional group of citizens* – a group which is a shrinking both in terms of size and influence. Fewer people today have a more or less religious orientation in life and the effects of this shift on the foundations of democracy and ethics are still uncertain.

On the one hand, most Dutch people consider *climate change* a severe challenge. But, Western Europe is largely dependent on natural gas. Much of this comes from Russia and the environmental threat caused by gas and gas exploration is not mentioned as this may create a crisis with Putin, who stands at the head of the country that supplies much of Europe's gas. This fear of a diplomatic crisis in turn complicates the efforts to resolve the situation in Ukraine, in Turkey and in Syria where Russia is also involved. On the more local Dutch level, some people literally feel the consequences of gas exploration and extraction when it regularly leads to earth tremors that cause structural damage to historical buildings and private houses in the northern part of the country.

These above five phenomena or events are supposed to have or have had a major impact on the sense of well-being of citizens in Europe (SCP Research)²³ In general one can say that “countries” where people have stronger trust in political institutions are generally also those where people trust each other more, have a more positive view of migrants and are more satisfied with their lives. More negative views on immigration are also mostly found in older age groups and people with lower education levels.

Nevertheless, it is a proven fact that never in history has Europe been as safe today and that European children have highest life expectation in the world. Research on levels of economic health, risk of being the target of terrorist attacks and the influence of immigrants on economic development all lead to a fear which is purely subjective, based on rabble-rousing, propaganda and very specific perspectives on the realities of European life. Feelings of fear are often the result of a paradoxical conclusion that “exactly because things really are going well, we immediately when observe things go wrong.” As our most important source of information, the media always deal with exceptions, i.e. the bad. Perceptions are deceiving: if one is to ask people how many children worldwide attend school,

22 Cf. De Graaf, B. 2015. *Elf lessen van Beatrice de Graaf, de hoogleraar die Nederland de weg wijst na Parijs* (Eleven lessons from Beatrice de Graaf, the professor who shows the Netherlands the way after Paris). The Correspondent, 23 November. Online at: <https://decorrespondent.nl/3668/Elf-lessen-van-Beatrice-de-Graaf-de-hoogleraar-die-Nederland-de-weg-wijst-na-Parijs-/112813008-5ea22047> (Accessed: 12 Desember 2015).

23 Boelhouwer, J.; Kraaykamp, G. & Stoop, I (eds). 2016. *Trust, life satisfaction and opinions on immigration in 15 European countries*. The Netherlands Institute for Social Research | scp The Hague, January 2016, 24. Online at: http://www.scp.nl/Publicaties/Alle_publicaties/Publicaties_2016/Trust_life_satisfaction_and_opinions_on_immigration_in_15_European_countries (Accessed: 29 February 2016).

they will say 30, perhaps 40%. In fact, for girls alone, it already stands at 90%! Another example is that most people would agree that the number of people who have died due to natural disasters over the past decades has increased, while, in fact, the number decreased by 93%! No wonder Dutch opinion leader Rutger Bregman warns us not to underestimate the influence of the media. He considers a focus on terrorism to be “an extremely efficient communication strategy” and states that “the real dangers of the world are perhaps not the dangers that are observed as the most threatening.”²⁴

In light of the above, one may conclude that the concept of “hope” *expressis verbis* does not have a place in this societal discourse in Europe. It is exclusively connected to the language discourse of the Christian tradition and of poetics. Only in exceptional cases is the term “hope” part of the language in popular culture. This again came strikingly to the fore during the public event of the Passion of the Christ on Good Friday 2014 in the Netherlands where popular artists and popular music enacted the passion of the Gospel. The concluding song, the only song sang after the dramatization of death of Jesus at the cross, refers to resurrection in terms of fear and hope; a ballad by Dutch performer Guus Meeuwis, *Offer me your fear, I'll give you hope in return* (song by the character of the risen Christ).²⁵

In short, although the average West European citizen has more wealth, better health and a higher education level than ever before, there seems to be a subtext in society, severely affected by feelings of uncertainty, fear and anger. The same could be said for South Africa’s society, where experiences of disappointment, frustration and anger leads to negativism, loss of perspective on what once had been the dream of the “rainbow nation” and sometimes to virulent utterances of violence and discrimination.

Compared to the challenges of South-Africa, the challenges of Western Europe perhaps seem insignificant. However, the intention here is not to compare or measure these feelings, but rather to show whether these feelings exist and how they affect these societies. And that is, to put it bluntly, in a resultant absence of trust in promise and a lack of personal and societal perspective, in short, the absence of hope.

Normative perspectives on fear and hope

In the above sections the authors indicated that Christians do not merely believe in freedom. Their faith *is* their liberation – from fear for hope, from self-seeking toward love and from the enslavement to evil toward resistance of evil. At the beginning of this essay, the authors undertook to follow three of the hermeneutical aspects in Osmer’s framework for practical theological interpretation. In what followed descriptive perspectives on the problematic praxis were offered. In this section the question that will be focused on is Osmer’s normative question: What ought to be going on? It seeks to discern God’s will and the possibilities in light of present realities. In the midst of our multi-media culture with its overabundance of information, people are longing for a compass in discernment. Osmer refers to this task in theological perspective as prophetic discernment. Prophetic discernment involves both divine disclosure and the human shaping of God’s Word.²⁶ Frangipane explains discernment as being the grace to see into the unseen.²⁷ Discernment also deals with a lens on hope and eschatology and, therefore, a closer investigation on the functioning thereof could be helpful.

24 Bregman, R. 2106. *Precies omdat het zo geweldig goed gaat denken we dat het slecht gaat*. Humo 12 January 2016. Via Blendle, Online at: https://blendle.com/i/humo/precies-omdat-het-zo-geweldig-goed-gaat-denken-we-dat-het-slecht-gaat/bnl-humo-20160112-119271_precies_omdat_het_zo_geweldig_goed_gaat_denken_we_dat_het_slecht_gaat (Accessed: 30 January 2016).

25 Meeuwis, G (music and lyrics). 2014. *Geef mij nu je angst, ik geef je er hoop voor terug*. Online at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W0yWe8nXs_g (Accessed 3 March 2016).

26 Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 134.

27 Frangipani, F. 2013. *Spiritual discernment and the mind of Christ*. Cedar Rapids, IA: Arrow, 33.

Preaching the paradox of hope against hope should start with the significance of discernment. The interpretation of the concept of discernment will be done from the perspective of two Scriptures, namely Romans 8:18-38 and Philippians 1:9-10.

Perspectives on discernment in Romans 8:18-38

Romans 8 may also be called the passage of hope. According to Vos, Romans 8 presents one with a rich landscape with intriguing theological contours.²⁸ Rasnake is amazed that the concept of λογίζομαι (consider) is evident in Romans 8:18 and that this concept is a typical mathematical concept that was used to weigh products on a scale.²⁹ The concept particularly refers to, *to judge after calculation*. In this calculation it becomes evident for Paul that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with glory that shall be revealed in us. To live between times in the eschatological sense of the word also entails weighing paradoxes of time. For instance, compared to the glory (taking cognizance of the yet and not-yet), the sufferings (in the here-and-now) have no weight on the scale.³⁰ Browning also brings this idea to the fore, namely the issue of making decisions regarding the common good within practical theological investigation.³¹ He reclaims the concept of *phronesis* (practical wisdom) and also underlines the importance of examining theory-laden practices. Practical theological research with the focus on discernment on communicative acts in church and in society could not really escape a clear vision on the essence and the true meaning of life. In this sense of the word, it could also be said that preaching of paradoxes also has to deal with a hermeneutic process of understanding regarding judgement.

The key to unlocking hope amidst paradoxes is, according to Romans 8, the fact that believers are living *in Christ*, are one with Him in His death and resurrection. The message of hope is after all paradoxical in essence: from a Christian viewpoint, the content is dealing with the certainty of being indwelt by God and also having one's dwelling in God. For those who easily become hopeless hope has to do with the recognition the certainty of the abundance of Christology that also unlocks hope that focusses with clairvoyant eyes.³² This also entails that the heirs of God and the joint-heirs with Christ are faced with the two ingredients of hope, namely suffering with Christ and also the hope of glorification. Between two seemingly concepts of paradoxes, namely suffering and glorification there is although a unit or bond. The expression "*in Christ*" produces profound hope, not the blind kind and the short-sighted kind of perspective, but hope that truly deals with reality. To live hopefully requires some kind of considering (judging) of what hope really comprises.

The bigger landscape of this passage is enclosed in the paradox between τοῦ νῦν καιροῦ (the present time) and μέλλουσιν δοξάν (coming glory). The eschatological tension regarding the surpassing hope is founded in the concept of ἀποκαλυφθῆται (revelation).³³ This kind of tension is often called the yet-but-not-yet of God's promises. It is also paradoxical because this revelation is already present, but at the same it is also hidden. The coming glory (eschatology) is not a kind of a new possibility that does not exist. The coming glory is no launching pad or trampoline to jump on in order to escape paradoxes in time. This coming glory has come in Christ and is already real and effective. Romans 8:18-38 opens this "foyer of hope". In proclaiming the yet-and-not-yet of God's glory, a sermon becomes a vessel of hope. God is not imprisoned in the past and He is also no phantom of the future.

28 Vos, C. 2007. Seeing visions and dreaming dreams: The imaginative power of preaching hope. In: C. Vos, LL Hogan and JH Cilliers (eds), *Preaching as a language of hope*. Studia Homiletica 6. Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 11–25, (14).

29 Rasnake, E. 2005. *Romeine*. Vereeniging: CUM, 150.

30 Du Toit, A. 2004. *Romeine: hartklop van die evangelie*. Wellington: Lux Verbi, 109.

31 Browning, D.S. 1996. *A fundamental practical theology: Descriptive and strategic proposals*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 4.

32 Vos, *Seeing visions*, 19.

33 Du Toit, *Romeine*, 109.

Preaching has the intention to tell people about the future that has already invaded the present.³⁴ The acknowledgement of the hopes and expectations of people concerning the final coming of the Lord could therefore serve as an expansionary anchor in the delivery of sermons. In this sense of the word, sermons may share in making history in the space and time of human existence as well as influence history, because sermons’ creative functioning.³⁵

The concept of *ἀποκαραδοκία* (earnest expectation or sighing) is used three times in Romans 8:18-39. Creation is eagerly looking forward to the coming glory (Romans 8:19-22), believers are eagerly looking forward (sighing) (Romans 8:23-25) and so does the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:26-27). The meaning of the concept *ἀποκαραδοκία* has to do with the stiff neck of an athlete, straining forward as he/she reaches toward the finishing line.³⁶ It could also denote *nostalgia* or *a longing for something*. The three sighing movements in Romans 8:19-27 are structured in concentric circles in order to form a crescendo.³⁷ The choir of sighs is creation, creature and the Creator Spirit.³⁸ It is important to note that this kind of sigh is not because of despair, but because of hope and longing! It could also be said that cosmological aspects, anthropological aspects and pneumatological aspects are meeting in symphony in this choir of sighing. Creation sighs, because of the imperfection of this age (cosmological aspect); believers are sighing because of the longing for completion and, therefore, it can also be called the pain of expectation (anthropological aspect); the Holy Spirit makes us sigh in the face of despair and fear.³⁹ The work of the Holy Spirit is described with the concept of *συναντιλαμβάνεται* (helps us in our weakness). The concept entails *assisting someone by supporting, to lend a hand and also to come to the aid of*.⁴⁰ The Holy Spirit is shouldering believers’ burden. The sighs of the Holy Spirit is wordless or unpronounceable. Believers do not know how to pray in the correct way according to God’s will. To overcome this weakness, the Holy Spirit helps and guides God’s children. According to Floor, the indwelling Spirit is in fact sighing in the hearts of God’s children.⁴¹ In our hearts the Holy Spirit is supporting our prayers. This sigh in the heart of believers is, according to Romans 8:27, also an act of *εντυγχάνει* (intercession) in the presence of God.⁴²

In Romans 8:31, a phenomenological question is being asked. The words *τί οὐκ ἐροῦμεν* are striking. Conclusive words are spoken on the magnitude of hope. Du Toit indicates that it is not about theoretical formulation in verse 31 but that these words have the scope of certainty about hope.⁴³ Vos described the paradox of hope with the metaphor of a lily in muddy water.⁴⁴ The lily flowers in this water and likewise hope grows in distressful water. The anchor or soil for this certainty is enclosed in the perspective of God is for us. The mentioning of the word “if” should not be understood at that there is any doubt about it, but as God is certainly with us. In verses 35 to 37 the paradoxes of life are described. Nevertheless in the midst of all the paradoxes, God’s children are more than conquerors (*ὑπερνικῶμεν*). Rasnake indicates that this concept is a compilation of “over the top” and “to triumph”⁴⁵ and it is used only once in the Bible. This triumph or conquering is not something outside reality, but a victory in the midst of paradoxes.⁴⁶ This perspective opens

34 Joubert, S. 2009. *Jesus – 'n radikale sprong. Koninkryk, kerk en wêreld en waar pas ek in?* Vereeniging: CUM, 113.

35 Engemann W. 2002. Preaching: creating of perspective. In: G Immink and C Stark (eds), *On man's re-entry into his future. The sermon as creative act.* Studia Homiletica 4. Zoetermeer, Von der Perk, 25-49, (25).

36 Du Toit, *Romeine*, 110.

37 Vos, *Seeing visions*, 16.

38 Floor, L. 2011. *Immanuel: God met ons.* Pretoria: Boekenhout, 93.

39 Vos, *Seeing visions*, 17.

40 Ibid. p. 17.

41 Floor, *Immanuel*, 94.

42 Ibid. p. 94.

43 Du Toit, *Romeine*, 114.

44 Vos, *Seeing visions*, 11.

45 Rasnake, *Romeine*, 156.

46 Du Toit, *Romeine*, 20.

up the informative aspect of hope that deals with conquering in the resilient praxis of hopelessness, because of difficult circumstances. This perspective further opens up a vision on hope that reframes people's lives. In Romans 8:38 the concept of *πέπεισμαι* (I am persuaded) is noteworthy. This concept denotes the fact that hope is dealing with certainties in Christ. It also entails that believers are convinced about the fact that they are more than conquerors. Therefore hope also entails to be convinced and to be persuaded of this fact that because of the fact that God is with us; God and the content of my hope are always bigger than hopeless circumstances. People with hope do not ignore things than causes fear. Hope provides vision on the future that became reality in the past and this is also a present reality right here and now. Hope in hopeless circumstances is comprehensive because it comprises all dimensions of time and space. Real hope does not reckon with the concept nevertheless, but with the concept of still. Hope creates the prospect of a vigorous view in the midst of fearful circumstances.

Perspectives from Philippians 1:9 and 10 on the concepts of discernment and approval

The prayer of Philippians 1:9-11 is preceded by the doxology of verse 3-8. In Philippians 1:9-11, the eschatological concept of *ἡμέραν Χριστοῦ* (The day of Christ) is notable. In Philippians 1, the Apostle Paul's thought that believers will have a view on the day of Christ is noted.⁴⁷ Knowledge, discernment and approval must be part of believers' preparation for this eschatological day.

In this sub-section the authors will only highlight two acts of thankfulness (doxology) that should be part and parcel of the believer's accoutrement, namely *discernment and approval*. The expression *πασηαιοθήσει* (all discernment) in Philippians 1:9 could also denote practical and focussed observation. It has to do with discretion;⁴⁸ the idea of insight or judgement. Louw and Nida even places this concept within the semantic domain of understanding.⁴⁹ Therefore, this concept denotes human wisdom or understanding. Love has to abound in knowledge and also in all wisdom. Frangipane describes it as "intelligent" and "discriminating" love.⁵⁰ From an eschatological viewpoint it could also be said that real hope also poses the idea of love concretised in insight and practical wisdom.

A further aspect of the lifestyle of hearers in the light of the coming day of Christ is the act of approval (*δοκιμαζειν*). The discerning observation has the intention of producing approval of things that are really excellent. The value of things that really add value must be approved. The concept *δοκιμαζειν* entails that something is regarded as being worthwhile or appropriate.⁵¹ It could also mean to trying to determine the genuineness of something by examination and testing it. From this discussion it becomes evident that the longing (hope) for the final coming of Christ is enabling people to become active in practical wisdom (discernment) and also in testing what things are really genuine. Real hope is also something that reckons with insight into things that really add value in life. To expect (hope) is not a passive act. To hope also includes the act of bringing expectations into the present. Hope has to do with the discernment about the meaning of life. Therefore preaching should be a meaningful act in order to create the meaning of hope.

The challenge of preaching in the spirit of discernment

Up to now, the exposition underlined that preaching has to take into account that true discernment and approval of life is also to be renewed until preachers and hearers are seeing reality from the

47 Joubert, *Jesus – 'n radikale sprong*, 179.

48 Müller, J. 1977. *Die brief aan die Fillipense*. Kaapstad: NG Kerk Uitgewers, 21.

49 Louw, J. & Nida, E. 1993. *Greek English lexicon of the New Testament* (I). New York: United Bible Studies, 385.

50 Frangipani, *Spiritual discernment*, 21.

51 Louw & Nida, *Greek English lexicon*, 362.

viewpoint of what real hope entails. Preaching that is creating new perspectives is, therefore, also preaching which takes place in the spirit of discernment and in the spirit of determining what is really value adding. It comes to our attention that the tendency of hearers to calculate life from the vantage point of the values of the present and physical life here and now could also threaten the dynamic and hopeful message of God’s future that is already present but is also yet to come.⁵² Preaching within paradoxes of life should reckon with the surprising act of hope against hope by the citizens of God’s Kingdom. To name the reality of hopelessness, fear and anger in preaching should not be separated from the starting point of the victory *of* Jesus Christ and the living faith *in* Christ. This does not mean relativizing real fear, but it recognises both the power of fear as well as the power of living hope, both from the perspective of God’s supremacy above all. The proclamation of the new life in Christ offers frames what become real hope. These frameworks also act as a powerful frame around paradoxes of life. Therefore, the challenge is not to preach in such a manner that hearers become hopelessly negative and want to withdraw from reality but rather to enable them to be witnesses against hopelessness in society.⁵³ Preaching with real discernment for the paradoxes is, therefore, always realistic preaching, because it deals with reality.

Hermeneutical spiral regarding discernment for hope against hope

The title of this essay in parts reads Round Capes of Good Hope, God’s wind never subsides. Without cognisance of the importance of understanding (hermeneutics), practical theological investigation will remain a science that operates on the surface of the existence of people. Practical theological investigation is indeed concerned about the acts of *knowledge about, knowing how to be, knowing how to do and knowing how to live.*⁵⁴ That is why one should connect the markers of our cultural context with the God-given words of Scripture. In summary, the context markers from both South Africa and Western Europe contexts are strikingly similar:

- Disappointment in circumstances, fear and anger.
- Uncertainty about the future and the way how to deal with it.
- The need for hope and expectations regarding it.

It seems as if people from different contexts are really trying to understand what is happening in the worlds around them. Preaching may be pivotal in the framing and understanding of what is happening within contexts that are experiencing uncertainty and fear. Changing contexts are creating fear in people’s minds and it is fear that produces people’s negative views on future. A negative view on future in turn leaves people with uncertainty and suddenly hope becomes the proverbial pie in the sky when we die.

From the study above the three context markers correlate with the content of Biblical passages investigated for the purpose of this essay, namely:

- Certainty about the eschatological future that has already arrived, but is also still to come.
- Discernment of the mind of Christ and acceptance of “like-mindedness” in following Christ.
- The essence of expectation is grounded in the reality of Christ’s victory. This reality transforms reality and preaching this reality also reframes our expectations.

52 Burns, *The nearness of God*, 154.

53 De Wet, F. & Kruger, F. 2015. Shattering the idols: confronting the resilient hold of de-humanizing powers on post-apartheid South-Africans with the living presence of the crucified and resurrected Christ. *In die Skriflig* 49(1), Art. #1937, 11 pages. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v49i1.1937>

54 Prétot, P. 2015. Benchmarks for a history of liturgical formation. Unpublished paper presented at the Societas Liturgica Conference, Quebec, Canada, 11 August, 5.

From a Christian viewpoint even paradoxes should not overwhelm people in creating a dark kind of uncertainty. Real discernment of hope against hope requires an appropriate kind of insight into what to say and how to act. Discernment also entails the realisation that God is not only acting in the past and in the future, but also in the present. To hermeneutically understand what is happening in the global village also entails to recognising *that hope requires a new focus on God's acts*.

Homiletical Perspectives

In a lecture entitled “Transformation and diversification at South African universities – some insights from public theology”,⁵⁵ Nico Koopman stated that the feelings of discomfort of many people in South Africa and their disconnection from society and communal values has to do with former or present marginalisation and a lack of experiences of justice. Leaders urgently have to promote justice, Koopman said. In a society where people feel marginalised, justice should have priority in all policies. However, Koopman also pleaded for a “thick language” of theology, for theological reflection on what is going on and on the interpretation of societal changes. Such theology is needed in order to connect the often “flat world of economic and social reality” with the language of transcendence, immanence, grace and God. Koopman, for instance, describes the act of seeking justice as

*[the]...assurance and calm of faith, the assertiveness and joy of hope, the attentiveness and excellence of love, the discernment, good judgement and wisdom, with temperance and according to God's measures and with the fortitude to wait and the fortitude to act.*⁵⁶

To connect the biblical-theological concept of hope to today's preaching in the cultures referred to above, we need a language that helps the listener to discern the situation in which they are and to find new perspectives on it. Generally speaking, this seems to be the task of all preaching, but in light of today's cultures of fear, such preaching could be more effectively in the way Walter Brueggemann recently did in his *Reality, Grief, Hope. Three urgent prophetic tasks*.⁵⁷ Brueggemann shows how the biblical language of hope is rooted in the deep trauma of loss of the temple of Jerusalem 587 BCE and how the task of prophetic preaching is to help the hearers deal with that reality, to create space for grief and anger and, in doing so, to feed the longing for another language, language of hope.

Preaching offers the opportunity to encounter reality from a multi-layered perspective of both empirical reality and biblical truth. In naming reality there is cognisance of the deeper and multi-dimensional theological layers of understanding of reality (cf. hermeneutical aspects) as defined by the God of Scripture. Sensitivity to the complexity of grief and anger of hearers, opens creative opportunities for addressing the dimensions of hope *within* reality. This has to do with opening up new spaces for hope, even in the midst of prevailing paradoxes. Romans 8 teaches one to apply this view in three circles, namely with the suffering (sighing) of the earth as God's creation and all living (longing) souls as God's creatures in view, as well as with the sighing of the Holy Spirit in mind.

Preaching on biblical texts has the power to release what Brueggemann calls a “counter-imagination” – a way of seeing the world that is an alternative to the consumerist, militaristic, death-obsessed imagination of the culture. Relating to this view, Hermelink sees the aim of biblical preaching as a preaching of hope and as an attempt to create listeners who will also speak hopefully in their

55 Koopman, N. 2016. Transformation and diversification at South African universities. Some insights from public theology. Unpublished public lecture delivered at PThU Amsterdam 4 February.

56 Koopman, Transformation, 2.

57 Brueggemann, W. 2014. *Reality, Grief, Hope. Three urgent prophetic tasks*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

concrete lives.⁵⁸ From that point onwards listeners have to speak in their own voices. As witnesses of what they heard, they have to learn to become responsible. Long expresses his view on eschatology in preaching and distinguishes between two kinds of eschatology, namely: The first kind that depends upon a literalistic grip on biblical images and results in a gospel that is intellectually implausible, stuck in the clouds of a pious and irrelevant heaven that never touches earth. If that is our only option, the retreat into a self-contained present tense is our only ethical choice. The second kind of eschatology, however, allows the eschatological affirmation that “Christ is risen!” and “Jesus is Lord!” to exert tension upon the present, generating both judgement and promise, creating the possibility of ethical action in the world sustained by hope.⁵⁹

If a biblical view of eschatology falls away in preaching, sermons become legalistic.⁶⁰ This means that human potential replaces God’s promises. In this kind of legalistic preaching a distorted kind of apocalyptic is used to force people in a certain direction with several concealed threats about the future. Changes in people’s lives and in society that originated from fear, do not last. Threats of the future make one intense, but do not console.⁶¹ Preaching hope founded in Christ’s cross and resurrection, solidarises with the suffering of the world and feeds itself with the heartbeat of the Holy Spirit’s sighing prayer of Romans 8. Preaching hope is closely connected to the Eucharistic praise on the one hand and to sighful prayer on the other. In more or less the same way, Allan Boesak, too, considers the speaking and preaching of hope as a task of today, to create places where hope coincide with history.⁶²

Finally, if one tries to define the three most basic characteristics of preaching hope, it becomes clear that the specific characteristics of the contexts of Western Europe and South-Africa are, although very differently, also both in need for the same antidote to fear and anger. Therefore, preaching hope should be defined by:

- ✎ a basic requirement that reality as such should be named in all its aspects, being part of the God-given reality of Romans 8 in a changing world;
- ✎ a fundamental insight that the living Christ and the faith in Christ orient our discernment on what reality is and should be;
- ✎ the longing expectation of a realised and not-yet-realised Kingdom of God.

Preaching hope is, therefore, realistic, insightful and longing for the future of God.

Conclusion

This paper set out to offer a theoretical account of the tension between the theory of hope and the praxis of hope as a paradoxical concept. It is clear that, as a creative act, preaching should always reckon with paradoxes. Preaching should help hearers in their discernment and reframing of their hope. Therefore, preaching has to do with preaching hope against hope. The preaching of hope has nothing to do with naivety and to preach the message of hope entails also proclaiming the fact

58 Hermelink, J. 2007. The theological understanding of preaching of hope. In: C Vos, L Hogan & J Cilliers (eds). *Preaching as the Language of Hope*. Studia Homiletica 6. Pretoria: Pretoria Book House, 29-57, (43-44).

59 Long, *Preaching*, 123.

60 Cilliers, J. 2004. *The living voice of the gospel; revisiting the basic principles of preaching*. Stellenbosch: AFRICAN SUN MeDIA, 82.

61 Ibid. p. 83.

62 He formulates six conditions of speaking of hope. Such a preaching only will be doing justice to people and be biblically legitimate, if: If we speak of Woundedness, If we speak of Anger and Courage (Augustine) If we speak of Struggle, If we speak of Seeking Peace, If we speak of Fragile Faith, If we speak of Dreaming. Boesak, A. 2014. *Dare We Speak of Hope? Searching for a Language of Life in Faith and Politics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

that we live between times and how to do this. Preaching may and should be influential in creating a new narrative on hope against hope. The contours of this hope have to do with God's "wind of faithful promises" that became real in Christ and this wind never dies down. Preaching hope against hope therefore is to proclaim that hope is an integral part of the listeners' expectations, but also of their existence. Our expectations are a lighthouse in the midst of the turbulence of hopelessness and preaching hope is a vessel when the tempestuous winds of hopelessness are blowing across continents.

Why did Jesus Calm the Storm? Miracles as a Homiletic Resources – A Study of Sermons on Matthew 8:23-27 by Augustin, Luther and Bonhoeffer

30

Sivert Angel¹

23 Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him. 24 Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. 25 The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!" 26 He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. 27 The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!"

(Matt. 8 23-27, NIV)

How to preach God at work in a way that surpasses expectations?

The challenge of preaching promise within the paradoxes of life² may present itself in different forms. This paper is based on a homiletical seminar for students during fall 2015. It was meant to address the embarrassment students had expressed about their inability to preach a "religious" message in their sermons, meaning something that moves beyond the rational explanation of a text. In our Norwegian university context, scientific thinking lays down strict premises for how students, well trained in historical critical exegesis, should go about the task of writing sermons.

This essay will address the problem of preaching a religious message to contemporary listeners by way of a case study, namely an analysis of sermons on Jesus' miracle of calming the storm in Matthew 8. The story shows God at work in a way that surpasses expectations and this essay analyses three sermons by three preachers from the history of Christianity in order to identify the strategies they use for preaching God at work in the life of their listeners.

Augustine, Luther and Bonhoeffer were chosen because, as normative representatives of a preaching tradition, they may offer constructive suggestions for how such a message may be preached and because their sermons on Jesus' miracles reveal profiled strategies toward this purpose. The essay wishes to offer a resource for contemporary preaching by showing the possibilities these sermons presents, but also put question marks behind by their interpretative strategies.

Since the three sermons were preached over a period of 1600 years from each other, the choice of analytical strategies is limited. It makes little sense to put too much weight on the historical contexts in a strict sense, even though the preachers were clearly tied to each other by references and as readers. A reconstruction of their respective theologies lies beyond the limits of any short study such

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² The theme of the 2016 Societas Homiletica conference in Stellenbosch.

as this and would shift focus from the preaching skill that is the primary interest of this essay. Rather, it will treat these historical texts as material for a form of practical-theological analysis. First, it aims at investigating the form of preaching practice expressed in the sermons and, second, it wants to show how these concrete practices construct theologies. The analysis will, therefore, be undertaken in a similar manner as with contemporary sermons. By describing their composition, we will arrive at the sermons' argument and the code it employs to transfer a message in the text to a contemporary situation. This, in turn, reveals a skill for interpreting Scripture for preaching. In this way, too, the essay wants to trace the *inventio* – part of their preaching skill, meaning the strategy they employ to extract a religious message in a text.

The leading questions that are brought to the sermon analysis are: How does the preacher interpret the supernatural action described in the text and how is this action applied to the listeners' situation?

Augustine's Sermon

The sermon of Augustine (354-430 CE) is from his career as bishop of Hippo in North Africa (from 396). The sermon I have chosen for this paper has no exact date, but it has been suggested that it is characteristic of the older Augustine and it is regarded as one of his 559 authentic sermons. It is commonly held that Augustine did not write out his sermons before he presented them, but that they were recorded by stenographers. He preached both in Hippo and Carthage and is said to have preached sitting down, without his vestments and to an audience that would contribute with lively interruptions and spontaneous applause.³

Augustine came to preaching via his reluctant acceptance of his election as bishop. Prior to this, he had been a professor of rhetoric in Milan and Rome. His way to church service is said to have involved a dual conversion. The first conversion was to Platonism, which he regarded a conversion to the invisible things. The second, which proceeded from the first, was a conversion to Christianity.⁴

Composition

The sermon analysed in this paper is one of Augustin's shortest, only about two pages.⁵ It may be divided in three parts; an introductory paragraph, a central paragraph with an application and a concluding paragraph. The introductory paragraph opens with a short reference to the gospel reading; Matthew's story about Jesus calming the storm, before Augustin's states his intention with the sermon: "I want to urge you not to let the faith sleep in your hearts against the storms and waves of this world."⁶

In this opening statement, a certain form of linkage is made between text and the present. Faith in the heart is linked to sleep, as are storms and waves to metaphorical storms and waves of this world. When sleep and storm are thus presented as central concepts in the gospel story and as metaphors

3 Doyle, D.E. 2007. Introduction to Augustine's Preaching. In: B Ramsey (ed.), *Saint Augustine Essential Sermons*. New York: New City, 9-10.

4 Tracy, D.W. 2008. Charity, Obscurity, Clarity: Augustine's Search for a True Rhetoric. In: RL Enos and R Thompson et al. (eds) *The Rhetoric of Saint Augustine of Hippo. De Doctrina Christiana and the Search for a Distinctly Christian Rhetoric*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 267-287, (275).

5 Ramsey, B (ed.). 2013. *The Works of Saint Augustine. A Translation for the 21st Century. Essential Sermons*. New York: New City, 103-104.

6 Ibid. p. 103.

for present phenomena, it relies on an interpretation that has a theological premise that Augustin states in the same introductory paragraph:

After all, it can scarcely be true that Christ the Lord had power over death, and did not have power over sleep, and that sleep possibly overtook the Almighty against his will, as he was out sailing. If you do believe this, he is asleep in you, but if Christ is awake in you, your faith is awake too.⁷

The fact that in Jesus the Almighty is present with power over death is presented as a knowledge that guides how the narration should be understood. This knowledge indicates a specific reading practice as prefigured in the text itself. It also elicits an absurdity in the plot that proves that the story should be read as a sign. Augustin concludes: “So even the sleep of Christ is a sign and a sacred symbol.”⁸

There is a clear connection here, where the sign preconditions that which it signifies, for the text may be read as a sign only if it is read in faith. Reading the story as a basic narrative, where Christ is simply overtaken by sleep, corresponds to Christ being asleep in the reader, while reading it as a “sign story” means that Christ is awake in the reader. The connection between text and present, therefore, involves a certain reading practice, a reading with faith and according to basic theological premises.

Having established this reading practice, Augustine provides the listeners with a code to Matthew’s story, in the form of an analogy about the soul and the heart:

The people sailing in the boat are souls crossing the present age on a paltry piece of wood. ... We are all of us temples of God, and every one of us is sailing a boat in his heart...⁹

The sermon’s introduction thus makes clear that the story is about something else than the things it describes. Thus it prepares the listeners for a teaching about souls and hearts.

The second part of the sermon brings the allegory into play by an actualisation in the form of a short hypothetical narration from contemporary life. Augustine has his audience picture that they have heard an insult and want revenge. When they give in to this desire and take revenge, it metaphorically means that they suffer shipwreck, since they, in their souls, surrender to the cruelty of others. Augustine explains the reason why this happens:

And why is that? Because Christ is asleep in you. What does it mean that Christ is asleep in you? That you have forgotten Christ. ... It has escaped your memory that he, when he was crucified, said, Father forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing.¹⁰

Here Augustine introduces a narration of a Christian soul as parallel to Matthew’s story about Jesus calming the storm. The parallel connects the different characters by metaphor. Christ asleep in the story is a metaphor for Christ asleep in the believer’s heart, similar to a restless soul. In contrast, Christ awake corresponds to a calm soul. In this way, Augustine lets that which takes place in the gospel story figure what takes place in the Christian’s soul. As the sea is rough when Jesus sleeps, but calm when he awakens, so the soul is restless when Christ is asleep in the heart and calm when he is awake in the heart. Note here that Augustine, perhaps not knowingly, makes a slight shift here, letting the heart take the role of the soul in the analogy.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

In the last paragraph of the sermon, the analogy is used as basis for instruction, when the elements of nature are presented as examples and the listeners are encouraged to imitate them: “Who is this, whom the sea obeys? His is the sea and he made it. All things were made through him. Imitate the winds and the sea instead, submit to the creator.”¹¹

In the final sentence, the allegorical interpretation is coined into a concluding invitation: “... don’t let’s despair; let’s wake up Christ, and so sail on in a calm sea, and reach our home country.”¹²

Analysis

There is an interesting duality in how Augustine views the wondrous aspects in Matthew’s story. Most obviously, he views the miracle as an illustration that informs the matters of the soul and the heart. Still, it is not merely an illustration, for the story is also a sign of who Christ is and therefore of the status of his wisdom. It is a wisdom that straightens and calms the soul in the same way as Jesus in the story calmed the storm. Thus, as signs of the status of Christ’s wisdom, the wondrous aspects of the story have to be factual.

This link between sign and fact is seen in the sermon’s concluding moral instruction. The encouragement to imitate the wind and the sea and subject oneself to Christ in a calm soul seems to presuppose that Jesus asleep in the boat was the Almighty himself. Only then is the story a sign and it is so in a way that moves beyond analogy: When Christ sets the rules for the soul, he does so because he as the creator of nature and Lord of the elements also is the wisdom and the Lord of the soul.

However, this way of connecting sign and fact also means that other analogous connections are prevented. The story of Jesus calming the storm does not point to analogous stories of wonders or miracles. Augustin’s use of the wondrous aspects of the story lets the supernatural be left in the text’s past. In other words, the story’s wonder does not point to a God who works wonders, but rather to a wisdom that exists harmoniously with the causalities of nature and which effects moral attitude and emotional control. It is a deduction with a supernatural premise, namely a sign that contradicts the causalities of nature, but which does not promise new wonders. Augustin’s reading of the story as a sign of the value of Christ’s wisdom for the soul, results in a description of how God acts in the world that is quite different from how God acts in the vigorous occurrences in Matthew’s story. God acts in the world through souls that restrain their anger and return to calmness.

Strategy

In Augustine’s sermon, the biblical text is not about the things it describes, but about the soul’s relation to Christ’s wisdom by its way of describing. The sermon extracts meaning from the text in a way that appears as an application of his theory for interpretation prescribed in *De Doctrina Christiana*, Augustine’s Christian rhetoric from 397.¹³ In opposition to contemporary rhetoric emphasis on form, he insists on the priority of content over form and sees *inventio* and scriptural interpretation as the central part of sermon preparation as that which secures content that is true.¹⁴ To be trustworthy, the interpretation of Scripture must follow certain rules, of which the most basic is that it deals with

11 Ibid. p. 104.

12 Ibid.

13 Saint Augustine. 1958. *On Christian Doctrine*. Transl. and ed. DW Robertson Jr. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

14 Hermanson, A.K.; Loewe, D.M.; Serrano, S.; Thomas, L.M. & Yoder, S.L. 2008. Saint Augustine and the Creation of a Distinctly Christian Rhetoric. In: RL Enos & LThompson (eds), *The Rhetoric of Saint Augustine of Hippo*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 1-10; and Tracy, *Charity, Obscurity, Clarity*, 275.

signs and things: “Things are learned by signs” and “... every sign is also a thing, but not everything is also a sign.”¹⁵

The distinction between signs and things corresponds to a distinction between that which is to be used and that which is to be enjoyed. Signs are to be used in order to reach things, whereas things are to be enjoyed, though things may also be signs. God is the ultimate “thing” which everything else points to and is the only “thing” worthy of being enjoyed in itself. To enjoy things that are signs and are meant to be used, means falling into a carnal, inferior love, instead of reaching the eternal and spiritual things. Still, since signs are ambiguous, they are only truly understood if one knows the things they refer to, which, for scriptural interpretation, means God. And since no human may know God, scriptural interpretation rests on this knowledge having been given. It is a gift that consists in the knowledge of Christ, God’s own Logos and relies on the Holy Spirit’s imparting of the knowledge of God as love.¹⁶

This basic rule should keep the interpreter alert to the level of signs that a passage in Scripture operates on. Scriptural ambiguity is there to open a space for a figural interpretation regulated by the basic principle. It should promote the knowledge of God as love and further the love of one’s neighbour.¹⁷ The interpreter who mistakes for literal that which is meant figuratively, makes the mistake of enjoying that which is to be used, instead of enjoying the only thing worthy thereof, namely God.

Therefore, when Augustine sees the story about Jesus calming the storm as a story that is actually about something else, it follows from a consequent interpretation strategy. What the story describes – people at sea being helped in a storm – can hardly be said to correspond to what Scripture is really about, therefore it must be a sign. In itself, a miracle that saves people lost at sea says little about the knowledge of God or the love of one’s enemy. The thing the story points to – a miracle being performed at sea – is itself sign of something else that in the end is the only true object of knowledge: “... we should use this world and not enjoy it, so that the ‘invisible things’ of God ‘being understood by the things that are made’ may be seen, that is, so that by means of corporal and temporal things we may comprehend the eternal and spiritual”, Augustine states.¹⁸ Augustine’s theory of signs tells something about how words refer to things, but also how visible things refer to invisible things that are eternal and spiritual and the only true objects of enjoyment.

If one now returns to how Augustine relates to the wondrous aspects of Matthew’s story, it becomes clear how Augustine’s premise for the preacher’s *inventio* leads him not to interpret the miracle as a testimony of how God works in the world, but rather as a sign of the knowledge Christ brings and of its function. This is the interpretation that corresponds to the concept of God that should control all interpretation of Scripture. The opposite interpretation of the story, namely that God’s action in the world comes in the form of intervention in the natural elements and is experienced as the calming of a concrete storm, would mean that Scripture aimed at enjoyment of visible and carnal things. It would mean subjecting to a “miserable servitude” under the signs.¹⁹

15 Saint Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 8-9.

16 Tracy, *Charity, Obscurity, Clarity*, 276-277.

17 “Whatever appears in the divine Word that does not literally pertain to virtuous behavior or to the truth of faith you must take to be figurative.” Saint Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 88.

18 Saint Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 10.

19 *Ibid.* p. 84.

Luther's Sermon

Luther's sermon was delivered early in his career, on February 1, 1517. It was, therefore, prior to his theses on indulgencies presented in October of the same year. According to the editors of the Weimar Ausgabe (WA), the sermon belongs to a corpus of sermons originally presented in Latin on the basis of prepared manuscripts and was intended for printing. They make probable the occasion for several of the sermons in the corpus and identify a colleague of Luther as the original recipient of his manuscript. There are records of one of the sermons having been presented in Latin to the Chapter of the Augustinians in Erfurt.²⁰ We might expect that a similar occasion was the context for the sermon analysed here, which was presented on the Sunday after Epiphany.

Composition

As in the case of Augustine's sermon, this is also a short sermon. The Latin text in *D. Martin Luthers Werke* takes up only about two pages²¹ – the English translation in *The Works of Martin Luther*, about three.²² The sermon may be divided into two parts, where the first part gives the interpretation of the text and builds a theological argument, whereas the second offers an application in two sections.

Luther starts his sermon by introducing a code to Matthew's miracle story:

There can be no doubt that in this Gospel the sea is a symbol of this world, that is, this troubled, unstable, and transitory life. The storm and the winds are rulers of this present darkness... the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. [Eph. 6:12]²³

While the sea corresponds to this world and this life, Luther points out that the winds on the sea correspond to the powers controlling life in this world. The ship on the other hand, symbolises the church, or faith itself, where Christ is.²⁴ This basic code makes the story one on faith and life in the present world that lends the following theme to the sermon: "... blessed is he who perceives his perils and unhappy he who sees no dangers."²⁵

The theme is not introduced on the basis of an explicit theological premise, such as knowledge of God, though humanity's sinfulness is an implicit premise. Nor is an explicit reading strategy presented. Luther seems to reach the symbolic meaning more intuitively by recognition of the situation Matthew describes. As believers and as church, the listeners are exposed to the powers of this world and this parallel points to how the dynamics in the story are at play in the life of the believer. The sermon serves the identification with the characters in the story placing the listener within the story's occurrences. This forms the basis for Luther's argument. The characters the listeners identify with were saved because they perceived the danger they were in and, therefore, those who perceives these perils are blessed, whereas those who sees no danger are unfortunate.

Luther brings his implicit theological premise into play by describing the situation in the boat as characteristic of human life. Not perceiving danger equals not seeing realities, Luther claims, since

20 Luther, M. 1883. *Sermone aus den Jahren 1514-1517*. In: H Böhlau Nachfolger (Hrsg.), *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe* Vol. 1. Weimar: Weimarer (WA), 1-2.

21 WA 1, 128-130.

22 Luther, M. 1959. *The works of Martin Luther* Vol. 51, Sermons 1, 23-26. JW Doberstein, HT Lehmann (eds). Charlottesville, VA: Fortress 1959, (LW).

23 LW 51, 23.

24 "seated" (LW) ("in qua Christus est") (WA).

25 LW 51, 23.

“there is no man [sic] without many and exceedingly great perils.” This lets Luther point out the paradoxical nature of reality:

The greatest security is the greatest temptation, the greatest wealth is the greatest poverty ... To have many temptations is no temptation, the greatest disturbance is the greatest peace. ... [For]... in the former, the fool reposes in himself and has forgotten God, whereas in the latter, the wise one forsakes himself and takes refuge in God. ²⁶

Though the storm is read as a symbol in Luther’s sermon, it is not really a figure for something else as in Augustine’s sermon. Rather, Matthew’s storm is seen as a metaphor for another storm functioning according to the same rules: It evokes a cry for help that saves.

In the second part of his sermon, Luther applies this knowledge to the lives of the listeners according to the code and the theological concept he has introduced.

Therefore it is well with those who find water breaking into their ship, for this moves them to seek help from God. Wherefore, observe how Christ in all things is seeking our profit and is serving us while he sleeps. The while he abandons us he is upholding us and while he is allowing us to go through storms in terror he is bringing us forward. ²⁷

Luther’s code thus interprets the storm in positive terms; it is what makes us turn to Christ. As in Augustin’s sermon, the boat signifies faith, but Christ sleeping is interpreted in a more literal sense. Christ signifies Christ, and therefore Christ sleeping in the boat has the disciples looking the storm in the eye and feel the fear in the same way as Christ asleep in the lives of the listeners awakens a need for Christ’s help. Luther describes Christ as doing two things: He acts by calming the storm, but also by sleeping. The way he leads his listeners through the story’s narrative sequences, reveals that it is Christ’s sleeping that has the greatest significance. In the story, Christ slept in the boat, was called for and intervened to calm the storm. Correspondingly, in the present, Christ sleeps in the lives of the believers and turns them to him to call for help. When this happens, it is as if everything is accomplished and Luther does not dwell further on the story’s conclusion. The final calming of the storm is just an echo confirming the sermon’s main point, namely that

... thus he teaches us [to] distrust ourselves and put our confidence in him. And what he says is really true: I kill and I make alive [Deut. 32, 39], which means that here the words, “wake him,” mean our deliverance. ²⁸

Luther’s conclusion of the sermon is a paradoxical accusation directed against himself and his listeners. Though salvation clearly lies in the tribulations, we still avoid them and crave security. Luther claims that

[w]e make ourselves secure in order to escape trials. We do not want perils which will drive us to cry out. We would rather perform good works in order to have peace. But this is to perish a thousand times. Woe to those who do this! ²⁹

26 LW 51, 24.

27 LW 51, 24.

28 LW 51, 25.

29 LW 51, 25.

Analysis

Luther's use of Matthew's story both resembles and differs from that of Augustine. Though they both take the storm as a fact, they primarily construe it as a metaphorical storm. Still, what Luther means by referring to the story as a symbol is different from what Augustine means when he calls it a sign. Augustine sees it as a sign referring to Christ's knowledge, whereas Luther focuses on the characters' way of acting as prefiguring how God acts. Correspondingly, Luther seems to interpret the examples in the story less flexibly. Christ refers to Christ; the disciples in the story refer to present disciples; and the storm refers to present storms, however, in a more metaphorical sense.

When it comes to how the wondrous aspects in Matthew's story and God's actions in the present are preached, one observes that when Luther presents the story as a symbol, it means that, though it was factual, it took place to communicate how God acts and show the true realities of life. He sees that God still acts in the same way, though in a metaphorical sense, namely as tribulations in life creating a cry for help which seems to result in a more metaphorical rescue, namely as salvation of the soul.

The move from seeing the story as sign to seeing it as symbol means a shift from seeing the story as an allegory of Christ's wisdom to an intuitive transfer of situation. Though the shift on a theological level may not be very radical, since both strategies point to the salvation of the soul as their main motif, the two strategies lead to opposite results on the level of moral instruction. Augustine promotes an overcoming of the soul's unrest, whereas Luther sees the restless soul as an ideal and the craving for ease of mind as the ultimate temptation.

Strategy

The shift from Luther to Augustine, seen in their interpretation of Jesus' miracle, from a flexible to a more fixed use of examples, from a reference to Christ's knowledge to a revealing of how God acts, can be traced in a changed homiletical strategy. An early work by Luther on the theme contains interesting references to Augustine. It is part of a text written against Jerome Emser's that had accused Luther of violating the distinction between the literal and spiritual meaning in Scripture. The discussion revolved around the quote "The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Corinthians 3:6), a quote that had also been a central theme in the tractate *On the Spirit and the Letter*, by Augustine. Luther refers to Augustine as an ally in the dispute, but their understanding of the quote differs.³⁰

Augustine's discussion of the quote had been part of his argument against Pelagius. Humans may not become righteous by their own merit, Augustine argued, for a reading of the Scripture that may lead to righteousness presupposes the gift of the Spirit. If one reads the letter of Scripture plainly, it works against its intention, so that when one reads the command *Thou shall not covet*, it awakens lust and does not promote virtue, unless it is read with the gift of the Spirit.³¹ Something similar

30 Luther, M. 1930. Answer to the Superchristian, Superspiritual, and Superlearned Book of Goat Emser of Leipzig. Transl. A Steimle. In *Works of Martin Luther*, Vol. 3. Philadelphia, PA: Muhlenberg, 346-360 (in: Lischer, R (ed.). 2002. *The Company of Preachers. Wisdom on Preaching Augustine to Present*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans, 189-195); the latter also in *The Works of Martin Luther* Vol. 39, 143-224. The text was written after Luther has received the pope's condemnation bull, but before the Diet of Worms the same year to when he received the imperial ban. The attack from Emser was grounded on Luther's claim that Scripture did not depend on the church's authority for interpretation.

31 Augustine, *On the Spirit and the Letter*.

happens if one takes literally in Scripture that which is meant figuratively. Without the nourishment of a spiritual intelligence, the words of Scripture produce nonsense.³²

Luther is mild in his critique of Augustine: “Those who have called the letter a veiled and a hidden word, as Augustine did for a while, have committed a more reasonable error.”³³ Still, his interpretation of Paul builds a defence of the literal meaning of Scripture that is at odds with Augustine’s concept. Paul does not distinguish between two senses of Scripture, Luther claims, for Scripture has no other sense than the literal. Though it has,³⁴ Luther’s argument is purely philosophical and grammatical, but has theological motives that differ from Augustine.³⁵

When Augustine promoted the distinction between reading Scripture literally and with a spiritual intelligence, it was in accordance with his theory of signs and things. The gift of the Spirit gives insight to Scripture’s reference and gives a criterion that makes Scripture uniform in a life giving way, namely as revealing knowledge of the God, who is truth and love and promoting a virtuous life.³⁶ Luther’s insistence on the literal meaning of Scripture gives a different result. In his concept, the ambiguity in Scripture does not stem from a wrongful reading and does not lead to nonsense. Rather, a certain ambiguity is characteristic of how Scripture acts. When Paul states that “the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life”, it is because there are two kinds of preaching ministries in Scripture, namely law and gospel, Luther claims.³⁷

In this last step of his argument, Luther enters a more theological and declarative mode. In prescribed *inventio*, literal meaning maintains a tensions in the letter that serves an overarching goal, which is the ministry of letter and spirit. Despite the differences, both Augustine and Luther see a clear theological principle guiding the interpretation of scripture. Luther’s principle rests not so much on insight into who God is, but into how he acts. This difference is analogous to the different outcomes of their exegesis.

In Luther’s sermon, this strategy shines through in intuitive transfers from story to present situation. The men in the boat represent the people gathered in church, that Jesus who slept physically in the boat refers to Jesus, who is sleeping in our world, the rescue from the storm means the salvation of the soul. The concept of Scripture’s two ministries structures the plot in the sermon. Though the strategy insists on the plain sense of the word, it also, with regards to the wondrous aspects of Matthew’s story, abandons the literal interpretation in its application. Jesus’ miracle is no longer a mighty intervention with the elements of nature.

32 “For that teaching which brings to us the command to live in chastity and righteousness is ‘the letter that kills’ unless accompanied with the spirit that gives life.” For that is not the sole meaning of the passage, “The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life”, (2 Corinthians 3:6) which merely prescribes that we should not take in the literal sense any figurative phrase which in the proper meaning of its words would produce only nonsense, but should consider what else it signifies, nourishing the inner man by our spiritual intelligence, since “being carnally minded is death, while to be spiritually minded is life and peace (Romans 8:6).” Augustine: *On the Spirit and the Letter*.

33 LW 39, 179-180

34 He refers, in part, to the principle of contradiction. In part he defines figural interpretation as contained in the literal and as part of grammar, and in part he distinguishes between the meaning of a text and speculations on a texts meaning. On the literal sense as connected with the question of Scripture as the sole authority for theology and the priority of grace, see Rasmussen, T. 1993. Luther. In: Trond Berg Eriksen (ed.), *Vestens tenkere* Vol. 1. Oslo: Aschehoug.

35 LW 39, 175-181.

36 Saint Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* (Quoted from Lischer, *The Company of Preachers*, 172): “... anything in the divine writings that cannot be referred either to good, honest morals or to the truth of faith, you must know is said figuratively. ... Scripture ... commands nothing but charity, or love, and censures nothing but cupidity, or greed, and that is the way it gives shape and form to human morals.”

37 “In that passage St. Paul does not write one iota about these two senses, but declares that there are two kinds of preaching or ministries. One is that of the Old Testament, the other is that of the New Testament. The Old Testament preaches the Letter, The New Testament the Spirit.” LW 39, 182.

Bonhoeffer's sermon

This sermon was presented in the year that marked the end of a life in peace and freedom for Bonhoeffer. He had grown up in a privileged family, well acquainted with the elite in academy and church and had started a promising career as an academic theologian. In 1933 he was teaching part time at the university in Berlin and ministered as chaplain to the technical university and as curate to the Sionskirche in a working class part of Berlin. The sermon was presented only two weeks before Hitler seized power, in a time of great tension and fear. Several of the young adults in his congregation belonged to the communist labour organisation and were targets for Nazi mobs. Bonhoeffer was engaged in finding safe shelter for the former. He was also active in the struggle against the so-called German Christians within the German church and on behalf of colleagues of Jewish descent. So much heat was stirred up around him that he, on the advice of senior colleagues in the church, chose to go to London to minister to two German congregations there. On his return in 1935, he was appointed the director of the confessing church's seminary. After a while, Bonhoeffer was banned from teaching in Berlin and the seminary was made illegal. During the war Bonhoeffer got involved in the planned assassination of Hitler, was imprisoned and executed after two years, shortly before the capitulation. In his notes from prison he writes about these days in 1933 and calls them the start of "a constant enrichment of experience" ("eine ununterbrochene Bereicherung der Erfahrung") and "a journey towards reality" ("eine Reise nach der Wirklichkeit").³⁸

Composition

The sermon was presented in a Vesper service on the evening of the second Sunday after Epiphany. At about seven print pages, it is considerably longer than the other two sermons under discussion in this paper. In its relatively complex structure, a simpler pattern may be found in the characteristic and repeated shifts between descriptions of the congregation's situation and reiterations and explanations of central motifs in the gospel story.

The sermon starts with a very clear statement on its theme:

*The overcoming of fear – that is what we are proclaiming here. The Bible, the gospel, Christ, the church, that faith – all are one great battle cry against fear in the lives of human beings.*³⁹

The first page of the sermon deals with the phenomenon fear. Fear is personified and introduced as an enemy that paralyses and destroys a person, linked to evil, and finally exemplified in the description of someone fearful:

*Have you ever seen someone in the grip of fear? It's dreadful in a child, but even more dreadful in an adult: the staring eyes, the shivering like an animal, the pleading attempt to defend oneself. Fear takes away a person's humanity. This is not what the creature made by God looks like – this person belongs to the devil, this enslaved, broken-down, sick creature.*⁴⁰

The last part of this section, introduces the remedy for fear, namely Christ and his cross. "We name the One who overcame fear and led it captive in the victory procession, who nailed it to the cross and committed it to oblivion."⁴¹

38 Best, I (ed.). 2012. *The Collected Sermons of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. Augsburg: Fortress; Krause, G. 1981. Bonhoeffer. In: HR Balz, G Müller & G Krause, *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* Vol. 7. Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 55-66.; Pasquarello, M III. 2015. Dietrich Bonhoeffer: On Becoming a Homiletical Theologian. In: D Schnasa Jacobsen (ed.), *Homiletical Theology. Preaching as Doing Theology. The Promise of Homiletical Theology* Vol. 1. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 103-128.

39 Ibid. p. 60.

40 Ibid. p. 61.

41 Ibid.

In this first section, Bonhoeffer both addresses the problem and points to the solution, in a rhythm that is repeated in all subsequent sections.

In the next section, Bonhoeffer retells Matthew's gospel story in a way that reveals it as parallel to the described situation of fear. The story is introduced as hypothetical story, giving the impression that what is being told could have happened here: "Let's say there is a ship on the high sea, having a fierce struggle with the waves."⁴²

Characteristic for Bonhoeffer's retelling is the way he introduces a new character into the story.

*But someone is there in the boat that wasn't there before. Someone comes close to him and lays cold hands on his arms as he pulls wildly on his oar. He feels his muscles freeze, feels the strength go out of them. The unknown reaches into his heart and mind and magically brings forth the strangest pictures. He sees his family, his children crying. What will become of them when he is no more?*⁴³

The new character in the boat is fear itself, a character that transports the introductory section about fear firmly into the gospel story, so that the gospel story also comes to deal with the fear addressed in the introductory section. The hypothetical tone is kept when the story moves on to describe Jesus in the boat: "Then it is as if the heavens opened. ... Christ is in the boat, and no sooner has the call gone out and been heard than Fear shrinks back, and the waves subside."⁴⁴

From the retelling of the Gospel story, Bonhoeffer returns to the present situation to address it in light of the gospel story:

*Fear is in the boat, in Germany, in our own lives and in the nave of this church – naked fear of an hour from now, of tomorrow and the day after. That is why we become apathetic, why we intoxicate ourselves with this and that.*⁴⁵

Still, Bonhoeffer finds hope in the fact that people still come to church and sense that something in life must change. It is a hope resembling Luther's positive verdict of the metaphorical storms that help people cry out for the saving help. In Bonhoeffer's sermon, this storm is experienced as fear, but also as a dullness of life. There is a shared sense of discontent that is interpreted as God evoking a call for the help that saves:

*Our affairs seem so enormous and infinitely important to us that we have become dulled toward anything else. This is the work of fear in us. And now we sense that we can't bear to be hemmed like this anymore; it's suffocating. The call of the church cuts through this questioning and foreboding. There is one thing we are lacking: to believe that the Almighty God is our father and our Lord. ... Away with you, Fear! Let us see you, Lord Jesus, strong helper, Savior!*⁴⁶

In the final section of his sermon, Bonhoeffer draws a connection between the storm in Matthew's story and Christ's cross which he had introduced at the outset of his sermon. "It [the church] takes the cross and places it before our eyes and asks: Did God abandon him?"⁴⁷

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid. p. 62.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid. p. 63.

47 Ibid. p. 64.

Against all objections and excuses, he wants to teach his audience to interpret the storm as connected to Christ's cross and as a sign of God's presence in life.

Learn to recognise the sign in your own life. Learn to recognize and understand the hour of the storm, when you were perishing. This is the time when God is incredibly close to you, not far away.⁴⁸

Analysis

Towards the end of the sermon, Bonhoeffer offers his perspective on the wondrous aspects of the story quite explicitly.⁴⁹ While employing a similarly paradoxical description of reality as in Luther's sermon, claiming that to let everything go and lose one's own security is to be totally free to receive God and be kept totally safe, Bonhoeffer states this paradox differently. He does not view it as God's paradoxical way of dealing with humans to save them, but maintains that this paradox is the true expression of faith. Only in a paradoxical world can faith be a faith in God and not in the shifting comforts of life and only as such can it be true faith and not superstition. Bonhoeffer explains his point by another retelling of the gospel story:

When the disciples were climbing aboard the boat, they seemed confident. ... They looked at the lovely calm sea and saw no reason to worry. But as the wind and waves increased in force, the disciples lost their calm and fear grew in them. ... The disciples couldn't sleep; their security was gone; their confidence was misplaced and now was lost. ... Only the faith that leaves behind all false confidence, letting it fall and break down, can overcome fear. This is faith: it does not rely on itself or on favorable seas, favorable conditions; ... but believes only and alone in God, whether or not there is a storm.⁵⁰

Thus Bonhoeffer clarifies how true faith is different from superstition. Since it does not rely on calm circumstances, it appears most clearly in the presence of trials. However, this raises a problem, for without Christ's calming of the threatening surroundings, faith may appear as only brave and not a gift and as not rooted in God's actions in this world. It is probably to counter such objections that Bonhoeffer, as the final part of his sermon, turns to a reflection about whether Christ is still doing miracles:

However, it does seem to be true, what you have surely all been quietly wanting to say for some time, that today Christ is no longer doing such amazing things. He is so strangely hidden away that we often think he is no longer there at all! Dear brothers and sisters, what do we know about what Christ can do and wants to do for us, this very evening, if we will only call upon him as we should ... We say there are no miracles any more, but what do we

48 Ibid.

49 Since a similar theory for exegesis and the *inventio* part of preaching as with Augustin and Luther can hardly be found in Bonhoeffer's authorship, this paragraph construes these perspectives on the basis of the sermon. Most of Bonhoeffer's statements on this theme are read out of books that has a more dogmatic scope and design. Commentators point to influence on him by Berlin scholars, from Luther and Augustin. From Luther and contemporary scholarship on Luther, he held, against contemporary historical critical exegesis that in the Bible God speaks directly to us. From Augustin, he held that the gift of the Spirit, as a gift of faith, was necessary for exegesis. The connection to a historical approach is found by pointing out that the Bible is written for and read by the church. Some commentators even see that he unconsciously (in *Akt und Sein*) employs an exegesis implying a fourfold meaning in Scripture, while others see him extracting a threefold meaning in scripture (ex. Christ – church – ethics). A remaining focus throughout his development as a theologian seems to have been to read the Bible in a way that identifies the divine revelation as something that is historically real, tangible and visible. See: Krause "Bonhoeffer" and Pasquarello III, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer."

50 Best, *The Collected Sermons*, 65.

*know really, you and I? We will certainly be ashamed of ourselves if one day we are allowed to see what God can do.*⁵¹

It appears important to Bonhoeffer's argument to not reject the reality, or possibility, of miracles, both the one described in Matthew's story and the ones anticipated by listeners encouraged to turn to Christ for help. This openness is crucial for the sermon's presentation of Christ as a credible recipient of cries for help and as someone one may turn to with one's fear. Still, in the concluding passage, one senses that Bonhoeffer sees the existential interpretation of the miracle as its primary meaning. The real miracle by Christ is a miracle that lies at the heart of all forms of change and that at its root is about feeling, namely the removal of fear. Thus Bonhoeffer concludes his sermon:

*They were amazed, saying "What sort of a man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?" We can well understand their amazement. What sort of a person is this on whom fear has no effect, who overcomes the fear in human life and takes away its power?*⁵²

Strategy

Imminent in this conclusion is the tension between the reality of miracle and the existential interpretation of the same miracle. It is connected with a theological balancing. The principal openness towards the reality of miracle has to be there because the freeing from fear is to take place in this political situation and, therefore, it needs a miracle. Still, Bonhoeffer cannot state Christ's action too plainly in order not to subject faith to the circumstances of the present situation. Fundamental in the sermon's argument to counter fear, therefore, is not the anticipation of new miracles, but the story of Christ's crucifixion and vindication. This motif is the firm fact which the overcoming of fear rests upon. Therefore, the central argument in Bonhoeffer's sermon does not depend on miracle having a factual reference, and it is not primarily explained as a story on God's action, but on faith: "Only the faith that leaves behind all false confidence, letting it fall and break down, can overcome fear."⁵³

Compared to the other two sermons in this essay, one notices the absence of an explicit code to how the connection between story and present is drawn. It is drawn very intuitively. The introductory passage on fear comes to guide the way the gospel story is retold. The story's characters are identity figures in the same way as in Luther's sermon, but here storm and salvation are not simply matters of the soul to the same degree as in Luther's sermon. There is an explicit openness to seeing the salvation prefigured in Jesus' calming the storm as a freeing of this life were one is paralysed by fear. The Christology in Augustine's sermon and its interpretation of Christ as revealing a hierarchy of being, is here differently construed. Bonhoeffer's reminds his listeners that our thoughts are small compared to God's and thus lets the story also serve as a reminder of Christ's wisdom. However in Bonhoeffer's sermon the Cross is the central point to understand Christ's presence. Christ's wisdom does not bind moral, nature and world in a harmonious system, but allow the sermon to enter as a paradoxical occurrence that places suffering in a new light that overcomes fear.

The clearest difference between Bonhoeffer's and the other two sermons, is the way Bonhoeffer brings Christ's cross into the sermon and the way he identifies a clear enemy, an enemy that is not identified as a person, but as a force in society, recognisable in what takes place in one's own and others' lives and that is spreading with destructive force. These trials are interpreted differently from

51 Ibid. p. 66.

52 Ibid. p. 66.

53 Ibid. p. 65.

what we found in Luther's sermon. They are not there as God's action, in Christ's sleep, to make us turn to God with a cry for help, they are there because of the devil. And Christ is there not only for us to turn to him and be saved, but rather for fear to be overcome so that evil's power over us is stopped. On this point, one may sense a form of synthesis of Luther and Augustine in Bonhoeffer's sermon. The intensity of Luther's sermon is clearly sensed. The fear Bonhoeffer fights is real, also in his own life. Still, the moral impulse and intention from Augustine, where Matthew's story points to a way for hate and egoism to be defeated, is kept, however not in Augustin's stoic manner.

Conclusion

A student trained in historical-critical exegesis may instantly notice how the three preachers treat the story as an isolated text and seemingly extract a theological meaning without arguing from its place within the composition of Matthew's Gospel. The fact that Matthew has placed the story after the Sermon on the Mount is not mentioned, as opposed to its placing among parables and wonders in Mark. Still, the focus for interpretation in the sermons could well have been reached also via modern exegesis. Augustine's presentation of Christ as the Logos of cosmos rings well with the rabbinic idea of the sea as representing the powers of chaos and the law as that which defeat chaos. Luther's focus on Christ as enabling a cry for help accords with his interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount as an expression of the dynamics of law and gospel. And Bonhoeffer's focus on fear supports a reading of the story as strengthening Jesus preaching of the law by the removal of fear.⁵⁴

Thus, the three preaching strategies are compatible with a contemporary reading practice. An interesting observation is that the oldest of the sermons is the one that interprets the miracle in the most rationalistic terms, whereas the youngest is the one most explicitly open to miracles. For all of them the historicity of the miracle is taken for granted and claimed without shame, but none of them see the wondrous aspect as the story's main point. Rather they see that the miracle is there to communicate a message. The distinctive ways they arrive at this message offers homiletical resources. They may be summed up in the following three models:

The interpretation present in Augustine's sermon may be described as being undertaken in a *mode of knowledge*. The miracle is seen as a sign pointing to knowledge and the sermon aims at explaining this signifying taking place in the story and its relevance for knowledge. By the sermon's application of the miracle to its listener's context, one may say that it preaches God's action as *figurative action*. It is an action conducted as figurative of something else: The display of knowledge and the thereby associated moral action is the real aim of God's action in the story.

The interpretation present in Luther's sermon may be described as being undertaken in a *mode of identification*. The story is preached in order to have the listeners see themselves within the story's narrative sequences in order to experience what the story's characters are described as experiencing. Correspondingly, God's action with the story's characters is described as parallel to what the listeners may experience, albeit in an unnoticeably metaphorical manner, so that God's action applied to the listeners' situation is presented as *metaphorical action*.

The interpretation present in Bonhoeffer's sermon may be described as being undertaken in an *existential mode*. The choices identified that the characters in Matthew's story were confronted with the same choices as the listeners were confronted with. Their choices had the same consequences and the same possibilities; the listeners may also let themselves be paralysed by fear and surrender to the hostile situation or turn to Christ to defeat it. Thus, God's action is applied to the listeners' situation as *factual action*, mainly by its power to remove fear, but this power rests in the ability to still conduct miracles.

54 Runeson, A. 2011. Matthew. In: MD Coogan (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Books of the Bible*. New York: Oxford University Press.

St. Augustine – Preacher of Paradox and Promise in Early Fifth-century North Africa

31

Stephan Borgehammar¹

The first major author of Christian literature in Latin was a North African by the name of Tertullian. Likewise, the first major preacher in Latin – at least one whose sermons have been preserved – was a North African: the famous Church Father, St. Augustine. And what a preacher he was! He had contemporaries whose preaching was equally famous and whose sermons, in terms of content, were just as profound and edifying, chief among whom was St. John Chrysostom. But no-one else known to us had St. Augustine's ability to interact with his audience. This makes him a model for preachers in every age and circumstance and his sermons an interesting object of study for students of homiletics.

The life of St. Augustine

St. Augustine was born in the year 354, in the town of Thagaste in present-day Algeria. People living along the Mediterranean coast of Africa were then mostly Latin-speaking, but many, including Augustine, considered themselves descendants of the Phoenicians who had founded Carthage. He received a good education and at the age of 29 went to Rome in order to make a living there as a teacher of rhetoric. Rome proved a disappointment and he moved on to Milan, where he came under the influence of the bishop, St. Ambrose. After a year in Milan he converted to Christianity and became a catechumen. In 387, when he was 33 years old, he was baptised by Ambrose. In the year after he returned to Africa, he converted the family house into a monastery for himself and a group of friends. In 391 he was ordained a priest in the town of Hippo Regius, on the outskirts of present-day Annaba in north-east Algeria.

At that time, presbyters did not preach in the presence of a bishop. However, Augustine was requested by his bishop, Valerius, to take on preaching duties in the cathedral. Augustine's response was first to request time off to study the Bible in preparation for the task.²

In 396, he succeeded Valerius as bishop of Hippo Regius. He remained in office for 35 years, until his death in 430 at the age of 76. During those years, he preached on most Saturdays and Sundays as well as on saints' days and major feasts. The total number of sermons he preached is estimated to have been between 4,000 and 8,000. Of the public sermons (*Sermones ad populum*), 559 are known to have survived until today. Perhaps more will be discovered in the future. In addition, we have his *Expositions of the Psalms* (*Enarrationes in Psalmos*) and his *Homilies* (*Tractatus*) on the Gospel of John and on

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2 Augustine, *Letter 21.1 to Valerius*.

the *First Letter of John*, which are Bible commentaries that probably originated as sermons for monks and clergy.

We owe the survival of so much of St. Augustine's preaching to skilled stenographers, listening to him preaching and taking down his words. It seems these men were employed by Augustine himself. Perhaps he planned at some point to rework and publish a selection of the sermons, but if so, he never got around to it. This is lucky for us because if he had, the stenographed sermons would probably have been destroyed. Instead, we now have what almost amounts to live recordings of what was said in churches in Roman North Africa at the end of the fourth and the beginning of the fifth century by one of the greatest preachers ever. Let us begin by reviewing the conditions under which these sermons were delivered, and then consider some characteristic features of Augustine's preaching method and style.³

The practical circumstances of St. Augustine's public sermons

Augustine preached primarily in his cathedral in Hippo Regius, the Basilica of Peace (*Basilica Pacis*). The ruins today identified as this church reveal a fairly large structure, roughly 50 m long and 20 m wide. The apse faces more or less north, which may explain why Augustine at the end of his sermons often says "Let us turn toward the Lord", an invitation to the congregation to turn toward the east for the intercessions. Most likely, Augustine preached sitting on a raised episcopal throne in the apse while his audience were standing. On Sundays, the audience would have been a mixed crowd of young and old, rich and poor, masters and servants, educated and uneducated. On major feast days, such as Christmas and Easter, the church was surely very crowded, while on certain saints' days the turnout could be poor.

The audience stood divided into groups: men and women were separated, and there were special sections for catechumens, penitents and consecrated women (widows and virgins). An interesting fact, to which we will return to below, is that Augustine normally seems to have addressed only the heads of households, that is, the more well-to-do among the male audience. But of course, all the others were listening in.

Because of his fame, Augustine was often invited to preach in the cathedral of Carthage. More than 100 of the preserved sermons are known to have been delivered there. In that metropolis his audience was more sophisticated, which caused Augustine to use a slightly more elaborate rhetoric. In one sermon from Carthage, Augustine spoke about vanity in a way that apparently made some of the wealthy ladies walk out.⁴ But there are also other settings. A few dozen sermons have been preserved that were preached in churches that are often hard to identify today, many of them probably situated in small towns in Augustine's own diocese. We shall look more closely at a sermon preached in a town called Chusa.

Augustine's sermons vary considerably in length. When he was eager to bring something across, he could talk for well over an hour. Occasionally, he even says to his audience that he will return to the

3 The following two sections are largely based in Doyle, D.E. 2007. Introduction to Augustine's preaching. In: B Ramsey (ed.), *Saint Augustine: Essential Sermons*. (The Works of Saint Augustine. A Translation for the 21st Century. Part III – Homilies.) New York: New City, 9-22. Essential bibliography on St. Augustine as preacher and on his sermons will be found here. See further Pellegrino, M. 1990. General Introduction. In: JE Rotelle (ed.), *Saint Augustine: Sermons* Vol. 1. (The Works of Saint Augustine. A Translation for the 21st Century. Part III – Homilies.) New York: New City, 13-137, and, for a chronological overview of Augustine's sermons, see Rotelle, J.E. 1990, *Saint Augustine*, Chronological Table, 138-163.

4 *Sermo* 32. See Hill, E, OP. 1994. St. Augustine – a male chauvinist? Talk given to the Robert Hugh Benson Graduate Society at Fisher House, Cambridge, on 22 November 1994. Online at: <http://www.its.caltech.edu/~nmcenter/women-cp/augustin.html> (Accessed: 20 February 2016).

same topic in his next sermon. On other occasions he is very brief indeed. This mostly occurs towards the end of his life, when he is old and frail. But when the weather is very hot, too, he can be brief, not only because his own strength fails him but out of consideration for his audience. On one occasion, indeed, he says, “Now my nose tells me I have been talking for too long.”

The length of many sermons may surprise us, but it must be remembered that Roman North Africa was a strongly oral culture, where public speeches were considered a form of entertainment. A good speaker like Augustine drew crowds who might otherwise have gone to see gladiator games and whose main reason for coming to church was that they enjoyed the sermon. Augustine knew this, and used his skills to win disciples for Christ.

Augustine’s mode and style of preaching

When preaching at public church services, Augustine did not usually expound a biblical text in its entirety. Rather, he would choose brief passages that supported a particular message he wished to bring across. These passages could be chosen from several of the readings before the sermon and even from liturgical texts. He often commented on verses from a responsorial psalm that had been sung before the sermon, but he would always also comment on the gospel reading.⁵ He clearly expected his audience to have listened attentively to the scriptural readings, because he frequently quotes a verse from one of them without saying which text it is.

Augustine never prepared his sermons in writing. He certainly thought beforehand about what to say, and prayed about it; at the beginning of the sermon he also often asked the congregation to pray for his inspiration; but when he was speaking he extemporised. This enabled him to take account of the reactions of the audience, which gives his sermons a wonderfully conversational character. If he felt that his point was not coming across, he would continue to elaborate on it until the audience understood. Frequently, too, we see him picking up a reaction or a word from someone in the audience and commenting on it.

Another feature of Augustine’s preaching that gives it a conversational tone is his use of fictive dialogue. To argue with an imaginary opponent is a favourite device when he wishes to counter hypothetical objections. At other times, he asks questions of the audience, or some group in the audience and answers the questions for them. Occasionally, Augustine will pretend to take the audience with him to a biblical scene that he wishes them to engage with, painting the scene before their eyes and addressing figures in it.⁶

However, Augustine did not merely wish to put on a show. His greatest concern was to make his hearers understand what it means to be a Christian and to act on that understanding. This was his duty and he frequently referred to it in terms that show that he regarded himself as God’s tool and mouthpiece. “They aren’t my sermons,” he would say, “I only speak at the Lord’s command.”⁷ At the same time, he did not regard himself as some kind of oracle and did not take pleasure in being bound to preach. In a sermon that he gave on an anniversary of his ordination, perhaps towards the end of his life, he speaks very seriously and movingly about his preaching duty as a heavy burden, onerous and impossible to carry unless God carries it with him.⁸ Augustine’s whole attitude to his task was to transmit the Word of God and the faith of the church without adding or subtracting anything whatsoever.

5 See *Sermo* 49, 1 (Saint Augustine: Essential Sermons, 56).

6 For instance, the stoning of St. Stephen in *Sermo* 49, 10-11 (Saint Augustine: Essential Sermons, 62-63).

7 *Sermo* 82, 15 (Saint Augustine: Essential Sermons, 136-137).

8 *Sermo* 339 (Saint Augustine: Essential Sermons, 387-98).

For this reason, Augustine deliberately kept his language simple when preaching. Although he was able to express himself elegantly and eloquently, as several of his written works show, he preferred a straight and simple style when preaching. Nevertheless, as a master rhetorician, he had an arsenal of devices for retaining people's attention and for persuading them to accept that which went against their grain. In addition to various forms of dialogue, one could mention his use of humour, sarcasm, insistent repetition and, in particular, antithesis. Antithesis occurs on almost every page of his sermons.

The use of antithesis, I contend, was not just a feature of Augustine's style or a personal preference, nor just a device calculated to intrigue audiences and help them remember what had been said – although it certainly also filled those functions. No, behind Augustine's use of antithesis lay his strong sense of paradox. By analysing in some detail his Sermon 9 on "The Ten Strings of the Harp", preached in the town of Chua, I hope to show that his preaching rested on a keen appreciation of two paradoxes: the paradox of God's mercy as revealed in the Incarnation; and the paradox of sin that makes people desire what is bad for them and reject what would do them good.

Summary of Augustine's sermon 9, "On the ten strings of the harp"

Let us begin with a summary of this rather long sermon. It probably lasted about one hour and twenty minutes.

Augustine starts by quoting Psalm 86:15: "God is merciful and compassionate, long-suffering, very merciful and true." People who love the world like to hear that God is merciful and compassionate, he says. If someone tried to restrain them from sinful behaviour, they would reply, "Don't try to scare me with, he is very merciful." But they forget the last word in the verse, which says that God is *true*. This means that he will also judge us.

Augustine then moves on to a verse from the gospels, Matthew 5:25: "Come to an agreement with your adversary quickly, while you are on the road with him." The adversary, he says, is God's Word that commands things that go against our grain. He then starts recounting the Ten Commandments. When he comes to the third, on keeping the Sabbath, he stops a little to explain that this is a spiritual command. It means we should toil here and now in order to attain the future rest that we hope for. When he comes to the sixth commandment, about not committing adultery, he says it means, "do not go to any other woman except your wife." Then he starts accusing his audience saying,

But what you do is demand this duty from your wife, while declining to pay this duty to your wife. And while you ought to lead your wife in virtue ..., you collapse under one assault of lust. You want your wife to conquer; [while] you yourself lie there, conquered.

He goes on like this for about a minute, then perhaps hears some complaints, because he says,

I am afraid that I, too, may be some people's adversary because I am speaking like this. Well, why should that bother me? May he who terrifies me into speaking make me brave enough not to fear the complaints of men [sic]. Those who don't want to be faithful in chastity to their wives – and there are thousands of such men – don't want me to say these things. But whether they want me to or not, I'm going to say them.

He then holds back a bit, explaining that he did not spend so much time on the first five commandments because he thought his audience already knew them and respected them. Then he returns to the sixth commandment and turns on the heat again:

Complaints in this matter are a daily occurrence, even though the women themselves don't yet dare to complain about their husbands. A habit that has caught on everywhere like this is taken for a law, so that even wives perhaps are now convinced that husbands are allowed to do this, wives are not. They are used to hearing about wives being taken to court, found perhaps with houseboys. But a man taken to court because he was found with his maid, they have never heard of that – though it's a sin. It is not divine truth that makes the man seem more innocent in what is equally sinful, but human wrongheadedness.

Augustine is well aware that the women are listening and will take this matter home with them. So he presents a little scene where a wife says to her husband, after the sermon, “What you are doing is not right. We both heard him saying so.” And the husband replies, “How come did this fellow ever come here, or did my wife go to church that day?”

Augustine now suggests that the audience would probably have preferred him to have been a popular singer. So let us suppose I am, he says. “I have brought a harp; it has ten strings.” Remember, he says, earlier they sang Psalm 144:9: “O God, I will sing you a new song, on a harp of ten strings I will play to you.” The harp, he explains, is the Decalogue. Then Augustine starts again to explain the Ten Commandments. Now he is more systematic: The first three commandments were written on the first tablet and refer to the love of God; the remaining seven were written on the second tablet and refer to the love of one's neighbour. Moreover, the first three can refer to the Trinity. There is a particularly beautiful passage here, where Augustine speaks about the eternal Sabbath as a gift of God in the Holy Spirit.

Having gone through all the commandments, Augustine first encourages his audience to observe them out of love, not out of fear. Then he deals with people who say that the commandments are impossible to fulfil and that God, therefore, has to be indulgent and pardon everybody. Such people, says Augustine, try to fashion God in their own image, but God wants to fashion them in his. If they learn to be satisfied with God as he is and start to love him as he is, then they will let him make them into the sort of persons they are not yet. Augustine adds the familiar simile of sick people and painful cures. Sins, he says, are fevers of the soul. “You ought to hate them as the doctor does.”

Augustine now returns to the command against adultery, saying that he is going to pluck that string of his harp constantly! First, he again compares the men unfavourably with their wives. Then he says that if this is a bitter pill, they must nevertheless swallow it because their insides are dangerously ill. And he becomes explicit:

Those of you who haven't been practicing the virtue of chastity, start practicing it now. Don't say, “It can't be done.” It's vile, my brothers and it's shameful for a man to say that what a woman can do can't be done. ... Your chaste wives show you that what you don't want to do can be done, and you say it can't be done.

Augustine continues on the topic in a very strong manner, lamenting a society that praises sexual exploits and laughs at chaste men. He also describes the interior battle against vice as a battle against wild beasts, probably in order to bring across to his audience that it is manly to be good and to obey the commandments. Finally, on this topic, he also deals with unmarried men who think it is nothing

to go to a brothel because they are neither being unfaithful nor harming anyone. Augustine replies that they are harming themselves and that they are the temple of God.

It's true [he says] you cannot harm God with your evil deeds, but you do offend him with your vices, you do offend him with your corrupt manners, you do him an injury in yourself. For what you are injuring is his grace, his gift.⁹

Summing up the main part of the sermon, Augustine exhorts his audience to serve God, just as they have servants who serve them. They know what it is to have a good and faithful servant; should they themselves then do worse in relation to God, who is their master?

In a kind of coda, Augustine goes on to deal with small sins – the ones we cannot help ourselves from committing; things such as saying an unkind word, having intercourse with one's wife merely for pleasure, or eating more than is necessary. These sins can be wiped away by means of almsgiving. But here Augustine again needs to take his audience to task: There are some who boast about their almsgiving and look down upon those who give less; others stare themselves blind at people who are richer than they and forget about the poor; and yet others invent a lot of excuses for not sharing their wealth. The common error is to throw away money on that which harms the soul and not to spend it on that which does good.

Augustine ends by exhorting his audience to give thanks to God, who has given them the ability to live good lives. “Spend your time in good works”, he says, “in prayer, in fasting, in almsgiving because of your tiny sins, and keep yourselves from those big sins, and in this way you will come to an agreement with the adversary.” He continues: “Walking confidently along the road in this way, you will not need to fear any holdups by the devil, because Christ has made himself into a broad road and highway that leads us straight home. Complete freedom from care is to be found there ... and total rest, since it is a place where even the very works of mercy will have ceased, because there will be no unfortunate in need there. So it will be the sabbath of sabbaths and there we shall find what here we desire. Amen.”

Paradox and promise in Augustine's sermon 9

By retelling the sermon at some length I hope I have conveyed not only its main points but also the combination of strong purpose and improvisation that is so typical of St. Augustine. He wants to get certain things across – not only intellectually, but he wants to improve the lives of his audience – and for this purpose he uses the Bible, arguments of all kinds, sentiments, provocations and striking images such as a harp, the curing of disease, an interior battle.

Another reason for my retelling the sermon at some length was to alert you to the social situation in which it was preached. It is abundantly clear that the people Augustine addresses are the heads of households. Indeed, I think social conventions forced him to do so. Even though he has specific things to say to wives and servants in this sermon, he never addresses them directly. Presumably, it was not *comme il faut*. Did Augustine feel this as a limitation? We do not really know. In every age, people tend to take the prevalent social structures for granted. But of this I feel certain, that both the ladies and the servants were grateful for the way Augustine defended their dignity as humans and Christians. In targeting the male elite and dealing sternly with them, Augustine did what could be done in order to reform society in his day. We must remember that mass media and the tools of

9 Saint Augustine, *Essential Sermons*, 39.

social engineering had not yet been invented. If at that time someone wanted to attack structural injustice, the only way to do it was to plead with the dominant segments of society.

Let us now look at the paradoxes brought up by St. Augustine in his sermon. There are quite a few and I shall divide them into two categories.

a. Paradoxes of sin

To begin with, God is both merciful and just. He is a God who forgives, but also a God who punishes. To love God is to strive for justice and to plead for mercy, at the same time. The reason why human beings experience God in this way is sin, not any fickleness in the divine nature. The first fundamental paradox of the human condition, then, is sin. To Augustine sin is above all disordered and misdirected love. Instead of loving eternal things, we love what is transitory; instead of loving God, we love God's creation; instead of loving others, we love ourselves and our personal pleasures.

The problem with all of this is that it destroys us. And here comes the next paradox: pleasures harm us, whereas sorrow can be good for us (if it is sorrow about our sins). A pleasant drink leaves us with nothing but a hangover, but a bitter medicine can restore our health. Why? Because our love is misdirected. We desire what is harmful, and think this is good just because we desire it, but we shun what is truly good for us because we experience it as bitter and repelling.

Time and time again Augustine returns to various aspects of this paradoxical condition. "The beginning of life," he says, "introduces the possibility of death. On this earth and in the human race the only one who cannot yet die is the one who has not yet begun to live."¹⁰ God's law becomes our adversary. Why? "Because it commands things against the grain that you don't do."¹¹ The examples of this are numerous. Double standards for men and women have become accepted to the extent that people think this is as it should be. Double standards for masters and servants are also taken for granted – a servant is expected to be good and dutiful, but his master does as he likes. And yet people are self-righteous:

What you pay attention to [says Augustine] is what the other person doesn't do, not what God tells you to do. You measure yourself by comparison with someone worse, not by the instruction of someone better. Just because he does nothing, it doesn't mean you are doing something great. But because you are so pleased with any minimal good works of yours – in fact, because your sterility is so great that the slightest yield pleases you vastly – you congratulate yourselves ... over a few miserable grains of almsgiving, and forget the great heaps of your sins. You have forked up, perhaps, heaven knows what paltry alms, which someone else either didn't have, or didn't fork up when he did have it. Don't look around you at who isn't doing anything, but ahead of you at what God is telling you to do.¹²

By emphasising the paradoxical conditions of human life, Augustine seeks to make people more aware of them and so give them a means of escape. Precisely because he wishes to set people free, he never tires of exposing their folly and their lame excuses when not doing the right thing. The folly consists in spending money on such things as actors, hunters and gladiators, "people", says Augustine, "who kill you; by the public shows they exhibit they are slaying your souls." An example of

10 Saint Augustine, *Essential Sermons*, 27.

11 Saint Augustine, *Essential Sermons*, 27.

12 Saint Augustine, *Essential Sermons*, 41-42.

a lame excuse is that some people don't give alms because they say they are saving for their children. This Augustine attacks in two ways. First he says,

*Let's see, shall we? Your father saves it for you, you save it for your children, your children for their children, and so on through all generations, and not one of them is going to carry out the commandments of God. Why don't you rather pay it all over to him who made you out of nothing?*¹³

Augustine's second line of attack is to suppose that a man loses one of his children. Augustine says,

If he was saving for his children, let him send that one's share after him. Why should he keep it in his money-bags and drop him from his mind? Give him what is due to him, pay him what you were saving for him. "But he's dead", says he. In fact he has gone on ahead to God; his share is now owed to the poor. It's owed to the one he has gone to stay with. It's owed to Christ, since he has gone to stay with him. And he said, Whoever did it to one of the least of these did it to me, and whoever failed to do it to one of the least of these failed to do it to me (Mt 25:40.45).

b. Paradoxes of salvation

In this last quotation Augustine not only exposes a paradox of sin but also introduces paradoxes of another kind, namely that the dead are alive with Christ and that it is possible to store up treasure in heaven by giving away money on earth. Whereas most of the paradoxes we have dealt with so far may be called paradoxes of sin, this other kind may be called paradoxes of salvation. To die here means eternal life over there; to give things away here means to gather a treasure there. The foundation for these paradoxes, although not spelled out in this particular sermon, is of course the mystery of salvation in Christ: God who became human in order that God's image might be restored in us; the God-man who suffered and died in order that we should have eternal life.

The paradoxes of salvation contain the promises that St. Augustine preached to his congregations. He does not offer them joy and prosperity in the present life. What he offers is guidance in order to live a morally good life on this earth and hope for a life of joy in heaven. The morally good life requires a lot of effort and its reward is not much more than a good conscience. If the leaders of society lead such lives, however, it will greatly benefit people around them. And gradually, perhaps, as the grip of false pleasures loosens, the inevitable pains caused by the paradoxes of sin will grow less. For Augustine is convinced that sin leaves you with a hangover and gradually destroys your inner self. Then, for a few who advance far on the road toward God, the pleasures of true love – love of God above all things and love of all things *in* God – will outweigh the pains of an ascetic lifestyle. But that is not something Augustine says much about in his sermons to the public at large. He is generous with his teaching on ordered love, because he believes it to be the key to the good life.¹⁴ However, he refrains from saying much about the temporal rewards of such a life. I think his pastoral experience showed him that few people manage to escape very far from of the clutches of the paradoxes of sin; and as for himself, he certainly knew the pleasures of spiritual contemplation, but the burden of pastoral care loomed larger in his life.¹⁵

13 Saint Augustine, *Essential Sermons*, 42.

14 See, above all, Book I of *On Christian Teaching* (*De doctrina Christiana*).

15 Of this he speaks eloquently in *Sermo* 339, 4 (*Saint Augustine: Essential Sermons*, 392): "There's nothing better, nothing more pleasant than to search through the divine treasure chest with nobody making a commotion; it's pleasant, it's good. But to preach, to refute, to rebuke, to build up, to manage for everybody, that's a great burden, a great weight, a great labor. Who wouldn't run away for this labor? But the gospel terrifies me."

Preaching the ultimate promise

The promises extended by Augustine in Sermon 9, then, are the promise that God's image can be renewed in each one of us, and the promise of the eternal Sabbath. In other sermons of his we find the same two promises, but perhaps couched in different, albeit biblical, imagery, such as heaven or eternal life. The promise of heaven and future glory is central to the Christian gospel, but difficult to convey because it concerns something that none of us have ever experienced.

To bring this promise across convincingly requires a judicious use of words. We sometimes hear cynical talk about “pie in the sky when you die”, making the promise of eternal life sound trite and incredible. Listening to this promise from the mouth of St. Augustine, however, has an entirely different effect, as this last quotation shows:

Because the one God is Father and Son and Holy Spirit, in the Holy Spirit, that is, in the gift of God, everlasting rest is promised us. Of that we have already received the pledge. That's what the apostle says: Who gave us the Spirit as a pledge (2 Cor. 1:22). If we have received a pledge so that we may be at peace in the Lord and in our God, that we may be gentle in our God, may be patient in God, we shall also in him from whom we have received the pledge be at rest forever. That will be the sabbath of sabbaths, on account of the rest that comes as the gift of the Holy Spirit. ... The seventh day [of creation], in which God hallowed rest, does not have an evening. It says “There was morning,” so that the day could begin. But it doesn't say “There was evening” to bring the day to an end; it says “There was morning,” but it does not end, because we shall live forever. Whatever we do with this hope in mind, if we do it, then we are observing the sabbath.

Communicating the Gospel to Dalits in India in the Midst of the Paradoxes of Life

32

Anuparthi John Prabhakar¹

The word Dalit is derived from the root *dal* that is also related to words like crack, open, slit, et cetera. As a noun and an adjective, the Sanskrit root refers to burst, split, broken or torn asunder, downtrodden, scattered, crushed, destroyed, et cetera.² Dalit was used to describe the outcastes and untouchables as victims of a caste-ridden society by a Marathi social reformer, Mahatma Jyotirao Phule, but it was coined by Indian jurist, economist, politician and social reformer Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar.³ In India, Dalits are known with many names like *Dasa*, *Dasyu*, *Raksasa*, *Asura*, *Avarna*, *Nisada*, *Panchama*, *Mletcha*, *Svapaca*, *Chandala*, *Achuta*, exterior castes, depressed classes, scheduled castes, Harijan, the Untouchables, et cetera.⁴

Dalits are called untouchables and outcastes. To be an outcaste means a person has no caste in a caste-ruled society, in other words a dissocialised person. According to Gertrude Warner:

*The word untouchable means exactly what it appears to mean. Those to whom the word is applied are not to be touched. Contact with the body or clothes of one of them causes pollution. Even accidental contact requires a ceremonial cleansing and a bath.*⁵

In some cases, a person is a Dalit as the result of their occupation. Another reason given for the origin of this caste and the untouchables is said to be the methods adopted by Aryans. The Aryans invaded India around 1500 BC. There was continuous conflict with the indigenous people and the Aryans looked down on them as inferior and excluded them as ritually unclean. According to the so-called *Varna* theory (Manusmruthi), there are four *varnas* that were divinely ordained. The outcastes were the result of alliances between the original four *varnas*. During the years after 200 AD, the practice of untouchability was intensified and *chandala* (impure) became the label.⁶ Untouchability also became hereditary in some communities. The Government of India prepared a list of these communities in 1935. It was issued under the Government of India Act of 1935, attached as a schedule and the list became official. It is indeed a frightening experience to see the list that includes 429 communities, whose touch it is believed pollutes others.⁷

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2 Massey, J. 1994. Dalits: Historical Roots. In: J Massey (ed.). *Indigenous People: Dalits: Dalit Issues in Today's Theological Debate*. Delhi: ISPC, 6.

3 Ibid. p. 6.

4 Ibid.

5 Warner, G.C. et.al. 1938. *Moving Millions: The Pageant of Modern India*. Boston, MA: The Central Committee on the United Study of Foreign Missions, 43.

6 Webster, J.C.B. 1992. *The Dalit Christians: A History*. Delhi: ISPC, 2-3.

7 Moon, V (ed.). 1990. *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches Vol.7*. Bombay: Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 259-265.

Human beings are consecrated with the gift of communication by an ever-communicating God. It is a fundamental characteristic of humanity. It contributes to healthy development and the continuation of human society. Because of communication, a person will be socialised through receiving common knowledge of norms that governs his or her society and it enables a person to become actively involved in the public life. According to the World Council of Churches in its Uppasala Statement on the Church and the Media of Mass Communication,

[c]ommunication is the fabric of life. It is by communication that we become what we are, both in our corporal and our spiritual life. Communication is also the way in which God makes himself known to man [sic], and man responds to God.⁸

In the Indian setting, norms that govern society are derived from Hindu religious traditions. Someone's caste is determined still in the mother's womb. Each person is socialised within a caste identity and by means of the caste norms that prevail in his or her community. In the case of outcastes, the Dalits, since they live on the margins of and segregated from society their communication activity is limited to their enclaves. They are deprived of every kind of knowledge, to which those from castes have access. They are set aside by their status without any opportunity to enter into broader social dialogue or to participate in such broad social interaction. Since Brahmins are believed to be created from the mouth of Brahma, they assert themselves as authority for religious communication, leaving no place for Dalits except within Dalit religions.

The proclamation to the gospel to Dalit communities resulted whole communities together responding positively to it. This was labelled "mass conversions" by some historians of the church. The introduction of new religion by the Foreign Missionaries in the western pattern alienated Dalits from their rich cultural heritage in several ways. Religious communication is one of the important aspects. Human communication is always contextual. The content is made up of verbal and non-verbal variables. The message is always embodied in cultural garb. By becoming aware of these basic truths, one may look for effective methods of communication in a given context. Some issues related to the communication of gospel to the Dalit communities are discussed below.

The role of communication in the community

Communication plays a vital role in the life of all human beings. It enables people to gather necessary information to socialise themselves in the community where they are living; it helps liberate people from oppression and fear; and, it unites people in community and communion. The word communication is derived from the Latin word *communis* (common, sharing, togetherness, fellowship, give and take, et cetera). The supreme expression of this communion finds its origin in the being of the Triune God. God's intention is to reconcile all of humanity with and in communion with him. Paul's words to the Colossians attest to this fact.

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. (Colossians 1:19- 20 NRSV).

In the New Testament, the word *koinonia* expresses both communion and community. "The basic intent of Christian communication is to share with all people the communion offered by God and experienced in common within the community of the household of God."⁹ The early church as

8 Manuel, A.D. 1994. *Communication and the Church*. Bangalore: The United Theological College, 20.

9 Lyon, D.H.S. 1986. *Communion, Community and Communication*. In: G Robinson (ed.). *Communicating the Gospel Today*. Madurai: The Tamil Nadu Theological Seminary, 81-82.

a community of believers was a communicating church. God has chosen it as an instrument to communicate Kingdom values to his people. Oneness, reconciliation, equality, justice, freedom, harmony, peace and love are the focal elements of Kingdom values.¹⁰

The implications of community are not to be confined to a local community. Communication has to build a community encompassing all of humankind. It has to break down the barriers of caste, race, sex, class, nation, power and wealth. In the words of Manuel, “[g]enuine communication cannot take place in a climate of division, alienation, isolation and barriers which disturb prevent or distort social interaction.”¹¹

Communication not only builds community; it also maintains community as the community character persists in providing space for participation of its members. Social relations are maintained through the sharing of meaning. Communication emits liberative power by enabling community members to express their needs and it motivates them to act together to fulfil their needs. This gives vigour needed to question unjust social structures and to strive towards an egalitarian society where human dignity is respected and promoted.¹²

The message for communication

Dalits live as a community. As community they are prone to experience all sorts of inhuman behaviour towards them from the so-called upper castes. They desire to be liberated, not as individuals, but as a community. In this sense the gospel has to play a greater role at the level of the community than perhaps in other context. The scope of salvation, for example, has to be broadened to include the community, not only individual members of it. Franklyn J Balasundaram explains as follows:

*[S]alvation means not just salvation of the soul, but the totality or the whole humans, of humankind and people, of the whole created universe. It is a salvation not just from sin, although sin remains the most important of all human evils to be liberated from, but from all human evils such as disease, hunger, death, corruption, wars, oppression, weeping, mourning, etc.*¹³

Salvation has to deal with social sin rather than only with individual sinfulness. It has to lead people to repent for their collective sinfulness towards Dalit communities. In short, salvation it should contain liberative implications.

When communicating the gospel to Dalit communities, the latter's cultural dimension has to be duly taken into account. According to Aleaz,

*“[c]ulture is humans’ creative expression of the way they perceive and interpret reality and it is their conceptual formulations of what is possible, what is beautiful, what is better. These find expressions in religious thought, philosophical reflections, literature or art, music and architecture.*¹⁴

Religious communication is not something foreign introduced to Dalit communities by Christian communicators. In fact, Dalits have an abundance of traditional religious communication. The

10 Manuel, *Communication*, 27.

11 Ibid. p. 28.

12 Ibid. p. 30.

13 Balasundaram, F.J. 1999. The Use of Scriptures in Liberation Theologies: The Bible, Interpretation and Contextual Relevance, *Voices from the Third World XXII*(1):130-131.

14 Aleaz, K.P. 1994. *The Gospel of Indian Culture*. Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 14.

religious movements of Veera Saivism, for example, communicated their religious teachings very effectively. The preachers of that tradition adopted indigenous methods and used people's language to communicate their message. Basavadu, the leader of the movement had considerable impact on the common folk through his teachings, partly because it the movement addressed the predominant social evil in the context of the Dalits, the caste. As such, this preaching served as a counterculture to the reigning Sanskrit culture.¹⁵

Dalit literature (Dalit Sahitya)

Aravind P Nirmal explains the meaning of the term *Dalit Sahitya* as referring to,

*... the body of literature which gives expression to the feelings and experiences of the writers representing the people who are broken, downtrodden, crushed, etc. More narrowly, the term represents the body of literature produced by the writers and poets belonging to the so-called outcaste communities, the untouchables.*¹⁶

Dalit Sahitya evokes the realisation among Dalits that they find themselves in the midst of social oppression and as the targets of discrimination. Its objectives are to produce literature telling the history of sufferings of these oppressed people, so that they become aware of their situation, thus serving as source material for the Dalit movement as a whole.¹⁷ Dalits were traditionally denied any access to learning. Their cultural and creative activity was considered debased and vulgar. However, the situation is changing, even the mainstream critics are now considering Dalit Sahitya as a legitimate and progressive genre.¹⁸ The nature of this literature is expressive of their sufferings, as

*[t]he poetry mirrors the pathos of humanity, the cry for life. The violence, inhumanity and domination and suppression of one section of humanity by another constitute the pain and sorrow of this world, articulated by the poet with a deep yearning for overcoming them. The cross is the pathos of God. No wonder one of the favorite themes of our artists and poets is the crucifixion. In the midst of pathos our poet sings a new song of hope.*¹⁹

Dalit writers use their writings as an instruments toward social change. The focus of their writings is liberation. It is a protest against inhuman attitudes toward them. It may take the form of poetry, novels, short stories, drama or folk traditions. Dalits were illiterate and uneducated for nearly two thousand years. This made them new to articulating the inhuman conditions they experienced through the ages and to voice their protest against Hindu caste system.²⁰

Among the Dalit Sahitya movements, the Marathi movement is significant. The ideology of Buddhism was an important trend that gave inspiration to these movements. Among their leaders, Jotirao Phule is significant. Born in 1827 into a family of fruit and vegetable growers, he was a member of the *Mali* caste. The *Malis* are ranked as *Shudra* in the four-fold caste system of Hinduism. Beginning from his student days, Phule was critical of Hindu social structures and attempted well-known efforts to reform them. During 1860s he was committed to a variety of reform campaigns. In his writings,

15 Rao, K.P. 1994. *Dalita Sahitya Vadam – Joshua*. Ponnuru: Lokayuta Prachuranalu, 44-45.

16 Nirmal, A.P. 1988. A Dialogue with Dalit Literature. In: ME Prabhakar (ed.), *Towards a Dalit Theology*. Delhi: ISPCK, 66-67.

17 Jogdanand, P.G. 2005. Dalit Sahitya Movement: Hermeneutic Perspective. In: J Massey and S Prabhakar (eds), *Frontiers in Dalit Hermeneutics*. Bangalore/Delhi: BTESSC/SATHRI/CDSS, 65.

18 Melanchthon, M. J. 2002. A Dalit Reading of Genesis 10-11:9. In: PL Wickeri (ed.), *Scripture, Community, and Mission*. Hong Kong: Christian Conference of Asia/The Council for World Mission, 167.

19 KC Abraham, K.C. 1997. Dalit Theology – Some Tasks Ahead. *Bangalore Theological Forum*, XXIX(1&2), 42.

20 Prabhakar, M.E. 1996. Doing Theology with the Poetic Traditions of India with Special Reference to the Dalit Poetry of Poet-Laureate, Joshua. In: J Patmuri (ed.), *Doing Theology with the Poetic Traditions of India: Focus on Dalit and Tribal Poems*. Bangalore: PTCA/SATHRI, 6.

he depicted Brahmins as the descendants of Aryan invaders, who conquered indigenous people and who used their religion as instrument for social control.²¹

Returning to my own setting of Andhra Pradesh, Dalit literature is known here for its efforts at addressing oppressive attitudes of Brahmanical ideology. Among the pioneers of Dalit literature Gurram Joshua is a well-known poet that tells the history and culture of his people. According to Prabhakar, Gurram Joshua,

... even as a lay person, [was one] well grounded in Christian ideals but, who transcended the bounds of his own religion and adopted a secular outlook, was totally committed to the liberation of his people, the (ex) untouchables and the Christian community as a whole. He did create a new hermeneutical situation informed by his social and cultural analyses, using primarily Indian thought patterns and linguistic styles.²²

Joshua refers to his experiences, struggles and protest through literature as follows:

I have learnt many lessons in life, under two gurus: poverty and caste-creed discrimination. The first taught me patience and the second taught me to protest against remaining a slave. I decided to tear myself free from the shackles of poverty and caste. I took up my sword to fight them. My sword was my poetry. I do not hate society, but, only its life patterns.²³

The 17th of July, 1985 probably is the saddest day in the lives of Andhra Pradesh Dalits. It was when the members of the upper caste attacked and brutally killed Madigas at Karamchedu. This event promoted unity among Dalits and gave momentum to the production of Dalit literature and the whole movement.²⁴ After this event, Katti Padmarao's writings and voice launched strong attacks on unjust structures in Indian society.

The role of Dalit literature can be seen as ongoing efforts towards progress in Dalit access to the spheres of education, employment, social life and political life. Above all it contributes to make them live like human beings in fullness. The purpose of gospel and Christian ministry is the same, namely the development of human beings so that they may live life in fullness, a fullness revealed in the life of Jesus Christ. Thus, Dalit literature may and does contribute much in the making of content and message for the communication in the Dalit contexts. It works as an effective hermeneutical tool in the process of drawing parallels between the Dalit story and biblical story. Aravind Nirmal rightly says,

... Dalit theology has much to learn from dalit literature... Dalit literature serves as a mirror which reflects the past, the present and the future of Christian dalits in India.²⁵

Dalit theology

John E Webster categorises existing Indian theologies among the oppressed classes into three types. One is the theology about them, found mainly in missionary material during the initial mass

21 O'halan, R. 1985. *Caste, Conflict, and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth-Century Western India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 4-141.

22 Prabhakar, *Doing Theology*, 18-19.

23 Ibid. p. 7.

24 Madiga, K.M. 2005. Dalita Sahityam Ivalekapoyina: Atma Gowravanni Sadhinchina Dandora Udyamam, *Vartha*, 2, 13.

25 Nirmal, *A Dialogue*, 75.

movements; the second is the theology for them, prepared by non-oppressed classes. Thirdly, theology by the oppressed classes that would be more relevant to their lives.²⁶

The gospel does not change, but the challenges that confront different communities of different generations do. “Thus, the task of theology is to show what changeless gospel means in each new situation.”²⁷ In fact, the gospel is the power of God and it has enough liberative power to change any inhuman situations humankind finds itself in. James H Cone explains the liberative power of the gospel as follows:

*If the gospel is a gospel of liberation for the oppressed, then Jesus is where the oppressed are and continues his work of liberation there. Jesus was not confined to the first century. He is our contemporary, proclaiming release to the captives and rebelling against all who silently accept the structures of injustice.*²⁸

If the above is true, then the task of theology in a Dalit context is to present the gospel in a way that is relevant to their specific situation.

To know the Dalit situation is to be familiar with their experiences, especially their pain. Dalits can understand God through their sufferings. Nirmal categorises those who are supporting the Dalit cause by understanding their pain according to three ways of knowing their pain: pathetic knowing, empathetic knowing and sympathetic knowing. Pathetic knowing comes only through first hand suffering as a Dalit and, naturally, this mode belongs only to Dalits. Empathetic knowing is possible for people such as Shudras, who experience pain pathos. Those with sympathetic knowledge want to help Dalits in the process of removal of Dalit suffering although they are not Dalits themselves.²⁹

Hermeneutical methods play a crucial role in the construction of Dalit theology. Latin American theologians consider hermeneutics as the cornerstone for their theology.³⁰ They see traditional interpretation methods that support and justify oppression as dominant hermeneutics or hermeneutics “from above”.³¹ They believe that process of interpretation has flow genuinely from the below, from the experiences of the oppressed. Dalit Christians, therefore, also have to take on their experiences as point of departure in their own interpretation to enable them to find meaning in life that would emancipate them.

The use of folk traditions as communication media

Ever since the introduction of Christianity to Dalit communities by Western missionaries, preaching (especially in the pulpit) has been the traditional method of communicating the gospel in Dalit and non-Dalit contexts. This resulted in an estrangement from native cultural communication methods. However, India remains a predominantly rural country with its 5, 75,000 villages.³² Majority of Dalit Christians live in villages and the villages are known for folk arts and thus also for folk methods of communication. This “indigenous media” uses art forms to convey information. Over long periods in history of these societies, folk media – also referred to as traditional media, cultural media, folk

26 Webster, J.C.B. n.d. From Indian Church to Indian Theology: An Attempt at Theological Construction. In: AP Nirmal. *A Reader in Dalit Theology*. Madras: Gurukul Lutheran Theological College & Research Institute, 106.

27 Cone, J.H. 1974. The Gospel of Jesus, Black People, and Black Power. In: A Kee, *A Reader in Political Theology*. London: SCM, 118.

28 Cone, *The Gospel of Jesus*, 120.

29 Nirmal, A.P. 1993. Doing Theology from Dalit Perspective. *Voices from the Third World*, XVI(2), 172-173.

30 Abraham, *Dalit Theology*, 40.

31 Arokiaaraj, G.C. 2005. A Reflection on Dalit Hermeneutics. In: J Massey & S Prabhakar (ed.), *Frontiers in Dalit Hermeneutics*. Bangalore/Delhi: BTESSC/SATHRI/CDSS, 205.

32 Rani, N.U. 1996. *Folk Media for Development: A Study of Karnataka's Traditional Media*. Bangalore: Karnataka, 1.

media, grass roots media, et cetera³³ – thus served as useful channels of communication. Folk culture is expressed in a variety of forms, such as numerous types of lyrical folk songs, ballads, heroic poems and epic plays, folk opera, narratives, legends and myths, proverbs and mnemonic formulae, riddles, magical formulae and incantations.³⁴

Important characteristics of folk media

As the so-called “common person’s simple means of expression”, folk media enjoys the approval of masses. Folk media can be seen as interpersonal channels of communication rather than impersonal channels. It facilitates the active participation of people in communication and communicates messages via well-known symbols, characters and ambience.³⁵ Perhaps not surprisingly, in the Bajpuri folk tradition many of folk songs depict the Brahman as a selfish one who enjoys life at the cost of others; one who manipulates situations to suit selfish interests.³⁶ One finds references to this in sayings such as: “For an ordinary meal (of curd and parched rice) the Brahmana walks twenty four miles and for rich food, fried loaves, thirty six miles” and “The floor is somebody else’s, the ghee is somebody else’s; Eat plentifully, O Babaji.”³⁷ An interesting characteristic of Bajpuri epic poems as conveyed by Indra Deva is that the heroes often belong to low and unknown castes, while villains are often from among the Brahmana.³⁸

Folk music is composed and sung by millions of people, again mostly in the countryside and those who do not have what would be seen as an intellectual culture. This music is the product communities, rather than of an individual. Among the working classes in particular, one finds a wealth of songs that deal with village occupations, such as cultivation of food in all its stages, the construction of roads, rowing boats, grinding wheat, et cetera. Among the songs of poor communities hunger and famine often feature.³⁹

Folk songs basically reflect the sorrow and fear (but, also joy) and social memories of the common people. They are simplicity and uniform; more emphasis is placed on the words than on the music itself; they are known for their functional applications rather than in their appeal; they have simple rhythms and tunes that enable rural audiences to follow the musical narration. Both the music and message of these songs appeal to emotions rather than to the intellect and their musical style often expresses the audience’s cultural identity.⁴⁰

Popular usage of folk music

Plenty of folk songs are used at different occasions by common people in Andhra Pradesh. For all occasions in and stages of life there are folk to be found. Among them are *lullabies* for children. In Telegu these lullabies are *Lali Patalu* or *Jolapatalu*. They are known for their beauty and rhythm and express the emotional attachment of mother and child. They also reflect no social discrimination, only common human aspects are involved.⁴¹

33 Ibid. p. 8.

34 Deva, I. 1989. *Folk Culture and Peasant Society in India*. Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 1.

35 Rani, *Folk Media*, 9-10.

36 Deva, *Folk Culture*, 8.

37 Ibid. p. 178.

38 Ibid. p. 175.

39 Devi, V.S. 1985. *Folk Music of Andhra Pradesh*. Madras: Shanti-Anand, 3-7.

40 Rani, *Folk Media*, 30-31.

41 Devi, *Folk Music*, 9.

Another notable category of folk music is *marriage songs*. Marriage ceremonies among Dalits are known their celebratory character and plenty of merriment. Before they became as Christians, drums and dances mingled with the use of alcohol played an important role. Regarding singing, women are the major performers and their singing is closely associated with socio- cultural and religious contexts. *Love songs* are unique among the working classes. Young men and women often work together, in the fields and in other places. It creates opportunities for intimacy and in some cases it may lead to marriage. Some folk songs therefore have strong erotic elements and are especially popular among folk communities. Love and marriage, but also the pain of separation from the loved one are popular themes in these songs. A folk song, *Siri Siri Muvva*, for example tells that

*... poverty drives away the man to seek livelihood in Rangoon and the woman at home recalls pathetically how her beloved husband treated her and what fine things he gave her and how much she longs for him.*⁴²

The other noteworthy type of song, referred to in passing already, is the *occupation song* associated with working settings and (mostly) with the working classes. Usually they are sung as groups both men and women together especially during working in the fields.

Songs are called *vennela* songs (moonlight songs). These are sung on the way home after working in the fields, late in the evening, under the moonlight with cheerful hearts. Some beautiful songs are heard from the crow of the boats by those who ply boats in the waters of Andhra Pradesh. Women who work indoors also sing some distinct songs while grinding wheat or churning curds.⁴³

James Theophilus Appavoo points toward an interesting dimension of folklore as constituting a protesting culture to the elite. Manu Dharmins have used the available media like dance, drama, songs and sculpture to communicate Manu Dharma ideals South Indian.⁴⁴ But, folk festivals like *Manasa Kollai* show how ritual drama has been effective ways to protest against to the upper castes.⁴⁵ When the land was grabbed from the peasants by the Manu Dharma kings, some folk songs from Sangam literature voiced strong opposition. Some were composed as a protest to gender discrimination, where Manu Darmins treated women as slaves. Songs also protested against the degradation of widows.⁴⁶

From the above, it becomes apparent that a preacher in Dalit settings may adopt existing traditional communication forms toward the meaningful communication of the gospel. Preaching in pulpits, through applying (Western) homiletic delivery methods and principles are often not suitable or ineffective in rural Dalit settings. In fact, Jesus' preaching methods will provide more effective guidelines for the preacher in Dalit contexts. According to the synoptic gospels, the major portion of Jesus' preaching ministry happened in Galilee, where ordinary folk lived. Jesus preached from the hillsides, in the marketplaces, near a well and even from a boat! He communicated the gospel using the language of ordinary peoples, often parables, especially those related to agriculture, that ordinary people could understand. Even deeper truths were thus communicated in simple language and not in the complex theological jargon we today often expect ordinary listeners to understand.

42 Ibid. p. 23.

43 Ibid. p. 23.

44 Appavoo, J.T. 1986. *Folklore for Change* Madurai: TTS, 46.

45 Ibid. p. 56.

46 Ibid. pp. 57- 67.

Conclusion

Even in the process communicating the gospel to them, Dalits are viewed as objects. Western Christian missions initiated this attitude either out of ignorance or deliberately. As preachers we know that the dynamics of communication involves in the transfer of a message from its source to the receiver. The basic problem encountered among Dalit congregations is the paradoxes that exist between the sender and the receiver. Until recently Western communication skills were taught and used in communicating with Dalits. However, there is an urgent need to develop more effective communication methods and skills in Dalit contexts and one way of doing this may be by adopting rich Dalit cultural traditions toward more meaningful communication with them.

An important characteristic of communication is that it builds and develops communities. The Indian Brahman tradition had the opposite effect – it divided societies, particularly via communicating Manu Dharma ideals. However, communication in the context of Christian worship strengthens community even where worshippers do not form a homogeneous group. Worshipping communities in the early church were highly heterogeneous, but they forms a community, as one body, the body of Christ. Sometimes even unbelievers would attend the worship events. Paul refers to this and reflects the role of communication in such a setting in his letter to the Corinthian church:

If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your mind? But if all prophesy, an unbeliever or outsider who enters is reproved by all and called to account by all. After the secrets of the unbeliever's heart are disclosed, that person will bow down before God and worship him, declaring, "God is really among you" (1 Corinthians 14:23-25).

The intention of Jesus Christ in this regard is obvious in his teaching on prayer to his disciples that addresses God the Father as "Our Father in Heaven". It speaks of a common fatherhood to the whole of the worshipping community, that which binds them together. Unfortunately, the recent introduction of a multitude of denominations to Dalit communities in fact resulted in strong divisions among believers that never existed in the past. Strong ecumenical understanding has to be promoted to help them to live in harmony and as community in this new context.

The gospel as gift of God has reached the suffering community of God, the Dalits. In such a context God bestows greater responsibility on the church to communicate his liberating and healing message. Jesus' birth and ministry in the Jewish cultural context provide a theological basis for the church to communicate the gospel in different cultural contexts. Dalit culture is a distinct culture within Indian cultural parameters. They have their own experiences and history, a history of oppression and struggle. Even while deprived for generations of the skills of writing and reading, they have produced their own "literature" that express their struggles and aspirations toward a dignified life. Dalit cultural products show their effectiveness in making people consciousness of the reality of their situation and in motivating them to protest against it. While attempting to communicate the gospel to their contexts, the church should become aware of how Dalit cultural products helped their cause.

The emergence of contextual theologies enabled many local communities to relate the gospel to their circumstances. Liberation theologies helped the oppressed communities to understand the liberative power of gospel for them. The ongoing efforts at formulating Dalit theology helping Dalits to find meaning for their lives in Scriptures. Since the theology supplies message for communication, Dalit theology plays a crucial role in formulating the message to be communicated to the Dalit communities.

Folk media itself proved a successful means in communicating messages to the rural communities. It is proved to be people's media by creating room for community participation. Even the content of folk literature is the product of whole communities and is subject to the copyright of any individual. It provides an opening to share meanings and messages in the community and as such it is appropriate to adopt the folk cultural elements also in the communication of the gospel in Dalit contexts. Finally, this will help in making Dalits partners no longer mere objects in the communication process.

Preaching and Promise in Latin America: Eschatological, Liberation and Prosperity Preaching within the Paradoxes of Life

33

Júlio Cézar Adam¹

Introduction

During the second decade of the 21st century one finds that the concept of promise rose in prominence in Latin American one. It seems a plethora of promises are made to whomever wants to listen to them by a variety of sources, including, if not especially, religious promises. In a recent interview published online on Carta Maior,² French anthropologist Alain Bertho claims that the attraction exerted by the Islamic State especially on the youth of Europe is related to a crisis regarding the future, a crisis of promise. According to Bertho, “the 21st century has abandoned the future in the name of risk and fear management, indifferent to the anger of the younger generations.” In his opinion, “[t]he root of evil (is) the end of utopias, which were buried by the collapse of all progressive political currents...”, creating a society where one “no longer talks of the future, but of risk and probability management.” In such a world, “[e]veryday life is managed by politicians who manipulate risk and fear as means of government, whether it be the risk to safety or risk of foreign currency (the debt), who talk a lot about global warming, but are incapable of avoiding the announced catastrophe.” For Bertho, Islamic State-type religious extremism acts as a promise, even if it involves committing acts of terror. To a large degree, one finds a similar scenario in Latin America: a lack of social, economic and political prospects with extremist and fundamentalist religious responses suggesting a way out the situation.

This essay reflects on the extent to which Christian preaching has abandoned the idea of promise and (positive) prospects on the future. It is also asked to what extent Christian preaching can still offer hope and alternatives to current challenges – not only individual, but also social ones. According to Bertho, without a sense of a future, people feel the need for a radical promise and what the world needs is

... the rise of another radicality, a radicality of collective hope, able to cut Jihadist recruitment off at its source. We have to recover the meaning of the future and of what is possible, and not fall into the terrorists' trap, which is precisely mobilization for war.³

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2 Bertho, A. 2016. Sejam os claros: um mundo acabou, não há como voltar atrás. Online at: <http://www.cartamaior.com.br/?%2FEditoria%2FInternacional%2F-Sejam-os-claros-um-mundo-acabou-nao-ha-como-voltar-atras-%2F6%2F35299> (Accessed: 2 February 2016).

3 Bertho, *Sejam os claros*.

To what extent can Christian preaching create hope, communicate the promise that will inspire such hope? Have the different promises conveyed in the different denominations and theologies in Latin America managed to transform the promise of the gospel of Jesus Christ into a reality of hope?

Promises are indeed made in the pulpit in Latin America and is found in least one of three types of sermons: the transcendentalist eschatological sermon that locates the promise in an afterlife or the end of time; the humanistic and liberating sermon that places the promise in the dimension of the socio-political struggle for transformation in the present; and the individualistic and prosperity-oriented sermon that projects promise as material achievement and hedonistic satisfaction.

I want to reflect on these three models of promise and to attempt a hermeneutical and homiletic glimpse based on two products of Latin American culture, namely *Two Worlds*, a short story by well-known author Isabel Allende⁴ and the film *Central do Brasil* (Central Station) directed by Walter Salles.⁵ These are two examples works have something in common with each other as well as with homiletics as they both deal with the Word and words. I do not seek narratives or expressive resources for preaching in these works, what I wish to do is to offer a hermeneutic reading of these products of contemporary Latin American culture and of the hope and promise that starts from the vitality of life, through written and spoken words in them to serve as an inspiration to reflect on preaching hope and transformation (a promise) in my context.

Preaching and promise in Latin America

Reflecting on the relationship between promise and preaching, one can identify at least three characteristic types of this relationship in the churches of Latin America from the 20th century until the present – there are certainly other models as well. The first and maybe most characteristic of them, especially in Protestantism, is the eschatological, transcendentalist, millenarian or Arminian preaching that places the promise in an afterlife or the end of time. The promise is thus to be fulfilled beyond death, in heaven, the dwelling of the soul, but also on the last day, when Christ returns. Eternal salvation of the soul, the person or the group is central. The promise is the crown of the final victory (2 Timothy 4:7-8) and it requires personal, moral, individual or collective dedication, consolation and acceptance of the conditions of life, even when they are adverse. The end justifies the means. We see this model in evangelical theologies, in historical Pentecostalism, and in other denominations that emphasise the return of Christ, for instance. A relative of mine, who is a member of a Pentecostal church, does not wear a bathing suit when they go to the beach, because if Christ returns while they are wearing such clothes, they will not be saved!

A second relationship between promise and preaching is reflected in the humanistic sermon, with its emphasis on socio-political engagement that was given a voice mainly through liberation theology since the 1960s in historical churches. In contrast to the previous model that this one considers as alienating believers from the world around them, liberation-based preaching places the promise in the dimension of the socio-political struggle for transformation in the present and in history. Ends and means coincide, that is, preaching and political struggle are part of one and the same process.

This new homiletics proved to be revolutionary in various senses: first of all because it displaced the focus of the preacher's attention on the people; second, because it considers the experiential situation as the point of departure for the reading of the Scriptures; third, because the people's opinion is as important or more than that of the specialist; fourth, because the

4 Allende, I. 1989. *Two Worlds*. Online at: <http://www.thomasuwritinglab.net/first-semester---argumentat/1st-semester-resources/two-words.pdf> (Accessed: 16 February 2016).

5 *Central do Brasil*. 1998 [Film]. Directed by Walter Salles. Brazil: Ministerio da Cultura.

reading is discussed dialogically from a critical perspective; and fifth, because this dialogue about life and faith results in concrete commitments with a view to transforming reality.⁶

In this second expression of the promise there remains an appeal to the future. However, what is promised is utopia, the hope of the Kingdom of God as a new society with humanistic, socialist, left-wing political features. This utopia has ethical and political implications for the present. The Kingdom has historical and political density. It is something that will become a reality amid the concrete and experiential context of people, but one already find signs of it today, in the present. In the words of a popular hymn, “the future illuminates the present, you come and will come soon.”⁷

A final expression of promise, much more recent and spread widely across Latin American, especially via the media, is the individualistic and prosperity-oriented preaching that projects promise as material achievement, as hedonistic satisfaction, or as fulfilment of other practical and immediate needs in the present. According to Ramos, in this model one finds a “... relationship between fundamentalist religion, spectacular media, capitalist economy and right-wing politics ...”⁸ Similar to the first model, there is a return to the transcendent level, although it incorporates magical, spectacular and triumphalist features of concrete and real situations, as does the second model. The difference is that in this third model, reality again focuses on individual aspects of personal and material satisfaction. The media, marketing and propaganda strategies and the capitalist market logic is used through which the ends – in this case success, prosperity or fame – justify the means. The promise may range from curing a physical disability or an incurable disease to re-establishing a love relationship, overcoming an addiction, solving sexual or emotional problems or the acquisition of personal goods (such as, better salaries, a house, a car or a business). The promise involves a struggle, but not a political struggle. It rather requires a struggle against the devil and the devil’s confidants, through the acquisition and consumption of religious “goods”. Even though this model opposes Afro-Brazilian religions, spiritualism and syncretic-popular Catholicism, the preaching found here incorporates many of the elements, rituals and symbols of those traditions,⁹ but gives them some biblical and Christian features.

One may say that most preaching in the Latin American context finds expression in and through one these three models. The one possible element that characterises the historical churches is the maintenance of the institution and the religious community itself. In this variant, the promise focuses on the church itself, on the maintaining the tradition, the denomination and the congregations in it. Furthermore, the three models are not isolated from each other, but reflect one and the same reality and one may derive from these models of promise at least three interconnected aspects. These are: human and material need and social and emotional vulnerability, on the one hand; the potential and the need for religious promises – in a profoundly religious context – that will illuminate and succour the present and the future, be it by promising a new life (even if after death), or in the creation of signs of the Kingdom in the form of social alternatives in the present, be it to solve the desires and needs of life, on the other hand. Regardless of the model, the promise always shows a way out and acts as an explanation for and justification of suffering. A third aspect to take into account is the Bible’s potential to supply life with promises. In a variety of (even opposing) ways, all

6 Ramos, L.C. 2005. *A pregação na Idade Mídia: Os desafios da sociedade do espetáculo para a prática homilética contemporânea*. São Bernardo do Campo: UMESP, 74.

7 Hymn 441, from the hymnal *Hinos do Povo de Deus*, IECLB, lyrics by Silvio Meincke and melody by João Gottinari and Edmundo Reinhardt.

8 Ramos, *A pregação*, 82.

9 What Bobsin calls religious expropriation and religious trafficking. See Bobsin, O. 2002. *Correntes religiosas e globalização*. São Leopoldo: CEBI/PPL/IEPG, 15.

models of promise take their inspiration from the Bible, even when their use of it is distorted and or at least suspect.

Homiletics, as the science of preaching, should recognise the reality of these models and the challenges they issue. Homiletics, especially in Latin America, should reflect on ways to deal with them; on what lies hidden behind these models, the reasons for their popularity; how to reflect and preach promise based on a legitimately biblical, theological and confessional foundation, but also by taking as point of departure the context and concrete realities of life and hope, or the lack of hope in Latin America.

Preaching, literature, cinema and promise

In this section I want to shift the focus in an attempt to point a different possible solution to the challenges referred to thus far. I have studied the possible relationships between the so-called lived religion¹⁰ – interfaces between theology, religion, religiosity and culture – and practical theology – especially liturgy and homiletics – as part of the challenge of working with the youth and with people outside of the church. Part of this has been to think about the sermon and the promise in the Latin American context via examples of works from those cultures.¹¹ The two examples discussed in what follows are taken from literature and from the cinema respectively. I propose a hermeneutic path – a hermeneutics of lived religion¹² if one likes – that may help one to think of preaching that will convey the promise amid the paradoxes of life in way that will contribute to meeting individual, ecclesial, ideological or market needs, but also to serve as examples from popular culture that may promise or point toward broader human and cultural transformations.

Why cinema and literature at all? Or, why look at culture from the perspective theology and homiletics? There are several reasons for this. Thinking of theology and particularly of practical theology and homiletics based on elements of culture is a way of breaking with the classical method of doing theology as a given discourse on the faith. At the same time, it means considering culture itself as a space for the expression and generation of a lived faith, a form of lived religion. According to this view, theology becomes a discourse – and a practice – based on faith and with faith.¹³ Thus it initiates not only a dialogue between theology with culture, but also a new theological paradigm that considers culture as an expression of what Westhelle calls “new knowledges”, originating from the margin or from an ex-centric thinking.¹⁴ Within this new paradigm one may say, for instance and according to Westhelle, that in our “literature we can find the greatest raw collection of authentically Latin-American theology.”¹⁵

10 “Die gelebte Religion, auch die christliche gelebte Religion, findet sich nicht nur in der Kirche. Es gibt sie nicht als Vorfindliche in einer Weise, wie es die Kirche als gesellschaftliche Institution gibt. Religion ist vielmehr ein kommunikativer Tatbestand. Ihr Begriff fungiert als “geistige Deutungskategorie”. Und in ihrer historischen Realität stellt sie kulturell, damit natürlich auch kirchlich-institutionell vermittelte, zugleich immer individuell angeeignete Deutungen dessen dar, was es mit dieser Welt und unserem Leben in letzter Instanz auf sich hat, von woher wir also kommen und wohin wir gehen. Sie ist gelebte Religion, wenn solche ganzheitlichen Lebensdeutungen in die Lebensführungspraxis übergehen.” Wilhelm Gräß, *Religion als Deutung des Lebens. Perspektiven einer Praktischen Theologie gelebter Religion* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verl., 2006), 17.

11 As said above, my intention here is not to reflect on a narrative theology or on a narrative method in homiletics. Rather I intend to think about literature and cinema as a space of promise, as an impulse to think about preaching in Latin America.

12 Ganzevoort, R.R. 2009. Encruzilhadas do caminho no rastro do sagrado. *Estudos Teológicos* 49(2):317-343.

13 Magalhães, A. 2000. *Deus no espelho das palavras: teologia e literatura em diálogo*. São Paulo: Paulinas, 156. Pentecostalism and religious syncretism in Latin America are themselves expressions of a lived faith that often escapes the codes of classical theology and dogmatics. Nonetheless, they are encapsulated within religious and theological codes, within religious experience. Doing theology by starting from such religious experience is something fundamental in Latin America. See. Magalhães, *Deus no espelho*, 116. Taking culture into consideration is something different.

14 Westhelle, V. 1995. Outros saberes. Teologia e ciência na modernidade. *Estudos Teológicos* 35:258-278.

15 Westhelle in Magalhães, *Deus no espelho*, 122.

A perspective from culture allows one to look further, it allows approaching life as if culture was a mirror of life. As Kunstmann and Reuter say in their work on pop culture and theology: “Die Populäre Kultur bietet den idealen Spiegel für das, was für den Einzelnen stimmig und dem Leben Sinn gibt. Ohne sie ist das heutige Leben jedenfalls nicht zu verstehen.”¹⁶ We thus start from the assumption that culture – erudite and popular culture – is not only a space of lived faith and has theological density, but that it is also a space of the interpretation of life, a web of meaning woven by human beings and which supports them.¹⁷ It offers access to concrete life and lived faith, in its depth, complexities and paradoxes, promises and dreams, without the need to fit into an ethical and moral framework, which is something typical in the church, for instance.¹⁸ Culture as a language is not a part of reality or something external to reality, but culture is the way in which reality is expressed and narrated.

Thinking of theology from the perspective of culture – specifically literature and cinema, because of their narrative potential – means creating a space for the concrete experience of the “religious subject, their language, life story, ethical action and transforming industriousness, without seeking to fix (the experience), recognised systemic schemes as determining truths.”¹⁹ These subjects, in turn, “are not raw, absolute, pure realities. They are in a permanent relationship with their cultural-symbolic and political-economic background.”²⁰ Reflecting on literature, specifically, Magalhães says that

*literature becomes a desirable interlocutor, because it has a commitment to reality, its contradictions and aspirations ... (literature) maintains its alterity at the same time as it reconstructs and revivifies the symbols and myths of the reality represented.*²¹

In his studies on lived religion, Gräb speaks of the human need for meaning, for answers, for an explanation for life and existence, and considers that these aspects are present in culture and in everyday life as a new space of the religious dimension.²²

In the case of cinema, this phenomenon of the religious dimension in and from culture becomes more evident. Kracauers talks of cinema as a mirror of society: “die Themen der Filme der letzten Jahrzehnten spiegeln die Themen und Probleme ihrer Zeit: Liebe, Natur, Authentizität, Identität, Gewalt,”²³ which are all issues related to the religious dimension, an invisible religion, as Luckmann²⁴ would say, also as a space of promise and transcendence.

16 Kunstmann, J. & Reuter, I. 2009. Einleitung. In: J Kunstmann & I Reuter (eds), *Sinnspiegel. Theologische Hermeneutik populärer Kultur*. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 11.

17 Geertz, C. 1998. “Deep Play”: Ritual als kulturelle Performance. In: A Belliger and DJ Krieger (eds), *Ritualtheorien: Ein einführendes Handbuch*. Opladen/Wiesbaden: Westdt., 112.

18 Literature is not primarily interested in explaining the place of the subject/s in the world or the role that they must or not take on, but rather in understanding them within the amalgam of relations, in their potentialities. Magalhães, *Deus no espelho*, 118. Here we can also consider the vast field that studies the correlation between culture and religion, as discussed famously by Paul Tillich and dealt with by Calvani.

19 Magalhães, *Deus no espelho*, 113.

20 *Ibid.* p. 114.

21 *Ibid.* p. 118.

22 Gräb, *Religion als Deutung des Lebens*, 29ff.

23 Herrmann, J. 2005. Film. In: K Fechtner, G Fermor, U Pohl-Patalong & H Schroeter-Wittke (eds), *Handbuch Religion und Populäre Kultur*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 67.

24 Luckmann, T. 1993. *Die unsichtbare Religion*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.

Two examples from Latin American culture

Two Words, the short story

The short story *Two Words*, by Chilean writer Isabel Allende,²⁵ is part of the book by the same author, *Stories of Eva Luna*.²⁶ It is the story of Belisa Crepusculario, a woman who sold words. Belisa came from a miserably poor family. Seeing that her siblings were dying because of the absolute poverty and a severe drought in the region where they lived, she went in search of water, in search of the sea, as a way of “tricking death”:

Until she was twelve, Belisa had no occupation or virtue other than having withstood hunger and the exhaustion of centuries. During one interminable drought, it fell to her to bury four younger brothers and sisters, when she realised that her turn was next, she decided to set out across the plains in the direction of the sea, in hopes that she might trick death along the way.²⁷

A piece of newspaper gets swept up by the wind and lands at her feet. This was her first contact with words. Belisa discovered that words run loose, without owners. She saw a possibility in the words. She paid a priest to teach her to read and write. She purchased a dictionary that she read from beginning to end and threw it into the sea because she did not want to give her customers packaged words. Thus, Belisa became a seller of words and

*[h]er prices were fair. For five centavos she delivered verses from memory, for seven she improved the quality of dreams, for nine she wrote love letters, for twelve she invented insults for irreconcilable enemies. She also sold stories, not fantasies but long, true stories she recited at one telling, never skipping a word.*²⁸

The two words that give the short story its name are words that Belisa whispered in the ear of her customers:

*To anyone who paid her fifty centavos in trade, she gave the gift of a secret word to drive away melancholy. It was not the same word for everyone, naturally, because that would have been collective deception. Each person received his or her own word, with the assurance that no one else would use it that way in this universe or the Beyond.*²⁹

Thus, going from market to market, one day something unusual happened. Belisa was fetched by force at the orders of a local colonel, the most feared and bloodthirsty man in the country. Standing in front of the colonel, Belisa discovered that she “was standing before the loneliest man in the world.”³⁰ The colonel wanted to be president – not by force, as was his custom, but to be elected by the people. Therefore, he needed Belisa’s services. A speech! “All night and a good part of the following day, Belisa Crepusculario searched her repertory for words adequate for a presidential speech.”³¹ Since the colonel did not know how to read,

[s]he read the speech aloud. She read it three times, so her client could engrave it on his memory. When she finished, she saw the emotion in the faces of the soldiers who had gathered

25 Allende writes within the Latin American genre of so-called “magic realism”.

26 Allende, I. 2010. *Cuentos de Eva Luna* (12th ed.). Buenos Aires: Desbolsillo, 15-24.

27 *Ibid.* p. 16.

28 *Ibid.* p. 17.

29 *Ibid.* p. 16.

30 *Ibid.* p. 19.

31 *Ibid.* p. 20.

round to listen, and saw that the Colonel's eyes glittered with enthusiasm, convinced that with those words the presidential chair would be his.³²

Belisa felt attracted to the Colonel from the very beginning. After carrying out her task and having settled things, Belisa gave him her two secret words, to which he was entitled but in which he was not really interested.

She walked slowly to the leather stool where he was sitting, and bent down to give him her gift. The man smelled the scent of a mountain cat issuing from the woman, a fiery heat radiating from her hips, he heard the terrible whisper of her hair, and a breath of sweet mint murmured into his ear the two secret words that were his alone.³³

The colonel's speech attracted crowds that listened to his words with profound devotion and emotion. "[T]hey were dazzled by the clarity of the colonel's proposals and the poetic lucidity of his arguments, infected by his powerful wish to right the wrongs of history, happy for the first time in their lives."³⁴

However, at the centre of the story is no longer the colonel's speech, but around the two words delivered to his ear. The colonel appeared bewitched by the words:

He was repeating his secret words, as he did more and more obsessively. He said them when he was mellow with nostalgia; he murmured them in his sleep; he carried them with him on horseback; he thought them before delivering his famous speech; and he caught himself savoring them in his leisure time. And every time he thought of those two words, he thought of Belisa Crepusculario, and his senses were inflamed with the memory of her feral scent, her fiery heat, the whisper of her hair, and her sweet mint breath in his ear, until he began to go around like a sleepwalker, and his men realized that he might die before he ever sat in the presidential chair.³⁵

The colonel was in such a state that one of his henchmen, El Mulato, went in search of Belisa, hoping that she could receive back the two words and make the colonel become normal again. The short story ends with the meeting between the two. The two words continued to be known only to the colonel, giving rise to something special between Belisa and himself:

The colonel and Belisa Crepusculario stared at each other, measuring one another from a distance. The men knew then that their leader would never undo the witchcraft of those accursed words, because the whole world could see the voracious-puma eyes soften as the woman walked to him and took his hand in hers.³⁶

Central do Brasil, the film

Central Station (*Central do Brasil*) is a French-Brazilian drama from 1998. It was directed by Walter Salles, with a script by Marcos Bernstein and João Emanuel Carneiro. Dora (Fernanda Montenegro) works at the train station (Central do Brazil) in Rio de Janeiro. She works as letter writer to illiterate people. Every day, after taking the crowded train, she sets up her small booth next to the station chapel, receives illiterate people and writes letters for them – love letters, letters to family members

32 Ibid. p. 21.

33 Ibid. pp. 21-22.

34 Ibid. p. 22.

35 Ibid. p. 23.

36 Ibid. p. 24.

far away, letters to begin relationships, angry letters, et cetera. At home, with her friend, they decide which letters will be sent, which will be torn up and which will wait in the drawer (like in purgatory, they say) for a later decision. Dora is a retired school teacher, who works with the letters to complement her pension. She is a sensitive person despite her harshness to her customers and the subterfuges she uses to solve situations (the so-called Brazilian *jeitinho*). Dora does not allow herself to become emotional in the face of the difficult situations she finds at the station and in the lives of her customers.

One of her customers, Ana, comes around with her son Josué (Vinicius de Oliveria) asking her to write a letter to her husband, Jesus, who lives in Bom Jesus do Norte, in the Brazilian *sertão* (hinterland).³⁷ Ana writes to scold her absent, alcoholic husband – “the worst thing that ever happened to me”, she says – to tell him that Josué wants to visit him. Ana came to Rio when she was pregnant with Josué and left her husband and two other children in the *sertão*. As she leaves the station, Ana is run over by a bus and Josué is only nine years old. Not having anywhere to go, the boy is forced to live at the station. Feeling pity, or perhaps guilt, Dora decides to help him and take him to his father. Several times Dora tries to get rid of the boy and send him onwards, as though he were one of her letters. She even tries to sell him into adoption – which she does not manage to do! She has to take him with her, take him “home”, she has to deliver him personally.

On their journey through Brazil, they encounter obstacles and make discoveries, especially of a personal nature. The journey becomes increasingly difficult as the two travel further into the hostile expanse of the *sertão*, a region of drought and poverty. Without money for a ticket, they hitch a ride with Cesar, a fervorous evangelical, with whom Dora wished to establish a relationship. They hitch a ride on with a group of pilgrims en route to the Bom Jesus do Norte Pilgrimage. Meanwhile, the relationship between Dora and Josué intensifies amid conflicts and the need to take care of each other. They are hard and rough, fragile and sensitive, misfortune and grace at the same time. As is the entire film, life, beauty and sensitivity amid the harshness of life, poverty, dryness of the *sertão*. At a certain point, looking at the landscape of the *sertão*, Josué asks whether his mother might be in heaven and whether she was buried appropriately. Not saying a word, Dora takes the boy by the hand and leads him to a small chapel in front of which stands a cross surrounded by lit candles. She tells him to place the small handkerchief that belonged to his mother on the flowers hanging from the cross, as though this was the boy’s farewell rite.

Despite their great expectations, Jesus, the boy’s father, is not found. The two decide to return to Rio, when Josué’s two brothers, Isaías and Moisés, who were left with their father by their mother, cross Dora and Josué’s path. Seeing the three brothers asleep, Dora realises that Josué has found his place; the “letter” has been delivered and Dora she decides to return home. Moved, she writes a letter to Josué on the bus. Her first letter. Neither Dora, nor Josué are the same people who set out on the journey.

The relationship between the short story and the film – words and promise amid life’s paradoxes

Both the short story and the film are products of Latin-American literary and cinematographic culture. These are two works that is easily accessible to people in general and can be considered products of pop culture. As Gutmann would say, these are examples “that work”.³⁸ The two examples

37 This is a common occurrence in Brazil, where people from the Northeast often migrate to the large centres in the Southeast (Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo) leaving their family far away, often for many years.

38 “Offenbar gibt es ein Charakteristikum, das die unterschiedlichen Genres der populären Kultur miteinander gemeinsam haben: sie müssen ‘funktionieren’.” Gutmann, H-M. 2002. *Der Herr der Heerscharen, die Prinzessin der Herzen und der König der Löwen* (3rd ed.). Gütersloh: Kaiser/Gütersloher, 39.

are narratives, they use language to portray a culture; they are mirrors in which one sees life and lived faith reflected. These examples are also deeply rooted in the reality of poverty, suffering and in power disputes so common in Latin America – the poverty of Belisa's family's, the poverty experienced in the everyday lives of commuters at the central train station; poverty and drought present in both scenarios; the abuses of power and violence by the colonel and his henchmen and by people who control trade at the central station, people who earn money illegally by exploiting (selling) people. At the same time, in both cases we see alternatives, subterfuges, *jeitinhos* used to avoid death. Words are one of these alternatives. The protagonists in both examples are women, Belisa Crepusculario and Dora.

As to the plot, one can see many parallels between the two works: both texts express a search, setting out, a promise amid the paradoxes of life, both concerns women who live from words. Both women are poor and live within the reality of poverty; words empower both sellers of words – Belisa and Dora are themselves their words, secret words, living letters. Words also act in the universe of other people, people in general, the colonel, Josué and his family. Both women have strong personalities, but at the same time they are sensitive, affectionate, able to perceive human suffering and loneliness. Despite their distressed physical appearance, both are sensual women and both stories give expression to their desires. In both cases words create realities, they open up spaces for hope, for possibilities, for love (?). These spaces of hope and promise, however, are not something extraordinary or radical. They do not overcome the paradoxes. Hope appears in the details, in the small transformations amid life with its paradoxes.

Religious aspects are present in both examples. In the case of the short story, the religious dimension is implicit. In the face of the harshness of life, there appears to be no space for God and the church. The priest is only useful to Belisa in teaching her how to read and write. Words, however, take on a character of power and magic. A gust of wind brings the piece of newspaper to Belisa that is her first contact with words, for instance. Her poetry and clarity charm people who hear them and bewitch the hard, cruel colonel. Words are alive, they have power, they charm, attract, change lives, create a bond, arouse love (and faith?), are both a secret and a mystery, something that resembles what we believe happens in the preaching of the gospel. In the case of the film, there are more explicit religious elements: the place where Dora writes her letters is next to a small chapel and altar to Our Lady; sometimes Josué stops in front of images of Mary with the child Jesus, as though imagining Dora and himself (Dora is like Mary who takes care of him, the boy); Dora decides where the letters will go (the drawer as purgatory) and people's fate; most characters' names are biblical – Jesus, Joshua, the brothers Isaiah and Moses; the truck driver, Cesar, is an evangelical, he has an image of Jesus on the window of his truck window with the phrase "With God I follow my fate". On the bumper is written "All is strength, only God is power"; in the truck with the pilgrims sing religious songs, people pray holding rosaries and there is the image of Jesus and Mary; the scenes from the Bom Jesus do Norte pilgrimage show a clear example of popular Catholicism; amid the pilgrims, Dora writes letters not only to the people known to the pilgrims, but also to Good Jesus himself; the wind that carries off Ana's (Josué's mother) handkerchief when she is run over, the same handkerchief that will be placed on an altar in front of a chapel in the *sertão*, symbolizing Ana's burial (the handkerchief would be a substitute for Ana). But, as in the words of the short story, also in this film it is the letters holds the plot together; because of the letters, Dora and Josué's paths cross; because of the words, Dora crosses the country taking Josué with her, as if she herself were a letter linking him to his family, or as if Josué were her letter to be delivered; at a time when there is no money and no food, it is the letters, including the letters to Good Jesus, that allow them to carry on their way. Another letter written by the father feeds hope; Jesus (the father) will return. The final scene from the film

shows Dora's own letter, the first letter that she, the "letter writer", writes to Josué. Such a bond and life is what we expect the sermon to create in the community of those who listen to the Word.

Conclusion

In the face of the crisis of promise of the twenty-first century, the crystallised models of preaching in Latin America offers people immanent and transcendent promises. The two examples taken from culture, besides showing the paradoxes of life in this context, acts as a mirror that reflects the lives and lived faith of people; it also express promises. The content of this promise, however, is very different. The promise here is not something grandiose and divine like the Kingdom of God, a new society or personal prosperity. The promise is within life itself, in the daily chores and struggles, in a fragmented manner, in the form of small transcendences: the discovery of the power of words on the page of a newspaper, letters that create and sustain bonds; a discourse that charms multitudes, words that bewitch and transform lives and people.

In the models of preaching discussed above, the foundation is the biblical Word; in the examples from culture we have words that are born from within life. The short story itself and the film are "texts" that create the new; they are like "living words", they give access to paradoxical reality, to life as it is. They are words that create worlds and hope. Nothing could be more biblical: "Words are things and people, and by words we create the world, we organise chaos and give new names to situations and people."³⁹ Here we have a vast field of homiletic reflection between Word and words. What is, after all, Word of God?

In this short essay I see possibilities to think about homiletics based on lived religion and on the dialogue with materials from culture as a way of bringing concrete, shocking and paradoxical life into the preached Word, rendering our sermons more filled with reality⁴⁰ and, at the same time, pointing to the transcendences and promises that happen, not in an idealised and wished-for model, project or status, but within paradoxical and complex life. As the short story and the film, I dare to imagine a sermon – Word of God and living voice of the Gospel – that is not conclusive or closed, but that, as "two words" or as living letters, does not have the answers and recipes, yet opens up to the sea and the *sertão*, to the possibilities, novelties and surprises of life. This is a preaching that does not give answers, but asks questions, does not conclude, but goes on its way, a preaching as a promise open to the paradox of life. The novelty of God lies not in a goal to be achieved, but amid paradoxical life. Could not this new path contain the possibility of hope – a mustard seed and yeast in the dough – that transforms the world?

39 Magalhães, *Deus no espelho*, 158.

40 Hoezee, S. 2014. *Actuality: Real Life Stories for Sermons That Matter*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 17.

Workshops



Preaching and the Language of Paradox: A Workshop¹

34

Elisabeth Grözinger²

What is a paradox? Some clarifications

Forms

It can, for instance denote contrast (bright/dark), opposites (high/deep), *contradictio in adjecto* (“small giant”), oxymoron (“wooden iron”, “more is less”, et cetera.)

Definitions

A paradox is a statement or an appearance that unexpectedly contradicts the generally expected, the prevailing opinion, or in a conventional understanding of the affected items or terms leads to a contradiction. The analysis of paradoxes often leads to a deeper understanding of the relevant articles or terms that resolves the contradiction. The plural is *paradoxes*, stemming from Ancient Greek: παράδοξον – from παρά (para), meaning “next”, “except”, “past it”, and in compositions also “resist”, combined with δόξα (doxa: “opinion”, “view”). Basically, a paradox refers to the contradiction between what is asserted on the one hand and the expectations and assessments on the other hand – the latter arising from familiar thinking in the form of heuristics, prejudices, platitudes, ambiguities, or limited perspectives, et cetera. The contradiction of everyday opinion (doxa) is common to all paradoxes.³

A paradox could also be described as constituting an opposite, or antipode, or as a contrast, the latter indicating a striking or conspicuous difference.⁴ It is sometimes referred to as a *contadictio in adjecto*, that is, a contradiction in terms is, for example, a “round square”. The addition of the adjective “round” contradicts the meaning of the word “square”. If it is used as a rhetorical device the contradiction in terms is called an oxymoron.⁵ The latter is often used to show something by unexpected, paradoxical combinations in a very significant way.

How does a paradox work? Some surprising examples

Simply put, paradoxes in language confuse. The use of paradox leads beyond well know cognitive schemata and patterns. As an illustration of this process, one may look at some examples from an

1 As a true workshop, no fully-prepared presentation was given, it rather took the form of a place for discussions and exchange that was open for development and further reflection on the topic.

2 Elisabeth Grözinger serves as an accredited training analyst at the CG Jung Institute in Zürich, Switzerland.

3 Cf. online <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paradoxon> (Accessed: 23 February 2016).

4 Cf. online: [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kontrast_\(Begriffsklärung\)](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kontrast_(Begriffsklärung)) (Accessed: 12 June 2016).

5 Cf. online: https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Contradictio_in_adjecto (Accessed: 12 June 2016).

interesting, perhaps even surprising field, at least as far as preaching is concerned, namely the role of paradox in medically-used hypnosis. Philip Zindel, a Swiss medical expert in hypnosis, explains aspects of hypnosis therapy and the paradox as a “tool” in of practicing medical hypnosis. According to Zindel, communication does not appeal at an argumentative, rational level, but rather

... appeals directly to the inner images, emotions, memories and perceptions and unconscious motivations and resources. Hypnotherapy is primarily a change-oriented form of therapy and only where necessary it is based on insight and knowledge... Hypnotherapy instruments provide a wide range of induction methods and various intervention options are available: relaxation at different depths, surprise, paradox, metaphorical communication, free or controlled imagination etc.⁶

Zindel practises a process wherein he uses four steps to introduce a trance during hypnosis. The use of paradox qualifies his third step. He describes this “tool” as follows: “A deepening of trance is enabled by the paradox that all the resources that the patient realises around him [sic], are coming from his own internal being. They are external and internal at the same time.” During this period of the trance-introducing process, Zindel tells his patients that “... all these wonderful things are in yourself. They are developed by yourself. They are around you and in you – at the same time.”⁷

From the perspective of Zindel, externality and internality can be simultaneously defined as “paradox” because, although there can be elements like an internal and external at the same time, we usually experience externality and internality as strictly separated phenomena.

This hypnotic use of “paradox” is revealing to me as, in this process, the “language of paradox” is used as an intervention that allows an approach to deeper and unconscious possibilities and potential of a person. I particularly appreciate this “widening” of paradox.

Poetic examples of the “language of paradox”

Kurt Marti is an author who is aware of the risks of closeness in though systems that seem to be absolutely plausible and evident. He is also a poet who uses paradoxical phrases to surprise the reader and, therefore, in light of our topic, he serves as a good example to introduce here. Marti’s work often makes use of aphorisms. These he describes as

“... the ability to think in antitheses, without letting yourself be seduced to construct syntheses. Humbug begins with syntheses and, worse, the terror of systems. The aphorism is an anti-Hegelian form.”⁸

Marti wrote a poem that illustrates this approach quite well:

*Great God small
great god
closer to us
than skin
or neck artery*

6 Cf. online: <http://www.psychosomatik-basel.ch/deutsch/bildung/dienstagmittagfortbildung/pdf/2010/zindel130410p.pdf> (Accessed: 12 June 2016).

7 Cf. online: http://content.schweitzer-online.de/static/catalog_manager/live/media_files/representation/zd_std_orig_zd_schw_orig/022/682/294/9783033043534_content_pdf_2.pdf (Accessed: 12 June 2016).

8 Kurt Marti, K. 1988. *Zärtlichkeit und Schmerz*. Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 20.

smaller
than cardiac muscle
midriff often:
too close
too small –
why
should we seek you?
we:
Your hiding-places⁹

The midriff (*Zwerchfeld* in German), is a muscle that is important for breathing and, in a metaphorical sense, for inspiration. The Greek word for it was *diáphragma*, a separating wall. The ancient Greeks thought that this was the place where the soul (*Phren*) was located. So the reference to the midriff may be understood as a hidden hint to the ancient Greek spiritual dimension in the relation between God and human beings. However, this background is non-evident and is so small and so subtle in the poem that it will could be discovered a well-educated reader.

But, poems are not sermons. In poems one is allowed to work at hidden levels; in sermons one should be easily understandable, also to people without any education. Therefore, one has to be careful of what one may learn from poets and what one may ultimately not adopt in one's preaching.

Sound associations may, for instance, be a poetic tool that one may adopt in one's preaching. The German word *Zwerch* (as used in the word *Zwerchfeld*), for example, sounds close to *Zwerg*, which means "dwarf" – the well-known little people in fairy tales. For Germans, it is nearly inevitable to associate the word *Zwerch* with *Zwerg*. In the German language, a clear sound connection exists between *Zwerch* and *Zwerg* that does not seem possible in English. "Midriff" in no way sounds "dwarf". The closest one may come is probably with the use of another English word for "dwarf", namely "midget". So, even in English there exists some associations between midriff/midget/littleness is given.

Marti often uses connotations (like *Zwerg/Zwerch-fell* in the German version of the poem quoted above) that enable him to elucidate his subject by way of contrast (for example, "small or little/great") due to the obvious wide range of possible meanings of some words when heard only (in this case *Zwerch-fell/Zwerg*) even when he formulates at the level of somatic comparisons. There are also hidden, obscure hints in the term "midriff", for instance:

1. You may feel one's midriff (or, midget!), if one laughs too much and non-stop. Then the midriff may hurt because continuous laughing disturbs the normal rhythm of breathing.
2. Normally the midriff/midget is imperceptible (like God?).
3. The midriff/midget is a muscle that helps one to breathe and breathing is often connected (nowadays especially in *Asian* religious traditions) with spirituality.

In poetry like this, containing humour, playfulness or elements of surprise, serve to loosen fixed connections between a word and its meaning. It opens up new possibilities to thinking – God may usually not be connected with a dwarf/midget! On this point, there is another place in this poem

⁹ grosser gott / uns näher als haut oder halsschlagader / kleiner / als herzmuskel / zwerchfell oft / zu nahe / zu klein – / wozu / dich suchen/ wir: deine verstecke. Kurt Marti. 1980. Abendland. Darmstadt/Neuwied: Luchterhand, 82.

where Marti plays with what he says. He transfers the described contrast between “small” and “great/big” in the *form* of his poem. The last two lines are decisively different, if one considers their length. The line with the human aspect (“we”) is short; the line that refers to God’s position is longer (“your hiding-places”). Now the “divine” line that relates to the “small” God, is the longer one. But this last, long line is not separated from the shorter line. It is well connected by the word “your”. And, *here the paradox becomes visible*. Again, there is a surprising contrast – but the opposite sides of this contrast are well combined and exist together, they are even related to each other.

Some conclusions

All of the above examples, taken from hypnosis and poetry, are appeals to a more open and deeper consciousness, also when preparing and delivering sermons as:

1. the purpose of using the language of paradox in a sermon is not to confuse or to provoke the listeners;
2. using the language of paradox in a sermon is not an unreasonable possibility. In fact, it may create a sermon beyond mere moral (or indeed moralistic) demands and requests;
3. using the language of paradox in a sermon represents an effort to empower the audience to go beyond their usual ways of thinking and to use unknown, subconscious resources;
4. using the language of paradox in a sermon is an act of countering kitsch, over-used, well-known images of God and to discover new ways of relating to God.

The above conclusions are also in line with the argument that precedes it, as it too is open ended! Questions that remain are, for example, whether the language of paradox is at all *appropriate* for sermons? Whether the language of paradox should be avoided in sermons because it is *manipulating*? Whether the language of paradox is, on the other hand, perhaps *indispensable* for sermons?

An example of the use of the language of paradox in a sermon:¹⁰

⁴ *Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice.*

⁵ *Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.*

⁶ *Do not be worried about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.*

⁷ *And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus*

Philippians 4:4-7

Dear sisters and brothers,

Even a few years ago I would not have valued these words of Paul much; to me it would have been inconsequential. The annual call to joy and friendliness bugged me. Nor did the promise of God’s proximity help much. I simply do not assume that we can expect the arrival of a Saviour that will resolve all our conflicts as we expect the arrival of an aircraft. The arrival of an airliner can be traced on the internet from the moment it takes off. But God is different to a plane or another vehicle that is travelling toward us. God is perhaps always at hand, is so near that God is just here. But this special proximity sometimes becomes pronounced for a couple of moments and leaves us

¹⁰ A translated and shortened version of a sermon by Elisabeth Grözinger, delivered on the 20th of December, 2015.

almost overwhelmed by the unexpected presence. Usually we experience God as belonging to far and entirely different spheres. And if anyone promises something that sounds as if Christ is close to us like an airplane approaching and expected to land soon, then we would only smile.

God is close, but God's closeness is often so terribly imperceptible. We are often experiencing not closeness to God, but distance from God! A distance that can leave one feeling all alone, alone in profound desperation. ... The experience of alienation from God may lead to the feeling of being entirely *left alone* by God.

"Once again I want to say it: Rejoice." Paul writes to the Christian community of Philippi. As such, is of any concern to us? Put differently, do we have any reason to rejoice?

Paul apparently had few reasons to celebrate, to rejoice. He was in jail when he wrote this letter. But Paul had other resources, mental inventories. He was – as far as we know – strongly convinced that Christ would come soon. He also obviously had the gift of not losing sight of the positives. For one, he realised that Christians around him were not losing hope. They did not cry in tribulation just because he (Paul) had been arrested. On the contrary, they continued what Paul had begun. In prison, Paul realised that other people – just like him – were a source of hope and confidence due to their knowledge of the resurrection of Christ. Paul did not feel left alone in prison. In fact, his letter creates the impression that his faith in God has even grown during these trying circumstances!

However, people do not always respond so optimistic when they must endure impositions. Our "backpacks are packed very different." Some have the power to grow, especially in crises. They notice everything that may give them hope. However, we are not all like that. Sometimes we are thin-skinned and we are more sensitive to that which threaten us, and nothing in the world, material or spiritual-cultural, seem to be able to help. Then we are not able to find a trace of anything harmless in the midst of all we perceive as dangerous to us.

But, back to our biblical text: "Once again I want to say it: Rejoice." Could these words of Paul writes to the community in Philippi be important for us, in our situation? Do we have reason to rejoice? Sure, we have reasons to be happy. I will return these reasons later, but first I want to say why I think these words of Paul are today more relevant for us than they have perhaps been in the past decades.

Instability characterises our time. We do not know what we to expect. We hear of unprecedented migration, of atrocities committed that we never thought possible, of deadly attacks in the midst of the world of distraction and entertainment. That is why I hesitated at taking Paul's call for to rejoice seriously. I thought, well, it would be nice, if one can only relax again and be really unconditionally happy. It would be nice, I thought, if all the irritations of recent months would fall away from one. Confidence would again set the tone and naiveté would no longer be a dangerous option. That would be great.

Yes, I thought it might be important today to challenge this call to joy of Paul. For the sake of our safety we can and must take care of our lives, but it may also be helpful not to forget that we are in fact able to be hopeful. Our capacity for joy is strong. This joy can be even stronger than depressing news that confronts us daily. This joy that lives in us can break out suddenly. Such joy gives the strength we need to live our lives. This joy may create internal inventories, inventories for those tough times that we fear, times we are not accustomed to. Tough times that – I hope – will not arrive.

"Once again I want to say it: Rejoice." Paul's call may well be of concern to us. It may indeed be reasonable, practical and necessary for our survival. Joy helps one survive. But what reason could we have to rejoice?

The first reason I see, is obvious and banal: We are. We have each other. It is true. As relational beings we may become disappointed and we may be hurt. But we actually have another option, to enjoy each other. However, we hardly talk about this option. Our complaints about others are often louder than the praise of others who touched us unexpectedly or who have simply delighted us. It seems easier to complain about other people than to speak of how deeply we appreciate a word, a gesture of another human being.

I do not know, I want to remember only an admittedly banal story about how good it is and how important it is to feel and experience friendly “moderation”, as Paul calls it. But we can lose the knowledge of the importance of cordiality toward each other. To me, the ability to be at ease is sometimes lost, when I – obsessed by my daily responsibilities – scurry through Dornach, the village where I work.

But now, the promised banal story about an obvious reason for joy.¹¹

It is the story of the people from the village Swabedoo. The inhabitants of this village gave each other always small furs (called “fuzzies”) whenever they met each other. They rejoiced in meeting fellow Swabedoodahs. They wanted to show this. So, they gave each other furs (fuzzies). Each Swabedoodah carried a bag full of warm fuzzies to give to others. The Swabedoodahs never ran out of fuzzies. They were very happy, the little people of Swabedoo, who allowed one another to feel their friendliness. But there was a little green goblin who lived at the edge of the village. The goblin was an outsider, he did not belong to the others. Therefore, he once took the opportunity when he met a small Swabedoodah, and whispered in his ear that he should be careful with his fur stock, because someday all of it may be gone. The unthinkable had happened. The small Swabedoodah believed the goblin and henceforth did not want to hand out any more of his warm fuzzies. And, his example had a ripple effect. The people of Swabedoo ceased to hand out small warm furs to each other. Cases of robbery of furs started taking place! People no longer felt safe in the parks especially from dusk. Sometime later a disease broke out in Swabedoo, called “softening of the spine”. The Swabedoodah walked around bent over. People thought that their bags with the little furs were the cause of their illness due to the weight of the bags. So they decided to leave them at home behind lock and key. In a short while one could find no Swabedoodah with a fur bag on his or her back. The atmosphere in the village was so sad that even the goblin felt that he wish he could change the situation. He gave his friend, the little Swabedoodah, green stones to replace the little furs. This made an impact, as well. Now the people of Swabedoo gave each other stones to mark their mutual appreciation. The effect was not what they had expected. The people who were given a stone, heard the friendly words, which accompanied the stone, as if these would mean just the opposite. It seemed that the accompanying words were given without any personal reference. Some of Swabedoodahs suffered so deeply that they rebelled. They secretly began to give each other little furs again. They were somehow quite bashful in doing so. But it is said this custom was again growing among the Swabedoodahs.

That is the end of the story. It is, I should add, a story from the wellness culture, a mainstream story. One cannot say anything against it – not if you do not want to be seen as a suspicious curmudgeon. Yes, it is a banal story and a simple story. But it reminds us of our possibilities: We can do more than only reinforce our security. We can practice friendliness. We can enjoy the cooperation that exists.

There is a second reason to celebrate. This second reason is connected with Christmas. With the story that God became human. God became human in Jesus of Nazareth. God came and is coming into our world. This arrival has not stopped for over 2000 years. God is looking at us. Again and again. Therefore, somewhere in us we can find God. Kurt Marti the poet was also for a long time pastor in Bern, and he celebrates this with a poem. According to the poem, the great God can be very small. God’s proximity

11 German version: online at: http://www.ziitboersa.ch/downloads/texte/Die_kleinen_Leute.pdf (Accessed: 12 June 2018).

can make God almost invisible. God is able to find a hiding-place ... *in us*. And, sometimes, if we let ourselves be touched by this God, it changes us. It opens our eyes to the beauty of our world; to the miracles that are present in other people; to the wonders that lie within ourselves. Sometimes we realise that we ourselves are God's hiding-places. This, I think, may be an excellent reason for joy and celebration.

So, this is what we are: hiding-places of that God, whose proximity enables us to be present. Present to and for ourselves, but also to and for each other and together with each other.

Amen.

Preaching Promise in the Midst of Paradoxes – Plain Language between Ethics and Aesthetics

35

Anne Gidion¹

Making it plain

“Make it plain, preacher!” In African-American preaching this means the preacher should relate the gospel to real life, using images familiar to the African-American community. I use the word “plain” for my studies on language and worship. In many ways the issues I address overlap with some of those “making-it-plain-ones” in African-American preaching. People with disabilities have, for example, successfully insisted on a use of Plain Language (PL) in public communication in a move toward “living without barriers”.

Guidelines and examples

The following are some guidelines toward using PL and some examples of how it may look.

A first guideline is to limit one’s ideas to one per sentence. One idea per sentence. Instead of, for example, saying: “Yesterday I went to the bookstore and bought a book I had seen a couple of days ago that I really wanted to have”, one may use shorter sentences of less than 15 words, such as: “There is this book. I saw it in the bookstore. I really want to read it. So I went to the bookstore. I bought it.”

Use verbs instead of nouns to indicate an action. “God Creator of Heaven and Earth”, may be better addressed in the following way: “God, you created us. You created the Earth and the Heaven.”

Use positive words and sentence constructions and try to avoiding negatives. Instead of saying: “I am not talking about the mess you made yesterday”, one may use: “Yesterday you made a mess. Today I am talking about something else. We are going to ...”

Use the active voice instead of the passive voice as in “Peter denied Jesus” as opposed to “Jesus was denied by one of his closest disciples.”

Use technical words, metaphors, images with sparingly and with care. Build a “ramp” to assist the audience. One may, therefore, instead of saying: “This Pauline verse has quite a Karl Barthian quality to it...”, try something like: “There was this Swiss Reformed Theologian, Karl Barth. He wrote many books. His major work had more than 10 volumes. And, his sentences are also very long.” (It would

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be hard to translate Barth into plain language!) In fact, some of the verses of the Bible themselves are also very complicated and referring to them in PL may also be of great value in preaching.

Plain language and religious language

Religious matters are a special issue for PL, because language in worship services concerns more than simply getting information across. Many worship services e.g. begin a lecture with the sentence “the Word of God for the People of God.” This is more than just a few ideas that one wants may consider getting across in a different way. A preacher tells the story of liberation, crucifixion, justification, creation. This he or she usually does taking for granted that the audience should know or understand such “big” words. PL tries to crack such words and sentences open, to break it down, in other words, it tries to make it plain.

The accessibility and inclusiveness of the language used are two of the things behind the use of PL. John Swinton, who teaches theological ethics at the University of Aberdeen, speaks of the issue of belonging rather than of inclusion. To Swinton, being included means one may enter the room and gets through the door. To belong means one may stay, feel welcome and feel part of. And, is that not what the gospel is all about?

As can be expected there are also arguments against the use of PL, specifically in workshop. One is that it undermines the language of Tradition, the beauty and majesty of religious language, indeed, of biblical texts. However, within liturgy there are ample places for such language – in the Eucharist, the Creeds, or the Lord’s Prayer. Another criticism is that PL may lead to theological arguments in sermons losing their complexity, their beauty of language, their dogmatic structure. It would all boil down to children’s gospel, it would just be “Jesus loves you” over and over again. In other words, in PL, the complexity of the argument becomes unrecognizable, the dogmatic structure of Christian belief, the speech-event quality of homiletical language are all lost. This is both all true as well as all totally untrue. How is this possible?

PL between ethics and aesthetics

The above arguments are not only used in the struggle against PL, they are also well known in other discourses, such as those on feminist Bible interpretation, Christian-Jewish dialogue and liberation theology. There is always (at least) an ethical and an aesthetical side of this kind of argument, an argument one may call “elliptic”.

The ethical argument usually says that it since biblical texts are for everyone, is just and fair to makes texts accessible for all. According to the aesthetical argument, “They (as in ‘people with disabilities, that is, not you or me, thank God!’) can have their own worship services with symbols and easy reading material. Let them and their pressure groups not spoil the beautiful worship services for the rest of us. So please no more PL!”

In my work, I am putting PL right in the middle of the ellipse. I want people to use PL and feel both the pain and the pleasure; to go through it and find their own way. I want people to feel the paradoxical quality of PL, which is close to the mythical experience: simplicity is complex and complexity makes it easier at first sight, because one just uses old, well-known words and phrases and, in that way, one feels safe. However, the PL version moves closer to the truth, whereby the truth gets even more complex!

Religious language as God's gratuity

The word "Gratis" means "for free". It definitely does not mean something has no value! And, I think one should get the Word for free, which in a sense is what PL does by giving one access to it. This does not necessarily mean that every word in Worship has to be that way. Some elements do lose some of their effect because their form is so much part of their content. So, sometimes it is easier to leave the form as it is and to rather build a ramp towards better understanding it – as in the Barth example above. The Lord's Prayer, the Creed, the Christmas story, all of these are sometimes better brought across as they are, as symbols of the old times, of the majesty of the long story of the Christian church. That is fine.

However, I am not interested in dos and don'ts. I am interested in helpful tools within the ministry and for Christian life in the midst of the diversity that makes up the world of today. As a preacher, one has to talk about the Word of God to the people of God. And, this Word belongs to the people of God and the preacher needs to share this word for free. One way of doing so is to heed the call to "Make it plain, preacher!" When one has something to say, one might as well just say it. In this sense, PL poses the questions clearly also those that ask: "How to talk about God today in the middle of the paradoxes? And, to whom? Only to those who already think they know the answer?"

Sermons



Is the Voice Enough?

36

Allan A Boesak

Then the LORD spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound of words, but saw no form; there was only the voice.

(Deuteronomy 4:12)

I was in the spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard a loud voice like a trumpet... Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lamp stands, and in the midst of the lamp stands I saw one like the Human Son...

(Revelations 1:10 (a), 12)

I

Her name is Nomonde Calata. She is the widow of one of the leaders of the freedom struggle in South Africa, Fort Calata, one of four young men waylaid, detained, tortured, and murdered by the South African secret police in 1985. I preached at their funeral in July 1985.

In 1996, Mrs. Calata testified before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. She had hardly started to speak when she suddenly broke down, threw her body backwards and opened her mouth in a primeval scream of pain, suffering and grief. Archbishop Tutu, the TRC and the people in the hall listened in stunned, awed silence. This is how journalist Antjie Krog describes the moment:

The starting point of the hearings was the indefinable wail that burst from Nomonde Calata's lips, the signature tune, the defining moment, the ultimate sound of what the process is about...

It was a cry against the injustices that choked our daily lives; against the relentless violence of systems of oppression, of deadly assault and torture that killed her husband; against the helplessness that is the spawn of the hopelessness with which oppression hopes to break our spirit and our will to resist. She had no power to bring to book the murderers of her husband; no power to exact justice, no power even to wring an apology from their unwilling lips. She had only her voice.

The call to reconciliation, the necessity of reconciliation, its challenges, its risks and its meaning, are all embodied in this one cry. Today, almost twenty years after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, after the euphoria of a freedom fought for but not yet gained, after forgiveness given but justice denied, after sacrifices made in hope on top of the sacrifices made in struggle and with Nomonde Calata's cry ringing in our hearts, now that we have learned to speak of reconciliation

less triumphantly, but more thoughtfully; with less certitude but with more conviction; with more humility but even more consciousness of the presence of God, is that voice enough?

Is the voice enough to make South Africa understand that reconciliation is not possible without the confrontation of evil, without remorse and repentance, without restitution, without forgiveness and without the restoration of justice, rights and dignity?

II

As our text from Deuteronomy Chapter 4 makes clear, that is a question ancient Israel had to seriously contend with. Israel's unique concept of its God presented it with particular challenges in the ancient world.

First, Israel believed in only one God, not a multitude of gods, like just about everyone else around them. Every empire biblical Israel had suffered under over the span of centuries had pantheons of gods – the Greeks and the Romans had twelve each. Not only was the idea of one god only problematic; in that world it was ridiculous. There was, if truth be told, great comfort in a hierarchy of gods. If a Roman general did not feel secure in the protection of Mars, the god of war, or the prayers of a naval officer to Neptune, the god of the sea, went unanswered, they could always turn to a higher authority – Jupiter. If a Greek supplicant did not receive succour from Athena, the goddess of wisdom, or felt left in the lurch by Hera, goddess of marriage, they could always appeal to Zeus, and Zeus would have the last word.

Not so with Israel. Israel had nowhere else to go. Israel had to appeal to Yahweh against Yahweh. If you had a case against Yahweh, you had to go to Yahweh's court to plead your case. Yahweh was prosecutor and judge, first and last resort. That has always been one of monotheism's great dilemmas and Israel felt it keenly.

III

But Israel had a second difficulty. The gods of the other nations identified with the upper echelons of society – the priesthood, the nobility, the privileged and the powerful. Their gods were as powerful as they themselves understood the workings of power, with at the very top their divine pharaoh, or emperor, or king.

Israel, however, had a God who identified with slaves; not with the rich and powerful, but with the poor and the oppressed, the weak and defenceless, the stranger, the widow and the orphans – the despicable and dispensable of this world, what Franz Fanon aptly called “the wretched of the earth”.

On top of this, Israel faced a third difficulty. It worshipped an invisible God. All around them, the other nations had huge, impressive images of bronze, silver or gold, each in their own way depicting the particular power of that god, each housed in magnificent temples, each and every one of them examples of amazing technology; each and every one of them symbols of great power. Praying in those temples, calling upon a god represented by such magnificence was a source of great inspiration, great pride and great power.

Israel had none of that. No statues, no images, no imposing, empowering symbols, no temple until much later. Deuteronomy 4 sums it up: there was only the voice. Of course there were signs and wonders and deeds of power; water from a rock and manna from heaven, a moving cloud and a

moving pillar of fire – but all were from a God Israel could not see, never bring in as visible, tangible evidence of existence and power ... there was only the voice.

That is why, when Moses tarried too long on the mountain, the Israelites could no longer contain their need to see, to touch, to have a tangible presence. So they made their golden calf, bowed down and said, “These are your gods, o Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt.” And in that moment of ecstatic, unguarded jubilation, the truth of their deepest heart spills out: “*These are your gods, o Israel...*”

So the question would remain: “Is the voice enough?”

IV

Standing before that burning bush, Moses heard the voice and a promise that would live forever: “I have *seen* the misery of my people; I have *heard* their cry; I *know* their suffering – therefore I shall come down and rescue them...” But standing in front of Pharaoh; on the run from Egypt’s armies and horses and chariots in the middle of the Red Sea, the question comes again: “Is the voice enough?”

As his people were about to cross the Jordan, God spoke to Joshua: “be strong and full of courage...”, but in the face of new realities and the real fear of the unknown, the question arises again and again: “Is the voice enough?”

As Israel became more and more seduced by the temptation to be “like the other nations” and imitated the ways of empire more and more – oppressing the poor, building a kingdom on militarism, forced labour and economic exploitation; trampling the heads of the poor unto the dust of the Earth – there was the voice: “Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream”; the voice reminding them of what they *knew* Yahweh required of them: to do justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly with their God. They *heard* the voice. But, the question is: Is the voice enough?

V

There has always been the voice. We could hear it, if we would, if we wanted to. It rang through moments in our history: the voice of Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth, of Frederick Douglass and Henry Highland Garnet, of Lilian Ngoyi, Beyers Naudé and Steve Biko.

We heard Beyers Naudé telling us when there is a struggle going on, neutrality is not possible. But today, as we still try to sit on two chairs, trying to serve both God and Mammon, trying to sacrifice at the altar of love and justice and at the altar of greed and wealth – is the voice enough?

We heard Albert Luthuli say that the road to freedom is always via the Cross. But today, as we spend our time wondering, trying to work out whether the struggle for justice and peace can be won without too much discomfort, too much inconvenience, too much sacrifice – is the voice enough?

We hear Dietrich Bonhoeffer clearly: We must learn to look at the great events in our history from below, through the eyes of the oppressed, the defenceless, the despised, the unworthy – those who suffer. And yet, we find it almost impossible to leave our corners of comfort and our places of privilege. We keep seeing the world through the veil of the benefits wrought by our privilege, no matter the suffering those benefits bring for those we keep powerless.

We heard Martin Luther King warn us that the triple evils of militarism, racism and capitalism are the great obstacles in the way of freedom, justice, peace and the humanisation of the world. But today

we remain so strangely mesmerised by a muscular Christianity, so captivated by capital, so fixated on race, so peaceful in the face of endless war, so disempowered by the power of the powerful, that we have to ask: Is the voice enough?

VI

However, in the first Chapter of John's Apocalypse, John reports:

*I was in the spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet ...
Then I turned around to see whose voice it was that spoke to me...*

That, at least, is how most translations have it. In the Greek, however, John writes, "I turned around to see the voice that spoke to me..." Thus, the voice John heard was not a sound, but a person. "And I saw one like the Human Son..." That is who the voice is: Jesus the Messiah, and I hear him say:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. He has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

Jesus is the One who was accused, tried, mocked and spat upon; the One they crucified. But on Sunday morning he rose from the dead because death and the grave had no power to hold him. And I heard him say, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me, and I am with you, even unto the end of the age." That is the voice John heard and it is the voice we should still hear today. And this is where we will hear that voice: in the cries of the poor, the downtrodden, the destitute and the dispossessed, the marginalised. It is the voice of the single mother who has no helper to raise her children; the voice of the battered woman who has no defender – not in the courts and not in the church.

I heard Jesus give women the authority to go and tell the disciples, still hiding behind closed doors, that he has risen, so that woman's voice, not allowed to speak in public, suppressed in the home, drowned in patriarchal violence, dismissed as not worth hearing – that voice becomes the voice that carries the good news: Jesus is alive! But in the church today: Is that voice enough?

It is the voice the LGBTQI brother and sister who, today more than ever, is targeted, hunted down, raped and murdered in the name of a terrifying, homophobic Jesus. It is the voice of the thousands upon thousands of refugees fleeing wars of terror not of their making, but caused by the powerful for the sake of endless profits and now terrorised by indifference, hatred and teargas on the borders of the countries run by those same powers. It is the voice of the 1 billion women, men and children who go to bed hungry at night.

The question is: Is the voice enough?

Is it enough to disturb us in our comfort, enough to make us stand up for truth, enough to make us hunger and thirst for justice; enough to make us rise up against evil; enough to make us reclaim the tradition of the prophets and of Jesus of Nazareth?

If that voice is enough, we will be able to speak truth to power. If that voice is enough, we will be able to stand where Christ stands and is always to be found – with the wronged, the poor and the destitute. If that voice is enough, we will be able to rise up against any form of injustice wherever it raises its monstrous head.

I know this to be true: The voice of Jesus rises above all other voices of racism, sexism, patriarchalism and militarism. It rises above all voices of fear, threat, intimidation and violence. *That* voice is enough. If we believe that, we will not be afraid. If we believe that, we will find hope and courage to love, with passion and commitment, the ways of justice.

If we believe that we will sing with the Black church that song about the power of the voice of Jesus. It is a song long sung in the Black church, first recorded by Blind Joe Taggart in 1932. It was a dark and terrifying time for African Americans. It was a time in which lynching was rife, the “quintessential symbol of black oppression... the negation of the message of hope and salvation [of the cross] by white supremacy” as Jim Cone writes. As African Americans would leave their places of worship or their homes, they would see the gathering of whites under a tree, torches alight, picnic baskets packed, children playing around, photographers taking pictures for posterity and to sell to those who wanted proof of white power, men cutting body parts off the body hanging from the tree, perhaps half burnt. Black people shuddered at the sight of “strange fruit” hanging from the tree.

They saw the lynching tree, and they saw the body hanging from the tree, but they looked beyond the lynching tree and they saw the cross, that other lynching tree from long ago. And they saw another body hanging from that other lynching tree and they knew, three days from Friday, on Sunday morning, the power of that lynching tree would be broken. And they sang:

*Satan, we're gonna tear your kingdom down,
Satan we're gonna tear your kingdom down.
I heard the voice of Jesus say,
Satan, your kingdom's comin' down!*

Pablo Picasso, in the midst of the Spanish Civil War of 1936/7, said that “Art is a lie that makes us realise the truth.”

Part of what Picasso meant by this, was that the artist has the ability to use images, drawings that are seemingly distorted in order to convey the truth about what is before us. Some of us may be aware of several of his grotesque depictions that were attempts to reveal the truth about what was in fact happening during the Spanish Civil War. And, so his drawing of *Guernica* and *The Dream and Lie of Franco* are some examples of this seeming distortion.

When an artist wants to draw on a piece of paper or canvas a landscape scene, it is important that there is a sense of perspective about what is closer and what is further away. And, often one needs to distort lines in one dimension in order to convey what it is in fact in two. So, for example, if we were drawing a scene of the street outside this building, looking up the avenue of trees, we would need to draw the depth of perspective in such a way that the parallel lines of the trees meet in the distance, but in fact they do not meet, but we have to draw it that way in order to convey what our eye sees when it looks at depth. We distort, as it were, to convey what in fact is the truth.

The above paradox of art is carried over into so many areas of our life and we find many similar forms of paradox in theology as we try to speak about the mystery and wonder of the Trinitarian God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – or the character of Jesus being fully God and fully human.

In the passage that we read this morning from Luke’s Gospel, we have a classic example of this kind of paradox of truth. In the words of Jesus:

If anyone wishes to follow after me, let them deny themselves and lift up their cross each day and follow me. For whoever wishes to save their life, will lose it. And whoever loses their life on my account will save it.

These immensely challenging words of Jesus are found in all three synoptic gospels and, what is more, all three gospels place this saying of Jesus in the prior context of him having asked his disciples the crucial question, “Who do you say I am?” (Luke (9:20).

As each of us knows only too well, this is probably the most pertinent question that Jesus asks and that we are called to answer anew each day.

1 Devotion, Tuesday 15 March 2016, at the Societas Homiletica Conference on “Preaching Promise within the Paradoxes of Life”, Stellenbosch, South Africa.
2 David Hunter is pastor emeritus of Stellenbosch United Church where he and his wife, Celene served for 27 years before retiring at the end of 2015.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his *Letters and Papers from Prison*, sharpens the question for us in the letter he wrote to Eberhard Bethge on 30 April 1944. Bonhoeffer asks: “What keeps gnawing at me is the question, what is Christianity, or who is Christ actually for us today?” And, this is indeed a question with which we continually wrestle and how we choose to answer it, shapes what we see and how we live. How we answer the question about His identity, will inform whether in fact we are following him or merely ourselves.

Karl Barth reminds us that there is no person who does not have his or her own god or gods as the object of their highest desire, trust, or as the basis of their deepest loyalty and commitment.

We wrestle with the question posed to us by Jesus and never have it “in the bag”, as it were. Genuine faith requires continual engagement with this question, and faith “continually seeking understanding”. But, knowledge of faith is also followed by the shadow of doubt. And, what is more, we will constantly need to put our faith into practice, despite all the doubts, uncertainties and dislocations.

As Hans Kung so wisely comments, “The believer, like the lover, has no conclusive proofs to give them completely certain security. But the believer too, like the lover, can be completely certain of the Other, by committing themselves entirely to the Other ... the ultimate reality of God is revealed only to trusting committed faith...”

So, let us look more closely at Luke’s account of this very challenging word from Jesus.

Luke begins with Jesus speaking to all of his audience, He was speaking to all: “If anyone wishes to come after me, let them deny themselves and lift up their cross daily and let them follow me.” Faith is not simply about some kind of verbal response about what may be true, but far rather, it is a personal movement toward the one whom we affirm.

I am married to Celene (yes, the Greek goddess of the moon, helplessly drawn into her gravitational orbit and I have been followed by a Moon Shadow for 38 glorious years, with all the lunacy that this brings!).

When we got married in the University Chapel at Rhodes in Grahamstown, we promised to love one another. They were words that we said to each other and, from that day onwards, we have needed to give substance to those words in the daily practice of what love looks like in all the changing circumstances of our lives. It has meant the continual commitment to make all our decisions in the light of one another. To practice this love, this commitment, is to constantly align our lives with the value that Celene has for my life and mine for hers. And, in order for this relationship to be sustained, it is most necessary that other relationships or priorities that we have need to be repositioned in the light of our commitment to one another. This relationship needs to take priority and there is the commitment of choosing daily to align our choices so that they express our ongoing commitment to one another, to the one we have chosen.

I am also intrigued that Jesus speaks about our relationship with him as a following on a journey. “If anyone will to come after me”, there is the sense of dynamic movement, change, challenge, but there is also the sense that when we go on a journey we have to make choices. Choices about what to bring with us: “Let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily.”

When we have gone away as a family, there is frequently a bit of tension between myself and Celene. We have limited space in the car and I often jokingly said that I think that Celene has some difficulties with spatial conceptualisation! There always seems to be far more to take than there is space for. We

have to choose what is important for where we are going and who is going with us. So, too, some things have to be denied if we are going to go at all on this journey with Jesus. I wonder what we have sensed Jesus asking us to leave behind in order to follow him? Is there anything at all? And, if nothing, then who may we possibly be following?

I find it fascinating to note that the words that Luke uses to express this challenge and choice are in the present tense. To continually come after me and deny oneself. If there is to be a relationship of any significance, then it requires continual choosing in this way. Without this denial that Jesus speaks about, one can seriously doubt the value that the relationship has for us.

However, it is important to know that this denial of self does not mean a hating of oneself. That is not what Jesus is asking for. Rather, when he speaks about denial, it seems to me that he is speaking about the need to say “no” to the proud, self-obsessed ways in which one can live, asking that one would change the understandings by which we live, which is really the meaning of *μετανοια*. And what is more, *μετανοια* is Good News for our lives. It is choosing to come before him with the sense of our own vulnerability, a vulnerability that is dependent on the grace of God and not coming with a proud conviction that we are somehow self-made people.

It appears to me that Jesus is speaking about a continual re-centred self, re-alignment as it were. We know only too clearly how driving a car with bad wheel alignment not only wears the tyres unevenly, but also makes the care more dangerous!

Perhaps, one of the clearest expressions of this re centred life is in Chapter 18:9-14, where Luke recalls,

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt. Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee standing by himself, was praying thus, “God, I thank you that I am not like other people, thieves, rogues, adulterers or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.” [Look, I am denying myself!]

But the tax collector standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast saying, “God be merciful to me, a sinner.” I tell you, this person went down to his home justified rather than the other, for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.

My father-in-law, who was professor of ecclesiastical history and dean of the Faculty of Divinity at Rhodes University, said that one of the distinctive temptations of academia, was the “pride of knowledge”. Not that he was wanting to promote obscurantism or ignorance, but rather there was the sense amongst scholars at times to seek mastery by means of knowledge or intellectual ability – a sense of the overvaluing of one’s knowledge and a lack of the continual need to recognise that all our knowledge is limited by where we stand and what we can see. There is a continual need for humility in all our learning.

Reinhold Niebuhr, reminded us of the way in which our pride may be the source of our deepest deception. He said that

... [t]he cross which stands at the centre of the Christian world view, reveals both the seriousness of human sin and the purpose and power of God to overcome it. It reveals humankind violating the will of God in its highest moral and spiritual achievements, in Roman Law and Jewish religion, and God absorbing this evil into Himself at the very moment of its most vivid expression.

What extraordinary hope this is for all of us who are continually being drawn into the web of our pride. There is the need for us to be vigilant about this pride and to remember that the meaning of the word disciple, is in fact one who is continually learning.

Our failure to recognise this often leads to the unhealthy competition between colleagues. It reminds me of those hauntingly accurate words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his *Life Together*. He begins quoting from Luke 9:46, a passage that comes just after this one we focus on this morning. “An argument arose amongst them as to which one of them was the greatest.” Bonhoeffer goes on to say that,

[w]e know who it is that sows this thought in the Christian community. But perhaps we do not bear in mind enough that no Christian community ever comes together without this thought immediately emerging as a seed of discord. Thus at the very beginning of Christian fellowship there is engendered an invisible, often unconscious life and death contest ... An argument arose amongst them as to which one of them was the greatest ... It is the struggle of the natural person for self-justification. They find it only in comparing themselves with others, in condemning and judging others. Self-justification and judging go together, as justification by grace and serving others go together.

Extraordinary insightful words for all of us, each day.

And lastly for today – although it could never be lastly in terms of this passage – Jesus speaks about denying oneself and taking up one’s cross daily and following him. What will this mean for us?

It seems that Jesus is saying here, that faithfulness in following Jesus will lead us into suffering. Also to sharing the suffering of others, com-passion, suffering with, engaging in expressing the heartbeat of God’s love through sharing our lives and resources.

Yesterday, at this conference, we heard statistics of the devastating distance and disproportionality between the “have’s” and “have-nots” in our world. Between the centres and the peripheries. It seems that as we seek to daily follow Him and *love one another as He has loved us*, this loving of God and our neighbour cannot be made concrete without self-sacrifice and shared suffering.

I was privileged to spend 27 wonderful years of my life here in Stellenbosch as the minister of this congregation. Part of the ministry in has been the extraordinary gift of 120 people from Kayamandi joining this congregation 10 years ago. It has meant that our lives have been continually immersed in the daily struggle of the greatest proportion of our South African society. I know that many of you spent some time yesterday afternoon walking through the streets of Kayamandi and so you have some sense of the context in which many people live in this town. You also probably heard about the fire that destroyed many houses late yesterday afternoon as well.

For many of us, this journey of *κοινωνία* has led us in so many different places emotionally. From weeping with the pain of life, wrestling with the anger of injustice, struggling to effect the forms of justice that are possible as we have sought to live expressing Hope as “the passion of the possible”, in the words of Paul Ricoeur. It has meant trying to wrestle with the concrete challenges of an “economy of exclusion” right here before us, and seeking to put into practice something of what the practice of an “economy of inclusivity” would look like, as imperfect at that is.

However, it has also meant being utterly exhausted with the weight of what one sees and carries, the fatigue and at times despair of the enormity of it all. Of wanting to run from the weight and pain...

The alternative to this life of denying ourselves and following Christ is a life where we desperately try to save our own lives. And there is the profound irony that in trying to save our lives, secure and preserve them, we in fact end up losing them. We are given the gift of life through the graciousness of God and it is a life that cannot be hoarded, kept safe, guarded, but can only be lived to the extent that it is given to another in His name. And, ironically, as we lose our lives, as it were in this way, in giving them away in his name, and for his sake, we indeed discover that our lives are saved, found, fulfilled.

The refugee crisis in Europe and elsewhere is a source of enormous concern as it challenges the ways in which we have lived. In South Africa, we have had to wrestle with this issue for many decades. The notion of refugee depends on where you are standing as people have fought over “the right to the land”. And you know only too clearly how our history reveals how we have struggled and how ideologies of separation have caused unspeakable pain – the attempts to “save ourselves” as it were.

Is there here some sense of us needing to discover what it means to be a neighbour to the other, a losing of ourselves as it were and yet, ironically and paradoxically, a gaining of our true self, in order to see and sense something of the kind of community the Lord has in mind for his World?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer has that most wonderful description of the church: Christ existing as community. And so we come to the table, where we are reminded of God’s great denying of himself so that we may live. A love that reveals his love of us being greater than his love of himself. And we come with empty hands to receive of this love, this life, to receive again of his mercy so that we may go out to represent that same character of love that we continually receive from this gracious and truthful Lord of all.

Isaiah 50:4-9a¹

38

Charles L Campbell²

“Wake up, Isaiah. Wake up! Listen to me! Open your ears! I have a word for your tongue today.”

Morning after morning after morning that was the prophet’s experience. Every single morning: “Wake up, Isaiah! Wake up! Listen to me! Here’s the word for you to speak today.”

It is intriguing, is it not? Every morning God has to wake Isaiah up. Even prophets, apparently, have to sleep, though I never think of them that way. But there is Isaiah, sound asleep, when God interrupts, like a loud and irritating alarm clock: “Wake up, Isaiah! Wake up! Here’s the word for today.” I wonder if Isaiah ever once wanted to say: “Couldn’t I just sleep in? Give me a break! Is it really so urgent that you have to wake me up *every single morning?*”

Maybe there is a good reason God has to wake Isaiah up. Maybe the prophet is tired – exhausted. Think about it. He has been prophesying for a long time. He has been denouncing injustice, warning of exile, offering hope. He has been challenging the people day after day, month after month, year after year. Words of judgment, words of promise, words of condemnation, words of comfort. As one of my students put it, it has been quite a roller coaster ride for the prophet!

And God told him at the beginning, the people will not comprehend; they will not understand. Their minds will be dull, their ears stopped, their eyes shut. Even at the moment of his call, Isaiah asked: “How long, O Lord? How long?” And now it is years later – and he knows how long. And there is no end in sight. He has done everything God has asked him to do. He even walked around naked for three years – talk about embodied symbolic action! And now maybe he is just tired; he wants to sleep.

That is what happens to prophets. They get tired. You can hear it in their voices. The voice of Martin Luther King, Jr., for example. For many years, he preached words of challenge and hope in the face of racism and economic inequality and the military industrial complex. And you can hear the exhaustion in his voice at the end. He often sounds “bone tired”, as one scholar put it.³ My students immediately notice the change in his voice when they listen to him.

And you can also hear his tiredness in the frustration and rage in his voice. “I have a dream” becomes “God will bring doom!” By the end, King has had it with the powers that oppose his call for justice.

1 Closing worship service preached at the Societas Homiletica Conference on “Preaching Promise within the Paradoxes of Life”, Stellenbosch, South Africa, 16 March 2016.

2 Charles L Campbell is professor of homiletics at Duke Divinity School, Duke University.

3 Lischer, R. 1995. *The Preacher King: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Word that Moved America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 137.

And I suspect, if he were still alive looking at my country today, he would be as exhausted as ever. His dream is still a long way off.

Prophetic exhaustion. Some of you know that feeling. I have heard you talk about it this week. And I suspect all of us have some very tiring days ahead.

The refugees, the immigrants, stream in – human beings with names and faces and stories. And you speak out – a word to sustain the weary and challenge the powerful. But the backlash against “those people” just seems to grow stronger. And the violent powers creating the crisis seem impossibly large and intractable.

Or the heat and droughts and floods of climate change grow more intense. And you keep trying to shout above the storm. A voice crying in the wilderness. But far too little is changing. And the challenges seem completely overwhelming.

Or you watch our global economic system continue to create the richest of elites while leaving the poor destitute. And you preach: “Let justice roll down like waters!” But the powers and principalities could not care less.

Or maybe it is just the complexity and enormity of it all. Speaking a fitting word seems impossible. And you get tired. You just want to sleep.

But, every morning, God calls: “Wake up! Wake up! I have a word for you today.” And some days it is an affirmation and some days it is a provocation, some days it is migration and other days it is anticipation. Always a specific word for a specific time and a specific place – *this day*. It can be exhausting discerning a new, unpredictable word from the Lord every morning. Indeed, we may at times get tired because we just can seem to hear the word ourselves. Can we not just sleep in today?

Isaiah may have been really tired. And at this time in his ministry, he may also have been really frustrated, even confused. At this point (Second Isaiah) the prophet has stepped into the odd paradox of our meeting – the paradox of preaching promise to the people.

Finally, Isaiah must have thought, I get to preach comfort and hope – no more harsh judgment. “Comfort, comfort my people”, says the Lord. “Speak tenderly to Jerusalem.” You’re going home. Your exile has ended. There will be a highway in the desert – a new Exodus. The glory of the Lord will be revealed. A word to sustain the weary. Thanks be to God! *Finally*, after all those difficult First Isaiah years – *finally* Isaiah was going to be popular! He would be welcomed. People would surely love *this* Word. This glorious, comforting, hopeful Word.

But that is not what happens. Isaiah proclaims God’s stirring and remarkable promises. But the people strike him on the back, pull out his beard, insult him and spit in his face. Isaiah’s extraordinary word of promise meets resistance and rejection.

We do not know exactly who persecutes him. Maybe it is the rulers of the empire who do not want Isaiah stirring up the exiles. “Don’t you dare give any hope to those refugees, Isaiah!” Or, maybe it is some of Isaiah’s own people. They have made peace with exile, they have become complacent, maybe co-opted. “Another Exodus? Are you kidding us? The last one took forty years. And we know what it is like back home. And we have finally settled in here!”

Or maybe it is those who have learned not to hope for too much. They are so beaten down they do not dare dream impossible dreams. That is just a setup for disappointment. “We’ll just settle for the

prose of the probable, Isaiah, rather than your poetry of the impossible.⁴ Leave us alone with your foolish, unrealistic visions. We've been duped too many times before, you ridiculous old man."

Strange that even good news can unsettle and disturb. That is what Isaiah is facing.

And that is what happened to Jesus as well. He proclaimed the best news imaginable: "Blessed are the poor", he announced. "Blessed are those who mourn." "The reign of God is at hand" – here and now. He healed the sick, cast out the demons. He raised the dead: "Come out!", he shouted to Lazarus. "Come out!" And Lazarus came out.

But, as with Isaiah, people struck Jesus on the back, pulled out his beard, insulted him, spit in his face, deserted him, and finally hung him out to die. His voice also grew tired, tired. Indeed, for preachers, Lent may be the story of that voice. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me", Jesus begins, quoting Isaiah. "He has anointed me to preach good news to poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind. To let the oppressed go free; to proclaim the jubilee year."

But, at the end, his voice is different, tired: "Let this cup pass from me." "Why have you forsaken me?" "It is finished." And then maybe a long, wordless moan. And he goes to sleep. Until God interrupts him too: "Wake up, Jesus. Wake up!"

Odd is it not? Even good news can lead to rejection; proclaiming gospel can wear you out. For even believers are often so captive by the powers of death that newness is unsettling, even threatening. "The threat of life", as Walter Brueggemann once put it.⁵ Many of us do not want let go of the old so that the new might be born – preachers included! "I am", we have to confess, as Johan Cilliers reminded us; not just "they are". We often pray like Augustine: "Make us new, O God, but not yet." The stone has been rolled away, but the tomb is so familiar – even comfortable. As our colleague Anna Carter Florence put it, the gospel "has always been more than the church can handle, even when it is the very thing the church prays for."⁶ Newness is scary. It is tempting as preachers just to roll over and go back to sleep.

But God keeps calling. God keeps calling Isaiah. God keeps calling Jesus. God keeps calling us. Maybe that call comes like an alarm clock in the morning. Or, maybe God calls through a deep conviction in our hearts that we just cannot shake. Or maybe it is a comment from a colleague at a conference or a visit to a place like Kayamandi. But God keeps calling: "Wake up! Wake up! I have a word for your tongue today." Our persistent and unmanageable God keeps on interrupting, keeps on unsettling, keeps on waking us up to preach another day.

Isaiah does not roll over and go back to sleep. Isaiah also does not just drag himself out of bed for another dreary day of preaching. Did you notice what the prophet does? He meditates. He prays. He rests – rests for a while in God. He reaffirms his dependence on God and he reclaims the faithfulness of God.

Indeed, I think Isaiah shares with us his daily morning meditation:

*The Lord helps me,
therefore I have not been disgraced;*

4 Webb, S.H. 1993. A Hyperbolic Imagination: Theology and the Rhetoric of Excess. *Theology Today*, 50 (April): 67.

5 Brueggemann, W. 1996. *The Threat of Life: Sermons on Pain, Power, and Weakness*. Charles L Campbell (ed.). Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress.

6 Florence, A.C. 2007. *Preaching as Testimony*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 118.

*The Lord helps me, therefore I have set my face like flint,
and I know I shall not be put to shame;
the one who vindicates me is near.
Who will contend with me?
Let us stand up together.
Who are my adversaries?
Let them confront me.
It is the Lord who helps me;
Who will declare me guilty?
Amen.*

And this is not just Isaiah's prayer. It is the morning prayer of all of us who take up the preaching office. And it is not always a grand, joyful statement of confidence. Some mornings, maybe it is. But often I think it is a prayer the prophet clings to when she is exhausted – when nobody is listening and she aches to discern a fitting word. At times it is a prayer the prophet repeats at dawn just to get enough energy for the day. I think of Luther waking up and reminding himself: "I have been baptised." "I have been baptised." "I have been baptised." God stands by God's word.

That is the prayer Isaiah prays each morning:

*The Lord helps me,
therefore I have not been disgraced;
The Lord helps me, therefore I have set my face like flint,
and I know I shall not be put to shame;
the one who vindicates me is near.
Who will contend with me?
Let us stand up together.
Who are my adversaries?
Let them confront me.
It is the Lord who helps me;
Who will declare me guilty?
Amen.*

Morning after morning after morning, Isaiah prays that prayer. He rests for a while in the faithfulness of God.

Then he gets out of bed – occasionally, maybe he hops out of bed.

He takes a deep breath.

He tends the wounds on his back and washes his spit-covered face.

And he goes out to preach another day.