

The
International Journal
of Homiletics



Volume 4 (2020)

Editorial

2020 – this year will surely be remembered as the year of the Covid19-pandemic. Writing these lines in August 2020, there are around 20 million people infected (numbers increasing continuously) – and the whole population of the world affected by the virus. 750.000 people died in the first months of the pandemic. And all over the world poverty increases, and the most vulnerable are most affected by the crisis.

Are there any ‘answers’ sermons can give? Or is this a time for silently listening with the congregations to the word of God? What is the role of preaching in the pandemic – knowing that we will never simply return to the situation ‘before’ the pandemic, but that our way of living, and also our way of preaching and celebrating worship will change.

The fourth volume of the *International Journal of Homiletics* opens with an article from South Africa presenting first results of an empirical research on preaching in times of the pandemic. Marileen Steyn, Cas Wepener and Hennie Pieterse, all three from Stellenbosch University, conducted a grounded theory exploration on *Preaching During the COVID-19 Pandemic in South Africa* analyzing 24 sermons preached on March 22 and March 29 2020- during the time of the South African lockdown. They convincingly show that in an experience of ‘distance’ (to God and the others) sermons primarily try to present a God who is ‘near.’ The authors explore the ‘hinges’ preachers use to help people on the threshold between near and far. They also point to the role liturgy plays together with the words of the sermon and suggest Holy Saturday/Silent Saturday as a metaphor for the homiletical endeavor of preaching in times of crisis. The article is presented in our volume in an English and an Afrikaans version.

We are glad to present four more articles in this volume of our journal:

Ellen T. Charry, Professor of Theology Emerita at Princeton Theological Seminary, deals with one of the fundamental problems of Christian preaching from the very beginning: its open or latent Anti-Judaism. By rereading Biblical texts, texts of sacred music, and sermons Charry shows, how Anti-Judaism ‘works’ hermeneutically and homiletically underlying the role of supersessionism for hermeneutics and preaching. Her article is a passionate plea for a new Christian preaching avoiding supersessionism.

It is sad to say that also this article is absolutely up-to-date – at least in many European contexts, where Anti-Semitism is on the rise again. And also on a worldwide level we see that the times of the Covid-19 pandemic are also great times for conspiracy theories – and again and again they go hand in hand with classical Anti-Semitic stereotypes.

David M. Csinos, Assistant Professor of Practical Theology at Atlantic School of Theology, examines quite a new and booming phenomenon of art: sound-and-light shows. Observations and interpretations of shows in Orléans, in Jerusalem and on Mont-Saint-Michel verify the thesis that these shows can be seen as a form of preaching in the public square – maybe giving some inspiration for ‘regular’ preaching in a visual age as well.

HyeRan Kim-Cragg, Associate Professor of Preaching at Emmanuel College in the University of Toronto, Canada, deals with the challenges for preaching in a “post-truth era”. The word “post-truth” was chosen as the Oxford Dictionaries’ Word of the Year in 2016 – and since then we have experienced many aspects of what it means to live in these times. Kim-Cragg deals with Biblical hermeneutics, the visual society and the role of media, and with aspects of violence thus providing a panorama for future research – and also paving the floor for Societas Homiletica’s next ‘physical’ meeting in Budapest dealing with Preaching Truth and convening (hopefully) in August 2022.

The final article of this volume comes from Brazil and is presented in English and Brazilian. Klaus A. Stange, who teaches Theology at the Lutheran Faculty of Theology, shows, how Neuroscience and Homiletics can be brought in dialogue – thus introducing readers into a very recent field of research with huge potential for further studies and for the ‘making’ of sermons.

We are grateful to the contributors to this volume, to our peer-reviewers, to David Stark for editing the English texts, and to Ferenc Herzig for doing all the other editing work (which is a lot). And we thank all our readers who form an international community of people who are interested in preaching and are longing to connect our stories with God’s story – also in this year of crisis.

The next issue of the *International Journal of Homiletics* will be a special issue on “Preaching in times of crisis,” publishing some of the papers presented at Societas Homiletica’s Online Conference (August 10–12, 2020). We hope to be able to publish it towards the end of the year.

Best wishes and greetings to all of you all over the world!

Alexander Deeg, Leipzig, Germany

Marlene Ringgaard Lorensen, Copenhagen, Denmark

Table of Contents

Editorial	i
 Preaching During the COVID-19 Pandemic in South Africa Marileen Steyn, Cas Wepener and Hennie Pieterse	 1
 Prediking ten tyde van die COVID-19-pandemie Marileen Steyn, Cas Wepener and Hennie Pieterse	 21
 Awakening to Judaism and Jews in Christian Preaching Ellen T. Charry	 41
 Light Art, Street Art, and the Art of Preaching David M. Csinos	 74
 Preaching in a Post-Truth Era HyeRan Kim-Cragg	 88
 Neuroscience and Homiletics in Dialogue Klaus A. Stange	 103
 Neurociência e Homilética em diálogo Klaus A. Stange	 121
 Homiletical Squib Alexander Deeg	 140

Preaching During the COVID-19 Pandemic in South Africa: A Grounded Theoretical Exploration

Marileen Steyn, Cas Wepener, and Hennie Pieterse

Abstract

Churches have been prompted to rethink the format of preaching and the content of sermons since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent restrictions on church gatherings. What does preaching look like, or what may it look like in times of crisis? These questions arose, specifically considering the content of sermons in the week before and after the national lockdown was announced in South Africa.

Using Grounded Theory, the content of sermons delivered during this period was examined in order to identify an emerging theory regarding the homiletical content. From these findings, a homiletic praxis theory is formulated for preaching in times like these.

The tension between proximity and distance that is experienced by hearers and proclaimed by preachers is explored. Habits of faith and discernment emerge as core concepts in mitigating this tension and in navigating the thin spaces that are created by liminal times such as these.

1. Introduction

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has confronted the modern world with the crisis of health management in a network culture. As part of their response to this crisis, authorities have implemented regulations such as social distancing, national quarantine and, as is the case in South Africa, different levels of lockdown. On 15 March 2020, South African president Cyril Ramaphosa announced a national state of disaster. This entailed the prohibition of gatherings of a hundred people or more. Consequently, the majority of churches across the country had to lock their doors and seek alternative forms of being church and holding worship services. On the following Sunday of 22 March 2020, many churches, including the Dutch Reformed Church¹ entered the relatively unknown territory of hosting e-services through videos, live broadcasts, podcasts, virtual celebrations of the Lord's Supper and other forms of worship and communion made possible by technology.²

¹ The Dutch Reformed Church is the largest mostly Afrikaans speaking Reformed church in South Africa.

² Cf. *Nicholas Matthee*, Hoe lyk begrafnisse wanneer daar niemand kan wees nie? in: *Die Kerkbode*, 3 April 2020, <https://kerkbode.christians.co.za/2020/04/03/hoe-lyk-begravnisse-wanneer-ander-nie-daar-kan-wees-nie/> [accessed

On 23 March 2020, president Ramaphosa addressed the nation once again, this time announcing a national lockdown, restricting the movement of all citizens, of three weeks. This announcement left many citizens with feelings of uncertainty, fear and panic and it increased the pressure on the church to be a witness. Under the lockdown restrictions and regulations, preachers had to proclaim the gospel from their homes on 29 March 2020, by means of (often unfamiliar) technology.

Aside from the impact these changes had on the liturgical-spatial aspects of the event of preaching, the pandemic has also evoked theological questions that in turn pose challenges to preaching. In the light hereof, questions regarding the content of sermons in times of crises such as these arose, more specifically the question: what was the content of the sermons preached the week before and after the implementation of lockdown in South Africa and in the Dutch Reformed Church? To date, research has been done regarding the format of preaching and liturgy in times of crisis and under movement restrictions such as a lockdown,³ as well as on pastoral care.⁴ This article, however, wants to contribute to the discussion by looking at the content of sermons during this time of crisis – an area that has received little attention to date.

From the above context, the research question arose: What were the core themes of the sermons preached in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and consequent lockdown, and what would a homiletic practice theory for preaching look like in this situation? The purpose of the study is therefore, on the one hand, a substantive analysis of preaching and, on the other hand, an attempt to formulate homiletic route markers in the form of a (preliminary) theory of practice for preaching in comparable times based on the insights gained from the analysis. In order to answer this question and achieve these goals, Grounded Theoretical research has been undertaken.⁵

09 August 2020]; *Cas Wepener/Nicholas Matthee*, Kubernagmaal in virustyd, in: *Die Burger*, Volksblad, 17 March 2020, <https://www.netwerk24.com/Stemme/Menings/kubernagmaal-in-virustyd-20200317> [accessed 09 August 2020]. Idem., Kuberbegraafplase, kuberpelgrimstogte en Korona. in: *Vrye Weekblad*, 27 March 2020. In this regard also see the work of John Witvliet and the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship at <https://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/covid-19-and-worship-resources-for-churches-adapting-to-social-isolation> [accessed 09 August 2020].

³ *Matthee* (note 2); *Wepener/Matthee* (note 2).

⁴ *Anandie Greyling*, Wenke vir virtuele pastoraat, in: *Die Kerkbode*, 6 April 2020, <https://kerkbode.christians.co.za/2020/04/06/wenke-vir-virtuele-pastoraat/> [accessed 9 August 2020]; *Jan-Albert van den Berg*, Pastorale sleutels vir 'n COVID 19 grendeltyd. *Communitas*, 17 April 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SBBatw1i8uk&t=739s> [accessed 9 August 2020]. Note that there were also some voices in the media that opposed the use of new technology in liturgy in these days. Cf. *Dieter de Bruin*, COVID-19: Geleenthede en ongemak van 'eredienslose' tyd, in: *Die Kerkbode*, 13 April 2020. <https://kerkbode.christians.co.za/2020/04/13/COVID-19-geleenthede-en-ongemak-van-eredienslose-tyd/> [accessed 9 August 2020]; *Johann Rossouw*, Nagmaal is nie sommer enige ritueel nie, in: *Die Volksblad*, 24 March 2020. <https://www.netwerk24.com/Stemme/Aktueel/nagmaal-is-nie-sommer-net-enige-ritueel-nie-20200324> [accessed 9 August 2020].

⁵ This study was carried out as part of a project of the Task Group of Research and Equipment of the Western Cape Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC). The data was collected from pastors who are all pastors in the Dutch Reformed Church. This sample yielded a result that is true to a typically middle-class or wealthier group of people, as the majority of churches in the sample consist of congregations with middle-class or upper middle-class members. According to *Schoeman's* (2020) research among DRC churches in 2019, churches indicated that 98% of their members

2. A Grounded Theoretical Study

In this article, Grounded Theory was used to analyze the contents of sermons. This is the methodology most commonly used for content analysis of documents (such as typed or written sermons) and interviews in the last few decades.⁶ It is currently one of the most respected scientific methods for determining the content of documents. It is used worldwide in the social sciences, as well as in theological analysis of sermons. Yet it should not be confused with content analysis which focusses more on the content itself than on the generation of theory out of the content of documents, as is the case in Grounded Theory.

Some researchers use the AtlasTI program for their coding when using Grounded Theory, but for this research, it was done manually. This method was more appropriate for the collaborative approach⁷ to coding that was employed for this article and was possible because of the smaller number of sermons (twenty-four sermons) that formed part of the empirical sample.

Grounded theory works with texts (the sermons in this case) that can be collected by various appropriate means, including approaching preachers or accessing sermons on the internet. Once the data is obtained, the first phase, namely open coding, can begin. During this phase, each section or fragment of the sermon containing distinguishable, unique content is assigned a code.⁸ Codes summarize the content thematically or label it using the precise words of the data.⁹ A possible category can be written next to each code. A category refers to content that is unique and has its own characteristics. The first set of data is coded throughout using this method. Constant comparisons are important in this process so that all content overlaps can be corrected and assigned to unique categories.¹⁰

were white. A white person's average income is approximately R24.646 per month (Statistics South Africa 2019: 61). The results, which focused on seclusion, silence and rituals, among others, speak of this context. Cf. *Kobus Schoeman*, *Kerkspieël* 2019, in personal correspondence per e-mail, 28 April 2020; Statistics South Africa, *Inequality trends in South Africa. A multidimensional diagnostic of inequality*, 2019, <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/Report-03-10-19/Report-03-10-192017.pdf> [accessed 9 August 2020].

⁶ *Kathy Charmaz*, *Constructing grounded theory. A practical guide through qualitative analysis*, Thousand Oaks (CA) 2006; *Hennie J.C. Pieterse*, An open coding analytical model of sermons on poverty with Matt 25:31–46 as sermon text, in: *Acta Theologica*, 31(1), 95–112 (2011); idem, An emerging grounded theory for preaching on poverty in South Africa with Matthew 25:31–46 as sermon text, in: *Acta Theologica*, 33(1), 175–213 (2013); cf. *Hennie J.C. Pieterse/Cas J. Wepener*, *Angry preaching. A grounded theory analysis from South Africa*, in: *International Journal of Public Theology*, 12(3f.), 401–415 (2018); *Marileen Steyn*, *A grounded theory analysis of sermons on racism*, Unpublished MDiv-dissertation, University of Pretoria 2016; *André Verweij*, *Positioning Jesus' suffering. A grounded theory of Lenten preaching in local parishes*, Eburon 2014.

⁷ The coding was done by one researcher, who is also the first author of this article, and then sent to the other researchers for their input and coding. The results of the coding by the three researchers were compared, in the light of and respect for intersubjectivity and integrated into the final results.

⁸ *Melanie Birks/Jane Mills*, *Grounded Theory. A practical guide*, London 2011, 9.

⁹ *Hennie J.C. Pieterse*, The Grounded Theory methodology to conduct content analysis of sermons and interviews. Critique and response, in: *HTS Theological Studies*, 76(1) (2020) <https://hts.org.za/index.php/hts/article/view/5851> [accessed 9 August 2020], 2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

The second phase of analysis is selective coding. For this, the researcher needs a second set of data (sermons). These sermons are coded in the same way as the first, with the possible categories next to the codes. When completed, the open and selective codes are placed side by side and compared. The purpose of the selective coding is to determine whether the new, second set of sermons contains content that can strengthen or expand the open codes and categories. Alternatively, the second set of data can bring forth new codes and categories that can be added in the second phase.¹¹ In this way, it is then determined whether the data is saturated.¹² This means that new categories will no longer appear at that particular time and in the particular context from adding new content.

The third phase is known as theoretical coding. In this phase, the possible categories that emerged from the total number of codes are compared. Where categories overlap with or strengthen other categories, they are combined so that the result is a small number of categories, each representing a unique example from the total number of sermons. Categories can then be used as theoretical concepts for the identification of an emergent theory. This means that the researcher identifies a central category (concept) that stands in relation to the other categories.¹³ A scheme or model must then be made by means of a sketch with back and forth arrows to show the relationships between the theoretical concepts. This theory is called an emerging grounded theory that emerges from the practice of preaching on a particular matter at a particular time.

Criticism¹⁴ of this methodology often comes from quantitative researchers who prefer questionnaires and computer-generated data. These methods often require a hundred or more sermons. However, in Grounded Theory, scope does not determine whether a sample is adequate. Rather, the sample is considered sufficient when the data is saturated and no new categories emerge from new content analyzed. For this reason, smaller sets of data can be used.¹⁵ The smaller sets of data also allow for the identification of finer nuances within the data, more so than in quantitative research.¹⁶

¹¹ Hennie J.C. Pieterse, An open coding analytical model of sermons on poverty with Matthew 25:31-46 as sermon text, in: *Acta Theologica*, 31(1), 95–112 (2011), 124.

¹² Cf. John W. Creswell/Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative inquiry and research design. Choosing among five approaches*, Thousand Oaks (CA) 42018, 87–88.

¹³ Birkens/Mills (note 8), 12.

¹⁴ See Pieterse (note 9), 4, for a more complete discussion of critical voices of Grounded Theory.

¹⁵ Cf. Creswell/Poth (note 12), 88–90.

¹⁶ Cf. Hennie J. C. Pieterse, *Communicative Preaching*, Pretoria 1987 (1991) (1995).

3. Homiletical Content of Sermons

The research formed part of a research project of the Task Group for Research and Equipment of the Western Cape Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church. The research began with the collection of sermons preached on 22 March 2020 in Dutch Reformed Churches. Preachers were asked on Facebook if they were willing to send their online sermons in written format to the researchers. To supplement the data, some sermons were accessed via congregations' websites. Most of the sermons received came from congregations in the Western Cape Synod, with some sermons from other synodical regions. Twelve sermons were gathered in total, six from the Western Cape for the first cycle of coding and six sermons from congregations from other synodical regions for the second cycle of coding. The differentiation in geography was partly due to convenience, but in part because the research did not want to cover only one region, as the research aimed at national and denominational representation. However, as the second round progressed, it became clear that the data was not saturated and that further data was needed.

Consequently, it was decided to use all the sermons from 22 March for the first cycle of coding. This was possible due to the method of theoretical sampling within Grounded Theory that allows for adjustments in empirical data as the research progresses.¹⁷ Once this had been decided, all twelve sermons preached on 22 March 2020 were re-coded as part of the first cycle of open coding. At this point, it was suspected that Lent and the events surrounding the crucifixion would emerge as a core category. This was due to the fact that the sermons were preached within this specific time within the liturgical calendar, and thus the sermons were interwoven with this liturgical-theological language. However, no final decisions on categories or core categories could be made at this time.

The second cycle looked at twelve sermons preached on 29 March 2020, in the same congregations as the previous week. The data was coded using selective coding and consequently the preliminary categories were reduced to eleven main categories.¹⁸ These categories were labelled and can be described as follows:¹⁹

¹⁷ *Creswell/Poth* (note 12), 318.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 84.

¹⁹ The language used in the descriptions is the language derived from the sermons. It is for this reason that the term "we" is used, and that God is referred to as male.

	Core Category	Description
1	The disruption caused by COVID-19	The COVID-19 pandemic disrupts the economy, social interaction, safety and church life.
2	Theodicy question	The COVID-19 pandemic raises questions about suffering and God's presence.
3	God's divinity	God is present and in control. He gives life and is the Conqueror over death. Nothing can separate us from His love.
4	Discernment and change	An emphasis on the importance of discernment in faith and change.
5	Serviceability	God calls everyone to serviceability, obedience, discipleship, and the proclamation of the Gospel.
6	Lent and the events surrounding the crucifixion	Lent and the events surrounding the crucifixion provide a lens through which to understand the current context.
7	Fear	The disruption caused by COVID-19 in turn causes fear which is normal and should not be denied, but must be dealt with.
8	Consolation and hope	We find our comfort and hope not in easy answers, but in our identity in Christ, God's divinity, and love.
9	Habits of faith, rituals and seclusion	At this time, we are called to habits of faith, especially coming to a standstill and practicing seclusion, but also through rituals such as Communion, baptism, and practices such as lament, prayer, fasting and worship.
10	Community and congregation	We are called to fellowship and to serve as the body of Christ in our communities and congregations.
11	Identity	We again become aware of our human nature and we hold on to our identity as children of God.

Table 1: Categories after selective coding

Once the second cycle was completed, the cycle of theoretical coding was started. During this cycle of coding, several categories were tested as core categories. A core category was considered credible if it related to multiple other categories. Although Lent and events surrounding the crucifixion had the most points of contact with other categories, it was decided that this category is not so much a part of the central line of thought, but that it rather forms the context within which the sermons took place and the language through which the theory is expressed.

Rather, discernment in faith and habits of faith have emerged collectively as a core category.²⁰ Although these two categories form two strong individual categories, the sermons intertwine these two categories so closely, and the categories share so many points of contact with other categories, that it was decided to treat them as a unit. The diagram below provides a graphical representation of the findings.

	CORE CATEGORY	A1	B1	C1	D1	E1	F1	G1	H1	I1	J1	K1	L1
1	The disruption caused by COVID-19	4, 6	8		2, 3	1, 2, 4, 7	1, 2, 3, 6		7				5
2	Theodicy question	2						1, 5		1, 3, 5	3, 5	5	
3	God's divinity	2, 8, 9, 11, 14	13	9, 10	5, 6, 13								
4	Discernment and change	1, 10			1, 4, 10				8				
5	Serviceability	13, 15, 17, 20	3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16		11		4, 5, 9	2, 3, 4, 5, 6	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10		4	4	2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12
6	Lent and the events surrounding the crucifixion		14, 15	1	13, 14	3, 4, 10, 17							1
7	Fear			3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8	7			1, 5	7	4	2, 8	1	
8	Consolation and hope	3, 5, 8	4, 14	9	3, 5, 8, 14	6, 13	7, 8		6	2, 3, 5	1, 7	2	
9	Habits of faith, rituals and seclusion	1, 10	5	2	12	5, 8, 9, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16			8				
10	Community and congregation	16, 18	2								6, 7		7, 11
11	Identity	6, 7, 19		1	15								

		SERMONS: SELECTIVE CODING											
	CORE CATEGORY	A2	B2	C2	D2	E2	F2	G2	H2	I2	J2	K2	L2
1	The disruption caused by COVID-19	13				2, 3	10		1	1	4, 5		
2	Theodicy question	3, 4	1, 4, 8			5						5	
3	God's divinity	5, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 15	2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 11, 12	2, 5, 9, 12	3, 10	4, 6, 7	1, 2, 3, 4, 12, 16	4, 8	3, 6, 7, 9, 10	3, 7, 8, 9	9	6, 7	6, 10
4	Discernment and change			3, 4, 7, 8, 10, 11	1, 2, 6, 11		9, 13, 14	5				6, 7, 8	
5	Serviceability	9, 14			1, 5, 7, 8		13, 17		11		8, 10, 11		3, 4, 5, 8, 11
6	Lent and the events surrounding the crucifixion	6				1, 5	3, 5, 10	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11			6		
7	Fear							10	8				1, 2, 5, 7
8	Consolation and hope		9, 10		11	9	6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 18	11	2, 6	4, 6		4	11
9	Habits of faith, rituals and seclusion	1, 2, 12		1, 3, 4, 6, 10			15		5		3	1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8	9
10	Community and congregation	9								2, 3	1, 2, 7, 8		
11	Identity	13	13	9	4, 9	8, 9							3

Tables 2 & 3: Open and selective coding of sermons

²⁰ Birkés and Mills note that any emerging core category (and theory) is not the only option, but that it is, true to a postmodernist paradigm, merely an option.

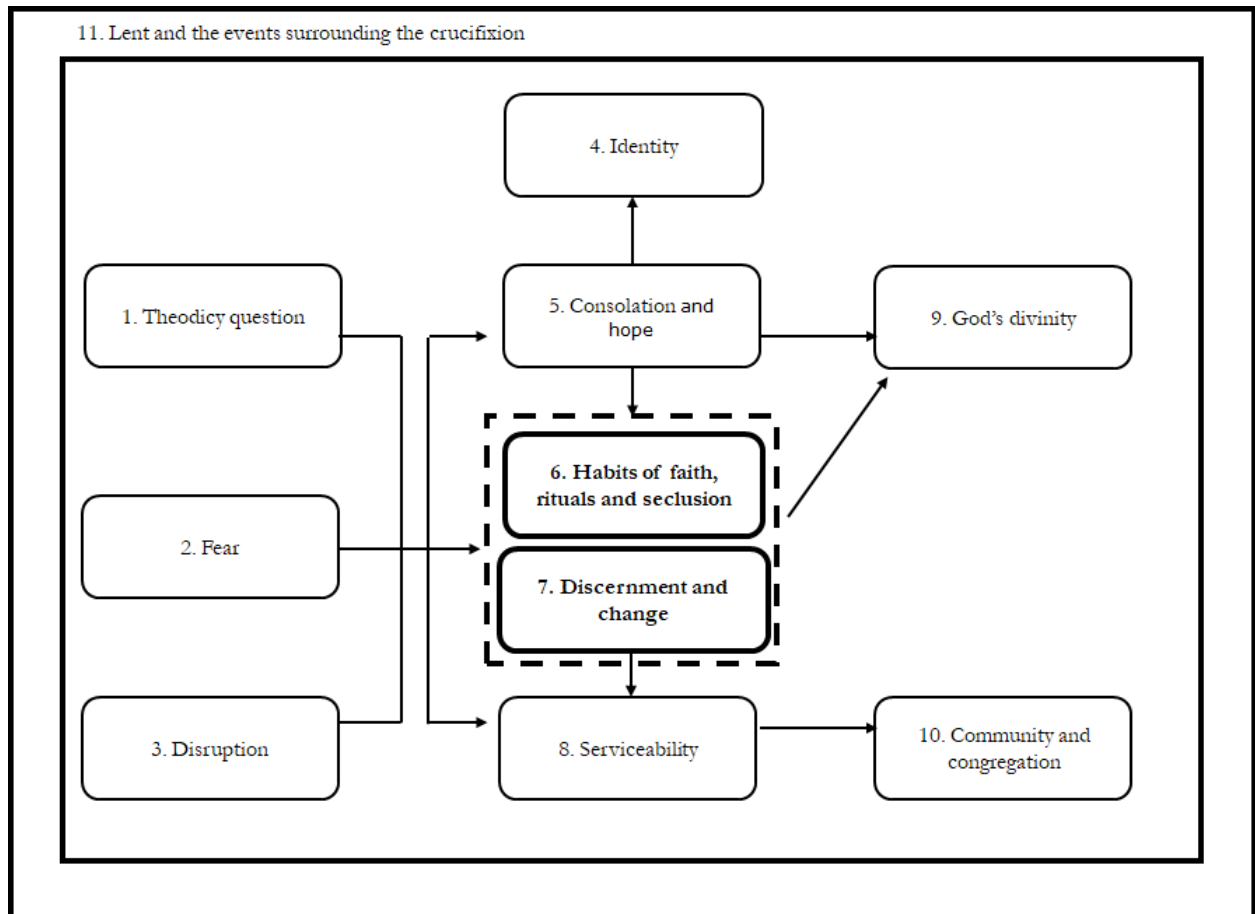


Figure 1: Theoretical coding of sermons preached in the times of COVID-19

The theoretical coding can be explained as follows:

- The COVID-19 pandemic has three consequences: It causes (1) questions about God and suffering (the theodicy question), (2) fear, and (3) disruption.
- These consequences call for three responses: (5) the search for consolation and hope, (6) the use of habits of faith such as rituals and seclusion (accompanied by (7) discernment in faith and change), as well as (8) serviceability.
- (5) Consolation and hope are found in (4) listener's identity as children of God and (9) God's divinity. To see this divinity (6) habits of faith and (7) discernment are needed.
- (8) Serviceability, as a (6) habit of faith, calls for (7) discernment in order to (10) rethink what it means to be a community and a congregation.
- All of these concepts play out within the framework and through the language of (11) Lent and the events surrounding the crucifixion and this gives additional meaning to each of the elements involved. This emerging model can also be expressed in the language of Lent and the events surrounding the crucifixion as follows:

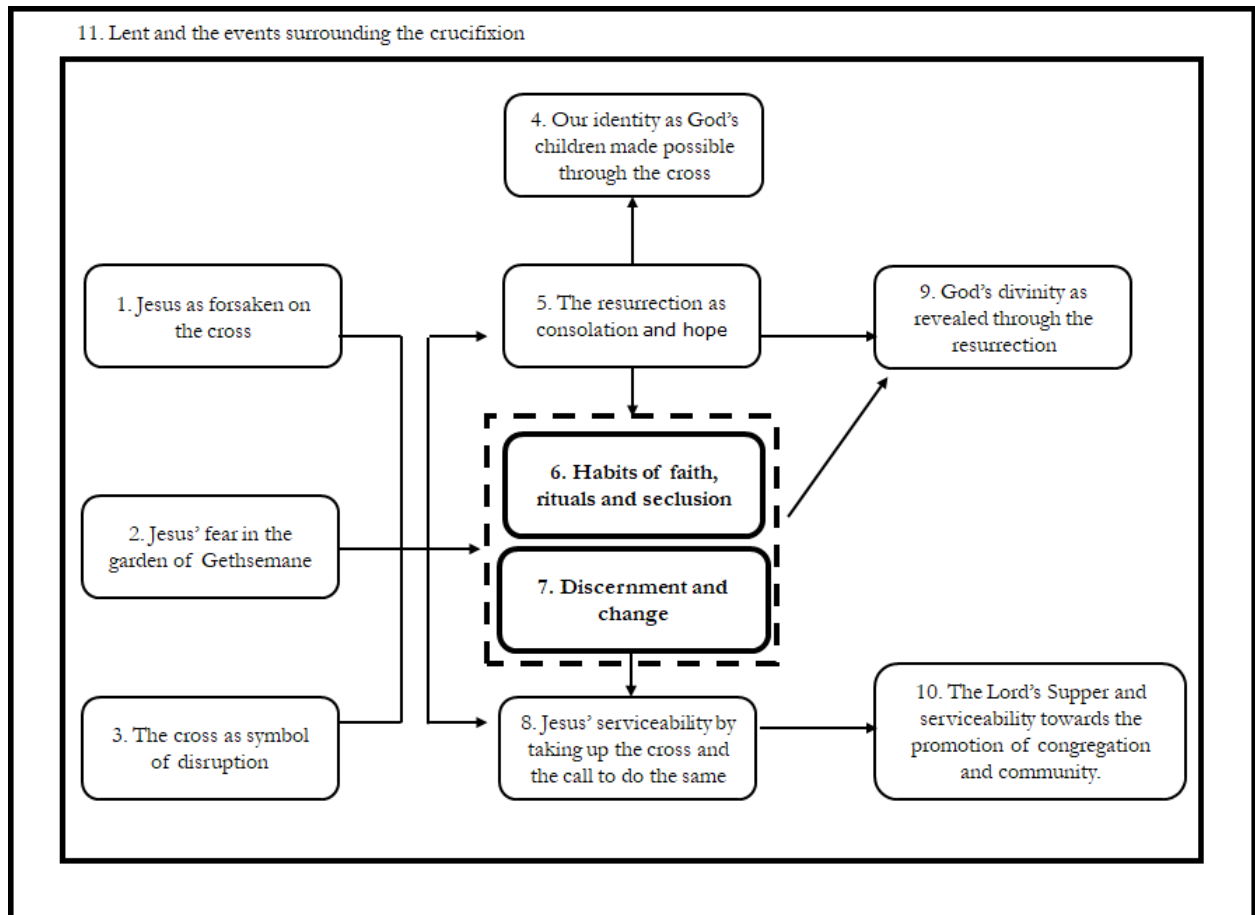


Figure 2: Theoretical coding of sermons preached in the times of COVID-19 in the language of Lent and events surrounding the crucifixion

From the identification of these two concepts as core categories, the following emerging theory of preaching in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic has been identified: amidst the disruption²¹ caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the hearers are invited to see God's divinity, with the help of habits of faith and discernment, as comfort and hope and to be serviceable. Here, it is important to point out that not all the categories are explicitly mentioned in this emerging theory, but only those categories that stood out most in the preaching and had the most connections with other categories.

Thus, the first part of the research question of this article was answered, namely that the core themes that brought forth an emerging theory were identified. The second part of the question deals with a preliminary homiletical praxis theory. In this homiletical praxis theory a differentiation is made between the reality experienced by the hearers and the reality proclaimed by the preachers, and the manner in which habits of faith and discernment form a hinge between the two realities.

²¹ In this context, disruption refers to the general disruption caused, but also to the fear and the theodicy question.

The habits of faith that were encouraged in the sermons are then illuminated in the light of the theory. The goal is firstly to understand why relevant categories and habits and faith emerged and how it influences preaching, and secondly to formulate a praxis theory.

4. Emerging Homiletical Praxis Theory

The content of sermons preached in the first two weeks since the imposition of restrictions in South Africa, can thus homiletically be described as follows: amidst the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the hearers are invited by the preachers to see, with the help of habits of faith and discernment, God's divinity as a comfort and hope, and to be serviceable.

This theory consists of three parts. The first has to do with the hearers' experienced reality (the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic). The second section deals with the reality proclaimed by the preachers (God's divinity as comfort and hope). Between these two realities there exists a third section, namely habits of faith and discernment. This third section forms a hinge between the experienced and proclaimed reality. Serviceability can be said to flow out of this intersection between the two realities.

A discussion of each of these parts, and how they deal with the spatial tension between *near* and *far* follows.²² Habits of faith and discernment are then described as creating a thin space, a liminal threshold, which carries the tension that exist between *near* and *far*, and facilitates interaction between these two poles of proximity and distance.

4.1 A Near-Far Experience of the COVID-19 Pandemic

In the sermons studied, three perceived facets of the hearers' experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic emerged, namely disruption, fear and the theodicy question. These experiences can each be understood in terms of the concept of spatial distance (to be far). People's lives were disrupted because many people had to start living *far* away from each other due to social distancing and the lockdown.²³ Fear and anxiety arise when what people experience is *far* removed from what they know or from what makes them feel safe. In turn, these feelings of being *far* or *far from* raises questions about God's presence and the suspicion or fear that God too may be *far-off*. Therefore, the question "Where is God?" emerged. Thus, this experience of *far-removed*, of being distant, flows

²² For a study of spatiality and preaching, see *Johan Cilliers, A space for grace. Towards an aesthetics of preaching, Stellenbosch 2016.*

²³ It is important to note that in many South African contexts, families live in close quarters, with many people sharing a few rooms. In these times, these families are not living far away from one another. Nevertheless, people in these contexts are also asked to live removed from other family and friends.

from the physical sphere into the psychological and on to the spiritual sphere. After all, the three spheres cannot be separated and therefore an experience of being distant in one sphere also affects the others.

However, disruption, fear and the theodicy question are not only signs of what is distant, but also of what is nearby. Examination of the functioning of trauma provides insight into how distance is experienced.²⁴ Trauma is not an external event, but rather a person's physiological response when the capacity for adaptation of the individual or community is overwhelmed.²⁵ Therefore, it is not possible to say that everyone, without exclusion, is traumatized by the COVID-19 pandemic. It can be said that everyone is asked to make adjustments (due to disruption) and that some people's capacity may be exceeded. What could have exacerbated the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is the extent of the adjustment required, the removal of agency due to major decisions being made by central leadership, and the way in which many coping mechanisms (which includes activities such as jogging, smoking, going out and socializing) were restricted or prohibited.

All of these factors could contribute to fear, which can be a symptom of trauma. Trauma can, in turn, lead to what South African pastoral Theologian Riaan van der Merwe (2013) refers to as the "winter season of the soul." It refers to the times in one's life when the believer feels stuck and removed from God.²⁶ It is in times like these when there is an increased need to "find God in darkness" and "experience God ...".²⁷ This is in line with theory that posits that the re-establishment of a coherent image of God and the world is one of the primary tasks of the traumatized individual or community (theodicy issue).²⁸ These insights into trauma can be valuable for preaching amidst a pandemic and lockdown period.

Despite the experiences of *far*, there is thus also the experience that fear and spatial alienation are *near*. It is comparable to trauma that is so nearby and intimate that it sits within the human body. Trauma is primarily a physiological reaction and the process, as well as the effects of trauma,

²⁴ Whether it can reasonably be said that the hearers had already experienced trauma at the time of the sermons is hard to say. However, themes that are often associated with trauma have emerged and for this reason trauma is being looked at. The argument could also be made that the hearers' access to international news regarding COVID-19 could already be traumatizing in that it could cause or have already caused secondary trauma. Cf. Jan-Albert van den Berg, *Pastorale sleutels vir 'n COVID-19 grendeltyd*. Communitas, 17 April 2020:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SBBatw1i8uk&t=739s> [accessed 9 August 2020]; cf. Kathy Weingarten, *Common shock. Witnessing violence every day. How we are armed. How we can heal*, New York (NY) 2003.

²⁵ Cf. Megan Warner/Christopher Southgate/Carla A. Grosch-Miller/Hilary Ison (eds.), *Tragedies and Christian Congregations (Explorations in Practical, Pastoral and Empirical Theology)*, Oxon 2020.

²⁶ Riaan Van der Merwe, *Seisoene van die siel: Natuurlike geloofsgewoontes vir organiese geestelike groei*, Stellenbosch 2013, 44.

²⁷ Ibid., 42.

²⁸ Warner et al. (note 25), 1.

settles in the brain and body.²⁹ After all, people do not *have* bodies, but *are* bodies, as the Dutch theologian Gerardus van der Leeuw remarked already more than seventy years ago.³⁰ COVID-19 is threatening because it threatens not only the human body in terms of life or death, but also the body's everyday functioning and rhythms. An example of this is the way in which trauma, as it comes nearer, breaks people's connections with themselves, with others, with resources, as well as with their frame of reference, thereby reinforcing the sense of distance.³¹

All three of these elements of disruption, fear and the theodicy question thus indicate that the preachers recognize this near-far context of the hearers and that they respond to it. This calls for reflection on how preaching can function within this paradox. However, the near-far paradox is not only present in the experienced reality of the hearers, but also in the reality proclaimed by the preachers.

4.2 A Near-Far Proclamation of Comfort and Hope

In their response to this near-far experience of the COVID-19 pandemic, preachers offer consolation and hope by proclaiming the reality of God as a *near*. Where preachers focused on the hearers' experience of distance, they spoke of God as nearby. The proclaimed reality pointed to God's presence in humanity's suffering. God makes people His children (language of proximity).³² God is almighty and nothing can separate (distance) people from God's love (eternal nearness). The message is thus not only that God is there and exists, but that God is near.

Coupled with the message that nothing can separate people from God's love, is the message that death is far away. Here it is not meant that Christians will escape death, but that death's impact on the proximity of God is far removed. Accompanying this message is the proclamation of God's creating of new life out of the old – a strong emerging theme.³³ Again, it creates the image of God who moves death (which, in the context of the sermons also referred to hopelessness) far away to make room for life to draw near. Preacher H's words from the second cycle are a good example of this near-far language where he proclaims: "Where they felt that God was turning his back on them, they now felt that God was with them. Where they felt dead in exile, there is again new energy and new plans."

²⁹ Hilary Ison, Working with an embodied and systemic approach to trauma and tragedy, in: Warner et al. (note 25); Karen O'Donnell, Eucharist and trauma. Healing in the B/body, in: Warner et al. (note 25).

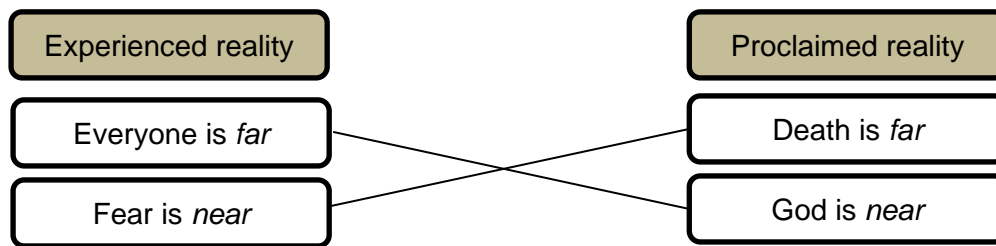
³⁰ Gerardus Van der Leeuw, Sacramentstheologie, Nijkerk 1949, 9.

³¹ Ibid., 47.

³² Although a parent and child do not necessarily have a close relationship, it is clear in the context of the sermons that a close relationship is implied.

³³ The occurrence of this theme was strengthened by the fact that the lectionary text of the week was Ezekiel 37.

The contents of the sermons thus form a chiasm. Where the experience of distance is known, God's proximity is proclaimed. Where there is talk of fear and hopelessness, the removal of death is proclaimed.



This depiction is not a rule. Where there was preaching about the proximity of fear and disruption, there was sometimes also the proclamation about God's nearness. What does become clear from the content of the sermons is a continuous inclination by the preachers to work with this *near-far* tension.

At this point it is interesting to briefly look at the two fictional sermons of Father Paneloux, offered by the philosopher and writer Albert Camus in his novel, *The Plague*. In the novel,³⁴ a plague breaks out in the city of Oran. One of the characters in the book, a Jesuit priest named Father Paneloux, gives a sermon in the local church shortly after the outbreak of the plague and again at the end of the plague. Between the two sermons several months pass during which the inhabitants experience unprecedented misery.

With Paneloux's first sermon, the church is packed. For the most part, the worshipers are told that the plague is a punishment that the people of Oran deserve. Nearer the end of the sermon, however, Paneloux focuses his attention on hope. He refers to Mathieu Marais who felt helpless and hopeless during the plague in Marseille. However, unlike Marais, Paneloux says, he has never experienced the help of God and Christian hope more intensely than he did then. The narrator ends his description of the first sermon as follows: "He hoped, against all hope, that, despite the horror of these days and the cries of dying, was the word of love. God would do the rest." In this sermon, Paneloux presents what the preachers in this research described in their sermons as easy answers – words of the plague as God's punishment. Yet Paneloux also speaks of the Christian hope that he is now experiencing more strongly than ever before. For Paneloux, comfort and hope are *near* at the beginning of the plague.

The second sermon, preached after experiencing much misery, depicts a completely different approach, although there are strong similarities to the first sermon. Paneloux talks softly during the second sermon and he also hesitates often. Camus further writes: "... he no longer said 'you' but

³⁴ Albert Camus, *The Plague* (translated by Robin Buss), London 2001 [1947].

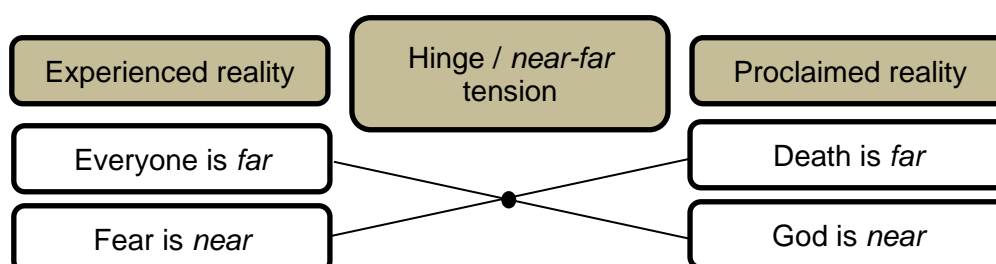
‘we.’” The narrator then informs the reader that, contrary to what the hearers would expect, the preacher did not say anything about the eternal happiness that awaits and which would compensate for the suffering. There is no definitive message of comfort or hope that is nearby. People are simply encouraged to continue in the dark, to try and do good, and to put themselves in God’s hands. There is no island in the plague, there is no middle ground. He then concludes by saying that it is difficult to love God, because it involves a total surrender of yourself. This is the hard lesson, according to the preacher. This is faith. In this sermon, the message of comfort and hope has lost its proximity and Paneloux no longer preaches that death is far away.

Camus’s work shows that while the content of a sermon may remain partly the same, it will inevitably change as the preachers are directly affected by the circumstances. Saying that God is near and death is far away is the proclaimed reality of the sermons studied and it may be appropriate for the contexts of those sermons at those times. From the analysed sermons, it seems as though the preachers themselves experienced a liminal time themselves which is reflected in the content of their preaching. Therefore, it is necessary to ask what can be preached when the preacher no longer experiences God as *near* and when death moves closer and closer.

4.3 Habits of Faith and Discernment Amidst Near-Far Experiences

In the sermons under discussion, the proclaimed reality is offered as one that could become the hearers’ experienced reality if they engage in habits of faith and practice discernment. In the middle of the *near-far* chiasm formed between the experienced reality and the proclaimed reality lies a tension. Preachers encourage hearers to see the proclaimed reality with the help of discernment brought about by faith habits. In the context of the sermons, discernment is to discover that that which seems *far*, is in fact *near*. It is to be sensitive to where God is at work. However, to see this, it is necessary to learn how to look, how to listen, how to experience in and with the body, and it is for this reason that habits of faith are discussed together with discernment.

The preachers refer to various habits of faith. The most common are servitude and seclusion, but lament and the sacraments as liturgical rituals also emerge. In this regard, the focus of this section now turns towards silence, ritual, lament and lastly servitude.



The purpose of seclusion is often to discern God's presence and work. Seclusion involves the intentional *distancing* from others in order to become aware of the *nearness* of God. Silence as a habit of faith can also be included in discussions on seclusion because this too is closely linked to discernment. Many of the preachers and hearers were immersed in silence during the period of lockdown. Although silence can be threatening to some, silence is viewed positively within the Christian tradition, for example when Elijah experienced God in the whispering of silence in 1Kings 19. Silence, therefore, serves the word – specifically the most ideal Word – and thus it serves discernment, and as such, preaching. Peeters points out that "... in the liturgy one sees that silence is not an end in itself."³⁵ Furthermore, silence is also closely linked to habits of faith such as rituals.

On 29 March 2020, the crux of the preachers' messages was habits of faith and discernment. During the lockdown period, this discernment, according to the preachers, is about much more than just a rational, mentally oriented discernment. In isolation and in the midst of silence, it also becomes a physical affair. This is what Kearney and Treanor call carnal hermeneutics which prioritizes other senses, especially touch and taste.³⁶ Thirty years ago Lukken had already stressed the importance of physicality in liturgy, saying that the human body is the hub of every ritual and that we can only gain access to mystery through our bodies.³⁷ In this regard, Kearney shows that while "touch is something we do to the world, it is also something the world does to us."³⁸ He also points to Merleau-Ponty, who defined flesh as a chiasm, a chiasm between the person and the world, "... a reversible crossing which precedes all analytic and transcendental divisions between subject and object, consciousness and thing."³⁹

During the period of social distancing and lockdown, the preachers confirmed that preaching and liturgy cannot be separated from each other at this time and that one serves the other. The discernment of the right word, and the hearing of the sermon and its appropriation, are served during lockdown by the silence and by the physical hermeneutics that takes root at home through liturgical rituals. The performance of liturgical rituals at home are encouraged and supported in the sermons and these involve multiple senses such as touch, taste, and smell, instead of just hearing the sermon and seeing the preacher.

³⁵ B. Peeters, Zwijgen, in: Marcel Barnard and Paul Post (eds.), Ritueel bestek. Antropologische kernwoorden van de liturgie. Zoetermeer 2001, 160.

³⁶ Richard Kearney/Brian Treanor (eds.), Carnal Hermeneutics, New York (NY) 2015.

³⁷ Gerard Lukken, Liturgie en Zintuiglijkheid. Over de betekenis van lichamelijkheid in de liturgie, Hilversum 1990, 5.

³⁸ Richard Kearney, The wager of carnal hermeneutics., in: Kearney/Treanor (note 36), 21.

³⁹ Ibid, 37.

In this regard, it was significant that many Dutch Reformed churches continued to celebrate the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday. Hearers were encouraged to use bread and wine at home and, in so doing, become involved in the preaching in a bodily and sensual way. In the sermons studied, the baptism and Lord's Supper was also referred to as bodily reminders of the hearers' identity as children of God and as part of the body of Christ.

Liminal spaces are so-called "thin" spaces where the distance between people and God often feels smaller.⁴⁰ Therefore, liminal times are the ideal opportunities to establish or strengthen habits of faith and discernment. However, to do this, people must be helped to see the value of liminality and to know what to do with their fear.⁴¹ Thus, in this context it is important to appreciate the close relationship between preaching and liturgy in the lockdown period.

Torvend, however, questions the church's propensity to focus only on the sacraments and liturgy and advocates the reconsideration of the place of everyday bodily practices and actions in faith formation.⁴² He pleads that the church not only focus on liturgy, but also use gatherings to promote practices and actions that honor and celebrate people's physicality.⁴³ For it is precisely in these sacramental as well as non-sacramental acts and practices where God meets people and where people are transformed.⁴⁴

Lament, which is a common habit of faith in many Christian traditions, again moves between the experience of being far away from God, as well as the nearness of death or chaos, and then towards the assurance that God is near and death far away. This is an essential habit, because as Allen rightly points out: "... church services can be uncomfortable and unsatisfying for the one who grieves, for these services may reflect an aversion to sorrow that takes no account of the gloomy realities of life."⁴⁵

O'Connor further makes a connection between the practice of lament and witnessing.⁴⁶ According to her, the lament found in Lamentations calls for a witness who can see suffering. "The witness sees suffering for what it is, without denying it, twisting it into a story of endurance, or

⁴⁰ *Susan Beaumont*, How to lead when you don't know where you're going. Leading in a liminal season, Mary-Land 2019, 16.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 13. See also: *Gerald Arbuckle*, Grieving for change, London 1991; *Coenie Burger*, Gemeentes in Transito, Cape Town 1995; *Cas Wepener*, Burning incense for a focus group discussion. A spirituality of liminality for doing liturgical research in an African context from an emic perspective, in: *IJPT* 19(2), 271–291 (2015); *idem*, Kookpunt! 'n Gelowige reaksie van 'n ontnugterde nasie: Christelike nadenke oor woede, Wellington 2015.

⁴² *Samuel Torvend*, Touch me and see: A resurrection of the body in the church?, in: Institute of Liturgical Studies Occasional Papers, http://scholar.valpo.edu/ils_papers/124 [accessed 9 August 2020] 2013, 124.

⁴³ *Cf.*, *ibid.*, 6.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 9

⁴⁵ *Leslie Allen*, A liturgy of grief. A pastoral commentary on Lamentations, Grand Rapids (MI) 2011, 5.

⁴⁶ *Kathleen O' Connor*, The book of Lamentations, in: Leander Keck (ed.), The New Interpreter's Bible, Volume 6, Nashville (TN) 2002, 100.

giving it a happy ending. The witness has a profound and rare human capacity to give reverent attention to sufferers and reflect their truth back to them.” This is also the strong argument that Katongole makes in his book *Born from Lament*.⁴⁷ The key question he asks and answers is inspired by 1Peter 3:15. He tries to give an explanation for the hope that lives in people. The answer he offers is the deep complaint that resounds from parts of Africa, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda, where people have experienced unprecedented misery. According to him, hope takes the form of wrestling and fighting with God. To complain and to lament is an expression of hope. To lament and to complain to God is to enter that near-far space of tension with hope.

Service in the context of COVID-19 is discussed in the sermons as a way to bring the community close, despite the experience of distance. It is encouraged in several ways. Ironically, one of the facets of servitude spoken of is the need to stay far away from others during the pandemic, for their protection. Several preachers made a distinction between physical and social distance and advocated for keeping contact and social proximity despite the physical distance. Some preachers also asked their hearers to renounce the spreading of fake news, while others asked them to spread and proclaim the Gospel in these times. In other sermons, hearers were encouraged to stay close to others by becoming aware of how far their own context is removed from that of many others who are less-privileged in the country, and by becoming involved in these contexts. Underlying the segments dealing with service in the sermons is the *near-far* tension. On the one hand, hearers were called to be of service and remain near the misery of others and the world in need. On the other hand, hearers were restricted in doing so through traditional ways, being called upon to practice social distancing.

The functional nature of the sermons is thus not limited to the promotion of discernment through individual habits of faith, but it is also extended to the call for concrete acts of service. This habit of faith is not so much about seeing God’s presence (though there is one preacher who describes it in this way), but rather to show God’s presence to others. The proclaimed reality thus becomes part of people’s experienced reality because of servitude. This preaching becomes a form of prophetic preaching that does not confine faith to a private, spiritual cause, but which also looks at and hears the context of the hearers and their environment.⁴⁸ It is a reminder that care for human dignity in the time of COVID-19 not only asks the preacher to be a pastor, but also a prophet.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Emmanuel Katongole, *Born from lament. The theology and politics of hope in Africa*, Grand Rapids (MI) 2017.

⁴⁸ Hennie J.C. Pieterse, Prophetic preaching in the contemporary context of South Africa, in: In Luce Verbi, 47(1) (2013), <https://indieskriflig.org.za/index.php/skriflig/article/view/114> [accessed 9 August 2020], 4.

⁴⁹ Nico Koopman, COVID-19 and human dignity. Theology in the time of COVID-19, *Communitas*, April, 29 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z2SeOufaPQ4> [accessed 9 August 2020].

However, prophetic preaching is more than just preaching to the context. It also calls for the preacher to evaluate critically society's thinking and ideologies about that context and to look at it deliberately from more perspectives than that of the middle-class person.⁵⁰ This is very important when speaking of service that is aimed at the poor in society. Van Aarde points out that South Africa's need for service is precisely the result of colonialization and Apartheid.⁵¹ In this regard, Villanueva writes about the "human colonial virus" that is in mankind and that is known by people's management of wealth.⁵² He argues that the roots of philanthropy are colonialism, that altruism, generosity and servitude can speak of a savior mentality, and that it can exacerbate the separation of races and cultures.⁵³ According to this reasoning, people's ill-considered movement towards others in service could inadvertently promote even more socio-economic distance.

Thus, in the tension between near and far, the preachers used and encouraged habits of faith to act as a hinge between the experienced and proclaimed realities. These habits of faith retain the near-far tension and thereby give the hearer the opportunity to see God's divinity in the thin spaces of liminality.

5. Concluding Remarks: Preaching Silent Saturday Amidst Lockdown

Underlying the sermons studied lies a particular theology that is articulated within the larger context and framework of Lent and the events surrounding the crucifixion. This is a message that discusses the disruption of COVID-19 in light of the disruption of the cross, the fear within Jesus and his disciples, and Jesus' feeling of abandonment in the midst of his suffering on the cross. The experienced reality of the hearers is thus defined in the language of Good Friday. Similarly, God's victory over death and God's life-giving nature and works are proclaimed on the basis of the message of Resurrection Sunday.

The sermons analyzed, as already pointed out, center on habits of faith and discernment as a hinge between the experienced and proclaimed realities. This emphasis indicates an underlying theology that is aware that there is progression from Good Friday towards Resurrection Sunday. Although none of the preachers explicitly focused on Holy Saturday, this article suggests that the preachers, in their focus on near-far liminality, open the way for the development of a homiletic

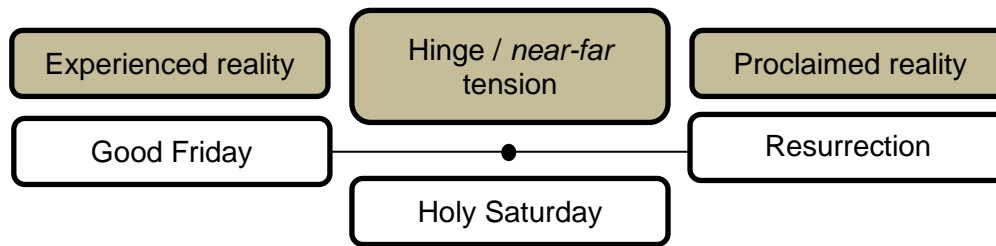
⁵⁰ Pieterse (note 48), 4f.

⁵¹ Botha van Aarde, Franciscus van Assisi: sy betekenis vir vandag! *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 25(2) (2004) <https://verbumeteclesia.org.za/index.php/ve/article/view/296> [accessed 9 August 2020], 740.

⁵² Edgar Villanueva, *Decolonizing wealth. Indigenous wisdom to heal divides and restore balance*, Oakland (CA) 2018, loc. 144.

⁵³ Villanueva, loc. 150.

theology of Holy Saturday for preaching in the midst of a crisis. This can be indicated by this diagram:⁵⁴



The names given for Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday are names that contain the crux of the preaching proclamation, namely the cross and resurrection. Quiet Saturday, alternatively known as Silent Saturday, on the other hand, uses language that refers to a habit of faith, namely seclusion and silence. On the liturgical calendar, Silent Saturday is the day for seclusion, silence and lament. Silent Saturday thinks of the occupied grave and thereby becomes an empty day, a day of waiting, a day of absence – a day of *far*. It is a day that is often ignored on the liturgical calendar of traditions such as the Dutch Reformed Church. Silent Saturday gives importance to acknowledged suffering that is freely and openly lamented.

It also specifically indicates an awareness of the spatial distance both preachers and hearers are experiencing during the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact that this distance has on physicality amid restrictions. As preachers move closer to the cameras, they may experience the spatial and emotional distance between them and their hearers. One could argue that e-services themselves are liminal spaces where preachers are close to, yet far from, their hearers. This spatial *near-far* tension between preacher and hearer is not new to the church. Paul's letters were virtual communications reminding the church that the Body of Christ's nearness extends beyond physical proximity.⁵⁵ After all, Philippians and Philemon were written from Paul's time of confinement (captivity). It is from Paul's own Silent Saturday that he was able to write intimate letters across miles for communities that had experienced limitations, hardship and liminality.⁵⁶

In this virtual space, preachers are invited, whether in Lent or Easter, to remain in a sermon mode of Silent Saturday, to rest in a homiletic spirituality of liminality that holds on to both cross and resurrection, as long as lockdown, at whatever level, continues.

⁵⁴ See also *Cas Wepener*, Stil Saterdag 2020. God is 'n gat om 'n gat, LitNet, 10 April 2020, <https://www.litnet.co.za/stil-saterdag-2020-god-is-n-gat-om-n-gat/> [accessed 9 August 2020].

⁵⁵ *Warner* et al. (note 25), 19.

⁵⁶ Philippians' theme of eschatological expectation can serve as a reminder that the liminality of Holy Saturday lies not only in the moment between Christ's death and resurrection, but that the church also lives in the liminality between Christ's ascension and return.

At the heart of preachers' sermons on the Sundays a week before and after South Africa's lockdown was announced, were habits of faith and discernment that could help the hearers, amid the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, to see God's divinity as comfort and hope, and to be serviceable. On the basis of this, a homiletic praxis theory has been formulated which centers on the near-far tension in the experienced, as well as the proclaimed realities, and which offers habits of faith and discernment as the space that can hold this liminal tension. The foundation on which such a theory of practice rests is the theology of Silent Saturday, a threshold time that both preacher and hearer feel in his/her own body. As such, it is a hopeful theology that, while all involved in the sermon events are imprisoned and confined within their own bodies, holds on to both suffering and victory.

Rev. Marileen Steyn, born 1992, Ph.D. Student at and Research Assistant for the Department of Practical Theology and Missiology at the Stellenbosch University, marileen.steyn@gmail.com.

Prof. Cas Wepener, born 1972, Professor in the Department of Practical Theology and Missiology at the Stellenbosch University, cwepener@sun.ac.za.

Prof. Hennie J.C. Pieterse, born 1936, Research Fellow at the Department of Practical Theology and Missiology at the Stellenbosch University, pietehjc@absamail.co.za.

Prediking ten tyde van die COVID-19-pandemie: 'n Gegronde teoretiese verkenning

Marileen Steyn, Cas Wepener, Hennie Pieterse

Opsomming

Sedert die uitbreek van die COVID-19-pandemie in Suid-Afrika, het die gevolglike inperking van kerke gevra om oor die formaat en inhoud van prediking te herbesin. Die vraag het ontstaan hoe prediking in tye soos hierdie lyk en kan lyk en spesifiek die inhoud van preke die week vóór en ná die staat van inperking.

Hierdie artikel ondersoek die inhoud van preke wat in hierdie tydperk in Suid-Afrika gelewer is deur middel van gegronde teorie, ten einde die kerntemas in die prediking te midde van die COVID-19-pandemie en grendeltyd te identifiseer en vandaar 'n homiletiese praxisteorie vir prediking in tye soos hierdie daar te stel.

Die naby-ver spanning wat in die wisselwerking tussen die beleefde realiteit van die hoorders en die realiteit wat verkondig word, na vore kom, word ondersoek. Geloofsgewoontes en geloofsonderkeid word ondersoek as kernkonsepte wat hierdie spanning kan vashou en wat hoorders kan help om die dun ruimtes wat deur liminale tye soos hierdie geskep word, te navigeer.

1. Inleiding

Die uitbreek van die COVID-19-pandemie het die moderne wêreld met die krisis van gesondheidsbeheer in 'n netwerkkultuur gekonfronteer. As deel van owerhede se antwoord op die krisis, is maatreëls soos sosiale afstand, nasionale kwarantyn en, soos in die geval van Suid-Afrika, verskillende vlakke van grendeltyd ingestel. Op 15 Maart 2020 het Suid-Afrikaanse president Cyril Ramaphosa 'n nasionale ramptoestand aangekondig en 'n verbod op saamtrekke van honderd of meer mense ingestel. Een van die gevolge hiervan was dat die meerderheid kerke, waaronder NG kerke,¹ regoor die land hul deure moes sluit en na alternatiewe vorme van kerkwees en eredienste moes begin soek. Op 22 Maart 2020 het baie kerke, waaronder die NG Kerk, nuwe grond betree deur e-eredienste aan te bied met behulp van video's, lewendige uitsendings van eredienste,

¹ Die NG kerk is die grootste Afrikaans-sprekende Gereformeerde kerk in Suid-Afrika.

potgooie, virtuele nagmaalvierings en ander vorme wat deur tegnologiese ontwikkelinge moontlik gemaak is.²

Op 23 Maart 2020 het president Ramaphosa 'n nasionale kwarantyn van drie weke aangekondig. Dit het mense onseker, vreesbevange en paniekerig gemaak en die druk op die kerk om 'n getuie te wees, verhoog. Op 29 Maart 2020 is dominees weer te midde van die inperking en verbod om samekomste gevra om deur middel van (vir sommiges onbekende) tegnologie die evangelie vanuit hul huise te verkondig.

Benewens die liturgies-ruimtelike impak wat daar op die Woordverkondiging was, het die pandemie ook teologiese vrae aangeroei wat uitdagings aan die prediking gestel het. In die lig hiervan het die vraag ontstaan hoe prediking in tye van krisis soos hierdie lyk en kan lyk, en meer spesifiek wat die inhoud van die preke die week voor en na die staat van inperking was. Tot op hede is daar reeds navorsing oor die formaat van prediking en liturgie ten tye van krisis en kwarantyn bekend gestel,³ asook oor pastoraat.⁴ Hierdie artikel wil egter 'n bydrae tot die gesprek maak deur te kyk na die inhoud van preke in hierdie krisistyd, 'n area wat tot op hede nog geen aandag geniet het nie.

Vanuit bogenoemde konteks het die navorsingsvraag ontstaan: Wat was die kerntemas in die prediking te midde van die COVID-19-pandemie en gevolglike grendeltyd en hoe sou 'n homiletiese praxisteorie vir prediking in so 'n situasie daar kon uitsien? Die doel van die studie is dus ensyds 'n inhoudelike analise van die prediking en andersyds 'n poging om op grond van die insigte wat uit die analise bekom word, homiletiese roetemerkers te formuleer in die vorm van 'n

² Cf. *Nicholas Matthee*, Hoe lyk begrafnisse wanneer daar niemand kan wees nie? in: Die Kerkbode, 3 April 2020, <https://kerkbode.christians.co.za/2020/04/03/hoe-lyk-begravnisse-wanneer-ander-nie-daar-kan-wees-nie/> (28 April 2020 geraadpleeg).; *Cas Wepener/Nicholas Matthee*, Kubernagmaal in virustyd, in: Die Burger, Volksblad, 17 March 2020, <https://www.netwerk24.com/Stemme/Menings/kubernagmaal-in-virustyd-20200317> (17 Maart 2020 geraadpleeg). Idem., Kuberbegraafplase, kuberpelgrimstogte en Korona. in: Vrye Weekblad, 27 Maart 2020. Sie nook in hierdie verband die werk van John Witvliet en die Calvin Institute of Christian Worship op <https://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/covid-19-and-worship-resources-for-churches-adapting-to-social-isolation> (28 Maart 2020 geraadpleeg).

³ *Matthee* (note 2); *Wepener/Matthee* (note 2)

⁴ *Anandie Greyling*, Wenke vir virtuele pastoraat, in: Die Kerkbode, 6 April 2020, <https://kerkbode.christians.co.za/2020/04/06/wenke-vir-virtuele-pastoraat/> (6 April 2020 geraadpleeg); *Jan-Albert van den Berg*, Pastorale sleutels vir 'n COVID 19 grendeltyd. *Communitas*, 17 April 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SBBatw1i8uk&t=739s> (18 April 2020 geraadpleeg). Daar was wel in hierdie tyd ook enkele stemme in die media wat gekant was teen die gebruik van nuwe tegnologie in die liturgie in hierdie tye. Cf. *Dieter de Bruin*, COVID-19: Geleenthede en ongemak van 'eredienslose' tyd, in: Die Kerkbode, 13 April 2020. <https://kerkbode.christians.co.za/2020/04/13/COVID-19-geleenthede-en-ongemak-van-eredienslose-tyd/> (28 April 2020 geraadpleeg); *Johann Rossouw*, Nagmaal is nie sommer enige ritueel nie, in: Die Volksblad, 24 March 2020. <https://www.netwerk24.com/Stemme/Aktueel/nagmaal-is-nie-sommer-net-enige-ritueel-nie-20200324> (28 April 2020 geraadpleeg).

(voorlopige) praxisteorie vir prediking in vergelykbare tye. Om hierdie vraag te beantwoord en die doelwitte te bereik, is gegronde teoretiese navorsing onderneem.⁵

2. 'n Gegronde Teoretiese Studie

Die metodologie wat in die laaste paar dekades internasionaal die meeste vir die inhoudsontleding van dokumente (soos getikte of geskrewe preke) en onderhoude gebruik is, is die gegronde teorie (*Grounded Theory*) metodologie.⁶ Dit is op die oomblik een van die mees gerespekteerde wetenskaplike metodes om die inhoud van dokumente vas te stel. Gegronde Teorie word wêreldwyd in die sosiale wetenskappe gebruik, asook veral in die ontleding van preke binne die teologie. Tog moet inhoudsontleding wat op die ontleding van inhoud self fokus, nie met Gegronde Teologie gelykgestel word nie, omrede die laasgenoemde meer op die identifisering van ontleding van 'n ontlukende teorie fokus, soos in die geval van Gegronde Teorie. In hierdie artikel is gegronde teorie gebruik om preke se inhoud te ontleed. Sommige navorsers maak van die AtlasTI-program vir hulle kodering gebruik, maar in hierdie navorsing is dit per hand gedoen. Hierdie werkswyse was meer gepas vir die samewerkende⁷ benadering tot kodering en was moontlik omdat daar met 'n effens kleiner aantal preke (vier-en-twintig preke) gewerk is.

Die navorsing begin met tekste (die preke in dié geval) wat op enige gepaste wyse ingesamel kan word, hetsy predikers wat genader is of preke wat van die internet afgetrek is. Daar word begin met die eerste fase, naamlik oop kodering. Aan elke gedeelte of fragment van die preek wat onderskeibare, unieke inhoud bevat, word 'n kode toegeken.⁸ By elke kode word enkele woorde

⁵ Hierdie studie is uitgevoer as 'n projek van die Diensgroep Navorsing en Toerusting, Wes-Kaap Sinode van die NG Kerk. Die data is onder leraars wat almal predikante in die NG Kerk is, ingesamel. Hierdie steekproef het 'n resultaat gebied wat getrou is aan die tipies middelklas of ryker groep, aangesien die meerderheid kerke in die steekproef uit middelklas of hoër middelklas lidmate bestaan. Volgens Schoeman (2020) se navorsing onder NG kerke in 2019, het kerke aangedui dat 98% van hul lidmate blank is. 'n Blanke persoon se gemiddelde inkomste is ongeveer R24 646 per maand (Statistiek Suid-Afrika 2019:61). Die resultate, wat onder meer op afsondering, stilte en rituele gefokus het, spreek van hierdie konteks. *Kobus Schoeman*, Kerkspieël 2019, persoonlike korrespondensie per e-pos, 28 April 2020. Statistiek Suid-Afrika, *Inequality trends in South Africa: A multidimensional diagnostic of inequality*, 2019, <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/Report-03-10-19/Report-03-10-192017.pdf> (3 May 2020 geraadpleeg).

⁶ *Kathy Charmaz*, *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*, Thousand Oaks (CA) 2006; *Hennie J.C. Pieterse*, An open coding analytical model of sermons on poverty with Matthew 25:31–46 as sermon text, in: *Acta Theologica*, 31(1):95–112 (2011); idem, An emerging grounded theory for preaching on poverty in South Africa with Matthew 25:31–46 as sermon text, in: *Acta Theologica*, 33(1):175–213 (2013).; Cf. *Hennie J.C. Pieterse/Cas J. Wepener*, Angry preaching. A grounded theory analysis from South Africa, in: *International Journal of Public Theology*, 12(3f):401–415, (2018).; *Marileen Steyn*, A grounded theory analysis of sermons on racism, Ongepubliseerde MDiv-verhandeling, Universiteit van Pretoria 2016; *André Verweij*, Positioning Jesus' suffering. A grounded theory of Lenten preaching in local parishes, Eburon 2014.

⁷ Die kodering is deur een navorser, wat ook die eerste outeur van hierdie artikel is, gedoen en dan na die ander navorsers gestuur vir hulle insae en kodering. Die resultate van die kodering was deur die drie navorsers, met die oog op intersubjektiwiteit, vergelyk en dit is toe in die finale resultate geïntegreer.

⁸ *Melanie Birk/Jane Mills*, *Grounded Theory. A practical guide*, Londen 2011, 9.

wat die inhoud saamvat, aangeteken.⁹ Langs elke kode word 'n moontlike kategorie neergeskryf. 'n Kategorie is inhoud wat uniek is en 'n eie eienskap bevat. Op hierdie wyse word die eerste aantal preke wat die ondersoeker bekom het, deurgaans gekodeer. Konstante vergelykings is in hierdie proses belangrik sodat alle oorskrydinge van inhoud reggemaak kan word.¹⁰

Die tweede fase van ontleding is selektiewe kodering. Hiervoor het die navorser 'n volgende stel data (preke) nodig. Hierdie preke word op dieselfde wyse gekodeer met ook die moontlike kategorieë langs die kodes. Wanneer dit voltooi is, word die oop koderings en die selektiewe kodes langs mekaar geplaas en vergelyk. Die doel van die selektiewe kodering is om vas te stel of die nuwe, tweede stel preke inhoude bevat wat die oop gekodeerdes kan versterk of uitbrei, of nuwe inhoude in kodes wat in die tweede fase bykom en bygevoeg word.¹¹ Op hierdie wyse word dan vasgestel of die data versadig is (saturated).¹² Dit beteken dat daar in die tyd en konteks waarskynlik nie meer nuwe inhoude sal voorkom nie.

Die derde fase is teoretiese kodering. In hierdie oefening word die moontlike kategorieë wat uit die totale aantal kodes voortgekom het, vergelyk. Waar kategorieë oorskry of ander kategorieë versterk, word hulle saamgevoeg sodat die navorser 'n klein hoeveelheid kategorieë het wat elk 'n unieke voorbeeld uit die totale aantal preke verteenwoordig. Kategorieë kan dan as konsepte vir 'n teorie gebruik word. Dit beteken dat die navorser 'n sentrale kategorie (konsep) kies wat in verhouding staan met die ander kategorieë.¹³ 'n Skema of model moet dan by wyse van 'n skets met heen en weer pyle gemaak word om die verhoudings aan te toon. Hierdie teorie word 'n onthuikende gegronde teorie (emerging grounded theory) wat uit die praktyk van die prediking oor 'n sekere saak of tyd na vore kom, genoem.

Kritiek¹⁴ op hierdie metodologie kom dikwels soms uit die oord van kwantitatiewe navorsers met vraelyste en rekenaargevormde data. Daarvoor sou 'n mens honderd of meer preke benodig. Gegronde teorie let egter nie op die omvang van die steekproef nie. Die steekproef word eerder as voldoende beskou wanneer die data versadig (*saturated*) is en geen nuwe kategorieë uit nuwe data na vore kom nie. Om hierdie rede kan daar met kleiner stelle data gewerk word.¹⁵ Dit is in hierdie

⁹ Hennie J.C. Pieterse, The Grounded Theory methodology to conduct content analysis of sermons and interviews: Critique and response, in: HTS Theological Studies, 76(1) (2020) <https://hts.org.za/index.php/hts/article/view/5851> (3 May 2020 geraadpleeg), 2.

¹⁰ Ibid., 3.

¹¹ Hennie J.C. Pieterse, An open coding analytical model of sermons on poverty with Matthew 25:31-46 as sermon text, in: Acta Theologica, 31(1):95-112 (2011), 124.

¹² Cf. John W. Creswell/Cheryl N. Poth, Qualitative inquiry and research design. Choosing among five approaches, Thousand Oaks (CA) 42018, 87f.

¹³ Birks/Mills (note 8), 12.

¹⁴ Sien Pieterse (note 9) vir 'n meer volledige bespreking oor kritiese stemme teenoor gegronde teorie.

¹⁵ Cf. Creswell/Poth (note 12), 88-90.

kleiner stelle data wat fyner nuanses in die data ook beter opgetel word as in kwantitatiewe navorsing.¹⁶

3. Homileties-Inhoudelike Bespreking van Preke

Die navorsers het begin deur preke wat op 22 Maart 2020 in die NG Kerk gepreek is, in te samel. Daar is op *Facebook* vir bereidwilliges gevra om hul aanlynpreke in geskrewe formaat aan die navorsers te stuur as deel van 'n navorsingsprojek van die Diensgroep Navorsing en Toerusting van die Wes-Kaap Sinode van die NG Kerk. Om die data aan te vul, is enkele preke wat in geskrewe formaat op webwerwe geplaas is, ook gebruik. Die preke wat ontvang is, het hoofsaaklik uit gemeentes in die Wes-Kaap Sinode gekom, met enkele preke uit ander sinodale streke. Twaalf preke is ontvang - ses vanuit die Wes-Kaap vir die eerste siklus en ses vanuit gemeentes uit ander sinodale streke vir die tweede siklus van kodering. Die diversiteit ten opsigte van geografie was gedeeltelik as gevolg van die preke wat ingewin is, maar ook as deel van die navorsing se poging tot nasionale en denominasionele verteenwoordiging. Soos die tweede rondte gevorder het, het dit duidelik geword dat die data nie versadig is nie en dat verdere data benodig word.

Teoretiese steekproefneming¹⁷ is 'n metode binne 'n gegronde teorie as benadering wat dit moontlik maak om die preke vanuit die ander sinodale streke eerder deel te maak van die eerste siklus van kodering. Al twaalf die preke wat op 22 Maart 2020 gepreek is, is weer gekodeer as deel van die siklus van oop kodering. Op hierdie stadium is daar wel vermoed dat Lydenstyd en die kruisgebeure as 'n kernkategorie na vore sal kom omrede die preke in hierdie tyd (Lydenstyd) op die liturgiese kalender gelewer is en dus met hierdie liturgies-teologiese taal deurweef is. Geen finale besluite ten opsigte van kategorieë of kernkategorieë kon egter op hierdie stadium gemaak word nie.

Die tweede siklus het gekyk na twaalf preke wat op 29 Maart 2020 in dieselfde gemeentes as die vorige week gepreek is. Die data is met behulp van selektiewe kodering gekodeer en gevolglik is die voorlopige kategorieë verminder na elf hoofkategorieë.¹⁸ Hierdie kategorieë is soos volg benoem en beskryf:¹⁹

¹⁶ Cf. Hennie J. C. Pieterse, *Communicative Preaching*, Pretoria 1987 (1991) (1995).

¹⁷ *Creswell/Poth* (note 12), 318.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 84.

¹⁹ Die taal wat in die beskrywings gebruik word, is die taal wat uit die preke ontleen word. Om hierdie rede word daar na "ons" en na God as manlik verwys.

	Kernkategorie	Beskrywing
1	Die ontwrigting van COVID-19	Die COVID-19-pandemie veroorsaak ontwrigting ten opsigte van die ekonomie, sosiale afstand, sekuriteit en kerkwees.
2	Teodiseë vraagstuk	Die COVID-19-pandemie roep vrae na lyding en God se teenwoordigheid op.
3	God se goddelikheid	God is teenwoordig en in beheer, Hy skenk lewe en is die Oorwinnaar oor die dood. Niks kan ons skei van sy liefde nie.
4	Geloofsonderskeid en verandering	'n Klem op die belang van geloofsonderskeid en verandering
5	Diensbaarheid	God roep almal op tot diensbaarheid, gehoorsaamheid, dissipelskap en die verkondiging van die evangelie.
6	Lydenstyd en kruisgebeure	Lydenstyd en die kruisgebeure gee 'n lens waardeur die huidige konteks verstaan kan word.
7	Vrees	Die ontwrigting veroorsaak vrees wat normaal is en nie ontken moet word nie, maar wel hanteer moet word.
8	Troos en hoop	Ons vind ons troos en hoop nie in maklike antwoorde nie, maar in ons identiteit in Christus, God se goddelikheid, en liefde.
9	Geloofsgewoontes, rituele en afsondering	In hierdie tyd word ons geroep tot geloofsgewoontes, veral stilstand en afsondering, maar ook rituele soos die nagmaal, doop, en praktyke soos lament / gebed / vas en aanbidding.
10	Gemeenskap en gemeentewees	Ons word geroep tot gemeenskap en om as liggaam van Christus in ons gemeenskappe en gemeentes te dien.
11	Identiteit	Ons word opnuut bewus van ons menslikheid en ons hou vas aan ons identiteit as kinders van God.

Tabel 1: Kategorieë na afloop van selektiewe kodering

Na die tweede siklus van selektiewe kodering is daar oorbeweeg na die derde siklus, genaamd teoretiese kodering. Tydens hierdie kodering is verskeie kategorieë as kernkategorieë getoets. 'n Kernkategorie is as geloofwaardig beskou indien dit met verskeie van die ander kategorieë verband

gehou het. Alhoewel *Lydenstyd en kruisgebeure* die meeste raakpunte met ander kategorieë gehad het, is daar besluit dat hierdie kategorie nie soseer deel van die sentrale gedagtegang is nie, maar wel die konteks vorm waarbinne die prediking plaasvind en die taal waarin die teorie uitgedruk word.

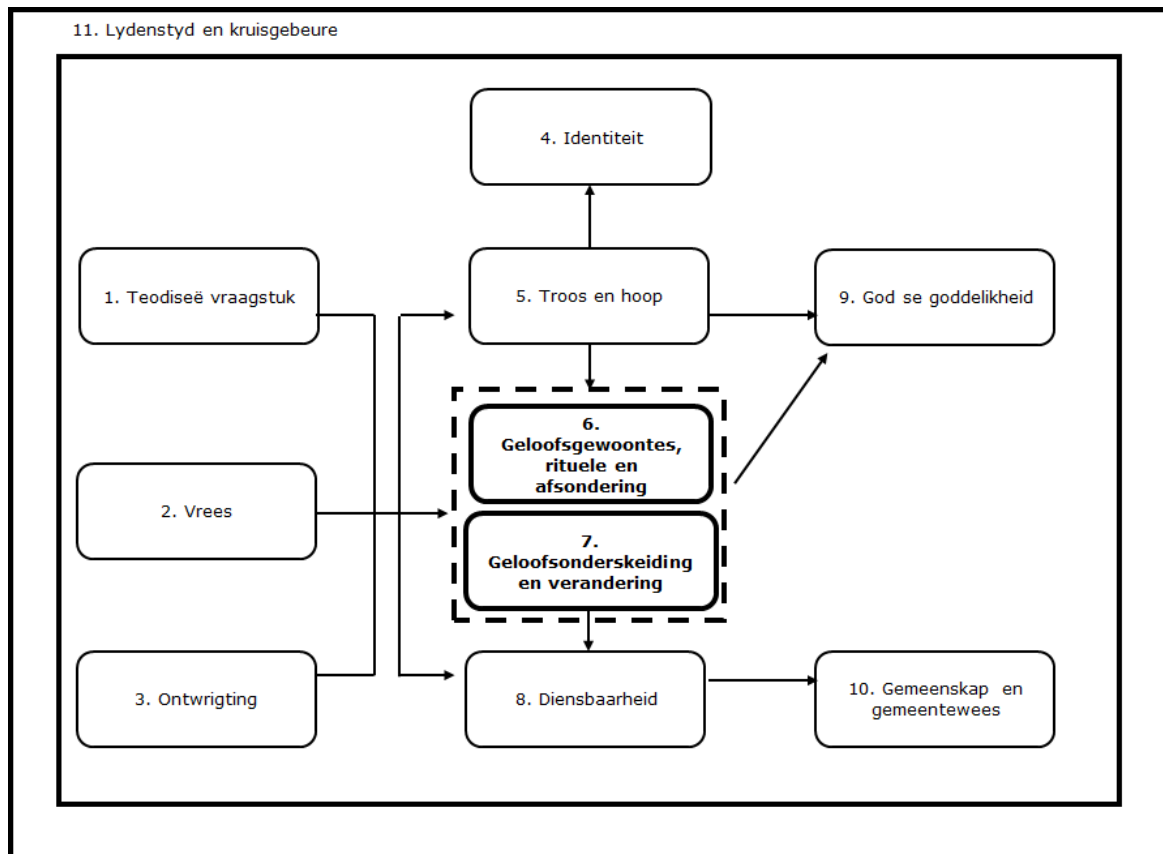
Geloofsonderskeiding en -gewoontes het eerder gesamentlik as kernkategorie ontluik.²⁰ Alhoewel hierdie twee kategorieë twee sterk individuele kategorieë vorm, is hulle in die preke so nou aan mekaar verbonde en het hulle soveel raakpunte met ander kategorieë gedeel, dat daar besluit is om hulle as 'n eenheid te hanteer. Die onderstaande diagram bied 'n grafiese voorstelling van die bevindinge.

		PREKE: OOP KODERING*											
	KERNKATEGORIE	A1	B1	C1	D1	E1	F1	G1	H1	I1	J1	K1	L1
1	Die ontwriging van COVID-19	4, 6	8		2, 3	1, 2, 4, 7	1, 2, 3, 6		7				5
2	Teodiseë vraagstuk	2											
3	God se goddelikheid	2, 8, 9, 11, 14	15	9, 10	5, 6, 13		7	1, 5		1, 3, 5	3, 5	3	
4	Geloofsonderskeid en verandering	1, 10			1, 4, 10				8				
5	Diensbaarheid	13, 15, 17, 20	3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16		11		4, 5, 9	2, 3, 4, 5, 6	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10		4	4	2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12
6	Lydenstyd en kruisgebeure		14, 15	1	13, 14	3, 4, 10, 17							1
7	Vrees			3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8	7			1, 5	7	4	2, 8	1	
8	Troos en hoop	3, 5, 8	4, 14	9	3, 5, 8, 14	6, 13	7, 8		6	2, 3, 5	1, 7	2	
9	Geloofsgewoontes, rituele en afsondering	1, 10	3	2	12	5, 8, 9, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16	5		8				
10	Gemeenskap en gemeentewees	16, 18	2								6, 7		7, 11
11	Identiteit	6, 7, 19		1	15								

		PREKE: SELEKTIEWE KODERING											
	KERNKATEGORIE	A2	B2	C2	D2	E2	F2	G2	H2	I2	J2	K2	L2
1	Die ontwriging van COVID-19	13				2, 3	10		1	1	4, 5		
2	Teodiseë vraagstuk	3, 4	1, 4, 8			5						5	
3	God se goddelikheid	5, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 15	2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 11, 12	2, 5, 9, 12	3, 10	4, 6, 7	1, 2, 3, 4, 12, 16	4, 8	3, 6, 7, 9, 10	5, 7, 8, 9	9	6, 7	6, 10
4	Geloofsonderskeid en verandering			3, 4, 7, 8, 10, 11	1, 2, 6, 11		9, 13, 14	9	4			6, 7, 8	
5	Diensbaarheid	9, 14			1, 5, 7, 8		13, 17		11		8, 10, 11		3, 4, 5, 8, 11
6	Lydenstyd en kruisgebeure	6				1, 5	3, 5, 10	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11			6		
7	Vrees							10	8				1, 2, 5, 7
8	Troos en hoop		9, 10		11	9	6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 18	11	2, 6	4, 6		4	11
9	Geloofsgewoontes, rituele en afsondering	1, 2, 12		1, 3, 4, 6, 10			15		5		3	1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8	9
10	Gemeenskap en gemeentewees	9								2, 3	1, 2, 7, 8		
11	Identiteit	13	13	9	4, 9	8, 9							3

Tabel 2 en 3: Oop en selektiewe kodering van preke

²⁰ *Birks en Mills* herinner dat enige ontluikende kernkategorie en teorie nie die enigste teorie is nie, maar dat dit, getrou tot 'n postmodernistiese paradigma, 'n moontlike teorie is.

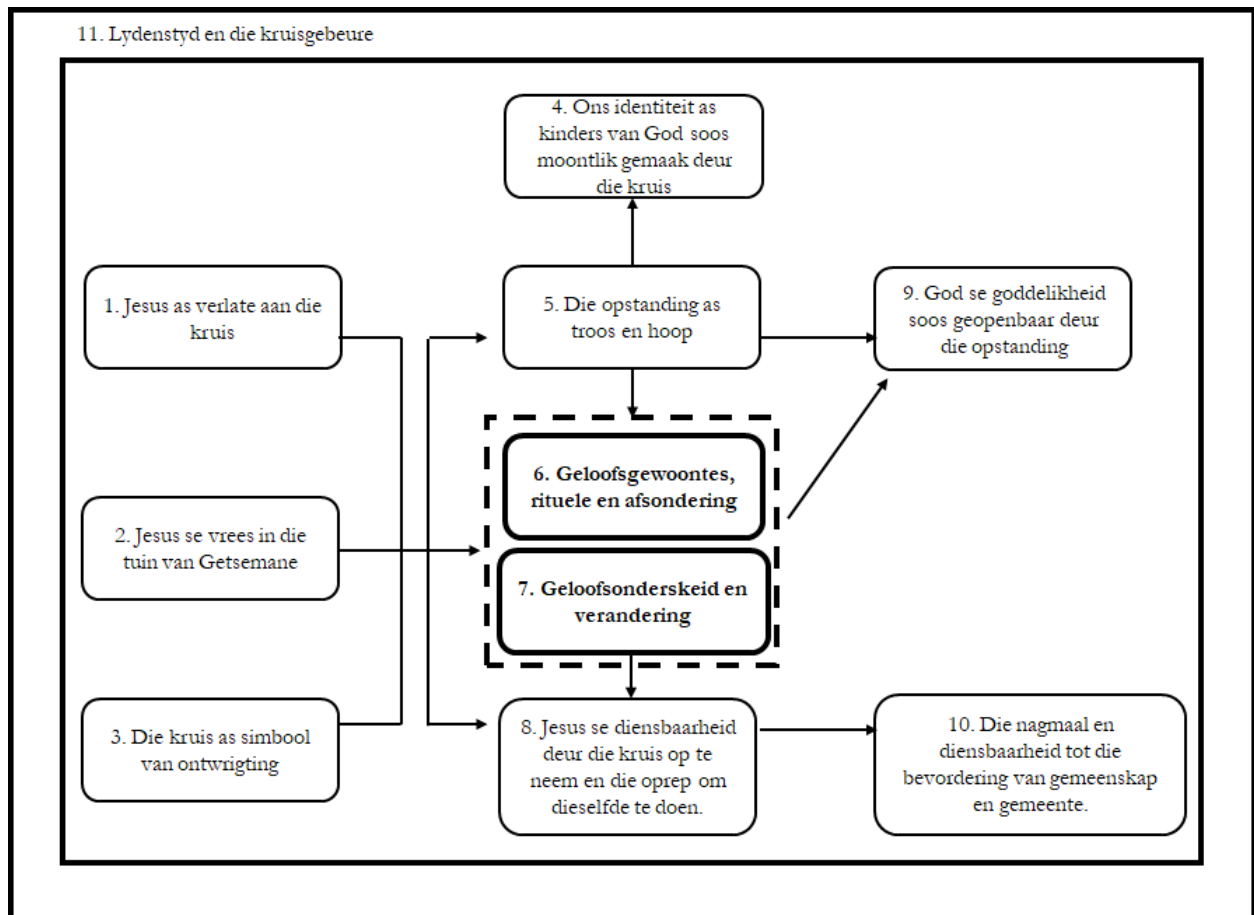


Figuur 1: Teoretiese kodering van preke te midde van COVID 19

Die teoretiese kodering kan soos volg verduidelik word:

- Die COVID-19-pandemie het drie gevolge: Dit veroorsaak (1) vrae na God en lyding (die teodiseë vraagstuk); (2) vrees; en (3) ontwrigting.
- Hierdie gevolge vra drie reaksies: (5) die soeke na troos en hoop; (6) die gebruik van geloofsgewoontes soos rituele en afsondering (wat gepaardgaan met (7) geloofsonderskeiding en verandering); sowel as (8) diensbaarheid.
- (5) Troos en hoop word gevind in (4) mense se identiteit as kinders van God en in (9) God se goddelikheid. Om hierdie goddelikheid raak te sien, is (6) geloofsgewoontes en (7) geloofsonderskeiding nodig.
- (8) Diensbaarheid, as 'n (6) geloofsgewoonte, vra vir (7) geloofsonderskeiding om (10) nuut te dink oor gemeenskap en gemeentewees.

- Al hierdie konsepte speel af binne die raamwerk en in dje taal van (11) lydenstyd en die kruisgebeure en dit gee verdere betekenis aan elkeen van die betrokke elemente. Hierdie ontlukende model kan ook soos volg in die taal van lydenstyd en die kruisgebeure uitgedruk word:



Figuur 2: Teoretiese kodering van preke te midde van COVID 19 soos uitgedruk in die taal van Lydenstyd en die kruisgebeure

Vanuit die identifisering van hierdie kernkategorieë is die volgende ontlukende teorie met betrekking tot prediking te midde van die COVID-19-pandemie geïdentifiseer: te midde van die ontwigting²¹ wat deur die COVID-19-pandemie veroorsaak word, word die hoorders genooi om, met behulp van geloofsgewoontes, met geloofsonderskeiding om te gaan ten einde God se goddelikheid as troos en hoop raak te sien en diensbaar te wees. Hier is dit belangrik om uit te wys dat nie al die kategorieë uitdruklik in hierdie ontlukende teorie genoem word nie, maar slegs die

²¹ In hierdie konteks verwys ontwigting na ontwigting van lewensomstandighede, vrees en die teodiseë- vraagstuk.

kategorieë wat die meeste in die prediking uitgestaan het en die meeste verbande met ander kategorieë gehad het.

In hierdie homiletiese praxis teorie word daar onderskei tussen die realiteit wat deur die hoorders ervaar word en die realiteit wat deur die predikers verkondig word en die manier waarop geloofsgewoontes en geloofsonderskeid 'n skarnier tussen die twee realiteite vorm. Die geloofsgewoontes wat vanuit die preke ontluik het word dan in die lig van die teorie verhelder. Die doel is eerstens om te verstaan waarom die relevante kategorieë en geloofsgewoontes na vore gekom het en hoe dit prediking beïnvloed en tweedens om 'n praxisteorie te formuleer.

4. Ontluikende homiletiese praxisteorie

Die preke wat in die eerste twee weke sedert die instelling van inperking in Suid-Afrika gepreek is, kan dus homileties-inhoudelik volgens die ontluikende teorie soos volg beskryf word: Te midde van die ontwrigting wat deur die COVID-19-pandemie veroorsaak word, word die hoorders genooi om met behulp van geloofsgewoontes met geloofsonderskeiding om te gaan met die doel om God se goddelikheid as troos en hoop raak te sien en diensbaar te wees.

In hierdie teorie is daar as't ware drie groter afdelings. Die eerste het te make met die hoorders se beleefde realiteit (die ontwrigting wat deur die COVID-19-pandemie veroorsaak word). Die tweede afdeling handel oor die realiteit wat deur die predikers verkondig word (God se goddelikheid as troos en hoop). Die derde afdeling is die skarnier wat die beleefde en die verkondigde realiteit aan mekaar verbind, naamlik geloofsgewoontes en -onderskeiding. Waar hierdie twee realiteite mekaar ontmoet, vloei daar diensbaarheid (as geloofsgewoonte) uit.

'n Bespreking van elk van die groter afdelings en die wyse waarop hierdie afdelings met 'n ruimtelike²² spanning tussen *naby* en *ver* te make het, volg. Geloofsgewoontes en -onderskeiding word dan beskryf as 'n dun ruimte, met ander woorde 'n liminale ruimte of drumpel, wat die spanning van *naby* en *ver* dra en wisselwerking tussen die twee ruimtes bewerkstellig.

4.1 'n Ver-Naby Belewenis van die COVID-19-Pandemie

In die preke wat bestudeer is, het drie fasette van die hoorders se belewenisse van die COVID-19-pandemie na vore gekom, naamlik ontwrigting, vrees en die teodiseë vraagstuk. Hierdie

²² Vir 'n studie oor ruimtelikheid en prediking, sien *Johan Cilliers*, *A space for grace. Towards an aesthetics of preaching*, Stellenbosch 2016.

belewensse kan elk omskryf word deur die woord *ver*. Mense se lewens is ontwrig omdat baie mense weens sosiale afstand en die grendeltydperk *ver* van mekaar moes begin lewe.²³ Vrees en angs ontstaan wanneer dit wat mense beleef, *ver* verwyderd is van dit wat hulle ken of laat veilig voel. Hierdie gevoelens van *ver* het op sy beurt vroeë oproep oor God wat as *ver* beleef word. Daarom het die vraag “Waar is God?” na vore gekom. Die belewenis van *ver* spoel dus vanaf die fisiese sfeer oor na die psigiese en na die geestelike sfeer. Die drie sferes kan immers nie van mekaar geskei word nie en daarom het verwydering in die een sfeer ook ’n invloed op die ander sfeer.

Ontwrigting, vrees en die teodiseë vraagstuk is egter nie net tekens van wat *ver* is nie, maar ook van wat baie *naby* kom. Insig in die werking van trauma²⁴ bied insig in hoe hierdie afstand beleef word. Trauma is nie ’n eksterne gebeurtenis nie, maar eerder die mens se fisiologiese reaksie wanneer die individu of gemeenskap se kapasiteit vir aanpassing oorweldig word.²⁵ Daarom is dit nie moontlik om te sê dat almal deur die COVID-19-pandemie getraumatiseer word nie. Daar kan wel gesê word dat almal gevra word om aanpassings te maak (ontwrigting) en dat sommige se kapasiteit oorskry kan word. Wat die impak van die COVID-19-pandemie kon vererger, is die omvang van die aanpassing wat aangevra is, die verwydering van agentskap deurdat groot besluite deur sentrale leierskap geneem is, en die wyse waarop baie mense se hantering van trauma (wat aktiwiteite soos draf, uitgaan en by vriende kuier) insluit, ingeperk is.

Al hierdie faktore kon bydra tot vrees, wat ’n simptome van trauma kan wees. Trauma kan op sy beurt lei tot dit waarna Riaan van der Merwe as die “winterseisoen van die siel” verwys.²⁶ Dit verwys na die tye in ’n mens se lewe wanneer die gelowige vasgeval en verwyder van God voel. Hierdie tye word dus juis geken aan ’n behoefte om “God in donkerte te vind” en “God ... te ervaar”.²⁷ Dit strook met Warner et al. wat die hervestiging van ’n koherente beeld van God en die wêreld as een van die primêre take van die getraumatiseerde individu of gemeenskap identifiseer

²³ In Suid-Afrika is dit die realiteit dat baie gesinne nou juis nader aan mekaar moet bly omrede daar soms baie mense in een huis is. Nietemin word daar ook van mense in hierdie kontekste gevra om verwyderd van familie en vriende te leef.

²⁴ Of daar met redelikheid gesê kan word dat die hoorders ten tye van die preke reeds trauma ervaar het, is moeilik om te sê. Tog het temas wat dikwels met trauma verband hou, na vore gekom en om hierdie rede word daar na trauma gekyk. Die argument kan ook gemaak word dat die hoorders se toegang tot internasionale nuus rakende COVID-19 reeds traumatiserend kon wees deurdat dit sekondêre trauma kon veroorsaak. Cf. *Jan-Albert van den Berg*, Pastorale sleutels vir ’n COVID-19 grendeltyd. *Communitas*, 17 April 2020: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SBBatw1i8uk&t=739s> (accessed 18 April 2020); Cf. *Kathy Weingarten*, *Common shock. Witnessing violence every day. How we are armed. How we can heal*, New York (NY) 2003.

²⁵ Cf. *Megan Warner/Christopher Southgate/Carla A. Grosch-Miller/Hilary Ison* (eds.), *Tragedies and Christian Congregations (Explorations in Practical, Pastoral and Empirical Theology)*, Oxon 2020.

²⁶ *Riaan Van der Merwe*, *Seisoene van die siel: Natuurlike geloofsgewoontes vir organiese geestelike groei*, Stellenbosh 2013, 44.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 42.

(teodiseë vraagstuk).²⁸ Hierdie insigte rakende trauma kan ook waardevol wees vir prediking te midde van 'n pandemie en grendeltyd.

Vrees en ruimtelike verwydering is dus *naby*. Dit is vergelykbaar met die werking van trauma wat só *naby* is dat dit in die mens se liggaam gaan sit. Trauma is primêr 'n fisiologiese reaksie en die proses, sowel as die gevolge van trauma, gaan sit telkens in die brein en in die liggaam.²⁹ Mense het immers nie liggame nie, maar *is* liggame, soos die Nederlandse teoloog Gerardus van der Leeuw meer as sewentig jaar gelede reeds opgemerk het.³⁰ COVID-19 is juis so bedreigend omdat dit nie net die mens se liggaam kragtens lewe of dood bedreig nie, maar ook die liggaam se alledaagse funksionering en ritmes. 'n Voorbeeld hiervan is die wyse waarop trauma, soos dit nader kom, juis mense se verbintnisse met hulself, ander, bronne en verwysingsraamwerk breek en sodoende die gevoel van *ver* versterk.³¹

Al drie die elemente van ontwrigting, vrees en die teodiseë vraagstuk dui dus daarop dat die prediker hier 'n konteks van *naby* en *ver* erken en hierop antwoord. Dit vra egter ook dat daar besin word oor die manier waarop prediking met hierdie paradoks in prediking te werk kan gaan. Hierdie paradoks van *naby-ver* is egter nie net in die beleefde realiteit van die hoorders teenwoordig nie, maar ook in die realiteit wat deur die predikers verkondig word.

4.2 'n Ver-Naby Verkondiging van die Troos en Hoop

In hulle reaksie op hierdie *naby-ver* belewenis van die COVID-19-pandemie bied predikers troos en hoop deur die verkondiging van die realiteit van God as 'n *naby* God. Dáár waar predikers gefokus het op die hoorders se belewenis van *ver*, het hulle gepraat van God wat *naby* is. Die realiteit wat verkondig is, het gewys op God se teenwoordigheid in die mens se lyding. God maak mense God se kinders (taal van *nabyheid*³²). God is almagtig en niks kan mense skei (verwyder) van God se liefde nie (ewige *nabyheid*). Die boodskap is dus nie net dat God daar is en bestaan nie, maar dat God *naby* is.

Saam met die boodskap wat sê dat niks die mens van God se liefde kan skei nie, is die boodskap dat die dood *ver* is. Hier word daar nie bedoel dat Christene nie sal doodgaan nie, maar

²⁸ Warner et al. (note 25), 1.

²⁹ Hilary Ison, Working with an embodied and systemic approach to trauma and tragedy, in: Warner et al. (note 25); Karen O'Donnell, Eucharist and trauma. Healing in the B/body, in: Warner et al. (note 25).

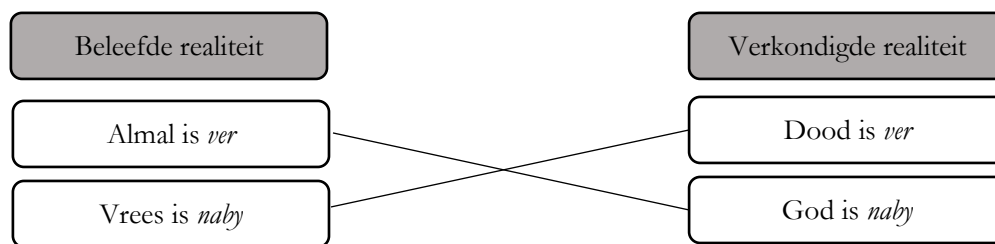
³⁰ Gerardus Van der Leew, Sacramentsheologie. Nijkerk 1949, 9.

³¹ Ibid., 47.

³² 'n Ouer en hul kinders word nie altyd geken aan 'n *nabye* verhouding nie, maar in die konteks van die preke is dit duidelik dat dít wel vir die predikers die geval is.

wel dat die dood se impak op die nabyheid van God ver verwyderd is. Tesame met hierdie boodskap is daar diegene wat sê dat God nuwe lewe uit die oue skep – ’n tema wat sterk in die preke na vore gekom het.³³ Weereens skep dit die beeld van God wat die dood (in die konteks van die preke - ook hopeloosheid) ver skuif om ruimte te maak vir lewe om nader te kom. Prediker H se woorde in die tweede siklus is ’n goeie voorbeeld van hierdie naby-ver taal in die verkondiging: “Waar hulle gevoel het God draai hulle rug op hulle, voel hulle dat God nou by hulle is. Waar hulle dood gevoel het in ballingskap, is daar weer nuwe energie en nuwe planne.”

Die prediking se inhoud vorm dus ’n chiasme. Waar die belewenis aan verwydering geken word, word daar van nabyheid gepreek. Waar daar van vrees en hopeloosheid gepraat is, word daar oor die verwydering van die dood gepreek.



Hierdie uitbeelding is nie ’n reël nie. Waar daar oor die nabyheid van vrees en ontwrigting gepreek is, is daar soms ook oor God se nabyheid gepreek. Wat dit wel wys, is ’n deurlopende tendens om met die *naby-ver* spanning te werk.

Dit is interessant om hier kortliks na die preke van Vader Paneloux in *Die Plaag* te kyk. Die filosoof en skrywer Albert Camus bied twee fiktiewe preke in hierdie roman. In *Die Plaag*³⁴ breek ’n pes in die stad Oran uit. Een van die karakters in die boek, ’n Jesuitiese priester genaamd Vader Paneloux, lewer kort na die uitbreking van die plaag ’n preek in die plaaslike kerk en ook weer teen die einde van die plaag. Tussen die twee preke verloop etlike maande waartydens die inwoners ongekende ellende beleef.

Met Paneloux se eerste preek is die kerk stampvol. Die erediensgangers word in groot omvang vertel dat die plaag ’n straf is wat die mense van Oran verdien. Nader aan die einde van die preek fokus Paneloux egter sy aandag op hoop. Hy verwys na ene Mathieu Marais wat tydens die plaag in Marseille sonder hulp en hoop gevoel het, maar in teenstelling met Marais, sê Paneloux, het hy nog nooit intenser die hulp van God en Christelike hoop beleef as juis toe nie. Die verteller eindig sy beskrywing van die eerste preek soos volg: “He hoped, against all hope, that despite the horror of these days and the cries of the dying, our fellow-citizens would offer heaven the only word that

³³ Die voorkoms van hierdie tema was versterk deur die feit dat die leesrooster teks vir die week Esegël 37 was.

³⁴ *Albert Camus, The Plague*. Vertaal deur Robin Buss, Londen 2001 [1947].

a Christian should, which was the word of love. God would do the rest.” In hierdie preek bied Paneloux dit wat die predikers in hierdie navorsing as maklike antwoorde sou beskryf – woorde van die plaag as God se straf. Tog praat Paneloux ook van die Christelike hoop wat hy nou sterker beleef as ooit vantevore. Vir Paneloux is troos en hoop aan die begin van die plaag *naby*.

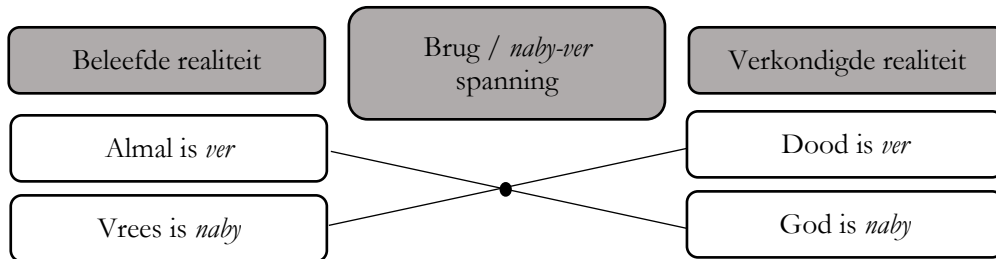
Die tweede preek, nadat die stad baie ellende beleef het, verbeeld ’n geheel ander toonaard, alhoewel daar inhoudelik sterk ooreenkomste met die eerste preek is. Paneloux praat tydens die tweede preek sagter en hy aarsel ook telkens. Camus skryf verder: “... he no longer said ‘you’, but ‘we’”. Die verteller deel die leser dan mee dat, anders as wat die hoorders sou verwag, die prediker niks gesê het oor die ewige geluk wat wag en wat sou kompenseer vir die lyding nie. Daar is geen definitiewe boodskap van troos of hoop wat *naby* is nie. Wat ’n mens nou moet doen, is om gewoon voort te gaan in die duister, probeer om goed te doen en om jouself in God se hande te plaas. Daar is nie ’n eiland in die plaag nie, daar is geen middeveg nie. Hy eindig dan met die stelling dat dit moeilik is om God lief te hê, want dit behels ’n totale prysgawe van jouself. Dit is volgens die prediker die harde les. Dit is geloof. In hierdie preek is die boodskap van troos en hoop *verder* en Paneloux preek nie meer dat die dood *ver* is nie.

Camus se werk beeld uit dat al bly die inhoud van ’n preek ten dele dieselfde, word dit tog ook anders, aangesien die predikers in hulle menswees aangeraak word deur omstandighede. Om te sê dat God *naby* en die dood *ver* is, is die verkondigde realiteit van die preke wat bestudeer is en dit is moontlik gepas vir die konteks van daardie preek. Dit wil voorkom asof die wyse waarop die predikers wie se preke ontleed is, self ’n drumpeltyd beleef het en dit het neerslag gevind in hulle preke. Daar moet dus gevra word na die manier waarop daar gepreek kan word wanneer God selfs vir die prediker nie so *naby* voel nie en die dood al *nader* kom.

4.3 Geloofsonderskeid en Geloofsgewoontes te midde van Naby en Ver

In die preke onder bespreking kan die verkondiging ’n beleefde realiteit word indien mense met geloofsonderskeiding omgaan deur die gebruik van geloofsgewoontes. In die middel van die *naby-ver* chiasme wat tussen die beleefde realiteit en die verkondigde realiteit gevorm word, lê ’n spanning. Predikers moedig hoorders aan om die verkondigde realiteit raak te sien met behulp van geloofsonderskeiding wat deur geloofsgewoontes bewerkstellig word. In die konteks van die preke is geloofsonderskeiding om te ontdek dat dit wat *ver* lyk, *naby* is. Dit is om sensitief te wees vir waar God aan die werk is. Om dit raak te sien, is dit egter nodig om te leer hoe om te kyk, hoe om te luister, hoe om lyflik te beleef, en dit is om hierdie rede dat geloofsgewoontes saam met geloofsonderskeiding bespreek word.

Die predikers verwys na verskeie geloofspraktyke. Die mees algemene geloofspraktyke is diensbaarheid en afsondering, maar lament en die sakramente as liturgiese rituele kom ook na vore. In hierdie verband word daar nou verder gekonsentreer op stilte, rituele, lament en laastens diensbaarheid.



Afsondering se oogmerk is dikwels om God raak te sien. Afsondering behels die opsetlike *ver*wees van ander om van die *nabyheid* van God bewus te raak. Stilte as geloofsgewoonte kan spesifiek ook betrek word by afsondering want dit hang baie nou saam met geloofsonderskeiding. Baie van die predikers en hoorders was in 'n grendeltyd in stilte gedompel. Vir sommige mense kan stilte bedreigend wees, maar binne die Christelike tradisie kan stilte ook 'n positiewe waarde hê, soos Elia wat in 1 Konings 19 vir God in die fluistering van die windstilte beleef het. Stilte dien dus die woord, maar spesifiek die mees ideale woord en dien dus as sodanig onderskeiding en by uitstek ook die prediking. Peeters wys daarop dat "... in de liturgie ziet men dat stilte geen doel op zichzelf is."³⁵ Stilte is verder nou verbonde aan geloofspraktyke soos rituele.

Op Palmsondag, wat die Groot Lydensweek ingelei het, was die kern van die predikers se boodskappe geloofsonderskeiding en -gewoontes. Hierdie onderskeiding gaan volgens die predikers tydens die grendeltyd oor veel meer as slegs 'n rasonale, verstandelike georiënteerde onderskeiding, maar word in afsondering en te midde van stilte by uitstek ook 'n lyflike aangeleentheid. Dit is wat Kearney en Treanor vleeslike hermeneutiek noem wat ander sintuie, veral tas en smaak, prioritiseer.³⁶ Lukken het dertig jaar gelede reeds die belang van liggaamlikheid in die liturgie benadruk en sê: "Het menselijke lichaam is een knooppunt in ieder ritueel" en ook "... dat wij slechts in en door die lijfelijkheid toegang hebben tot dat mysterie."³⁷ In hierdie verband wys Kearney dat "touch is something we do to the world, it is also something the world does to us."³⁸ Kearney wys ook op Merleau-Ponty wat vlees as 'n chiasme definieer, 'n chiasme

³⁵ B. Peeters, Zwijgen, in: Marcel Barnard and Paul Post (eds.), Ritueel bestek. Antropologische kernwoorden van de liturgie. Zoetermeer 2001, 160.

³⁶ Richard Kearney/Brian Treanor (eds.), Carnal Hermeneutics, New York (NY) 2015.

³⁷ Gerard Lukken, Liturgie en Zintuiglijkheid. Over de betekenis van lichamelijkeheid in de liturgie, Hilversum 1990, 5.

³⁸ Richard Kearney, The wager of carnal hermeneutics. In Kearney/Treanor (note 36), Carnal Hermeneutics, New York (NY) 2015, 21.

tussen die persoon en die wêreld, “... a reversible crossing which precedes all analytic and transcendental divisions between subject and object, consciousness and thing.”³⁹

Die predikers het in die grendeltyd bevestig hoedat prediking en liturgie in hierdie tyd nie van mekaar geskei kan word nie en dat die een die ander dien. Die onderskeiding van die juisste woord, die hoor van die preek en toe-eiening daarvan, word in ’n grendeltyd in die stilte en deur ’n lyflike hermeneutiek gedien wat deur middel van liturgiese rituele tuis wortel skiet. Dit is die uitvoering van liturgiese rituele tuis wat in die preke aangemoedig word of die preke ondersteun het, wat juis ook meerdere sintuie soos tas, proe en ruik betrek, eerder as slegs die hoor van die preek en die sien van die prediker.

In hierdie verband was dit ook merkwaardig dat baie NG Kerke voortgegaan het met die viering van die Nagmaal op Heilige Donderdag. Baie gemeentes het op hierdie dag die hoorders aangemoedig op brood en wyn tus te gebruik en dus op ’n lyflik-sintuiglike wyse aan die prediking deel te neem. In die preke bestudeer, is die doop en die nagmaal ook na verwys as liggaamlike herinneringe van die hoorders se identiteit as kinders van God en as deel van die Liggaam van Christus.

Liminale spasies is sogenaamde “dun” ruimtes waar die afstand tussen mens en God dikwels kleiner voel.⁴⁰ Daarom is liminale tye juis die ideale geleenthede vir geloofspraktyke en -onderskeiding. Om dit te doen, moet mense egter gehelp word om die waarde van liminaliteit te sien en om te weet wat om met hul vrees te doen.⁴¹ Sodoende is dit dus ook in hierdie verband belangrik om die noue verband tussen prediking en liturgie in die grendeltyd te waardeer.

Torvend bevraagteken die kerk se geneigdheid om slegs op die sakramente en liturgie te fokus en pleit vir ’n herbesinning oor die plek van alledaagse liggaamlike praktyke en handeling in geloofsvorming.⁴² Hy pleit dat die kerk nie net op liturgie sal fokus nie, maar samekomste sal gebruik om praktyke en handeling wat mense se liggaamlikheid eer en vier, te bevorder.⁴³ Dit is

³⁹ Ibid., 37.

⁴⁰ Susan Beaumont, *How to lead when you don't know where you're going: Leading in a liminal season*, Mary-Land 2019, 16.

⁴¹ Ibid., 13. Sien ook: *Gerald Arbuckle*, *Grieving for change*, Londen 1991; *Coenie Burger*, *Gemeentes in Transito*, Kaapstad, 1995; *Cas Wepener*, *Burning incense for a focus group discussion. A spirituality of liminality for doing liturgical research in an African context from an emic perspective*, in: *IJPT* 19(2): 271–291 (2015); idem, *Kookpunt! ’n Gelowige reaksie van ’n ontnugterde nasie: Christelike nadenke oor woede*, Wellington 2015.

⁴² *Samuel Torvend*, *Touch me and see: A resurrection of the body in the church?* in: *Institute of Liturgical Studies Occasional Papers*, http://scholar.valpo.edu/ils_papers/124 (May, 4th 2020 geraadpleeg) 2013, 124.

⁴³ Ibid., 6

omrede dit juis in hierdie sakramentele sowel as nie-sakramentele handeling en praktyke is waar God ontmoet en die mens verander word.⁴⁴

Lament, wat dikwels (maar nie altyd nie) 'n gemeenskaplike geloofsgewoonte kan wees, beweeg weer tussen die belewenis van *ver* wees van God, die *nabyheid* van die dood of chaos en dan die versekering dat God naby en die dood ver is. Dit is 'n noodsaaklike geloofsgewoonte, want Allen skryf tereg: "... church services can be uncomfortable and unsatisfying for the one who grieves, for these services may reflect an aversion to sorrow that takes no account of the somber realities of life."⁴⁵

O'Connor maak verder 'n verbintenis tussen die geloofspraktyk van lament en getuienis.⁴⁶ Volgens haar vra die lament in klaagliedere vir 'n getuie wat lyding aanskou. "The witness sees suffering for what it is, without denying it, twisting it into a story of endurance, or giving it a happy ending. The witness has a profound and rare human capacity to give reverent attention to sufferers and reflect their truth back to them." Dit is ook die sterk argument wat Katongole in sy boek *Born from lament* maak.⁴⁷ Die kernvraag wat hy vra en beantwoord, is geïnspireer deur 1 Petrus 3:15 en die bereidheid om 'n verduideliking te gee vir die hoop wat daar in mense lewe. Die antwoord wat hy bied, is die diep klag wat uit dele van Afrika soos die Demokratiese Republiek van die Kongo en Uganda waar mense ongekeende ellende beleef het, opklink. Volgens hom neem hoop die vorm van stoei en stry met God aan. Om te kla en te lamenteer is 'n uitdrukking van hoop. Om te kla en by God te kla, is om daardie middelspasie van *naby-ver* hoopvol te betree.

Diensbaarheid in die konteks van COVID-19 word geskets as 'n manier om die *naby* van gemeenskap te bewerkstellig ten spyte van die belewenis van *ver*. Dit word op verskeie maniere aangemoedig. Een van die fasette van diensbaarheid waarvan daar gepraat word, is ironies genoeg die noodsaaklikheid van *ver* van ander bly, ter wille van diensbaarheid en liefde teenoor mekaar. Tog is daar predikers wat 'n onderskeid tussen fisiese en sosiale afstand maak en wat vir nabye kontak te midde van die afstand pleit. Dit behels hoofsaaklik om gereeld met ander kontak te maak. Party predikers vra hul hoorders om afstand te doen van die verspreiding van fopnuus, ander vra vir die verspreiding en verkondiging van die evangelie. Vir ander predikers moet die hoorders naby aan ander bly deur bewus te word hoe ver verwyderd hul eie konteks van baie mense in die land is en hoe hulle dus opgeroep word om ook betrokke te raak. Onderliggend in

⁴⁴ Ibid., 9

⁴⁵ Leslie Allen, *A liturgy of grief. A pastoral commentary on Lamentations*, Grand Rapids (MI) 2011, 5.

⁴⁶ Kathleen O'Connor, *The book of Lamentations*, in Leander Keck (ed.), *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Volume 6, Nashville (TN) 2002, 100.

⁴⁷ Emmanuel Katongole, *Born from lament. The theology and politics of hope in Africa*, Grand Rapids (MI) 2017.

die segmente oor diensbaarheid lê daar 'n *naby-ver* spanning in hoorders se behoeftes om diensbaar en naby aan ander se ellende en die wêreld in nood te wees, maar onsekerheid oor hoe dit in die konteks van die hoorders kan lyk.

Die preke se funksionele aard is dus nie beperk tot die bevordering van geloofsonderskeiding deur geloofsgewoontes nie, maar word ook uitgebrei tot die oproep vir konkrete diensbaarheid. Hierdie geloofsgewoonte het nie soseer te doen om God se *nabyheid* raak te sien nie (alhoewel daar 'n prediker is wat dit op hierdie manier beskryf), maar eerder om God se teenwoordigheid aan ander te wys. Die verkondigde realiteit word dus deel van mense se beleefde realiteit as gevolg van diensbaarheid. Hierdie prediking word 'n vorm van profetiese prediking wat geloof nie tot 'n private, geestelike saak beperk nie, maar wat ook na die hoorders en hul omgewing se konteks kyk en daarop inspraak maak.⁴⁸ Dit is die herinnering dat menswaardigheid in die tyd van COVID-19 nie net van die prediker vra om pastor te wees nie, maar ook profeet.⁴⁹

Profetiese prediking is egter meer as om net vir die konteks te preek. Dit vra dat die prediker die samelewing se denke en ideologieë oor daardie konteks krities moet evalueer en doelbewus uit meer perspektiewe as dié van die hoë middelklaspersoon te kyk.⁵⁰ Dit is baie belangrik ten opsigte van diensbaarheid wat telkens op die armes in die samelewing gerig is. Van Aarde wys uit dat Suid-Afrika se nood aan diensbaarheid juis die gevolg van kolonialisering en Apartheid is.⁵¹ In hierdie verband skryf Villanueva oor die “kolonialis virus” wat in die mens is en wat geken word aan mense se bestuur van rykdom.⁵² Hy redeneer dat filantropie se wortels kolonialisme is, dat altruïsme, vrygewigheid en diensbaarheid van 'n reddermentaliteit kan spreek, en dat dit juis die skeiding tussen rasse en kulture kan vererger.⁵³ Volgens hierdie redenasie kan mense se ondeurdagte nader-beweeg in diensbaarheid, juis sosio-ekonomiese afstand bevorder.

In die spanning tussen *naby* en *ver* het die predikers dus geloofsgewoontes gebruik en aangemoedig om 'n brug te bou tussen die beleefde en verkondigde realiteit. Hierdie geloofsgewoontes behou die *naby-ver* spanning en bied daardeur vir die hoorder die geleentheid om in die liminaliteit van dun ruimtes God se goddelikheid raak te sien.

⁴⁸ Hennie J.C. Pieterse, Prophetic preaching in the contemporary context of South Africa, in: In Luce Verbi, 47(1), (2013), <https://indieskriflig.org.za/index.php/skriflig/article/view/114> (4 Mei 2020 geraadpleeg), 4.

⁴⁹ Nico Koopman, COVID-19 and human dignity. Theology in the time of COVID-19, *Communitas*, 29 April 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z2SeOufaPQ4> (29 April 2020 geraadpleeg).

⁵⁰ Pieterse (note 48), 4f.

⁵¹ Botha van Aarde, Franciscus van Assisi: sy betekenis vir vandag! *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 25(2), (2004) <https://verbumeteclesia.org.za/index.php/ve/article/view/296> (3 Mei 2020 geraadpleeg), 740.

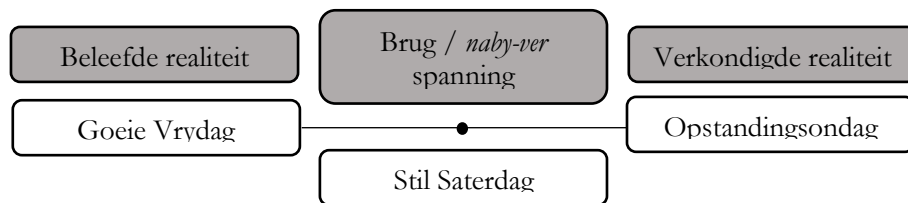
⁵² Edgar Villanueva, *Decolonizing wealth: Indigenous wisdom to heal divides and restore balance*, Oakland (CA), 2018, loc. 144.

⁵³ Villanueva, loc.150.

5. Ten Slotte: Stil Saterdag Prediking te midde van Grendeltyd

Onderliggend aan die preke wat bestudeer is, lê 'n bepaalde teologie wat binne die groter konteks en raamwerk van Lydenstyd en die kruisgebeure verwoord word. Dit is 'n boodskap wat die ontwrigting van COVID-19 aan die hand van die ontwrigting van die kruis, die vrees van Jesus en die dissipels en Jesus se gevoel van verlatenheid te midde van sy lyding aan die kruis, bespreek. Die beleefde realiteit van die hoorders word dus omskryf in Goeie Vrydag-taal. Op soortgelyke wyse word God se oorwinning oor die dood en God se lewegewende aard en werke aan die hand van die boodskap van Opstandingsondag verkondig.

Die geanaliseerde preke sentreer, soos reeds uitgewys, om die geloofsgewoontes en -onderskeiding wat as skarnier tussen die beleefde en verkondigde realiteit lê. Hierdie klem dui op 'n teologie wat onderliggend in hierdie preke is en wat daarvan bewus is dat daar progressie is tussen Goeie Vrydag en Opstandingsondag. Alhoewel nie een van die predikers dit pertinent so genoem het nie, wil hierdie artikel stel dat die predikers, in hul fokus op die liminaliteit van *naby-ver*, die weg oopmaak vir die ontwikkeling van 'n klein homiletiese teologie van Stil Saterdag vir prediking te midde van 'n krisistyd. Dit kan met hierdie diagram aangedui word:⁵⁴



Die name wat vir Goeie Vrydag en Opstandingsondag gegee word, is name wat die kern van die verkondiging van die prediking bevat, te wete kruis en opstanding. Stil Saterdag, aan die ander kant, gebruik taal wat verwys na 'n gebruik, 'n geloofsgewoonte, wat vroeër bespreek is, naamlik afsondering en stilte. Stil Saterdag is op die liturgiese kalender by uitstek 'n dag van stilstand, afsondering en lament. Stil Saterdag van die vol graf is 'n leë dag, 'n dag van wag, 'n dag van afwesigheid. Dit is die dag wat op die liturgiese kalender in 'n tradisie soos die van die NG Kerk gewoonlik geïgnoreer word. Stil Saterdag gee belang aan lyding wat erken en beklag word. Dit dui ook spesifiek op 'n bewustheid van ruimtelike afstand soos wat beide predikers en hoorders in die tyd van die pandemie beleef en ook die impak wat dit op lyflikheid te midde van inperking het.

Soos wat predikers nader aan die kameras skuif, mag hul moontlik die ruimtelike en emosionele afstand tussen hulle en hul hoorders beleef. Mens sou kon argumenteer dat e-dienste self liminale ruimtes is waar predikers naby dog ver van hul hoorders verkeer. Hierdie ruimtelike

⁵⁴ Sien in hierdie verband ook *Cas Wepener*, Stil Saterdag 2020. God is 'n gat om 'n gat, LitNet, 10 April 2020, <https://www.litnet.co.za/stil-saterdag-2020-god-is-n-gat-om-n-gat/> (10 April 2020 geraadpleeg).

naby-ver spanning tussen prediker en hoorder is nie nuut vir die kerk nie. Warner et al. herinner hul lesers dat Paulus se briewe virtuele kommunikasie was wat die kerk herinner dat die Liggaam van Christus se *nabyheid* verby fisiese nabyheid strek.⁵⁵ Filippense en Filemon is immers vanuit Paulus se tye van inperking (gevangenis) geskryf. Dit is vanuit Paulus se eie Stil Saterdag wat hy oor kilometers heen intieme briewe vir gemeenskappe wat self inperkinge, ontberings en liminaliteit beleef het, kon skryf.⁵⁶

In hierdie virtuele ruimte word predikers genooi om, hetsy in Lydenstyd of Paastyd, in 'n preek-modus van Stil Saterdag te vertoef, te berus in 'n homiletiese spiritualiteit van liminaliteit wat aan beide kruis en opstanding vashou, solank as wat die grendeltyd, op watter vlak ook al, duur.

Die kern van die predikers se preke tydens die Sondag voor en na grendeltyd 2020 was geloofsgewoontes en geloofsonderskeiding wat die hoorders, te midde van die ontwrigting wat deur die COVID-19-pandemie veroorsaak word, kan help om God se goddelikheid as troos en hoop raak te sien en diensbaar te wees. Op grond hiervan is 'n homiletiese praxisteorie geformuleer wat sentreer om die *naby-ver* spanning in die beleefde, sowel as in die verkondigde realiteit en wat geloofsgewoontes en geloofsonderskeiding as die ruimte bied wat hierdie spanning kan vashou. Die fondament waarop so 'n praxisteorie rus, is die teologie van Stil Saterdag, 'n drumpeltyd wat beide prediker en hoorder aan sy/haar eie lyf voel, maar as sodanig is dit 'n hoopvolle teologie wat, terwyl almal wat betrokke is in die preekgebeure lyflik ingekerker is, vashou aan beide lyding en oorwinning.

Rev. Marileen Steyn, born 1992, Ph.D. Student at and Research Assistant for the Department of Practical Theology and Missiology at the Stellenbosch University, marileen.steyn@gmail.com.

Prof. Cas Wepener, born 1972, Professor in the Department of Practical Theology and Missiology at the Stellenbosch University, cwepener@sun.ac.za.

Prof. Hennie J.C. Pieterse, born 1936, Research Fellow at the Department of Practical Theology and Missiology at the Stellenbosch University, pietehjc@absamail.co.za.

⁵⁵ Warner et al. (note 25), 19.

⁵⁶ Filippense se tema van eskatologiese verwagting kan as herinnering dien dat die liminaliteit van Stil Saterdag nie net in die oomblik tussen Christus se dood en opstanding lê nie, maar dat die kerk ook in die liminaliteit tussen Christus se hemelvaart en terugkeer leef.

Awakening to Judaism and Jews in Christian Preaching¹

Ellen T. Charry²

Abstract

Preaching is a daring undertaking. Whether through music, sermons, reading scripture, or personal conversation, speaking of God is an interpretive act. One never quite knows how what one plays, says, writes, or depicts is received. The distance between minds is vast. And given that every set of eyes may read the same words differently and each set of ears hear each interpretive utterance differently, hoping to communicate meaningfully with those watching and listening is nothing short of audacious. Among these challenges, one of the most delicate is preaching on Judaism and Jews. Yet Christians cannot avoid it. Judaism and Christianity are one another's nemeses. Some biblical texts lend themselves to anti-Jewish attitudes and stereotypes that may be unrecognized so deep is Christian contempt for Jews and Judaism.

This paper offers suggestions for avoiding anti-Jewish preaching. To do that effectively it will be necessary to awaken a sensibility to the concern that pervades and penetrates Christian thought. That requires slogging through some "unprettiness." The paper first illustrates anti-Jewish preaching by interrogating a popular text, Luke's story of the Pharisee and the tax collector. It then briefly considers Christian hymns and sacred choral music and then focuses on four sermons: The Letter to the Hebrews, Melito of Sardis's On Passover, Augustine's sermon 122 on John 1:48-51, and a recent sermon on Galatians 3:23-29. It concludes with suggestions for preachers, musicians and congregations and includes guidelines for preaching on Jews and Judaism and a bibliography for further study.

1. Presenting Problems

Judaism has always been Christianity's handy whipping boy, but it was only as the Shoah came to light that Christian scholars began to realize that Christianity had paved its way over many centuries. Setting out here, it is important to distinguish four current concerns that may sometimes run together: anti-Judaism, supersessionism, anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism. While these overlap, they

¹ To awaken a concern sleeping in the Christian living room this essay will flout several scholarly Christian conventions. It will use the Jewish Publication Society's translation of Hebrew Bible (JPS) or this author's own translation. It will list the books of the Hebrew canon in the Jewish order. It will transliterate names and places phonetically from Hebrew rather than through layers of language specific transliterations commonly used. It uses Older Testament and Younger Testament to avoid the standard supersessionism titles. In addition, when referring to scripture as understood when the documents of the Christian canon were being written it will use "scripture," to indicate the Septuagint as they had it. These unconventions may be disconcerting at first, but the topic warrants them.

² With thanks to Rev. Agnes Norfleet and Fr. Sean Mullen for commenting on a draft of this article.

are distinct. *Anti-Judaism* is theological contempt for Judaism. *Supersessionism* is the theological corollary that the Church is now the Israel of God and that the Jewish people no longer are or perhaps never really were God's people. Supersessionism is a toxic expression of Christianity because it claims that Judaism's replacement by the Christian church is God's decision. *Anti-Semitism* is animosity toward Jews. Anti-Semitism is, of course, a misnomer because not all Semites are Jews and not all Jews are Semites.³ It is broader than Christianity and predates it, but Christian antipathy toward Jews has an independent life. It sometimes appeared as state policy and state sponsored violence and jurisprudence but perhaps was more frequently expressed in spontaneous local proclamation and violence and in art, music, and literature. *Anti-Zionism* is the conviction that the State of Israel should not exist and that the present nation state should be dismantled. Criticism of policies of any democratically elected Israeli administration is not anti-Zionism but critical Zionism. Either may bleed into anti-Semitism. This paper deals only with the theological concerns: anti-Judaism and its hungry child, supersessionism preached through sacred choral music, congregational singing and sermons.

Anti-Judaism. Luke 18:10–14

Contempt for Judaism began with writings that came to be called the New Testament, itself a supersessionist term. Acrimony among Judahites and between Judahites and gentiles about Jesus led to the split into two heritages. Fraternal acrimony became Christian contempt. Technically speaking, there is neither anti-Judaism nor anti-Semitism in the Christian scriptures because the contestants are among perhaps fifteen or more communities from which we have written records. We see pro- and anti-Jesus parties among them, but the situation was fluid. Various parties coalesced into proto-Christianity and proto-Judaism that eventually divorced bequeathing Judaism and Christianity to us. So, contempt for Phariseism, one of the parties that had both pro and anti-Jesus factions is built into the documents that became Christian scripture. Contempt for Pharisees and their scribes and law, the sacrificial system and its ministers and simple artisans and workers that now characterize the Younger Testament, became anti-Jewish when disputes became irresolvable. Perhaps the breaking point is the Jerusalem meeting recorded in Acts 15. Once the texts were transmissible in written form all took on a different meaning. Local disagreements lodged themselves as a war between threatening and threatened enemies.

³ Igor P. Lipovsky, Where Did the Ancient Semites Come From?, in: American Journal of Biblical Theology 10, no. 25 (August 2009): ND.

A star witness in this convoluted process is the story of the tax collector and the Pharisee (Luke 18:10–14). It is anti-proto Judaism not yet evidencing supersessionism.

Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee the other a tax collector.

The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, “God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.” But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!”

I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.

This story is a core text for preaching contrition, purveying humility to the church. It is easy to preach on, being a textbook case of good guy bad guy stereotypes. Often the good guy, the humble repentant one, is portrayed anachronistically as if he were a Christian that the audience should emulate. The bad guy, the Pharisee, is the kind of person you do not want to be—self-satisfied, smug, even though, in this instance, the gentleman is quite quiet about his prayer life, (standing by himself). Still, he is often interpreted as “the Jew,” with whom the audience does not want to be associated. That both are Jews, perhaps both Pharisees, may fall by the preacher’s wayside. Even when not named as Christian and Jew, the characterizations come easily. But the vignette intends to teach about different personalities not Jews and Christians since there were at that time no Christians. Indeed, juxtaposing a tax collector and a Pharisee is incoherent. Phariseism is a method of scripture interpretation. Tax collecting is a means of livelihood. The story is about neither. It is about personality types. Jewish tradition holds the repentant sinner in higher esteem than the one who refrains from sin. Perhaps that is the message intended here, but if so, it is lost amidst Luke’s *ad hominem* argument against people with whom he disagrees.

Even if the good-guy bad-guy stereotype is applied immediately to the people in the pews with no mention of the context in which the passage was written, the division between the arrogant Pharisee (qua Jew) and the penitent tax-collector (qua Christian) conveys Christian contempt. The near-to-hand sermon on this text points to humility as the chief Christian virtue even though it is not on Paul’s short list (1 Cor 13). Apparently breast-beating is more praiseworthy than contributing to the common good as the Pharisee does. The good guy—bad guy stereotype is misguided and harmful because we are all both. Augustine missed this important point and Christians have suffered gravely from the oversight.

Restraint is in order here to appreciate not only what the text's author intended to teach, but also what he did teach. That may be just as or even more preachable than what seems to be his message. In this pericope, Luke, addressing a gentile audience, put this self-righteous slanderous thanksgiving in the mouth of a Pharisee: "God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector." This self-patting and cursing thanksgiving exists only in Luke's angry mind of course. Judaism has no tradition of spontaneous prayer such as this seems to suggest. Luke is caricaturing what he would like his audience to think is in the mind of the Pharisee standing off to one side.

We know that at least three of the fourteen one-sentence daily morning thanksgivings that made their way into Jewish daily morning prayer existed at that time. This is for two reasons. First, we know that Luke knew them because he ridiculed them here. He paraphrases and shortens the formula that appears in Jewish morning prayer: "Praised are you Lord our God master of the universe who..." to "God, I thank you that ..." Second, at Gal 3:28 Paul mentions and refutes these three thanksgivings that Luke is caricaturing: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." Paul is overturning these daily morning thanksgivings hoping for one Jesus community. His hope fails however, and his nasty characterizations of non-Jesus following Jews in Rom 9 and Gal 4 do not help his cause. They established eternal enmity between Jesus followers and non-Jesus followers once Paul's letters became sacred scripture.

That he lists the three disconcerting blessings in the same order in which they appear in morning prayer confirms this reading. Paul's rejection serves his interest in gentiles. Luke's anger is less clear. Paul was anguished not angry. Luke, writing later, is simply angry. If he is a gentile speaking to gentiles, he would understandably object to at least one of these three blessings as Paul does. Here are the controversial thanksgivings as they appear in the Jewish prayer book:

Praised are you Lord our God, ruler of the universe who has not made me a gentile.

Praised are you Lord our God, ruler of the universe who has not made me a slave.

Praised are you Lord our God, ruler of the universe who has not made me a woman.

Current recensions of the prayerbook have revised both the Hebrew and the English. The new version translates:

Praised are you Adonai our God who rules the universe, making me in the divine image.

Praised are you Adonai our God who rules the universe, making me a Jew.

Praised are you Adonai who rules the universe, making me free.⁴

While Paul simply rejects the original three thanksgivings probably because they would discourage gentiles, Luke goes one step further, disfiguring them, probably for the same reason. But writing a few decades after Paul, the atmosphere was angry and tense. Here, again, is Luke's defamatory caricature. "God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector." Sadly, Luke's ugly spin on these thanksgivings was carved into Christian sensibility as the word of God rather than as the words of Luke. Luke, of course, could not have fathomed that he was writing "the Bible" for a religion based on love of God and neighbor. Measured speech is not his forté.

What does all this mean, then, for Luke's rendering of the story about two Jews? First, of course, we see that Luke did not understand Phariseism and did not want to. Second, he knows enough about Jewish prayer to defame it. Third, he inadvertently heralded Christianity's obsession with self-abnegating humility that began in earnest with monasticism in the fourth "Christian" century.

As an eager gentile Jesusite it was tempting to demean non-Jesusites. Perhaps beneath Luke's anger is an exegetical debate about whether Jesus is predicted by scripture. What better way to drive a lesson home than demeaning one who did not find him there? One way to treat this text is to see its moral teaching precisely in Luke's angry caricature of proto-Jewish prayer and Pharisees that libels those with whom he is angry. It aims to encourage gentiles and disgrace those at the root of Paul's olive tree. Today we would call what Luke put in the Pharisee's mouth libel. This story reveals more about passionate righteous indignation that stereotypes one group by another that thinks itself superior to the other than about Pharisees. Luke's intemperateness raises the question of how to deal with our own righteous indignation and tendency to generate stereotypes.

This story is a high wire act. For those sensitive to its anti-Jewish use, might it not be more fruitful to preach one of Augustine of Hippo's greatest gifts to the west? His psychology teaches that we are all self-serving to some degree or another. Even the best among us are narcissistically tinged. This is original sin. Although neither he nor Calvin had the phrase "self-serving," Calvin believed that every part of us can harbor it. His phrase, "total depravity" does not work well in

⁴ *Siddur Sim Shalom*, For Weekdays (New York City: The rabbinical Assembly; the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism 2002).

English just now. From this perspective, Luke's message applies both to the one who pays taxes to Caesar and the one who collects them for him. Both help keep the peace in a tense environment.

The tax-collector is resented by the general public because he seems to be a turncoat although he is contributing to keeping a delicate peace with Rome. Some may have been corrupt, but where is that not possible? Luke is teaching that Pharisees should be despised although they obey traffic laws, pay taxes, care for their children and parents and earn an honorable living. They also contribute to the fragile peace. The Pharisee pays his taxes; the tax-collector carries them to the government. Self-righteousness is more insidious than Luke lets on. His anger has gotten in his way, and therefore it is now in our way as readers locking us into stereotypes that became truth. Luke's good guy is as vulnerable to self-righteousness in his penitential pose as is his bad guy, perhaps even more so.

Now, how one goes about helping people deal with the angry Luke in themselves is for the preacher to decide. Self-examination is more to the point than bashing others. Even if the preacher treats the audience as if they were upstanding citizens who deserve censure for being content that they are, they know that they are really the good repentant guy, or getting there; they are in church, after all. The Pharisee invective will not stick to them because they already belong to the good guy's church.

Now the Pharisees and scribes as well as biblical teaching ("the Law") are not bygones. Judaism as we have it today is their descendant. Preaching against the Pharisees, scribes, the law and so on, demean every Jew, including those sitting in the pews on Sunday morning and those in parishioners' extended family at Thanksgiving, perhaps Christmas. Pray that the Jews to whom you preach (perhaps unknowingly) are Jewishly uninformed and so will not recognize the insults hurled at them by the "gospel of love." Christians are aware of Phariseism primarily through its angry critics like Luke. Indeed, Phariseism saved Judaism from extinction after the massive devastation at Roman hands. Perhaps that is why the Synoptic writers went after them. Needless to say, learning about a group only from its enemies is not particularly reliable.

Supersessionism

Christian supersessionism, also known as replacement theology, displacement theology or fulfillment theology is Christianity's triumphalist ecclesiology. Basically, with Jesus God threw Judaism under the proverbial bus in favor of a new community that embraces Jesus. To protect God, Christians also argue that Jews threw themselves under the bus because most failed to

Christianize. Christians hoped that Judaism would commit suicide by accepting Jesus, but most Jews clung to God instead.

The Christian claim is that the church has displaced, replaced, overridden, or supplanted Judaism as the people of God. Judaism is now theologically dead and illegitimate. It died on the cross in God's eyes. It no longer has theological validity and so should cease to exist materially as well. Jews who think that Judaism is theologically alive and who worship God Jewishly are wasting their time and look foolish to knowledgeable Christians who have traditionally branded them as "blind" for not accepting their Christian way.

Here is an example of Christian contempt for the synagogue sculpted into Strasbourg Cathedral.



Supersessionism is not a post-biblical idea. Today some Christian communions want to demur from supersessionism, but that remains a rhetorical flourish as long as the biblical texts, music, artwork and doctrines that inscribe it remain in place. It is throughout the Younger Testament. First Peter 2:4-10 is a clear example. Another is Hebrews as we shall see. Saying that Jews are our "elder brothers" (a historical inaccuracy in itself) simply affirms supersessionism quietly because "elder" and "younger," like the terms "Old Testament" and "New Testament," mean following after one another and that is the supersessionist pose. Keep in mind that primogeniture was standard in biblical times.

Yet three times Genesis goes out of its way to reverse the normal order so that the younger usurps the primary blessing meant for the elder. Abel is preferred over Cain and is murdered for it. In late life confusion, Isaac gives Jacob Esau's blessing, creating dangerous strife (Gen 27). In his turn, Jacob gives the younger Ephraim his elder brother, Menasheh's blessing (Gen 48). The

reason for depriving the elder his due in Genesis is not at all clear, although its consequences play out repeatedly in Israel's interactions with the nations. Perhaps it was to justify Israel's own identity as God's people, since it was a small nation (Deut 7:7) that identifies itself as immigrants descended from a "wandering Aramean" to whom God gave other peoples' land (Deut 26:5).

Under different circumstances, the older/younger upending motif continues in the stories of the workers in the vineyard (Matt 20), the wicked tenants (Matt 21) and the prodigal son (Luke 15). Clearly the elder should inherit but in all cases the younger does. Indeed, Paul did the same to justify a gentile church.

Rom 9:12f. splices together phrases from Gen 25:23 and Mal 1:2f. presenting them as though they were a single verse in Genesis 25 that reads: "I have loved Jacob, but I have hated Esau." "Jacob" is now gentiles whom God loves; "Esau" is now Jews whom God hates. This deft sleight of hand does not exhaust Paul's intention, however. He adds that "the elder shall serve the younger" (Rom 9:12). Perhaps he intends "serve" in a theological sense, as Rom 11:7–11 suggests. But the love-hatred motif carries the idea in a different direction.

The reversal of Sarah and Hagar (Gal 4:24–31) that parallels that of Jacob and Esau is also hostile with Jews being represented as children of the slave and gentiles as children of the free woman (30f.). Paul carved displacement theology and contempt for Judaism and Jews in stone for all time and it produced rivers of blood. All this is to say that elder and younger brother language does not challenge Judaism's displacement.

Here, I follow a narrow definition of supersessionism that represents the Christian view that the church has overridden or overwritten the synagogue and with it the Jewish people as the people of God. Supersessionism is the outcome of the ecclesiological struggle between the synagogue and the church, for each defines itself as the exclusive people of God over against or even despite the other's claim to the same honored status. The Christians claimed that Jesus-followers now constitute the Israel of God and that non-Jesus followers do not. At that time, non-Jesus following Judahites of course, never considered this claim seriously. Jews have never doubted that they are the Israel of God.

Scripture authenticates the election of the children of Israel, now the Jewish people, as "the chosen people" (Isa 43:20; Dan 11:15) God's "people Israel" (Deut, Judg, 1&2 Sam, 1 Kgs, Jer, Ezek, and Amos, Dan, 1&2 Chron) "the children of Israel" (Gen, Exod, Lev, Num, Deut, Josh, Judg, 1&2 Sam, 1&2 Kgs, Isa, Jer, Ezek, Hos, Joel, Amos, Obad, Mic, Pss, Dan, Ezra, Neh and 1&2 Chron) "a holy nation" or "holy people" (Exod, Deut, Isa and Dan) or simply "Israel."

Early on, Jesusites laid claim to the same identity but they could not base that claim on scripture as Jews could unless the biblical texts as read in Greek meant something other than what they said. Paul began that transformation and most Christian interpreters followed his practice, redefining Israel's scriptures as about Jesus and themselves rather than about the events and characters portrayed therein. Anachronistically eisogizing themselves into the text was the easiest way for Christian leaders to do that. One example, perhaps the most successful, was to eisogize Christ into the tetragrammaton (*theos* in the Septuagint). Naming scripture the "Old Testament" clinched the deal.

Redefining scripture as Christian rather than Israelite and themselves as the people of God began long before Christianity gained power and the communities separated. The replacement of Jews and Judaism by the Christian church took some time but is incipient in Christian writings that were later canonized.

Younger Testament authors identified the church as "the household of God" (Eph 4:12, 1Tim, 1Pet); "God's field, God's building" (1Cor 3:9); "God's offspring" (Act 19:29); "God's beloved" (Rom 1:7); "God's elect" (Rom 8:30, Tt 1:1); "God's temple" (1Cor 3:17); "God's family" (Gal 1:2); "God's own people" (Eph 1:14); "God's chosen ones" (Col 3:12); "God's house" (Heb 3:6); "people of God" (Heb 4:9; 11:25), God's children (1John 3:2, 5:19). Supersessionism is perhaps clearest in 1Pet 2:9f.: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people [...]. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

The phrase, "body of Christ" (Rom 7:4; 1Cor 10:16; 12:27, Eph 4:12) need not define the entire people of God but came to be synonymous with it. The church as the exclusive people of God was nailed down by St Cyprian's dictum *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (there is no salvation outside the church). Judaism no longer has a right to claim its scriptural identity as "the people of God" (Jud 20:2; 2Sam 14:13).

2. Hymns and Sacred Choral Music

Before considering hymns, a liturgical note on Christianizing psalms is warranted. The Gloria Patri has traditionally been appended to the recitation of psalms in public worship. Musical settings of psalms often give it particular flourish. From a Jewish perspective, this is a particularly egregious practice. Eliminating it would not relinquish Christian claims to the poems and it would be a powerful statement of good faith to Jews.

The musical selections here are two hymns “Come O come Emanuel,” and “Come, ye faithful raise the strain,” and a note on Christian sacred choral music.

Come, O Come Emmanuel

With this scriptural preparation, let us turn to displacement theology in hymns. Perhaps the most beloved Advent hymn.

O come, O come, Emmanuel
And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel

O come, Thou Day-Spring, come and cheer
Our spirits by Thine advent here
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night
And death's dark shadows put to flight

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel

It is not clear who “captive Israel” is in this lyric. If Israel is the Jewish people “that mourns in lonely exile here” as if without God, the supersessionism is blatant. Some diaspora Jews may have endured the “gloomy clouds of night,” in exile but they longed for their homeland to release them from unfavorable environments, not for God who is with them in all locations and environments and certainly not for Jesus who enabled Christianity. Where Jews were allowed to flourish, they settled in comfortably in host cultures. In bad times, longing for their native land sustained hope, but by and large being dispersed was productive for both the Jewish communities and the larger societies.

Come you faithful raise the strain

Another notably supersessionist hymn is “Come, you faithful, raise the strain.” “Come, you faithful, raise the strain of triumphant gladness! God has brought his Israel into joy from sadness!” Sadness is, of course, Jesuslessness. Joy is embracing him. The direct object of God’s action, “his Israel” is ambiguous. If “his Israel” refers to the Church as Israel it is clearly supersessionist. Or, if “his

Israel” refers to Christianized Jews, the end of Judaism is in mind. Either way, ending Judaism seems to be the goal.

Yet that never happened on a large enough scale to wipe out Judaism as Christianity expected it would. Yes, there were high pressure times in which Jews capitulated either to prevent expulsion, trial, economic, social, educational and professional disenfranchisement, even death in some instances. A few who converted, perhaps out of conviction brought grave suffering on their abandoned community, by supplying Jewish texts that could be used against Jews.

It is tempting for each Christian generation to presume itself better equipped, better positioned, better supported to finally win over the stiff-necked, blind, stupid Jews. Ardent as well as gentle evangelistic strategies had been tried and failed. Perhaps Christianizing Jewish scripture would do it. The mendicant orders in the Middle Ages thought that compelling Jews to listen to Christian sermons would do it. Perhaps denigrating the Talmud and publicly burning all (hand-written) copies of its numerous volumes in France would do it. Some thought that forcing Jews to dispute with the Christian power structure publicly, prearranging to humiliate them and then exiling their ensnared spokesmen would do it. Here is the advantage of being a stubborn people, indomitably loyal to God.

Later modern European scripture scholars and theologians thought that anti-Jewish interpretation of scripture or the promise of citizenship and legal, social, and economic advancement would do it. Finally, Hitler, perhaps realizing that Jews just would not do it, took a different approach to the “Jewish question.” Yet even that failed. At a ladies’ day retreat that I attended in the early 1980s with a powerful conservative evangelical church in the US, a woman spoke the following into my journalist’s tape recorder: “Good came from the Holocaust because some Jews came to know Jesus.” Her obscene smugness hangs in the air.

Karl Barth finally admitted that Jews would not Christianize. He alone of all Christian theologians considered that there was a theological reason for Jewish existence. The church had always believed that God has covenanted only with itself. Of course, Jews have claimed the same. But Barth had the courage to realize that pitting those elected for the covenant (Christians) against those rejected who were outside the covenant (Jews) was a mistake because Jews would never enter the Christian covenant, believing that God’s covenant with them is eternal. Barth decided to put the Jews inside the Christian covenant as those elected by God for rejection. From being rejected by God *de facto* as the whole tradition had it Jews became rejected by God *de jure*.

Barbed comfort from Barth here. At last, the Jews have a place in the Christian economy of salvation. Moving Jews inside the Christian covenant to deal with Jewish intransigence damns all Jews for all time. It is Barth’s analogue to, or perhaps application of the decide charge that

Christians took it upon themselves to punish as God's representatives. How much of an advance this is on Cyprian's teaching that individuals outside the Church are lost, when now a whole people inside the Christian covenant is rejected by God is dubious. The Roman Catholic Church considerably weakened the deicide charge in 1965 but Barth's doctrine of election stands.

Sacred Choral Music

Christianity's monumental repertoire of sacred choral music, like its architecture, sculpture, and painting shaped western civilization. Mass settings, requiems, passions, oratorios, cantatas, psalm settings, motets, settings of the canticles, and so on bring the taste of divinity to the musical palate far beyond Christian settings. It is disconcerting that Christian anti-Judaism and supersessionism infect the general public through the finest music ever composed. Music is perhaps a more powerful form of preaching than mere words.

Unlike hymnody, scholarly research on anti-Judaism in Christian sacred choral music is beginning. Michael Marissen charted this path, devoting his scholarship to disclosing this unpleasant reality.⁵ Focusing particularly on Bach and Handel, Marissen understands that it is the texts themselves rather than the personal animus of librettists and composers that continue to transmit Christian anti-Judaism to church and concert audiences alike.⁶ Now to sermons.

3. Sermons

Sermons discussed here are Hebrews, *Melito of Sardis's* "On Passover," *Augustine of Hippo's* Sermon 122 and *Christopher Holdsworth's* sermon "According to the promise heirs" on Gal 3:23–29. A

⁵ *Michael Marissen*, The Character and Sources of the Anti-Judaism in Bach's Cantata 46, in: Harvard Theological Review 96, no. 1 (January 2003), 63–99; idem, The Social and Religious Designs of J.S. Bach's Brandenburg Concertos, Princeton 1995; Michael Marissen, Tainted Glory in Handel's Messiah. The Unsettling History of the World's Most Beloved Choral Work, New Haven 2014; idem, Bach & God, New York 2016.

⁶ Here I pause for a personal anecdote. I was a happy subscriber to a local baroque instrumental ensemble. The season program announced that its annual Good Friday concert would be the St John Passion performed in several area churches. Six months before the performance I called the orchestra's office and asked if there would be anything said or written in the program about the anti-Jewish tone and effects of this work. I got no answer. I attended the performance. Nothing was said. Bach, of course, was a preacher in sound. The venom against the Jews is so prominent in the work that I could not sit through the second half where hostility toward Jews is more pronounced. At intermission as I was leaving the church, I saw the rector who had welcomed the audience and shared my concern that nothing was said to mitigate the anti-Jewish power of the piece. It was, after all, in a church on Good Friday. I told him that I wanted to send two of Marissen's books to the maestro and gave him my business card. He said I could bring the books to him and he would convey them to the maestro who is one of his parishioners. I did that and included a letter explaining my concern because the concert functioned as a worship service as Bach intended. Several weeks later, I received a nasty two-page single-spaced letter from the maestro chastising me for politicizing great music and that my concern was bogus. It is just great music. About a month later I called the orchestra's office again and since the maestro clearly was not interested in the books asked could I have them back. The office manager said he would do that. I never heard back. The books had been thrown away unread.

comment on *Martin Luther's* "On the Jews and their Lies" is included. Although not intended as a sermon, it preaches.

Epistle to the Hebrews

The earliest extant proto-Christian sermon is the Epistle to the Hebrews (60–95 CE). It both crafts Christian doctrine and maps supersessionism. Hebrews is a homiletical midrash on scripture, Christologizing it to have it mean something other than what it says. The author has mastered the Septuagint and ranges agily through it, taking it from non-Jesusites and giving it to Jesus-following Judahites. The story of God and Israel is no longer the story of God's relationship with the world through Abraham's descendants recounted in the Hebrew Bible, although a rendition of that history appears in chapter 11. That story is now about the preexistent Son of God and his function as the high priest of a new priesthood.

Our agile exegete picks Christian scriptural flowers Christologizing whichever texts could be reinterpreted to support his vision as he moves point by point building Christianity to separate the Jesusites from aborning Judaism from which they had come. He strains to separate the communities. For example, he uses Palms 8, 95 and 110 and not surprisingly, Jer 31 to Christianize the Israelite texts. He christologizes many other biblical texts as well. Christ is not yet God, of course, but he is superior to angels, Moses, the Aaronide priesthood, the Temple and anything connected with Judahite religion at that time.

A common historical misunderstanding must be rectified at this point. Since both Judaism and Christianity as we now know them emerged from Judahite religion, it is an historical error to think that Christianity emerged from Judaism or that Christianity is the daughter of Judaism. Israelite religion, not Judaism is the religion of the Hebrew Bible. Fred Craddock is sensitive to the supersessionism concern, yet his observation that "The writer appeals to the Old Testament as a living Word of God and presents his case for the Christian faith as being in continuity with that Word. To read Hebrews as an attack on Judaism is to misread Hebrews" is a common apologetic Christian misreading.⁷ It is inaccurate not only because honoring Hebrew scripture does not constitute acceptance of Judaism as theologically legitimate, but also because Hebrew scripture tells of Israelite religion not of Judahite religion or of Judaism. Theologies of continuity are as supersessionist as are theologies of discontinuity. Ancient Israelite religion is one of Judaism's predecessors just as it is one of Christianity's predecessors. Hebrews is not so much an attack on

⁷ Fred B. Craddock, Letter to the Hebrews: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections, in: New Interpreter's Bible, vol. 12, 12 vols., Nashville 1998, 7f.

Judaism as it is a dismantling of Judahite religion at the time and repurposing the debris in a new edifice.⁸

The author of *Hebrews* is a deft midrashist, probably a Jewish scholar by background and training. He begins transforming the meaning of the texts by wrenching them from their historical setting; Jewish midrashic interpretation did as well. Hermeneutics is the art of crafting strategies to render acceptable texts that grate against contemporary sensibilities intellectually or morally.⁹ *Hebrews* employs both Greek and Jewish hermeneutical strategies to argue that nascent Christianity has replaced nascent Judaism. Paul had already turned scripture on its head making it say something other than what it was universally understood to mean. Both are deconstructing normalcy and using its forms to house different matter. It is like telling citizens of a nation that their country is no more because it has been conquered by another and that they are welcome to apply for citizenship.

Hebrews uses various strategies to delegitimize nascent Judaism and authorize nascent Christianity in its place by showing that the new, better meaning of the scriptures is in Christ not in whatever the text says about historical events. Here are a few examples:

1:5 – The author quotes Psalm 2:7 “You are my son; today I have begotten you” to mean that Jesus is higher on the scale of divinity than angels. It locates Jesus ontologically in relation to divinity. The ontology of the title “Son of God” would officially be determined at Nicaea (325), of course, but Heb 1:5 sets the stage for it as do the hymn in Philippians 2 and the beginning of John’s Gospel. Our next theologian, Melito of Sardis, takes the hint as we shall see.

2:5–9 – On the face of it, Psalm 8 is about the ontological status of humanity in relation to angels. But *Hebrews* makes it be about Jesus. “As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to them, but we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.” The author has, in effect, removed Jesus from humanity and put him above angels although where or what that ontological status is is nebulous. Jesus is being moved up the ontological ladder. Western atonement soteriology is gestating here.

⁸ A physical example of this is in the Noble Sanctuary, the Dome of the Rock. In the small undercroft beneath the main floor, where one gets quite close to the stone, is a little portico of sorts, or perhaps the remains of one. The pillar facing worshipers is recycled from a church; is a Christian cross is carved into its capital. It is cemented in upside down.

⁹ *Ellen T. Charry*, *Hermeneutics. Biblical*, in: Samuel E. Balentine (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Theology*, vol. 1, 2 vols., New York 2014.

2:17; 5:1–10 are about the duties and responsibilities of the High Priest on Yom Kippur when he enters the holiest part of the Temple to atone for his sins, those of his family and of the entire people of Israel. Jesus, already above the angels, is also the high priest who atones for the sins of the people. Here he is the priest, not the victim.

5:10; 7; 8:1–7 dismiss the Aaronide priesthood to invent a new one, that of Malkeetzedek mentioned at Gen 14:18 and carried into Ps 110:4 (a psalm that our author finds very useful). Jesus is the high priest of this new order that replaced the House of Aaron. This is theologically important because Jesus does not have priestly ancestry and is never anointed as either king or priest although his followers applied those titles to him. The Gospel writers are not attending to scriptural detail.

8:8:13 – Jesus becomes the sacrifice that replaces the biblical sacrifices practiced in the Temple. Now he is above the angels, though our author is not quite clear about his ontological status. He is the priest making the atoning sacrifice on behalf of the people on the ground and becomes the sacrificed victim at the same time hard as that is to wrap one's mind around. The canonical Gospels repeatedly ask Jesus to explain who he is, where he has come from, what he is doing, where he is going. Hebrews adds to the confusion. Sorting it out is a matter of decision rather than discovery that reached its climax in 451 at Chalcedon. That process is not unlike the scholarly Jesus Seminar (1985-2006) that voted on what the scholars thought Jesus actually said.

We do not know whether Hebrews was written before or after the burning of the Temple by the Romans. Without the Temple, Jews had to replace the priesthood and the sacrificial system. Memory of the cult was preserved in Mishna Yoma. Perhaps people were ready to let go of them in any case. Safely tucked in memory's storehouse, however, prayer and local synagogues blossomed as the center of Jewish energy. Hebrews, on the other hand, recycles the debris from the defunct cult as Christianity. In essence, the Jews put the debris from the burned Temple in long-term storage, while the author of Hebrews recycled it.

Probably to arouse lapsing Jewish Christians to reinvigorate their new faith, our author predictably calls upon Jer 31:31–34 to argue that the prophet's notion of a new covenant now located in Jesus has replaced God's holy covenant with biblical Israel. This is a major theme of the letter developed in chapters 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13. This new covenant has obsoleted the first one. It is better than the first covenant because it is made with blood and is eternal. Those who resist will be severely punished because they have “spurned the Son of God, profaned the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace” (Heb 10:29) (cf. Rom 8:4–6). Of course, it never occurred to Jews that they profaned the blood of the covenant or even what that

refers to. Perhaps the author has Ex 12 in mind, although God's covenant with Israel is made in chapter 34 where there is no mention of lamb's blood. Poetic license provides great leeway.

Heb 12:2 has Jesus seated at the right hand of the throne of God, though not yet God. Within this, 9:15 cryptically names him "the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, because a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant." Chapter 11 explains that "those who are called" are the full panoply of biblical figures from Abel to David. Here is another way of Christianizing the Hebrew Bible. In this case, however, the characters are anachronistically Christologized and repurposed for the new covenant made by Christ's blood. Augustine, and long after him Calvin would pick up this idea of Christ as mediator of a new covenant based on Jer 31. Chapter 12:24 reasserts Christ's role as mediator. His mediatorial function between God and us is possible because our author had previously located Christ above the angels in the heavenly hierarchy where he is "crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death" and now seats him at the right hand of God's throne.

As confusing as the various roles and identities of Christ are in Hebrews, the writer is building an argument verse by verse, chapter by chapter. Hebrews gives us the Younger Testament's clearest statement of repurposing Judahite religion to create Christianity. Christ is the new Temple, the new high priest who makes atonement for the sins of the people, and well as the victim sacrificed or driven into the desert for their sake. He is above the angels and sits at God's right hand, an idea that was taken into the creeds. Hebrews includes many biblical personages and condemns those who do not fall in line. The birth of Christianity and the death of Judaism are being played out before our eyes here like a feature film scene by scene. Our next sermon is a sequel to this text.

"On Passover"

"On Passover" builds on Hebrews. It is a second "Christian century" poem in Greek attributed to *Melito*, the bishop of Sardis.¹⁰ It is most likely a sermon declaimed to Christians attracted to Judaism, former Jews, or those vulnerable to Jewish evangelization against whom Christians were competing for adherents. Christianity was an upstart self-starter. Judahite religion, though struggling to find its footing after the devastating wars with Rome, had a pedigree, was respected, and legal. Christianity had none of these advantages. This poem has Christianity striving for authenticity by discrediting emerging Judaism.

¹⁰ Cf. *Bart D. Ehrman*, *Melito of Sardis: On the Passover*, in: *idem.*, *After the New Testament. A Reader in Early Christianity*, New York 1999, 115–28.

This powerfully dramatic homily develops several themes. It discredits Passover that relives and teaches the Exodus account of the original events. It replaces the celebration of the first Passover with another: Christ. While doing this the author invents the deicide charge that became the lynch pin of standard Christian Israelology.

This discussion is of the work's theology, not its provenance, the motivations behind it or its audience that might contextualize its anti-Judaism. Its blazing oratory stands on its own. It is a detailed scolding of Jews and Judaism that cashed out for Christians. Its strident supersessionism permeates Christian Israelology ever after.

One reading of the piece is that Melito tears down Jewish Passover to build a Christian one. These scholars divide the work into two sections to that end. While that may be structurally appropriate, for the purpose of discerning the development of its anti-Judaism I will consider the sermon in four sections: its demolition of Passover's meaningfulness after Christ, the immediate salvific meaning of Christ's death, the creation of the deicide charge, and a last great burst of soteriological exhilaration like the final skyrocketing fireworks at the end of the show.

The first section, segments 1–46, argues that Christ replaces Passover. Melito uses typology to press the replacement idea. "The type was for a time, but grace is forever" ... "The [old scripture] was a model; the other [the new gospel] was found to be the finished product" (verse 4). "By the smallness of the model, destined to be destroyed, might we see that thing which is to arise from it; higher than it in size, and mightier than it in power, and more beautiful than it in appearance, and more elaborate than it in ornamentation" (36). This point is repeated multiple times indicating how important it is for his argument. Perhaps he has Phil 3:7–9 in mind. Having served its purpose, Passover, and perhaps Judaism altogether, has been theologically "destroyed" by Christ.

With Judaism now meaningless, Jews get nothing from it even if they do not realize it. In any case, it is not soteriologically significant. "When the church came on the scene and the gospel was set forth, the type lost its value by surrendering its significance to the truth, and the law was fulfilled by surrendering its significance to the gospel" (42). "Indeed, also the law was fulfilled when the gospel was brought to light, and the people lost their significance when the church came on the scene, and the type was destroyed when the Lord appeared. Therefore, those things which once had value are today without value" (43). Perhaps Passover was his point of entry because it was attractive to gentiles and important to Jewish Christians. Indeed, it is attractive to Christians today although that is a bit strained.

Christians should forego the Pesach seder because it is an empty rite.¹¹ They have a new paschal lamb, Christ, who replaces the lamb of Exodus 12. To press the point, Melito exegetes the Exodus narrative closely although some of his points do not accord with the text. He blames Jews for misunderstanding Exodus's true meaning at every step and ridicules what his audience's Jewish neighbors were celebrating.

By Christologizing Passover, Melito follows Paul (1 Cor 5:7-8) who surely knew that the paschal lamb has no soteriological significance. Atonement is made through the priestly ritual enjoined by Lev 16 that is now completely separate from Passover. But descriptions of the last supper sustain the confusion of Passover with Yom Kippur because it took place near or on Passover. It is the final seder according to Melito. "The last supper" then has double meaning. It was Jesus's last meal with his friends as well as the last theologically meaningful Jewish Passover seder for all time. There were two deaths on the cross: Jesus and Judaism altogether. Melito does not mince words: "The one first conceived, the one first born, the one sought after, the one chosen was dashed to the ground" (26). Israel, the first born of God has become one of the first-born dead of the final plague against the Egyptians.

Although replacement of Jewish Passover with a Christ-centered version occupies this section it sounded notes that would crescendo later in the poem and reverberate forever in orthodox Christianity both east and west. Early in the poem Melito says that the one "buried as a man, rose up from the dead as God, since he is by nature both God and man. He is everything...in that he is begotten he is Son, in that he suffers he is sheep, in that he is buried he is man, in that he comes to life again he is God" (8 and 9).

Section two of the poem argues that Christ's sacrificial death addressed human sin (46–71). Recounting the history leads into the significance of Christ's death. "... he accepted the sufferings of the sufferer through his body which was capable of suffering. And he destroyed those human sufferings by his spirit which was incapable of dying. He killed death which had put humans to death" (66) and "raised up humankind from the grave below" (71). The two natures doctrine, ratified at Chalcedon in 451 is already in place here.¹²

The third section of the poem (72–99) is high drama. It formulates the deicide charge in two steps. First it identifies the Jews as Christ's murderers and then it deifies Christ. The order is designed for maximal rhetorical effect. "O lawless Israel, why did you commit this extraordinary

¹¹ Perhaps here it is actually necessary to recall again that biblical Israelite religion is not Judaism. Jews do not slaughter, roast and eat an animal at today's Pesach seder, although they do eat matzah and they do eat meat. The sacrificial apparatus has not been part of Judaism since 70 CE.

¹² Nostra Aetate – On Relations with Non-Christians, <https://www.ewtn.com/library/councils/v2non.htm> (accessed May 13, 2019).

crime of casting your Lord into new sufferings...” (81). Melito recognizes the necessity of the execution but laments that the job was not left to gentiles (75f.).

Naming all Jews as Christ’s murderers may be the first charge of collective guilt. It is not those whose actions harmed others who are responsible for the effects of their actions or policies, but all who are like them in a way that the complainant deems pertinent to their particular suffering. Here the perpetrators are all Jews against Christ. Collective guilt is now applied to a host of perpetrators. Germans, men, Australians, Caucasians, Turks, heterosexuals, Israelis, Christians and so on all are called to account for their offenses. A difference between these applications of collective guilt and Melito’s is that victims of the modern perpetrators are other people. Melito’s ire is not about what Jews have done to Christians but about what they have done to Christ.

In segment 82 of “On Passover,” Christ becomes “the firstborn of God the one who was begotten before the morning star.” He created the universe and accompanies, guides, and chastises Israel’s misdeeds throughout scripture (81–85). This is the one “you” (Jews) murdered. The Romans disappear. Writing extensively in the second person plural now strikes its blow. “Why have ... you ... O Israel ...?” becomes the unrelenting antiphon connecting lists of Israel’s many failings that Melito levels against the Jews he is speaking to in absentia. The knife plunges deeper knowing that while the charges are leveled in the second person plural, he is addressing Christians. One wonders if they received his taunts with glee overhearing his assault on their neighbors.¹³ Interestingly, while our author heaped derisive scorn on “you ... O Israel,” his Jewish contemporaries and their forebears, he did not project that guilt and shame onto all Jews going forward. He left that for the later church that readily took Melito’s place as the prosecuting attorney.

One last element is needed to clinch the doctrine: the identity of the victim. Having introduced the grounds for decide in segments 8 and 9 the drama climaxes succinctly: “God has been murdered” (96). It is finished. The Jews are accused of murdering God although of course, everyone knows that that is a rhetorical flourish because God is unmurderable. The idea that the Jews murdered God is nonsense. Melito preempts Nicaea, just as he has preempted Chalcedon.

¹³ *Augustine* used the same technique to rouse his Christian hearers against the Jews in his *Answer to the Jews*: Augustine of Hippo, *Answer to the Jews*, in: *Writings on the Old Testament*, vol. 1/14, Works of Saint Augustine. A Translation for the 21st Century, Hyde Park, NY 2016, 750–77. Bad-mouthing people behind their back is a standing temptation, usually done in the third person. But speaking condemnation to a third party already predisposed to dislike those being spoken to as if they were present carries invective to a new level. Turn the table and imagine a rabbi’s sermon to her congregation in which she says “why have you Christians hated us? Why have you Christians reviled us? Why have you Christians exiled us? Why have you Christians accused us of poisoning your wells? Why have you Christians accused us of murdering your children? Why have you Christians locked us in ghettos? Why have you Christians locked us out of your universities? Why have you Christians killed us?” Now the perpetrators know the truth about how they are perceived by their victims. Melito and Augustine were brilliant preachers.

Christ's blood is redemptive, but centuries of harming Jews left the Christian Church sitting in a pool of Jewish blood that unfortunately Jews had to photograph for Christians to see. The church blinded itself to its crimes against the Jews in its triumphalist belief that their treatment of Jews was warranted by God's judgment against them. Again, the argument is that Jews threw themselves under the bus. That blindness is the great sadness of Christian history. How to mop up the blood one is sitting in when it is invisible? The charge that all Jews killed God lived unquestioned for eighteen centuries until one Jew, Jules Isaac, managed to speak with Pope John XXIII in 1960.

The final section of this sermon (100–105) paints word pictures of the saving benefits of Christ, some of which were introduced previously. He now adds forgiveness of sins and reprises resurrection and the death of death (that may or may not be tied to resurrection). Melito's literary fireworks led later theologians and artists to depict several scenarios and interpretations of salvation. Resurrection is central. He has Christ say, "I am the one who destroyed death and triumphed over the enemy and trampled Hades under foot and bound the strong one" (102). The "strong one" was assumed to be the Devil; his defeat by Christ defeats death, or in other visions ransoms believers from mortality (echoing Gen 3:10). The imagery was fleshed out in theology and art as Christ entering Hades to release the Patriarchs and other just ancestors from death. The idea circulated and became part of the baptismal creed (the Apostles' Creed) with the words "he descended to the dead." It is also in the "Athanasian" Creed with the wording "descended into hell." Both creeds post-date "On Passover." The harrowing of hell, as this descent was called, became associated with Holy Saturday.

In the very next segment however, Christ appears as the pascal lamb: "I am the passover of your salvation, I am the lamb which was sacrificed for you, I am your ransom," followed by a slew of additional benefits of his death (103). Here, following John 1:29, Christ's replacement of the pascal lamb is for forgiveness of sins although that is not its function in the Exodus story or the seder as noted above. But the word "ransom" harks back to the devil motif. In short, Melito bubbled over telling his audience of the wondrous accomplishments of this one murdered by the Jews for the sake of the well-being of gentiles. Here we see the cornucopia of understandings of salvation all run together. It becomes understandable that enthusiastic Christians would plead with Jews to join them and enjoy all these blessings.

In addition to the themes discussed, this sermon points toward other anti-Jewish attitudes:

1. Jews are “blind” because they do not agree that Jesus is the content of their scripture.

They hold to the text that is before them. Or, Jews are stupid refusing the truth that is right in front of them in christologized scripture. This approach often uses promise-fulfillment typology. The meaning is not discernible in the words of the texts. Later theologians used demeaning adjectives describing Jews alone but without the explanatory “because” clause that would focus the epithet. Without an explanatory rationale for them, these adjectives become general character traits of Jews. Matthew 23 bequeaths “hypocrites” and of course, “blind guides” to lead the attack. Luke gives us “lovers of money” (Luke 16:14). Others added more adjectives.

2. The Christian Church: New Israel... or True Israel?

These post-biblical phrases are often run together but they are significantly different. “New Israel” is traditional Christian supersessionism. Hebrews and Melito both exemplify it even though neither coined the phrase. Melito is a “continuity” theologian. Israelite history prepared for Christ so it “is both old and new” (57 and 58).

The term “true Israel” however is quite different, for it implies that the Israelites, now Jews, never truly were Israel. They were just a placeholder until Christ came (Gal 3:24.25). There are passages where Paul can be read as implying that gentile Christians are the great nation gathered from all the families of the earth promised to Abraham. That enables Paul to make the grand reversals in Galatians 4 and Rom 9:6–8. Gentiles are “the children of the promise,” the descendants of Isaac and Jacob, and Sarah (Gal 4). He does not qualify these replacements with “now” or “but now.” Of course, other passages in Paul lean toward supersessionist Israelology, so the question is worth discussing. Whatever Paul was thinking about that, Justin tells Trypho that “we, who have been quarried out of the bowels of Christ, are the true Israelit[e] race.”¹⁴ Clement of Alexandria uses “true Israel” in *The Instructor*.¹⁵

3. In executing Jesus, the Jews killed their own messiah.

What “messiah” means, however, varies by context. Jews did not need a messiah to save them from their sins because the sacerdotal sacrifices did that when it functioned. In the diaspora and exile other mechanisms developed to serve that function. Judaism has no artistic or literary depictions of hell or divine wrath, and so no medieval penitential system to address them. These

¹⁴ *Justin*, Dialogue with Trypho, in: Thomas P. Halton/Michael Slusser (eds.), *Selections from the Fathers of the Church*, v. 3, Washington, D.C. 2003.

¹⁵ *Clement of Alexandria*, *The Instructor*, Edinburg/Grand Rapids 1986.

fearmongering institutions hit their mark in Luther. Some preachers took it upon themselves to put “the fear of God” into Christians to spur moral living.

Further, certainly the idea that “messiah” (anointed one) constituted an ontological status other than thoroughly human was beyond imaginability, perhaps because Jews assiduously avoided pagans while Christianity sought them. Even the idea that the messiah would be a military leader like Bar Kok̄ba was not self-evident although it had a following. Whatever energy there was for this surely quelled with Bar Kok̄ba’s utter defeat. There have been at least a dozen messianic claimants in Jewish history. A different image ensconced in Jewish memory is in the Babylonian Talmud.

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said to Elijah: When will the Messiah come? Elijah said to him: Go ask him. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi asked: And where is he sitting? Elijah said to him: At the entrance of the city of Rome. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi asked him: And what is his identifying sign by means of which I can recognize him? Elijah answered: He sits among the poor who suffer from illnesses. And all of them untie their bandages and tie them all at once, but the Messiah unties one bandage and ties one at a time. He says: Perhaps I will be needed to serve to bring about the redemption. Therefore, I will never tie more than one bandage, so that I will not be delayed (Sanhedrin 98a).

4. Conclusion

“On Passover” is a *tour de force*. Its powerful rhetoric, carefully crafted cadences and adroitly interlaced doctrinal steps build what seems to be an air-tight case of Christian truth against Jewish resistance to their own God. The decide charge against the Jews amounted to Judeocide by Christians.

By the time it was written, treatises against the Jews were already beginning to appear. Melito did not invent the genre but he carried it to rhetorical perfection. Quite apart from its anti-Jewish accomplishments, “On Passover” is remarkable because it directs or anticipates what became Christian orthodoxy. It anticipates the Nicene doctrine of the Trinity and the Chalcedonian doctrine of the incarnation of the dual nature of Christ. Further, it anticipates many soteriological images that were later elaborated. Again, this uncannily anticipates history. There was never a church council to select one soteriological image as orthodox so all the images and perhaps others remain available. In short, this brilliant work of art decisively shaped Christianity and Christian Israelology beyond anything its author might have hoped or imagined. And so it was.

Augustine of Hippo (354–430)

No presentation on anti-Jewish preaching would suffice without considering Augustine of Hippo. Of the 430 sermons that we have, we will look at 122.¹⁶ We do not know its date, but he tells us that it was addressed to educated Christians. When reading Augustine, do keep in mind that he was the weightiest mind of his day (and knew it). He carefully preserved his corpus like a space capsule knowing that it would enable western civilization to revive after what we once called the Dark Ages because a) he lived a long time, b) he did not develop Alzheimer's, and c) he wrote more than anyone before him and quite possibly after him. He died in 430 as Mediterranean civilization was dramatically ending.

In reading his massive corpus, it is also helpful to know that he did not know Hebrew and he struggled with Greek. We do not know which Latin translation of the Bible he relied on in which work. As we can see from looking at just two Christian texts, by Augustine's day anti-Judaism was in full dress augmented by numerous *Adversus Iudaeos* tracts since Melito including his own.¹⁷ Here we examine Sermon 122 on John 1:48–51.

Nataniel asked [Jesus], "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." Nataniel replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." And he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

Augustine's sermon proceeds like this. What Jesus says to Nataniel actually applies to the whole human race, and the fig tree represents sin here. He associates the fig tree with the fig leaves in Genesis 3, going out of his way to note that human sexual organs are not sinful. It is the sin of wrong eating that made Hava (life) and Adam (earth) ashamed not their nakedness.

The mention of angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man takes Augustine to Jacob's dream of the heavenly ladder and God's powerful promises to him at Gen 28:10–22, of course. Augustine is intensely interested in the stone that Jacob anoints the next day naming the place Beyt-El, the house of God. The anointed stone becomes the anointed Christ (although we have noted that no event anoints him). At this juncture, Augustine leaves these texts without cause and stops the flow of thought to denigrate the Jews.

¹⁶ *Augustine*, On the Words of the Gospel of John 1:48–51: "When You Were under the Fig Tree I Saw You." Sermon 122, in: *Sermons*, (94A–147A) on the New Testament, vol. 4, Works of Saint Augustine. A Translation for the 21st Century 3, Charlottesville, VA 2009, 238–43.

¹⁷ *Idem*, Answer to the Jews, in: *Writings on the Old Testament*, vol. 1/14, Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, Hyde Park, NY 2016, 750–777.

He turns to the parable of the tenants in the vineyard that relies on Ps 118:22: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.” It is low-hanging fruit for the supersessionist mind.

He is the stone about which he said himself, *Whoever stumbles over this stone will be shaken to bits; while anyone on whom this stone comes down, it will crush him* (Mt 21:44). He is stumbled over when he is lying on the ground; he will come down on him when he comes from on high to judge the living and the dead [...]. Woe to the Jews, because they stumbled over Christ when he was lying there humbly. *This man*, they say, *is not from God, because he breaks the sabbath* (Jn 9:16). *If he is the Son of God, let him come down from the cross* (Mt 27:40). Madman, the stone is lying there, and that's why you mock it. But if you mock, you're blind; if you're blind, you stumble; if you stumble, you are shaken to pieces; and when you have been shaken to pieces by him lying there now, you are going to be crushed by him coming down on you afterward (239).

To make sure that his audience has grasped the condemnation of Jews that Augustine concocts, he recurs to Yaakov's birth holding onto his twin brother's heel (Gen 25:26). He construes the name Yaakov (meaning “by the heel”) to mean supplanter. The annotator of the new translation, an acclaimed Augustine apologist, knows that this is a non sequitur but lets it stand. Augustine hangs his obscure argument on a bevy of unrelated scripture texts skipping all around trying to support his unrelated point. He next jumps to Gen 32:24–31, Yaakov's night-long wrestle with a man that left him injured but blessed with another name that would serve to justify the church to consider itself to be “Yisrael.”

Augustine plays on the two name changes, that of Avram to Avraham and that of Yaakov to Yisrael.

The name Avraham was to receive its explanation in this world, because it was here that he became the father of many nations, which is what he got the name from. The name Israel, on the other hand, belongs to the next world, where we will see God. So the people of God, the Christian people, is in this world and this time both Jacob and Israel; Jacob in our actual situation, Israel in our hopeful expectation. The younger people, you see, is called the supplanter of its brother, the older people. But have we supplanted the Jews? Well, we are called their supplinters, because they were supplanted, or set aside, for our sake. Unless they had become blind, Christ would not have been crucified; if Christ had not been crucified, that precious blood would not have been shed; if that blood had not been shed, the whole world would not have been redeemed. So it's because their blindness was profitable for us that the elder brother was supplanted by the younger, and the younger was called “Supplanter. But the question is: for how long? (p. 241)

The answer to that question is, of course, forever unless Jews convert. Consider a scarcely recognized observation. While our bishop recognizes that Christian salvation requires Christ's execution, why is he not exultantly celebrating the Jews for assisting that? Christian blindness at what is simply before them is astonishing.

Note: Even in John, the Gospel that has the most vicious things to say about Jews in the Bible, the author recognizes one good one: Nataniel. Yet even that poignancy cannot arouse a sympathetic word from the most influential bishop of the church. The Jews are supplanted, they have stumbled, they are crushed under Jesus. This translation of Augustine's sermons was published in 2009 in the new translation of Augustine's works for the 21st century. The commentator says not a word about this sermon's anti-Judaism.

Martin Luther

Even the briefest review of anti-Jewish preaching cannot avoid the Protestant Reformation. "The Jews" were a ready cipher for criticism of the papacy and several reformers take full advantage of that handle. While the *Adversus Iudaeos* tradition had its heyday in the Patristic Age, Martin Luther revived it in "On the Jews and their Lies" (1543) that he insisted on publishing against collegial advice. The 150-page tract (in English) is not a sermon, but it certainly preaches.

Luther's scandalous tract advises the following seven point policy toward Jews in German lands: burn down their synagogues, raze and destroy their homes, burn their prayer books and Talmudic writings, forbid rabbis to teach, revoke safe conduct policies, prohibit usury, set them at hard labor. At another point, he approves of cutting out their tongues. He continues: "God's anger with them is so intense that gentle mercy will only tend to make them worse and worse, while sharp mercy will reform them but little. Therefore, in any case, away with them!"¹⁸ He calls for their expulsion from German lands without police escort several times in this work. It was his final solution. Hitler took over the German church rather easily. Celebration of the 400th anniversary of Luther's Reformation (1917) had fueled nationalism, a point not lost on Hitler. *Mein Kampf* appeared in 1925. The "Confessing Church" that objected to Hitler on theological grounds was not concerned for Jews.

Christopher Holdsworth, "According to Promise Heirs," on Gal 3:23–29 was preached on 15 June 2019.¹⁹

But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster *to bring us* unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God by

¹⁸ *Martin Luther*, On the Jews and Their Lies, in: Franklin Sherman (ed.), *Christian in Society*, vol. IV, 55 vols., 47, Philadelphia 1971, 268–272.

¹⁹ <https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/according-to-promise-heirs-christopher-holdsworth-sermon-on-justification-240443> (accessed July 29, 2020).

faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye *be* Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (KJV)

Holdsworth's short and rather unremarkable sermon does not press Christians beyond their comfort zone. It does not assault Jews as do other texts that we have reviewed. Its supersessionism is more subtle. It explains that like children we [gentiles] started out needing tutoring and Jewish practice did that. Of course, for a post-Pauline Christian, Jewish practice/teaching/custom – that is God's instruction through Moses – became a deterrent because circumcision and dietary restrictions were onerous (especially men) so Paul dropped them to make his gospel more appealing. Quite unnecessarily, perhaps simply for rhetorical flourish, he went on to denounce them as well, as if they are theologically offensive rather than simply a hindrance to church growth.

The preacher reads this text as comforting Christians with Christian freedom (as Luther put it), release from the ordered life at which Mosaic instruction aims. What matters is faith, to be “in Christ.” From our perspective looking at supersessionism, it is notable that being “in Christ” makes one a child of Abraham and that wipes out the distinctions that Paul rejects in this passage. The preacher homes in on the intimacy between being “in Christ” and being Avraham's children.

The closing paragraph of this chapter [of Galatians] is leading to a triumphant conclusion: literally, “If ye are Christ's, then Avraham's seed ye are, and according to promise heirs” (Gal 3:29). This explains the radical unity here: again, “There is not Jew nor Greek; there is not bondman nor [sic] free; there is not male and female” (Gal 3:28). That is to say, all these distinctions are irrelevant to “as many as were baptized into Christ because Christ ye did put on (Gal 3:27).

This theme continues:

I have pointed out before just how frequently Paul uses the expression ‘in Christ’, ‘in Him’, ‘in the Beloved’ in Ephesians 3:1-14. The Apostle writes here in Galatians that we are sons of God through faith ‘in Christ Jesus’ (Galatians 3:26); that “as many as were baptized into Christ” did “put on Christ” (Galatians 3:27); that “ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28); and that “if ye are of Christ, then Abraham's seed ye are” (Galatians 3:29).

For our interest here, the preacher's message is that the only way to be Abraham's children is to be in Christ. Those not in Christ are not Abraham's seed, as Paul said at Rom 9:6f.: “It is not as though the word of God had failed. For not all Israelites truly belong to Israel, and not all of Abraham's children are his true descendants.” This is stated explicitly by John 8:39–44.

Our preacher explains further:

Then we read that “we are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). Jews are still Jews and Gentiles are still Gentiles (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:13), but in Christ (and only in Him!) the old distinctions are done away (cf. Ephesians 2:15). He concludes: “Thus we come full circle back to where we began: ‘If ye are Christ's,

then Abraham's seed ye are, and according to promise, heirs' (Galatians 3:29). The spiritual heirs of Abraham are in view here: all those who are found in Christ Jesus. Ours is a spiritual inheritance: 'eternal in the heavens' (2 Corinthians 5:1); 'to be with God which is far better' (Philippians 1:23); 'and so shall we ever be with the Lord' (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Alleluia. Amen.

John and Paul, and of course our preacher are clear: Jews have been disinherited. But Christians exhale and rejoice for they are in the right place. In Christ, or at least at the communion rail (where there is one), worldly distinctions momentarily vanish.

Christian triumphalism is the flip side (the upper side?!) of supersessionism. Here is the silent stab of Christian supersessionism. Those not feasting with us, even if they abstain on grounds of conscience and principle that Christians want to respect may be honored at the interpersonal level but that does not speak the word of the church. Doctrinally speaking, there can be no respectful disagreement in this case. Of this contempt, Rev. Holdsworth says nothing. The few selections here among many. The dangling question is what fuels this libelous powerhouse of scorn. The obvious answer is that comfortable Christians have simply assumed that Christian anti-Judaism is true because it is written in their books and been preached by great minds. Further, anachronistic scripture interpretation---reading Christ as central to the Hebrew text---has blotted out the text itself, blunting the Christian conscience and dulling Christian consciousness. Hoping to overcome the spiritual vapidness of some modern critical exegetical tools, the recent theological interpretation of scripture movement, to which this author has contributed, risks subduing the voice of historical-critical method that is essential to liberate the voices of the Hebrew Bible from pious distortion.

5. Walking Forward

The few selections here are among many. The dangling question is what fuels this libelous powerhouse of scorn. The obvious answer is that comfortable Christians have simply assumed that Christian anti-Judaism is true because it is written in their books and been preached by great minds. Further, anachronistic scripture interpretation – reading Christ as central to the Hebrew text – has blotted out the text itself, blunting the Christian conscience and dulling Christian consciousness. Hoping to overcome the spiritual vapidness of some modern critical exegetical tools, the recent theological interpretation of scripture movement, to which this author has contributed, risks subduing the voice of historical-critical method that is essential to liberate the voices of the Hebrew Bible from pious distortion.

Those aware of Christianity's underside must judge whether Christian anti-Judaism and supersessionism are a theological problem to be addressed for the moral and theological integrity

of Christianity.²⁰ Numerous church bodies have condemned anti-Semitism and Pope John Paul II took responsibility for Christian antisemitism: “For Christians the heavy burden of guilt for the murder of the Jewish people must be an enduring call to repentance; thereby we can overcome every form of antisemitism and establish a new relationship with our kindred nation of the old Covenant.”²¹ But such statements do not touch Christian anti-Judaism.

As noted, considerable rhetorical repair work has been accomplished in the past half-century. A large and still growing body of fine scholarship on both anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism accumulates on library shelves. Would that it trickled into seminary classrooms. Historical unmasking, enlightened biblical scholarship and interpretation, liturgical repair including long-resisted revision of the Oberammergau passion play, is completed or in process. Some Christian children’s Bibles and teaching materials have been revamped, most notably their visuals that had previously depicted “Jewish” characters as unsavory, ugly, swarthy and strange while “Christian” characters were painted in bright colors, with smiling faces and inviting gestures. Thanks to the liturgical renewal movement published prayerbook liturgies have largely been cleaned up.

Unfortunately, pictorial materials in college textbooks often still use photographs of ultra-Orthodox Haredi Jewish men dressed in seventeenth century costumes as if they represent all Jews. Perhaps publishers think that exoticism will sell books.

Eradicating offensive preaching and teaching begins with each teacher, especially teachers of preachers. Assuming that Christian anti-Judaism is a Christian problem, seminary curricula would need to take up this task. Anti-Judaism impacts every field of theological education.²² Sadly, excellent scholarship remains locked in the library, of course, because academics often write to debate one another and do not write for preachers. Until Jewishly sensitive scholarship trickles into university and seminary classrooms informed perspectives will remain in the academic preserve.

This essay focused on preaching at the local level. From where is our help to come? Current on-line resources are the “Internet Jewish History Sourcebook” (<https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/jewish/jewishsbok.asp>) and “Reading from the Roots” (<http://readingsfromtheroots.bard.edu/first-sunday-of-advent/>). The former will help preachers understand Judaism in Jewish terms. The latter is English translations of passages in the Revised

²⁰ A student of mine approached a highly esteemed colleague saying that he was interested in this matter and was considering studying with me. My colleague assured him that concern about Christian anti-Judaism was a fad, so he needn’t bother.

²¹ https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1990/november/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19901108_amb-germania.html (accessed July 29, 2020).

²² Eugene J. Fisher, *Seminary Education and Christian-Jewish Relations. A Curriculum and Resource Handbook*, Washington, D.C. 1988.

Common Lectionary translated less anti-Jewishly than other translations. It calls for a companion to help preachers deal with problematic passages. Less than a handful of books help Christian preachers avoid anti-Judaism.²³ Guidance for sermon preparation is sorely needed in electronic form.

Leadership

This essay offers suggestions for the local level, for preachers, musicians and for congregations. The easiest place for preachers to begin redressing Christian anti-Judaism is with themselves. Guidelines for avoiding contemptuous preaching are appended here in the concluding Appendix.

Preachers are the keepers of Christian rhetoric. Passion for proclaiming the gospel may discourage nuance, however. Melito, Augustine and Luther are examples. Luther could not curb his tongue. The writers discussed here were passionate for their causes. Yet maturity restrains the prudent who can anticipate harm that might flow from their sentences. This is difficult.

Contextualizing problematic texts may help a bit because it grants distance from the text. Historical appreciation that the context of vituperative anti-Jewish language is not our own –that the maestro in my anecdote refused to grant – is essential in order to distance hearers from a text’s or a musical setting’s venom. But preaching, whether through music or sermons, seeks the precise opposite. That is a tightrope that preachers must walk. Having people cry “crucify him, crucify him” when staging John’s passion narrative does not help, even when Christians are invited to see themselves as vicarious Jews. Caricaturing one’s worst self as a Jewish self only exacerbates the problem.

Musicians are especially important here because they understand that when words and music come together, they are more powerful than either is alone. Choral anthems and hymn and song lyrics may be revised rather easily. Aside from recitation of the Lord’s Prayer and money collected, singing may be the only aspect of the worship that comes from the worshipers. Where emendations are not feasible note should be made of the harmful consequences of the text and music and encourage listeners to distance themselves from it.

²³ Marilyn J. Salmon, *Preaching without Contempt. Overcoming Unintended Anti-Judaism*, Fortress Resources for Preaching, Minneapolis, MN 2006, <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/toc/ecip065/2005035400.html>; Clark M. Williamson, *Interpreting Difficult Texts. Anti-Judaism and Christian Preaching*, Phila 1989; Ronald J. Allen/Clark M. Williamson, *Preaching the Gospels without Blaming the Jews. A Lectionary Commentary*, Louisville, KY 2004. Amy-Jill Levine/Marc Zvi Brettler (eds.), *The Jewish Annotated New Testament. New Revised Standard Version Bible Translation*, Oxford 2017. Though not on preaching *per se* it is a great resource.

Christian congregations can also take reparative steps toward their Jewish neighbors. A dedicated confession of sins against Judaism and the Jewish people could be written for Christians to say among themselves to encourage reflection on and education about Christian history. A special penitential service that brings Christians and Jews together may also be appropriate. Christians can take leadership by reaching out to their neighbors contritely. Unlike Christianity, Judaism thinks of sin first on the horizontal plane where hurt occurs and only subsequently on the vertical plane. For Christians to meet Jews on the horizontal plane would be a step forward.

Repentance recognizes the need for resolution of the theological enmity between the traditions but does not do more than that. “Let bygones be bygones” will not do. Ignoring the past will not quell Jewish fear or diminish institutional memory. Recognizing Christian failure faces in the right direction. The Jewish High Holy Days offer Christians an opportunity for contrition. Elul is Judaism’s penitential season. It is a month and the first two weeks of the following month, Tishrey, a total of about 45 days. It is a season of self-examination and an opportunity to repair damaged relationships. The season usually corresponds to August-September of the Gregorian calendar, some years extending into October. Lent is Elul’s Christian analogue.

Elul is a season of soul-searching examination of one’s life over the preceding year. Special penitential prayers and Ps 27 are added to the daily morning service and the shofar is sounded daily to awaken people to themselves. The most stirring practice of this month is to approach everyone whom one might have offended during the past year and ask forgiveness, perhaps talking about the troubles if that would be helpful. Further, since we don’t always know the hurt we have caused, it is appropriate to approach many family members, friends and colleagues seeking to learn of hurt given. This strenuous spiritual work requires almost eight weeks. Should an offended person refuse forgiveness one waits a bit then tries a second time. Should that too fail one waits again and tries yet a third time. Should forgiveness not be forthcoming one seeks forgiveness from God on Yom Kippur.

Elul prepares for the great Ten Days of Awe from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur when the metaphorical Book of Life and the gates of heaven open and everyone’s fate for the coming year inscribed. As the 24-hour fast of Yom Kippur ebbs the Book of Life closes and the gates of heaven lock for another year. So, it would be appropriate that Christians publicly repent before the Jewish community by partnering with a local synagogue during Ellul.

Christian admission of sin against the Jewish people (not a service of reconciliation) would be suitable. If a Christian minister were to reach out to a local synagogue proposing such a possibility and the synagogue agreed, the Jewish participants should structure the event. Only the offer of public repentance should come from the Christians. Meeting in the synagogue is preferable to

meeting in a church building. The annual *Seliḥot* service, traditionally a midnight service on the Saturday night before Rosh HaShanah is an opportunity for liturgical creativity. Such a program must preclude Christian evangelism and testy topics like Zionism, Jesus, and the Trinity that are not appropriate for a penitential setting.

Such an event would take much planning and preparation of participants. A service of Christian repentance designed by Jews is a grand leadership opportunity for Christians. It would step toward Christian-Jewish rapprochement. Further events and opportunities could flow from it. These are weighty matters. Reconciliation is not yet in sight. But it is never too late to repent.

[May] YHWH guard you from all harm.

[May] he guard your life.

[May] YHWH guard your going and coming now and forever.

(Ps 121:7 JPS)

Appendix: Guidelines for avoiding preaching contempt for Jews and Judaism

It is difficult for Christian preachers to avoid encountering Jews and Judaism. Christianity traditionally treats the Older Testament as a foil against which Christianity is superior, not only in degree but in kind. Christianity is true; Judaism is false. Indeed, Christianity depicts Judaism as theologically empty; faithful Jews are quite wrongheaded. The Younger Testament's dependence on Israel's scripture for its pedigree requires preachers to interpret the Hebrew texts that the Christian church made its own. The Older Testament transmits a vision of ancient Israelite religion that both Jews and Christians claim as the foundation of their exclusive identity as the one and only Israel of God.

Ancient Israelite scripture is neither Judaism nor Christianity. In Christianity's Greek scriptures, we see both nascent Judaism and nascent Christianity emerging from Second Temple Judahite religion. The communities of Jesus-followers recorded in the Greek scriptures are competing with one another and with Pharisaic, Sadducean and Essene interpretations of Second Temple Judahite religion to capture the proper way to worship Israel's God in a tumultuous time. It was a religious free fall.

Caricaturing Jesus's opponents as bad people, blind guides, hypocrites, children of the devil and so on happened in a highly polarized moment when tensions among these various contestants were high and anger unrestrained. These angry outbursts became frozen as the words of God! Similarly, the angry moment of the Protestant Reformation became frozen into its own perennial present. Preaching Christian scripture millennia later trying to socialize each generation into these

past frozen moments has been injurious to Jews and Judaism to be sure, but perhaps also to those who have imbibed another age's anger as their own. Preaching frozen texts is a delicate enterprise. Considering the tragic history that they fostered, it behooves Christian preachers to pause before preaching on any text involving Jews and Judaism.

In preparing a sermon consider:

1. how your remarks may shape the auditors' understanding of Jews and Judaism.
2. how Jews will receive your remarks about them; they may well be in your audience.
3. how the situation depicted in problematic texts is unlike your own.
4. nuancing forceful rhetoric.
5. how a New Testament writer is using Older Testament material and to what end.
6. preaching frequently on Older Testament texts as living voices to deepen your congregation's understanding of God's life with Israel.
7. providing information about the passage and its historical context that would help an auditor distinguish the original context from your appropriation of it.
8. identifying positive characteristics of negatively portrayed characters and their situation.
9. whether a biblical character or setting is truly pejorative or whether received interpretation assumes it to be so. Nicodemus is such a figure.

Consult:

1. several translations of the Bible for their translation of texts treating Judaism and Jews. The *Contemporary English Bible* is sensitive to this concern as is *Norman A. Beck*, presenter, in: *The New Testament. A new Translation and Redaction*, Lima, Ohio 2001). An important on-line resource with this concern is "Reading from the Roots" (<http://readingsfromtheroots.bard.edu/first-sunday-of-advent/>).
2. a Jewish colleague who will read your sermons and help you avoid giving offense. S/he will have relevant Jewish materials that will nuance your reading.

Avoid:

1. demonizing characters in the text and local communities descended from them.
2. applying contemptuous depictions of Jewish characters in the text to people today.
3. depicting characters in the text as one dimensional.
4. absolute contrasts to enhance impact of your message.
5. the temptation to smugness.

Remember:

1. Christians and Muslims worship the God of Israel.
2. Jews today are direct descendants of the Jews in the Younger Testament.
3. Jesus, Paul and the disciples were not Christians.
4. to understand before you condemn.

Scrutinize:

1. the text's portrayal of interchanges between Jesus and his opponents in an enflamed moment.
2. the text's portrayal of Jewish leaders from their perspective.
3. partisanship in the text, appreciating that every story has two sides.

Reminder from King Solomon:

Reprove a wise man, and he will love you.

Instruct a wise man, and he will grow wiser;

Teach a righteous man, and he will gain in learning (Proverbs 9:8b–9, JPS)

Ellen T. Charry is Professor of Theology Emerita at Princeton Theological Seminary.

ellen.charry@ptsem.edu

Light Art, Street Art, and the Art of Preaching: Sound-and-Light Shows as Public Proclamation

David M. Csinos

Abstract

This article examines how the phenomenon of sound-and-light shows fulfills the purposes of preaching and, as such, can be perceived as a form of public proclamation. Originating in France but now offered all over the world, these shows use large-scale video projection to display images on the facades of historic buildings, many of which are religious in nature, set to sound effects and music. The author begins by addressing three purposes of preaching that arise within homiletical discourse: testimony of God's story, empowering transformation, and engendering encounters with God. Drawing from recent qualitative research into spectators' experiences at sound-and-light shows, the author then examines how three specific shows serve as case studies that demonstrate that, while not sermons, they can indeed fulfill each of the purposes of preaching. As such, these spectacles can be seen as a vibrant form of proclamation amidst contemporary public settings.

Since their beginnings in France in the middle of the twentieth century, sound-and-light shows (or *spectacles son et lumière*) have grown into an international phenomenon. These popular shows use digital projection (sometimes called video-mapping) to cast images onto the facades of historic buildings – many of which are religious, like cathedrals and abbeys – to tell tales and capture the imagination through displays of light with images set to music and story. Worship services *inside* such historical churches might attract only a handful of people, but large crowds gather *outside* for these light shows, many of which include elements of Christian theology, history, and liturgy.

Throughout the summer of 2019, the city of Orléans offered a light show on the Gothic Sainte-Croix Cathedral that told the story of Saint Joan of Arc, from her humble beginning in rural France to her ongoing legacy throughout the country. I visited this city as part of a larger qualitative study into the experiences of spectators at sound-and-light shows and how such shows might impact their religious and spiritual lives. As I stood amidst a large crowd watching the show, I was struck by a scene that arose toward the end, which featured a montage depicting Joan's legacy through the use of images that appeared like graffiti. Gradually the front of the flamboyant cathedral became covered in a collage of spray-painted lines and colours depicting Joan, Jesus, and

many other images. With this scene lighting up the night sky, I couldn't help but wonder how sound-and-light shows might serve as a form of Christian proclamation in the public square.

The digitally-mediated graffiti projected onto the stone and glass of the cathedral called to mind Adam Hearlson's likening of homiletical theology to street art. Homiletical theology, he argues, is a sort of "theological vandalism"¹ that, like street art, "is by nature public, impermanent, and provisional."² If, as Hearlson compellingly argues, homiletical theology is like street art, could sound-and-light shows be considered a form of homiletical theology? More specifically, could they in some way fulfill the purposes of preaching in contemporary public contexts? In this article I answer this question by drawing from the results of the qualitative research I undertook into the experiences of spectators at sound-and-light shows. I begin by outlining three broad purposes for preaching offered by contemporary homileticians, each of which is related to one of the characteristics of street art described by Hearlson. I then use three sound-and-light shows, each of which I interpret from a different angle, as case studies to demonstrate how these nighttime spectacles can fulfill these purposes of preaching and, thus, can indeed be considered a contemporary form of homiletical theology proclaimed within the public square.

1. Purposeful Proclamation

O. C. Edwards Jr. opens his *A History of Preaching* by declaring that "most Christian bodies consider the proclamation of the Word of God to be the constitutive act of the church. No other major religion gives preaching quite the central role that it has in Christianity."³ Preaching is a ubiquitous feature of Christianity, a defining characteristic of the worship lives of our faith communities. But why does preaching matter? What are its purposes? While complete consensus may be beyond the realm of possibility, there are three points of convergence at which multiple perspectives intersect: preaching testifies to God's story, it empowers transformation, and it evokes encounters with God.⁴

¹ Adam Hearlson, Wet Paint. Matthew 15, the Canaanite Woman, and Painted-Over Proclamation, in: Homiletical Theology in Action: The Unfinished Theological Task of Preaching, ed. David Schnasa Jacobsen, Eugene (OR) 2015, 43–60, 46.

² Ibid., 47.

³ O. C. Edwards Jr., *A History of Preaching*, Nashville (TN) 2004, 3.

⁴ I am certainly not the first person to identify these three broad purposes for preaching. Paul Scott Wilson, for instance, writes in his introductory textbook on preaching that "preaching is an event in which the congregation hears God's word, meets their Savior, and is transformed through the power of the Holy Spirit to be the kind of community God intends." Paul Scott Wilson, *The Practice of Preaching*, rev. ed., Nashville (TN) 2007, 5. Likewise, Roger Standing's argument that through preaching "truth is expressed, the heart is inspired, and the will is engaged" is deeply related to the three purposes I lay out in this article. Roger Standing, *Mediated Preaching. Homiletics in Contemporary British Culture*, in: *The Future of Preaching*, ed. Geoffrey Stevenson, London 2010, 9–26, 22.

1.1 Preaching as Testimony of God's Story

A first point of convergence surrounds the role of preaching in the proclamation of God's story, an act that harkens to the public nature of street art in the witness it offers to the gathered community. Preaching has an intimate relationship with scripture, for the Bible is the primary source of all utterances from the pulpit. All that a preacher says and does has any weight because it is founded upon and emerges from our texts that we hold to be sacred. Without scripture, without telling and interpreting God's story revealed in the Bible, preaching is merely opinion and conjecture, a motivational speech or a damning tirade born out of and remaining within the experiences of humanity. Anna Carter Florence's work is central to understanding the testimonial nature of preaching. In *Preaching as Testimony* she writes, "the preacher tells what she has seen and heard *in the biblical text and in life*, and then confesses what she believes about it."⁵ Good preaching requires that we take great care to explore the contours of a text; then and only then do we dare to bear witness to what we have seen and heard by sharing it from the pulpit.

Going further, however, the testimony of the preacher doesn't stop at testifying to the God of scripture. Preaching also testifies to God's ongoing story as it has unfolded throughout history among people and in places not recounted in scripture yet among which God has certainly been at work. Preaching bears witness to God in the here and now as it connects the twin poles of the biblical text and contemporary life.⁶ The homiletical task is one of making connections between God as revealed in our sacred texts and God as revealed in the world around us, both past and present. As such, preaching is nothing less than, as Doug Pagitt proclaims, "the act of people being led more deeply into the story of God,"⁷ a story found within the pages of scripture, the canon of history, and the world in which we live.

1.2 Preaching as Empowerment for Transformation

Preaching is not testimony for the sake of testimony. It is, as Phil Snider has written, to "invite listeners to faithfully imagine, embody, and experience the transformation harbored in the gospel of Christ."⁸ To testify to God's story and lead people more deeply into it is to challenge the

⁵ Anna Carter Florence, *Preaching as Testimony*, Louisville (KY) 2007, xiii.

⁶ See, for example, Ruth C. Duck, *Worship for the Whole People of God: Vital Worship for the 21st Century*, Louisville (KY) 2013, 139, and Cleophus J. LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching*, Louisville (KY) 2000, 13, and Paul Scott Wilson, *The Four Pages of the Sermon: A Guide to Biblical Preaching*, rev. ed., Nashville (TN) 2018.

⁷ Doug Pagitt, *Preaching in the Inventive Age*, Nashville (TN) 2014, 151.

⁸ Phil Snider, Introduction, in: *Preaching as Resistance: Voices of Hope, Justice, and Solidarity*, St. Louis (MO) 2018, 1.

community—preacher included—toward positive transformation through the power of God. In this way, the sermon moves from an act of imagination alone to an act of embodiment. Like street art, preaching is provisional in that, rather than being a static, untouchable entity, it is offered to the community with the expectation and hope that those who hear the message will do something with it.

Preaching can evoke transformation in a myriad of ways and at multiple levels. For one thing, it has the power to transform the one who proclaims. It's not enough for preachers to climb the stairs to the pulpit and exude eloquence and passion to stir their hearers toward transformation. Preachers must first listen to how God is calling them to be shaped and reshaped. In her well-known homiletical memoir *The Preaching Life*, Barbara Brown Taylor recounts that preaching is a mystical endeavour, an experience of transformation among both preacher and faith community in which "the ordinary details of [our] everyday lives are translated into the extraordinary elements of God's ongoing creation."⁹ Preaching, of course, is also about transformation among the gathered community. This is what Saint Augustine had in mind when he claimed that preachers must not simply teach their hearers, but must also delight and move them. Good instruction, he argues, should inspire and persuade others to carry into practice that which they have heard.¹⁰ With this we come to a third level of transformation, that through which those transformed – preacher and hearer alike – in turn engage in action that transforms the world in light of their encounter with God's story. Preaching does not only evoke alternative ways of thinking and of perceiving the world; it also creates an alternative world.¹¹

1.3 Preaching as Encounter with God

Preaching is, finally, a means by which the community encounters God. This claim is not universally held,¹² and among those who do plant their flag within this camp, there is no consensus about how preaching engenders experiences with God. Yet homileticians across several Christian traditions claim that God is present in the moment of the sermon.

⁹ Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Preaching Life*, Lanham (MA) 1993, 91.

¹⁰ Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, trans. R. P. H. Green, Oxford 1997, 117–9. See also Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Preaching in Intercultural Contexts*, in: *Homiletic* 40, no. 1 (2005), 8–21, 11.

¹¹ Otis Moss III, *Blue Note Preaching in a Post-Soul World. Finding Hope in an Age of Despair*, Louisville (KY) 2015, 26.

¹² Ronald Allen, for example, states clearly that while sermons can help us relate to God, "we do not encounter God directly" through preaching. Ronald J. Allen, *Preaching and Postmodernism*, in: *Interpretation* 55, no. 1 (2001), 34–48, 41.

Although the Catechism of the Catholic Church does not name the homily as a manifestation of Christ's presence in the Mass,¹³ some Catholic theologians argue that it can indeed be a locus for encountering God in the liturgy. Thomas Scirghi, for instance, proposes that preaching offers "a special opportunity to meet the living Lord,"¹⁴ thus naming the homily as sacramental. Within mainline Protestantism, Karl Barth offers a clear example of preaching as an encounter with God, arguing that through God's grace human proclamation of God's Word becomes a medium through which God addresses God's people.¹⁵ In his words, "preaching is not merely a proclamation of human ideas and convictions, but, like the existence of Jesus Christ Himself, like the testimony of the prophets and apostles on which it is founded and by which it lives, it is God's own proclamation."¹⁶ Within the Anglican Communion there is consensus among some that, while not a sacrament, the preached word is sacramental in nature by its transforming of the ordinary materiality of human speech into something greater through which God's presence breaks through our reality.¹⁷ Finally, while evangelical Protestants are less likely to see preaching as a means for encountering God, there are some within this diverse body who uphold this claim. Donald English and Cleophus LaRue may believe God to be indirectly present in the sermon,¹⁸ but Willette Alyce Burgie-Bryant holds that "Christian preaching is ideally a manifestation of God's own Presence, with power to have temporal impact from an eternal point of origin."¹⁹ Although the claim that God can be encountered within the sermon is controversial, theologians from many traditions agree that the transcendent presence of God can break through in the homiletical moment. Through the power of God, preaching can evoke a holy encounter, an impermanent experience that, similar to street art, might last for a moment but the effects of which reverberate throughout time.

¹³ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1088, available at http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p2s1c1a1.htm.

¹⁴ Thomas J. Scirghi, SJ, *Longing to See Your Face. Preaching in a Secular Age*, Collegeville (MN) 2017, 8. For other Roman Catholic theologians who speak of the sacramental nature of preaching, see Robert P. Waznak, *An Introduction to the Homily*, Collegeville (MN) 1998, and Paul Janowiak, *The Holy Preaching. The Sacramentality of the World in the Liturgical Assembly*, Collegeville (MN) 2000.

¹⁵ Karl Barth, *Homiletics*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Donald E. Daniels, Louisville (KY) 1991, 44.

¹⁶ Idem, *Church Dogmatics I/2*, trans. G. T. Thomson and Harold Knight, Edinburgh 1956, 746.

¹⁷ See Ruthanna Hooke, *Real Presence. Sacramental Embodiment in Preaching*, in: *Preaching and the Theological Imagination*, ed. Zachary Guiliano and Cameron Partridge, New York (NY) 2015, 19–43 and Kate Bruce, *Igniting the Heart. Preaching and Imagination*, London 2015.

¹⁸ Donald English, *An Evangelical Theology of Preaching*, Nashville (TN) 1996, 15f., 20. Cleophus J. LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching*, Louisville (KY) 2000, 77f. Idem, Introduction, in: idem (ed.), *More Power in the Pulpit. How America's Most Effective Black Preachers Prepare their Sermons*, Louisville (KY) 2009, 1–8, 4.

¹⁹ Willette Alyce Burgie-Bryant, *The Presence and Power of Christian Preaching*, in: *More Power in the Pulpit* (note 18), 9–15, 9.

2. Projected Proclamation

Over a six-month period in 2019, I visited twelve sound-and-light shows – eight in France, two in Jerusalem, and one each in Prague and Durham (UK) – to learn about how they affect the spiritual and religious lives of the members of the public who attend them. Eight were stand-alone shows and four were part of multi-day digital/light art festivals. Each was displayed on a historical Christian building, such as a cathedral, parish church, or abbey, except for the show in Jerusalem, which were offered inside the courtyard of the Tower of David. Every show included explicit religious and spiritual elements through their themes, the ways they used the architecture of the religious building on which they were projected, or a combination thereof. At each site I distributed postcards to spectators that contained information about the study and an invitation to complete an online survey about their experience of the show. I also conducted about a dozen interviews with spectators and local clergy of churches on which these shows are projected.

While this research indicates that sound-and-light shows can have positive effects on the spiritual and religious lives of spectators, the data generated also demonstrates that these shows serve as a contemporary form of theological proclamation within the public square. Certainly, they are not sermons in the traditional sense; yet by using sound-and-light shows as case studies, it becomes evident that they can indeed fulfill the three purposes of preaching that I described earlier. In the remainder of this article, I will make such an argument by drawing from three interpretive layers pursued during this research. First, I explore the testimony of God's story by discussing the show at Orléans through an examination of the show itself. I will then address the purpose of empowering transformation by considering the experience of a spectator at a show in Jerusalem. Finally, I will mine my own reflexive engagement with the show at Mont-Saint-Michel to address the homiletical purpose of encountering God.

2.1 Public Testimony in Orléans

During the summer of 2019 the French city of Orléans offered a sound-and-light show about Saint Joan of Arc, “the Maid of Orléans” who saved the city from the English in the early fifteenth century. Titled “*Jeanne, la force de l'âme*” (“Joan: Strength of Soul”), the show took viewers on a journey through the life and legacy of this celebrity saint, from her calling that came through the voices of Saints Michael the Archangel and Catherine of Seina to her ongoing legacy throughout France. While not a biblical story, this show testifies to the ongoing saga of God in the world. Joan was, after all, not simply a great military leader; she was a person of deep faith who followed God's call in her life, a call that ultimately ended with her martyrdom in Rouen at around nineteen years

of age. While some shows are infused with religious meaning through their use of the Christian art and architecture built into the cathedrals, this one served up an extra helping of Christianity through the explicit telling of a story lifted from the vaults of church history.

The 16-minute show begins as vines rise along the wall of the seven-century-old Sainte-Croix Cathedral, highlighting the walls between porticos and window as they grow and flower until the whole facade is covered with foliage. As they fade, a warm yellow light appears on the upper gallery and the silhouette of a young Joan appears. With soft music in the background, the whispers of a man and woman echo in the night. *Jeanne. Jeanne. Jeanne.* As they continue calling the young girl's name, the silhouetted Joan wanders along the gallery as if on a balcony, her head moving left and right as she searches for the voices calling her by name. She appears in the north tower as if peering out a window before walking along the gables above the portals. Light begins to radiate down from the towers, illuminating the entire building in gold and orange as an enormous Joan rises, now clad in a suit of armour, having answered the call of God.

As the scene changes the cathedral is depicted as if created entirely by enormous pieces of stained glass that shine majestically until shattered to symbolize the English invasion of Orléans. When every piece of glass has fallen the facade, now in darkness, becomes engulfed in larger-than-life chains. Eventually a sword strikes and breaks the chains as Joan, illuminated by light behind her like an aureola, walks toward the centre of the scene, her body as high as the building. As she pushes the darkness away the cathedral dazzles in colour once again as trumpets sound and cheers ring out. The Maid of Orléans has saved the people—all because she followed the voice of God.

The story does not end there. The silhouetted heroine is pictured on horseback in front of the rose window, the speakers pumping out a contemporary upbeat tune as she rides across the landscape. Scenery unfolds across the stone structure to convey not only her movement across the countryside, but her spirit as it moves forward in time. Rather than speaking about a life cut short at the stake, the show glorifies the ongoing legacy of this saint, her positive response to God's call resulting in actions still reverberating throughout the land now, many years later. Colours move across the cathedral as the spray-paint-like images of which I spoke in the introduction to this article gradually appear: the sacred heart of Jesus, an image of a young Joan, a resurrected haloed Christ, and a street sign bearing the heroine's name are tagged on this masterpiece of Gothic architecture. As another scene change unfolds, a library appears, books open, and the facade becomes covered with letters of the alphabet that move and shift until Joan's face is depicted. All sorts of voices can be heard offering short words of homage about the legacy of this teenager's

faith. Then, without warning, a light illuminates the rose window and radiates out to the whole building as a woman's voice sings these words over and over: "You can do anything."

This sound-and-light show is one of many that speak to the first purpose of preaching. It joins those in Le Puy, Chartres, Le Mans, Amiens, Mont-Saint-Michel, and Jerusalem to testify to God's story as told in scripture and in the ongoing life of the church throughout the centuries. In fact, with so many shows of this nature, the public testimony to God's story is by far the most salient of the three purposes of preaching among the sound-and-light shows I visited. Whether offering a biblical narrative or a story from church history, the lights that dance across these buildings bear witness to God's presence and activity in the world.

This telling of Joan's calling and ongoing legacy does more than simply recount the story; it invites spectators to enter the story. Like a Sunday morning sermon, it speaks to what God has done in the world, in this case how God used a young peasant girl to free her fellow citizens. But it goes further than just offering a story set in a particular era of time. In its depiction of Joan's ride across the centuries, in the spray-painted walls and streets named in her honour, in the spoken words that pay tribute to her life, and in the reminder that "you can do anything" that you are called to do, the show bears witness to the ongoing saga of God. Viewers are prompted to ask how the strength of Joan's faith-based action lives on today in those who stand up for what is right and just. This, of course, is a mark of good preaching. Theologians like Cleophus LaRue and Ruth Duck remind us that sermons tell God's story *and* invite us into it by connecting it with our lives and the world in which we live.²⁰ In this way the projected proclamation of the show in Orléans becomes nothing short of prophetic – which Walter Brueggemann identifies as the crux of Christian preaching²¹ – as it dares us to imagine that anything is possible for those who, like Joan, search for God's voice as it calls to them in the night.

2.2 Provisional Transformation in Jerusalem

The city of Jerusalem hardly needs an introduction. As a sacred site for Jews, Christians, and Muslims, religion and spirituality are infused into the stones with which the city is built. At the west end of the Old Town, rising from the cityscape next to Jaffa Gate, is the Tower of David, a citadel that dates back over 2000 years. Visitors to Jerusalem can purchase tickets for two sound-and-light shows that use over 20 projectors to illuminate nearly all the walls of citadel's courtyard.

²⁰ LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching* (note 18), 13 and Duck (note 6), 139.

²¹ See *Walter Brueggemann, The Practice of Prophetic Imagination. Preaching an Emancipating Word*, Minneapolis (MN) 2012.

One show tells the story of Jerusalem and the other recounts the life of King David. I conducted research at both of these shows for a week in September 2019. One spectator (I'll call her Julia) offered responses in the online questionnaire about her experience of the King David show that demonstrates that these types of shows can provoke the sort of transformation imagined in the second purpose of preaching.

Throughout the show, the story of King David unfolds on the walls around the crowd seated in the corner of the courtyard. Using short quotes from scripture that appear at the top of a tower, scenes follow the progression of David's life as recordings of actors and artists' renderings of scenery blend together to full orchestral music. The show depicts David playing a flute as he tends his sheep, Samuel anointing the boy, and his triumph over Goliath. As the Philistine army disperses the walls become covered in lush foliage as David and Jonathan walk together amidst the pastoral scenery. The story continues as David plays his harp as his kingdom is established to the cheers of the ancient Israelites, that is, until he watches Bathsheba bathing and playing cards fall from the sky, with only the king of spades remaining on the wall. A passage of scriptures reads "And David dwelt in the citadel, and called it the city of David... and David waxed greater and greater" (2Chron 11:7, 9). Finally, a regal David dressed in fine robes appears and looks over his city until the crowd is left with an invocation to pray for the peace and prosperity of Jerusalem.

The content of this show certainly offers further evidence for the testimony they can offer to the story of God. Yet Julia's experience serves as a case study in how they can also empower transformation in the lives of spectators. While she expected it to simply be a form of entertainment, Julia found that the show was a means for going deeper in her faith. She was raised in the Roman Catholic Church but she clearly states that she is not a member of a religious tradition and does not consider herself to be religious. Yet she indicated that spirituality is somewhat important in her life, being careful to distinguish it from organized religion.

The King David show was the second one Julia had seen in Jerusalem; she had attended the "Night Spectacular" show that offered a visual history of the city a few days earlier. For reasons she struggled to put into words, the King David show was more meaningful to her: "The colors, effects, the stories with the sounds - all of them on those old, historical walls" blended together into a deeply meaningful experience. It became more than simply a pleasant way to spend an evening in the Holy City. This was clear in the frustration she felt at the "impatience and disrespect" of tourists who pushed and shoved in the queue or spoke loudly and used flash photography during the show (the latter of which was expressly forbidden).

The fact that Julia said these behaviours “ruined a little the feeling the show gave to me” speaks to the depth of her experience and the connection she felt during the production. Her experience witnesses to the power that can be evoked by the blending of light, sound, and story all playing out on a building infused with historical and religious significance. In her words, “I don't know if it's about the show or where it took place – in Jerusalem, the old Town, where ‘everything’ is about the religious – it gave a special feeling while I was watching a spectacular light show about David's life—stories from the Bible and historical events.” The saga of David came alive for her, as did the living today who claim David as part of their religious heritage, with whom Julia now felt a sense of connection²²: “I'm not sure, if I can explain this feeling, but as you can feel this atmosphere meanwhile you're getting closer to the people who live there by getting to know them better through their history and little parts of the base of their culture, you can feel more connected to the others.”

Julia was clear that the King David show resonated with her on a spiritual level, causing her to leave the citadel in a different manner than she had entered it. Her encounter with the story and the people who hold fast to it stirred something inside of her that led to a change of thought and behaviour. Throughout her four days in Israel and the Palestinian Territories she became fascinated by all that had happened in this land over the years, especially those commemorated in the Bible. On her last night in Jerusalem, as she watched the life of King David play out through that sound-and-light show, she made a decision to go deeper into this experience and learn more. Writing in the questionnaire she states, “I have to tell you that since I left Israel I started to watch movies about biblical stories and people. I just wanted to know more about them—the people, the base of the religion, the stories ... And first I decided it during this light show, because I didn't recognize every scene then. And I don't consider myself as a religious person.” While it is not a dramatic moment of conversion, Julia's experience of the sound-and-light show speaks to the sort of delight of which Saint Augustine writes in his book about preaching, one that inspires people to do something with what they have heard.²³ In her case, the show provoked her to take intentional action to better understand the stories of scripture and the people who hold fast to them.

The King David show ends with call to action, a petition to pray for the peace and prosperity of Jerusalem. Much like a good sermon, it asks the participant to do something as a result of their

²² This sense of connection is central to definitions and descriptions of the core of human spirituality. See, for example, *David Hay with Rebecca Nye, The Spirit of the Child*, rev. ed., London 2006, and *Joyce E. Bellows, Educating Faith. An Approach to Christian Formation*, Toronto (ON) 2005.

²³ Augustine (note 10), 117–119.

experience. For Julia, the show was a call to explore further the land and people of the Bible. While the show may not have prompted her to join a church, for a person who does not engage in any sort of religious practices, the desire to learn more about the stories and people in scripture and the actions taken therein are in fact markers of a transformation in her life that she felt was noteworthy. Even Julia herself seemed surprised by what this light show sparked within her, for she reminded me – and herself – that she doesn’t consider herself a religious person and yet is now finding herself interested in stories with deep religious significance.

2.3 Impermanent Encounter at Mont-Saint-Michel

We arrive now at a new sound-and-light show and a new vantage point from which to observe it. I will attend to my own reflexive experience of the show at the abbey of Mont-Saint-Michel to speak of how these shows can clear the path toward encounters with God among spectators. Writing oneself into research through practices of reflexivity is a growing practice among qualitative researchers, one that Natalie Wigg-Stevenson exemplifies in her study of the production of theological knowledge at Nashville First Baptist Church.²⁴ Thus, while much insight about sound-and-light shows is born through careful analysis of the shows as well as the generation of data about the experience of spectators, the personal nature of this enterprise offers an additional vantage point and a further layer of interpretation when I consider my own reflexive engagement.

The 2019 show at Mont-Saint-Michel, titled “*Les Chroniques du Mont – L’Archange*,” (“Chronicles of the Mount – The Archangel”), offers stories about Saint Michael the Archangel and the famed site of pilgrimage in Northern France that bears his name. Rather than being projected on the *outer* walls of the building, this show invites visitors to walk through the abbey and view many different shows offered in its various chapels and halls. Visitors begin in a small chapel and make their way through halls, corridors, and chapels that immerse spectators into the story of Saint Michael. Some rooms use strips of light running up pillars that illuminate and change colour to timed sound effects as they interpret the history of Mont-Saint-Michel. Others use video projection and music to recount the legends surrounding Saint Michael’s roles within the stories of scripture and his appearance to Aubert, Bishop of Avranches, in dreams in which he asked the bishop to build a sanctuary to his name (which would become the abbey itself). One corridor uses ancient sound-and-light technology by employing candles and mirrors to illuminate the space as

²⁴ Natalie Wigg-Stevenson, *Ethnographic Theology. An Inquiry into the Production of Theological Knowledge*, New York (NY) 2014.

the sounds of monks singing Gregorian chant fill the air. The show culminates as visitors walk up a dark staircase and suddenly find themselves in the abbey's majestic church. Lights at the floor flood the columns, walls, and windows with soft colours that rotate along the colour spectrum. On the ceiling of the north semitranssept a projected show depicting Saint Michael's battle with evil and hosts of angels who lead souls to be with God in heaven, thanks to the final conquest over evil that came through Jesus' death and resurrection. Visitors are free to move about the church, listen to the sounds of an angelic choir, and walk onto the western porch to take in the abbey as it is lit against the dark sky.

The abbey of Mont-Saint-Michel has been a space of spiritual vitality for over one thousand years. It is a site of pilgrimage, a thin place at which, as Aubert has said, heaven comes down and touches earth.²⁵ The sound-and-light show heightens the spiritual nature of this space, allowing it to come alive anew as it invites visitors on a journey closer and closer toward the beating heart of the cathedral, one that moves from the history of the stones and mortar to the Divine presence to which the space attests.

It is not surprising, then, that despite the fact that I attended this show as a researcher, my experience of it became deeply spiritual, one in which time stood still and transcendent holiness broke into the here and now. I entered the abbey as the sun was setting and was quickly struck by the serene mood evoked through the lights and sounds within the small chapel. I continued through sparse rooms and down corridors, mesmerized by how the spaces had been transformed to immerse us – in quite abstract ways – in the history of the abbey. When I arrived at the candle-lit room I became conscious of a shift within my spirit. As I moved deeper and deeper into the stone structure the light from the setting sun had gradually faded until the only light in the space was that which emanated from the candles, I noticed that my thoughts had shifted away from the research I was there to conduct and toward the temporality of that space and the presence of God that hovered around me. The ordinary elements of light, sound, and stone revealed “treasures of grace” through what Jean-Pierre de Caussade names “the sacrament of the present moment.”²⁶ The visible elements in that abbey had carved a path toward the invisible God.

As I walked down a small stone staircase I noticed that the projections in the next few rooms had shifted away from the history of the abbey and toward the biblical drama in which Saint Michael is held to be bound up. While there were discernible thematic shifts in these shows, the

²⁵ *Jonathan Luxmoore*, Outpost of European Faith. Mont-Saint-Michel Serves as Spiritual Oasis in Secular Times, in: *National Catholic Reporter*, July 13–26 (2018), 1a.2a.

²⁶ *Jean-Pierre de Caussade*, Abandonment to Divine Providence, *Notre Dame (IN)* 2010, 25f.

openness to the Divine that resulted from my experience in the candle-lit room also left me with a greater sensitivity to God's presence, thus allowing me to better see the religious and spiritual elements of the projections thereafter. So when I finally ascended a narrow staircase and entered the abbey church my spiritual radar was on high alert. Immediately the soft lights running up the pillars in the nave and along the choir flooded me with an overwhelming awareness of the sacred. My eyes and my heart couldn't help but be drawn to the simple cross that was illuminated behind the altar, flanked by radiating pillars with a candle between each one. There were certainly many other people in the church, some slowly walking around and others sitting in pews to take it all in; but all I noticed was the Divine spark that illuminated this ancient place. Through the sound-and-light show I had been converted from a visitor to a pilgrim and I had arrived at a destination that I did not know I had set out to reach. What began as a visit for the sake of research morphed into nothing less than an encounter with God, a spirit-to-Spirit connection, a living testimony that Mont-Saint-Michel truly is a site at which heaven descends to earth.

Of course, not everyone who experiences the sound-and-light show at Mont-Saint-Michel is moved toward an encounter with God. Some participants in my research, in fact, said that although there are overtly spiritual and religious aspects of the show, it did not connect with them in a spiritual or religious way. Others, however, offered responses that lead one to believe they sensed a Divine presence in the show, although they did not name it in such an explicit way. A visitor from Switzerland, for example, used the term "mystical" to describe his overall experience of the show, saying it connected with his "belief in something higher." Another visitor told me that she "felt spiritual vibes," a sensation that surprised her. Neither of these visitors came right out and said they encountered God in these shows, but they seemed to have connected with something beyond the self, with a transcendent power of which they were more acutely aware in that time and place. Their experiences join mine in speaking to the power of the show to evoke the presence of the Divine, thus fulfilling a present-day purpose for Mont-Saint-Michel as described by Fr. Fabien-Marie, prior of the religious community that oversees the abbey: "Welcoming tourists, and proposing they become pilgrims by witnessing with us."²⁷

3. Public Proclamation

These three case studies, each offering a particular angle of a specific sound-and-light show, demonstrate that, at some level, these shows can fulfill the three purposes of preaching. While they

²⁷ *Luxmoore* (note 25), 1a.

are not sermons, they affirm that preaching “comes in a variety of forms and dynamics, in and out of the pulpit.”²⁸ Indeed they can testify to the story of God, engender transformation among spectators, and even create spaces for encountering God.

The fact that these show *can* lead to the three ends of preaching does not mean that every show plays a role in all – or even any – of these purposes. Much like preaching, there are a great many variables at play that combine together to influence how spectators engage with these shows, such as their openness to religion and spirituality, their personalities and preferences, the many experiences they bring with them into that space, and even, as Julia reminds us, the behaviour of people sharing in the experience. And, of course, God works in different ways with different people, being revealed to some in one moment and others in another. As much as a particular sound-and-light show might seem like potent fodder for one or more of the purposes of preaching, there are no guarantees that spectators will witness God’s story, undergo even a minor transformation, and sense the presence of God. Yet my interpretations of the content of the show in Orléans, Julia’s experience in Jerusalem, and my reflexive engagement with the show at Mont-Saint-Michel indicates that sound-and-light shows can indeed be a manifestation of homiletical theology and a unique form of public proclamation in our contemporary world.

David M. Csinos, born 1984, Assistant Professor of Practical Theology at Atlantic School of Theology, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.

dcsinos@astheology.ns.ca

²⁸ *William Brosend* helpfully indicates that sermons are simply one way of proclaiming the gospel when he states that although the Gospel writers say Jesus preached, he did not necessarily do so in what we might name as sermons. *William Brosend*, *The Preaching of Jesus. Gospel Proclamation, Then and Now*, Louisville (KY) 2010, 70.

Preaching in a Post-Truth Era

HyeRan Kim-Cragg

Abstract

In this paper, the question of whether Christian preaching is implicated in the growing movement of populism is posed. The paper has identified three critical issues that call for investigation in homiletical hermeneutics. The first issue addresses the problem of biblical interpretation for homiletic practice. The second issue has to do with the impact of social media that often distorts the truth. Alarming dependence on the smart phone suggests that the task of the preacher in this rapidly changing visual and high tech culture is to deliver sermons that are critically aware of visual culture rather than literary culture. Finally, the paper calls for an approach to preaching that seeks to reveal missing, hidden and distorted truth as a way to speak against the demonic power of the profit-driven capitalism and the epidemic of gender-based violence against women and sexual minorities.

1. Introduction

This article explores the question, “What is the role of preaching in a Post-Truth era?” At heart, it asks whether there is a co-relation between the recent political populist movement and the practice of preaching. Or to put it more bluntly, it poses the question of whether the current rise of far-right and fascist politics around the world has something to do with the legacy of Christendom, and by extension with practices of Christian preaching. The pulpit has been used for propaganda purposes, “sending believers off to the Crusades and to support wars of all kinds. Christian preaching has also supported slavery, racism, and the oppression of women, gays, and lesbians.”¹

As a person teaching and researching homiletics it is important to do some self-examination and own my complicity, complacency, resistance, and vulnerability. In this vein, it may be useful to raise three critical issues that homileticians and preachers need to address in a Post-Truth era marked by exclusion, division, polarization and violence.

The first issue raised here is the critical role of homiletical hermeneutics. By homiletical hermeneutics I mean interpretative lenses preachers use when reading biblical texts for preaching. Here I identify three pitfalls that preachers must heed as far as scriptural interpretation and exegesis

¹ Charles Campbell, *The Word Before the Powers. An Ethic of Preaching*, Louisville 2002, 83.

is concerned: a literal view of Scripture, selective forgetfulness, and value-neutral historical biblical criticism. I argue that these pitfalls lead to apolitical preaching, a move that may end up contributing to populist, xenophobic, misogynist and exclusive ideologies.

The second issue examined is the impact of social media, especially focusing on visual images as media that affect the way we hear things and thus necessitating being taken into consideration by preachers. Once the powerful influence of visual media is discussed, we will turn to the impact of smart phone or screen culture in reducing the congregation's attention span as a challenge for preachers and hearers of the sermon. The impact of visual social media invites preachers to rediscover the biblical stories as visual scenes as well as narratives.

Finally, taking up the two issues raised above, I suggest that preachers are called to expose violence understood as profit-driven capitalism at a global scale and the sexual abuse and domestic violence against women.

2. Note on “Post-Truth Era”

In 2016, the word “post-truth” was chosen as the Oxford Dictionaries’ Word of the Year.² It was coined in reference to the result of the 2016 Brexit referendum and the media coverage of the US presidential election of 2016.³ The term, “post-truth era” was first used by Ralph Keyes in 2004 in his book where he argued that deception is becoming more prevalent in the social media-driven world. He was particularly concerned about misleading statements made by the US Bush administration after 9/11 and Britain’s Blair’s weapons of mass destruction rhetoric.⁴

Drawing from the historical development of the terms “post-truth” and “post-truth era” referring to the political scene in the US and UK, we can say the post-truth phenomenon has something to do with political lies that are viewed as acceptable and with news reporting which is not based on proven facts. Thus, here truth is understood as facts, mainly facts reported in journalism. When facts are concealed or fabricated, news becomes misleading and that is how another term “fake news” has appeared as a related neologism. One may wonder how fake news becomes accepted as truth. A cognitive neurology study offers an answer: repetition creates a sense that misinformation is true. What this means is that even if we know that something is not true, if we are exposed constantly and repeatedly to the claim that it is, our brain will eventually accept it as

² *Alison Flood*, ‘Post-truth’ named word of the year by Oxford Dictionaries, in: *The Guardian* (16 November 2016).

³ *Daniel W. Drezner*, Why the post-truth political era might be around for a while, in: *The Washington Post* (16 June 2016).

⁴ *Ralph Keyes*, *The Post-Truth Era. Dishonesty and Deception in Contemporary Life*, New York 2004.

truth. That is how commercialized advertisements work. That is also why fake news continues relatively unchallenged. Julian Matthews, a cognitive scientist, provides ways to resist being coopted by fake news. This includes critical probing, asking such questions as who benefits from such fake news?, what are its sources?, and what type of content is it?⁵ This discipline of critical probing as remedy to fake news suggested by the work of neuroscientists informs the role of preaching in a post-truth era.

The other point to be made, referring to the terms “post-truth” and “post-truth era,” is that with the increase of fake news, prejudices that do not deserve a public platform are shared widely in public spaces. Such platforms as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram allow blunt racist remarks, misogynist views, Islamophobia, homophobia and anti-Jewish prejudices to be spoken. Thus, it is imperative to address preaching as a public act (mostly public speech) within these heavily politicized social media contexts. Preaching is always a political and public act addressed to a corporate ecclesial body made up of people whose lives are daily impacted by the principalities and powers in the world. Thus, attention to violent speech including hate speech and its impact on the congregation should be an essential part of preaching.

3. Biblical hermeneutics for Homiletics in a Post-Truth Era

There are at least three challenges that the preacher needs to consider when engaging the biblical interpretation to preach in a Post-Truth Era. The first challenge is the literal understanding of the Bible. That preaching appeals to the authority of scripture remains central and foundational. The challenge comes, however, when the proclamation of the *Word* of God is equated with and identical to *words* (small letter) in Scripture. We as preachers and researchers of preaching must constantly remind ourselves to distinguish these two lest we fall into the trap of biblical literalism. We need to constantly teach current and future preachers that The Word (*logos*) of God in Christian preaching refers to Jesus Christ, his ministry and his teaching of love, peace, justice, and mercy and not to every word in the Bible. In Jewish faith, God’s self-disclosure is revealed in Torah, while in Christian faith, the divine self-disclosure is incarnated in Jesus of Nazareth. When we say that “the Bible – as a collection of writings by human beings – is *the word of God*, we are speaking figuratively [...]. This metaphor (‘the Bible is the word of God’) expresses God’s self-disclosure through conversation.”⁶ To proclaim the incarnational nature of Jesus Christ as fully human and

⁵ Julian Matthews, How fake news gets into our minds, and what you can do to resist it, in: The Conversation <https://theconversation.com/profiles/julian-matthews-566547> [accessed on May 7 2019].

⁶ Arthur Van Seters, Preaching and Ethics, St. Louis 2004, 112. The emphasis is original.

fully divine is an enigma; it is a statement of paradoxical faith. The message “the Word was God and the Word became flesh” (John 1:1.14) that captures the incarnational faith is obviously not something any preacher can fully deliver in a sermon. However, that preachers are limited in their abilities to proclaim the Word, does not mean that they cannot or should not preach. In fact, the opposite is true. Through the imperfect act of proclamation, the Word can be made manifest. Preachers are broken vessels through which the divine light by grace may shine.⁷ As Karl Barth argued, preachers should be able to distinguish the “threefold form” of the word of God: Jesus Christ as one Word of God, the Sacred Scriptures as witness to him, and preaching as the word of God, attesting to him here and now.⁸ While God is unknowable and far beyond human comprehension, God is also encountered and experienced as being as close as our breath. Both preacher and congregation are touched by the transcendence of God in worship, as the divine voice is heard in the human echo. Within this paradox, one must learn to distinguish between the divine voice and the human voice.

Discerning the voice witnessed in Scripture is a difficult task for preachers. The Bible does not give a simple and clear prescription the way a pharmacist might. It is descriptive, filled with open-ended and multiple insights. That is where the role of the Spirit comes in. The reformers strengthened the tradition of reliance upon the Spirit to makes things clear, at least discernible, for preachers and those who encounter Scripture. Scriptural interpretation must be guided by the Spirit who accompanies us to dance between ambiguity and clarity. In a biblical literalist approach there is no ambiguity. Unfortunately, this literal treatment of the Bible appeals to some today, and it is made more acceptable by the fact that we live in a biblically illiterate world. Many of us living in the 21st century have not grown up knowing the Bible stories that were once taught at home, church and school. My personal teaching experience may illustrate this reality. A few years ago, I was teaching a course to first year seminarians. Some were in their 20s or 30s. One day, I was trying to get them to think about how gender roles are involved in finding their voice as preachers. Women preachers must wrestle with the stereotypes that church and society put on women, a stereotype that sees the appropriate place for women as being at home, raising children, doing kitchen work and cleaning. In this discussion, I said, something like, “don’t be like Martha.” Many young students thought that I was talking about Martha Stewart, the CEO of the Martha Stewart Living, instead of knowing that I was referring to the story of Martha and Mary (Luke 6:38–42).

⁷ *Gordon Lathrop*, *The Pastor: A Spirituality*, Minneapolis 2011, 5.

⁸ *Karh Barth*, *Homiletik. Wesen und Vorbereitung der Predigt* Zurich 1960, 30, cited in: *Andrea Bieler/Hans-Martin Gutmann*, *Embodying Grace. Proclaiming Justification in the Real World*, trans. Linda A. Maloney, Minneapolis 2010, 180.

That is the reality for some young people today, even those raised in the church. Mary Ann Beavis and I have raised this issue elsewhere: “The era when all people grew up as Christian and regularly went to church is gone. The assumption that people know the Bible cannot be taken for granted – even among church-goers [...]. People do not know what is in the Bible, therefore, it is easy to be misguided, to submit to an ideology, whether it be of Fundamentalism or Anti-Semitism or of facile rejection of Christianity [...]. Not moving beyond a literal, superficial understanding of the Bible is dangerous because a literalist’s position can easily slip into taking a fundamental position [...]. As long as we continue to live in a biblically and religiously illiterate world, religious violence will be more likely to occur.”⁹

The second challenge for homiletical hermeneutics that may contribute to the populist movement involves “selective forgetfulness.”¹⁰ This concept refers to a false reading strategy that tells one side of the story while masking the other side. One example of this is the portrayal of David in the Book of Samuel as a great king while neglecting his murder of Uriah and infidelity with his wife Bathsheba. As a result of such a cover up, a complicated truth about David is disguised or distorted and sometimes denied. Such autocratic selections turn the pulpit into “a private forum” in which the preacher gets into an unhelpful habit of choosing his or her favorite texts to preach on as if the serious task of revealing complicated stories in the text is a leisure akin to “riding personal hobby horses.”¹¹ This selective forgetfulness is a common (mal)practice where the solo preacher uses his or her power to singlehandedly choose passages for preaching. Such selective forgetfulness is typified in many expository sermons when a preacher will go verse by verse giving the illusion of a deep reading of scripture when in fact, what is often missing is the relevant context needed to faithfully interpret. This pattern has been derived from the Puritan style of sermon. While this kind of preaching may be effective in some contexts, the danger is that it often fails to locate the chosen text in wider contexts. It is like a study of Martin Luther King Jr’s sermons without locating them in the civil rights movement. To locate the text in the context leads to “an investigation of the social and political conditions prevailing at the time of composition.”¹² Failure to locate it means that texts are held captive to the preacher’s individual biases or opinions resulting in “false” if not “fake” sermons. Selective forgetfulness and the practice of choosing biblical texts that only show one side of the story become particularly dangerous when coupled

⁹ *Mary Ann Beavis/HyeRan Kim-Cragg, What Does the Bible Say? A Critical Conversation with Popular Culture in a Biblically Illiterate World*, Eugene 2017, xi.

¹⁰ *Justo González, Out of Every Tribe and Nation: Christian Theology at the Ethnic Roundtable*, Nashville 1992, 40.

¹¹ *Thomas Long, The Witness of Preaching 2nd Edition*, Louisville 2005, 73.

¹² *Temba L. J. Majico, Biblical Exegesis and its Shortcomings in Theological Education*, in: *Teaching the Bible. The Discourse and Politics of Biblical Pedagogy*, ed. Fernando Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert, Minneapolis 2009, 255–271, 255.

with a literal interpretation of the Bible. When people lack a critically well-informed view of Scripture and this combines with selective forgetfulness, it is easy to be misled and to submit to such ideologies as anti-Semitism, anti-climate change, anti-choice, anti-refugee/migrants, and anti-Islam to name a few. This is how and why biblical interpretation is critical for preaching lest it should conceal the populist agenda.

Thirdly, there is a challenge for homiletical hermeneutics in a post-truth era that comes from historical biblical criticism that assumes value neutrality, and scientific objectivity. The historical criticism is neither objective nor neutral because it only provides “*the* definitive and universal meaning in the biblical text” for privileged readers who are in power.¹³ One of the dominant methods in biblical criticism, John McClure argues, is to assume “a unitary, transcendental and masterful author behind every author of the biblical text.”¹⁴ However, it is not hard to find the biblical evidence that contests this assumption. On one occasion, for example, Paul’s writing records that women and men exercised leadership in the early church (1Cor 2:5), yet a few chapters later in the same book, Paul restricts the ministries women might exercise in the church (1Cor 14:34–36). In Genesis, one passage talks about God creating men and women equally in the image of God (Gen 1:26), while in the next chapter, God creates woman out of the man’s rib (Gen 2). As a matter of fact, there is diversity, not uniformity, of Scripture. The truth about Scripture lies in its multiplicity which “testifies to its depth: two testaments, four gospels, contrasting points of view held in tension.”¹⁵ The Bible, containing the only or the objective truth, then becomes a measuring stick used to judge others and sometimes even becomes a stick to beat and punish those who do not measure up. This use of the Bible in preaching has been around longer and has been more prevalent than we want to admit.

This triple hermeneutical problem, literal understanding, selective forgetfulness, and the assumed neutral objectivity of historical criticism, poses a real danger to the preachers’ ability to address issues of pressing importance from the pulpit. These harmful approaches to Scripture have contributed to a cynical view of Christianity and damaged some Christians who have ended up leaving the church. David Kinnaman, through his qualitative research on people dissatisfied with Christianity, demonstrates the way ideas of the literal truth of Scripture, selective reading, and supposed objectivity of historical criticism of the Bible feeds a metanarrative; namely, that

¹³ Gale Yee, *The Author/Text/Reader and Power. Suggestions for a Critical Framework for Biblical Studies*, in: F. Segovia/M. Tolbert (eds.), *Reading from this Place. Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States*, Minneapolis 1995, 113. The emphasis is original.

¹⁴ John McClure, *Other-wise Preaching. A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics*, St. Louis 2001 14.

¹⁵ A Song of Faith, <https://www.united-church.ca/community-faith/welcome-united-church-canada/song-faith>.

Christian Scripture contains the capital *The* only truth and makes universal claims about what human beings are, who they should be, who is saved, who has sinned, who is blessed, and who is cursed.¹⁶

These three pitfalls of biblical interpretation are prominent in ushering in deductive preaching. While not all deductive preaching is unhelpful, Pablo A. Jiménez critiques the expository form of the preaching as “colonial” which was imported and transplanted by “the British rationalistic homiletic school, exemplified by Charles Haddon Spurgeon and John A. Broadus” around the world during the colonial era. It is also “monological,” he adds, featuring “a scholarly discourse preached by an authoritative figure,” proclaiming “the” truth of the Gospel, while assuming the role of the pew as dependent listeners to be enlightened.¹⁷

David Lose, overcoming these pitfalls, claims that preaching is at a crossroads and that the unified, literalist, objective treatment of the biblical interpretation no longer appeals to many and/or does not make sense. To people who are influenced by feminist, postmodern, postcolonial, and pluralist worldviews, such preaching of proclaiming the universal and exclusive message, holds little value and does not help to counter the pressures of individualism, consumerism, and nationalism.¹⁸ A healthy homiletical approach to biblical interpretation, therefore, is interested in the readers whose lives are deeply influenced by current political contexts and ideologies. These contexts and ideologies can differ greatly such that the same passage in Scripture may suggest quite different meanings. The Exodus story, for example, as argued elsewhere, has been liberating and inspiring for those readers who yearn for freedom and independence and those who experienced dictatorship and oppression.¹⁹ However, the same Exodus story of God leading the people of Israel to the promised land has been used to justify colonialism, and so it has not been liberating for those people whose land has been taken.²⁰ That is why Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza claims that “it is not only the intention of the ‘original authors’ that must be considered, but also the manner in which texts and interpretations of texts have functioned in historical and political settings.”²¹

¹⁶ David Kinnaman, *Unchristian. What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity ... And Why It Matters*, Grand Rapids 2007.

¹⁷ Pablo A. Jiménez, “If You Just Close Your Eyes: Postcolonial Perspectives on Preaching from the Caribbean”, in: *Homiletic* 40:1 (2015), 23

¹⁸ David Lose, *Preaching at the Crossroads. How the World and Our Preaching Are Changing*, Minneapolis 2013.

¹⁹ HyeRan Kim-Cragg, *Story and Song. A Postcolonial Interplay between Christian Education and Worship*, New York 2012, 32.

²⁰ Robert Allen Warrior, *Canaanites, Cowboys and Indians. Deliverance, Conquest, Liberation Theology Today*, in: *Christianity and Crisis* 1989, 21–27.

²¹ Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic. The Politics of Biblical Studies*, Minneapolis 1999, 28.

In short, an interpretive remedy for fake news is critically questioning who said what, (content), where (source), and why (benefit). Similarly, preachers must be equipped to challenge the literal interpretation of Scripture (which serves as an excuse to exclude, discriminate, and condemn), while investigating the habit of selective reading of Scripture (which conceals complex facts) and avoiding the myth of neutrality and objectivity (which privileges a certain group in power).

4. The Roles of Social Media for Preaching in a Post-Truth Era

Karl Barth upon his retirement in 1963 advised young theologians to “take your Bible and take your newspaper, and read both. But interpret newspapers from your Bible.” “Journalists form public opinion,” he continued to say, and therefore “[t]hey hold terribly important positions.”²² Barth was right about the impact of the news media on the world and its importance for those in the pulpit and the pews. Being cognizant of the impact of the secular news, however, he made a counter-argument, stressing the importance of the homiletical orientation to God revealed in scripture for interpreting the worldly news.

56 years later in the age of Facebook and Twitter, Barth’s words continue to be relevant. We cannot escape the “terrible important position” of social media and journalism for us today. Preachers and their parishioners are bombarded by news coming over these digital waves. People in today’s world are caught like flies in the internet, struggling to know what to believe and who is telling the truth. Richard Ward diagnoses the problem in this way: “Digital technologies transmit voices that are crisp and clear of distortion. Celebrity speakers and broadcasters dominate the airwaves, setting standards (for good or ill) for speaking in public. The energized barrage of digitalized voices making sales pitch after pitch leaves listeners skeptical of truth claims and hungry for authenticity.”²³ Many hearers including people in the pew are misled. Many preachers are either at a loss of what to do, or in a state of denial. Other preachers at the opposite side of the spectrum are over-worried about and having a hard time discerning how to lead the flock in this highly digitized technological world. But preachers cannot afford to be overwhelmed or indifferent. They have a critical role to play in proclaiming the Good News in a world of virtual and digitalized spaces.

These challenges are not about to go away any time soon. Thus, homiletics engaging more vigorously with these challenges is in order. A place to start is by analyzing two-related modes of

²² Barth in Retirement, in: *Time Magazine*, Friday, May 31, 1963.

²³ *Richard Ward*, Finding Voice in the Theological School, in: Jana Childers/Clayton J. Schmit (eds.), *Performance in Preaching: Bringing the Sermon to Life*, Grand Rapids 2008, 139f.

social media. One is the visual image that is such a powerful component of digital communication. The other is the smart phone which takes up a large portion of people's attention in the 21st century. Both modes have positive and negative implications for preaching.

On a positive side, many homileticians who believe in the power of narrative, including panoramic salvation narratives in the Bible, called for making biblical stories as scenic in preaching.²⁴ Alyce McKenzie has recently asserted the power of “scenes” or word pictures that abound in the Bible as she offers a definition of the scene in preaching as “a unit of human perception” or “a vivid version” captured in the biblical story that gains and holds “attention, providing compelling conveyances for exegetical and theological teaching.”²⁵ Many stories in the Bible often contain a story event within a story as a plot that includes contentious characters and a degree of conflict, in the case of the King David story raised earlier. That is why sermons could function best as narrative form having a plot as Eugene Lowry presented.²⁶ In order for a narrative to become a scene, the mode of preaching has to have an element of ‘show’ rather than merely ‘tell.’ This is where a power of visual image, arousing a sense of sight and not just of hearing, becomes particularly critical in preaching for the people today who are smartphone watchers rather than hearers of radios or readers of books and newspapers.

On a negative side of over-dependence of the visual image in social media, with regards to the impact of the smart phone, McKenzie acutely observes that as “screen and attention span have shrunk, so has the faith of many people in panoramic salvation metanarratives captured in the Bible from Exodus, exile, advent, the cross, and the empty tomb, to Pentecost that is unfolding in preaching event.”²⁷ The attention span of most people in the pews today has been shortening because more and more people are struggling with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Yet, at the same time people are hardwired to make connections with stories in the world and those of our lives. But these stories people seek to connect with are not necessarily captured in the epic novels or concise poetry books. They are mostly presented and consumed through the visual media including YouTube, a medium that was only created less than 15 years ago. This relatively young age medium has three billion views every day and its number is growing as every minute more videos are uploaded on a smartphone, another young in age that changed the world with the unveiling of the iPhone in 2007. People in the pews today are less used to

²⁴ E. g., *Tom Troeger*, *Imaging a Sermon* Nashville, 1990. *Paul Scott Wilson*, *The Four Pages of the Sermon. A Guide to Biblical Preaching*, Nashville 1999.

²⁵ *Alyce McKenzie*, *Making a Scene in the Pulpit: Vivid Preaching for Visual Listeners*, Louisville 2018, 3.4.

²⁶ *Eugene L. Lowry*, *The Homiletical Plot. The Sermon as Narrative Art Form*, Louisville 1980.

²⁷ *McKenzie* (note 25), 2.

listening to radio to get news. Many people read neither books nor newspapers in printed forms. Instead they watch news through their palm size smartphone and upload such videos as YouTube. Attention deficiency and screen dependency have a close connection and they have a huge implication for preaching. The traditional sermon that relies on 15–30 minute, one-way communication without visual aids has a real challenge to make a connection to its audience in today's world. Should preachers reduce their sermons to 3–5 minute blurbs to be more in line with the average You-Tube clip? Should preachers turn their sermon into commercial advertisements, episodic, flashy, excessive, or hyper-stimulating?

While such drastic change of preaching may not be feasible, desirable, or realistic, the influence of the visual image in social media should not be underestimated but deserves proper attention. McKenzie's plea to visual listeners of sermons in a world of smartphone and the You-Tube era, yields constructive insights. Preachers need to enhance their ways of reading the Bible as visual stories with plots and movements for the sake of preaching. Preachers need to present God as holistic scene maker who cares for people not just as one-dimensional listeners but as multi-dimensional creatures fascinated by images. Preachers connecting God with people must invite and evoke people to experience the scenic narrative power to touch them deeply. This connecting role of preaching is particularly important when our lives in a highly politicized post-truth era are fractured, distracted, incoherent, and therefore disconnected from larger stories that are beyond our own, including God's. Theologically speaking, to pay attention to scenes in preaching is to try to connect the lives of listeners to the overarching salvation plots or panoramic narratives of creation, fall, redemption, and recreation that God has initiated and continues to initiate. These overarching panoramic narratives of the divine embrace connect episodic, seemingly disjointed-looking stories and events of fragmented human lives into a whole.

In short, gauging both positive and negative impact of the visual images in social media, we need to make a critical point about how these visual images are connected to fake news, as a way to tell lies and distort facts and truths in a post-truth era. Thousands of these images flash across our lives each day in the fast-moving whirlwind world of social media. Seeing is believing and the medium is the message as Marshall McLuhan eloquently put it in 1967.²⁸ Around the same time that Barth and McLuhan were thinking about the influence of media in the 1960s, the World Council of Churches was encouraging member churches to create sermons that included visual arts.²⁹

²⁸ *Marshall McLuhan*, *The Medium is the Message. An Inventory of Effects*, London 1967.

²⁹ Norman Goodall (ed.) *The Uppsala Report 1968*, Geneva 1968, 81f.

On a negative side, visual images, while subtle, can be a powerful conveyor of information, values and attitudes. Culture, which is often reflected in visual images, shapes our thinking and our actions as well as our knowing.³⁰ A visual quality of story can foster the imagination of the listeners. It is not enough to use these optical representations or word pictures inherently good. Visual images can distort truth and reinforce oppressive structures of dominance. The blonde-haired, blue-eyed, and white-skinned Jesus presented “under the guise of scientific and rational objectivity” as if it were factually true is one particularly important example of a powerful image that distorts the truth.³¹ Seeing is powerful because “the way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe [...]. We are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves.”³² It is not difficult to find examples of how the visual images, a painting, a sculpture or a photo could change the relation between things and ourselves in a world. Visual images as medium conveying a message in a powerful way may misinform facts, and mask truths, truths about crimes, truths about violence committed by the powerful, which we turn to next.

5. Preaching as Exposing Truth in a Post-Truth Era

Once the work of interpreting texts and framing their contexts in Scripture is done, preachers enter into the next homiletical movement of what to say or how to present the message. The core content of the sermon that needs to be spoken in a post-truth era must inevitably include revealing truth that has been hidden, distorted, or altered by the principalities and powers. This was at the heart of preaching in the Reformation era. For Martin Luther, to preach was to expose the ugly face of Satan as a demonic power of the world. He acknowledged that this was not an easy task. “It is the most dangerous kind of life to throw oneself in the way of Satan’s many teeth,” he wrote.³³ And yet, if preachers fail to address the countless powerful forces that shape and destroy human (and non-human) life in the world, as Charles Campbell argues, preaching turns into “the monstrous *homiletical* heresy.”³⁴

For John Calvin, speaking truth as preaching is speaking about the knowledge of faith as a way of perceiving. By perceiving he meant the need to pay attention to God, mirroring God and God’s work in the world. There is a connection between revealing truth (Luther) by exposing a

³⁰ Charles Foster, Imperialism in the Religious Education of Cultural Minority, in: Religious Education 89 (1992), 146.

³¹ Randall Bailey, In Danger of Ignoring One’s Own Cultural Bias in Interpreting the Text, in: R. S. Sugirtharajah (ed.), The Postcolonial Bible. The Bible and Postcolonialism, London 1998, 74.

³² John Berger, Ways of Seeing, London 1972.

³³ Cited in: Campbell (note 1), 69.

³⁴ Ibid., 70. The emphasis is original.

demonic power and reflecting God's activity in the act of preaching (Calvin). The contemporary Reformed homileticsians share similar views with these two reformers. Charles Campbell and Johan Cilliers develop an insight into how preachers might become truth revealers holding up a mirror to the congregation in preaching. This is effectively done when preachers embrace their roles as fools for Christ.³⁵ "The Emperor's New Clothes," a story created by Hans Christian Andersen, offers a salient example in this regard. This story is not just an entertaining tale but a powerful story depicting the subversive wisdom of the lower classes who mock the Emperor by playing fools. Unless you are foolish, you would not dare to confront the Emperor this way. However, the story depicts that it is through the seemingly innocent utterance of the child that the truth is revealed. This foolish act of the powerless child exposes the stupidity of the exulted and mighty Emperor. The story points to Empire, with which many of us are complicit, and from which some benefit far more than others. It is a candid example of speaking the truth (as oppression and injustice of the imperial power) that was revealed by a child through an act of bold innocence.³⁶

What are the demonic powers of the world in a post-truth era that need revealing through preaching? What are the faces of these monsters that require unmasking in preaching today? There are many demonic faces.³⁷ One such demonic face is Capitalism. Andrea Bieler and Hans-Martin Gutmann, facing the global economic crisis that shook the world in 2008, juxtapose divine grace with the market driven profit economy and argued for preaching justification. They juxtapose the exploitation of human labour and the land for the sake of the superfluous profit with the inexhaustible and intractable grace of God.³⁸ Human greed is defeated by the divine grace in preaching. This juxtaposition when outlined in preaching reveals the truth that confronts the evil powers and satanic principalities exercised by neoliberal capitalism today.³⁹

Another example of a demonic power is sexual and domestic violence against women and sexual minority groups. Gender-based violence against women has existed as long as patriarchy has.⁴⁰ Yet, statistics tell us that this age-old sexual and domestic violence committed by men has escalated in recent years. In the era of the "Me-Too movement" a term coined by activist Tarana Burke in 2006,⁴¹ it is alarming but not surprising to find that sexual abuse, harassment, and assaults

³⁵ Charles L. Campbell/Johan H. Cilliers, *Preaching Fools. The Gospel as a Rhetoric of Folly*, Waco 2012.

³⁶ HyeRan Kim-Cragg, *The Emperor Has No Clothes! Exposing Whiteness as Explicit, Implicit, and Null Curricula*, in: *Religious Education* (2019), DOI: 10.1080/00344087.2019.1602464

³⁷ For example, *Andrew Wymer* called fascism and racism as demonic faces that need unmasking. See his, *Punching Nazis? Preaching as Anti-Fascist Resistance*, in: *IJH* vol 3 (2018), 81–98.

³⁸ *Bieler/Gutmann* (note 8), 5.

³⁹ *Eunjo Mary Kim* names neoliberal capitalism and global climate change as challenges to preaching. *Preaching in an Age of Globalization*, Louisville 2010.

⁴⁰ *Emily Asken/O. Wesley Allen Jr.*, *Beyond Heterosexism in the Pulpit*, Eugene 2015, 16–20.

⁴¹ 11 years later on October 5, 2017, Me-Too movement went viral when the New York Times and New Yorker's

of men against women and heterosexual men against members of the LGBTQ community take place almost ubiquitously, at home, at work, and in church and politics. It may not be coincidental that the rise of right wing politics and gender-based and sexual violence are happening concurrently. There may be a connection between religious violence and sexual violence fueled by the fear of difference, the fear of the other, due to race, religion, and gender.

In short, the fear of the other, whether the fear is toward religion, gender, or race as propellers for populist movements, leads to hatred and violence. That is why discerning the broader dimensions of violence with an analysis of fear is a critical task of preaching. Barbara Patterson contends that if our preaching is a discernment of Christ's incarnation, we must learn as preachers to be attentive to both individual and systematic violence, while discerning the violence within us, and seeking to communicate "how Christ's woundedness touches the woundedness of violated women and our own wounds."⁴² Making the connection between fear and violence requires a spiritual discipline, constantly reflecting the current context of violence and reading the biblical texts about violence, while mirroring God's activity in the world. It also involves discerning the othering process.⁴³ Patterson asks, "How many sermons have we heard that have no shared experiences with real women who suffered violence?"⁴⁴ We may extend this question by asking how many sermons we have preached and heard that have shared experience with real people who suffered violence as a result of the fear of the other.

A constant self-reflective mirroring as a spiritual discernment is needed in preaching. This is what it means to unmask or uncover evil in preaching, disclosing what has been missing (not preached) or distorting complicated realities (selective forgetfulness and status quo). As a practical theological act, preaching must always speak from the edges, preaching the other.⁴⁵ Otherwise, preaching is in danger of serving as "an unconscious means of preserving the status quo."⁴⁶ To disrupt this status quo is to proclaim, as discussed earlier, the paradox of faith witnessed in Scripture. It also involves a paradoxical rhetorical claim, negotiating complexity, ambiguity, and contrasting views. The nature and the task of preaching in this regard is unsettling, interrupting, and transgressing. That is one of the most obvious paradoxical Gospel messages, captured in 'the

investigation went into and revealed the sexual misdeeds of *Harvey Weinstein*. The #MeToo movement is now spreading to the entire globe and entering into a courageous fury over the ways women are mistreated.

⁴² *Barbara Patterson*, Preaching as Nonviolent Resistance, in: *Telling the Truth. Preaching about Sexual and Domestic Violence*, ed. John McClure and Nancy Ramsay, Cleveland 1998, 99–109, 103.

⁴³ *Lucy A. Rose*, *Sharing the Word. Preaching in the Roundtable Church*, Louisville 1997; *John McClure*, *A Roundtable Pulpit*, Nashville 1995.

⁴⁴ *Patterson* (note 42), 105.

⁴⁵ *Ronald J. Allen*, *Preaching and the Other. Studies of Postmodern Insights*, St. Louis 2014.

⁴⁶ *Campbell* (note 1), 86.

last shall be the first' (Matt 20:16) and in the song of Mary (Luke 1:46-55). Such a paradoxical message is directly related to speaking to abusive power to challenge the dominant hierarchy, including the preferential option for the poor and the marginalized. That is why exposing violence as a way of speaking to power as preaching means breaking the silence for those whose voices were taken away.⁴⁷

Preaching ultimately not only exposes but envisions. The last word of preaching is not death but a new life. Preaching does not stop at deconstruction but aims to transform. Envisioning is oriented to the future. Preaching as eschatological points to a reality present and not yet completely here. It is about evoking possibilities and igniting hopes.⁴⁸ "In the midst of the powers of death, the preacher directs the congregation's attention to glimpses of God's Shalom that is *already* breaking into the world."⁴⁹

6. Conclusion

This article has posed the question of whether Christian preaching is implicated in the growing movements of populism and ultra-right wing politics around the globe today. It has identified three unhelpful ways to interpret Scripture as homiletical practices which may usher in or at least perpetuate fundamentalist views. The difficulty lies when the opposite argument is made that populist views claim to give voice to the people and not the elites who are blamed for injustices. The discerning Spirit must be in place so as to clarify whether such views actually advocate for the marginalized or not.

We have noted that Scripture contains complimentary and contrasting views and that the words in the Bible should not be treated as the neutral and monolithic absolute truth that is understood literally and beyond particular contexts. Preachers are encouraged to practice looking at the larger and complicated contexts in the Bible, connecting them with current contexts that face hearers and readers today. An examination of the impact of social media in a Post-Truth era has helped us articulate the subtle yet powerful impact of the visual image that often distorts facts, even creating fake news. We live in a world where members of our congregations are heavily dependent on smart phones. Therefore, the preacher, noting their positive and negative impacts,

⁴⁷ *Christine Smith*, *Preaching as Weeping, Confession, and Resistance. Encountering Handicappism, Ageism, Heterosexism, Sexism, White Racism, Classism*, Louisville 1992, 131.

⁴⁸ *Thomas Long*, *Preaching from Memory to Hope*, Louisville 2009.

⁴⁹ *Campbell* (note 1), 123. The emphasis is original.

needs to evoke images that resonate with the social media culture and effectively reach out to people. Such needs call for viewing the Bible, more than reading, as scenic with plots.

Finally, the article calls for preaching as speaking against the demonic power of profit driven capitalism and the epidemic of gender based violence, two evils among others which are often either unspoken or hidden. The role of preaching in this regard requires exposing and unveiling the demonic principalities. That is what it means to preach in a Post-Truth Era.

HyeRan Kim-Cragg, born 1970, Associate Professor of Preaching at Emmanuel College in the University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada.

hyeran.kimcragg@utoronto.ca

Neuroscience and Homiletics in Dialogue:

Perspectives for Preaching

Klaus A. Stange

Abstract

“One thing is for sure, and can be observed: when someone preaches about some topics of justification, the people sleep on the sermon, or start coughing [...], but when [the preacher] starts telling stories or giving examples, then they become interested, remain silent and pay careful attention”. [Martin Luther]

Could neuroscience help us to comprehend the phenomenon that Luther observed? What does neuroscience tell us about the sermon listener? How and when do they hear? The intent of this article is to put neuroscience in dialogue with homiletics; to comprehend neurological processes attached to hearing through the emotional system resulting in cognitive processing with synapses and memory. Neuroscience impulses are related to preaching, especially preaching with a focus on narrative form.

1. Introduction

The modern history of neuroscience is still being written.¹ Neuroscience has a long tradition of focusing on this object.² However, while science with its status, it is recent.³ Its field of activities is broad, thereby also increasing several areas of knowledge, such as biology and medicine (contributing to the survey area of brain activities, regeneration research about the injured brain, the affect of drugs on mirror neurons, etc.),⁴ psychology (contributing to the survey area of human

¹ Usually we speak of neurosciences (plural), signaling that it is not univocal, but dialogues with other areas of knowledge and is integrated into them.

² Robert-Benjamin Illing, *Geschichte der Hirnforschung*. Lexikon der Neurowissenschaft. Heidelberg 2000.

³ The last decade of the last century (1990–1999) was declared the decade of the brain by President *George W. Bush*.

⁴ As an example, we mention the studies undertaken to understand the role of drugs on the brain. *Kamila Fernandes Ferreira/Sabliny Carreiro Ribeiro/Luiz Gonzalo Gomes Barreto*. O prazer do crack. Dourados: Universidade Federal da Grande Dourados UFGD, Anais do 3º Simpósio Internacional de Neurociências da Grande Dourados, vol. 1, 2012.

behavior),⁵ education (contributing to research that helps to understand how the brain learns),⁶ Philosophy/Theology (reconsidering the human's identity, how conscience, faith is formed, etc)⁷ and, recently, artificial marketing and intelligence.⁸

In the area of neuroscience two distinct visions with correlating methodological approaches compete. The first seeks to find and associate a specific neuron with each human action or behavior. Here there is a reductionism of human beings to electrochemical phenomena in the brain. The second view perceives the nervous system with a much more holistic dimension. The objective, in that case, would not be to ask “why” first but to ask “how.” Both views are not mutually exclusive.⁹

In spite of the range of approaches that neurosciences allow, in this article we will focus on systems of neuroscience and cognitive neuroscience with regard to our interest in relating neuroscience to homiletical science. Neuroscience can fertilize reaching, specifically understandings of the process of listening to preaching. For example, when listeners participate in a service and listen to a sermon, they are involved in their entirety. In other words, their corporeality¹⁰ enables the mention of a single word to bring a smell to memory; a sentence might

⁵ An emblematic example is the case of *Phineas Gage*, an American worker who in 1848 worked on the construction of a railway. By placing the powder in a crack in the rock, the friction of the iron rod with the rock caused a spark, causing the powder to explode. The iron rod entered the left cheek, destroyed his eye and left the front of the skull. Despite the serious accident, Phineas survived and recovered relatively quickly, to everyone's amazement. However, after a few months, a radical change in Phineas' personality was observed: he started acting rudely, disrespectfully, without measuring the consequences. Gage's case was considered one of the first scientific evidences to indicate that injuries to the frontal lobes of the brain can alter a person's personality, emotions and social interaction. Cf. *Péricles Maranhão-Filho*, Mr. Phineas Gage e o acidente que deu novo rumo à neurologia. *Revista Brasileira de Neurologia*. Rio de Janeiro: UFRJ, vol. 50 (2014), no. 2, 33–35.

⁶ *Ramon M. Cosenza/Leonor B. Guerra*, Neurociência e educação: como o cérebro aprende. Porto Alegre 2011. *Fernanda Antoniolio Hammes de Carvalho*, Neurociências e educação: uma articulação necessária na formação docente. Rio de Janeiro, vol. 8 (2011), no. 3, 537–550. *Gilson Lima*, Redescoberta da mente na educação: a expansão do aprender e a conquista do conhecimento complexo. Educação & Sociedade. Campinas: UNICAMP, vol. 30 (2009), no. 106, 151–174. *Marta Pinheiro*, Aspectos históricos da neuropsicologia: subsídios para a formação de educadores, *Revista Educar*, Curitiba: UFPR, no. 25 (2005), 175–196.

⁷ *Edenio Valle*, Neurociências e religião: interfaces. *Revista de Estudos da Religião*. São Paulo: PUC, no. 3 (2001), 1–46. *Ulrich Eibach*, Gott im Gehirn? Ich – eine Illusion? *Neurobiologie, religiöses Erleben und Menschenbild aus christliche Sicht*, Wuppertal 2006. *José Manuel Gimenez-Amaya*, ¿Dios en el cerebro? La experiencia religiosa desde la neurociencia, in: *Scripta Theologica*, vol. 42, 2010. *Rhawn Joseph* (ed.), *Neurotheology. Brain, science, spirituality and religious experience*. California 2002. *Raul Marino, Jr.*, A religião do cérebro: as novas descobertas da neurociência a respeito da fé humana, São Paulo 2005. *Gerson J. Pessoa Fischer*, fenômeno espontâneo ou neural? Uma crítica ao dualismo cartesiano na teologia., in: *Reforma e Educação Anais do 1º Simpósio Internacional de Lutero*. São Bento do Sul: União Cristã / FLT, 2012. *Juan José Sanguinetti*, El desafío antropológico de las neurociencias. *Rivista di scienze dell'educazione*. Roma: Pontificia Facoltà di Scienze dell'Educazione “Auxilium”, vol. 53 (2015), no. 3.

⁸ *Gerhard Raab/Oliver Gernsheimer/Maik Schindler*, Neuromarketing. Grundlagen Erkenntnisse Anwendungen, Wiesbaden 2009. *Jochen Thinius/Jan Untiedt*, Events – Erlebnismarketing für alle Sinne: Mit neuronaler Markenkommunikation Lebensstile inszenieren, Wiesbaden 2013. *David Scheffer*, Neuro Sales: Mehr Verkaufserfolg durch Hirnforschung?, in: *Lars Binckebanck* (ed.), *Verkaufen nach der Krise*, Wiesbaden 2011.

⁹ *Howard Gardner*, Inteligência: um conceito reformulado. Rio de Janeiro 2000. *Tárik de Athayde Prata*, O que há de reducionismo no naturalismo biológico de Searle? *Revista de Filosofia Aurora*. Curitiba: PUCPR, vol. 27 (2015), no. 42, 875–894.

¹⁰ In the West and among a good part of the Brazilian historical Evangelic Churches, there is still an excessive perception of the preaching listener, which unilaterally values, the cognitive, rational, and mental aspects of the hearing.

be associated with experiences in which a narrative can mediate deep comfort and support; or hearing the blessing might, in fact, uplift the listener. Thus, it is helpful to understand how people hear and perceive preaching, how sensory impressions, narratives, or good humor triggers a whole network of neuronal activities and synapses. Therefore, any preacher would do well to pay attention to the perspectives that neurosciences open to the process of the Gospel's communication.

2. How does the one listening to preaching receive a message through the sensory system?

Preaching reaches out to a person through the senses. The human sensory system works in a hierarchical way. First, the brain tends to consider the information that comes in through the sense of sight as true. The visual system is dominant among sensory systems. Other senses take up the function of confirming the information mediated by the optical system. Only when the optical sensory system is not sufficiently precise are the hearing system (and other senses) actuated.

Of the five human sensory systems, the hearing system's functioning is considered the most simple of all: the sound wave, in air pressure form, reaches the eardrum and causes it to vibrate. The vibration of the eardrum by the ossicles acts like a piston that pushes and pulls the membrane over the oval window. The membrane's movement over the oval window moves the fluid that is inside the cochlea, acting on the basilar membrane, causing the hair cells to move from side to side and, depending on the movement of the cells, a chemical reaction is interpreted by neurons and communicated to the brain. This process of neuronal communication is called synaptic transmission.¹¹

Synaptic transmission in the nervous system of an adult human being, as a general rule, is attained through a chemical process that is quite complex.¹² Basically, the synapse cycle consists of a) neurotransmitters present in the synaptic vesicles, b) a stimulus that causes the neurotransmitters to leak into the synaptic cleft, c) a postsynaptic neuron, capable of receiving the neurotransmitter and producing an electrical response or adequate chemistry and d) a mechanism to remove the neurotransmitter from the synaptic cleft to "zero out" the cycle. This entire cycle must take place very quickly.¹³

¹¹ Mark F. Bear/Barry W. Connors/Michael A. Paradiso, *Neurociências – Desvendando o sistema nervosa*, Porto Alegre 2008, 347.

¹² In addition to chemical synapses, there are also electrical synapses, that is, the communication from one neuron to the other takes place through an electric current; cf. *ibid.* 104.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 104–109.

To simplify, depending on their function, we can classify neurotransmitters as “excitatory” and “inhibitors.” Among the dozens of neurotransmitters discovered so far, we highlight some already consolidated in academic research:¹⁴

1. Acetylcholine (ACh): Acetylcholine was the first neurotransmitter discovered. This neurotransmitter is associated with muscle contractions and movements. However, acetylcholine also acts as a neurotransmitter responsible for learning and memory. Acetylcholine is released during the period of deep sleep.¹⁵
2. Serotonin (5HT). Serotonin is attributed to acting on the cardiovascular system and, in the background, also on the respiratory system. Serotonin is responsible for regulating sleep (especially sleep latency, the time it takes to fall asleep), humor (including aggressive behavior), appetite, libido, behavior inhibitor (reduced level of serotonin in the brain has been associated with suicide), regulates sensitivity to pain and performs thermal control of the body.¹⁶
3. Dopamine (DA). Dopamine is responsible for feelings of pleasure, satisfaction, and motivation. The neurons that produce and release dopamine are responsible for regulating movement, regulating and controlling emotional behavior, and acting on functions associated with memory, emotion, anxiety, and planning.¹⁷
4. Noradrenaline (NA). Noradrenaline is related to physical and/or mental arousal and is also associated with good humor. The release of noradrenaline facilitates attention and alertness during the day. Conversely, during the hours of sleep, noradrenaline levels are reduced.¹⁸
5. Adrenaline. Adrenaline is a neurotransmitter that stimulates muscles to react to stressful situations. Adrenaline affects heartbeat, dilation of bronchi and pupils, the release of sweat, etc. – as a response to some threatening stimulus.¹⁹
6. Gamma Amino Butyric Acid (GABA). It is the main inhibitory neurotransmitter of the brain synapses.²⁰

¹⁴ Bryan Kolb/Ian Whishaw, *Neuropsicologia humana*, Buenos Aires 2006, 106.

¹⁵ Simone Bittencourt, *Neuromoduladores e neurotransmissores*. Disponível em: http://www.neurofisiologia.unifesp.br/neuromoduladores_nocaogeral_simonebittencourt.pdf. Acesso em: 09 nov. 2018.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

7. Glutamate (Glu) and Aspartate (Asp). Glutamate and Aspartate are the main excitatory neurotransmitters in the Central Nervous System. The role of glutamate is fundamental in the memory process.²¹
8. Neuropeptides. There is a wide variety of peptide neurotransmitters. Peptides are released in lesser quantities and generally in conjunction with other neurotransmitters, in order to modulate or influence classic neurotransmission. Neuropeptides, for example, act on the inhibition of pain or, create feelings of euphoria and happiness.²²

Through the produced synapses from impulses in the hearing system, it is possible to distinguish objects or phenomena that are often not identified through other senses. By hearing we can distinguish the voice of a friend, for example. Hearing also allows us to acquire a language. It is fundamental to our communication.²³ Not only that, in addition to helping human beings performing utilitarian functions of communication and survival, hearing has evolved to enable us to explore the sensations and emotions produced by sound.²⁴

3. How does the one listening to preaching process a message through the limbic system?

The communication of a message is perceived by the sensory systems. But, before the message is consolidated and memorized, it is processed by the limbic system – the circuit of emotions. In a figurative language, the processing of a message corresponds to a filter function. It is as if the limbic system filtered all the information received from the outside world and “wrapped” the information with feelings.

Many studies have been carried out to understand and comprehend the relationship between sensory perception, emotion, and subsequent action. Scholars locate in the limbic system – the neuronal circuit related to emotions, feelings such as joy and sadness,²⁵ anger,²⁶ stress or FFF

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ *Bear/Connors/Paradiso* (note 11), 344–347.

²⁴ For example, musicians explore sound to thrill and generate sensations. Cf. *Johannes Block*, Die Predigt als Hör-Ereignis. Zur Erfahrung von Musik als hermeneutische Schule der Homiletik, in: *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 107 (2010), 532–549.

²⁵ Joy and sadness involve dopaminergic neurons.

²⁶ Anger involves the amygdala and regions of the hypothalamus. Cf. *Bear/Connors/Paradiso* (note 11), 577.

responses,²⁷ empathy,²⁸ pleasure and reward,²⁹ or fear.³⁰ Many responses in the body are actually autonomous responses; others are cognitive.³¹

It is likely that science will be able, more and more, to understand and explain the biological aspects associated with emotion. But it is very unlikely that science will be able to define what emotion is. It seems that this will remain a fundamentally philosophical question.

Despite the validity of neuroscience looking for physical-biological correlations responsible for feelings and emotions, we agree with Bear, Connors, and Paradiso that the plasticity and network character of the brain makes it such that the various parts of the brain influence each other. Therefore, we prefer to speak of a system of emotions rather than a limbic system. To advocate for the networked system of emotions suggests that there are no morphofunctional regulatory components in the brain, that is, all the elements involved have similar regulatory functions. Systems actually depend on the integration of their components in a complex, non-hierarchical way. In the system of emotions, therefore, although there is a clear and precise definition of the neuronal circuits that compose it, in the final analysis it works in a network—in an integrated way.³² In fact, the environment is responsible for different developments of emotions in the brain.³³

²⁷ FFF = The fight-flight-freeze response. When an environment is perceived as “safe”, the body activates inhibitory mechanisms on the structures that control the fight-flight behavior. And, when the environment is perceived as threatening, the amygdala is in charge of triggering excitatory stimuli on the autonomic nervous system, in order to generate a protective reaction, Cf. *Joachim Bauer*, *Das Gedächtnis des Körpers. Wie Beziehungen und Lebensstile unsere Gene steuern*, Frankfurt am Main 2015, 24ff.

²⁸ In the 1990s, a group of Italian neurobiologists discovered, at random, what we now call the mirror neuron. Mirror neurons play a crucial role in the field of human behavior. They allow one person to imitate another, regardless of memory, often unconsciously. They also allow the recognition of the intention of an action, its social meaning, including the interpretation of aspects of non-verbal communication. Cf. *Marcia Alves Tassinari/Wagner Teixeira Durange*, *Experiência Empática: da neurociência à espiritualidade. Revista da Abordagem Gestáltica: Phenomenological Studies*, vol. 20, no. 1, 53–60, 2014. *Giacomo Rizzolatti/Laila Craighero*, The mirror-neuron system. *Annual Review of Neuroscience*, v. 27, 169–192, 2004.

²⁹ Dopamine, as a neurotransmitter, seems to play a fundamental role in mediating the feeling of pleasure and reward. Cf. *Manfred Spitzer*, *Schule der Zukunft – Hirnforscher Vortrag in Feldbach*. Disponível em: <https://youtu.be/NR-KPZEL3Aw>. Acesso em: 01 jun 2017.

³⁰ Probably due to the need for survival, the brain developed the ability to record and memorize negative experiences with greater speed and intensity. The amygdala and hypothalamus are the regions of the brain where feelings of fear and anger are produced. Cf. *Bear/Connors/Paradiso* (note 11), 573ff.

³¹ *Vanderson Esperidiao-Antonio* et al. Neurobiology of the emotions. *Rev. psiquiatr. clín.*, São Paulo, vol. 35, no. 2, 2008, 56.

³² *Ramon Cosenza*, *Fundamentos de neuroanatomia*, Rio de Janeiro 42013.

³³ *Bear/Connors/Paradiso* (note 11) 571.

4. How does the one listening to preaching entrench a message through the cognitive system?

A message that is perceived by the sensory system and processed and “wrapped” by the system of emotions is able to be consolidated and recorded in the brain as a memory and as a learning experience.³⁴ It is necessary to develop skills so that learning happens. The acquisition of skills is essential so that new information and information that is already recorded in memory be placed in dialogue and provide new synapses, associations, and learning.³⁵ When a link is established in the brain between new information and pre-existing information in memory, neurotransmitter substances such as acetylcholine and dopamine are released by the brain, which improves concentration and generates pleasure and satisfaction.³⁶ One of the biggest mistakes that occupies popular imagination is the idea that today it is no longer necessary to dedicate yourself to learning something. All the necessary information is available on the internet. But, it is an illusion to think that the brain consolidates learning by the “just in time” paradigm,³⁷ to think that all information is in the cloud and, when necessary, is accessed. There is no knowledge on the internet, only information. Knowledge is only in the brain and it is dependent on connections and synapses. The brain does not download. Only when the brain is exercised does it create new synapses. When the brain is not stimulated, it saves energy. The routine is designed precisely to save energy.³⁸

Further, emotions are directly involved in the process of consolidating a message. Depending on the type of emotion that the interaction with the environment provokes and the diversity of stimuli that the listener of the sermon receives, emotions can favor or hinder the communication process.³⁹ As said previously, emotions affect the consolidation of a message and impact learning, both in a way that favors it and harms it. Anxiety and prolonged stress, for example, have a devastating effect on learning. Under prolonged stress, “the glucocorticoid hormones secreted by the adrenal gland act on the neurons of the hippocampus [memory area], even destroying them.”⁴⁰

³⁴ *Tatiana M. Dorneles*, *As bases neuropsicológicas da emoção. Um diálogo acerca da aprendizagem*. Licenciatura. Ivoiti, vol. 2, no. 2, 14–21, 2014.

³⁵ *Spitzer* (note 29).

³⁶ *Dorneles* (note 34), 18.

³⁷ “Just in time” is an administrative philosophy derived from the automobile industry (Toyota) in which production must be carried out in the right quantity and at the right time. In the assembly line of a product, all the inputs are reached at the exact moment they become necessary, avoiding the agglomeration of unnecessary stocks and raw materials. Cf. *Jeffrey K. Liker*, *O modelo Toyota: 14 princípios de gestão do maior fabricante do mundo*, Porto Alegre 2005.

³⁸ *Spitzer* (note 29).

³⁹ *Dorneles* (note 34), 14–21.

⁴⁰ *Cosenza/Guerra* (note 6), 84; *Bauer* (note 27), 24–34.

Also considering the process of consolidating a message, Gerhard Roth⁴¹ demonstrated that the adult human being is not able to assimilate new learning, in a concentrated way, for more than five minutes. After that time, the information needs to be consolidated in the brain (recorded); otherwise, new information simply replaces the first, which is then forgotten. And, the privileged way for the brain to consolidate and “record” information is through emotions. The brain consolidates a message when learning is related to emotions. Unfortunately, information associated with negative emotions is recorded much more quickly than information with positive emotions.⁴²

Finally, regarding the consolidation of a message by the brain, we need to highlight that this consolidation does not happen as a mechanical biochemical process. Quite the opposite, a message is consolidated in different ways depending on the context from which it is communicated. Every preaching event presupposes a context. In these contexts, emotions and relationships are inserted. Emotions and relationships are part of life from the moment of birth until the end of the life cycle. Throughout this period the subject is constituted and constitutes other subjects. Human beings depend and need to relate. Without a relationship with the other they languish and die. So too, when there are no relationships the human brain does not develop but languishes. Neurological research shows that the brain works in a network form. Nothing works in isolation, independently. Neurons are all related. The human being’s cognitive and emotional potential develops in relationship with the other. Only in relationships do human beings develop an identity.

Therefore, the less intense the neuronal activity, the less likely there will be new neuronal connections and synapses. From the perspective of neuroscience, the preacher’s goal should be to stimulate neuronal activity, to stimulate the creation of synapses, because in this way the message is better consolidated. Hence the importance of creating mental images.⁴³ The images are constituted in the brain from the senses. It is interesting to note that the senses do not work in isolation in the brain. Quite the opposite, each sense derives part of its information from the other senses. For example, hearing derives around 25% of the information from the other senses. The good news is that, from the perspective of neuroscience, good preaching is capable of generating much more neuronal activity (when the brain produces images) than a film, for example, where images are abundant but ever present and built for the viewer. In good preaching, the listener is able to “see with the ears.”⁴⁴

⁴¹ Cf. *Gerhard Roth*, *Wie einzigartig ist der Mensch? Die lange Evolution der Gehirne und des Geistes*, Heidelberg 2010.

⁴² *Antônio Damasio*, *O erro de Descartes. Emoção, razão e o cérebro humano*, São Paulo 1996.

⁴³ *Júlio César Adam*, *Um Deus com o rosto do Brasil: um estudo exploratório sobre a relação entre imagens e imaginários de Deus na cultura e na pregação evangélico-luterana*. Horizonte. Belo Horizonte: PUC Minas, vol. 14, no. 44, 2016.

⁴⁴ *Walther von La Roche/Axel Buchholz*, *Radio-Journalismus. Ein Handbuch für die Ausbildung und Praxis im Hörfunk*, Berlin 2009.

Summation: We try to describe the process of hearing from the perspective of neuroscience. Relevant to the scope of our article, the process of listening does not reside exclusively in biological properties – as important as these are – but in the Limbic System, the System of Emotions. All information captured by the Sensory System goes through the Emotions System that works as a kind of filter and will give a point, a meaning to the information, enabling memory and learning, that is, the consolidation of the message. In the same way, if we ask how the listener of the sermon listens, the answer is directly associated with synapses. Quality listening presupposes the consolidation of synapses. And, when synapses are consolidated in the brain, the brain produces memory. Only from memory is it possible to learn and grow cognitively. In the last part of this article, we want to derive the implications of neuroscience for homiletics.

5. Listening to preaching fertilized by neuroscience

How can neuroscience fertilize the preaching, specifically the process of listening to a preacher?

5.1 A preaching that surprises listeners

One of the great impulses to put the human being in motion is the feeling of reward, the feeling that the effort was worth it. In every personal undertaking, it is necessary to find a balance between the risk to be taken and the security of life itself. From then on, the brain pours large amounts of dopamine into the bloodstream. If there were not this feeling of satisfaction, of reward, the human being likely would not be willing to act, and would not take risks. In addition to meeting their basic needs, the human being is able to aim for higher “rewards.” In doing so, for example, the human being seeks money, power, the beauty of the body, the victory of his football team, art, a cozy atmosphere, and—if we are to make a connection with the worship service—captivating preaching, as a form of reward. The human being is able to categorize everything through a reward scheme, including preaching. Preaching can trigger feelings of reward, of pleasure. The same happens when listening to preaching; it can generate joy.⁴⁵ Preaching can generate a feeling of gratification when it surprises and when connects the text with life in a way that does not just say the obvious. As we saw earlier, the brain categorizes as relevant to life only what is activated by the conscious of the brain and evaluated by its emotional charge to then become a synapse and long-term memory. In

⁴⁵ In this context, it is possible to understand why preachers who use humor in their sermons, easily captivate listeners. The fact is that, from the perspective of neuroscience, humor activates several regions in the brain. The listener will laugh and rejoice, creating sympathy for the preacher and, at the same time, confidence in what he says. In our understanding, a Brazilian preacher who uses humor extensively in his preaching is Pastor *Cláudio Duarte*, easily accessible on many links on youtube.

this case, on the one hand, the listener of preaching is curious. On the other hand, the brain easily accommodates when something sounds boring. In this case, it tends to ritual, repetition, and routine.⁴⁶

If we consider that through preaching we want to reach the listener with a message, and we want the message to be recorded and consolidated in the listener's life, dopamine plays an important role. When dopamine is blocked in the brain, learning is impaired. Therefore, when listeners are underloaded or overloaded with demands, they do not learn properly, since feelings of reward have not been generated or have been suppressed. As we have seen, when the brain “gets the impression” that the effort it takes to learn is not worth it, it simply does nothing. But when the brain “delights” and the message in preaching is given an emotional charge, dopamine is discharged into the bloodstream and learning can be more effectively accomplished. Dopaminergic neurons are stimulated when the feeling of reward is “better than expected.” This behavior of neurons could explain why the human being always looks for more and intense sensations of reward and is not satisfied with what they already have.⁴⁷

Thinking about the listener of preaching could highlight the relevance of a dialogue between neuroscience and theology: They both know something of the inherent feeling in the human being who always seeks more intense experiences of pleasure and reward and never seems to be satisfied.⁴⁸ Since only “better than expected” experiences are capable of generating dopaminergic discharge, there is no point in preaching with a moral appeal to the reason of the listener.

Jesus told the parables of the lost coin, the lost sheep, and the “lost” sons.⁴⁹ They are narratives that portray the joy of finding something that has been lost: the shepherd's sheep, the woman's coin, the son who returns home. This indescribable joy, which simultaneously describes the joy in heaven for a sinner who repents, is, from the perspective of neuroscience, a narrative that describes a discharge of dopamine by the brain in the bloodstream. The man and the woman are rewarded for their effort to look for what had been lost; the father sees his waiting time rewarded and everyone celebrates the achievement with friendly people. Jesus preached to his listeners in such a captivating way that they always wanted to hear more. This experience for some who were listeners to Jesus led to a radical change in life. These listeners abandoned their safe life in favor of an itinerant life, becoming Jesus' first disciples and finding meaning in their lives.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Behavior assumed by the brain to save energy.

⁴⁷ *Angela Rinn*, *Die Kurze Form der Predigt*, Göttingen 2016, 82.

⁴⁸ Gen 11 :1–9 (Torre de Babel); Ex 16 (Reclamação dos israelitas no deserto. Deus envia codornizes e o maná) ilustram o aspecto da insaciabilidade do ser humano.

⁴⁹ Luke 15.

⁵⁰ *Rinn* (note 47), 83.

The role of humor in preaching has already been mentioned. We can understand why many preachers like to start their sermon or lecture with a humorous story. Humor captivates and fosters empathy with the preacher. Peter Lampe provides us with an example of how Jesus inserted the surprise factor and the use of humor in some of his parables. For example, in the parable of the yeast that a woman mixed with wheat, the immense amount of wheat used by the woman draws the attention of the listeners: around 176 lbs! If we consider that in Jesus' time families made their own bread, the amount of flour used must have been stunning. The second surprise stems from the fact that Jesus compared leaven and wheat with the action of the Kingdom of God in the world. Perhaps Jesus' listeners had never heard of such an association. Jesus's message certainly generated astonishment and laughter.⁵¹ Jesus has the ability, in a sentence, to fascinate his listeners through humorous narratives that move and surprise them. He tells the narratives in such a way as to arouse curiosity, the desire to hear and experience more, to learn.

In this way, preachers have the potential to cause dopamine release in the listener. By hearing preaching, large areas of the brain are activated. The listener creates mental images. If there is an element of surprise in the preaching, dopamine is released. The opposite also happens: when the preacher does not create expectations or when the preacher anticipates the resolution of the problem, dopamine is not poured on the listener. Would it be possible for preachers to avoid generalizations in preaching? As much as the expression "God loves you" has a profound theological and existential meaning, the phrase is likely to have little effect on listeners who have heard it for the nth time. Through the lens of neuroscience, even if a preacher has an excellent exegesis, it can be lost when the elements of surprise or expectation are not inserted into the communication of the message. At best, listeners of the preaching should receive the preacher with expectation, looking for preaching that involves them in many ways: spiritually, intellectually, corporeally, and ethically.⁵² Finally, we emphasize what we have already stated: the feeling of pleasure and reward results from the activation of dopaminergic neurons in the nucleus accumbens. But we still want to emphasize that in conditions of deprivation the release of dopamine is greater. That is, when people live in deprivation—in any sense—a small gesture, a simple action is capable of generating a discharge of dopamine. Christian preaching could consider the fact that for many people around the world, listening to preaching is not obvious. Because of totalitarian regimes, there is no religious freedom, and listening to a preacher becomes something to be looked forward to. This fact should lead Christians who live in an environment of religious freedom to evaluate the way they live their spirituality. With what expectations do they participate in the service, with

⁵¹ Peter Lampe, *Die Wirklichkeit als Bild*. Neukirchen-Vluyn 2006, 155 cited by: Rinn (note 47), 83.

⁵² Rinn (note 47), 84.

what expectations do they exercise the spiritual disciplines (prayer, Bible reading, communion, fasting, etc.).

5.2 A preaching of the mutuality

Neuroscience points to what the Christian tradition has long asserted: human beings acquire their identity from relationships. They are relational beings. From a theological perspective, human beings are created in the image and likeness of God and designated as *Gegenüber Gottes*.⁵³ Trinitarian communion is paradigmatic for Christian communion.⁵⁴ Human beings can only exist as interlocutors, they “atrophy” when isolated. Human beings depend on other human beings to develop; develop language, for example. This occurs because the brain develops its potential when stimulated from external impulses.

Therefore, in a strict sense, the brain does not develop; quite the opposite, it loses its potential if it is not stimulated. For example, any child who was born in a healthy way is able to learn any language spoken in the world as their native language. It all depends on the language she hears from her interlocutors. Cognitive and emotional potentialities develop from relationships, from mutuality.⁵⁵ “People learn what they are and who they are in the social and cultural communion to which they belong. This includes the religious context in which they grow up.”⁵⁶

A person’s social and relational identity can be developed through narratives, stories told in the social group to whom the listener of the preaching belongs. Through narratives, social competencies are mediated, such as the competence to put yourself in the place of other people. Another derivation in neuroscience for homiletics consists in the discovery that hearing narratives activates a vast network of neurons in the brain. A study conducted by medical researchers at the University of São Paulo (USP) researched the areas of the brain that are activated at the moment the respondent is confronted with narratives that refer to joy, irritation, sadness, anxiety, and fear. The researchers noted that the feeling of joy activated more areas in the prefrontal and subcortical regions than the other analyzed feelings. The researchers also found that the various feelings surveyed activated a variety of areas, demonstrating the concept of network and interdependence with which the brain works.⁵⁷

⁵³ Christina Aus der Au, *Körper Leib Seele Geist. Schlüsselbegriffe einer aktuellen Debatte*, Zürich 2008, 186–238.

⁵⁴ Ricardo Barbosa, *O caminho do coração: ensaios sobre a trindade e a espiritualidade crista*, Curitiba 1998.

⁵⁵ Marcus David Ziemann, *Relacionamentos interpessoais: a relevância da mutualidade bíblica para a edificação de uma comunidade cristã*, São Bento do Sul: FLT, 2009.

⁵⁶ Rinn (note 47), 87.

⁵⁷ Jorge Almeida et al., Engagement of multifocal neural circuits during recall of autobiographical happy events. *Brazilian journal of medical and biological research* = *Braz J Med Biol Res*, Ribeirão Preto, vol. 41, no. 12, 1076–1085, 2008.

Contextualizing dialogue between neuroscience and homiletics, it is relevant information for preaching that from the perspective of neuroscience listeners only survive as human beings in an environment of relationships. And, only from relationships are they able to develop competencies such as speech. Living in a community, in relationships, is not a matter of personal decision but a matter of survival. The theological premise is that the Christian is not able to live their faith in isolation, but in an interdependent and mutual way. That is, only as an interlocutor before God and his fellow human beings can the Christian find a full life – a fact also legitimized by neuroscience. How, then, can the listener of the preaching be encouraged to live in a context of communion? A significant contribution can be made by preaching narratively.

When Jesus told his parables his listeners learned something about their relationship with themselves, with their neighbors, and with God. When Jesus spoke in his narratives of joyful events (party, wedding, finding a lost coin, finding a lost sheep, finding a treasure in the field, or the precious pearl), the narratives evoked positive memories and many regions in the brain were activated in his listeners. And, very importantly, Jesus connected positive memories with the Kingdom of God! Finally, the principle of mutuality in preaching also raises a question for the preacher and their relationship with listeners. We will see more details about the person of the preacher in the next section.⁵⁸

5.3 An empathic preaching

Feelings and emotions, as a rule, make communication between people possible and favorable. But, feelings and emotions can also eventually harm communication. Feelings, so to speak, constitute a preparation of the organism to interact and communicate with the environment. A very important feeling for establishing contact and dialogue is the feeling of empathy. As seen earlier, empathy is made possible by the fact that in the brain there is a Mirror Neuron System, which allows someone to put themselves in the other's place, at the point of acting and feeling like the other. "We use cortical representations, which encode our own motor system, to simulate the action of another person in our brain and, in this way, in advance to understand the intention of the other: we reflect others in ourselves."⁵⁹ From a neuroscience perspective, the feeling of empathy is vital to relationships. It formats and consolidates relationships. However, empathy can be activated with different forms and intensities, and can even be blocked. A fundamental factor – perhaps the most important, related to the ability to demonstrate empathy is trust.

⁵⁸ Rinn (note 47), 89–91.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 92.

In adults, trust is a much more comprehensive factor, [than in children] in the sense of mediating criteria to assess whether a person is worthy of empathy and help. It is not enough to know personally. As some experiments show, the best chances of receiving help and empathy are those who belong to the same group: people from the same family, who have the same religion, the same values and share the same opinions; speak the same language, and belong to the same ethnic group. All of these factors help to establish a degree of reliability, to guarantee, that they will not be exploited. But if the person who needs help and empathy is someone strange, geographically distant, someone, who only knows himself through the media, it may even happen that the appeal causes an empathic reaction, but the impulse is weak and easy to suppress. A very effective method, used by adults to suppress impulses of empathy, is rationalization. For example, the person rationalizes and comes to the conclusion that the other person is to blame for his situation and therefore does not deserve help.⁶⁰

The feeling of empathy is blocked when trust is betrayed and the rules of the social group have not been observed. There will be no expression of empathy if someone goes through difficulties or has been punished for the fact that he supposedly broke the rules of the social contract. In this case, empathy can be expressed in its opposite: cruelty, evil, and violence.⁶¹

By focusing specifically on the listener of the preaching, empathy as a neuronal phenomenon can help the listener and the preacher to establish links. For the preacher, it is evident that preaching with a moralistic appeal is unlikely to motivate listeners in the right way to experience faith in love and service. And listeners of preaching have the opportunity to understand, from neuroscience impulses, why they are sometimes not as empathic as they would like to be. The decision for an action resulting from empathy is made in a fraction of a second and, depending on the values that the listener has, a lack of confidence or a rationalization can suppress the feeling of empathy and the action derived from it. Also in the context of religious tolerance, the discoveries of neuroscience can bring helpful impulses to the Christian community, which as a cohesive social group with feelings of belonging, can be led to evaluate its values and reflect upon the possibility of opening up to the other.⁶²

5.4 The listener in a context

About the brain, research indicates that its development occurs from two fronts. The first is biological, where genes occupy a prominent place. Early stages of development are strongly affected by genetic factors; for example, genes direct newly formed neurons to their correct

⁶⁰ *Doris Bischof-Köhler*, Empathie, Mitgefühl und Grausamkeit. Und wie sie zusammenhängen, in: *Psychotherapie* vol. 14 (2009), no. 1, 52–57, 56.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 56f.

⁶² *Rinn* (note 47), 95.

locations in the brain and play a role in how they interact.⁶³ However, despite the fact that genes organize the basic structure of the brain, they do not project the brain's development completely. Instead, genes allow the brain to adapt according to the impulses it receives from sensory systems. This is the second front involved in the development of the brain. The plasticity of the brain is amazing so that the environment acts on its formation. A child's senses report to the brain about his environment and experiences and stimulate neural activity. Speech sounds, for example, stimulate activity in brain regions related to language. If the number increases (more voices are heard), synapses between neurons in that area will be activated more frequently. And repeated use strengthens a synapse. Synapses that are rarely used remain weak and are more likely to be eliminated later. The strength of synapses contributes to the connectivity and efficiency of networks that support learning, memory, and other cognitive skills. Therefore, a child's experiences not only determine what information enters his brain but also influence how the brain processes information. In summary: genes provide a model for the brain, but the person's environment and experiences carry out their construction.⁶⁴

From this analysis, neuroscience offers clear implications for thinking about how one listens to preaching. The communication of the Gospel takes place when preaching is pronounced. However, we can be sure that preaching is not the only moment when the listener appropriates the Gospel. Preaching always occurs within a context. The environment in which preaching is delivered impacts and acts upon the listener, sometimes in order to favor and underline the uttered word and sometimes to create noise for the listener. From the perspective of neuroscience, context is as important for the communication of the Gospel as the preaching itself. The context of the preaching (liturgy) should observe three criteria: listeners need to understand, then connect, and finally develop the context of the preaching.⁶⁵ The whole context that involves the listener—the environment, songs, prayers, Bible readings, confessions of sin and faith, the Lord's supper, the blessing and sending, offerings, and the preaching itself—could be molded from the three mentioned criteria: does the listener understand symbolic communication? Does what is said in the context of the preaching connect with the listener? How can a preacher mold, prepare, and develop a context (or a frame) for preaching so that preaching's purpose is achieved?

⁶³ Michael Rutter, Nature, Nurture, and Development. From Evangelism through Science toward Policy and Practice, in: Child Development, vol. 73 (2002), no. 1, 1–21.

⁶⁴ Maturana and Varela provide an interesting example when describing an experiment done with a newborn lamb that is separated from its mother for a few hours and then returned to its mother. Apparently the lamb develops normally, but when observing its interaction with the other lambs, it is noticed that it does not play, it remains remote and lonely. Neuroscience is still unable to give a detailed answer, but it is certain that the environment influenced the development of its neuronal structure. In fact, during the first hours, mothers continuously lick the lambs all over the body. The deprivation of this maternal stimulus changed the lamb's behavior. Cf. Humberto Maturana/Francisco Varela, A árvore do conhecimento: as bases biológicas da compreensão humana, São Paulo 2001, 142–143.171–196.

⁶⁵ Klaus Douglass, Celebrando o amor de Deus, Curitiba 2000, 43.

5.5 The listener builds images

All information perceived by the sensory system is processed by the brain through electrical or chemical synapses. Synapses trigger motor or cognitive responses, for example. It is important to highlight the enormous synaptic potential that hearing is capable of generating in the brain, due to the fact that hearing enables the construction of mental images. Building mental images in the listener of preaching is a great challenge for homiletics. How could the preacher communicate the Gospel so that while the message is heard a network of neurons are activated, forming synapses from mental images? How does one communicate so that the listener experiences what they hear? How does one develop the theme of preaching so that the listener “sees with their ears”?

Preaching is best understood when the message content is combined with sensory impressions. The preacher connects with sensory perceptions of hearing, which in turn stimulate other areas of the brain, such as the limbic system, which is accessed and activated. Preaching can offer a path. Through preaching in narrative form, images are evoked in the mind of the listener. The images activate the synaptic system so that many areas of the brain are activated. If we compare the synaptic stimulus produced by a preacher in narrative form with a film, for example, narrative preaching has the advantage of producing much more neuronal activity than film. This is due to the fact that the narrative acoustically accesses the brain. The listener hears one part or scene after another, having to mentally create and construct the images, in order to form the plot. In film, the images come readily; the film does not encourage the creation and construction of mental images. Therefore, listening to a preaching narrative can be highly meaningful, captivating, and interesting. The construction of mental images is one of the reasons why many people prefer to read a book rather than watch the film adaptation.

5.6 Preaching that thrills the listeners

Without neglecting the rational and logical dimension of preaching, it is important that the emotions are considered by the preacher, because from the perspective of neuroscience the listeners of preaching will be especially attentive when their emotions are involved.⁶⁶ “The brain likes to be flattered; it is dependent and needy.”⁶⁷ Preaching could be mobilized to foster positive emotions—joy, enthusiasm, curiosity, gratification—and to ponder the need for language that evokes

⁶⁶ In this case, the limbic system, especially the amygdala and hippocampus, is activated in the brain. *Robson Marinho* points out that around 40% of listeners have an emotional profile, that is, they like and prefer to listen to sermons with a strong emotional appeal. Cf. *Robson Marinho*, *The art of preaching*, São Paulo 1999, 36.

⁶⁷ *Dorneles* (note 34).

feelings such as fear, apathy, and frustration.⁶⁸ We imagine preaching that is pleasant to hear and communicates worth-while perceptions to the listener.

Whoever preaches, triggers emotional states resulting from experiences, memories, context, and the environment in their listeners that permeate both the emotional state of the preacher and the listeners. The experiences of the preacher and the listeners of preaching have a remarkable influence upon intensity, meaning, and decision making. This human inter-relationship builds identity as new insights are acquired in relationships.⁶⁹ Formation of identity and the emotions make sense when the listeners of the preaching are children and adolescents. It is necessary for preachers to remember when faced with children and adolescents, that they are taking part in “the formation of subjects who are forming their prefrontal cortex, their identity, their learning, their memories, and the emotion that is triggered by one or the other can be a determining factor.”⁷⁰ The preacher’s interaction with the child audience generates emotions that “affect attention, the evocation of memories or even generate negative or positive memories for future evocations.”⁷¹ The relationship between preacher and listeners can be motivating, so the listener needs to accept the person of the preacher before accepting the message. The listener should not be afraid of the preacher but have a pleasant experience.

For an engagement of the listener, the first few minutes of preaching is the decisive moment. When the listener’s curiosity is aroused at the beginning of preaching, when their emotions are involved, the probability of the message being recorded is increased. Relevant in this context of memory is also repetition, emphasizing what you need and want to stand out.

6. Conclusion

Our attempt was to understand the possible impact of neuroscience on the homiletical task—on preaching. We tried to verify how neuroscience could help preaching, always having the listener as a transversal axis of our analysis. First, from the perspective of neuroscience the brain is activated through preaching that surprises the listener. A sense of surprise is generated when an expectation is created, when a feeling of reward is offered, or when the listener perceives mutuality. Second, because the brain functions as a system of mirror neurons, preaching that engages the principle of interdependence can enable the listener of preaching to grow in empathy and acts of mercy. Third, as neuroscience shows the ways that context shapes the development of the brain, so preaching

⁶⁸ *Cosenza/Guerra* (note 6), 84.

⁶⁹ *Dorneles* (note 34), 18.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

should be understood as that which occurs within symbolic contexts. Fourth, neuroscience details important insights for preaching about the hearing system, which provides the listener with the possibility of constructing mental images capable of recording themselves deeply in memory. Finally, neuroscientific reflection around the limbic system – the system of emotions – demonstrates the importance of positive emotions and feelings in preaching. These feelings enable memories to exercise their creative and transforming function in the listener. With these five observations, we hope that this article will encourage significant impulses within homiletical research while also inspiring preachers in their task of communicating the Gospel.

Klaus A. Stange, born 1967, Teacher in the field of Practical Theology, teaching themes of homiletics and missiology at the Lutheran Faculty of Theology in São Bento do Sul / SC, Brazil.
klaus.stange@flt.edu.br

Neurociência e Homilética em diálogo:

Perspectivas para a prédica

Klaus A. Stange

Abstract

“Uma coisa é certa, podem observar: quando se prega a respeito de algum tópico da justificação, o povo dorme na prédica, ou começa a tossir [...] mas quando se começa a contar histórias ou dar exemplos, aí o povo estica as duas orelhas, fica em silêncio e presta muita atenção”. [Lutero]

Poderia a neurociência nos ajudar a compreender o fenômeno que Lutero observou? O que a neurociência tem a dizer sobre o ouvinte da prédica? Como e quando ele ouve? O presente artigo pretende colocar a neurociência em diálogo com a homilética; compreender processos neurológicos associados à audição, passando pelo sistema das emoções para resultar em um processo cognitivo – com suas sinapses e memória. Impulsos da neurociência são relacionados à prédica, com destaque à prédica em forma narrativa.

1. Introdução

A história moderna da neurociência ainda está sendo escrita.¹ A neurociência possui uma longa tradição quando se focaliza seu objeto.² No entanto, enquanto ciência com status próprio, ela é recente.³ Seu campo de atuação é amplo, contribuindo com várias áreas do saber, como a biologia e medicina (contribuições na área do mapeamento das atividades cerebrais, estudos sobre a regeneração do cérebro lesionado, a atuação de drogas sobre os neurônios etc),⁴ psicologia (contribuições na área do comportamento humano),⁵ educação (estudos que ajudam a

¹ Geralmente se fala de neurociências (plural), sinalizando que a mesma não é unívoca, mas dialoga com outras áreas do saber e nelas se integra.

² Robert-Benjamin Illing, *Geschichte der Hirnforschung*. Lexikon der Neurowissenschaft. Heidelberg 2000.

³ A última década do século passado (1990–1999) foi declarada como a década do cérebro pelo presidente *George W. Bush*.

⁴ Como exemplo, mencionamos os estudos empreendidos para compreender a atuação das drogas sobre o cérebro. *Kamila Fernandes Ferreira/Sablino Carreiro Ribeiro/Luiz Gonzalo Gomes Barreto*. O prazer do crack. Dourados: Universidade Federal da Grande Dourados UFGD, Anais do 3º Simpósio Internacional de Neurociências da Grande Dourados, vol. 1, 2012.

⁵ Exemplo emblemático é o caso de *Phineas Gage*, operário americano que em 1848 trabalhava na construção de uma estrada de ferro. Ao colocar a pólvora numa fenda na rocha, o atrito da barra de ferro com a rocha provocou uma faísca, fazendo a pólvora explodir. A barra de ferro entrou pela bochecha esquerda, destruiu seu olho e saiu pela parte frontal do crânio. A despeito do grave acidente, Phineas sobreviveu e recuperou-se relativamente rápido, para o espanto

compreender como o cérebro aprende),⁶ Filosofia/Teologia (reexaminando a identidade do ser humano, como se forma a consciência, a fé etc)⁷ e, recentemente, o marketing e a inteligência artificial.⁸

No âmbito da neurociência concorrem duas visões distintas de abordagem metodológica, sendo a primeira aquela que procura encontrar e associar a cada ação ou comportamento humano um neurônio específico. Nesse caso há um reducionismo do ser humano a fenômenos eletroquímicos no cérebro. A segunda visão percebe o sistema nervoso muito mais em sua dimensão holística. O objetivo, nesse caso, não seria primeiramente perguntar pelo “por que”, mas perguntar pelo “como”. Ambas as visões não são excludentes.⁹

A despeito da abrangência de abordagens que as neurociências possibilitam, nesse artigo iremos nos concentrar na neurociência de sistemas e na neurociência cognitiva, haja vista nosso interesse em relacionar a neurociência com a ciência homilética. Entendemos que a neurociência pode fecundar a prédica, especificamente o processo do ouvir de uma prédica. Por exemplo, quando um ouvinte participa de um culto e ouve uma prédica, este é envolvido em sua integralidade, ou seja, no aspecto da sua corporalidade¹⁰ na qual a menção de uma simples palavra traz a memória um cheiro; uma frase pode ser associada a experiências na qual uma narrativa pode mediar

de todos. Entretanto, depois de alguns meses, foi observada uma mudança radical na personalidade de Phineas: ele passou a agir de forma grosseira, desrespeitosa, sem medir as consequências. O caso de Gage foi considerado como uma das primeiras evidências científicas a indicar que lesões nos lóbulos frontais do cérebro, podem alterar a personalidade, as emoções e a interação social de uma pessoa. Cf. *Pérides Maranhão-Filho*, Mr. Phineas Gage e o acidente que deu novo rumo à neurologia. *Revista Brasileira de Neurologia*. Rio de Janeiro: UFRJ, vol. 50 (2014), no. 2, 33–35.

⁶ *Ramon M. Cosenza/Leonor B. Guerra*, Neurociência e educação: como o cérebro aprende. Porto Alegre 2011. *Fernanda Antoniolio Hammes de Carvalho*, Neurociências e educação: uma articulação necessária na formação docente. Rio de Janeiro, vol. 8 (2011), no. 3, 537–550. *Gilson Lima*, Redescoberta da mente na educação: a expansão do aprender e a conquista do conhecimento complexo. *Educação & Sociedade*. Campinas: UNICAMP, vol. 30 (2009), no. 106, 151–174. *Marta Pinheiro*, Aspectos históricos da neuropsicologia: subsídios para a formação de educadores, *Revista Educar*, Curitiba: UFPR, no. 25 (2005), 175–196.

⁷ *Edenio Valle*, Neurociências e religião: interfaces. *Revista de Estudos da Religião*. São Paulo: PUC, no. 3 (2001), 1–46. *Ulrich Eibach*, Gott im Gehirn? Ich – eine Illusion? *Neurobiologie, religiöses Erleben und Menschenbild aus christlicher Sicht*, Wuppertal 2006. *José Manuel Giménez-Amaya*, ¿Dios en el cerebro? La experiencia religiosa desde la neurociencia, in: *Scripta Theologica*, vol. 42, 2010. *Rhawn Joseph* (ed.), *Neurotheology. Brain, science, spirituality and religious experience*. California 2002. *Raul Marino, Jr.*, A religião do cérebro: as novas descobertas da neurociência a respeito da fé humana, São Paulo 2005. *Gerson J. Pessoa Fischer*, fenômeno espontâneo ou neural? Uma crítica ao dualismo cartesiano na teologia., in: *Reforma e Educação Anais do 1º Simpósio Internacional de Lutero*. São Bento do Sul: União Cristã / FLT, 2012. *Juan José Sanguinetti*, El desafío antropológico de las neurociencias. *Rivista di scienze dell'educazione*. Roma: Pontificia Facoltà di Scienze dell'Educazione “Auxilium”, vol. 53 (2015), no. 3.

⁸ *Gerhard Raab/Oliver Gernsheimer/Maik Schindler*, Neuromarketing. Grundlagen Erkenntnisse Anwendungen, Wiesbaden 2009. *Jochen Thinius/Jan Untiedt*, Events – Erlebnismarketing für alle Sinne: Mit neuronaler Markenkommunikation Lebensstile inszenieren, Wiesbaden 2013. *David Scheffer*, Neuro Sales: Mehr Verkaufserfolg durch Hirnforschung?, in: *Lars Binckebanck* (ed.), *Verkaufen nach der Krise*, Wiesbaden 2011.

⁹ *Howard Gardner*, Inteligência: um conceito reformulado. Rio de Janeiro 2000. *Tárik de Athayde Prata*, O que há de reducionismo no naturalismo biológico de Searle? *Revista de Filosofia Aurora*. Curitiba: PUCPR, vol. 27 (2015), no. 42, 875–894.

¹⁰ Ainda persiste no ocidente e entre boa parte das igrejas evangélicas brasileiras de matriz histórica uma excessiva percepção do ouvinte da prédica que valoriza, unilateralmente, o aspecto cognitivo, racional, mental do ouvinte.

profundo consolo e amparo; ouvir a bênção pode, concretamente, erguer o ouvinte. Assim, nos interessa entender como as pessoas ouvem e percebem a prédica, como as impressões sensoriais, narrativas ou o bom humor desencadeiam toda uma rede de atividades neuronais e sinapses. Portanto, qualquer pregador ou pregadora fará bem em atentar para as perspectivas que as neurociências abrem para o processo de comunicação do Evangelho.

2. Como o ouvinte da prédica recepciona uma mensagem pelo sistema sensorial?

A prédica alcança uma pessoa pelos sentidos. O sistema sensorial humano funciona de forma hierarquizada. Primeiro, o encéfalo tende a considerar como verdadeira, as informações que chegam pelo sentido da visão. O sistema visual é dominante entre os sistemas sensoriais. Os demais sentidos passam a assumir uma função de confirmar as informações mediadas pelo sistema óptico. Apenas quando o sistema sensorial óptico não é suficientemente preciso, o sistema auditivo (e demais sentidos) são acionados.

Dos cinco sistemas sensoriais humanos, o funcionamento do sistema auditivo é consideravelmente o mais simples de todos: a onda sonora - na forma de pressão de ar, alcança o tímpano e faz com que ele vibre. A vibração do tímpano é ampliada pelos ossículos que funcionam como um pistão que empurra e puxa a membrana que se encontra sobre a janela oval. O movimento da membrana da janela oval move o fluído que se encontra no interior da cóclea, atuando sobre a membrana basilar, fazendo com que as células ciliadas se movimentem de um lado para o outro e, dependendo do movimento das células, gera-se uma reação química interpretada pelos neurônios e comunicada ao encéfalo. Esse processo de comunicação neuronal denominamos de transmissão sináptica.¹¹

Via de regra, a transmissão sináptica no sistema nervoso de um ser humano adulto se dá através de um processo químico, bastante complexo.¹² Basicamente, o ciclo de uma sinapse consiste em: a) neurotransmissores presentes nas vesículas sinápticas, b) um estímulo que cause o derramamento dos neurotransmissores na fenda sináptica, c) um neurônio pós-sináptico, capaz de receber o neurotransmissor e produzir uma resposta elétrica ou química adequada e d) um mecanismo para

¹¹ Mark F. Bear/Barry W. Connors/Michael A. Paradiso, *Neurociências – Desvendando o sistema nervoso*, Porto Alegre 2008, 347.

¹² Além das sinapses químicas, existem também sinapses elétricas, ou seja, a comunicação de um neurônio para o outro se dá através de uma corrente elétrica; cf. *ibid.* 104.

remover o neurotransmissor da fenda sináptica para “zerar” o ciclo. Todo esse ciclo deve ocorrer muito rapidamente.¹³

De forma simples, dependendo da sua função, podemos classificar os neurotransmissores em “excitatórios” e “inibidores”. Dentre as dezenas de neurotransmissores descobertos até o momento, destacamos alguns já consolidados na pesquisa acadêmica.¹⁴

1. Acetilcolina (ACh): A acetilcolina foi o primeiro neurotransmissor descoberto. Esse neurotransmissor é associado às contrações e aos movimentos dos músculos. No entanto, a acetilcolina também atua como neurotransmissor responsável pelo aprendizado e pela memória. A acetilcolina é liberada durante o período de sono profundo.¹⁵
2. Serotonina (5HT). Atribui-se à serotonina a atuação sobre o sistema cardiovascular e, num segundo plano, também sobre o sistema respiratório. A serotonina é responsável por regular o sono (especialmente a latência do sono, o tempo que se leva para adormecer), o humor (inclusive, comportamento agressivo), o apetite, a libido, inibidora de conduta (nível reduzido de serotonina no encéfalo tem sido associado ao suicídio), regula a sensibilidade à dor e faz o controle térmico do corpo.¹⁶
3. Dopamina (DA). A dopamina é responsável pelas sensações de prazer, da satisfação e da motivação. Os neurônios que produzem e liberam a dopamina são responsáveis pela regulação do movimento, regulam e controlam o comportamento emocional e atuam em funções associadas à memória, à emoção, à ansiedade, ao planejamento.¹⁷
4. Noradrenalina (NA). A noradrenalina é relacionada a excitação física e/ou mental, sendo também associado ao bom humor. A liberação de noradrenalina facilita a atenção e o estado de alerta durante o dia. Inversamente, durante as horas de sono, os níveis de noradrenalina se encontram reduzidos.¹⁸
5. Adrenalina. A adrenalina é um neurotransmissor que estimula os músculos a reagirem a situações de estresse. A adrenalina interfere nos batimentos cardíacos, na dilatação dos

¹³ Ibid., 104–109.

¹⁴ Bryan Kolb/Ian Whishaw, *Neuropsicologia humana*, Buenos Aires 52006, 106.

¹⁵ Simone Bittencourt, *Neuromoduladores e neurotransmissores*. Disponível em: http://www.neurofisiologia.unifesp.br/neuromoduladores_nocaogeral_simonebittencourt.pdf. Acesso em: 09 nov. 2018.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

brônquios e pupilas, na liberação do suor, etc – como uma resposta a algum estímulo de ameaça.¹⁹

6. Ácido Gama Amino Butírico (GABA). É o principal neurotransmissor inibitório das sinapses do encéfalo.²⁰
7. Glutamato (Glu) e Aspartato (Asp). Glutamato e Aspartato são os principais neurotransmissores excitatórios do Sistema Nervoso Central. A atuação do glutamato é fundamental no processo da memória.²¹
8. Neuropeptídios. Existe uma grande variedade de neurotransmissores peptídios. Os peptídios são liberados em menor quantidade e geralmente em conjunto com outros neurotransmissores, visando modular ou influenciar uma neurotransmissão clássica. Neuropeptídeos, por exemplo, atuam sobre a inibição da dor ou, geram sentimentos de euforia e felicidade.²²

Através das sinapses produzidas a partir de impulsos do sistema auditivo, é possível distinguir os objetos ou fenômenos muitas vezes não identificados através dos demais sentidos. Pela audição conseguimos distinguir a voz de uma pessoa amiga, por exemplo. A audição também nos permite adquirir uma linguagem. Ela é fundamental para nossa comunicação.²³ Não só isso: além da audição desempenhar funções utilitárias de comunicação e sobrevivência, a mesma tem evoluído no sentido de nos habilitar a explorar as sensações e as emoções produzidas pelo som.²⁴

3. Como o ouvinte da prédica processa uma mensagem através do sistema límbico?

A comunicação de uma mensagem é percebida pelos sistemas sensoriais. Mas, antes de da mensagem ser consolidada e memorizada, ela é processada pelo sistema límbico - o circuito das emoções. Numa linguagem figurada, o processamento de uma mensagem corresponde a uma função de filtro. É como se o sistema límbico filtrasse todas as informações recebidas do mundo externo e “embrulhasse” as informações com sentimentos.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ *Bear/Connors/Paradiso* (note 11), 344–347.

²⁴ Por exemplo, músicos exploram o som para emocionar e gerar sensações. Cf. *Johannes Block*, Die Predigt als Hör-Ereignis. Zur Erfahrung von Musik als hermeneutische Schule der Homiletik, in: *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 107 (2010), 532–549.

Muitos estudos têm sido realizados no sentido de entender e compreender a relação entre uma percepção sensorial, a emoção e a subsequente ação. Os estudiosos situam no sistema límbico - o circuito neuronal relacionado às emoções, sentimentos como a alegria e a tristeza,²⁵ a raiva,²⁶ o estresse ou reações de luta-fuga,²⁷ a empatia,²⁸ o prazer e a recompensa,²⁹ ou o medo.³⁰ Muitas respostas do corpo são, na realidade, respostas autônomas; outras, cognitivas.³¹

Provavelmente a ciência será capaz, cada vez mais, de entender e explicar os aspectos biológicos associados à emoção. Mas é muito improvável que consiga definir o que é emoção. Parece que esta permanecerá sendo uma questão fundamentalmente filosófica.

A despeito da validade de a neurociência buscar correlatos físico-biológicos responsáveis pelos sentimentos e emoções, concordamos com Bear, Connors e Paradiso quando estes afirmam a plasticidade e o caráter de rede do encéfalo, de modo que as várias partes do encéfalo se influenciam mutuamente. Portanto, preferimos falar de um sistema das emoções ao invés de um sistema límbico. Preconizar o sistema das emoções em forma de rede sugere que no encéfalo não há componentes morfofuncionalmente regulatórios, ou seja, todos os elementos envolvidos exercem funções regulatórias semelhantes entre si. Sistemas, na realidade, dependem da integração de seus componentes de uma forma complexa, não hierárquica. No sistema das emoções, portanto, ainda que se tenha uma definição clara e precisa dos circuitos neuronais que o compõe, pode-se

²⁵ Alegria e tristeza envolvem neurônios dopaminérgicos.

²⁶ Raiva envolve a amígdala e regiões do hipotálamo. Cf. Bear/Connors/Paradiso (note 11), 577.

²⁷ Quando um ambiente é percebido como “seguro”, o corpo aciona mecanismos inibitórios sobre as estruturas que controlam o comportamento de luta-fuga. E, quando o ambiente é percebido como ameaçador, a amígdala se encarrega de desencadear os estímulos excitatórios sobre o sistema nervoso autônomo, a fim de gerar uma reação de proteção, Cf. Joachim Bauer, Das Gedächtnis des Körpers. Wie Beziehungen und Lebensstile unsere Gene steuern, Frankfurt am Main 2015, 24ff.

²⁸ Na década de 1990, um grupo de neurobiólogos italianos descobriram, ao acaso, o que hoje denominamos de neurônio espelho. Os neurônios-espelho desempenham uma função crucial no âmbito do comportamento humano. Eles permitem que uma pessoa imite outra, independentemente da memória, muitas vezes de forma inconsciente. Eles também permitem o reconhecimento da intenção de uma ação, seu significado social, inclusive, que se interprete aspectos de uma comunicação não verbal. Cf. Marcia Alves Tassinari/Wagner Teixeira Durange, Experiência Empática: da neurociência à espiritualidade. *Revista da Abordagem Gestáltica: Phenomenological Studies*, vol. 20, no. 1, 53–60, 2014. Giacomo Rizzolatti/Laila Craighero, The mirror-neuron system. *Annual Review of Neuroscience*, v. 27, 169–192, 2004.

²⁹ A dopamina, enquanto neurotransmissor, parece assumir uma função fundamental na mediação do sentimento de prazer e recompensa. Cf. Manfred Spitzer, Schule der Zukunft – Hirnforscher Vortrag in Feldbach. Disponível em: <https://youtu.be/NR-KPZEL3Aw>. Acesso em: 01 jun 2017.

³⁰ Provavelmente pela necessidade de sobrevivência, o encéfalo desenvolveu a capacidade de gravar e memorizar com maior velocidade e com maior intensidade, experiências negativas. A amígdala e o hipotálamo são as regiões do encéfalo onde se produzem as sensações de medo e raiva. Cf. Bear/Connors/Paradiso (note 11), 573ff.

³¹ V. Anderson Esperidiao-Antonio et al. Neurobiology of the emotions. *Rev. psiquiatr. clín.*, São Paulo, vol. 35, no. 2, 2008, 56.

considerar que, em última análise, ele funciona em rede, de forma integrada.³² Inclusive, o meio ambiente é responsável por desenvolvimentos distintos das emoções no encéfalo.³³

4. Como o ouvinte da prédica consolida uma mensagem pelo sistema cognitivo?

Uma mensagem que foi percebida pelo sistema sensorial e processada e “embrulhada” pelo sistema das emoções, está apta para ser consolidada e gravada no encéfalo como uma memória e como um aprendizado.³⁴ Para que aconteça o aprendizado, é necessário o desenvolvimento de competências. A aquisição de competências é fundamental para que informações novas e informações que já estão gravadas na memória, sejam colocadas em diálogo e propiciem novas sinapses, associações e aprendizado.³⁵ Quando no cérebro se estabelece uma ligação entre uma nova informação e informações preexistentes na memória, são liberadas pelo encéfalo substâncias neurotransmissoras como a acetilcolina e a dopamina, que aumentam a concentração e geram sensações de prazer e satisfação.³⁶ Um dos maiores equívocos que povoam o imaginário popular, é a ideia de que hoje não é mais preciso se dedicar a aprender algo. Toda informação de que se necessita está disponível na internet. Mas é uma ilusão achar que o cérebro consolida aprendizados pelo paradigma “just in time”,³⁷ achar que toda informação está nas nuvens e, quando necessária, é acessada. Na internet não há conhecimento, apenas informação. Conhecimento só há no cérebro e ele é dependente de conexões e sinapses. O cérebro não faz *download*. Somente quando o cérebro é exercitado, ele cria novas sinapses. Quando o cérebro não é estimulado, ele poupa energia. A rotina serve exatamente para poupar energia.³⁸

Nesse sentido, as emoções estão diretamente envolvidas no processo de consolidação de uma mensagem. A depender do tipo de emoção que a interação com o meio ambiente provoca e a diversidade de estímulos que o ouvinte da prédica recebe, as emoções podem favorecer o processo de comunicação ou, então, bloqueá-lo.³⁹ Como dito, emoções afetam o consolidar de uma mensagem, afetam o aprendizado, tanto de forma a favorecê-la, quanto prejudicá-la. A ansiedade

³² Ramon Cosenza, Fundamentos de neuroanatomia, Rio de Janeiro 42013.

³³ Bear/Connors/Paradiso (note 11) 571.

³⁴ Tatiana M. Dorneles, As bases neuropsicológicas da emoção. Um diálogo acerca da aprendizagem. Licenciatura. Ivoti, vol. 2, no. 2, 14–21, 2014.

³⁵ Spitzer (note 29).

³⁶ Dorneles (note 34), 18.

³⁷ “Just in time” é uma filosofia administrativa derivada da indústria automobilística (Toyota) na qual a produção deve ser realizada na quantidade certa e no tempo certo. Na linha de montagem de um produto, todos os insumos são alcançados no momento exato em que se tornam necessários, evitando aglomeração de estoques e matéria-prima desnecessários. Cf. Jeffrey K. Liker, O modelo Toyota: 14 princípios de gestão do maior fabricante do mundo, Porto Alegre 2005.

³⁸ Spitzer (note 29).

³⁹ Dorneles (note 34), 14–21.

e o stress prolongado, por exemplo, possuem um efeito devastador sobre o aprendizado. Sob efeito de stress prolongado, “os hormônios glicocorticoides secretados pela suprarrenal atuam nos neurônios do hipocampo [área da memória], chegando a destruí-los”.⁴⁰

Considerando ainda o processo de consolidação de uma mensagem, *Gerhard Roth*⁴¹ demonstrou que o Ser Humano adulto não é capaz de assimilar um novo aprendizado, de forma concentrada, por mais do que 5 minutos. Depois desse tempo, as informações precisam ser consolidadas no cérebro (gravadas), caso contrário, novas informações simplesmente substituem as primeiras, sendo estas esquecidas. E a maneira privilegiada de o encéfalo consolidar, “gravar” informações, é através de emoções. O cérebro consolida uma mensagem quando o aprendizado está relacionado a emoções. Infelizmente, informações associadas a emoções negativas são gravadas com muito mais rapidez do que informações com emoções positivas.⁴²

Finalmente, no que diz respeito à consolidação de uma mensagem pelo encéfalo, precisamos destacar que essa consolidação não acontece como um processo bioquímico mecânico. Pelo contrário, uma mensagem se consolida de diferentes formas a depender do contexto a partir do qual ela é comunicada. Toda pré-dica pressupõem contextos. Nesses contextos se inserem emoções e relacionamentos. Emoções e relacionamentos fazem parte da vida, desde o momento do nascimento até o final do ciclo de vida. Durante todo esse período, o sujeito é constituído e constitui outros sujeitos. O Ser Humano depende e necessita relacionar-se. Sem um relacionamento com o outro, ele define e morre. Nesse sentido, o cérebro humano não se desenvolve, mas define quando não há relacionamentos. Pesquisas neurológicas demonstram que o próprio cérebro funciona na forma de uma rede. Nada funciona isolado, de forma independente. Os neurônios estão todos relacionados. As potencialidades cognitivas e emocionais do Ser Humano se desenvolvem no relacionamento com o outro. Apenas nas relações o Ser Humano desenvolve uma identidade.

Portanto, quanto mais intensa a atividade neuronal, maior a probabilidade de surgirem novas conexões neuronais e sinapses. Na perspectiva da neurociência, o alvo de uma pré-dica deveria ser o de estimular atividade neuronal, estimular a criação de sinapses, porque dessa forma a mensagem é melhor consolidada. Por isso a importância de se criar imagens mentais.⁴³ As imagens se

⁴⁰ *Cosenza/Guerra* (note 6), 84; *Bauer* (note 27), 24–34.

⁴¹ Cf. *Gerhard Roth*, *Wie einzigartig ist der Mensch? Die lange Evolution der Gehirne und des Geistes*, Heidelberg 2010.

⁴² *Antônio Damasio*, *O erro de Descartes. Emoção, razão e o cérebro humano*, São Paulo 1996.

⁴³ *Júlio César Adam*, *Um Deus com o rosto do Brasil: um estudo exploratório sobre a relação entre imagens e imaginários de Deus na cultura e na pregação evangélico-luterana*. Horizonte. Belo Horizonte: PUC Minas, vol. 14, no. 44, 2016.

constituem no cérebro a partir dos sentidos. É interessante anotar que os sentidos não funcionam de forma isolada no cérebro. Pelo contrário, cada sentido deriva parte de suas informações dos demais sentidos. Por exemplo, a audição deriva em torno de 25% das informações da região dos demais sentidos. Uma boa notícia é que, na perspectiva da neurociência, uma boa prédica é capaz de gerar muito mais atividade neuronal (quando o cérebro produz imagens) do que um filme, por exemplo, onde as imagens são abundantes mas já vem prontas - não precisam ser construídas. Na boa prédica, o ouvinte é capaz de “ver com os ouvidos.”⁴⁴

Resumindo: Procuramos descrever o processo do ouvir na perspectiva da neurociência. Relevante para o escopo de nosso artigo é o fato de o processo do ouvir não residir exclusivamente em propriedades biológicas mas, tão importante quanto estas, é o Sistema Límbico, o Sistema das Emoções. Toda informação captada pelo Sistema Sensorial, passa pelo Sistema das Emoções que funciona como uma espécie de filtro e vai dar um sentido, um significado para a informação, possibilitando a memória e o aprendizado, ou seja, a consolidação da mensagem. Da mesma forma, se perguntamos pelo ouvinte da prédica e como ele ouve, a resposta está diretamente associada às sinapses. Ouvir com qualidade pressupõem a consolidação de sinapses. E quando no encéfalo sinapses são consolidadas, o encéfalo produz a memória. Só a partir da memória é possível o aprendizado, o crescimento cognitivo. Na última parte desse artigo, queremos derivar implicações da neurociência para a homilética.

5. Ouvir uma prédica fecundada pela neurociência

Como a neurociência pode fecundar a prédica, especificamente o processo do ouvir de uma prédica?

5.1 Uma prédica que surpreenda os ouvintes

Um dos grandes impulsos para colocar o ser humano em movimento é o sentimento de recompensa, o sentimento de que o esforço valeu a pena. Em todo empreendimento humano é necessário encontrar um equilíbrio entre o risco a ser corrido e a segurança da própria vida. Nesse momento, o encéfalo despeja grande quantidade de dopamina na corrente sanguínea. Não houvesse esse sentimento de satisfação, de recompensa, provavelmente o ser humano não se disporia a agir, e não assumiria correr riscos. Para além de satisfazer as suas necessidades básicas, o ser humano é capaz de almejar recompensas mais “elevadas”. Assim, por exemplo, o ser humano busca no dinheiro, no poder, na beleza do corpo, na vitória de seu time de futebol, na arte, num

⁴⁴ *Walther von La Roche/Axel Buchholz*, Radio-Journalismus. Ein Handbuch für die Ausbildung und Praxis im Hörfunk, Berlin 2009.

ambiente aconchegante, e – se fizermos uma relação com o culto, numa prédica cativante, uma forma de recompensa. O ser humano é capaz de categorizar tudo num esquema de recompensas, inclusive uma prédica. Uma prédica pode desencadear sentimentos de recompensa, de prazer. O mesmo acontece quando, ouvir uma prédica, gera alegria.⁴⁵ Uma prédica consegue gerar o sentimento de gratificação quando a mesma surpreende, conecta o texto com a vida, de uma forma que não diga apenas o óbvio, mas surpreenda. Como vimos anteriormente, apenas aquilo que o encéfalo categoriza como relevante para a vida, é ativado pelo consciente do encéfalo, avaliado pela sua carga emocional para então, transformar-se em uma sinapse e memória de longo tempo. Portanto, por um lado, o ouvinte da prédica é curioso. Por outro lado, ele facilmente se acomoda quando algo soa de forma entediante. Nesse caso, ele tende ao ritual, à repetição e à rotina.⁴⁶

Se considerarmos que através de uma prédica desejamos alcançar o ouvinte com uma mensagem, e almejamos que a mensagem seja gravada, consolidada na vida do ouvinte, a dopamina desempenha um papel relevante. Quando a dopamina é bloqueada no encéfalo, o aprendizado fica prejudicado. Portanto, quando um ouvinte é subcarregado ou sobrecarregado com exigências, ele não aprende adequadamente, uma vez que não foram gerados sentimentos de recompensa ou os mesmos foram suprimidos. Como vimos, quando o encéfalo “fica com a impressão” que o esforço despendido para aprender não vale a pena, ele simplesmente não faz nada. Mas quando o encéfalo “se encanta” e a comunicação da mensagem na prédica é envolvida com uma carga emocional, a dopamina é descarregada na corrente sanguínea e o aprendizado pode ser mais efetivo. Neurônios dopaminérgicos são estimulados quando a sensação de recompensa é “melhor do que o esperado”. Esse comportamento dos neurônios poderia explicar porque o ser humano sempre busca por mais e intensas sensações de recompensa e não se satisfaz com aquilo que possui.⁴⁷

Pensando no ouvinte da prédica, poder-se-ia derivar a relevância de um diálogo da neurociência com a teologia: Ambas conhecem o sentimento inerente ao ser humano que busca sempre por experiências mais intensas de prazer e recompensa e parece nunca estar satisfeito.⁴⁸ Uma vez que apenas experiências “melhores do que o esperado” são capazes de gerar a descarga dopaminérgica, nos parece que de pouco adiantam prédicas com um apelo moralista à razão do ouvinte.

⁴⁵ Nesse contexto pode-se entender porque pregadores que fazem uso do humor nas suas prédicas, facilmente cativam ou ouvintes. Fato é que, na perspectiva da neurociência, o humor ativa várias regiões no encéfalo. O ouvinte da prédica vai rir e se alegrar, criando uma simpatia para com a pregadora e o pregador e, simultaneamente, confiança para aquilo que ele diz. No nosso entendimento, um pregador brasileiro que se utiliza extensamente do humor em suas prédicas e palestras é o P. Cláudio Duarte, facilmente acessível em muitos *links* no youtube.

⁴⁶ Comportamento assumido pelo encéfalo para poupar energia.

⁴⁷ *Angela Rimm*, *Die Kurze Form der Predigt*, Göttingen 2016, 82.

⁴⁸ Gen 11:1–9 (Torre de Babel) e Ex 16 (Reclamação dos israelitas no deserto. Deus envia codornizes e o maná) ilustram o aspecto da insaciabilidade do ser humano.

Jesus contou a parábola da moeda perdida e da ovelha perdida e dos filhos “perdidos”.⁴⁹ São narrativas que retratam a alegria de se encontrar algo que se perdeu: a ovelha do pastor, a moeda da mulher, o filho que volta para casa. Essa alegria indescritível, que simultaneamente descreve a alegria no céu por um pecador que se arrepende é, sob a perspectiva da neurociência, uma narrativa que descreve uma descarga de dopamina pelo encéfalo na corrente sanguínea. O homem e a mulher são recompensados pelo seu esforço de procurar o que havia se perdido; o pai vê o seu tempo de espera recompensado e todos celebram o feito com pessoas amigas. Jesus pregava aos seus ouvintes de forma tão cativante, que estes queriam ouvir sempre mais. Esta experiência, para alguns que foram ouvintes de Jesus, conduziu a uma radical mudança de vida. Estes ouvintes abandonaram a sua vida segura em prol de uma vida itinerante, tornando-se os primeiros discípulos de Jesus e encontrando um sentido para suas vidas.⁵⁰

Já foi mencionado anteriormente o papel do humor na prédica. Podemos compreender porque muitos pregadores gostam de iniciar a sua prédica ou a sua palestra com uma história de humor. O humor cativa e favorece a empatia com a pregadora e o pregador. Peter Lampe nos fornece um exemplo de como Jesus inseriu em algumas das suas parábolas o fator surpresa e o humor. Por exemplo, na parábola do fermento que uma mulher misturou ao trigo, chama a atenção dos ouvintes a imensa quantidade de trigo utilizada pela mulher: em torno de 80 kg! Se considerarmos que no tempo de Jesus as famílias faziam seu próprio pão, a quantidade de farinha utilizada deve ter evocado no mínimo, espanto. A segunda surpresa deriva do fato de Jesus comparar o fermento e o trigo com o agir do Reino de Deus no mundo. Provavelmente nunca os ouvintes de Jesus tinham ouvido semelhante associação. A mensagem de Jesus certamente gerou espanto e risos.⁵¹ Jesus tem a capacidade de, em uma frase, fascinar os seus ouvintes através de narrativas bem-humoradas, que emocionam e os surpreendem. Ele conta as narrativas de tal modo a despertar a curiosidade, o desejo de ouvir e experimentar mais, de aprender.

Assim, prédicas possuem o potencial de provocar a liberação de dopamina no ouvinte. Ao ouvir uma prédica, grandes áreas do encéfalo são ativadas. O ouvinte cria imagens mentais. Se na prédica há um elemento surpresa, acontece o despejo da dopamina. Também o contrário acontece: quando a prédica não cria expectativas ou quando a pregadora e o pregador antecipa a resolução do problema, a dopamina não é despejada no ouvinte. Seria possível que pregadores evitem generalizações na prédica? Por mais que a expressão “Deus te ama” tenha um profundo sentido

⁴⁹ Lc 15.

⁵⁰ Rinn (note 47), 83.

⁵¹ Peter Lampe, *Die Wirklichkeit als Bild*. Neukirchen-Vluyn 2006, 155 cited by: Rinn (note 47), 83.

teológico e existencial, a frase provavelmente terá pouco efeito sobre ouvintes que já ouviram a mesma pela enésima vez. Sob o viés da neurociência, mesmo que uma prédica tenha uma excelente exegese como pressuposto, esta pode se perder quando os elementos da surpresa ou da expectativa não forem inseridos na comunicação da mensagem. De forma ideal, o ouvinte da prédica deveria receber a pregadora e o pregador com expectativa, uma prédica que o envolva de muitas maneiras: espiritualmente, intelectualmente, vivamente e eticamente.⁵² Finalmente, sublinhamos o que já afirmamos anteriormente: o sentimento de prazer e recompensa resulta da ativação de neurônios dopaminérgicos no núcleo accumbens. Mas ainda quer-se destacar que, em condições de privação, a liberação de dopamina é maior, ou seja, quando pessoas vivem em privação – em todos os sentidos, um pequeno gesto, uma singela ação é capaz de gerar uma descarga de dopamina. A pregação cristã poderia considerar o fato de que, para muitas pessoas mundo afora, ouvir uma prédica não é algo óbvio. Por conta de regimes totalitários, não há liberdade religiosa e ouvir uma prédica se torna algo que se aguarda com grande expectativa. Esse fato deveria levar os cristãos, que vivem em ambiente de liberdade religiosa, a avaliarem a forma como vivem a sua espiritualidade. Com que expectativas participam do culto, com que expectativas exercitam as disciplinas espirituais (oração, leitura bíblica, comunhão, jejum etc).

5.2 Uma prédica da mutualidade

A neurociência aponta para aquilo que a tradição cristã há muito tempo já asseverava: o ser humano adquire a sua identidade a partir de relacionamentos. Ele é um ser relacional. Na perspectiva teológica, o ser humano é criado à imagem e semelhança de Deus e designado como *Gegenüber Gottes*.⁵³ A comunhão trinitária é paradigmática para a comunhão cristã.⁵⁴ O ser humano apenas consegue existir como interlocutor, ele “atrofia” quando isolado. Seres humanos dependem de outros seres humanos para se desenvolverem; desenvolverem a linguagem, por exemplo. Isso reside no fato de que o encéfalo desenvolve suas potencialidades quando estimulado a partir de impulsos externos.

Portanto, no seu sentido estrito, o encéfalo não se desenvolve, pelo contrário, ele perde as potencialidades se as mesmas não são estimuladas. Por exemplo, qualquer criança que nasceu de forma saudável, é capaz de aprender qualquer língua falada no mundo como sua língua materna.

⁵² Rinn (note 47), 84.

⁵³ Christina Aus der Au, Körper Leib Seele Geist. Schlüsselbegriffe einer aktuellen Debatte, Zürich 2008, 186–238.

⁵⁴ Ricardo Barbosa, O caminho do coração: ensaios sobre a trindade e a espiritualidade crista, Curitiba 1998.

Tudo depende da língua que ela ouve de seus interlocutores. Potencialidades cognitivas e emocionais se desenvolvem a partir de relacionamentos, da mutualidade.⁵⁵ “As pessoas aprendem o que elas são e quem elas são na comunhão social e cultural a que pertencem. Isso inclui o contexto religioso em que elas crescem”.⁵⁶

A identidade social e relacional de uma pessoa pode ser desenvolvida através de narrativas, histórias contadas no grupo social ao qual o ouvinte da prédica pertence. Através de narrativas são mediadas competências sociais, como a competência de colocar-se no lugar do outro. Outra derivação na neurociência para a homilética reside na descoberta que ouvir narrativas ativa uma vasta rede de neurônios no encéfalo. Um estudo dirigido por pesquisadores de medicina da Universidade de São Paulo – USP, pesquisou as áreas do encéfalo que são ativadas no momento em que o pesquisado é confrontado com narrativas que remetem a alegria, irritação, tristeza, ansiedade e medo. A pesquisa constatou que o sentimento da alegria ativou mais áreas na região pré-frontal e na região subcortical, do que os demais sentimentos analisados. A pesquisa também constatou que os diversos sentimentos pesquisados, ativaram uma variedade de áreas, demonstrando a concepção de rede e interdependência com que funciona o encéfalo.⁵⁷

Contextualizando o diálogo da neurociência com a homilética, trata-se de uma informação relevante para a prédica, o fato de, na perspectiva da neurociência, o ouvinte apenas sobreviver enquanto ser humano em um ambiente de relações e, só a partir de relações, ser apto a desenvolver competências como a fala, por exemplo. Viver em uma comunidade, em relacionamentos, não é uma questão de decisão pessoal, mas uma questão de sobrevivência. A premissa teológica é a de que o cristão não é capaz de viver a sua fé de forma isolada, mas de forma interdependente e mútua, ou seja, apenas como um interlocutor diante de Deus e de seu semelhante é que ele consegue encontrar uma vida plena - fato também legitimado pela neurociência. Como, então, o ouvinte da prédica pode ser estimulado a viver em um contexto de comunhão? Uma contribuição significativa pode ser dada pela prédica narrativa.

Quando Jesus contava suas parábolas, seus ouvintes aprendiam algo a respeito da relação consigo mesmos, com o próximo e com Deus. Quando ele falava em suas narrativas de eventos alegres (festa, casamento, encontrar uma moeda perdida, encontrar uma ovelha perdida, encontrar um tesouro no campo ou a pérola preciosa), as narrativas evocavam lembranças positivas e muitas

⁵⁵ *Marcus David Ziemann*, *Relacionamentos interpessoais: a relevância da mutualidade bíblica para a edificação de uma comunidade cristã*, São Bento do Sul: FLT, 2009.

⁵⁶ *Rinn* (note 47), 87.

⁵⁷ *Jorge Almeida et al.*, *Engagement of multifocal neural circuits during recall of autobiographical happy events*. *Brazilian journal of medical and biological research* = *Braz J Med Biol Res*, Ribeirão Preto, vol. 41, no. 12, 1076–1085, 2008.

regiões no encéfalo eram ativadas em seus ouvintes. E, muito importante, Jesus conectava as lembranças positivas com o Reino de Deus! Finalmente, o princípio da mutualidade na prédica também coloca uma pergunta para a pregadora e o pregador e suas relações com os ouvintes. Veremos mais detalhes sobre a pessoa do/a pregador/a no próximo tópico.⁵⁸

5.3 Uma prédica Empática

Sentimentos e emoções, via de regra, possibilitam e favorecem – mas eventualmente prejudicam, a comunicação entre pessoas. Sentimentos, por assim dizer, constituem uma preparação do organismo para interagir e comunicar-se com o ambiente. Um sentimento muito importante para o estabelecimento do contato e do diálogo, é o sentimento da empatia. Como visto anteriormente, a empatia é possibilitada pelo fato de no encéfalo existir um Sistema de Neurônios Espelho, que permitem que alguém se coloque no lugar do outro, a ponto de agir e sentir como o outro. “Nós utilizamos representações corticais, que codificam nosso próprio sistema motor, para simular a ação de outra pessoa em nosso encéfalo e, dessa forma, de forma antecipada compreender a intenção do outro: nós refletimos outros em nós mesmos”.⁵⁹ Na perspectiva da neurociência, o sentimento da empatia é vital para os relacionamentos. Ela formata e consolida relacionamentos. No entanto, a empatia pode ser ativada com formas e intensidades distintas, inclusive, pode ser bloqueada. Um fator fundamental – talvez o mais importante, relacionado à capacidade de demonstrar empatia é a confiança.

Nos adultos, a confiança é um fator muito mais abrangente,[do que em crianças] no sentido de mediar critérios para avaliar se uma pessoa é digna de receber empatia e ajuda. Não é suficiente conhecer pessoalmente. Como alguns experimentos demonstram, as melhores chances de receber ajuda e empatia tem aquelas pessoas que pertencem a um mesmo grupo: pessoas da mesma família, que tem a mesma religião, os mesmos valores e compartilham as mesmas opiniões; falam o mesmo idioma e pertencem ao mesmo grupo étnico. Todos esses fatores ajudam a estabelecer um grau de confiabilidade, para garantir, que não serão explorados. Mas se a pessoa que necessita de ajuda e empatia é alguém estranho, geograficamente distante, alguém que se conhece apenas através da mídia, até pode acontecer de o apelo causar uma reação empática, mas o impulso é fraco e fácil de ser suprimido. Um método muito eficaz, utilizado pelos adultos

⁵⁸ Rimm (note 47), 89–91.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 92.

para suprimir impulsos de empatia, é a racionalização. Por exemplo, a pessoa racionaliza e chega à conclusão que o outro é culpado pela sua situação e, portanto, não merece ajuda.⁶⁰

O sentimento de empatia é bloqueado quando a confiança é traída e as regras do grupo social não foram observadas. Não haverá expressão de empatia se alguém passa por dificuldades ou foi punido pelo fato de, supostamente, ter quebrado as regras do contrato social. Nesse caso, empatia pode expressar-se em seu oposto: crueldade, maldade e violência.⁶¹

Ao atentar-se especificamente para o ouvinte da prédica, a empatia como fenômeno neuronal pode ajudar o ouvinte e a pregadora e o pregador a estabelecerem vínculos. Para a pregadora e o pregador fica evidente que uma prédica com apelo moralista, provavelmente não motivará os ouvintes de forma correta para uma vivência da fé em amor e serviço. E os ouvintes da prédica tem a oportunidade de compreender, a partir de impulsos da neurociência, porque por vezes eles não são tão empáticos quanto gostariam de ser. A decisão por uma ação decorrente da empatia é tomada em fração de segundos e, a depender dos valores que o ouvinte tem, a falta de confiança ou a racionalização podem suprimir o sentimento de empatia e a ação dela derivada. Também no contexto da tolerância religiosa, as descobertas da neurociência trazem impulsos para que a comunidade cristã – enquanto grupo social coeso e com sentimentos de pertença, avalie seus valores e reflita a possibilidade de se abrir para o diferente.⁶²

5.4 O ouvinte em um contexto

No que diz respeito ao encéfalo, as pesquisas indicam que seu desenvolvimento acontece a partir de duas frentes. A primeira é a biológica, onde os genes ocupam um lugar de destaque. Os estágios iniciais do desenvolvimento são fortemente afetados por fatores genéticos; por exemplo, os genes direcionam os neurônios recém-formados a seus locais corretos no encéfalo e desempenham um papel na maneira como eles interagem.⁶³ No entanto, a despeito de os genes organizarem a estrutura básica do encéfalo, estes não projetam o cérebro completamente. Em vez disso, os genes permitem que o encéfalo se adapte de acordo com os impulsos que recebe pelos sistemas sensoriais. Esta é a segunda frente implicada no desenvolvimento do encéfalo. A plasticidade do encéfalo é surpreendente, de modo que o ambiente atua sobre a sua formação. Os sentidos de uma criança

⁶⁰ *Doris Bischof-Köhler*, Empathie, Mitgefühl und Grausamkeit. Und wie sie zusammenhängen, in: *Psychotherapie* vol. 14 (2009), no. 1, 52–57, 56.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 56f.

⁶² *Rinn* (note 47), 95.

⁶³ *Michael Rutter*, Nature, Nurture, and Development. From Evangelism through Science toward Policy and Practice, in: *Child Development*, vol. 73 (2002), no. 1, 1–21.

relatam ao encéfalo sobre seu ambiente e experiências, e essa entrada estimula a atividade neural. Os sons da fala, por exemplo, estimulam a atividade em regiões cerebrais relacionadas à linguagem. Se a quantidade de entradas aumentar (se mais vozes forem ouvidas), as sinapses entre os neurônios nessa área serão ativadas com mais frequência. E o uso repetido fortalece uma sinapse. Sinapses que raramente são usadas permanecem fracas e são mais propensas a serem posteriormente eliminadas. A força das sinapses contribui para a conectividade e eficiência das redes que suportam aprendizado, memória e outras habilidades cognitivas. Portanto, as experiências de uma criança não apenas determinam quais informações entram em seu encéfalo, mas também influenciam como o encéfalo processa informações. Em síntese: os genes fornecem um modelo para o encéfalo, mas o ambiente e as experiências da pessoa realizam a sua construção.⁶⁴

Fica evidente as implicações que o contexto, na perspectiva da neurociência, tem sobre o ouvinte da prédica. Formalmente, a comunicação do Evangelho acontece por ocasião em que a prédica é proferida. Porém, podemos estar certos que a prédica não é o único momento em que o ouvinte se apropria do Evangelho. A prédica sempre ocorre em contextos. O ambiente em que a prédica é proferida impactam e atuam sobre o ouvinte, de modo a favorecer e sublinhar a palavra proferida ou, por vezes, criando ruídos para o ouvinte. Sob o enfoque da neurociência, o contexto é tão importante para a comunicação do Evangelho quanto a prédica em si. O contexto da prédica (liturgia) deveria observar três critérios: os ouvintes precisam entender, depois conectar e, finalmente desenvolver o contexto da prédica.⁶⁵ Todo o contexto que envolve o ouvinte – o ambiente, as músicas, as orações, as leituras bíblicas, a confissão de pecados, a confissão de fé, a ceia, a bênção e o envio, as ofertas e a prédica em si, poderia ser moldado a partir dos três critérios mencionados: o ouvinte entende a comunicação simbólica? Aquilo que é dito no contexto da prédica conecta com o ouvinte? Como pode-se moldar, preparar e desenvolver um contexto, uma moldura para a prédica, de modo que o propósito da prédica seja alcançado?

⁶⁴ Maturana e Varela fornecem um exemplo interessante quando descrevem um experimento feito com um cordeiro recém-nascido que é separado de sua mãe por algumas horas e, em seguida, devolvido à sua mãe. Aparentemente o cordeiro se desenvolve normalmente, mas ao observar sua interação com os demais cordeiros, percebe-se que ele não brinca, permanece afastado e solitário. A neurociência ainda não consegue dar uma resposta detalhada, mas é certo que o ambiente influenciou no desenvolvimento de sua estrutura neuronal. De fato, durante as primeiras horas, as mães lambem os cordeirinhos, continuamente, por todo o corpo. A privação desse estímulo materno modificou o comportamento do cordeirinho. Cf. *Humberto Maturana/Francisco Varela, A árvore do conhecimento: as bases biológicas da compreensão humana*, São Paulo 2001, 142–143. 171–196.

⁶⁵ *Klaus Douglass, Celebrando o amor de Deus*, Curitiba 2000, 43.

5.5 O ouvinte que constrói imagens

Toda informação percebida pelo sistema sensorial é processada pelo encéfalo através de sinapses elétricas ou químicas. As sinapses desencadeiam respostas motoras ou cognitivas, por exemplo. Há de se destacar o enorme potencial sináptico que a audição é capaz de gerar no encéfalo, pelo fato de a audição possibilitar a construção de imagens mentais. Construir imagens mentais no ouvinte da prédica se constitui num dos grandes desafios para a tarefa homilética. Como a pregadora e o pregador poderia comunicar o Evangelho, de modo que enquanto a mensagem é ouvida, uma rede de neurônios sejam ativados, formando sinapses a partir de imagens mentais? Como comunicar de modo que o ouvinte vivencie o que ele ouve? Como desenvolver o tema da prédica de modo a que o ouvinte “veja com os ouvidos”?

Uma prédica é melhor compreendida quando o conteúdo da mensagem é combinada com impressões sensoriais. A prédica conecta com percepções sensoriais da audição, que por sua vez, estimula outras áreas do encéfalo, como o sistema límbico, que é acessado e ativado. A prédica em forma narrativa pode oferecer um caminho. Através da prédica em forma narrativa, imagens são evocadas na mente do ouvinte. As imagens ativam o sistema sináptico, de modo que muitas áreas do encéfalo são ativadas. Se compararmos os estímulos sinápticos produzidas por uma prédica em forma narrativa com um filme, por exemplo, a prédica narrativa tem a vantagem de produzir muito mais atividade neuronal do que o filme. Isso se deve ao fato de a narrativa, acusticamente acessar o encéfalo de forma sequencial. O ouvinte ouve uma parte ou cena após a outra, tendo que mentalmente criar e construir as imagens, de modo a formar o enredo. No filme, as imagens já vêm prontas; o filme não estimula a criação e construção de imagens mentais. Por isso, ouvir uma prédica narrativa pode ser altamente significativo, cativante e interessante. A construção de imagens mentais é uma das razões pelas quais muitas pessoas preferem ler o livro, em vez de assistir a sua versão na forma de um filme.

5.6 A prédica que emociona seus ouvintes

Sem negligenciar a dimensão racional e lógica da prédica, é importante que as emoções sejam consideradas pela pregadora e o pregador, pois os ouvintes da prédica, na perspectiva da neurociência, estarão especialmente atentos quando suas emoções forem envolvidas.⁶⁶ “O cérebro

⁶⁶ Nesse caso acontece a ativação do sistema límbico, especialmente da amígdala e do hipocampo, no encéfalo. Robson Marinho destaca que em torno de 40% dos ouvintes possuem um perfil emocional, ou seja, gostam e preferem ouvir prédicas com forte apelo emocional. Cf. *Robson Marinho, The art of preaching*, São Paulo 1999, 36.

gosta de ser adulado; é dependente e carente”.⁶⁷ A prédica poderia ser apresentada de modo a mobilizar emoções positivas - alegria, entusiasmo, curiosidade, gratificação e ponderar a necessidade de uma linguagem que evoque sentimentos como o medo, apatia e frustração.⁶⁸ Imaginamos uma prédica que seja prazerosa em ser ouvida e comunique ao ouvinte a percepção de que vale a pena o empreendimento.

Quem exerce o ministério da pregação, desencadeia em seus ouvintes estados emocionais decorrentes de experiências, de memórias, do contexto e meio ambiente que perpassam tanto o estado emocional do/a pregador/a quanto dos ouvintes. As vivências do/a pregador/a e dos ouvintes da prédica são marcantes e a intensidade e o significado das mesmas influenciam a tomada de decisões. Esta inter-relação humana constrói identidade, pois nas relações se adquire novos conhecimentos.⁶⁹ Abordar a experiência, a formação de uma identidade e as emoções fazem todo o sentido quando os ouvintes da prédica são crianças e adolescentes. É preciso que o pregador lembre – quando diante de crianças e adolescentes, que ele é “formador de sujeitos que estão formando seu córtex pré-frontal, sua identidade, suas aprendizagens, suas memórias, e a emoção que é desencadeada por um ou outro pode ser fator determinante”.⁷⁰ A interação do/a pregador/a com o público infantil gera emoções que “afetam a atenção, a evocação de memórias ou até mesmo gerar memórias negativas ou positivas para futuras evocações”.⁷¹ A relação entre pregador e ouvintes da prédica pode ser motivadora, de modo que o ouvinte precisa aceitar a pessoa do/a pregador/a, antes de aceitar a sua mensagem. O ouvinte não deveria ter medo do/a pregador/a, mas ter uma experiência prazerosa.

Decisivo para um envolvimento do ouvinte são os primeiros minutos da prédica. Quando no início da prédica é despertada a curiosidade do ouvinte, quando suas emoções são envolvidas, a probabilidade de a mensagem gravar-se é aumentada. Relevante nesse contexto da memória também é a repetição, dar ênfase àquilo que precisa e se quer destacar.

6. Conclusão:

Nossa tentativa consistiu em perceber possíveis derivações da neurociência para a tarefa homilética, respectivamente, a prédica em si. Procuramos verificar como a neurociência poderia fecundar a

⁶⁷ Dorneles (note 34).

⁶⁸ Cosenza/Guerra (note 6), 84.

⁶⁹ Dorneles (note 34), 18.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 19.

⁷¹ Ibid.

prédica, sempre tendo o ouvinte como eixo transversal de nossa análise. A reflexão a respeito de uma prédica que surpreenda o ouvinte – haja vista que sob a perspectiva da neurociência o encéfalo é ativado quando se cria uma expectativa, um sentimento de recompensa; perceber o ouvinte em sua dimensão de mutualidade – pois verificamos que no sistema nervoso prevalece o princípio da interdependência; a reflexão derivada do sistema de neurônios-espelho – que capacitam o ouvinte da prédica à empatia, a ações de misericórdia; a percepção de que o desenvolvimento do encéfalo depende intrinsecamente de contextos – prédica não acontece fora de contextos simbólicos; o sistema auditivo – que proporciona ao ouvinte a possibilidade de construir imagens mentais capazes de se gravarem profundamente na memória; a reflexão em torno do sistema límbico, respectivamente sistema das emoções – que demonstra a importância das emoções e sentimentos positivos para que as memórias exerçam sua função criativa e transformadora no ouvinte: desejamos que o artigo traga significativos impulsos para inspirar pregadores e pregadoras na sua tarefa de comunicação do Evangelho.

Klaus A. Stange, born 1967, Doutor em Teologia, Docente na Faculdade Luterana de Teologia / Brasil

klaus.stange@flt.edu.br

Homiletical Squib

Alexander Deeg

“A time to keep silence, and a time to speak” (Eccl 3:7b)

Preaching and keeping silent in times of the COVID19-pandemic

In one of the early analysis of the COVID19-crisis, published in May 2020, ‘futurolgist’ Matthias Horx writes:

“It is astonishing that God and religions in their well known and institutionalized form almost do not play a role in this crisis. The churches are empty because they have to empty, but also the sermons in the internet sound empty in a strange and particular way.”¹

Sermons that sound “empty.” This is a harsh critique – written after some weeks, in which many priests and pastors did their very best to reach out to their congregants and the whole society in many different and often very creative ways. New forms of internet worship services were created, pastors found new ways of preaching in the Social Media, words of hope were written with chalk on sidewalks, ‘sermons to go’ were presented at the fences of church buildings, etc.

This is immense energy – and Matthias Horx speaks of ‘emptiness’? For me, Horx is surely not the most authoritative source for homiletical critique. But I admit that his words struck me, and many questions came to my mind.

Might we have started to speak too soon? Might we have tried to ‘offer’ something to the people who were (and are!) longing for comfort and perspective in times of crisis? Might we have attempted to show how ‘relevant’ we still are as a church in our days? Might we even have tried to functionalize and instrumentalize the crisis to show the importance of pastors, church, and sermons?

¹ *Matthias Horx*, Die Zukunft nach Corona. Wie eine Krise die Gesellschaft, unser Denken und Handeln verändert, Berlin 2020, 19. The sentence is my rough English translation of the original German: „Erstaunlich ist ja, dass Gott und die Religionen in ihrer bekannten und institutionalisierten Form in dieser Krise kaum eine Rolle spielen. Die Kirchen sind leer, weil sie leer sein müssen, aber auch die Predigten im Internet wirken auf eine seltsame Weise entleert.“

These are very critical questions – but sometimes, some critical self-evaluation might make sense. And especially we, the Protestant ‘church of the Word’, might quite often be the church of too many words. Might our wish to be ‘helpful’ and close to the people, have had a paradoxical effect of not being helpful at all?

One of the most striking pictures I saw in the last months was to see Pope Francis on March 25th – almost alone on St. Peter’s Square in Rome at a rainy evening –, spending the blessing “Urbi and Orbi” at an extraordinary time of the year and then praying in silence for minutes. A film director couldn’t have thought of a better staging – and in fact, there were many film and theatre directors who said how impressed they were to see what was happening in Rome on this rainy spring evening.²



The Pope’s action stressed the moment of crisis – showing the world that the situation is difficult, and it is time for extraordinary action. He staged the loneliness of social distancing. And at the same time, he used the ritual possibilities: blessing the people on TV with the Urbi et Orbi-blessing, kneeling in prayer and adoration. Well, he also said some words, he preached – but the words were surely not the most striking and impressive sign for me, but an empty square.

² <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2020-03/pope-francis-urbi-et-orbi-blessing-coronavirus.html> [accessed August 9 2020].

Could there have been a better staging of our situation towards God? We do not just ‘have’ answers and share them with those who still want to listen to us? We ourselves have to listen in the situation of disruption. We have to pray and to lament. We do not know from the outset, who ‘God’ is and what s/he does – but we are missing him/her and longing for him/her ...

I think that (1) we Protestants again and again have to learn that words are not everything we might have, but it is about words *and* ritual. And that (2) words in a time of crisis have to express doubt and fear, have to show longing for God and the fear not to ‘find’ him/her, have to be homiletical ways of lamenting. People have a right to know that we do not ‘have’ God and know his/her plans, but wait and long for him/her. I think that showing this in our words is a chance for preaching in our times of the Covid19-pandemic.

Prof. Dr. Alexander Deeg, born 1972, Professor for Practical Theology at the University of Leipzig, Germany, and co-editor of IJH.