In Search of Meaning.
Preaching within the context of a “Post-Apartheid” South African Society

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Declaration:

I, the undersigned, Sharon Davis, hereby declare that the work contained in this assignment is my own original work, and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

Signed: ....................................................

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ABSTRACT

The search for meaning, as a universal human quest, seeks to answer questions pertaining to the purpose in life. Preaching, as an ecclesiastical communicative tool, should be a platform from which to address such universal concerns. But how relevant are contemporary pulpit messages in light of this ongoing search and in light of the suffering experienced by many in our South African context with its unique history and ongoing challenges?

Revisiting concepts such as meaning, hope and community are foundational components in our contemporary deliberations of the intention and practice of preaching today. If the homiletical intention is to instill hope, establish community and address humanities questions related to embracing the abundance in abundant life, then the praxis thereof should demonstrate a commitment to the relevance of people's struggles. In the context of a post-apartheid South Africa, these questions are more pronounced as people experience the ongoing effects of poverty, prejudice, injustice and are confronted with the HIV/AIDS pandemic. For preaching to remain relevant it would need to extend its boundaries from the pulpit to the community. It will need to understand the plight of its people by addressing the questions that communities are asking, rather than providing messages far removed from humanities current experiences.

In order to maintain this balance of hope, it will require an evaluation of the emphasis placed on representing both the social and spiritual aspects of the gospel. Social, with its focus on following the example of Christ on earth, and Spiritual, with its emphasis on both a realized and eschatological hope. Embracing this holistic message of the gospel should inherently contribute to personal and communal transformation as it is a message of good news for physical, emotional, socio-economic, psychological and spiritual realities. The language employed in this ongoing commitment requires constant renewal in order to synchronize the needs of the people with the message of hope. A message that is needed, longed for and inherently meaningful.
OPSOMMING

Die soeke na betekenis, na die beantwoording van vrae met betrekking tot die doel in die lewe, is 'n universele verskynsel. Prediking, as 'n medium van kerklike kommunikasie, behoort ook sodanige universele vrae te adresseer. Die vraag is egter hoe toepaslik boodskappe vanaf ons preekstoele is in die lig van hierdie voortdurende soeke van die mens, en in die besonder ook in die lig van ervarings van swaarkry, soos beleef deur tale mense in ons unieke Suid-Afrikaanse konteks?

Konsepte soos betekenis, hoop en gemeenskap is deurslaggewende komponente in ons nadenke oor eietydse gestaltes en praktyke van prediking. Indien die homiletiese voorneme is om hoop, gemeenskap en menslike vrae na betekenis te adresseer, moet die praktyk daarvan duidelike aanduidings gee dat dit die kwessie van kontekstuele relevansie uits terneer ernstig opneem. In die konteks van 'n pos-apartheid Suid-Afrika, word bogenoemde bestaansvrae gekonsentreer in mense se belewenis van die effekte van armoede, partydigheid, ongeregtigheid, en HIV/AIDS. Vir prediking om toepaslik te bly sal die dichotomie tussen preekstoel en gemeenskap deurbreek moet word. Dit impliseer dat mense se lyding die tregter vorm waardeur prediking gegiet word, eerder as dat abstrakte en irrelevante boodskappe gelewer word, wat ver verwys is van die werklikhede van mense se huidige ondervindings.

Ten einde betekenisvol te kan preek, moet beide die sosiale en geestelik aspekte van die evangelie as eenheid verkondig word. Christus se aardse bestaan onderstreep die belang van die sosiale reikwydte van die evangelie, en sy beklemtoning van 'n hoop vir vandag en die toekoms dui op die geestelike dimensie van hierdie sosiale reikwydte. Hierdie holistiese boodskap van die evangelie sluit alles in, vanaf persoonlike tot sosiale transformasie, omdat dit 'n boodskap van goeie nuus is vir fisieke, emosionele, sosio-ekonomiese, sielkundige en geestelike realiteite. Die taal wat gebruik word in hierdie verkondiging vereis konstante vernuwing ten einde 'n voortdurende sinkronisering van die behoeftes van mense met die boodskap van hoop te bewerkstellig.
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CHAPTER 1

1.1 RESEARCH TITLE

‘In Search of Meaning. Preaching within the context of a “Post-Apartheid” Society’.

1.2 INTRODUCTION

Within the discipline of Practical Theology, a four phase approach to a research study will ensue in this research discussion. Following an introductory brief in chapter one, a detailed discussion in Chapters two and three will explore, in the context of an interdisciplinary approach, the ongoing universal search for meaning. The Post-Apartheid social context has been selected as a framework in which to develop this discussion in light of the significant difference that preaching can make within the lives of contemporary South Africans in their quest for meaning. Following an introduction of the hypothesis, the fourth chapter will focus on the normative research phase in which theological and biblical perspectives will be explored. Recommendations are made in chapter five which will contribute to the value that an integrative approach to preaching will have on society’s enduring existential quest (Dingemans 1996:92).

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

If, as some suggest, preaching is about encountering God in light of spiritual renewal and moral wholeness in the context of community, how effective are our ecclesiastical pulpit efforts in aligning the purpose of preaching with addressing humanities ongoing need for meaning and purpose? (Proctor 1992:10). In the context of South Africa’s historical past, how effective are we in addressing the spiritual and social hurts, needs and desires for a hopeful and meaningful existence? In light of these pertinent considerations it remains essential for ecclesiastical traditions to continuously review and deliberate over the relevant balance it maintains in its commitment to the Biblical imperative to preach the
good news, and its commitment to communities in their quest for meaning, truth and wholeness.

The universal search for meaning and purpose has become a dominant discussion in the face of forever challenging discoveries within scientific, philosophical and religious discourse. The church is called upon to respond to these existential questions and is beckoned to validate its beliefs and doctrines, specifically within the contexts of Biblical anthropology and the Doctrine of God. Furthermore, it remains called upon to respond to the immanent needs of society in order to remain a legitimate voice and presence in the world today (Cottingham 2003:11).

If meaning and purpose are shaped by the conditions, challenges and demands of society (Morris 1992:16) the church needs then to explore how meaning is shaped, formed and communicated within its tradition. Commitment to how it communicates messages of hope and purpose for the individual and collective need to remain priority if ecclesiastical relevance is to be maintained. Thus, in exploring the homiletical intention the church should be able to integrate the practice of preaching with humanities reception of this proclamation of a gospel that is indeed good news.

Within South Africa, specifically, a call for understanding and meaning persist in light of the overwhelming social, economic and political needs. In looking at post-apartheid South Africa it will be necessary to formulate an understanding of its uniqueness in terms of these specific problems. Within this discussion, concerns related to poverty, HIV/AIDS, and general humanistic injustices will be looked at in terms of past and present suffering with a focus on a realized hope.

It remains the objective of this research to demonstrate the significant difference that preaching is able to contribute in creating, establishing and maintaining meaning. The quest of humanity for meaning is universal. However, with the complexity of the dynamic social, economic and political changes within every community, the need for relevancy in preaching calls for it to address the suffering of specific social issues. The aim of this research thesis is therefore to demonstrate that preaching should embody an integrated approach to both the spiritual and social needs of communities (Wilson 1995:28). In
addressing these social concerns preaching must contribute to the process of establishing hope and addressing injustice. It is this alignment between the purpose and practice of preaching that remains central to this discussion.

1.4 HYPOTHESIS

This research thesis challenges the purpose and practice of preaching in light of humanities search for meaning and purpose. If the South African context is considered a unique framework for deliberations around meaning in light of the relevancies of the realities of hope, injustice and suffering, then preaching should demonstrate a commitment to reconciling the social and spiritual dimensions of the gospel.

1.5 METHODOLOGY

The quest for meaning is an ongoing and universal one. Throughout the ages Philosophy, Science and Religion have sought to address this quest through the offerings of questions and answers alike. In as much as this search is a universal phenomenon each culture, age and worldview bring with it specific challenges to the relevance of the search. In light of this, the South African context has been selected as one in which this quest for meaning is unique, particularly as it is related to addressing issues of injustice, suffering and hope. In light of its past, South Africa is now faced with the challenges of understanding and articulating this search within the context of healing, hope and reconciliation. Preaching is considered as a modality that can and should address this search.

If preaching is to be good news, it should offer to this communal search both the social and spiritual components of the gospel. In light of this, preaching should be cautioned against a reductionist approach to the presentation of the gospel with a focus on the spiritualisation of biblical and theological principles, as was evidenced in our country’s history. A Christological study will seek to demonstrate this holistic approach in light of
the kingdom perspective. A focus on communication will ensue in order to evaluate the role that language plays in creating or hindering such messages.

According to Dingemans, (1996:92) research within the discipline of Practical Theology has shifted towards a more ‘practice-directed’ approach. He outlines a descriptive four phase approach to the nature of this research exploration with a primary concern beginning with a focus on an interdisciplinary description of an analysis of the present situation. The second phase, which succeeds the initial description, is an attempt to provide a detailed explanation of the situation. It is within this phase that the integration of various social sciences with theological reflections will assist the analysis and critique of the research problem. In light of the above mentioned two phases, the following research study will begin with an identification of humanity’s existential quest through the interdisciplinary discourse of philosophical, anthropological, psychological, and sociological perspectives. The Post-Apartheid South African context is a dynamic and unique situation in which the present needs arising from continuous socio-economic struggles call for an engaging response from the church. Chapters two and three therefore seek not only to engage with this universal search for meaning, but also aim to give a comprehensive explanation of the South African challenge in which concepts of hope, meaning, language and purpose specifically relate to how preaching may address the suffering and meaninglessness within communities at large. Chapter four, thus follows Dingemans’ third phase of research which may be termed as the ‘normative phase’. Herein lies a descriptive presentation of theological and biblical perspectives of homiletical intention and practice. It should be acknowledged at this stage, that the author’s personal theological and social partiality has the ability to shape the formulation of the research, in terms of interest and critique. As a white English speaking female, with an Evangelical background, the frame of reference has lead to deliberations of the contemporary context in light of historical influences of the church, particularly the suburban middle class church in South African. For this reason the contributions of this research to be found in chapter five, and which is referred to as recommendations by Dingemans, highlights the need for the integration of social and spiritual perspectives of the gospel in order to establish messages of hope and purpose in life for the present and the future and to create a sense of belonging with our community of faith.
1.5.1 The Homiletical Practice

A focus on the theological and biblical perspectives of preaching is an essential part of this discussion. An understanding of the motivation, practice and effects of preaching upon communities needs to be challenged in light of humanities search for relevant and meaningful contributions to life. In light of the homiletical intention and practice it is evident that preaching is not only able to, but is also called upon to make a difference in humanities search for meaning.

This research thesis will involve a non-empirical study in providing an analysis of the concepts of meaning and its interrelatedness with life purpose, hope and suffering. It seeks to clarify and elaborate upon the various perspectives of homiletical theory and intention. Through secondary textual data it aims to explore homiletical intention and practice in its intended and potential contribution to creating meaning and purpose. An understanding of the term ‘relevance’ remains essential to this discussion.

The research will follow a multi-disciplinary approach, with a primary focus on practical theology as it engages with community development and missiological understandings. It will also include perspectives from the human sciences, anthropology and explore the existential questioning of philosophy. Implicit within this analyses is a focus on the need to address the use of language, hence the inclusion of a linguistic analysis as it pertains to the process of how language is involved in the creation and formulation of meaning.

In addressing the contemporary quest for meaning in the context of suffering and hope, considerations of both modern and post-modern approaches to meta-theories will be included. This is of particular importance as it relates to the concept of meaning within the homiletical discipline.
With specific reference to content the paper will begin with a focus on exploring homiletical intention with particular reference to Biblical and Christological perspectives. Within this framework a dialogical approach will ensue regarding Preacher and Preaching, Kingdom Perspectives, Reductionistic approaches to proclamation and the holistic emphasis on pulpit content in terms of addressing the social and spiritual needs of humanity. It is within this theoretical framework that specific attention will be given to the description and definition of the following terms: relevance, hope, meaning and language.

1.5.1.1 Relevance

Within the context of shifting worldviews it remains essential to any discussion to consider the impact of theoretical reflections on historical traditions, discoveries and the resultant challenges it presents. In light of this it would seem as though relevance itself is a relative concept – forever accommodating changes both in thinking and practice. This said, it does however remain essential to consider unchanging anthropological needs such as our engagement with making meaning of and in life. Homiletical endeavours should therefore remain attuned to the inherent and circumstantial needs of congregants. With postmodern considerations of truth’s relativity ecclesiastical traditions are challenged to present the ‘good news’ in a relevant manner that not only impacts upon our eschatological perspectives, but impacts an embodied experience of meaningful existence.

1.5.1.2 Hope

Preaching as an event of hope will need to address traditional and historical homiletical intentions. Traditional theology, which describes authentic hope in terms of the cross and the resurrection, uses the terms ‘grace’ and ‘judgment’ (Wilson 1995:107). This discussion needs to be integrated with an emphasis on both its spiritual and social applications. In light of this, authentic Christian hope is neither an over optimistic approach that is characterised by an emphasis on the eschatological promise and the
elevation of the glory of the cross, nor the more pessimistic approach of hope which reflects the despair of sin and helplessness of humanity (Thiselton 1995:24).

Hope is not only to be understood as a cognitive attitude of expectation for favourable outcomes. Instead it may also be described as an emotional commitment to the idea of the power of goodness. (Cottingham 2003:68). In its response to this, preaching is to provide an integrative approach to the proclamation of hope with a concern for social and spiritual wholeness.

1.5.1.3 Meaning

Questions concerning the meaning and purpose of life are both philosophical and religious questions. Modernity has lead to the influence of a more rational scientific approach to the existential quest as opposed to a mere spiritual quest, yet it remains difficult to separate these two areas of questioning and thought (Cottingham 2003:2).

Preaching therefore will need to take into consideration a multi-disciplinary approach which would include scientific, philosophical and religious discussions around meaning. The barriers to our existential search therefore include deliberations around the limitations of scientific reasoning, the spiritual explications of evil and suffering, and the philosophical aspects of futility and fragility.

1.5.1.4 Language

It is through the perspective of preaching as a communicative event that the possible challenges of language as it is used to convey meaning become evident. Language does not only refer to communication or self-expression, it extends beyond rational and romantic ideas in that it aims to acknowledge the mystery of words in our human consciousness. It is evident that social language embodies our cultural norms and practices. Words therefore shape our worldviews, they support our value systems and they formalise our often unacknowledged beliefs by which we choose to live accordingly.
It may be stated that through language we are able to learn to think about the world, our social behaviour, and ourselves (Buttrick 1988:180). If preaching is to be responsible in its articulation of the message of the gospel it will have to consider its careful selection of words, with an intention of establishing a sense of hope within the community. Preaching therefore as a communicative event will be a commitment to a process of conveying both cognitive and connotative meaning to its audience as it is aware of their needs to be visually, emotionally and mentally stimulated. But above all preaching which seeks to engage the community will be able to develop a language which reflects a theological and contemporary understanding of the context which will emphasise, in word and deed the message of the gospel, and will demonstrate kingdom principles of justice, equality and peace.

1.6 DELIMITATION

Humanity’s existential quest is an extensive study that spans a variety of academic disciplines, including philosophy, science, religious studies, and psychology to name but a few. However, the primary focus of this research thesis is not a study of Existentialism nor is it a philosophical endeavour, but rather a Practical Theological discussion with a focus on the interdisciplinary contributions of anthropology, sociology, philosophy, psychology and theology with the aim of evaluating the homiletical dimensions of theory and praxis in order to expound the problem of the meaningfulness of life in relation to the specific concepts of hope, suffering and injustice. The South African context has been selected as a specific reference for this study with a primary focus limited to two significant concerns for South Africa, namely poverty and HIV/AIDS. In light of this, the research problem is developed in which it is suggested that the ecclesiastical discipline of preaching is able to contribute significantly through its theological and biblical perspective of an integrated approach to the gospel. The purpose, then, of this research thesis is to challenge how preaching as a communicative event is able to convey meaning to our contemporary Post Apartheid South African context amidst the pain and suffering.
1.6.1 Integration

The research title ‘In Search of Meaning: Preaching in a Post-Apartheid South Africa’ has developed the flow of three specific movements in which to demonstrate the effect of preaching in the South African context. The first movement commences with developing an understanding of the concept ‘meaning’ as it relates to humanity’s existential quest. It seeks to address fundamental concepts which assist in creating a foundation for the premise of this study, which is largely concerned with how South Africans are able to make sense of their current circumstances, as the second movement. The proclamation of the gospel, the third movement, involves the declaration of hope and a message of ‘good news’ and if this is the case, it will be necessary then to develop an understanding of the biblical, historical and contemporary contributions of preaching.

1.7 RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION

It is the aim of this thesis to challenge the relevance and effectiveness of preaching, particularly as it relates to the issues concerning injustice, suffering, and hope. Our countries sermonal history, particularly in western suburban ecclesiastical communities, has run the risk of presenting an exclusively eschatological approach to life and salvation. This has resulted in many questioning the relevance that practical theology offers. In light of this there remains the challenge of presenting the whole gospel, with focus upon the challenges that are faced within the realities of social, familial, political, economic and spiritual life. Preaching, as a meaningful communication tool, should be challenged to consider how content and rhetoric are used to address messages of hope and meaning within the realities of crisis and suffering.
CHAPTER 2

2. IN SEARCH OF MEANING

The existential quest is a universal one, recognisable as a timeless journey. The concepts of life, meaning and purpose have been celebrated, questioned and debated throughout history, yet there remain unique aspects that are particularly relevant to contemporary Western Society. (Singer 1992:4).

Life appears to be a contradiction of experiences - on the one hand, a blessing and on the other hand a curse. From an optimistic view of life we drive towards self-preservation, and with energy and enthusiasm we envision our dreams, we strive to accomplish our goals, and we even delight in the joyous pain of activity and growth. This is an indication of the depth of our hunger for life in which we will fight against death in order to live. There are however, times when we view our life from a pessimistic perspective in that we exist to suffer. We become overwhelmed by the futility of our dreams, and our striving for unattainable goals leaves us with a sense of emptiness, leaving us feeling alone in a world of absurdity (Christian 1981:6).

It is evident that the question pertaining to the meaning of life is a difficult question to address. It is one that questions the interpretation of what we understand ‘meaning’ to be and often leads to further questions rather than answers. Taylor states that despite this difficult process which may often be perceived as futile in its ongoing questioning, any reflective person will indeed acknowledge its importance. In a sense it is a question that seeks to have a significant answer (Hanfling 1987:40). This raises an important awareness for the Christian faith as it is not a context or community that is exempt from addressing the questions and answers of this universal search.
2.1 PHILOSOPHICAL, SCIENTIFIC AND RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE

2.1.1 Philosophical reflections on the universal existential quest

The word ‘philosophy’ derives from the Greek words ‘philein’, meaning to love; and ‘sophia’ meaning wisdom. The philosopher is, therefore, the lover of wisdom. In the search for wisdom, the philosopher will admit that to be wise is in essence the possession of understanding and skill in order to make mature judgments about the use of knowledge within the context of our daily lives. There is an interdependent relationship between philosophy and the freedom of inquiry as neither are able to exist without the other. Our ability to inquire is therefore founded within our possession of freedom. But if our freedom to inquire has become too limited, then it is freedom that becomes our primary goal in life.

Our western heritage has been founded upon the two great traditions of the Greco-Roman and Judaic worldviews. Although these two traditions have appeared to harmonise a coherent worldview there remains a few Greek and Judeo-Christian beliefs which remain incompatible with one another, and in our search for meaning the approaches taken by each one differs considerably. The Greek commitment is to reasoned inquiry within the nature of our existence. In contrast the Judeo-Christian commitment has held to religious beliefs which rest beyond our human ability of understanding (Christian 1984:20). Throughout history the varying definitions of philosophy have been influenced by different contextual concerns, societal changes and technological advancements. Therefore philosophy has been shaped by the alternative responses to the shifting areas of interest, for example the importance of conduct, ethics and morality, or the nature of the external world and the existence of differing realities (Blackstone 1971:9). It can be stated that philosophy then includes the analysis and clarification of concepts and beliefs which cover all the dynamics of human existence and which are fundamental to all aspects of life whether it be scientific, political, ethical, theological or artistic in nature. But if philosophy is to be viewed as a discipline which is concerned with the quest of meaning in life, and if it pertains to a more general concern for those aspects which interrelate with humanity’s needs, desires and questionings, it has to then be concerned with the practical realities faced by humanity. It can, therefore be concluded that analysis and clarification is the process in which philosophical knowledge is obtained in the effort to discover truth about humanity, society and the world
with the underlying hope and intention of bringing change to these interrelated relationships. Classical philosophers, as a result of their search for wisdom, were able to adopt various and differing positions or theories, despite the conflict with one another. The ideal philosophical procedure was always sought to be an impartial analysis of a particular concern despite the differences in thought, beliefs or approaches, therefore many philosophers were atheists while others were Christian, politically some held to democratic perspectives while others were totalitarians. This emphasizes that philosophy requires more than merely expounding ideologies but rather calls for a critical examination and evaluation of all relevant evidence. It is to include not only theories about human existence, and about human behaviour, whether morally, politically or religiously, but also epistemological theories concerning the various human discourse and knowledge claims as it is evidenced in both classical and contemporary philosophical thought (Blackstone 1971:5). It can be concluded that philosophy involves the perspectives and theories about human existence, the world and reality, the use of empirical research available from the scientific disciplines, the reflection and analysis of the nature and status of knowledge and other various discourses. In our search for meaning we may have to live within the tension of limited answers, with the adaptability of changing our opinions and attitudes as we encounter new developments in research, but it is a call to remain critical and reflective of the continuous cycle of our ongoing questions in light of our human dignity as rational and emotive beings.

2.1.1.1 The Absurdity of Life

Within the recognition of these philosophical and existential perspectives, there is the assertion that life as a whole does not inherently have specific meaning, therefore each person actively constructs meaning for him/her self. Existentialists will thus argue that there is no ultimate meaning that is externally derived. The absurdity of life therefore refers to the abstract theory about life rather than to the actuality of genuine life. In principle life is just a matter of chaos and disorder and meaning is to be imposed on life, and not built into it (Baumeister 1991:3).
Within the context of this thinking we are constantly faced with the irresistible question of ‘why’, when searching for meaning in life. Although we would be comforted by knowing that life is truly meaningful and in all things there is a specific purpose for our existence, we cannot be tempted to satisfy our need of not knowing with paraphrased answers which only address the superficiality of life, as this will simply lead to absurdity. This is the proposed problem which lies at the centre of a nihilistic existential perspective, which arises from ultimately viewing the universe as meaningless and humanity as absurd (Christian 1984:10).

In contrast to the above perspective with its focus on absurdity, there is the perspective that affirms that our modern lives are full of meaning. On the one hand our lives have appeared to be saturated with meaning, whether generated through language, information, communication, media, symbols, norms and institutions, yet the confusion that we face today rests in how we are to assemble meaning from all the various messages we receive.

The concept of existential angst is a significant one in this regard as it illustrates for us the universality of humanity’s anxiety. The essence of this view is that we either discover that life indeed has no meaning, or we lose sight of the meaning that is already there. Angst is therefore the name given to the fear we have of either of these options. McGrath summarises in this way:

> Angst reflects a deeply rooted fear of meaninglessness and pointlessness, a sense of the utter futility of life, even sheer despair at the bewildering things that threaten to reduce us to nothing more than a statistic – ultimately a mortality statistic … and while it seems trite to talk about the meaning of life it is a question that lingers at the edges of reflective human existence (1993:43).

This is a point of entry for the gospel as the task remains to bridge the divide between the hope of the gospel and the hopelessness of our search.
2.1.2 The Search for Meaning in Reason

It is evident that the difficulty in defining philosophy rests in one sense with the view that it has no direct subject matter, in contrast with many other specialised disciplines. Physics, chemistry and geology, for example, have restricted sets of phenomena or objectives. It would appear that philosophy then is concerned with just about everything and it is this lack of limitations that distinguishes it from other specialised sciences. The questions and explanations of philosophy are of such a general or universal nature that they cannot be resolved or answered merely by scientific methods. Originally though, the ancient Greek philosophers combined philosophy and science as one discipline. At this time there were no highly developed scientific methods or the existence of specialised scientific disciplines. Philosophy’s all embracing discipline thus was divided when the development of new techniques in observation, measurement, and testing were applied to certain sciences. In one since we have witnessed even further divisions within these disciplines themselves as technological advancements have lead to the new fields of study such as microbiology and biochemistry (Blackstone 1971:2).

In our existential quest it is evident that not only is there a close relation between science and philosophy, there is also the interrelated dialogue between science and religion. Agnostic perceptions challenge religious beliefs pertaining to the ways in which we ascribe meaning to life. Modern science may be viewed as following the principle that every person should seek to find reason for the ‘faith’ which is within them. This principle expresses that when faced with intellectual challenges we are to seek reason, to the extent that no other considerations should be regarded. Intellectual considerations however are only validated as conclusions when they are demonstrable.

Within our scientifically ordered world there remain aspects that transcend scientific reasoning. The question, ‘why’ is repeatedly asked within the realm of apparent gaps between what science deems to answer and the consequent limitations thereof. Christianity has traditionally discredited science through those gaps, rather than using science as a rational springboard for providing answers to questions about this ordered world. After all, our quest for meaning is often rationally informed. (McGrath 1993:38)
The church, in this regard, cannot merely affirm faith principles as the only way, as we are created thinking, rational beings.

The seeming divide between the discipline of science and the realm of religion has resulted in many a debate. A scientific analytical and factual approach to life does not diminish the opportunities to enter into religious discussion or even diminish opportunities to hold to religious beliefs. However, the past and the present testify to the irreconcilable differences that many scientists have held in that it is not possible to profess what science cannot prove. The primary concerns with a scientific quest to our existential search involves questions about the origin of lifestyle which has lead to interdisciplinary discussions on evolution. In his article ‘Has Science eliminated God?’, Alistair McGrath discusses the scientific reasoning behind atheism and challenges these presuppositions. McGrath as an Evangelical theologian with a background in science, is credibly able to provide perspective on the contemporary scientific discussions concerning the debates in science, atheism and religion (McGrath 2005:118). A fundamental concern of science is that religion asserts its beliefs in faith, which is a movement away from a factual, evidence-based search for truth. Truth therefore should be found in explicit proof and there is opposition against the concept of mysticism or anonymity that associates itself with faith. The following quote demonstrates the challenge of this unity:

We are often uncomfortable in the presence of mystery. We feel safer when faith is confined within dogmatic formulations and tidy theories. But our attempts to control and manage God cost us dearly. Our sense of wonder is exiled, our faith begins suffocating from thick layers of dull familiarity and easy answers, and our lives are emptied of surprise (Nouwen 2001:32)

2.1.3 Meaning and the Search for God

In the search for meaning of life, we are attempting to articulate analogous questions about the world. It is a search for understanding our present reality, and an attempt to decipher the reasons behind who is ultimately in control of our fate. Singer states that theories about God are often secondary concerns and that questions about God’s essence, His omniscience and omnipotence should be contained to theological
discussions. Thus, to argue about the attributes of God is to engage in discussions that are of minor importance to most people. He concludes by saying that these discussions are more about what we receive by affirming them in terms of them meeting our desire to reassure ourselves about an ultimate source of goodness in the universe, and that we are valued, and that there is an after-life (Singer 1992:24).

On the one hand this discussion is debatable particularly in light of suffering and injustice, for it is at these times that people question the existence of God and His involvement in our world. On the other hand, it serves as a warning and reminds us that there is a need for relevance. To dismiss the theological reflection as not being the primary concern of most individuals is stating that the Christian faith does not focus on matters pertaining to the concerns of communities.

There is the awareness of the continuous search for faith in God, or a god, and it is a search that seeks evidence of His presence. Christians hold to the belief that God has brought our very existence into being for the purpose of living in eternal communion with Him. Therefore it would appear that our creator would do everything possible to prevent our doubt concerning His existence. It would also mean that allowing us to struggle in a religious ambiguous environment would not reflect on the actions of a loving God. Therefore we should be able to expect that God would seek to alleviate this deep religious concern of a God who appears to be hidden from his very creation (Morris 1992:87).

This phenomenon of the hiddenness of God appears to be one of the most troubling challenges for the Christian faith. Many of the great mystical writings of the Western tradition have been consumed by this unavoidable topic. Brueggemann, for example, describes the concept of the ‘hiddenness’ of God, as a perspective evident in the Old Testament. It was through an interactive faith of questioning, searching and insisting that the Nation of Israel’s relationship developed with God and it was always out of life’s experiences that the series of questioning arose. (Brueggemann 1997:318). This perspective of the ‘hiddenness of God’ in Judaism, refers to the indirect and not fully visible actions of God, which were contrasted with the known and visible ways in which God had so evidently displayed his presence within the life of their community. As the
people of God, the Israelites were not able to interpret the ceasing of God’s visible actions as his disengagement in their daily life, nor did they affirm that he had removed his presence. For this reason the God of Israel, whose righteousness the nation depended upon, meant that they would also be expectant of God to intervene on their behalf, and would do so by demonstrating justice, equity and reliability.

It was through times of ‘hiddenness’ that we are able to recognise how the Israelites language of God altered. No longer did words portray the powerful demonstration of God’s mighty acts of justice and retribution, instead the shift towards Gods acts within the community’s daily life in terms of his concern for governance, order, and preservation were displayed (Brueggemann 1997:334). It was through this perspective of hiddenness that we are able to acknowledge the Israelites celebration of God’s generous, creative and faithful governance for them. This association therefore for us today, may call for a shift, not only in our language but also in our perspectives and interpretations of how we describe God during times whereby we lack the ability to recognise God’s visible action in our communities. Preaching is therefore able to encourage, strengthen and support the commitment and perseverence of the community during these times, and to celebrate moments of God’s more silent provisions.

The problem of evil described as the single greatest intellectual problem for religious belief, is closely related to this search for a hidden God. It questions how an all-loving and powerful God could permit creation to experience suffering and pain to the extent that we both historically and currently witness. C.S Lewis affirms this view through the following question:

If God were good, he would wish to make his creatures perfectly happy, and if God were almighty he would be able to do what he wished. But the creatures are not happy. Therefore God lacks either the goodness or power or both. This is the problem of pain in its simplest form. (Lewis 1943:14)

This association of the hiddenness and mystery of God in light of the prevalence of evil in the world raises many fundamental questions in discussions around the meaning and purpose of life. It questions how we are to justify God’s goodness in a world that endures
great suffering and pain. (Morris 1992:89). This very challenge often questions the credibility of the Christian faith and it is here that the theological consideration around theodicy is helpful.

2.1.3.1 Theodicy

In light of this magnitude of suffering in the world, it would appear essential that preaching address the fundamental theological concerns of the sovereignty of God and the presence of suffering in the world. This focus on Theodicy has traditionally concentrated on attempting to defend God against accusations by trying to demonstrate the meaningfulness of God's activity in the world. (Dorman 1995:105) According to the philosophical nature of theodicy there is recognition of this rational attempt to explain who God is in light of the evil and suffering present in our world (Louw 2000:21). Yet perhaps we are not as much seeking to justify God, but rather understand why certain things happen. And in light of this the problem of theodicy is highlighted, as it is an inexplicable reality to understand these dynamics outside of a faith that knows the limits of human reason. Additionally, it remains a great challenge for the gospel to be preached to those for whom experience has made it obvious that God does not rule.

Karl Barth, in this regard, has contributed significantly to this contemporary discussion, particularly through his work on revisiting Luther’s theology of the cross which included a particular focus on the ‘Suffering God’. The central theological debate in discussing suffering creates this tension between two fundamental attributes of God, namely sovereignty (power) and solidarity (pathos) and the difficulty lies in seeking to reconcile these two attributes. In support of God’s solidarity in our suffering, and in accordance to his goodness and love, this immanent experience of our ‘suffering God’ may question his immanent sovereignty. On the other hand, an emphasis on God’s sovereignty and judgement distances God from our circumstances and alienates us from his presence. (Louw 2000:11).

In the context of suffering, it is our faith that experiences intense pressure as suffering confronts the reality of life and often contradicts the beliefs which we hold. What surfaces
in this regard are thoughts associated again with the apparent absence of God. This leads us into another set of questions which not only challenges the presence and providence of God, but questions God’s ability and willingness to be identified with our suffering. For this reason, suffering leaves us with an overwhelming emotional response and the all-consuming feelings of isolation and helplessness. The expectation of solidarity expressed in the engagement of God’s presence is exchanged for an existence of meaninglessness and a sense of being lost. Suffering then also challenges our theological understanding of God’s providence, which raises questions about his purpose, plan and will for our lives. It is a call for us to interpret God’s action, supremacy and guidance in history as we search for meaning and understanding of our destiny and purpose (Louw 2000:118).

The tension that rises within us here is a result of the conflict we perceive between what we believe to be true and the contradictory feelings we experience. This conflict is evident when the content of our faith contradicts what we actually experience in our daily lives (Louw 2000:117). A significant homiletical challenge remains not only in this raising of awareness but in affirming the need of addressing this tension. If preaching is to assist us in our communication and act as a channel for hope, it will need to address our faith content in light of our circumstances. This leads us to acknowledge the need for preaching’s relevance and the need to be theological and socially aware of the implications we face in suffering.

2.1.4 Meaning as the Fulfillment of Human Need

The concept of understanding the basis of human ‘need’ is an essential one as people are motivated to find ways of meeting needs and desire in various ways. From a psychological perspective the discipline of Logotherapy, with its focus on the meaning of human existence, claims that striving to find meaning is the primary motivation for one’s life (Frankl 1984:85). There are three central needs to which Logotherapy ascribes which address our search for meaning. These needs are presented as foundational in humanity’s quest for meaning. The first of these needs focuses on the process of work or
the completion of a task. The second includes considerations of experience and encounter, while the third is presented in an understanding within the context of suffering. (Frankl 1984:116). Braumeister supports these psychological underpinnings in his presentation of four basic needs, central to meaning. These basic human needs includes a focus on purpose, value, efficacy and self-worth. A person who is able to sufficiently address these needs would appear more likely to experience a sense of meaning. (Baumeister 1991:32). Our concern however does not rest with the numerical representation of how many of our needs are being met within a particular framework, instead we are to recognise the contributions that these central needs bring to our search for meaning and thus enhance our endeavours.

It remains evident today that religion is an important source of meaning in life for many people, reflected in the obvious fact that nearly all known societies have religious faiths. However, it also remains evident that many people appear to live very meaningful lives with little or no religious influence. Religion does not seem to offer a meaningful perspective on life for some, yet at the same time it is apparent that many may well find a great deal of meaning within the religious persuasion. Yet religion seems to remain only one way in which to address the search for meaning. Many focus their search toward obtaining financial gain, many choose entertainment and the experience of the now to direct their search and many look toward relationships to fulfill the emptiness of life’s journey. This said, it would seem that moments of crisis challenge the sustainability of these appeared relevancies. (Baumeister 1991:31). This proposes a very real challenge for preachers today. Our contemporary society reflects an apparent inability for religion to fulfill people’s search for meaning, yet this also presents an opportunity to evaluate the means in which people are finding meaning and the processes by which these inherent needs are being met. The church needs to re-evaluate how they are contemporarily packaging the gospel in order to meet humanity where they are at. A focus on the eschatological answers to the search for eternal meaning are short lived in light of grave suffering in the world today. The language employed by ecclesiastical communities needs to be reconsidered as age old jargon seems to have become superficial lifestyle formulas, lacking meaning and depth. Traditional Christian jargon, whether encapsulated in a Scripture verse, or taken from a preachers sermon has led us to a place where we stop questioning the significance of statements made. We are told and in turn tell others – just
believe, just trust, just pray, as if the “just” prefix holds within it the power and guarantee for overcoming our struggle. (Bakker 2006) Challenges of this nature are essential if preaching is to remain a relevant agent of meaning and change.

How does preaching, then, address the perceived lack of need for religious influence in the search for meaning if the church is perceived to be part of the problem. How does it address the same search for those within the context of the Christian faith, whose quest for meaning is as pronounced as those without the church?

2.1.5 Meaning – A Communal Quest

Our sense of making meaning in life is closely linked with our need to belong. This focus on togetherness and the need to connect is demonstrated through our overt avoidance of solitary confinement, exile, isolation and loneliness. In fact, these have served as forms of punishment within societal frameworks. It therefore remains essential to our deliberations around the meaning of and in life to take cognizance of the significance of connection, togetherness, belonging and communality.

Our need for belonging may be argued from anthropological, biological, psychological and sociological perspectives but it is culture that essentially provides frameworks enabling togetherness. The role of language is significant in this regard as it enhances or diminishes communal living. (Baumeister 1991:15). We can therefore affirm that meaning is to be found in shared experience.

The dynamics of ‘belonging’ however are faced with the challenging reality of contemporary societies composition. Each individual member of society belongs to a wide range of differing institutions where social and cultural aspects have specific customs and norms that shape public life. For this reason, each person is influenced by decisions made on various levels within the construction of a society. Living conditions of communities vary in accordance with economic and social climates. Poverty, lack of education and poor infrastructures influence the opportunities available to people. The
results of crime, violence and abuse appear to have created a moral vacuum which has placed significant impact on the changing structures of family life. This collaborates a sense of frustration, leading to a sense of futility and unease about the future (Proctor 1992:23). It also highlights people’s need for help that is beyond themselves, perhaps even from a transcendent source. There exists amongst communities suffering from the socio-economic constraints, the desperate need for justice from a higher authority, and the appeal for liberation from oppression. People in such desperate need are readily open to new possibilities as their circumstances appeal for change. This may lead or force them to seek that which is beyond their present reality. Together with this is the recognition of an increased interest and search for personal spirituality. For this reason preaching has the ability to reach those who search for identity, who yearn for freedom and long for liberation, for those victims of racism, economic depression, social isolation, and sexism. It must therefore be able to bring a sense of God among them, so that they may be aware of His presence with them. A presence that is able to transcend current reality and replace it with a sense of hope and joy (Proctor 1992:23)

Additionally there is a call for personal identity that seeks after self-worth. Self-worth refers to the need which people have to make sense of their lives in a way that enables them to feel they have positive value. In its practical outworking, this need may take on the form of finding some way to feel superior to others, yet it usually refers to the need we have to find some basis for positive self-worth. People thus seek certain criteria according to which they can increase positive self regard and convince others to regard them more positively. It is a desire which longs for the respect of self and others and includes both individual and collective components. (Baumeister 1991:46).

The desperate need for meaning in this world has to take cognisance of these facts. Each individual is a physical being, fragile and finite and we often feel burdened beyond our strength and beyond our power to cope. We are created with limits. We trust and seek to be trusted. We are competitive, proud and often tempted. We strive for success, efficiency and the need to be effective. We resist sickness, fight illness and are determined to survive the challenges and crisis we face. Yet despite this we continue to feel helpless through random victims of violence, crime, car crashes and the like. There is not only a need to hear the preacher offer a sense of meaning to a world of confusion but
to answer an overwhelming sense of not being alone in this world. For this reason preaching needs to reiterate the truth that God has not left humanity to its own devices and that there is hope in this world (Proctor 1992:21). Larry Crabb summarises this need for the collective in stating that ‘beneath all our problems, there are desperately hurting souls that must find the nourishment only community can provide. (Crabb 1997:xvi)

2.2 MEANING AND CHANGE

By the late 1980’s, the term ‘instant gratification’ was used to describe a period in which the Western world sought to eliminate all the inherent barriers between wanting something and actually acquiring it. This continued into the early 1990’s when a few cultural critics argued that this formulated a utopia perspective on life and would eventually lead to the demoralisation of society as it encouraged behaviour seeking after pleasure and addiction. In fact, our entire Western culture has often been depicted as one which suffers from a crisis that undermines the values upon which it is based. This has raised doubts about certain parts of Western ideology, which concerns itself with democratic traditions. These have always been oriented towards encouraging people to pursue whatever will satisfy and fulfil their desires, regardless of the cost. It is at this point that tensions are raised. How can this process be justified if it means that it is to provide temporary goods which generate a pervasive inability to accept and truly profit from reality? This crisis, which has now become more widespread in developing countries, presupposes a general belief that the pursuit of happiness is universal, that in principle it will be accomplished, and that this forms part of each individuals human rights (Singer 1992:4). Although these ideas reflect the influence of the humanistic perspective of the Enlightenment period, and although we would encourage society to seek happiness, it does raise the need to address our contemporary problems which result from a sense of meaningless in life and particularly from those who must struggle for survival in a competitive world (Singer 1992:5). If this is the case, then pursuing and attaining happiness might appear to be paradoxically self-defeating. The happier we are, the harder it is to find meaning and purpose in life which is essential for our sustainable contentment. Recognising this perspective, demonstrates our contemporary concern with
meaning that is specific to the modern world. It stems from our relative wealth and freedom, in a context of dissatisfaction and even despair about creating a genuinely long lasting happiness.

So it is not foreign for us to claim that in our society today there is an increasing sense of the overwhelming fear of total and ultimate meaninglessness of life that acknowledges the worth and value of life. A perpetual experience of emptiness becomes a conscious void within one’s inner self, to the point that Fankl offers the term ‘existential vacuum’ to describe this situation (Frankl 1984:111). Widespread cases of depression, aggression and addiction seem to increase as the search for a meaning in life continues to be a struggle.

Today more than ever it would appear that there is a more pronounced search for understanding life and the consequent search for meaning. The apparent decline in religious belief, which has offered meaningful perspectives for so many, is thought to be one of the contributing factors that lends itself towards this search. Those who still hold to religious belief, appear to be more critical toward religious answers than was previously the case. These questions begin to address the acceptance of religious practices and traditions which have lost meaning for so many. The continuous search for meaning finds its focus in a series of questions pertaining to ‘why’. Frustration arises from a cyclical series of questions and answers and results in the continuation of the search for, more often than not, justifiable answers that are not always available or accepted (Hanfling 1987:2). Modernity has made its contribution to humanity’s profound change in the manner in which the concept of human life is viewed. Modern science has altered perception to the extent that humanity is no longer viewed as the centre of the universe. Questioning pertaining to the origin of life and existence of other forms of life begin to play an important role in challenging previously held religious beliefs. In this modern age of reason and science, answers became more descriptive in addressing the question ‘how’ rather than ‘why’, resulting in a shift away from a religious perspective in which meaning was to be found in the purposes and will of God.
2.2.1 Shifting worldviews and the Unique Challenges of Postmodernism

Western history is commonly divided into three eras - premodern, modern and postmodern, each with its own inherent characteristics, challenges and the consequent implications for theology, the church and preaching (Allen 1997:15).

The unique challenges of postmodernism may well be summarized through 4 key aspects. These include the accommodation of multiple truths that lead only to preferences. There are today many alternatives and competing viewpoints on offer as truth is created within these. In other words, what is true is what one believes to be true. In this regard, no individual and no group has a hold on the truth – there are only preferences and possibilities. Within Postmodern community distinctiveness the individual becomes lost in the group as society splits into more and more groups. There is no longer such a thing as national consensus or national identity and this makes it very difficult for people today to find a sense of belonging. Traditional communities fostered a sense of belonging and stability, yet today there is no permanence to the communities to which we belong. We seem to belong to a set of fragmented groups. A third characteristic of postmodernism includes the introduction of virtual reality which is an experience that is real in effect, but not in fact. It teaches us to trust only what our senses can verify and since our senses perceive the world differently, each individual's view of reality will be unique. Therefore we don't have access to reality apart from certain concepts and language that help us make sense of the reality we are living in. Following on from this is the realisation that instead of the ideals of wealth and prosperity, in this world of choice, we are left with pictures of human misery. This misery leaves people desperately looking for something to give them meaning. It would seem that “The optimism of the modern era and the hope in God of the pre-modern era have been forsaken in the postmodern era. Instead of optimism there is now suspicion and mistrust. Instead of hope there is insecurity and instability.” (Long 1997:72)

The church can therefore speak to the world, not because it has a message that is objectively true, but because it embodies alternative values in life depicted and made possible by Jesus. They are practices and virtues that embody the character of God –
forgiveness, reconciliation, faithfullness, trust, patience, peacemaking, constancy.
Postmodernism is challenging us to get away from belief and merely belief. Beliefs and convictions should be understood as habits of acting, yet sadly Christianity has fallen into the danger of demonstrating an unhealthy gap between beliefs and actions. Too often Christians insist that the gospel is objectively true regardless of how they live. It does absolutely no good to insist that the proposition “Jesus is Lord of the universe” is objectively true while at the same time we live our lives in such a way that this lordship remains completely invisible. Philip Kenneson states:

‘What our world is waiting for, and what the church seems reluctant to offer, is not more talk about objective truth, but an embodied witness that clearly demonstrates why anyone should care about any of this in the first place. The fact that most of our non-Christian neighbours cannot pick us out from the rest of their non-Christian neighbours, suggests that they are right in refusing to accept what we say we believe when our lives makes those beliefs out to be a lie’. (Long 1997:76)

A favourite passage employed by preachers is 1 Peter 3:15 – “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give reason for the hope that you have”. The problem is – no one is asking. A primary task the church has today is to live in the world in such a way that others are driven to ask about this hope, we are therefore called to emphasise the hope more than the reason. (1997:76)

Therefore, assumptions the preacher may make about the congregation today, will be very different to those made one or two generations ago (Proctor 1992:13). In the historical period known as modernity, credibility was placed on science, reason and knowledge. Earth was acknowledged to be the centre of the solar system, with the sun revolving around it. The actual thought of humans walking on the moon was considered pure fantasy. Technological advancements included experiments with television, x-rays and air travel. Western Christianity was formalised, everybody went to church, and the Bible was recognized as the unquestioned, infallible word of God. The preacher was the favoured authoritarian. Yet it is only half a century later that we begin to recognise a shift in human thought and behaviour, in science, technology and urbanization. These shifts result in visible changes for the Christian faith as it impacts upon Spirituality. In light of the various Christian movements, ranging from the TV evangelist, to the signs and wonders healers with mass audiences, the preacher has to shift accordingly to the reflective
thought patterns of listeners and their search for honesty inquiry. Preachers today are faced with the similar challenge of interpreting ancient truths in relevant manners and are asked to bring their gifts, skills, understanding, imagination, scholarship, analysis and interpretation as they prepare to serve through their preaching. For this reason, preaching must define, declare and defend the gospel as it has done throughout history (Proctor 1992:13).

In the postmodern ethos and in an awareness of the shift in cultural worldviews the preacher has to recognise how the gospel is able to participate in creating an emerging world, to evaluate how the Christian faith is compatible or incompatible with this worldview, and how the it can begin to transform culture. Furthermore there requires an openness to reflecting basic theological convictions concerning God, the gospel, and the nature and purpose of the church and the world. (Allen 1997:10).

2.3 THE LANGUAGE OF THE QUEST

Influencing all that we think and do is the eternal question, ‘What is the meaning of our existence?’ Within the difficulty of defining meaning, whether from a philosophical, scientific or religious perspective it is evident that meaning is associated with the concepts of language and our mental capacity for connections. It is suggested that a definition of meaning could be ‘the shared mental representations of possible relationships among objects, events and relationships’. Meaning can be recognised as the associations we make with connection. Language, too, is a significant component in our sharing and communication of meaning as it refers to the symbols and concepts we use in creating messages to convey mutual understanding. The process of sharing is important to us because the nature of language is essentially social. It requires at least two people using words to converse in order to create understanding. Language therefore entails that people have certain meanings in common (Baumeister 1991:16).

Various disciplines have attempted to solve the challenges pertaining to the ‘problem’ of life. The concepts relating to meaning in our contemporary context are in need of ongoing
clarification especially as we seek to explore words such as ‘purpose’ and ‘meaningfulness’ from an interdisciplinary perspective. In addition to this, we need not only seek to define the terms used in describing our existence but a specific focus is required to identifying this ‘problem of life’. The study of meaning, particularly the meaning of life, has often been viewed as a philosophical study and one that should be viewed as a notion properly confined to the area of language rather than to events or objects (Cottingham 2003:2). Many philosophers have recognised the need for philosophy to address the use of language in its attempt to convey and describe the meaningfulness of the word ‘meaning’. Some have suggested that there is a need to shift the words from their metaphysical use to rather their everyday use (Hanfling 1987:2). Although this question of meaning is a philosophical one, it is necessary to recognise that not all philosophical problems can be solved and thus they remain ongoing discussions in which questions often become more important than the answers.

2.3.1 The Implications of ‘Meaningfulness’

In using this term ‘meaningful’ we refer to the profoundness and depth of an activity with a movement away from anything that could be described as trivial, superficial or shallow. It also refers to that which is obtainable, either via goal setting or that which requires a focus of energy and concentration to execute. Aimlessness, non-directive or accidental consequences cannot contribute towards meaningfulness. In order to fully understand this concept we should focus on how language is used to structure and interpret it. It may be described as a hermeneutical concept that in order for something to be meaningful to us, it has to be interpreted and construed in a certain way by us (Cottingham 2003:20). Meaningfulness in action implies a certain degree of self-awareness or transparency for us. Therefore to engage in a meaningful activity, there must be an understanding of the actual activity, and personal interpretation must correlate to a transparent awareness of purpose, i.e. I must know what I’m doing and why I’m doing it before this can acquire meaning. This however is not always applied to morality in meaning. It is quite possible for meaning to be ascribed to an act or behaviour in which the individual is fully aware of his/her actions despite the ethical consequences (Cottingham 2003:22).
It is evident therefore that one of the problems concerning the exploration of the word meaning is our ability to define or understand it. It is a call for the recognition that meaning is a concern for both existence and purpose. Language confronts this difficulty and attempts to address the complexities of its nature. Out of a cluster of linguistic terms and phrases, two particular words assist us in relating the concepts of existence and purpose. These two words are cognitive and valuational. A cognitive sense of the word ‘meaning’ refers to the fact that we seek explanation and clarification about an occurrence or event. We gain insight into its related properties and observe implications for the future. On the other hand, it can also have emotional significance and describes meaning associated to our personal feelings. In this manner valuational meaning is able to reveal and declare our highest values (Singer 1992:23).

As language can be recognised as a hindrance to our process of understanding and communicating meaning, it is also important to acknowledge language devices which assist us in our ability to transfer meaning. Biblical metaphors can be used as figures of speech in our theological discussions to represent that which we find most difficult to communicate. Preaching will be aided by the use of metaphorical preaching, in that it is an attempt to convey the meaningfulness of theological language and our contexts seriously. It uses human analogies to describe certain attributes pertaining to God. Therefore metaphorical theology develops the dynamic interaction between God and our circumstances. (Louw 2000:50).

2.3.2 Questioning the Questions

It has been stated that when one has a ‘why’ to live for one can bear with almost any ‘how’ (Frankl 1984:84). Contemporary philosophy has particularly been characterised within a linguistic orientation as traditional queries about the purpose of life have often been rejected in a more radical manner. In order to have meaning, our comments must have a logical form that is syntactically and semantically adequate for expressing a meaningful question. But there is no assurance that meaning is conveyed as a result of correct grammatical structure. Questions about the purpose and meaning of life are therefore not necessarily self-contradictory or inconsistent. They may at times be vague
or extend beyond our ordinary experience but they should rather be treated as metaphorical and symbolic rather than literal or factual. This will not deprive them of intelligibility. It may however be acknowledged that this puts them into a category closer to poetry than to science but this is not a serious impediment. Our linguistic capabilities are infinitely diverse and although some critics may have good reasons for dismissing the quest for a meaning of life, we should not exonerate such a quest purely because language is faced with the challenge and difficulties of conveying understanding (Singer 1992:31). This is particularly important to our homiletical discussions in which intention and practice refers to the dynamic use of language in creating meaning. If preaching is to consider addressing the present and future desire for meaning within the community it too will be confronted with the challenges of language. It will be through a creative and integrated approach in which preaching through communication will convey the content of its message.

The ability to determine whether or not problems about meaning can be resolved is a difficult one. We cannot presume that if they cease to concern us that the problem has found a solution. Many of us have become indifferent to these questions posed by the meaningfulness of life, as our lifestyles allow us to become less sensitive to these questions (Singer 1992:14). Yet one of the most challenging discussions for philosophers is in defining the problem itself. When debating the meaning of life, do we understand what it is that we are requesting and what it is that we hope to find? One of the greatest difficulties therefore is not to find a solution but rather to redefine the question. It could be possible that in knowing and understanding the question, we will be able to know the meaning of the answer. This may be the starting place for the wisdom concerning the nature of philosophy. Our expectation should not be toward conclusive and comprehensively satisfying solutions. In a sense it can be represented in the movement of a spiral as each answer presents itself with a series of new questions. Philosophy therefore is able to stimulate the imagination and address intellectual debate, but even more importantly it enables us to clarify our intuitions. (Singer 1992:15).

Interestingly the Old Testament use of the lament demonstrates for us today how the Nation of Israel interacted with God based on a series of questioning. It is these questions of the lament that demonstrates how the people of God, respectively yet
urgently request to see his participation in their distressful circumstances, to intervene in their pain and remove the long sufferings of oppression, and for God to be faithful to his commitment to them as his chosen nation as well as to be true to his character of holiness and justice. These questions may be summarised into three pleas or requests for God’s intervention on their behalf, namely how long, why and where? (Brueggemann 1997:319).

How long? This questioned relates to the period of ‘waiting’, in which the Israelites anticipated God’s involvement in their circumstances and waited for his redemption. When the waiting period grew for a considerable time and the people grew restless, the question therefore arose ‘how long’ must we wait? It therefore is not a plea for God to reveal information pertaining to his ways nor is it a request for God to provide a timetable for how long their suffering will continue, instead it a period of frustration in which the people’s desire for God’s intervention is evident. It is a question which appeals to God to act on their behalf, and to demonstrate his power and justice in rescuing them based upon his faithfulness to his promises.

Where? In a similar manner this question concerns the appeal for God to intervene on Israel’s behalf, yet instead of seeking information about where God’s kindness and mercy are, it is rather within the apparent hiddenness of his faithfulness that the nation calls upon God to restore his commitment to them through liberating them from their sufferings.

Why? In times of what appeared to be senseless suffering the Israelites expected once again for God to hear their cries to him for mercy and to attend to their needs. Again this is not a plea for God to justify his seeming inactivity, but rather to be attentive to their pain and helplessness in order for Him to reveal himself through acts of redemption.

It is this question ‘why’ that is more often raised within the context of suffering as one that addresses the distress, grief, pain and doubt of those who suffer. It is often a question directed towards God in the search for help and comfort and is also an attempt to understand the complexities of human suffering. On the one hand it can lead to the rejection of God, as a result of overwhelming despair. Yet, on the other hand it can lead
to seeking God’s justice amidst the experiences of pain, helpless and oppression (Louw 2000:21).

The question ‘why’ in Scripture is represented through the lament. It is an expression of our anger, confusion and pain before God and it may include an accusation towards God for allowing such experiences to take place. According to Louw, (2000:21) the Biblical perspective of lament is associated with philosophical and traditional approaches to our human quest for meaning in suffering as well as through our ability to understand the concept of evil. It is our human response to reconcile the apparent differences between the injustice of suffering and the all-encompassing love and goodness of God’s justice.

For this reason lament and theodicy are closely related. Lament is the expression of emotional concerns which pertain to the more rational philosophical debates of theodicy. It is recognised as a petition made before God, especially in the light of our present reality of suffering. It is an active protest for circumstances to change and hopes fervently for future redemption. (Louw 2000:23).

Louw furthermore expands our interpretation of suffering in light of five significant questions. (Louw 2000:16). Questions of this nature guide us in our inherent endeavours to understand moments of suffering in light of our ongoing search for meaning. The questions include Why, How, Where, When and How, and if our search truly embraces communal living, then the Who question will address those affected or involved within the context of suffering. Included in the above is a focus on the hiddeness and/or realisation of God’s presence, the understanding of hope as a present and future reality, and the possible transformational results within the experience of suffering.

In questioning the questions we ask in trying times it is helpful to recognise that often the silence in response to ‘why’ produces more suffering than actually enduring the physical suffering. Stated otherwise, our intellectual problem often incurs more suffering than the experienced misery and so because there are often no answers to these questions, the questions themselves need to be changed, since answers don’t produce the comfort we are seeking. (Bakker 2006)
2.4 THE VALUE OF MEANING AND THE MEANING OF VALUE

In ascribing value to our being and doing there flows an inherent focus on meaning. This value base remains not only significant on the level of individual gain, but becomes a valuable cultural resource in creating frameworks for collective meaningful contributions. Without a value base, people may not see the reason to act in socially desirable ways. It has been argued that modernisation tends toward nullifying many of the traditional value bases, leaving modern society unable to provide sufficient justification for behavioral patterns. This raises the important consideration of individual and collective boundaries as benchmarks for a meaningful existence. Current perceived loss of ‘valued values’ tends toward the offering of freedom, yet freedom for freedoms sake possesses no lasting value. In a recent visit to the Limpopo province this was evidenced through perceiving the effect of globalisation and the integration of traditionally separate cultural norms. This integration posed the challenge of finding security and stability within new found freedoms. Without these traditional boundaries, people appeared to be living a life of uncertainty, thereby having a direct impact upon their existence as they new it. This challenging problem of modern society is important for us to understand in terms of how people struggle to find value in their lives and thus continue to search for meaning (Baumeister 1991:40).

A difficult challenge within the context of our search for meaning is the process in which we evaluate, determine and establish reasons for our behaviour. It is evident that we are conscious of the concepts of right and wrong, and good and evil, but it is not always apparent how and why these concepts influence our choices in different ways. Our individual decisions are based upon our own discerning as to what we think is good, what we value and what we desire. Similarly, in our knowing of what we value, we are able to evaluate what we do not want, and formulate concepts of our own understanding of that which is not good (Wall 2001:345). When cruel and inhuman behaviour becomes meaningful to the lives of individuals or communities, the problem of ethics becomes more prominent. (Cottingham 2003:26). It is here that the discussion comes full circle as we reaffirm the philosophical presupposition that meaning is a derivative of our rational and value based approach to this quest. The challenge, however, remains in knowing when to cease our questioning when the questions themselves are adding to our ‘angst’.
This may lead us away from further debate to recognizing that our answers will result from our conduct. Life is therefore also a concern which seeks to take responsibility for discovering answers through the fulfillment of duties which are constantly before each of us. (Frankl 1984:85).

Many people within the church and in fact within society have a deep, authentic but often unfocused longing to understand the meaning of life. This search which includes a desire for values, spirituality, and authenticity provides the preacher with a point of entry for the gospel. The preacher is able to correlate the gospel with community’s felt needs, and their larger unrecognized needs (Allen 1997:26). Meaning is therefore said to be derivative and not intrinsic. (Morris 1992:57). If life is to have meaning it must derive meaning from a purposeful or intentional activity.

A primary human need, then, is to see our activities oriented towards a purpose. The importance of purpose rests in one’s ability to interpret the present activity in light of the future. Present events and activities thus obtain meaning by being connected to future events. This focus on meaning enables the person to see beyond the immediate situation and to be able to interpret the present situation in relation to an idea of a future event. Therefore it is possible to state that what is, right now, derives meaning from what is not yet. It is also significant to note that the focus of this directional approach is not for achievement or realization. In fact it is quite possible to live a meaningful life in the pursuit of goals that are never realised in one’s life time.

The problem that arises from this concept is the simplification of subjective thought which highlights the role of ethics and meaning as it describes the close association between meaning and value. It also recognises that in the desire to create a sense of purpose people require the ability to establish and exhibit a sense of control in their environments and therefore become active participants in the quest for meaning.
2.5 LIFE AND DEATH

There has been much consideration on the relationship between life and death. Many have struggled to understand how life can in fact be meaningful when it results in death. It leads fundamentally to ask the question ‘what is the value of life?’

Part of our existential search needs to address the reality of death as part of the reality of life. For some philosophers, death should be of no concern to us as in life death is not a present reality, and in death we are no longer present. For others death is of no significance to us as there is no life after death, hence no reason for deliberations of this nature. Others, however view death as a form of evil, destroying the gift of life. (Hanfling 1987:79). In this debate around whether death is a component to be addressed in life, many would propose that by virtue of humanities experiences of pain and suffering, the complexities related to a discussion of death forms part of these realities.(Hanfling 1987:86). Death, it can be said, affects us psychologically and emotionally in that we fear the unknown and we are challenged to deal with a presupposed reality. But death can also be viewed as a function of life, as it is recognised as that which completes all events of our existence. This perspective of death is highly favoured by some who state that religious thought prefers to hold to the view that death is the meaning of life. Religious dogma affirms this view by emphasising Eschatological perspectives, especially when our earthly lives have been depicted as a preparation for an external existence (Singer 1992:51). To often we hear messages proclaiming the perfect blessed after-life, in contrast to our present reality of suffering and despair with the intention of declaring hope and consolation. The theme of endurance and perseverance on earth will be the reward of blessing and joy in the after-life (Hanfling 1987:28). In encouraging an integrative approach to the homiletical presentation of this topic it remains necessary for preaching to present the gospel as a present and future hopeful reality.

A reductionist approach to eschatology highlights the significant shortcomings of our earthly existence, and points to the hardships of life in comparison with the ideal perfect life that awaits us. This comparison however demonstrates a short-sightedness of thought and leads to the danger of highlighting the perfect futuristic life over and above the present reality of life. It leaves one with a sense of the worthlessness on earth as
opposed to an experience of the abundance of life. Inasmuch as Western society would prefer to ignore the concept of death we are faced with its inevitable reality. (McGrath 1993:45) Denial is no way to avoid our fears or our experiences of suffering. Meaning in life is gained through the partnering of all facets of humanity – our actions and behaviours, thoughts and beliefs and needs and desires.
CHAPTER 3

3. MEANING IN POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

As preaching seeks to address meaning in the context of a post-apartheid South Africa it remains an essential challenge to define the prefix – ‘post’. What is unique about using this context as a platform for addressing how ecclesiastical communities are able to share, shape and inform a message of meaning and hope through relevant homiletical interventions? If ‘post’ refers to that which follows, how is it that there is still such a gap between the systemic changes, and the current living conditions and experiences of those we label ‘previously disadvantaged’, yet who continue to live with similar realities. Yet the hopeful reality is that the more we feel there has been little change, the more we need to affirm the many changes that are prevalent in this new South Africa. As hopes and fears of a truly democratic South Africa surface it remains essential that we are reminded of the universality of humanity in our shared experiences of the search for meaning, our experiences of suffering and our longing for hope.

3.1 MEANING AND HOPE

3.1.1 The universality of humanity

The sacredness of human life has been affirmed throughout the ages and within varying religious, sociological, philosophical and psychological fields. Within Christianity, it is the doctrine of ‘Imago Dei’ that grounds our deliberations on this facet of anthropology. If then, we believe that all humans are created in the Image of God, we are thus affirming that we share commonalities of being (Erickson 1985:516). We are created equal, we share cultures, races, vocational directives, genders, economic classes and various other commonly shared distinctions by virtue of our humanity. We posses many other things in common such as our relational struggles and the challenges of sin and morality yet even though we consider the many things we have in common, we have never denied a sense
of diversity. We see Christ embracing diversity yet never labeling one inferior and another superior. So it is evident within the world, and indeed our South African context, that although in theory we affirm this fundamental theological grounding of human equality in light of the likeness of the Image of God, the outworkings thereof would reveal something different. Perhaps it is what Nolan has called ‘Abstract Religion’ – it is great on paper and it sounds good in sermons but it doesn't touch the realities of life. It enables the oppressor to carry on oppressing and presents no challenge to those who are in fact doing nothing. (Nolan 1988:210) To be fair it is not new to the South African reality. Every country and religion faces the danger of disintegrating into rituals and formalities that are divorced from life. We see the OT prophets having to confront the religious establishment of their own time with irrelevance, emptiness and even blasphemy of their sacrifices and ceremonies.

The unity of humanity is therefore of great theological and practical significance since it implies that all persons are equal in the sight of God. And it is from here that we find the foundation for our response as Christians to the ethical challenges of justice, racism, sexism, and the like, as it is easy to agree in theory that we are equal but belief is futile unless acted upon. The role of the Church, in this regard, is to bring God into the picture. The problem with an abstract gospel is that it brings God in but leaves out the picture. (Nolan 1988:214)

Within this experience of commonality it would seem that community would be a rare experience today. Many people feel isolated by certain aspects of their humanity. We confront the distinctives of rich and poor, men and women, East and West, whites and blacks – all of these contribute to different worldviews and if not understood, embraced or challenged, for many can lead to great loneliness and even marginalisation. Even amongst people who are alike there seems very little real community – technology has made direct human interaction unnecessary – email, TV/internet shopping, counseling over the phone, religion through the TV. Too many people’s lives are structured by an existence that isolates them from others. For some it may have nothing to do with technology but rather the residues of broken trust from childhood years, or fear of getting to know others and allowing others to know them. Even within our religious traditions we
have not escaped this breakdown of community – the growing number of denominations, divisions over theology, authority, and politics is all too common.

Postmodernism has presented a unique set of challenges in this regard. Within this worldview there is a significant focus on community but they are communities of preference where the potential for prejudices run high. Because postmodernism embraces relativity and questions absolute truth it is accepted that we move from one group to another until we belong – the problem is that there is no consistency, stability or security since people just keep moving. In this regard ‘church hopping’ is a faith lifestyle, the individual becomes lost in the group, and society splits into more and more groups. There seems no such thing as national consensus or national identity and this makes it very difficult for people today to find a sense of belonging. Traditional communities fostered a sense of belonging and stability, but today there is no permanence to the communities to which we belong – we belong to a set of fragmented groups. This, in turn, makes peoples search for meaning and belonging a lot more difficult.

An essential reason for the need to look at this concept of community as a theological concept is that people long for a sense of belonging and togetherness and the institution of the church should be there to provide that God-ordained community existence, yet all too often it is the church that has resulted in people rejecting the faith because of hypocrisy, prejudice, judgmentalism, differing moral standards and the like. It remains essential for our ecclesiastical communities to articulate, embrace and embody these commonalities of being. Through the medium of the pulpit visitors and congregational members should feel welcome and at home in a community that rests on the love of Christ. It should be a community of solidarity where there is awareness and an attempt to address shared needs and challenges – challenges relating to economic struggles, morality and sin, the need for connection, support and comfort in those times of suffering that confront us all. Ultimately it is a search for a realized hope which can be embraced despite the circumstances of life.
3.1.2 The Search for Meaning and the Experience of Hope

Our search for meaning in life is particularly challenged in times of crisis, chaos, conflict and social upheaval. When what we have always known to be true and foundational in our lives is turned upside down, when restrictions are placed upon us limiting our freedom of expression, or through the experience of suffering of political, social and economic injustices, we are challenged to find new ways in which to live. Our natural inherent need for survival drives us forward seeking possible changes which will enable us to continue with purpose despite the despair of our suffering. Hope is related to our realistic or illusionary expectations about the future, and whether this future is immediate or long term, our longing for change is faced by challenge. (Nolan 1988:195).

In order to understand hope it remains essential to distinguish between despair as a way of life and despair as a moment in life, therefore to hope is to look upon despair as only a moment in human existence. (Evans 1984:66) In these moments of despair we sense the fragility of meaning yet the decision to hope continues to beckon for us to live from one moment to the next in the assurance that, although there are mysteries and challenges, there is a meaningful order to the world in which our place is affirmed. (Evans 1984: 69)

Preaching which aims to present the gospel of hope will need to interact with the challenges of the community. In this manner, preaching can no longer endorse a message which advocates the independent activity of God, at the exclusion of our participation. This will result in the attempt to have a gospel of hope without the personal challenge of our involvement. At the same time however, we cannot promote social responsibility in our preaching without demonstrating the foundational basis for which we seek transformation to occur. Thus preaching will have to support the dynamic approach of a hope which challenges our active involvement in bringing about the desire for change which we so long for.
3.1.2.1 The Intentionality of Hope

Hope is also to be recognised as a mode of consciousness within the realm of willing, deciding and persevering. It is a specific form of intention that although has its focus in the future, is very much an experience in the now, with tangible thoughts, feelings and present day impacts. This expectant future, with its tangible realities, is always associated with that which is good. Acts of hope are thereby deliberate and decisive but differ from hopeful action in which we are perceived to be acting ‘from’, ‘out of’ and ‘in’ hope (Smith 2004:208). Hope is not to be associated with illusion or wishful thinking, which are indeed modes of intending the future but lack the potential for fulfilment. Hope itself is not a guarantee for the fulfilment of our desires, it does however imply our intent for that which is good and meaningful. Thus our ‘dashed’ hopes or ‘shattered’ hopes are not indications that our hope was not authentic but rather they serve as reminders of the limitations to a hope influenced by circumstances and contexts. In this way we may confirm that hope is different from a guarantee despite the fact that it is characterised by a certain confidence (Smith 2004:209)

With hope thus viewed in light of its intentionality, the person who chooses to hope is then rescued from moments of despair and in this manner is able to affirm the deliberate nature of hope. Without this freedom to choose or without this sense of accomplishment life may lack significance and although we may be alive we are void of anything which pertains to meaning or purpose. It is in this light that hope implies a certain amount of perseverance in believing that a positive outcome is possible even when there is some evidence to the contrary.

3.1.2.2 Hope in context

The result of this apparent increase in realities such as social injustice, poverty and moral corruption within our contemporary society, witnesses the increased number of powerless people in need of change and transformation. This has helped to escalate the already present need for a sense of meaning and purpose in which a realistic hope may develop. In fact it is often communicated that one of the greatest needs of the late twentieth
century is the need for hope (de Klerk 2007:177). This poses the inevitable challenge for us today, ‘How are we to communicate a message hope in a context where the actual recipients of our message envision no end to their experiences of poverty, and injustice’. ‘How are we to impact such a helpless and despairing community? Is it indeed possible and even fair of us to attempt to ignite a sense of hope whereby suffering is an ongoing human experience?’ The concern therefore includes a focus on the approach we take to create and develop a true sense of hope in the reality of brokenness and disillusionment. This crisis in which the future appears to be completely negative calls for a presence of an immediate hope rather than the communication of empty promises about an unrealistic future (de Klerk 2007:186).

One of the greatest challenges for us today is the experience within communities where poverty and affluence exist side by side. How is hope established within a community where there is an overwhelming sense of despair and immense suffering in juxtaposition of the abundance of the wealth of others? We are faced therefore with the challenge of integrating a sense of hope in which meaningful and sustainable transformation is established for all and where there is affirmation of equality and dignity despite the contrasting lifestyle differences.

3.1.2.3 An Eschatological Hope

In as much as a reductionist and futuristic approach to a theology of eschatology has been critiqued in this paper, it nevertheless remains a necessary doctrinal persuasion. If hope serves to conquer our desperation where human capacities and earthly possibilities are exhausted, it would call for a reality beyond reality. The inherent nature of a Christian eschatology affirms the liberation and motivation of people in need. On the one hand we are encouraged by the opportunities afforded by technological advancements and on the other hand we are disillusioned through a loss of faith in humanity and technology. (Nürnberger 1994:148) Reflections on historical worldviews illustrate for us the progression in leading us to these challenges. The Theistic worldview at end of the 17th century viewed God at the centre of the universe where meaning was to be found in Christ. Within the Modern worldview of the 18th century scientific revolution the belief that
scientific discovery would solve the problems of the world was elevated. Science meant knowledge, knowledge meant power, therefore God was no longer needed. In the Postmodern era it seems as though progress has let us down and science, technology and industrialisation have lost their magic. Throughout this developmental history it would seem as though humanity has cyclically and constantly faced three essential questions. ‘Who am I?’ – referring to identity, ‘Why am I here?’ – with its reference to life’s purpose, and ‘Where am I going?’ – with a focus on destiny. It is in light of the continuous resurfacing of these questions that a holistic emphasis on eschatological reflections remain pertinent.

The good news that the gospel has to offer is essentially a message of hope within a world where hopelessness is rampant. But it is not only within our day and age that this is a reality. Many ancient philosophers in centuries before Christ have expressed this hopleness. Sophocles wrote: ‘Not to be born at all – that is by far the best fate’. In the twentieth century existentialism reflected this challenge in many a literary work. There appears little encouraging news, whether social, economic or political. (Erickson 1985:1065) A truly holistic eschatological intention, then, would encompass the personal, communal, social-structural and ecological dimensions of life. Within the context of a realized and hopeful hope humanity is encouraged to transcend reality and all its limitations. This is the core of the eschatological message. (Nürnberger 1994:149) A core that not only acknowledges a brighter future, but one that affirms the realised implications of hope within present realities. South Africa is in need of such a powerful message of hope in light of the many changes that have occurred, yet still need to occur.

3.2 MEANING AND SUFFERING IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

3.2.1 Racism and Apartheid

Racism is an ideology of racial domination that incorporates beliefs in a particular races cultural and biological inferiority. It uses such beliefs to justify and prescribe unequal treatment of that group as it is reflected in both its attitudinal and structural aspects. It
excludes groups on the basis of race or colour for the purpose of maintaining domination. Theologically it is a sin in that it denies the truth that all human beings are made in the image of God. (Boesak 1983:3)

Accordingly, apartheid maintains that human beings are irreconcilable, highlighting a contradiction of Scripture which says that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. Separation, disunity and division are all due to sin and are contrary to the divine purpose. The history of South Africa shows that the majority of whites have never put into practice their theories about our common human origin. This highlights the essential balance between the unity of our beliefs and our practices. As such a false theology will always lead to a perverted anthropology. Apartheid in this regard makes a persons ethnic identity, the colour of his/her skin, the crucial factor in determining human relations and in ordering society. It prescribes who you may marry, where you live, where you may work, if you may work, what education you may receive and to which church you may belong. In light of this understanding it remains an essential task of post-apartheid theological reflections to demonstrate the previous debilitating hermeneutical process that were involved in causing the societal challenges we now face.

3.2.1.1 The unique challenges of Apartheid

The order of society in South Africa was previously built on the criteria of race and ethnicity, resulting in the social and political system of apartheid. The willingness to abandon this system in favour of a morally more defensible one has brought with it the awareness that the prejudices of race and ethnicity have become ingrained within people’s core beliefs. It has been evident, throughout the South African period of an Apartheid system, that many critics have challenged the injustices and inequalities of such a structure. Although these forms of criticism have varied according to particular fields of study such as politics, economics, sociology, and theology it has been the fundamental concerns for equality, based upon the principles of human rights that has formed a basis for an ongoing critique.
In light of this, research has sought to determine what social values ought to apply in a South African society which was not initially structured according to the principles of race or ethnicity. It was hoped that these findings would assist in creating a viable alternative to an Apartheid system (Lategan & Kinghorn et al 1987:1). Additionally, it aimed to investigate a Christian response to this in light of the 78% of South Africans who claimed to be Christian. The transformation message of the gospel has not always been evidenced in practice.

This word transformation has and continues to be a significant word for the manner in which society reconciles injustice and hope. Despite the apparent agreement for a more just society, today it still remains evident as in the late 1980’s that the challenge lies in determining the outcomes of a process of transformation. Ultimately the concern resides in how this change will impact both the individual and community.

The challenge before the church lies in its engagement with discussions centered upon the establishment of equal rights, implying the assurance of opportunities for the implementation of these rights. It is evident within Scripture that the proclamation of the gospel addresses the well being of all people, with the inclusion of societal structures (Lategan & Kinghorn et al 1987:1). However, Biblical perspectives and Christian traditions have never provided the church with a standardised procedure for addressing the structuring of society. Instead, it addresses the fundamental principles of ethical perspectives on human life which serve as a significant platform for reflecting on these structures and quality of societies. This would require an ongoing assessment of the present, in order to achieve a hopeful future, especially as this is related to the process of transformation.

In light of this it has been evident that apartheid restricted the freedom of basic human rights for the majority of South Africans. In so doing it placed a burden upon their livelihoods in controlling their access to fundamental resources such land and water, labour opportunities and the controlling of limited access to education and health services. Therefore the struggle to end apartheid is not only recognised as a moral struggle for good governance but as a human struggle for survival in which South African citizens would be able to express their freedom in building homes and communities in
which life could prosper (De Gruchy & De Gruchy 2004:229). Many of the churches sought to communicate this as a message of hope, in which the period after apartheid would anticipate the coming of the kingdom of God. It was a message that provided perseverance for its congregations in a time of despair (De Gruchy & De Gruchy 2004:230).

This particular message of hope has been the underlying precedent in many liberation struggles against various forms of oppression and injustice. It has provided the support for communities and nations to, not only endure their present reality, but to rise above it and strive for freedom. Unfortunately a message of hope which articulated the end of apartheid as being able to generate the range of resources needed to sustain the changes in livelihoods was too naïve for the country. The end of the apartheid era was fundamentally necessary for our country, but not sufficient in itself to bring about the kind of transformation society envisioned. Therefore Post-Apartheid South Africa continues to be challenged by the livelihoods of those who confront unemployment, poverty, poor housing, poor education, limited access to health services, and access to land and water. Collectively this demonstrates what constitutes the ongoing struggle faced by our country (De Gruchy & De Gruchy 2004:230).

3.2.1.2 A Liberating theology

As we deliberate the possibilities of South African transformation and as we face the ongoing search for meaning in the context of suffering and injustice, the concept of change remains an essential one within these deliberations. We are able to gain much insight from the contributions of human sciences on the practice of change management but it has become relevant for the church today to ask itself the question ‘how does change occur?’ Do we instil change within our theological perspectives or does the community begin to develop strategies for transformation? Once again we are able to recognise the Apartheid era as an example in which the inconsistency of ecclesiastical theological contributions was evident. Some actively addressed the community appeal for justice and equality, while others directed their focus toward the spiritual implications of liberation alone. (Pityana 1995:93). Therefore if the church is to continue its contribution
toward making a significant difference within communities, it will need to proclaim a gospel in which hope remains a continuing theme. This will address the powerlessness felt by the victims of oppression, and respond creatively to the disillusionment of helplessness that prevails within our communities. To reaffirm individual and communal identity, to establish a sense of freedom which will liberate people from the dependency and restraints of fear, to empower communities to embrace their journey of transformation; and to enter into partnerships based upon equality, dignity and ownership - this may be considered the proactive work of the church.

In our ongoing participation of transformation, we are searching for ways in which we are able to satisfy the most fundamental human aspirations of equality, dignity and the possibility of personal freedom for all. It is for this reason that the liberation theologian, Gutierrez states that ‘philosophers have only interpreted the world… the point however is to change it’ (Stott 2001:108). The challenge for the church therefore requires an intentional commitment in which authentic and concrete processes are embraced resulting in the church as agents of change in the community. It is a concern for the rights of the individual and the community as a whole and it is a deliberate decision for engagement despite the overwhelming difficulties. The message of the church is to communicate a sense of belonging, an understanding of suffering and a reality of hope; and if this is indeed the challenge for the church, then preaching is to be a significant agent of this change as it confront the misconceptions, prejudices and attitudes which do not support a theological and biblical message of reconciliation and transformation for our society.

A Christological perspective, in this regard, assists us in developing a response to the socio-economic challenges in light of communities still longing for liberation. It is through Christ’s example of interacting with the marginalised, the oppressed and the destitute that we are called to respond in a similar manner. At the same time however we affirm that Christ came to proclaim the kingdom of God, in word and deed. We are therefore to called to demonstrate kingdom principles and to emphasise the reign of God in all areas of society, thus our challenge is to participate in liberating people from the restraints of oppression and to evoke justice and peace. We are also able to affirm the identity of a
suffering God through a focus on Christ’s death and yet at the same time it is the resurrection which offers us the content of a message of hope (Villa-Vicencio 1994:192).

Our ecclesiological practices are therefore to flow from these Christological reflections. It is a call for the church to respond in its identification with the poor. This has an immediate impact on homiletical intention and practice which is called to reflect a theological message of hope. Preaching therefore no longer happens in isolation nor in the confines of the church walls but it seeks to be among the poor as it teaches, challenges and supports the concerns of the poor. It places an emphasis on the solidarity of preaching in which the preacher is able to share, not just knowledge of the situation, but an experience of understanding the dynamics of poverty. It would seem that churches today are split between those who stress conversion but have forgotten its goal and those who emphasise Christian social action but have forgotten the necessity for conversion. (Sider 1993:101) The church is therefore to incorporate the social and spiritual perspectives of the gospel and to present a Christ who is no longer removed from the realities of our context, but in demonstrating a Christ as one who suffers with us, who defends the victims of injustice and protects the rights of the abused, who comforts those affected by of HIV/AIDS, and resides with the homeless - this remains the present challenge for the church. The message of hope then becomes a liberating message, elevating people beyond their harsh realities toward embracing a realised hope not only intended for future relief, but as a celebration of connection, purpose and transcendent love.

This may indeed be the time in which the church is challenged for a new theology, a liberating theology in which theology becomes a critical reflection on praxis (Villa-Vicencio 1994:187). In this manner we are not concerned for a new doctrine or a new approach to ethics but rather it is an intentional focus on the process of how we ‘do theology’. This is an emphasis on the opportunity for the reflection of our practice, within the context of our South African challenges, in order that we may seek the inspiration of our faith and the message of the gospel which will assist us in addressing the pain, hardships and despair of our society. Its aim is to seek freedom, self-respect and equal opportunities for all South Africans.
It can therefore be recognised in a society which is characterised by inequality, coercion and conflict that it is very unlikely that neutrality will exist, in fact it may even be impossible. (Villa-Vicencio 1994:188). This then determines the shape of our new theology, in that it is a call for justice, a message of hope in context and the empathetic response to those in suffering. It also implies that we are able to confirm that our theological reflection on praxis involves the response of the church to what is happening within society.

3.2.2 Human Dignity and Equality

The South African constitution is a conscious and deliberate attempt to challenge and change the Apartheid era of inequality. For this reason one the fundamental values that is demonstrated throughout our Constitution as a core concern is that of equality. Particularly recognised within the Bill of rights, it is to exhibit a commitment to an open and democratic society which endorses human dignity, equality and freedom. (Buhlungu 2006:103).

Our Constitution unlike many other constitutions is deliberate in its protection of socio-economic rights. It is to ensure that all citizens have the rights to access adequate housing, healthcare services, sufficient food and water and social security (Govender 2006:112). A challenge facing the Constitution is one of implementation and ensuring the realisation of the rights of the Bill of Rights.

In addressing the concerns of injustice and suffering in South Africa, it is necessary to develop an understanding of how a Christian anthropology will impact our proclamation of the gospel within a democratic society. The denial of human dignity means that we disqualify the equality of all humans based upon the theories and attitudes of superiority, arrogance and elitism as it is expressed in deeds and structures of oppression and exclusion. Equality remains one of the fundamental elements of human existence (Lategan & Kinghorn et al 1987:4).
If equality, then, is one of the fundamental aspects of human existence then we need to be addressing the manner in which it is embraced and demonstrated in our South African context. Because of a close association between attitudes and behaviours it becomes essential to affirm a process that challenges values and norms according to desired and preferred behaviours. This is of particular importance within the context of our Christian faith. Human equality needs to be affirmed through words and deeds, leading to a need for evaluating the alignment of our beliefs, words and actions.

It must be reinstated that human dignity and the equality of humanity does not assume that we are all the same. The fact that there is variety amongst individuals and communities allows for us to experience alternative and differing perspectives on life which should contribute to our meaningful existence rather than inhibit our understanding of diversity. South Africa, as with many other countries, is faced with the challenge to overcome ideologies that do not celebrate, encourage or establish the appreciation and significance of diversity. The ‘otherness of others’ is instead recognised as that which limits human life with such ideologies resulting in processes of eliminating difference (Lategan & Kinghorn et al 1987:5). If preaching is able to make a worthwhile contribution here, it is to proclaim the Christian message that diversity is a gift.

Lategan highlights his understanding of the role of the church in terms of its expression of unity. (Lategan Kinghorn et al 1987:6). The call to the church is to acknowledge the real meaning of human diversity and to be able to depict it within its community of faith. For this reason, the church will no longer merely express the visible manner in which God through Christ relates to the world but rather it would become a demonstration of the fact that it is possible to remove the barriers of exclusivity, in accordance with human rights. The church can therefore be expected to demonstrate this process as it embodies the unity of diversity as this will serve as a prophetic word to the world. It is when the church is a participant of the fulfillment of societal and political concerns that it is able to demonstrate the influence of the gospel of reconciliation.

It is for this reason that the kingdom of God is a prevalent message within the context of these social and economic dimensions. It is to acknowledge the social structures within which people live and to address those injustices which remain unacceptable and prevent
the human right of equality. (Lategan & Kinghorn et al 1987:21). Therefore in our search to make a significant difference in the lives of Post-Apartheid South Africans, we will need to address those prohibiting factors that do not contribute towards a truly meaningful experience of life. Consequently it is a call to become active participants of change and justice.

3.3 SYSTEMIC INJUSTICE WITHIN THE SEARCH FOR MEANING

Although we may affirm the structural end of the apartheid era, it is possible to acknowledge that many of its consequences remain with us. Socio-economic concerns remain visible in our South African context. In addition, the evidence of domestic violence and high crime rates contribute to our country’s structural challenges, presenting a fragmented and broken society. However as we continue to face these challenges of gender inequality, unemployment, and unequal distribution of resources, our attention will need to address these social injustices within the dynamic context of HIV/AIDS (Muro 2003:42) Perhaps this expresses how the present situation in South Africa poses a ‘new struggle’ for us. Post-Apartheid South Africa is therefore challenged once again with the need to address the socio-economic and political injustices in a transforming manner (Cilliers 2007:156). The crisis of the AIDS pandemic in Southern African reflects a context of desperation, and of severe suffering in which there is an atmosphere of despair and hopelessness. However, this crisis also presents many possible opportunities in which the present circumstances may be addressed through a birth of creativity and vision. The challenge to us as Church and society is that we are being called, confronted and urged to share the burden of a community and its struggles with identity, values and beliefs (Muro 2003:32).
3.3.1 HIV/AIDS - a Human rights issue

We are continually reminded that the HIV/AIDS pandemic does not occur in isolation but rather within a socio-economic context. The three most fundamental principles of our South African Constitution, equality, freedom and dignity are therefore challenged in new ways. We are able to confirm that the HIV infection has no distinction between race or class, and therefore we are continuously aware of its impact on the lives of men and women, children and pensioners, affluent and poor, single and married in our South African communities (Muro 2003:41). However, it has been recorded that women across the world experience higher rates of HIV infection, and this may be interpreted in terms of women’s vulnerability to HIV and AIDS which is associated with inequality in sexual, social and economic terms. HIV is can therefore be related to power struggles, gender inequality, poverty and destructive social norms. In addressing this pandemic, we therefore should not only be addressing women’s rights as human rights but the rights of all South Africans, including those of children. The abuse of women and children is a particular challenge within the South African society especially as it pertains to the increasing statistics of HIV/AIDS related to sexual abuse (Slattery 2002:27).

If we affirm the equality and dignity of humanity, then the consequent expectation will be the desire of all individuals for respect. This further implies our personal and communal responsibility towards one another, yet stigma and discrimination have been described as the second wave of silence confronting our society, the first being the lack of willingness to talk about the infection, particularly in avoiding the public address of sexual activity. In fact stigma could be defined as ‘a disease of the affected imposed on the infected’ (Muro 2003:48). The result of stigma and discrimination is due to the denial, silence, fear, and affirmation of prejudices. A sense of shame also develops when patients experience the judgment and condemnation of others who are most likely to associate HIV/AIDS with immorality (Slattery 2002:25). It therefore becomes evident that discrimination of HIV/AIDS patients is a violation of their human rights. We are challenged in this perspective as we are called to address the oppression of any and all marginalised within society.
Education is an ongoing process in this regard as communities remain vulnerable and in need of knowledge about HIV/AIDS. Training of both young and adult members of the community requires clarifying misunderstandings with a call to explain the medical implications of the infection as well as implore pastoral skills amongst members of the community (Muro 2003:43). Risks and fears about the infection have to be addressed as these form part of the misconceptions and lead to stereotyping and prejudice. As this remains an overwhelming task, the need for partnerships, dialogue and collaboration with various governmental departments and non-profit organizations remains essential. Participation will seek to collectively address the prevention of HIV/AIDS through the promotion of safe sexual activity. This particularly poses a challenge for the church who has appeared to remain silent on their teaching of sexual morality. For many centuries it has survived adequately on endorsing the practice of sexuality within the safety of marriage. As abstinence and fidelity remain essentials of the church’s morality code, it is now faced with the challenge of addressing these aspects within a context of AIDS. No longer can the church afford to remain quiet on its teachings of sexuality. The pandemic of HIV/AIDS is a direct call for the churches involvement. Preaching therefore plays an important role in communicating its teaching on sexuality and morality, as the pandemic has developed into a large scale concern, and as we are witnessing the global effects of HIV/AIDS. Dialogue on international levels has lead to annual worldwide conferences for the sharing of knowledge and skills. On a national level, policies and budgets address the socio-economics dynamics and local communities are restructuring themselves to manage these desperate needs. Support and care therefore include the interactive partnering and dialogue amongst church, community and government.

3.3.1.1 Making sense of HIV/AIDS in light of Mystery

The need to know the origin of HIV/AIDS lies in the search for a cure and its prevention. As a result many varying theories of origin have been developed and although many of these may be recognised as contributing scientific value, additional needs pertaining to personal and social responsibility have also arisen. The desire to apportion blame results from a desire to avoid the implications of responsibility which enables individuals to divert from playing a participatory role in addressing the concerns of HIV/AIDS. Another
perspective in addressing this pandemic includes the search for religious meaning and answers to the overwhelming proportions of the pandemic, which may now be viewed as out of control (Ryan 2003:3). Witchcraft has also surfaced in the discussion of the cause of HIV/AIDS in the belief that the origin derived through the spiritual realm of curses (Slattery 2002:26). Additionally, theological reflections have sought to assist in answering the inevitable questions, such as ‘If God is all powerful and ultimately in control of all things, why has he allowed the AIDS pandemic?’ ‘Did God create HIV/AIDS to punish humanity?’ and ‘If God seeks all that is good, why hasn’t he helped to prevent AIDS?’

In trying to solve these questions, many have opted to explain the relation between God and AIDS in terms of God’s punishment. This perspective holds the view that God, acting in accordance with the attribute of his justice, is punishing humanity for the sexual promiscuity which is so prevalent in our society. There is sufficient evidence which demonstrates the spread of AIDS is indeed related to the promiscuous sexual activity within society, and could in fact be contained if sexual activity was limited to faithful monogamous relationships. If we claim, however, that our conclusion to the origin of AIDS is indeed a form of Godly punishment, we discredit other attributes of God namely grace, mercy and forgiveness. While maintaining that there are consequences of humanity’s promiscuous sexual activity, both individually and collectively, it should be stated however that these consequences are not intended to be God’s deliberate will for the spread of AIDS (Ryan 2003: 5). In the attempt to avoid this perspective of a punishing God, we may find that we approach the AIDS pandemic from a moralistic perspective yet the possible dangers of this perspective results in our communicating a message in which a legalistic view of the law is developed. In such instances the breaking of the law results in having to receive retribution for these deeds. What then of other acts of immorality unrelated to sexual promiscuity? Is God inconsistent in his approach to dealing with humanity in our creation of a hierarchy of sin?

How are we to address these perspectives? How do we make sense of AIDS and would we be able to communicate a message which reflects the essence of a hopeful promise in the context of this present suffering? The challenges faced by the church pertain not only to intellectual reasoning but relate to supporting the emotionally affected members. Churches are faced with the problems of disclosure within their congregations, in which
HIV/AIDS rather becomes a concern for ‘others’ and in a sense HIV/AIDS effects those members not in our congregation. Preaching that communicates ‘about’ HIV/AIDS addresses social-economic issues at large but seldom communicates with those in need of pastoral care. The difficulties to overcome in this regard are issues related to stigma, stereo-typing and prejudice. Preaching therefore has to once again re-emphasis our identity, tackling concepts of ‘being made in the image of God’ in light of HIV/AIDS. It will endorse human dignity, and promote the equality of all people, in addition to encouraging the sharing of one another’s brokenness in community rather than in isolation.

3.3.1.2 The Challenge to Respond

The only guilt which is to be a concern for us today is our own guilt in failing to respond to the needs of our community, and failing to show compassion and care. The challenge of AIDS for the church today, calls for a response that is beyond merely addressing the socio-economic needs. It is a complexity of needs that extends into the areas of sexual ethics, suffering, stigmatisation, death and bereavement, confronting the church to creatively use its wealth of resources and energies in new ways. Homiletical endeavours will therefore not only be confronted with the challenges of pastoral care and counseling but also be challenged from the perspective of sustainable development. One particular and detrimental effect of HIV/AIDS is its impact upon family structures within our South African society. Children become heads of homes as a result of adult deaths in the family and the retired and aged are called to take care of orphans, with insufficient income placing desperate family members to seek employment anywhere.

The pandemic has exposed and challenged certain aspects of our theology, ethics, liturgy and the practice of our ministry. We will need to be more deliberate in our confrontation of sexual activity and in addressing biblical perspectives of sexuality, in which honest and realistic engagement may take place. In addition to this, there is a need to promote human dignity by confronting prejudices and rejecting stereotypes, to be a clear distinct voice in the community in which a message of hope comes alongside the needs of the community, advocating justice and equality; and finally to ensure that our theology is able to address the social and cultural concerns of contemporary society (Muro 2003:49).
It has been reported that approximately 40 million people worldwide are living with AIDS, 30 percent of these people live in Southern Africa, more alarming is the fact that the region is only 2 percent of the global population. The impact of these figures has already set forth socio-economic challenges in a Post-Apartheid South Africa. Our economy is faced with a growing loss of labour, high absenteeism and a break down in family structures. It becomes more difficult to remain optimistic when statistics report that the future holds for us even more severe figures. If the present trends continue a predicted figure of 70 million will die by 2020 and 348 million will be infected by the year 2040 (Cilliers 2007:156). How do we then offer a message of hope when statistics portraying hopelessness are prominent? Perhaps the answer lies, not in words, but in our affirmation of those we disregard. The church needs to demonstrate that which it so eloquently articulates in the context of its messages of hope, purpose and meaning.

In affirming a theology of life, the church will not only be able to promote the value of pastoral care towards the patients of HIV/AIDS but will also have a foundation from which to address the concerns related to death and dying (Ruele 2003:73). One of the primary emotional factors contributing towards the fear of this infection is the concept of death, as a result of the lack of a cure, and limited resources for the ongoing treatment of patients. Many patients who have tested positive for HIV/AIDS have expressed that they felt their diagnosis was like receiving an immediate death sentence. As preaching seeks to address the immediate and ongoing concerns of patients, it will be able to reinforce the affirmation of life through asserting faith in God the creator and sustainer of life. From a Christological perspective, we acknowledge the promise of Christ for a life of abundance. We are therefore able not only to offer an eschatological hope, but to be present amidst the pain and suffering offering through our words and deeds an expression of the compassion, care and comfort of God’s love. Through this we will be able to restore the shattered identities of many and bring a sense of togetherness in community.
3.3.2 Poverty

The definition of poverty reflects those specific characteristics with which to identify the poor. In so doing, it demonstrates those fundamental values associated with being poor. If the state of being in poverty is directly related to a lack of an acceptable quality of life, then being poor is an unacceptable and undesirable state.

In defining the concept of poverty a concern remains in the distinguishing of those we consider to be ‘poor’ from those who are ‘not poor’. This problem does not present itself as unique to the South African context, for the definition and measurement of poverty shapes and influences choices that all governments have to face (Magasela 2006:46). However, conflict not only centers upon how to define poverty but also relates to the question of who defines it. This is particularly relevant to the South African context as it relates to the long term effects of racial discrimination and the affects which caused poverties confinement to specific groups within society (Magasela 2006:48).

Despite the lengthy debates on poverty in South Africa, it has been recognised by some critics that in comparison to the developments and advances on international levels, our South African context is still in its formative stages, especially in terms of its research methodology (Lutchman 2006:4). It appears an opportune time to reflect the conceptualisation and measurement of poverty particularly in light of the fact that we lack a reliable and current definition. The first official review of poverty after 1994 was based on income poverty alone and did not succeed in considering the socio-economic perspectives. Also highlighted here is the popular form of poverty surveys, the household subsistence and minimum living level surveys, which were both developed during the Apartheid era and have remained unchanged (Lutchman 2006:5). This has been recognised as problematic as the contemporary Post-Apartheid period is significantly different from that which preceded it. It is therefore recommended that a more qualitative perspective should be adopted, one that has a focus on the socio-economic rights be established in accordance with our new Constitution (Lutchman 2006:5). This approach recognises that poverty is multidimensional in its nature and not simply concerned with income-related measures. It has a more dynamic approach in that it includes concerns for access to infrastructure and a quality of life to which every South African is entitled.
Defining poverty therefore remains a relative task. Often the process is assimilated in academic disciplines or through governmental explorations and practices which are then used to determine legislation and policies. But when we are able to include the diversity of definitions of those who would call themselves victims of poverty, we are able to affirm that the deliberations concerning poverty calls for multidimensional perspectives. A starting point from which to work is in recognising that poverty is often concerned with a lack of one's material well-being, which includes food, housing and land. Thus poverty is the lack of one's basic needs which leads to hunger and deprivation. In addition to these needs is the lack of basic infrastructures which is demonstrated by the insufficiency of transport, affordable electricity, running water and sanitation facilities. The psychological aspects of poverty should not be excluded from our definitions, as it is the awareness of a lack of power and independence which allows for exploitation or abuse of the poor. Very often the struggles of oppression in poverty, leads to the infringements of not only human equality and dignity but also challenges the community's identity and practice of cultural norms in which traditions, festivals and rituals are experienced. Poverty therefore is able to restrict one's ability to fully engage in community, ultimately leading to disintegration of social relations. In addition, the lack of inadequate health care services with the high costs of medical care generates a fear of becoming ill. The implications therefore may impact the loss of livelihood and place further social and economic pressures on the household. The perception of education is not always held in high regard as the necessity for income overrides the time spent studying. Often it is the value attributed to assets, whether physical, human, social or environmental, which contributes to a sense of stability and safety, therefore a lack of these resources heightens the vulnerability and exposure to risk experience within poor communities (Narayan & Patel et al 2002:31).

The above discussion draws our attention to the complexities involved in our approach to poverty. In terms of a Social Responsibility Programme or the development of a Needs Assessments survey we have to be conscious of the various integrated elements that are involved with the broader understanding of poverty. As we begin to address the processes for improving the quality of life for South Africans, we will have to explore how the implications of spiritual and social gospel take into consideration the contemporary circumstances of individual and community needs.
Despite the enormity of the challenges that faces South Africa it should be acknowledged that it has made significant progress since it has embarked upon democratic politics in 1994. However it is important to note that there still remains much to be done if the aims and objectives of the Constitution are to be fulfilled (Lutchman 2006:9).

In a Post-Apartheid South Africa the complexity of addressing the distribution of wealth remains a difficult and overwhelming task. It is however evident that significant disparity exists between those who have and those who are in need. The evidence of impoverished and marginalised communities exhibits the manipulation and exploitation prevalent in the South African context. It underlines the very pressing concern for the implementation of human rights systems which express human dignity for all.

3.3.2.1 Communication and the Poor

A response to the message of the gospel is one that seeks a demand for justice and a rejection of violence, and is integrated with the demonstration of patience and mercy on behalf of those who experience oppression and inequality. It is not a response which results from guilt or pity but rather from the perspective of solidarity, from which a sense of genuine compassion and empathy may flow. Communication of the poor may then be interpreted as the conscience of the church (Babin 1991:100). Therefore our understanding of the communicative event with the poor is more concerned with the process of describing who the ‘poor’ represent and how we are to enter into dialogical conversation with these communities. Our attitude should be motivated by the desire for justice, the willingness for humility in relationships; and a passion for the redistribution of resources, which should be implemented on an individual and corporate level. As we engage in this particular communication process it is necessary to recognise that the essence of who we are, in terms of our attitudes, beliefs and values are demonstrated in actions as well as our words (Babin 1991:101).

The poor may be described as being materially disadvantaged from human and social perspectives and as a result they are excluded from the conditions which give value to life
in society. In this way we can recognise that the communication processes of the poor and oppressed toward those of power and influence is formulated most often in forms of revolt, complaint, or as submission. In contrast the communication channels of the affluent with the poor are constructed by self-assurance, dictatorship, authoritarianism or is depicted as the donator or giver which may be subjected by a conscience of guilt (Babin 1991:102). Financial power is often a determining factor within these communication contracts. It appears ‘money is the message’

3.3.2.2 Powerlessness

Poverty is often an expression of hopelessness, powerlessness, humiliation and marginalisation (Narayan & Patel et al 2002:31). The lack of voice and power is not only experienced in the interactions of politics and the government, but also in the socio-economic sphere which includes the influence of bankers, moneylenders, and employers.

This concept of powerlessness may be perceived in terms of the dynamic struggles within our social systems. As a result of the social norms the desire for change in a specific dimension of our social system will find it extremely difficult if not in fact impossible to bring about systemic change (Narayan & Patel et al 2002:266). It has been evident that change in one part of a system, has more often than not, created a sense of resistance in the system, with its intention to reorder balance and harmony of the system.

Questions arising from suffering challenge the gospel once again in a context of overwhelming deprivation and despair. Poverty however focuses on questioning why an omnipotent God, who is in control of all resources, does not exhibit the kindness and generosity that biblical texts demonstrate. If indeed God’s power is beyond economics and politics, why then does it appear that these authorities remain in control? It is again through emphasising the social and spiritual implications of the gospel that we are able to communicate and present a compassionate God, and in the incarnation will testify to the God with us, God among us, and the suffering God. It is for this very reason that despite how far removed we may be from daily interaction and practice with the poor, it remains essential for the church to engage with communities. In our South Africa context being
removed from the challenges of poverty highlights the very existence of segregation and fragmentation of society.

A challenge for us today, rests in how we are to address the despair and despondency of many communities who are faced with the continual demands of life and yet unable to meet them through the lack of resources at their disposal. How are we to encourage those whose ongoing commitment and determination is confronted daily with overwhelming struggles. When life becomes all about survival, when it is consumed with the need to ‘make it through another day’ only to discover this new day offers more hardship than yesterday, how is meaning to be conveyed? Where is purpose in life to be found? If we proclaim the message of the gospel is one of hope, reassurance and comfort, what form would it take in addressing the overwhelming complexities of the poor in our South African context, a form that encompasses both word and deed. We will need to address the injustices of our communities, we will need to promote the distribution of resources, but above all we will have to become proactive participants in the transformation of our communities. In this way preaching will have the opportunity to invite, engage and encourage dialogue with the community, confronting the social concerns and addressing the enormity of the problems. Pastoral preaching will therefore be able to enter into the circumstances and offer genuine empathy for those who need comfort and reassurance.

This can be evident in our active and deliberate approach in addressing poverty. Preaching should attempt to avoid the divided message in which hope is directed towards the poor and challenge is communicated to the affluent members of our society. Instead a message of hope and challenge is addressed to all members in a collective manner. Those who face the hardship and despair from poverty or oppression need a message that is encouraging and at the same time challenging. These members need to be affirmed and supported in their struggle as they seek new perspectives and find purpose within their context (Nolan 1988:196). A basic concern of oppressed social groups is for the affirmation of Gods participation in their situation (Young 1990:114). And since we are ambassadors of Gods grace, mercy and hope, we are to articulate and demonstrate the presence of God in community.
3.3.2.3 Social Fragmentation as a Systemic Challenge

As a result of inequity within institutions, it may be recognised that the government, civil society and households are contributing towards an increasing societal fragmentation. This is evidenced through the decline in social cohesion resulting in social exclusion. This social cohesiveness may be described as the connectedness among individuals and social groups that encourage and support cooperation and equitable resource distribution within the various levels of society such as household, community and government. It reinforces stability within the community as it is able to relieve some of the material and psychological stresses associated with poverty. It is also a deliberate attempt toward the inclusion of minority groups, thereby affirming individual and group identities (Narayan & Patel et al 2002:220). In poor communities the concept of social connections assist by emphasising social solidarity in which emotional support is offered, daily tasks are shared and the offer of financial loans which may alleviate one another’s burdens. This community cohesion is concerned with the standard of living for all its members, which is not limited to material wealth, but is also concerned with social security and the regulation of behavioural norms of the group. Social cohesion therefore is able to address the psychological aspects of poverty, in that it aims to challenge the psychological dynamics of isolation created by poverty (Narayan & Patel et al 2002:221). In doing so it reaffirms the humanity of the poor in terms of human dignity and equality despite the most challenging of physical and economic circumstances.

The apparent increase in societal fragmentation may be contributed to economic factors such as unemployment, limited resources, natural disasters and a lack of social infrastructures, but may also include limited economic opportunities in which the affluent, powerful or criminal benefit as the expensive of others. Migration labour is also a significant contribution to the experienced social fragmentation in that it results in the separation of households and challenges a reconstructing of the community when men or women leave their communities for long periods of time. Additionally, the increase of lawlessness, crime and violence have lead to a deconstruction of justice and social systems (Narayan & Patel et al 2002:223).
In both rural and urban environments there is an increasing loss in the experience of community and kinship with an apparent association with the increase of corruption, crime and lawlessness. (Narayan & Patel et al 2002:219). It can therefore be deduced that social exclusion depicts the norms and processes which prevents equal and effective participation in the social, economic, cultural and political life of societies. It can be recognised through its relational perspectives, which acknowledges the division of power, implicating those who have power and affecting those without it. Social exclusion may also be ascribed to geographic factors and often certain social differences which pertain to ethnicity, gender, religion or age appear as reasons for exclusion (Narayan & Patel et al 2002:31). For this reason our contemporary South African challenge is to address the overt marginalising of certain groups, which would include women, children, the poor, specific ethnic groups, people with HIV/AIDS, the disabled and the elderly.

Today the question may be asked, ‘What is the relation among groups? In the absence of meaning it appears modern society has been unable to find or to make meaningful relationships, thus raising the level of frustration with life’s apparent emptiness and futility. Social sciences have indicated that this growing sense of frustration has lead to the outward expression of aggression, which may take on any number of forms (Zito 1993:148). It remains a key responsibility of the community of God to demonstrate this togetherness that appears absent in societal frameworks. Yet the church needs to evaluate their internal unity in order to speak with a voice of authority.

3.4 THE CHURCH AS AN AGENT OF CHANGE

3.4.1 Practicing our Proclamation

Today, perhaps more than ever, the church is faced with the constant challenge and questioning regarding its relevance in society. Perhaps we could even hear the echo of society’s call ‘Where is the Church?’ (Pityana 1995:89). Part of this current concern rests in the fact that the majority of our regular church members consider themselves to be ambassadors of the Christian faith and yet it appears that our teachings are somehow not
contributing significantly towards personal development and change, resulting in what appears to be a faith of irrelevance that is no longer able to impact our daily lives. If this is a true reflection of our South African context, then it is no wonder that we have been referred to as a secular society. The unfortunate irony of this points to our historical past with its focus on Apartheid. When amidst the turmoil, suffering and oppression, the church was confronted with the concerns of unity as the manner in which to address the realities of injustice and the proclamation of the message of hope. When it appeared that all meaning and purpose to life was lost, when despair and despondency had taken root in the lives of so many South Africans, a message of hope was needed, a message which confronted the future in light of its past. Can it be reaffirmed that we are faced with a ‘new’ struggle in South Africa, that within the complexities of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and the extremities of poverty, the church is called to proclaim a message that once again is able to convey a sense of hope and promote active involvement within our hurting and suffering communities. Can we then expect to see the church rise to this new struggle, and will society begin to see a new form of church unity that seeks to work together in this new South African crisis?

Interaction: this research study illustrates for us that an ongoing evaluation process is able to contribute significant value to our theological reflections. It particularly raises our awareness of the social structure of South Africa in terms of human rights and human dignity. It poses the question to what degree has the democratic hope for justice been applied in a Post-Apartheid South Africa and to what degree has Christian message of the gospel been able to contribute towards this. As we acknowledge the benefits of a proposed democratic society, which most closely accords with Biblical revelation and generally accepted Christian views, (Lategan & Kinghorn et al 1987:2) we are faced with the ongoing challenges of how to implement such a social structure. A Christian anthropological perspective would include both the theological and ethical dimensions needed to support the underlying principles of a democratic society (Lategan & Kinghorn et al 1987:2). This would again imply that both the spiritual and social aspects of the gospel be implemented in addressing the injustices suffered.
3.4.2 The Ministry of Reconciliation

‘The most powerful message we will ever preach or teach is the life we live. Our passion for reconciliation and our willingness to let it permeate our total being must be more evident than our eloquence of speech.’ (Hines & DeYoung 2000:121)

The above quote reflects the greatest challenge to the church – that of reconciling its words and deeds, beliefs and actions, attitudes and practices. We see the reconciliatory work of Christ indicating this relationship between God and humanity, while the Old Testament emphasized the essential attributes of the restitution of rights and justice. It remains evident that the process of reconciliation can never be affected by ignoring injustice – we are always still left with the fruits of the past. By using the term reconciliation we acknowledge that there are pre-existing barriers in relationships, with God and with each other. And because we have been reconciled with God we are ambassadors of reconciliation called to act on behalf of God to remove the barriers of sexism, racism, classism, homophobia and the like. (DeYoung 1997:45) Yet all too often the church has been part of the problem and indeed often the cause of fragmented harmonious realities. The pertinent question today remains: Has the church forfeited its right to call itself an agent of change in light of its hermeneutical processes, its support of segregation and its focus on the spiritual implications of the gospel often at the expense of its significant social counterpart.

DeYoung states that through the preaching and teaching of the Word, reconciliation can begin to take place. Our hurting world certainly needs a healing Word. The preacher then assists in accomplishing something important as thoughts and affections are put into words. (Hines & DeYoung 2000:109) In a conversation with Prof DeYoung in his recent visit to Cape Town, I was again challenged to evaluate the integrity of the balance between my words and actions. In being a custodian of the message of hope, reflected in our Christian ambassadorship, am I truly living and conveying that message in accordance with the grave needs within my community.

Affirming the activity of God in our world not only assures us of the presence of God, which contributes towards creating a sense of purpose and meaning in life; and assists us in establishing a worldview that recognises the value and worth of life, but it also
contributes to transformational virtues and moral wholeness as it communicates a message of hope. Proctor, calls this process of transformation the spiritual renewal of Christian life (Proctor 1992:34). Preaching therefore needs to include the proclamation of the Good News in a way that communicates a message of affirmation and declaration. This message acknowledges the state of our human brokenness and sin, but leads to the transforming work of Christ which brings reconciliation and wholeness. Preaching should not focus solely “on the exposure of the depths to which humankind can sink, but the heights to which we are beckoned” (Proctor 1992:34). The transforming work of God’s grace is not only witnessed in Scripture, but throughout history, as it calls for the renewal of moral regeneration, both in the lives of individuals as well as communities. For this reason the purpose of preaching is to demonstrate the renewing nature of humankind. This process of renewal and restoration must begin with the present reality of the congregation and also work towards the integration of both spiritual and moral wholeness. Those who are able to perceive God involved in our world, will result in an ability to perceive the possible and available hope of restoration and redemption, leading to growth in spiritual and moral maturity. (Proctor 1992:36).

In facing these challenges, the church today needs to express its identity as an eschatological and social community. It is to affirm that it is a community faced with the present socio-economic, diversity and technological challenges of society, but remains true to its continuous transforming nature that one day is to be fulfilled. Yet a future hope in the promise of a new society in which conflict and challenge no longer exist, should not divert the church’s attention from the ever present realities of suffering, pain and hardship within its communities. The church’s response therefore lies in it prophetic and pastoral role as it engages within the social structures of communities. (Mgojo 1995:10).
CHAPTER 4

4. PREACHING: CAN IT MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Preaching is an activity which is as old as the truth it proclaims and as contemporary as the day it takes place. Its message essentially emerges from eternity and at the same time its application is as current as the daily news. This is the challenge to preaching today. The communication of ancient truth into contemporary language should remain a priority on the preacher’s agenda. (Cox 1985:90) It is this emphasis on communicating truths relevance that would speak to the integrative message of the gospel.

4.1 AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

In terms of understanding both the relevance and purpose of preaching it remains essential to question whether preaching is concerned with obeying the Biblical imperative thereby affirming the responsibility of bringing Glory to God, or whether preaching should focus on and aim to benefit its hearers, with a bias toward meeting congregational needs. The debate follows whether preaching is an end in itself or rather a means to an end and raises questions related to the relevance of human need (Cox 1985:89). If we affirm that preaching has a transcendent purpose, we then acknowledge the emphasis on God’s redeeming activity in the world. It is this awareness that replaces the above ‘or’ with an ‘and’, as the motivation to obey a biblical imperative without concern for God’s interest in human need would prove futile and ineffectual.

In light of this it is essential to note that the very gospel which we proclaim is by its very nature concerned with all human activity, thus making the essence of preaching an all inclusive relevance to our lives. The gospel addresses human activity in that it will judge, affirm or transform our actions. A holistic understanding of this integrated message introduces us to the incarnational purpose of preaching. It remains the challenge of
preachers to remain aware of the various ways in which to facilitate the experience of this relevance.

An understanding of human needs is vital to preaching. Having a vague or general understanding of the universal human need will simply lead to sermons that address people’s needs in a manner in which the specifics are ignored. Such preaching will simply leave the congregation helpless and isolated. (Cox 1985:92)

In terms of exploring the above motivation for preaching the mode of delivery itself should be considered as a significant affirmation or hindrance to the reception of the message. It should therefore be recognised that preaching should avoid taking on the form of imperative commands which include statements such as - ‘you must’ and ‘you ought to’, nor should it voice conditionalism in its approach, implying that ‘if you behave in this way, it will be reward accordingly’. Instead it should be suggested that preaching becomes strongly indicative, representing the essence of the gospel message. It should reflect a message which is not idealistic or manipulative but allows a Christian worldview to impact upon reality. (Abbey 1973:112). Thus when people are needing to make moral decisions they will not be responding to messages that command certain expected behavioural norms, rather the decisive actioning would flow from an understanding of the integrative message of the kingdom.

In light of our integral concerns both doctrine and the contemporary concern must meet together in a central point. For example, preaching on ecology is a concern of the pulpit not because of the media’s emphasis on current global warming trends but rather as a result of Christian doctrine impacting upon our daily lives. Two doctrines immediately call for our response in this regard – ‘The earth is God’s creation’ and ‘Humanity has been called upon to care for the earth’. Preaching therefore has a distinctive teaching task that calls for the engagement with emergent contemporary issues with depth and power that is unique to the Christian faith (Abbey 1973:113).

The gospel message is one of hope and promise, yet communities in South Africa appear more desperate and more in need to hear a new message that would impact upon their
reality. Preaching needs to address social, spiritual and emotional concerns with the optimism of offering the tangible good news which the gospel proclaims.

4.2 A THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

The relationship between Theology and Methodology is an essential one in our deliberations around the difference that preaching has, can and should make in ecclesiastical practice. Although the normative space for Homiletical studies is within the realm of Practical Theology, it is the Doctrinal and Theological reflections that inform its practice. John Stott affirms that it is technique that will make us orators, but if we want to be preachers, theology is what we need (Stott 1982:92). An understanding and affirmation of the Doctrine of God, Scripture and the Church remain a pivotal part in answering the question – Can preaching make a difference? It is both good communicative practice and theological content that would seek to provide a foundational response to this question. In other words, it is what we say (Doctrine) and how we say it (Communication) that is important. The motivation and practice of preaching therefore beckons continuous evaluation if it is to remain a relevant communication modality in ecclesiastical practice today. 3 significant perspectives related to the essential purpose of preaching include the following:

4.2.1 Preaching as encountering God

A central purpose of preaching is the disclosure of God, an encounter which engages the congregation and is aimed at encouraging and strengthening faith, resulting in a deeper commitment to doing God’s work. This outcome thus develops a sense of renewed hope, stronger faith and a recommitment to the missional imperative. The word ‘event’ is described as an action or occurrence that happens in a moment of time in the lives of the hearers. Stating that it is a divine event, it is to be acknowledged that through preaching, God chooses to be encountered (Wilson 1995:22). This aspect of preaching which encounters God by means of a relationship, includes reconciliation and empowerment as
concepts to be included in salvific preaching. For this reason a theological understanding of salvation should be included in discussions around the purpose of preaching, with a focus on both the social and spiritual implications of salvation. A focus on beliefs, actions and behaviours will be central to this discussion as an integrative response to humanities search for meaning. (Wilson 1995:23).

This highlights for us a fundamental concern for the application of our faith. Our salvation and faith need to be expressed both through our value systems and through our beliefs as they are evidenced in daily life. Preaching is therefore the dynamic process in which the experiences of encounter, learning, and active listening are recognised by the implementation of its hearers. Wilson however, illustrates that preaching is not identical to teaching, lecturing or instructing. The distinction rests upon the fact that teaching is knowledge about God, whilst preaching is an encounter with God (Wilson 1995:27). The concept of encounter is significant for us as preaching is about encountering the presence of God. Perhaps a lack of focus on this outlines the reasons why people appear interested in what is being taught but are unmoved or unwilling to change their lifestyles as a result of what has been ‘preached’. Preaching is to be an experience of God’s encounter in and through the proclamation of the Word. As this becomes priority, the manners in which we employ preaching are less likely to lose focus on the centrality of God’s action amongst us. Attention to this purpose highlights that without it, our language may tend to imply that God is remote, abstract, indifferent, impersonal, passive, functional or even irrelevant (Wilson 1995:26). The relationship of the congregation with the preacher remains an important part of the process.

This concept of encounter is therefore significant as it highlights that preaching is about knowing that God is with us, in and through our experiences, our emotions and in our quest for knowledge. Within our ongoing search for meaningful encounters this focus on preaching adds value to the journey of this search.
4.2.2 Preaching as an Event of Hope

Creating a sense of hope for congregants would be an essential aim of a sermon. (Vos 2007:11). It would appear evident in both the Old and New Testaments that in their despair, anxiety, fear and doubt people turned to God for help. In times of great suffering people are faced with two of the most overwhelming experiences namely the despair of loneliness and the feeling of God’s abandonment and it is this primary concern that preaching is called upon to address. Romans 8 presents a framework for the pulpit as a vessel of hope and demonstrates how a Christological and Pneumatological approach would unlock hope for the congregation. Those who are in Christ have found hope in that he is our helper as salvation is reflected in his death and resurrection. The Pneumatological homiletical perspective demonstrates how we are delivered by God, our Paraclete (Vos 2007:18). In addition to this it is necessary to mention our invitation by God to live abundantly according to the resources He provides. It is at this point that we are to also recognise the importance of the biblical use of lament in which the victim turns to God in their suffering. An integrated approach to both Testaments demonstrates a Trinitarian approach to hope thus displaying the active role of a God of compassion and faithfulness, and the Saving Christ and a Life giving spirit.

Liturgy could be referred to as the space in which hope not only can be experienced but also celebrated. It is an opportunity to envision the future but it is through hope, communicated in the sermon, that we discover that the future has already begun. Our present reality is the opportunity and space where life can be embraced through hope. It is this place where the promises of preaching are to be lived and experienced (Vos 2007:25).

4.2.2.1 Hope as a Present Reality

Hope beckons translation into language for the present in which it is able to perceive a clear view of reality and which then articulates hope into the situation (Hermelink 2007:33).
Ensuring that preaching hope has a deliberate and intentional impact on our present realities means that preaching ascertains that there are two aspects of life which need discernment. Firstly preaching hope recognises and acknowledges the present contemporary struggles and takes a directive approach in facing the injustices of this world. Secondly, in communicating hope it becomes the duty of preaching to guide the congregation in their discovering of God’s presence in the present. (Hermelink 2007:42).

A problem arises in the contradictions between the present and future and experience and hope. We do not experience in the present what we have been promised in a future of hope. For this reason we struggle to find harmony with our present reality as the tension between hope and experience increases (Moltmann 1967:18). It is in this very contradiction that Moltmann states that hope must prove its power and overcome the tensions. We must be able to formulate statements of hope which address the contradiction to our present experiences of suffering, evil and death. For this reason hope should not only form part of our Eschatological understandings but rather hope should be the foundation of our theological reflections in which the eschatological perspective is revealed in our statements on divine revelation, the resurrection of Christ and on the developments of our faith and history (Moltmann 1967:19).

This should be demonstrated primarily through our preaching. If we intend to be effective in our approach to communicating hope to our congregations we must be aware of both its future and present realities. It invites us into our congregation’s present reality, amidst the experience of pain and suffering and beckons the church for a message of hope that will assist in transforming attitudes and beliefs of overwhelming helplessness. We will need to address these conflicts in which our faith anticipates a promised future of wholeness and perfection and allow hope to shape meaning for earthly reality in which hope rests upon the suffering and resurrected Christ.

In a re-reading of Moltmann’s Theology of Hope, it becomes evident that a framework for a theology of hope clearly demonstrates the tension between theological ideas and human existence, whereby priority is given to the theological level rather than to the empirical level of human experience. In affirming that theology determines the experience, it is necessary to develop homiletical theory which creates points of entry at
the level of human experience, which is, according to preaching, the application level of the sermon (Stark 2007:106). Moltmann indicates two possible ways in which we can address the empirical level: by extrapolation of what is and has been; and by anticipation of what is to come. Extrapolation is the means in which we are able to point towards the future in light of the past and the present. It is an essential dynamic of liturgy, which allows us to reflect upon the historical actions of God in expectation of the ways he is able to act in the future. The significance of this observation is that when it is applied to preaching, extrapolation gives rise to understanding the deeds of God in our lives. Anticipation, however is the ability to face the future because of previous promises.

The implications of this discussion are of particular relevance for our South African context. When we aim to communicate a message of hope to our congregations, preaching will have to be directive in its approach to socio-economic challenges. It will necessitate beginning with an integrated approach to addressing the spiritual and social perspectives of the gospel in terms of a present and future understanding of hope, thereby encouraging the concept of unification in our South African context. (Stark 2007:108) Homiletical theory should therefore be able to develop ways to preach hope, since hope is the most essential feature of preaching and of faith itself.

### 4.2.3 Preaching as a Collective Experience

The understanding of the relationship between individuals and community should receive heightened attention in this postmodern age. Whether addressing the congregation as a collection of individuals or as the gathering of one community proves to have practical implications for the focus of the sermon and also directly influences the congregation’s response. Essential to this discussion is a mention of the historical shift in viewing communal life. In the pre-modern era, people understood themselves communally and they shared a communal vision expressing a corporate personality. The community was represented in the individual and the individual embodied the community. Pre-modern people understood their personhood as embodied within the greater communal perspective. This vision of community often extended into a cosmic sense of community
as all things were interrelated. One of the functions of the preacher was to assist the congregation in understanding their individual relationships within the collective identity of the community (Allen 1997:138). With Modernity, came a shift in thinking towards individualism and anthropocentrism. The shift reflected on communities as being comprised of individuals who were only collective as a result of their social contracts. The purpose of the community was to serve the individual and make his/her fulfillment possible. The individual human being became the supreme inhabitant of the cosmos. The church became a collection of individuals who listen to sermons preached about their individual rights and choices in response to a personalised code of ethics and morals. As a result salvation of the entire cosmos was reduced to the reconciliation of the individual to God (Allen 1997:139). Despite the current increased awareness of diversity and pluralism, there is a new found longing for a sense of community. On the one hand people seek these differences in communities and on the other hand they affirm the integrity of the individual. It becomes the preacher’s task to demonstrate that the gospel is concerned with creating authentic community, at which point the congregation will be receptive listeners (Allen 1997:140).

It becomes interesting to note that in Western cultures, people become committed to their participation within a community when they are given the freedom to choose how this group aligns with who they are and what they are free to do. It is also worth noting that the concept of critical thought, developed in the modern era, still influences us today. Critical thought involves the process of evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of life’s possibilities. It therefore includes the conscious selection of different possibilities based upon critical analysis, and so we become what we decide (Allen 1997:142). The individual and community can be described as living in dialectical relationship, in that each contains the possibility to enrich or deprive the other. There is an urgent need today for preaching to become more intentional in its ability in shaping the church as community. The church as a result faces the opportunity to rediscover its sense of community as one centered in the expression of both unconditional love and justice for all. It is important to be aware how this is articulated in our contemporary society. No longer can a message of the gospel contain the ideas that the Christian life is about our individual relationship with God, despite the beneficial consequences of personal ethical responsibilities. In the understanding of community, it is essential that the Christian life
depicts an expression of a worldview which is shaped by a conscious awareness of God’s presence in our world and our joint response to this activity. The biblical reference of the analogy of the church representing different parts of a body, clearly calls for a community which relates to one another and to God more intimately. It can no longer be a congregation made up of individuals (Allen 1997:142).

Preaching must also be able to address the essential human need for belonging found in community. Scripture teaches the importance of communal life and the socio-economic implications for the general well being of community life (Proctor 1992:58). The tensions and barriers in our communities are largely related to inequalities and injustices; our own insecurities, fears, desires; as well as our uncritical acceptance of false information and knowledge of others, and our tendency towards superiority thinking.

The kingdom of God does not proclaim the distinctions of race and culture. The kingdom recognises a new alliance with no reference to a nationality or ethnic origin. Neither is it a structured institute nor a geographic organization or programme. Instead it is about relationships built in community which demonstrate the richness of diversity and authenticity. In order to create hope and the possibility for change, preaching can not exclude the need to address areas that divide community. Christ is our primary example as one who entered into and embraced the social concerns of His time. He encountered and welcomed the leper, feared and avoided; the blind, lame and mute, those recognized as sinners being punished for their sins, the tax collector, and the prostitute, all of whom were society’s outcasts. Christ was able to look beyond their inadequacies and recognize their personhood and significance in being created in the image of God (Proctor 1992:66).

In a world full of cynicism with the need to create hope and meaning, the preacher has to be aware of any indication of emerging communities. It will not be through cold, distant and logical sermons about community, but rather it will be the experience of community that will bear testimony to this truth. The kingdom of God will not rule in institutions, monuments or buildings, but rather in the complex dynamics of relationships. A significant concern for many rests in our witness to the manner in which we express the equality of all humanity. There is to be no prejudice within economic, educational or political
differences. When we seek genuine respect for all based upon our commonality in being human, we will then begin to gain an understanding of agape love. Christ demonstrated this selfless love, not in its blinded self giving but rather in response to the genuine interest of the needs of the community (Proctor 1992:69)

Another consideration includes the challenge of preaching as one-way communication, without the congregation being engaged in the process. Preaching has to address the unspoken questions of the congregation, to instruct and teach on topical concerns, to give moral guidance on ethical issues and to help the congregation with their present reality. The preacher therefore needs have knowledge of these ever present questions and concerns as well as a well formulated response expressed within an attitude of dialogue. In this way the preacher becomes one of the members of the congregation, rather than one who appears so removed from the congregation that the distance created will result in isolation, removing the congregation from connecting with what is being said.

4.2.3.1 Preaching and the Preacher

The relationship between the preacher and the congregation is an essential one and could ultimately either help or hinder a congregants encounter with God. The classical Greek term ‘ethos’ refers to the ethics or character of a speaker, and is seen as the essential dimension for any communication process. In order to build a relationship of trust, the preacher must be perceived by the community as having integrity. Wilson states that those congregations who sense that the preachers themselves not only believe what is being preached, but also include themselves as a member of the congregation, demonstrate that they also need to hear and practice the message. Thus they do not elevate themselves above the congregation. By expressing a genuine affirmation and sincerity for the members, it will contribute towards enhancing communication (Wilson 1995:26).

Proclamation must therefore demonstrate the preacher's personal interaction and response within the message. This stresses the difference between one who announces good news and the preacher who is involved with proclaiming the Good News. The one
who heralds good news may be removed emotionally from the message or would appear indifferent to it. The preacher far from being removed or distanced from the message would appear dedicated and humbly involved with the message. It is a passionate involvement and therefore preaching is not merely a presentation or report on the needs of others but instead becomes the communication of God’s Word through human experience (Smith 1984:30).

In this regard there is much debate centred upon the how personally the preacher shares in order to create a sense familiarity with the congregation. Motive for sharing therefore needs to be evaluated by the preacher. To share one’s personal struggles or show vulnerability in the forms of weaknesses allows the congregation to meet the human side of the preacher. Wilson quotes Karl Barth in saying that he believed that the preacher must exclude him/her self from what is being preached, as this would interfere with the message of the Word. The preacher is then to speak from the Scriptures rather than about a text. What is meant here is that the preacher should not be inventing something new in his/her sermon but rather to repeat what is already written in Scripture. Therefore according to Barth, no arguments, proposals or theories formulated by the preacher should be permitted to intervene. But perhaps it is wishful thinking to define the preacher’s role as nothing more as an impersonal channel. Whether we are involved in the activity of writing history or preaching, we will always communicate from the limitations of our own time and culture. We can never be merely instrumental in preaching, as God’s Word changes us and we change it for those in our congregations (Wilson 1995:28). We should never be completely transparent as though we do not speak from our own humanity, instead we should recognise our aim to be translucent in allowing God to speak through our words and actions. Our prime example should therefore be Christ himself. This communication process is a partnership with both God and humanity and in this process God actively uses who we are in all our humanity to witness to the Word (Wilson 1995:28).

Therefore besides the human need for meaning being addressed, congregations need meaningful preachers. It will include preachers who are not only able to create meaning but also who can create relationships in which the context communicates care, compassion and understanding.
4.3 A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

The New Testament makes use of various terms in relation to the practice of preaching. Words such as the following are included in this discussion: ‘didasklein’ – referring to the content of a message that is worth knowing, particularly as it relates to daily instruction; ‘kerussein’ and ‘euaggelizethai’ with its reference to communication for the purpose of mission and evangelization; and ‘marturein’, with its reference to a personal testimony before a crowd of witnesses. (Fant 1992:98) Two significant terms in this discussion include ‘kerygma’ and ‘didache’ with its focus on the difference yet close relationship between preaching and teaching respectively. The creative tension between these two words is evidenced in the understanding that teaching is indeed an essential part of preaching for it is not possible to separate the proclamation of God in Christ from instruction about what this means for us in our lives (Wilson 1995:26). It is this encounter that leads to a knowledge that is beyond information about God but a personal experience and an opportunity to know and be known by God. It is when we encounter God through his Word that we begin to be transformed.

4.3.1 Preaching as Response to the Biblical Imperative

We preach because Scripture commissions us to do so (Duduit 1992:13). Although it is to be affirmed that preaching is not a mere human intervention, but has been created by God through his grace as a central part of His will for the church, it remains necessary for us to challenge a response to imperatives that rest on the command alone. A theological formulation of the essential principles behind the biblical command should continue to sustain our thinking and practice of the proclamation of the kingdom.

An understanding that preaching is indeed rooted in Scripture and is revealed in the history of the church continue to serve this discussion. The church, it is suggested, has never been faithful when it has lacked loyalty and commitment in the pulpit. Again the idea that preaching is communication about God, and that its function is to be found in
God’s sovereign will, highlights for us that God’s intention for preaching does not simply rest upon our obedience to His command, nor does it call for our exclusion to the process. We are called to preach for we understand the need to proclaim the Good News of the transforming work of the Kingdom of God and to the witness of Christ’s example. His words were the representations of the life He lived, and His actions were the demonstration of His teachings. They were united in a holistic approach to a life that was not fragmented or compartmentalized into social or spiritual, being or doing, thinking or believing. The message of the ‘good news’ is precisely good news because it speaks to the entirety of human needs, desires and challenges – physically, spiritually, emotionally and mentally.

4.3.2 Christ the preacher

A focus on the ethos of Christ will include not only looking at what he preached, but how he preached and to whom he preached. He remains consistent in what he says and what he does. Christ was able to teach about compassion with wisdom, understanding and authority. He not only preached about compassion but engaged with those needing compassion. As such he samples for us perfection in his congruence between saying and doing, and believing and acting.

Synoptic evangelists often understand Christ’s ministry against the Biblical texts which describes His preaching: ‘Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom’ (Matt 9:35 and Mark 1:39). Christ confirms this in His own understanding of His purpose and mission in declaring the fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah 61, ‘the Spirit of the Lord had anointed me to preach His liberating message. The references to Christ’s ministry in John, also confirm His preaching and teaching emphasis. He was given the title of ‘Rabbi’ and informed Pilate that He had come ‘to bear witness to the truth’ (John 18:37).
4.3.2.1 Theology and Christ

Following the presentation that a primary purpose for preaching is the event of encounter with God, in a relational dynamic with us, the emphasis of homiletical theory therefore rests upon a Christological understanding of preaching. The theology we do in the pulpit is therefore centered upon Christ as the one demonstrating God’s saving grace, and without this event we have nothing to proclaim as the Good News. The loss of this event in preaching will lead to sermons that are merely literary, historical, theological, exegesis, or cultural or thematic exercises. The congregational members attend church to learn more about God and rediscover Him. Wilson describes this desire as the yearning and longing people have to see Christ making a difference in their lives in terms of both demand and hope. The essence of this process and encounter lies in the fact that the Good News which is proclaimed in preaching, cannot neglect the cross and resurrection of Christ as the center of our faith (Wilson 1995:71).

4.3.2.2 Bonhoeffer’s Christological reflections

In terms of Bonhoeffer’s reflections, the central point of preaching was to be found in Christology. In his view, the proclaimed word is the incarnate Christ himself, and is not to be a substitute for something else. It is to be viewed as if Christ is walking through his congregation as the Word. Thus, Bonhoeffer could declare that whatever is true of Christ must also be true of proclamation. (Fant 1991:85).

For Bonhoeffer, there are three characteristics that are dominant approaches to preaching. Any form of proclamation of Christ will be humble, critical and hopeful. It will be humble in nature as it acknowledges the fallen state of humanity. It will not however be pessimistic about the presence of Christ in this world and will not waste time, as Bonhoeffer viewed it, with the weak and pretentious question, “Does the modern, secular person need Christ?” Accordingly it will not attempt to reestablish a place for religion in the world, nor apologetically seek to provide the reasons for God in either the individual or social concerns of humanity. It must however, recognize that Christ is already present
in his world, and as Bonhoeffer puts it, each individual has to revisit and answer the age-old question, “Who do you say I am?”

Secondly, our approach needs to be critical as we acknowledge that our message contains the repetition of words and slogans. Our use of Christian jargon has often emptied our words of the Word and acts as a counterfeit, void of meaning and purpose. Thus, instead of creating a genuine and liberating Christ-encounter, our message has become an impenetrable religious barrier to those who are waiting for Christ to come through his word.

Thirdly, preaching needs to be hopeful. The church, it appears, seems to be in danger of neglecting this powerful affirmation. However pessimistic the circumstances of the world are perceived to be, a message of hope includes the optimistic reminder of Christ who is amongst us, not only in the word but is actively participating in liberating and redeeming us through acts of justice and throughout the messages echoing the faithful promises of God (Fant 1991:86).

Bonhoeffer’s expansion of his Christological approach includes a discussion around preaching fulfilling four essential requirements: that of continuity, of being theological, of being existential, and having ethical implications. For him, no Christology would be complete without the continuity of our historical tradition and the affirmation of doctrinal beliefs. It must address the existential understanding of humanity in terms of its relevance for the world and the church, and it must have an ethical response to the commandments of God in the world (Fant 1991:87). Preaching must therefore be positioned historically, theologically, existentially and ethically in relation to the Word, the church and the world. This leads to the acknowledgement that preaching cannot be biblical without being worldly, but equally preaching cannot be worldly without being biblical.

Preaching needs to address the existential question, “who is Christ for us today? It should seek both to interpret and give meaning to our understanding of who Christ is for our society. It cannot however be separated from its ethical dimension as it is impossible to separate preaching that is existentially involved with people in the world without equally considering the ethical ramifications. Preaching needs to hold a universal appeal for
people and their history, without losing its Christological focus. It must also continue to be open as Christology is never a completed task. It is a continuous response to the encounter with Christ and the world (Fant 1991:87).

Bonhoeffer's understanding of preaching is as relevant for us today as it was when he first preached. He recognises that the church is involved in two dynamic relationships, on the one hand with the world and on the other hand with God. Bonhoeffer's assertion is that proclamation serves as the link between the church and the world and without the proclamation of Christ and the cross, the world can never be as God intended it. (Fant 1991:10)

4.3.3 A Kingdom Perspective – An Embodied approach to a Social and Spiritual gospel.

The Covenantal relationship in the Old Testament teaches us that true worship with God required the Israelites to include social action as part of their religious rights before God. Holiness was recognised in their righteousness before God through acts of service. The well being of all people, including the outsider or alien was to be considered as their moral life was integrated into their spiritual life. The Jewish understanding of life included the social, moral, physical and spiritual dimensions, therefore highlighting that worship had to be communal, and had to focus on social justice in addition to the practices of physical rituals and the rites of purity and baptism.

It is also generally agreed that the central theme of the ministry and teaching of Jesus is the Kingdom of God yet the interpretations of what Jesus meant by Kingdom has been the topic of many a scholarly debate. (Kraybill 1978:23) Whatever interpretation we may hold of this rule or reign of God, it would appear that we have dualistically separated the social and spiritual dimensions of this kingdom message. As such, it would seem as though we have been presenting two gospels: a spiritual gospel, focusing on our individual relationship with God; and a social gospel, with its focus on service and community. (Bakker 2005:221). The upside down kingdom theology of Kraybill presents
this challenge for us in stating that ‘any gospel which is not social is not gospel. God so loved the world … that He did something about it – He became social in the form of His Son. In the incarnation the spiritual word became a social event.’ (Kraybill 1978:35)

Specifically yet not uniquely. it would seem that our history in South Africa would affirm the presence of two gospels through ecclesiastical communication and practice. What was the kingdom's message that was being communicated during the apartheid years? And how has that message been altered today through an embodied and holistic message that addresses both the spiritual and social realities and needs of humanity? It is not an exaggerated claim that the church has been part of the problem in South Africa's history and part of this problem has been in elevating the privatized and spiritual message of the kingdom above the very real and social aspects that Christ so clearly taught about and embodied. So the challenge for the church remains to redeem itself of the right it seems to have forfeited in the promotion of spiritual and social reconciliation. Preaching, community involvement and a renewed focus on pastoral responsibility would appear to be primary channels for this renewal. (Bakker 2005:221)

People are longing to hear a message of hope, in which they not only hear but see the presence of God active in daily life. Proclamation of the gospel is indeed centered in Christ, yet the gospel Christ proclaimed was the Good News of the Kingdom of God which encompassed messages addressing justice, peace, wholeness and holiness. The content of preaching should therefore be addressing such foundational concerns, not merely as themes but as a core response to the challenge of the kingdom. An integrated understanding of salvation rests upon the ongoing process of transformation and reconciliation. An individual commitment of this nature leads to a corporate response which actively addresses, challenges and is involved with the community in terms of its social, ethical, economic and spiritual needs, thus demonstrating the holistic approach of the kingdom to transformation and reconciliation.

We do not have two gospels – one spiritual and one social, one concerned with salvation and another concerned with hunger. We have a single integrated gospel – the gospel of the kingdom. (Kraybill 1978:36)
4.3.3.1 Preaching as Witness

Preaching must bear witness to our involvement in our communities and at the same time equip, challenge and encourage involvement. For this reason the purpose of preaching cannot be isolated to teaching or evangelism. Proclamation must be a witness to the activity of our spoken words.

In helping to make agape love a real and tangible part of societal understanding and practice it may require recognising that preaching will have to leave the pulpit if it is to remain relevant and incarnate in its expression.

“But selfless love cannot remain an inactive, poetic sentiment mouthed in the stillness of the cathedral, a vain and insipid gesture toward goodness without serious intention” (Proctor 1992:71). The parables of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son cannot be interpreted without an awareness of the acts of forgiveness and mercy, demonstrating compassion to the sharing of suffering and pain of the ‘other’.

Proctor openly admits that justice is often neglected in the preaching of many Evangelical churches. Historically, many countries today bear witness to the impacts of European colonising, the domination of controlling governments and the abuse of production with their raw materials. (Proctor 1992:75).

“When the impetus for genuine community is lost and the momentum has become undermined by passive inertia, when the celebrations of the human potential for true community have faded into a faint diminuendo, when the voices that should herald every sign of new movement toward a higher and nobler consensus are mumbling inarticulate, pious slogans and fumbling with icons of a lingering and weary tribalism, the kind of vacuum is created that nature abhors” (Proctor 1992:76).

It is for this reason that when preaching neglects the call to recognise the dignity and worth of all humans, when we deny others our help and remain uninvolved in addressing the community’s needs, and reject the fundamentals of justice and fairness, it will result in our forsaking genuine community and social renewal (Proctor 1992:79).
Christians face the ongoing tension in understanding and living out their dual citizenship. Christ in his teachings on the kingdom explains how believers are to live in the world but not be part of it yet there is a continuous struggle for Christians to fully grasp the implications this has for their lives. On the one hand, we live in a visible, tangible, physical, and temporal world. One the other hand we are faced with the reality of a spiritual world, one that is ever present and eternal (Proctor 1992:82). The ongoing struggle to balance this creative tension has left many an evangelical community, for instance, with a bias toward preaching the spiritual message of the kingdom often at the expense of the ever present social realities. This too has resulted in a reductionist approach to the teachings and applications of Soteriology. The implications of salvation have rested upon a privatized approach to living out spiritual realities. This inward and heavenbound understanding has resulted in a mere partial understanding and demonstration of the holistic message of the kingdom.

In the beatitudes, Christ’s teaching calls us to living beyond mere obedience to the law but to seek an even higher moral accountability. In seeking reconciliation with one another, in wanting us to love those who persecute us, Christ indicates that our example will witness to those around us and bring God glory (Proctor 1992:87).

4.3.3.2 Social preaching

Social preaching is based on following the example of Christ who began His ministry with a social imperative, and who calls us today to be responsible in our social proclamation and action. Social crisis preaching must take into account the issue of accessibility, which is conditioned by perception. As Smith states that which is inaccurately perceived or not perceived at all is then therefore unavailable. It can be stated that the response to social crisis, by the Christian community, will depend upon the triangular relationship between the Word, the preacher and the congregation. It is a process whereby the preacher is responsible to convey and make accessible the Word and its relevance to the congregation. (Smith 1984:28).
It goes without saying that the Christian faith is to be socially relevant, as it is expectant that it would interact with its social context. Smith states that the ongoing concern is related to the nature of its relevance. Many theologians and preachers of the Social Gospel movement of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century held the belief that there is a Christian command which calls for the Christian faith to initiate action regarding social conditions (Smith 1984:8).

The Old Testament gives clear evidence of a nation fully embraced in the social reality of life. This is seen through the proclamation of the prophets, and through the historical records and poetry that addressed social concerns. The New Testament begins with the formation of community and social empathy. Interestingly Christ’s arrival, His ministry and preaching, had profound social and political significance, and the apostles were fully aware of these social and political implications of their ministry (Smith 1984:9). Church history will also testify to the impact that the church had on its social and political context, sometimes for very different reasons. Today amidst the increasing economic and social power struggles, the church’s proactive involvement in social affairs is being called into question. On the one hand liberation theologians are criticised for failure to present the individual implications of salvation, while on the other hand the Mission Movements, including the holiness movement, have over spiritualised the gospel message to an Evangelistic message of individual salvation, and in so doing have neglected the social conditions of these communities. Yet despite the ongoing debates of the appropriateness of response to the social crises that arise, experience has shown that our faith is a vital resource for addressing social concerns (Smith 1984:10).

In addressing the effectiveness of preaching as it relates to social concern and crisis, Smith states that the primary objective rests in the quality of preaching, and not in homiletical devices or the emotive state of the congregation. Proclamation of the gospel will by necessity include the social dimension. Therefore, clever word manipulation and creative structural devices will not be considered as the quality of preaching. On describing disinterested congregations, Smith states that people are not tired of preaching but they are tired of our preaching, or restated, people are not tired of preaching but they tired of non-preaching. They have become tiresome of the irrelevance of messages, and overloaded with academic, philosophical debate which isolates
listeners from content and further distances the preacher from the congregation. Yet in a counter response, this is argued that it may give too much credibility to the listeners to decide upon the quality of a sermon. The main concern here is that both sides of the argument refer to a concern of relevance. The quality which lacks is the element in a sermon which does not impact the lives of its listeners. Preaching that contains a message of social relevance is no guarantee for large, enthusiastic congregations. Listeners may become hostile or tired of hearing about social concerns and issues of others. It is therefore important to consider the congregations reception of the message, but this should not affect the quality of preaching. Preaching must at all times remain faithful to the Word and to its essential purpose. Quality preaching addresses the very social needs expressed in the gospel, and its authenticity is measured according to the extent to which the social dimension is taken into account. The Word of God is proclaimed most effectively when it is seen in relation to its function of liberating the oppressed (Smith 1984:13).

It may be an assumed aspect of preaching, but one that should be reiterated in terms of our addressing social needs. Proclamation of the Word of God must demonstrate the relationship between ancient history and current issues. This allows preaching to have a unifying function in presenting the Word to a generation culturally very different to the historical event (Smith 1984:19). When preaching however fails to connect this relationship between ancient history and our current concerns, it also fails in its potential and promise. It was Karl Barth who reminded us that we should live with the Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other. This demonstrates the relevance of Scripture for our present reality and additionally highlights that the Word is as current as the morning paper. It can be concluded then that there is a profound relationship between the ancient history of Scripture and that of contemporary life. And it issues a challenge to preachers to demonstrate this relationship. (Smith 1984:23). The implications of this are significant as communities can be shifted from their perspective of helplessness and despair to a reality of hope, from confusion and an overwhelming sense of being lost to a position of clear direction, from a self-identity of being social victims to a status of being participants of their own liberation through the proclamation of the Good News. When this occurs the eternal is expressed in time and the universal becomes concrete in space together with a
knowledge of God’s presence communicated through an awareness of the knowledge of His care and compassion within the community.

This is associated with the congregations need for relevancy, association, interpretation and application. It is a process in which the congregation is making sense and meaning of what is being preached. They are looking for association between the God of the Scriptures and God of their present reality. They are involved with the text and the proclaimed message as each member interprets what is being said for their individual lives and the community. There is a deliberate emphasis on community, especially when the message is being preached to a congregation of individuals. The preacher for today’s context has to ensure that Biblical texts are expanded upon in order to communicate effectively to the contemporary congregation about contemporary concerns. For this reason, there has to be a relationship between the two. Our tradition and history should not merely be a record of the past but a witness of God’s participation in our world and the evidence for the continuation of his involvement. It is also called to demonstrate the implications this has within our social societies (Smith 1984:20).

Scripture is explicit in its special attention given to the oppression of minority groups within society. The liberation of people can be seen in both the Old and New Testaments with a regard for the spiritual and physical elements of well being. God’s gracious acts are not limited by any means to the New Testament neither should we separate the spiritual implications from the social needs of our lives today. The relationship of grace and judgment are visible in both Testaments. There is no Scriptural legitimacy for separating our spiritual and physical needs. Too often today, there appears to be a split in our approach to social action. This is an example of the misunderstanding of the concept of Christian witness and worship. Proclamation should not be restricted to the walls of the church on a Sunday, but rather in our words and deeds expressed in our daily lives in the ongoing interaction with our community. This emphasises once again the understanding which Bonhoeffer expressed as the ‘ministry of proclaiming’. It does not restrict proclamation to the preacher alone, but understands and encourages the witness of the community of faith (Fant 1991:12).
4.4 PREACHING AS A COMMUNICATIVE EVENT

Communication is the transmission of meaning through our words and deeds. Therefore the essence of language in preaching seeks to describe it as an event. As an event it must be relational in its nature and in this sense we refer to the communication process. If we regard language as the *pregnant* meaning of communication it must be recognised as a form of sharing and thus becomes a communal event (Pieterse 1995:22).

4.4.1 Words as Barriers to God’s Event

It must therefore be affirmed that preaching is primarily an oral event. It is important to acknowledge that the passive words used for God may in fact hinder or stand as a barrier in encountering Him (Wilson 1995:37). However, it is argued that the contrast of words with deeds is a fallacy. An Ancient Greek saying expresses this precise point, “By words alone are lives of mortals swayed” (Sweazey 1976:3). This point is certainly valid in terms of our understanding of persuasive communication. If the intention of preaching is to influence thoughts, attitudes and beliefs of a congregation, then we need to understand the full potential of our words and the ability they carry to bring about change. The contrary is also true, that the preacher’s words can hinder the event of God’s encounter by portraying God in nominal, distant, abstract, passive or impersonal ways (Wilson 1995:38). Recognising that our words may hinder an encounter with God in our preaching, assists us in paying attention to our selection of words.

Preaching as a communicative event, therefore, seeks to express the mystery of the Christian faith through the knowledge and experience of encounter. It aims to affirm the dynamic relationships between God, community and individuals, thus recognising that preaching is concerned with the process of how the preacher is actively engaged with the Word, the community and the social environment.
4.4.2 The Nature of the Communication Event

We are therefore able to affirm that the nature and characteristic of preaching as a religious communication process is distinguished from various other disciplines within the communication framework, namely advertising and marketing. The theological motivation for preaching as a communicative event serves as theory for the homiletical practice in Practical Theology. As a communicative community the church represents various communication systems. Although the principles of communication which apply in such systems correlate with many other societal systems, each system of communication has its own characteristics (Pieterse 1995:20).

Homiletics as a discipline of Practical Theology utilises research studies and methods from various operational sciences, such as Communication Science, yet it is to remain theological in nature. Thus the object of its theological enquiry is praxis, which addresses the past, present and future activities of God. The theological concern of the Christian faith and proclamation thus concerns the involvement of God in the world. As a result Practical Theology becomes a primary focus of the interaction of human relations with God and one another. It is for this reason that the homiletical intention and practice of Practical Theology is to reflect the dynamic relationship between the Word of God, the preacher and the community.

If preaching as a form of communication is to express a dynamic communicative conversation, it must allow the preacher and the community to become participants. The context for preaching may well be within the church but if preaching is to interpret the conversational situation in a holistic manner it will recognise that the social context of the community is an essential focus within this process. Preaching therefore extends beyond the dynamics of the church building and thus it needs to address the circumstantial events which shape the congregation. Social conflicts, economic struggles, and environmental conditions become influences in the preacher’s conversation within the community. The preacher and community therefore represent a mutual relationship in which meaning is shared rather than projected. It is in this interactive relationship that the preacher is able to creatively establish an empathetic and relevant message. Thus the communication convention shifts from a traditional perception of the preacher as an
autocratic ruler to a more mutual peer relationship in which vulnerability and emotions may be expressed respectively.

One may be able to challenge the claim that preaching should not be recognised as the church’s most essential activity in light of an acknowledgement that nothing which takes place within the church building is essentially the most important. Its focus is therefore not only concerned with when the congregation is gathered together on a Sunday morning, but when they are dispersed into their local communities that they are truly able to act and function as the demonstration of the Gospel. However, it is the very essence of preaching that is able to inform the nature of these activities of the church. This interdependent relationship between preaching and action is of vital importance. The activities, projects and programmes of the church are mostly likely to receive their inspiration, direction, and promotion from the pulpit. In a similar manner the most effective sermons are more likely to be extensions of all that the church is doing (Sweazey 1976:4).

The challenge for preaching today therefore rests upon addressing those restrictions to the dialogical conversation. One way communication styles will no longer be effective in creating the mutual respect and understanding that is desired by the community which longs to hear relevancy in preaching that embodies spiritual and social concern in a collective dynamic relationship.

4.4.3 From Monologue to Dialogue

In light of this it is to be recognised that traditional preaching takes on the form of a monologue through its representation of a one-way communication process. The preacher as communicator, delivers the message through the medium of the sermon while the congregation as recipients, listen without any opportunity for clarification or objection. However, if preaching is to be recognised as a communication event it needs to acknowledge that communication is essentially about a dialogical process. Communication which is not representative of the two-way exchange between
communicator and recipient creates opportunities for misunderstanding, misrepresentation and an overall disregard of the message (Pieterse 1995:99). If preaching is to recognise that this dialogical process is an interactive one, which involves interpersonal relationships it will call for a further development of this interactive relationship. The preacher will develop the message with regard to the recognised needs of the congregation. In affirming the importance of this relationship, then one is able to recognise the limitations of the monologue. The dialogue not only permits opportunity for a recipient's response but it encourages feedback. For this reason the preacher is actively engaged with the non-verbal communication messages of the congregation. The dynamics of non-verbal communication enhances our understanding of communication and enables the preacher to interact with the congregation in a manner that is no longer exclusive to the spoken word.

4.4.4 The Forgotten Recipient

Empirical research has revealed distinct deficiencies in homiletical practices particularly pertaining to the congregation’s reception of the message. This highlights for us that there is a significant lack of knowledge of the congregation’s needs, desires, values and beliefs. It appears that too many preachers’ worldviews are very different to their contemporary congregations (Pieterse 1995:75). We should be continually asking ourselves ‘Who is my audience?’ Preaching is therefore about knowing the One from whom the message comes, knowing the message, and knowing the ones to whom the message will go. This is ultimately a call for our words and ideas to have relevance and meaning. If then we affirm the importance of a dialogical approach to preaching, then we are also recognizing the importance of the recipients – their worldview, their social needs and their ongoing response to technological advancement.

Recent communication studies offer insightful techniques for the contemporary preacher. Modern developments in technology have particularly impacted upon the role of the advancement of media, particularly in the area of mass media. The twentieth century has thus lead to the systematic study of the processes of communication. This however is not
a new science as modern communicators rely heavily on classical rhetoric. New representations have lead to the advancement of communication models, in which diagrams and technical terminologies present the communication process. The Shannon-Weaver model is a primary example of such a diagram. It focuses on the interaction between communicator and receiver, the processes of encoding and decoding, and the content of the message itself. (Sweazey 1976:48). These developments have and continue to impact upon preachers as communicators.

4.4.5 Preaching in the Age of Electronic Media

Contemporary Christianity is faced with two particular challenges which rise out of the modern era. The first is a reaction against a theoretical and abstract faith which lacks any experience of a personalised spirituality. The second concern has been the impact of the developments in the above mentioned realm of multimedia. Although it may be debatable to claim that these challenges have led to the increased rejection of the church’s dogmatic doctrine and practices, it is has become vitally important to recognise that at present there is an increasing number of people who view the Christian faith as no longer being relevant to our society. It is this current situation which gives rise to a prevalent search for religion which offers meaning and purpose (Babin 1991:30).

The desire for virtual reality and the reliance upon stimulation, particularly in the younger generation, reflects this contemporary pull through current trends and thoughts. The electronic media plays a primary role in meeting these needs for visual and auditory sensations, which appear to go beyond the restrictions of time and space. There is a demand for instant gratification and a new search develops in which all things are to happen simultaneously.

The contemporary context therefore proposes many challenges to the ecclesiastical communicative approach. Not only should there be an acknowledgement of shifting worldviews but there should also be a review of the manner in which the medium encapsulates the message. Preaching therefore is challenged to find creative approaches
and dynamic forms if it is to be able to convey meaning and relevance to an audience that seeks excitement, ecstasy, adrenalin and stimulation. As such preaching is invited to consider the recent technological innovations of the media if it is to be regarded as a relevant and current form of communication. This however does not mean at the expense of the content of the message or as a reaction to modern trends. It is rather to be engaged with the opportunities of new media and at the same time become aware of the possible dangers. Preaching is therefore challenged to find appropriate ways of interacting with a society that longs to be entertained and to be able to integrate its message which will appeal to the heart and emotions as well as to intellect and reason. (Johnston 2001:61)

‘Society doubts the intelligence, relevance, and credibility of the church and its advocates’ (Johnston 2001:66). Is this a radical and exaggerated statement or does it perhaps reflect the contemporary situation of the church? In our pluralistic and technologically advanced communities there is an overwhelming variety of choice. How this impacts the church leads or should lead to questions pertaining to relevancy. How long can the church exist if it appears to be ignoring the community’s contextual needs and desires? How long will preaching continue to address questions that congregations are not asking; and how long will ineffective approaches continue to be used in communicating the message of the gospel? These questions voice the concern of a communication process that is able to extend beyond the exchange of words. Communication is about the reception of words and the perceptions by the listeners on a cognitive, intuitive and emotional level. In our modern search for describing meaning in texts we must become aware of the possible dangers that exist when we pay too much attention to the theological content of our message. Preaching is therefore called to create a balance between placing an emphasis on the hermeneutical process and ensuring that it originates from the rhetoric’s concern for the purpose of discourse, its form and structure, as well as considering the purpose and process of persuasion (Wilson 1995:65).

Today’s preacher is faced with the challenge of providing both meaning and relevance for its congregations. This places emphasis on the need for preaching as a communication process to create opportunities which will entice engagement with the community and allow for the comprehension of the message. The enhancement of the homiletical
practice rests therefore on increasing knowledge and understanding of the audience, which will include knowing who they are, how they think and feel, and what their perceived and unperceived needs are. It will require the message to be communicated in such a way that it is overtly possible for the congregation to understand the preacher’s message in relation to its relevance for them (Johnston 2001:65).

### 4.4.6 Theology and the Rhetoric

It was out of the need for an intentional manner in which argumentation in contexts of persuasive discourse could be presented that rhetoric as an art and practice was developed. The purpose and objective of this particular discourse was founded in the deliberations of persuasion, which sought to counter any other alternative possibilities. It was judged accordingly by the audience who, based upon the context of the speech would decide upon the basis of its merits (Resener 1999:10). Therefore whether the rhetor made a significant impact on the audience depended upon reputation and character, and the use of language and structure of the formation of the speech (Bluck 1989:25).

From its beginnings, rhetoric was closely associated to epistemology, as this integrating relationship demonstrates that the way we envisage the nature of human knowing influences the manner in which we communicate. In addition to this the ‘rhetorical circle’ insists that the inverse also be true, in that the process of our communication reveals in part the nature of human knowing. Primary concepts such as ‘probability’ and ‘opinion’ form the epistemological foundation in rhetoric (Resener 1999:10).

The nature of rhetoric has been an essential theme throughout the history of homiletical theory, as it pertains to the role of the preacher as the ‘speaker’ in the communication process. Historically it is evident that that many pre-Augustinian Christian writers recognised that there were no ways to reconcile the overt differences between rhetoric and theology. Therefore there was a great sense of unease concerning classical rhetoric among Christian theologians. It was generally accepted that rhetoric would have a
contaminating effect on the gospel. It was however through a small group of Greek fathers who disagreed with this perspective that influenced a shift. (Resener 1999:40). In numerous ways today, the homiletical intention of the relation with rhetoric affirms the beliefs held by Augustine. It is the affirmation that rhetoric is indeed neutral, and we are able to gain the valuable insights in order that we may enhance our preaching and witness of the gospel message. However, contemporary theologians remain conscious of the often subtle effects of manipulation in communication processes and for this reason the debate of morality has existed almost as long as the art of rhetoric itself. Many contemporary commentators are optimistic about current new rhetorical trends. The new developments in literacy, music and visual modes, in addition to the apparent freedom in more informal and varied communication mediums, may therefore open new possibilities for creative Christian communication (Bluck 1989:31).

For the contemporary preacher engaged with addressing the concerns of society, neither theology nor rhetoric can stand on its own. For an integrated approach to preaching, the process of communication has to ensure that the message is able to visibly communicate theology and that the receivers are convincingly persuaded. For this reason, if the preacher hopes to convey theological ideas to the congregation, the message must be appropriately formulated and structured. Personal attitudes and those inherent in aspects of theological education can be barriers to preaching. It becomes necessary to recognise the rhetoric in theology and the distinctiveness of theology in preaching. It may therefore be argued that when the purpose of preaching is conceived as God’s event, the homiletical theological approach is altered. Two reasons exist for this argument. Firstly, theology is to be conceived as relational and the rhetorical approach to preaching is to be recognised as conversational with the intent to persuade. Secondly, this process of persuasion results not only from reason (logos) but also from character (ethos) and the emotional (pathos) elements which have appeared to be present in theology, though often ignored through the ages (Wilson 1995:63).

Communication practitioners have recognised the value of logical reasoning as a significant contribution to the form of their message. Four frequently used forms of logical reasoning include deduction, induction, reasoning from causes and effects and reasoning from analogy (Gamble & Gamble 2002:533). Deduction reasoning is a movement from
the general to the specific, with the intention of finding an explicit conclusion. Whereas inductive reasoning involves a movement which flows from specific evidence to a more general conclusion. Logical reasoning includes the common practice of cause and effect. Throughout our daily activities we engage ourselves in asking questions, particularly the question ‘why’. In the process of persuasive communication, a focus on cause and effect is a more deliberate attempt to provide logical evidence towards influencing the audience. Communication practitioners may begin with the observed causes and hypothesise the effects or they may begin with the observed effects and hypothesise the causes. This form of logical reasoning is particularly engaging as it stimulates the audience’s response. It is also an interactive process which compels and encourages dialogue (Gamble & Gamble 2002:534). Reasoning by analogy, however takes the form of comparison, in order to make conclusions of similarity which support the persuasive argument. It will provide evidence to influence the audience’s decision making processes.

Homiletical theology presumes a relationship with the preacher and the congregation. The preacher should anticipate the needs of the community and aim to nurture the relationship. As a result it can be deduced that homiletical theology presumes rhetoric. We need to have a foundation from which we will be able to proclaim the gospel if we are to persuade others about Christ (Wilson 1995:76). Despite the various arguments in preaching against the use of rhetoric, we must acknowledge that it is not possible to be engaged in public speaking without involving the process of influence. In preaching, however, it is possible to become consciously aware of avoiding any manipulation in the communication process which aims to be deliberate in taking advantage of its receivers. In affirming the necessity to be aware of the congregation’s needs, we are not stating that the preacher must apply a consumerism approach to preaching. It is not about supply and demand. Instead the knowledge of our congregations, their bias and predisposition to and against certain ideas becomes a means rather than a substitute to their gaining a comprehensive understanding of the message (Johnston 2001:63).
4.4.7 The Power of Language

Modern communication studies offer significant possibilities for the interactive relationship between the church and its community. In its functions of proclamation, evangelism and teaching, the church depends upon effective communication. It therefore remains essential for the church to be informed about new studies and research conducted in the field of communication. It is also worth noting the valuable contribution that philosophers have made in communication studies which have rested upon the search for meaning in terms of ontological and epistemological linguistic studies. Philosophers such as Heidegger and Wittgenstein have explored the possibilities and functions of language in terms of what it can and cannot do. Other communication theorists have explored the fields of semiotics, semantics psycholinguistics and neurophysiology (Sweazey 1976:46).

Language is a powerful vehicle in which the preacher is able to construct his/her message whether it be through the written or spoken word, through telling stories, using creative metaphors or evoking emotions through the imagination. The preacher must be consciously aware of the congregation’s ability to interpret and understand within the boundaries of their frame of reference. Problems arise when people are unable to respond to the Word of God in their full humanity. We deny a full response in the movement in worship when we only intellectually affirm the truth of our faith without ensuring it makes a difference in our lifestyles or when we are lead by an emotional response at the exclusion of factual evidence. Non-integration, according to Wilson, can only imply disintegration (1995:77). For this reason, there is urgent need for preachers to allow for a process which does not only address engaging the mind but rather seeks to incorporate the full dimension of integrated human experiences. Reason alone will never sustain the motivation for change in lifestyles. Factual evidence will inform but no longer be sufficient for obedience or conviction. For this reason, the classical Greek rhetoricians spoke of three ways in which to influence their listeners. This included the reasons of logos (logical appeal of arguments and facts), of ethos (ethical appeal which concerns the character and integrity of the speaker) and pathos (emotional appeal). Ethos concerns far more than the just the personal ethics of a preacher, it includes the dynamic of personality and the character of relationship with the congregation. On the one hand it is important to note that preaching concerns the action of God’s event of experience and
revelation, but on the other hand intended rhetoric is essential from the pulpit, this requires a conscious level of planning and preparation from the preacher. Preaching on all three levels of logos, pathos and ethos requires a relational approach to theology, one which elicits a response from the congregation rather than closing it down in absoluteness and abstraction, lacking in meaning. For this reason, the congregational members must be aware of the preacher’s encounter with God. They must experience the empathy and understanding the preacher shares of their needs and concerns and experience a response which flows directly from a relational status with them. As such, the process of preaching must integrate head, heart and soul. Homiletical theology is not to be recognised as an intellectual exercise which results in a distant dispensing of knowledge but rather that which must involve our entire lives in light of a devotional purpose. Homiletical wisdom therefore makes the significant suggestion that in order to achieve these goals today, preaching needs to take an approach that will be conversational and dialogical in tone and style, rather than assertive and authoritarian (Wilson 1995:78). Classic rhetoric demonstrates how these needs are addressed through the form of the communication or speech. An argument is a dispute which seeks rational reason and meaning in either philosophy or science. Whereas the process of persuasion is an appeal to the will of the listeners, to move them towards making decisions. The relational dynamic seeks to establish or strengthen relationships (Dingemans 1996:38). Preaching would therefore be informative and explanatory through its didactic approach, it would be persuasive and make an appeal through its proclamation, and it would establish a context of trust and interaction between preacher and the community.

For preaching, therefore, to embody this integrated approach, the message should be able to engage with the mind, as it encompasses an intellectual understanding of God and the world, with the heart as it seeks to challenge one’s faiths and lifestyle, and with rational feelings which can be expressed through the genuine experience of communal life. This, together with the presentation of the holistic message of the kingdom, becomes a powerful tool within the challenges presented by ones search for meaning, wholeness and hope.
CHAPTER 5

5. CONTOURS FOR THE FUTURE

5.1 PREACHING IN OUR CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT

A revisiting of the hypothesis stated in chapter one will assist in demonstrating the motivation and challenges explicit within this research.

'This research thesis challenges the purpose and practice of preaching in light of humanities search for meaning and purpose. If the South African context is considered a unique framework for deliberations around meaning in light of the relevancies of the realities of hope, injustice and suffering, then preaching should demonstrate a commitment to reconciling the social and spiritual dimensions of the gospel'

Preaching as a communicative event seeks to interpret and respond to the biblical imperative of presenting the good news of the Kingdom of God. A kingdom-centred theology is concerned with every aspect of life and society and not just our souls, as has traditionally been taught. This message, although having an eschatological focus, addresses humanities immediate needs. A kingdom-centred theology must also be Trinitarian in its focus, emphasizing God the Creator, God the Redeemer and God the Comforter.

The theological presuppositions of this message assists us in recognizing the underlying yet intentional scope of an integral approach to this good news. The reality, however, has suggested that this good news has often been confined to many a church building without establishing its presence within the greater societal structures. We often hear about a vertical relationship with God and a horizontal relationship with other humans yet in reality, social life is not on a flat plane as we witness hierarchies of control, power and influence. A vertical dimension in our social life also relates to a divine love that we can share with others whom we would not normally share that love with.
As such, this paper has sought to reiterate the challenge of the gospel to be holistic in its emphasis of the significance of humanities spiritual, physical, psychological and emotional well being. Christ is often portrayed as one who clearly demonstrates the universality and extent of his love through interacting with those others have shunned. If we as Christians are to be Christ-like in our actions, then the initial challenge should be in explicating these elements of the gospel. Elements that challenge the unity of words with actions, and beliefs with practice. We are told to make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:19) The focus should be a witness of the historic Christ, but also to Christ as a living reality. It is also a witness by practice, as the church cannot perform its mission of witness unless it is practically demonstrating what it is witnessing about. Dualistic thinking of this nature seems to have crept into the church on many levels. We seem to have taught a hierarchy within the gospel message – salvation above ethics and spiritual above social. 'If the gospel transforms relationships, if the church is more than just a club, spiritual and social reconciliation need to be at the forefront of its ministry' (Kraybill 256). Part of the challenge is that we have understood the gospel too individualistically. Conversion in this regard means both a new relationship with God and fellow humans. It is not only an inner experience, affecting the spiritual side of our lives.

The universality of humanity recognizes our commonalities of being. A primary search in this regard remains in our question – ‘What is the meaning of life? In light of the South African context we are beckoning answers, not only to this universal question, but are seeking comfort and hope in a country that has and continues to experience brokenness and fragmentation. It has become evident that meaning within context is shape by social, economical, and political societal structures. It has therefore been necessary to go beyond the generic discussion of meaning and discover the South African contemporary context in which meaning is given shape.

Therefore, in order to answer the question, ‘How does the church respond to the immediate, necessary and desperate cry for meaning as it relates to suffering, injustice and poverty in our South African context?’ We must acknowledge this as a demand for a message of substance, and a message of genuine hope; one that is not exclusively from the philosopher or the academic, instead it is a specific cry, heard from the voices of the oppressed and the victims of injustice.
5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS: IN WORD AND DEED

If the church is to be an agent of challenge and change we need to reflect upon the orientation of our church today in terms of its position to change South African communities? Pieterse emphasises once again that we are to engage in word and deed if we are to be recognised as upholding the integrity of our messages. If it is our intention that preaching be validated a viable option for transformation and as a channel for which the church is able to communicate and demonstrate that the gospel which we proclaim is indeed to be a reality for all, then the call is for a unification of preaching as word and preaching as action.

‘If we want to communicate God’s love, grace and liberation to the poor in our country, we will have to do so by way of physical acts of upliftment. The church has to minister to the poor in deed and word – and in that order – impelled by Christian love. (Pieterse 2001:111).

The following suggestions are therefore made in light of the above reflections on homiletical intention and practice, as it aims to address the need for purpose and meaning in life, within the South African context:

- Preaching will encompass an integrated approach to the presentation of a social and spiritual gospel.

- It will therefore employ kingdom principles as it seeks to engage with concepts of justice, human dignity, and the promotion of equality.

- As it seeks to be an active participant of reconciliation, preaching will have to acknowledge the past, envision the future and be involved in the present.

- It will therefore seek to grasp an ongoing understanding of the community, through developing an openness to interact with contemporary trends and technologies.
• This will not however imply a loss of its historical tradition but in remaining faithful to Christian belief, it will seek to communicate messages of relevance and significance to the needs of its particular communities.

• Preaching that seeks to make a difference will become more deliberate in its content formulation and in its communicative practice. In this way as a communicative event preaching is involved, not only with the process of how it transmits its message but also with a reflection upon its doctrinal emphasis and theological reflections.

• Preaching which seeks to be an inclusive, communal occasion, extends beyond the parameters of the church building and aims to reach the socially excluded as it proclaims a message of hope to those longing to receive an empathetic mutually respective message of the gospel.

The Post-Apartheid South African context, in which ongoing struggles of injustice and human inequity are related to the concerns of poverty and HIV/AIDS beckons a response from the church in which, through its language and deeds, communities will recognise the tangible evidence of a reality in which hope, justice, and a meaningful experience no longer remain a futuristic phenomena but are presented as transforming certainties.
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