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HOMILETIC CONTOURS FOR PREACHING TO LISTENERS WHO FEAR THE DISASTROUS CONSEQUENCES OF CORRUPTION, WITH AN EMPHASIS ON COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

ABSTRACT

Research in the field of homiletics indicates that preachers have to reckon with the problematic praxis of fear caused by the effects of cognitive distortions regarding corruption. This article investigates the role that preachers can fulfil by not merely being brave from a distance. The research problem is as follows: Is it possible that the distorted cognitions of preachers and listeners could cause them to engage in a nitpicking process that allows hope to be held captive by fear? To what extent can a clear understanding of the essence of sermon delivery enable listeners to realise that hope has to do with a definite calculating process (cognition) that incorporates the yet and not yet reality. The article provides descriptive perspectives on a problematic praxis, offers strategizing perspectives from social psychology and scrutinises the essence of people's understanding of corruption and societal issues. It explores the normative vantage points of seeing, fearing God and the paradoxical nature

of hope. The role of people's ability to view reality seems to be pivotal for the experience of meaningfulness. The article uses a hermeneutical interaction between the elements of research. In conclusion, the article offers practical theological perspectives.

1.   INTRODUCTION

This article investigates the process of sermon preparation and sermon delivery, in order to avoid a homiletic praxis of speaking from a safe distance. To preach has to do with placing listeners in the presence of the living God. In doing so, preachers should realise that listeners' minds and thinking processes do matter. Cognitive corruption, for example, is contaminating people's minds and, in order to address the complexity of corruption, preachers must first comprehend the different understandings of listeners on this issue. The consequences of corruption as such create fear in people's minds in daily life. In order to preach that people could experience new perspectives within a context of fear, preachers must ensure what they are communicating and how people will engage with what is communicated. Robinson (2015) reiterates concerns about the eroding power of fear in the Western world.[1] Fear functions in a subversive manner and has subtly infiltrated society's reality and settled into the lives and brains of both ordinary people and political leaders. Feelings of fear are taking over feelings of trust when hope for the future is being contaminated due to an existential experience of loss (Alexander 2010:25). Within this field of tension, corruption and fear feed each other in a vicious cycle. It is often difficult to distinguish the different elements from each other, or to gauge which came first. Once people have acted in a corrupt way, they fear being caught. They thus attempt to hide their wrongdoings, often by means of further corrupt practices. On the other hand, people are sometimes scared of becoming the whistle-blower for fear of retaliation or backlash from corrupt people. The way in which people consider this issue is at the core of this investigation, because the memory of threats could cultivate fear in people's lives and inevitably dominate people's thinking processes (Jarymowicz & Bar-Tal 2006:372).

Hope proves to be no unfamiliar concept to South Africans when one considers how they elect to deal with seemingly unconquerable problems. In 1994, for instance, when the new democratic government of South Africa took office, with President Mandela at the head, the vast majority of

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1   See   http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2015/09/24/marilynne-robinson-fear/. Robinson shortly refers to her lecture at the Conference of *Societas Homiletica*, Wittenberg, Germany, 2015.

South Africans experienced a feeling of liberation (Pieterse 2013:1). However, the paradox of a feeling of liberation with a simultaneous experience of imprisonment gradually gained the upper hand. The disappointment of the majority is understandable with the disclosure that officials, who should be administrating funds for services to the poor, exacerbate people's experience of misery, due to corrupt practices (Pieterse 2013:4).[2] Disillusionment caused by disappointment with the delivery of important services has led to riots and violent protests that are giving rise to serious concerns about safety. South Africa has experienced a movement of collective protests, something that is described as a rebellion of the poor (Alexander 2010:25). This kind of violence creates fear within other people's minds. Introspection is needed on whether the wrong practices of corruption should be accepted as a typical reminder of the expression of the Roman philosopher, Cicero, namely *o tempora, o mores* (oh the times, oh the morals). Should one talk about the negative functioning of corruption or not? What is the difference between destructive talking and constructive preaching, in which this phenomenon is addressed? Tension is evident in answering the intriguing questions caused by the fact that contrasting strands of thought (cognitions) and language use surround this phenomenon of corruption (Eagle 2015:84; Melgar *et al.* 2010:121). After all, a corrupt perception implies that some corrupt actions are regarded as wrong in specific situations, but as acceptable practice in others (Maynard & Perakyla 2004:252).

From a homiletical perspective, the way of least resistance is to judge corrupt practices from a safe distance. It is more challenging to preach sermons as vessels of hope, in which the depth of the underlying dynamics and the functioning of various tension fields are addressed. It is easy to be brave from a distance. The research question for this article is thus: Is it possible that communication on the distorted cognitions of preachers and listeners on corruption could become a mere nitpicking process that allows hope to be held captive by fear? This investigation

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2   In South Africa, the Prevention of Corruption Act (South African Government 2004) defines corruption as an act that involves "Any person who – directly or indirectly – accepts or agrees or offers to accept any gratification from any other person, whether for the benefit of himself or herself or for the benefit of another person; or gives or agrees or offers to give to any other person any gratification for the benefit of that other person or for the benefit of another person, in order to act personally or by influencing another person so to act in any way that amounts to be illegal, dishonest, unauthorized, incomplete, or biased, or the abuse of a position of authority, a breach of trust; or the violation of a legal duty or a set of rules or designed to achieve an unjustified result or that amounts to any other unauthorized or improper inducement to do or not to do anything."

is interested in a homiletical praxis, in which hope is held captive by fear. Browning's (1996:13) description of a research activity as a process that starts with description, and then moves to systemising (exploring practical wisdom and understanding) and strategizing (practising strategic practical theology) is regarded as a suitable methodology for this article. This investigation is exploratory in nature. It is important to consider the psychological roots of the concept of cognition as a start to addressing the research problem. To this end, a qualitative literature study is undertaken.

2.   PERSPECTIVES ON COGNITIVE CORRUPTION AND THE INFLUENCE OF SERMON DELIVERY

This article focuses on preaching within a context of cognitive corruption as a result of skewed reasoning and understanding. People often point the finger only at self-interest and greed as triggers of corruption, but this article argues that not only corrupt actions, but also people's thought processes and feelings must be considered in a reflection on corruption. The aim of preaching is to help people recognise the root of their fear caused by corruption. Preaching must enable listeners to face fear itself. Preaching does not necessarily provide the practical answers to the causes of fear, but it offers the penetrating light of what it entails to live in the presence of the living God that should be feared. The idea of fearing the living God leads one to the notion of reverence as a motivating factor for daily life. Preaching as an important and integral part of liturgy must ensure that listeners are empowered to understand why reverence of God will also influence their practices in daily life. Preaching takes into account the erosion caused by fear, but it does not get caught in it, because preaching as proclaiming aims to offer new perspectives.

2.1   South Africa as the global capital of corruption where people put their own interests above those of society

The impact of deeply rooted corruption, sometimes described as cognitive corruption, as the deeper root of corrupt practices in contemporary South African society cannot be denied (De Gruchy 2011:3; Calderisi 2006:90). Corruption has enormous negative consequences for the development of an orderly and peaceful society. The deep impact of corruption creates fear in people's minds, mainly because of the fact that the quality of life for the poorest is a cause for concern. While South Africa is in the process of nation-building, the culture of corruption endangers the social fibre of society. In its current state, South Africa finds itself embroiled

in the polarity between the promise of righteousness for all, on the one hand, and an apparent lack of vision and political will to engage the issues that stand in the way of completion of the anticipated reform process, on the other (De Wet & Kruger 2013:16). A total of 27 million people (54% of the population) are officially living below the poverty line. In 2001, it was slightly below 50% of the population, some 19 million out of a population of roughly 40 million (Pieterse 2001a:32). More people are getting poorer in spite of the government's social grants.

One cannot, however, only speak about corrupt action, but should also include a reflection on people's corrupt understanding of this phenomenon (Blau 2009:612). Forster (2015:59) indicates that new avenues for authentic presence in the public and social environment have emerged, but it is not clear as yet whether these organisations have been able to unite South Africans in the battle against corruption (De Wet 2015:59). Given this state of affairs, it is easy to use preaching as a telescope to illuminate the infinite distance between hope and the present reality (Hermelink 2009:38). On the other hand, utilising a magnifying approach that could increase the feelings of fear is also devastating. Preaching could indeed proclaim messages that make listeners afraid of the reality outside the church building. Preaching could even fall into the trap of becoming a one-sided condemnation of officials and the ruling party without realising the deeper challenge that corruption is setting. This could cultivate a praxis of preaching, in which a one-sided emphasis on the darkness of the praxis of corruption is communicated in a one-dimensional manner. This phenomenon has been named a motivational appeal as determinant to persuade people that a dangerous society should rather be avoided (Gass & Seiter 2003:210). It is not difficult to even cite statistics that validate the point, in order to state how dangerous the world is. Naidoo (2012:657), for instance, expresses concern statistically and indicates that, despite legislation on tenders in government, 34% of all government departments awarded contracts to officials and their close family members. It is shocking that three national departments and their provincial equivalents (Health, Education, and Public Works), which together accounted for 70% of all state expenditure, failed to achieve clean audits. Despite a number of initiatives to curb corrupt practices in government departments in the public sector, it is evident that corruption is still rising (Naidoo 2012:658). One could even add and indicate that corruption costs the South African gross domestic product (GDP) at least R27 billion annually and is functional in the loss of 76 000 jobs that would otherwise have been created in a constructive manner. In rightly referring to this kind of statistics, the intention of the preacher should not be to only point towards mistakes and

condemn malpractices, but rather to become engaged in care for societal issues, especially the way in which people think about corruption itself.

2.2   The silence of government leaders and officials is a choice to condone corruption

Another consequence of fear is a mentality of throwing in the towel, because the fight is against a seemingly superior force and invisible power within the functioning of leadership (Mle & Maclean 2011:1376). Ponce *et al.* (2014:2) indicate that fear of what the future will bring is increasing, because a seeming inability to act against corruption could have an overwhelming effect on people's willingness to combat it, due to threats and a possible perception of disloyalty to the group or the political party (Naidoo 2012:663). Although legislation seems to be in place, there is a reluctance to act against corrupt practices (Kruger & Pieterse 2016:73). A culture of corruption implies a corrupted morality, not only by leaders, but also by followers, turning a blind eye to the fact that self-gain implies taking from others what is their due.

People fear that the silence of government leaders and officials when it comes to corruption is not the silence of meditation and contemplative prayer. It is rather a silence of voicelessness (Kritzinger 2012:233). According to Kritzinger (2012:234), voicelessness can be the result of a few factors. People are in need of a voice against the injustice of corruption, but the experience of their leaders who are seemingly voiceless is creating fear within people's minds. The multifaceted character of why leaders are sometimes voiceless could be, *inter alia*, because of guilt and apathy (a case of we are busy with other priorities and are not willing or able to devote any energy to this issue). It is even more disturbing that voicelessness could be a result of friendship, for example when we fail to publicly expose or criticise a particular instance of corruption, because the people committing it (or their superiors who are responsible) are our friends or relatives. Voicelessness, for example, when people remain quiet in a conversation, because they do not want to make fools of themselves among people whom they regard as more informed or more powerful. Closely related to this is a feeling of relative ignorance, a sense of being overwhelmed by the complexity or enormity of an issue. Often, such a sense of inferiority comes from having been bullied into silence by a dominant group, thus giving rise to a culture of silence (Kruger & Pieterse 2016:68). Finally, a hesitation to publicly criticise leaders who are members of our families or congregations causes a nepotistic voicelessness.

2.3   Christian participants in civil society are needed in the anti-corruption debate

Fear could lead to withdrawal from societal issues and a habit to speak from a safe distance. In the corruption debate, the phenomenon of corruption propelled by cognitive distortions and its effects cannot be limited to only the political, economic, social, and environmental levels. The difference in people's minds between corruption on a smaller scale versus corruption on a large scale and the justification of their own corrupt acts is cause for concern. Listeners to sermons could also have a distorted cognition on corruption. Corruption is like a cancer that not only destroys the social fabric of society, but also roots itself deeply in the moral and spiritual dimensions of human life, with devastating and paralysing effects. Not only does corruption promote a general lack of trust in institutions and leadership, but it also stimulates a perpetual culture of corruption that invades all spheres of life (Vorster 2011:3). A culture of corruption implies a corrupted morality (not only by leaders, but also by followers), in which a blind eye is turned to the fact that self-gain implies taking from others what is their due. The tragedy is that people try to justify their corrupt actions on the basis of a distorted understanding.

In contemporary South African society, communities of faith are challenged to orientate themselves in a changed political landscape so that they can play a proper role in civil society. A spectator mentality must be avoided and an attitude of participation must be developed. According to Koopman and Smit (2007:7), this requires the cognition that theologising within a public practical theology requires a cooperative and constructive approach. In this process, open dialogue is needed with people who do not necessarily share the metaphysical grounds of a Christian worldview. Listeners should be equipped to do this. De Gruchy (2004:59) rightly warns against a theology that is arrogant and triumphalist in its witness and a theology that seeks to bring insight to the debate on corruption.

Post-1994, democratic transformation became a reality with a focus on the issues of inequality and poverty. The concept of corruption, for instance, was seldom mentioned prior to 1994. It is evident that this was not because of the fact that no corrupt practices were evident in the apartheid dispensation; it was simply hidden from the public eye. This phenomenon leaves preachers and faith communities with a praxis where they should reflect on how they could possibly make a meaningful contribution to societal issues, in order not to speak bravely from a distance and become irrelevant in society, especially in offering one-sided regulating principles.

3.   SYSTEMISING PERSPECTIVES ON COGNITION FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

3.1   Perspectives on people's understanding (cognition) of corruption

Dread and unhope (*inespoir*) have become existential features of citizens living in the so-called "global village" of the 21st century (Louw 2014:7). Louw (2014:8) further indicates that to be exposed to meaninglessness can rob one of hope. Instead of excitement about life, life turns into a nightmare and one starts to resist life (Louw 2014:8). According to the above perspectives, it appears that people's understanding of the meaningfulness (cognition) of what they are experiencing within the praxis of fear, due to corruption, is indeed a valid aspect to reflect on. Preaching, in this instance, is pivotal in the framing and understanding of what is happening within contexts that are exposing people to experiences of uncertainty and fear in daily life. The other side of the coin is that fear has a negative influence on people's views of the future, thus leaving people with uncertainty. Suddenly, the need for the hope that is being proclaimed in sermons could possibly become a pie in the sky.

The concept of corruption varies widely depending on societies and people. Several contrasting thoughts and language use lie behind it. Fiske (2004:123) offers a different angle on this topic. He indicates that social cognition constitutes the process whereby people think about, and make sense of other people, themselves and their social situation. Alexander (2010:27) offers various reasons for this phenomenon of cognitive corruption. People are dependent on a political system or group because of peer pressure. Ultimately, the fear of losing their position or job as well as stigmatisation often lead to people defending a corrupt system. This causes an inability to escape from corrupt practices, due to continuous threats or even faked reports that will cause trouble for a whistle-blower. This emphasises the way in which people are trying to rationalise their acts and motives. The opposite is also true, namely that people rationalise about corruption by thinking that only a court can find them guilty of corruption. In some instances, people are also comparing themselves with other people and believe that corruption in smaller issues does not hurt people. They are above all not nearly as corrupt as other people. In people's understanding (cognition) of their situation, they believe that corruption will be beneficial for them (Gault 2017:828). People in organisations and in government could suddenly change their language, in order to avoid being questioned or accused of being corrupt (Gault 2017:830). Corrupt authorities often create fear that leads to a cognition that the corrupt party, organisation or group is the only system that could sustainably protect an individual.

Rothstein and Tegnhammar (2010:3) further debate on the role of cognition in the functioning of a corrupt system. A corrupt system will not change if there is no evidence of a dramatic change in political will or among the political elite. Neither the agents at the bottom of corruption nor the people at the top have good reason to change corrupt behaviour if they do not firmly believe that people are willing to really change (Rothstein & Tegnhammar 2010:4). If people do not have a good reason to change their conduct, it will not realise, even amidst severe legislation in this regard. Pleshkov (2014:6) elaborates on the relation between rationality and language use. Language could possibly stimulate irrational behaviour, which contradicts common sense and natural laws. Language could be influential in feeding vanity and inflaming passion. Corrupt people could use words to disguise their real thoughts. Blau (2009:597) emphasises the idea that people use particular words with a particular purpose. For example, corruption in itself is a value-laden word. Corrupt cognition from the government can weaken people and stimulate issues such as self-interest. Cognitively corrupt people will certainly use language to underplay the impact of corrupt practices.

3.2   Normative perspectives on righteousness and hope against hope

A movement is evident in this section that discusses the fear of God as the fertile soil and the attitude in which preaching has to flourish. Fear for corruption and its consequences must help listeners face reality, namely that fear of God is the wisdom that is needed in the daily challenges of life. Secondly, preaching must enable listeners to view daily life differently. Explaining the role of the eye as a way in which people observe reality could help them understand their responsibility in both the marketplace and the workplace. Lastly, the important function of preaching is to help people calculate the essence of life and of real hope.

3.2.1 Wisdom and the fear of the Lord

Barnett (2017:1) indicates that the philosopher Bertrand Russel once provided uncomfortable reasons for not being a Christian. Religion is, according to Russell, based mainly on fear. It is partly the terror of the unknown and partly the wish to feel that there is a kind of elder brother who will stand by you in all your troubles and disputes (Barnett 2017:2). Fear is the parent of cruelty. It is, therefore, no wonder that cruelty and religion have gone hand in hand, according to Russel's interpretation. Religious belief is a symptom of fear because, being aware that our lives are precarious and vulnerable, we seek the protection of a powerful deity

to comfort ourselves with an illusion of safety. Russel indicates that Christians develop concepts such as "*one day*" and "*on the other side*", in order to ignore realities (Deist 1984:19). He also believes that religion will exist as long as there is trouble in this world. The moment all the trouble is resolved, religion will reach its end (Deist 1984:24). According to Russel, the ultimate aim of faith is, unfortunately, to make people ignore reality.

In Luke 12:4, Jesus mentions the opposite and indicates that his followers should not be spiritually blind. Applied to preaching, they should not fear people, but God alone. This indicates that his followers must render reverence due to God (Larkin 2006:188). This is the reason for mentioning that preaching the fear of God could be regarded as fertile fear in addressing cognitive corruption. When Luther struggled with the issue of the fear of God, he distinguished between what he called a *servile* fear and a *filial* fear, which has since become famous (Strimple 2011:3). Servile fear is a kind of fear that a prisoner in a torture chamber has for his tormentor, the jailer, or the executioner. It is the kind of dreadful anxiety where someone is frightened by the clear and present danger represented by another person. *Filial fear*, drawing from the Latin concept of family, refers to the fear that children have for their parents. In this regard, Luther was thinking of children who have tremendous respect and love for their parents and who dearly want to please them (Strimple 2011:4). This kind of fear is about being afraid of displeasing the one who is, in the child's world, the source of security and love.

The consequence of preaching the message of fearing the Lord is that people will inevitably turn away from evil practices and turn to God in obedience (Prov. 3:7, 8:3, 8:13). Kaiser (1983:142) indicates that wisdom cannot be applied separately from the fear of the Lord. Fear of the Lord should be understood as reverent obedience to God (Atkinson 1996:101). The issue at stake is that preaching is not only about what is said, but also about what is heard by listeners. The fear of God is one of the golden threads that should accompany sermons that equip people on the road of wisdom.

3.2.2 Beauty is in the eyes of the beholder (Matt. 6:22-23)

In Matthew 6:19-34, the first priority set for a believer is to seek the Kingdom of God. It is often said that beauty is in the eyes of the beholder to indicate that meaning is in the eyes and in the ears of the beholders. It could also indicate that different people have different opinions on some issues. Stott (1999:157) highlights the importance of Matthew 6:22-23, which states that everything people do, depends on their ability to see. The principle in this metaphor is clear, namely sighted people walk in

the light and blind people in darkness. The difference between light and darkness lies in the intricate organ, the eye (Stott 1999:157). Therefore, one's eye has to be sound and healthy. Just as eyes affect the whole body, people's ambition as a destination, to which they fix their eyes and heart, affects their entire life (Stott 1999:157). To see and to see clearly without being clouded by materialism and own benefit will lead to a strong sense of values (Stott 1999:158). People's eyes can see that which is good or evil, that which is beneficial for people or harmful to society. In fact, what people see and perceive affects their entire being. Within a context of corruption, it appears that corrupt people have lost vision and the practices of darkness are inevitable. Listeners could also have lost vision on the real essence of life. It is striking that this idea is closely linked with the exposition of the treasures in heaven. It becomes even more complicated when one realises that fear and hope are also concerned with vision and how people view the present reality and future possibilities.

Viljoen (2009:5) summarises this, by indicating that the expression of the eye is the map of the body and should be understood in the ancient extra-mission theory of vision. Within this kind of understanding, a direct correlation is evident between the eye and the moral character of people. The description of the physical eye in these verses should be interpreted in ethical terms (Viljoen 2009:5). Sight is a function of moral light within a person. The eyes reflect the character and moral quality of a person as well as convictions and moral character. A healthy eye is a sign of moral integrity. It seems, like Troeger's (2009:64) view, that engagement with life takes place at the level of the imagination; it is something to reflect on in offering homiletic contours that give hope to people living in a fearful world. Imagination is the ability to hold before the mind's eye an image of something that is present, but also not present. To realise and see that God's world is entrusted to His children to care about will also encourage people to imagine the possibilities of increasing care for people who suffer due to corrupt practices (Troeger 2009:69). Preaching must help people imagine (see); in this sense of the word, it could vitalise people's understanding of hope, even amid the hold of cognitive corruption that leads to corrupt practices. In this instance, imagination provides listeners with the eschatological reality of God's world that has already arrived, but that is still awaited. To preach to listeners who struggle with the consequences of cognitive corrupt circumstances entails helping them see with their eyes what is right and what is moral.

3.2.3 Preaching from Romans 8:18-38 on hope against hope

Romans 8 could also be described as the passage of hope. Preaching from this chapter reveals intriguing aspects. Vos (2009:14), for instance, indicates that Romans 8 is a rich landscape with intriguing theological contours. It is interesting to note the importance of thinking (cognition) in a passage that addresses hope. Our understanding of hope could easily become distorted in the sense that we are hoping for the best. The fear for the consequences of cognitive corruption can darken life's lenses. The connotation of hope in Romans 8 does not mean hope for the best, even if I am not certain that the best things will ever come. The emphasis on accuracy is remarkable from this passage. Rasnake (2005:150) is amazed that the concept of λογιζομαι (consider) is evident in Romans 8:18 and is a typical mathematical concept that was used to weigh products on a scale. The concept denotes to *judge after calculation.* In this calculation, it becomes evident for Paul that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us. To live between times, in the eschatological sense of the word, also entails to weigh the paradoxes of time. For instance, compared to the glory (taking cognisance of the yet and not yet), the sufferings (of here and now) have no weight on the scale (Du Toit 2004:109).

The bigger decor of this passage is enclosed in the paradoxical tension of τοῦ νῦν καιροῦ (the present time) and μέλλουσαν δοξαν (coming glory) (Du Toit 2004:109). This kind of tension is often called the yet but not yet of God's promises. It is also paradoxical, because this revelation is simultaneously present and hidden. The coming glory (eschatology) is not a new possibility that does not exist. This coming glory has come in Christ and is already real and effective. Romans 8:18-38 opens a kind of foyer of hope. In proclaiming the yet and not yet of God's glory, the sermon becomes a vessel of hope. God is not imprisoned in the past, nor is he a phantom of the future. Preaching intends to tell people about the future that has already invaded the present.

The concept of ἀποκαραδοκια (earnest expectation or sighing) is used three times in Romans 8:18-39. It is evident that this is not an empty expectation. The creation is eagerly awaiting the coming glory (Rom. 8:19-22); believers are eagerly looking forward (sighing) (Rom. 8:23-25), and the Holy Spirit is joining the creation and believers in this (Rom. 8:26-27). The meaning of the concept ἀποκαραδοκια has to do with the elongated neck of an athlete who is reaching for the finishing line (Du Toit 2004:110). It could also denote *nostalgia* or a *longing for something*. The three sighing movements

in Romans 8:19-27 are structured in concentric circles to form a crescendo (Vos 2009:16). The choir of sighs is creation, creature and the Creator Spirit (Floor 2011:93). It is important to note that this kind of sigh is not one of despair, but one of hope and longing. It could also be mentioned that cosmological, anthropological and pneumatological aspects meet each other in symphony in this choir of sighing. The liturgical notion of singing within the context of sighing is striking. It seems that singing is only possible because of the relation between the three c's, namely creation, creature and Creator. In the process of creating singing, the creative Spirit will inevitably be the consequence thereof.

Singing within this context is no mere antithesis for fear and, therefore, a loss of the sight of fear. In Romans 8, creation sighs because of the imperfection of this age (cosmological aspect). Believers sigh because of the longing for completion. For this reason, it can also be called the pain of expectation (anthropological aspect). The concept of συναντιλαμβανεται (helps us in our weakness) describes the work of the Holy Spirit. This concept entails *to assist someone in supporting, to lend a hand and to come to the aid of* (Vos 2009:17). The Holy Spirit is shouldering believers' burden. The sighs of the Holy Spirit are wordless or unpronounceable. Believers do not know how to pray in the right way according to God's will. In this weakness, the Holy Spirit helps and guides God's children. Floor (2011:94) indicates that the indwelling Spirit is sighing in the hearts of God's children. In our hearts, the Holy Spirit is supporting our prayers. This sigh in the heart of believers is, according to Romans 8:27, also an act of εντυγχανει (intercession) in the presence of God (Floor 2011:94).

Verses 35-37 describe the paradoxes of life. Despite all the paradoxes, God's children are more than conquerors (ὑπερνικωμεν). Rasnake (2005:156) indicates that this concept is a compilation of "over the top" and "to triumph". This concept is only used once in the Bible. This triumph or conquering is not something beyond reality; it is a victory amid paradoxes (Du Toit 2004:20). This perspective opens up the informative aspect of hope that deals with conquering in the resilient praxis of hopelessness, due to difficult circumstances. In Romans 8:38, the conclusion of πέπεισμαι (I am persuaded) is evident. This concept denotes the fact that hope is dealing with certainties (cognition) in Christ. It also entails that believers are convinced of the fact that they are more than conquerors, even in the midst of fear as a result of corruption. Hope also entails being convinced and persuaded of the fact that, because God is with us, He and the content of my hope are always bigger than hopeless circumstances.

## 4.	STRATEGISING PERSPECTIVES ON THE HOMILETIC CONTOURS WITHIN THE PRAXIS OF FEAR

### 4.1	Silence as catalyst for preaching that understands listeners' challenges

Preaching has a significant influence on liturgy, but the reverse side is also true. Listeners must understand that the liturgical activity of listening, embracing and doing is their co-responsibility for preaching. All listeners come to the worship service with a particular attitude, an attitude that could be deeply affected by the brokenness and fear of this dispensation. The mindset of listeners is indeed important. In preaching on corruption, for example, aspects such as personal gain and greed could easily be unilaterally highlighted with reference to Scripture. The immediate question is: In order to achieve what? On the other hand, it is often very disturbing that preachers lead people in liturgy, followed by a deafening silence.

The opposite of a deafening silence is the concept of communicative silence. Dauenhauer (1980:4) intriguingly describes the various manifestations of silence. The function of silence, as an intervening act, is to pause between sentences or units of thought. The intervening silence binds the parts of an utterance. The meaning of the preceding thoughts (collaborative approach in taking people along in sermon preparation) and the ensuing thoughts is captured within this communicative moment of silence. Silence articulates or makes sense of speech. This kind of silence is interrupting in nature, but also reveals new possibilities for mediating acts and new patterns of communication (Muers 2004:6). This insight correlates with the fact that people are interpreting beings. Before uttering words, people must learn how to utilise communication before using it freely. Words and language can be harmful and this requires caution. Just as corrupt people choose to use language to motivate corrupt practices, preaching could harm listeners' understanding of life. Silences enable people to explore mediating activities within communication. It is notable that people allow themselves the right to say what they are thinking and, in so doing, they appeal to their own cognitions on corruption. In this regard, the concept of *interrupting silence* is becoming relevant. Faith communities should contribute towards establishing creative and interpretive moments of silence, in order to reflect on societal issues. Silence can enrich the value of encounters between people, even people from different cultural backgrounds and beliefs, on a topic such as corruption.

It is about a responsible silence and an interpretative moment in the realisation that thinking before speaking and swallowing your words rather than contaminating people's environment should start with a hermeneutical moment of interpretive silence. In order to preach about the fear caused by corruption, the challenge is certainly not to increase fear by only highlighting society as an evil space. Silence creates calmness and calmness leads to the utterance of therapeutic words. Silence offers the scaffolding for constructive communication between people.

4.2   Preaching that encapsulates reverence to God and people's fears within the persuasion of the message of hope

Boesak (2012:9) indicates that evil in society should not be neglected, but rather be named. The element of naming is not similar to a mere nitpicking process that allows hope to be held captive by further manifestations of fear. Boesak elaborates by saying that the moment of naming evil is the moment when the church becomes aware of the calling of God to participate in God's mission to abolish evils. As a prophetic, therapeutic and communicative community, the church has the responsibility to name and to list evil in society. The sermon's manuscript should not only be made up of sentences and words on the consequences of corruption, but should also be smudged with the tears of listeners exposed to the cognitive distortions and fears caused by corruption. It is after all impossible to separate God's Word from his people (Cilliers 2000:131).

In this sense of the word, preaching as the naming of evil practices must help listeners cope in a praxis of fear and view things differently. Preaching on the issue of fear caused by corruption, in which the complete message of the crucified Christ is not the centre, can never allow any lasting, expiatory, sanctifying and fulfilling life to break through. The key to unlocking hope amidst paradoxes is interrelated with a cognisance of the fact that believers are living *in Christ* and are one with him in his death and in his resurrection. The message of hope is in itself paradoxical in essence. There is a need for sermons that communicate wisdom (fear of God) in managing money, finding purpose in relationships, in the workplace where corruption is rife, and truly engaging in combatting corruption. Preaching must lead to a creative vision on life. The fear of God is not a mechanism to promote manipulation, but rather it is about faithful living that results from an encounter with the living God (Long 2009:39). This kind of wisdom is grounded in being affirmed, seeking, being surprised and opened to new possibilities.

The expression "*in Christ*" produces profound hope, not a blind and short-sighted perspective, but hope that truly deals with challenges in reality. To live hopefully requires some kind of consideration (judging) of what hope really comprises. People with hope certainly cannot ignore matters that create fear. Hope is not blind; it provides a vision for the future similar to what has become a reality in the past and is also a present reality right here and now. Real hope does not reckon with the concept of "despite", but rather with the concept of "still".

The danger with preaching is that it can easily become a one-sided nitpicking process and create a distance between the pulpit and reality in society. Sensitivity for the complexity of the grief and the fear of listeners opens creative opportunities for addressing the dimensions of hope within reality. This has to do with opening up new spaces for hope even in the midst of paradoxes. In this sense, preaching must function as an electric power plant that generates energy for social action, even in the midst of fear. As an integral part of the prophetic witness of communities of faith, preaching must also focus on bigger awareness of people's cognitive distortions on corruption and on how faulty reasoning could function as the root of corruption. The power of naming the evil is encapsulated in the idea that a transmission of power is needed. The approach of only preaching fear caused by cognitive corruption cannot be regarded as responsible.

5.   CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this inquiry, the question was raised as to whether it is possible that communication on the distorted cognitions of preachers and listeners on corruption could become a mere nitpicking process that allows hope to be held captive by fear. This is indeed possible, but the proclamation of the fear of the Lord and the ethical dimension of preaching that includes a vision on eschatology could bring hope to people who experience fear due to corruption. The easy practice of speaking from a distance must be condemned and replaced by a willingness to help listeners see and imagine new perspectives on their engagement within society. This will offer possibilities and energy that do not allow fear to take away the understanding of the meaningfulness of life.

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