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Preaching: An initial theoretical exploration

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In this article, the event of preaching was explored by making use of both older and newer sources. Whilst taking cognisance of continuous contextual changes and developments within the discipline of homiletics, core hermeneutical, theological and homiletical aspects of preaching are revisited. The aim of this exploration was to formulate a preliminary theory of preaching that can be revisited and revised as part of a larger empirical homiletical investigation, which makes use of Grounded Theory.

Contribution: This article adhered to the journal's scope and vision by its focus on a theoretical reflection on the practice of preaching at the intersection of theology, hermeneutics and homiletics.

Keywords: homiletics; preaching; hermeneutics; practical theology; theory of preaching; Grounded Theory; practice.

Introduction

Preaching is a complex religious practice. The event of preaching as religious practice should be revisited on a regular basis in the domain of practical theology and in the light of contextual changes and new theoretical developments. This is the aim of this article, namely, to explore preaching as a practice by making use of both older and newer sources whilst taking cognisance of continuous contextual changes and developments within the discipline of homiletics. More precisely, the aim is to formulate a preliminary theory of preaching that can be revisited and revised as part of a larger empirical homiletical investigation, which makes use of Grounded Theory.[1] We depart from this current theory of preaching to empirically research the practice of preaching.

When the empirical part of the research project has been completed, this theory will be revisited to formulate a new homiletical praxis theory. This is the common process of practical theological research (Verweij 2014), also empirical homiletics, namely, the theory–praxis interaction.

In this article, we firstly revisit preaching in the light of Paul Ricoeur's theory and in conversation with Hans-Georg Gadamer (1975). Thereafter, a theological and homiletical exploration follows pertaining to the source of the sermon, the faith of the listeners and sermon preparation. The theological exploration is continued with a discussion of preaching as event, the goal of preaching, the liturgical context of preaching, the personality of the preacher and inter-human communication. In this discussion, we also briefly point towards recent contextual challenges and theoretical developments that need further exploration, especially challenges pertaining to the task of postcolonising preaching and opportunities and challenges afforded by the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Ricoeur's hermeneutical theory

Everything that has to do with preaching a sermon in a worship service, whether in a church building or in an online service, plays out in the field of the tension between the biblical text in its context and the listeners to the sermon in their contexts. Interpretation of the message, concern or matter of the biblical text to contemporary listeners is the key to preaching that can make a difference. Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics (interpretation theory) is, to our knowledge, still relevant in this regard.

Ricoeur developed his own hermeneutical theory in critical interaction with Gadamer's theory of the fusion of horizons with dialogue as a model.[2] Ricoeur's problem with Gadamer's approach is

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1.Three researchers are currently working on a research project entitled 'Preaching in challenging times. A Grounded Theory Analysis of South African Sermons'. Themes that are explored include preaching and racism, anger, COVID-19 and poverty.

2.For a concise description of Gadamer's hermeneutics, see Pieterse (2001:74–77).

in the title truth *and* method. His critique on using two different concepts 'truth' and 'method' is that Gadamer in his interpretation could not free himself from the contradiction of the epistemological and methodological concepts. A choice must be made for either a methodological position of the studied reality and lose the ontological closeness or choose the truth position and then lose objectivity of the human sciences (Ricoeur 1981:60, 131). Gadamer therefore cannot escape from the problem of how to discern good from bad interpretations (Boonstra 2016:63). Ricoeur's theory is an attempt to overcome this anomaly between the objectivity of the sciences and the fundamental experience of the contemporary world (Ricoeur 1974:26).

According to Ricoeur, the central problem of hermeneutics is 'the status of written texts *versus* spoken language, the status of interpretation *versus* explanation' (Ricoeur 1981:165–166). The challenge thus has to do with the difference between spoken and written language. Ricoeur asked what exactly happens with the change from spoken to written language. *Spoken language* has the quality of making sense in its reference to an actual happening in the speaker's reality and at the same time, its view of that reality in which a person's narrative takes place has a claim of truth (Ricoeur 1974:28). The speaker has a *Beziehung zur Wirklichkeit, die einen Wahrheitsanspruch impliziert* [a view of reality that has a claim to truth] (Ricoeur 1974:28). This main characteristic of spoken language (speaker's intention) changes when the words are put to writing.

Written language makes the text *independent* of the original intention of the speaker. The intention of the speaker in his or her narrative is in the written text not the same as what the speaker meant. As a result of the autonomy of the text, there is a distance that developed from the original spoken language (Ricoeur 1974:28) and there is thus a difference between the speaker's intention and the meaning of the utterance (Ricoeur 1976:16–19). By putting spoken language into a written text, the speech act is divorced from its context. Only the content (locutionary act) of the speech act is preserved. The *Sache* in the text, that is, the matter, concern, value and cause of the text, is preserved.[3]

When people at a later stage read the narrative in the text, re-figuration occurs. The narrative that derives from a world of action in the past returns to the world of action – that is, the contemporary world of the reader. Interpretation means that readers read a text with a possibility to apply it to their own situation. Appropriation is in fact a condition for discovering its meaning. Application means letting go, as readers open themselves to the world presented by the text (Ricoeur 1981:191). When this happens, two worlds confront each other – the world of the text and the world of the reader. Texts furthermore have multiple meanings. The reader may experience the narrative in the text as an appeal, be renewed by it, be inspired to act and create a new narrative from the original text (Ricoeur 1981:184). The world of the text enters the world of the reader and provides a new vision.

Ricoeur made use of a hermeneutical arc of pre-figuration, con-figuration and re-figuration (Van Aarde 2020b:98). Every text is preceded by pre-figuration when the speaker speaks about an experience; con-figuration happens when an author creates a text with her or his own style and structure; re-figuration occurs when a reader reads the text and appropriates the matter of the text into his or her own contemporary world (cf. Pieterse 2001:78).

Ricoeur also applied his philosophical hermeneutics to theological reading of the Bible (Ricoeur 1974:36).[4] According to him, the fact that the voices of biblical people in their experiences of God were written into text and bring the sense and matter, the message, of the speakers in the Old and New Testaments to us today. Furthermore, the authors of the biblical texts put their messages in a written 'work', which is a text with an own structure and style. Therefore, readers must be aware of the genres of the texts they read to be able to understand it correctly (cf. Long 1989). Readers receive the message of the biblical authors in written language carrying the matter, the concern, the cause and the *Sache* of the Gospel to them – the *Sache Jesu*, for example. Exactly that *Sache* leads readers to see the Bible as revelation of God (Ricoeur 1974:40). When they appropriate that message of the Bible, it can open a new existence, a new life for them (Ricoeur 1974:44).

Over the past few decades, postcolonial hermeneutics has influenced many disciplines, also practical theology; however, only recently have homileticians begun to apply insights from postcolonial theory in homiletics.[5] Postcolonial theory points towards the fact that the colonialism is not over and remains in relationships in various oppressive forms (Go, Jacobsen & Lee 2015:4) and preachers are often powerful role players who can either perpetuate or challenge these oppressive systems through their preaching, which of course starts with the way in which they do exegesis and interpret texts. Post-colonial theory challenges myths of binarity (Pui-lan 2015:9) and heteronormativity. Pui-lan (2015) defines postcolonial preaching as:

> [A] locally rooted and globally conscious performance that seeks to create Third Space so that the faith community can imagine new ways of being in the world and encounter God's salvific action for the oppressed and marginalized. (p. 10)

This definition of Pui-lan and the work of other scholars have implications for all the aspects of preaching that are dealt with in this article.[6]

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3. The *Sache Jesu*, the cause of Jesus (his words and deeds of inclusiveness of every human being in the Kingdom of God with love, grace and freedom) in the texts of the New Testament (cf. Van Aarde 2020a:154–163), is a good example in this regard.

4. For a shortened text of these ideas, see Ricoeur (2008).

5. See volume 40 number 1 of the journal *Homiletic* for a collection of essays on this topic, as well as Travis's book *Decolonizing Preaching. The Pulpit as Postcolonial Space*. In 2020, the South African theologian Wessel Wessels completed a PhD thesis on postcolonial homiletics.

6. It is impossible to touch upon all the new developments in hermeneutics and its implications for preaching; however, we do want to point to the term carnal hermeneutics (Kearney & Treanor 2015) and flag it as an important development in philosophical thought in general and hermeneutics in particular that should be explored further in homiletics, especially in the light of developments pertaining to the Fourth Industrial Revolution, online preaching and the fact that senses such as touch and smell can in this way receive even less attention in liturgy and preaching. See also Wepener and Cilliers (2020).

The preacher must therefore read texts whilst preparing the sermon and analyse his or her own sermons very critically and in the light of notions such as empire and power (cf. Travis 2014). Ricoeur calls it *hermeneutics of suspicion* (Ricoeur 1970:27) and with post-colonial theory in mind, Travis (2014:2) defines preaching as 'a theological act that names, out loud, the world as it is and as it may become'. Ricoeur's theory is still relevant for homiletics, but should be augmented with insights from development regarding, for example, postcolonial theory.

The source of the sermon's message and the faith of the congregation

The canonical books of the Bible originated from God's actions of revelation in word and deed in Israel's history and in Jesus Christ who showed humankind God's heart of love, mercy and grace (cf. Robinson 1973). God came first to people, worked in their hearts and addressed them and they responded to God's call and message. What we have in the Bible as written texts is the words of people's experiences of God's words and saving deeds. The experiences of God's saving words and deeds were recorded by the writers and editors of the Old Testament and the Jesus followers in the New Testament. The Bible is a mirror of faith experiences by people over nearly 1200 years. What is said in the Bible has been tested over many centuries. It is a source for faith pronouncement. Bible is not only a book consisting of God's words and deeds but is also a book written by human beings; therefore, it is not perfect or without errors (Combrink 1985:156; Jonker 2019).

The Bible should not be read in a fundamentalist way. It must be interpreted under guidance of the Spirit and with common sense. There are good commentaries on all the books of the Bible, which must also be engaged critically and which can help readers to understand the message it wants to communicate to people in their contexts. McGrath speaks of Scripture as the Word of God in a nuanced way (McGrath 1996:169). We find this nuance in the formulation of Rudolf Bohren: 'In Scripture we have the precipitation of the self-revelation of God to human beings' (Bohren 1974:110). The words in the Bible and the Holy Spirit are in a strong connection. Words in the Bible are words of God in so far as the Spirit reveals it in our hearts and minds through his work. The Spirit speaks through Scripture (*Der Geist redet durch die Schrift*) (Bohren 1974:113). In the Protestant tradition, the authority of the Bible as God's revelation for humankind is accepted (cf. Van den Brink & Van der Kooi 2012:109). God is more than God's revelation. God is still the incomprehensible God whom humans must approach in reverence. The source for the message from God to the community of faith in the sermon to be preached next Sunday is from the texts of Scripture.

Christians, members of the church who assemble on a Sunday morning, expect to hear a word from God for them through the sermon. The source of their faith came from the words of Scripture, which have touched their lives, because the Bible is a book that breathes new life (Brueggemann 2005). 'The correspondence between faith and preaching is quite close' (Hermelink 2007:32):

> The 'authorizing voice' of scripture 'heard' in the community needs to be understood as a theological reality mediated through the biblical literature. That is, the authorizing voice heard in the text … is indeed the voice of the Holy God. That is the voice communities of faith heard in the text, a voice that authorizes in odd and unsettling ways. (Brueggemann 2005:6)

However, we have to scrutinise what we hear with a critical hermeneutics of suspicion (Van Aarde 2020a).

The interpretation of the biblical text in its context and in the community of faith's context in next Sunday's worship service is closely knit. The preacher cannot come to preach with an exegesis of the text alone. The context of the listeners on that Sunday must be interwoven in the message of the text and the exegesis worked into a speech that communicates well and is clear enough that the listeners can follow it with interest (cf. Tisdale 2008). The metaphor of a sponge may help to illustrate the preacher's position in the process. The preacher is a sponge who must absorb in herself or himself the context of the congregation, simultaneously absorb the context and message of the text and embody it in his or her existence. In this way, topical and actual preaching is possible and grace can be timed (cf. Cilliers 2019).

Preparing a sermon for next Sunday

The process a preacher can follow to prepare a sermon for next Sunday is captured in the metaphor of the preacher as a sponge. This is an important process that needs further scrutiny. Ricoeur's hermeneutics implies that the preacher should always start with the present context – the life world of the own congregation, the town, city, country and the world in which the preacher lives and works (cf. also Brouwer 2008). A preacher should not think that what should be said is in any case in her or his mind. A concerted effort must be made to listen to people in the congregation and in pastoral work with church members, a variety of daily newspapers can be read, and the discourse that is going on in the specific context should be closely followed. The preacher starts the process from the own context and situation (Immink 2010:13–14; Lischer 1981:80; Pieterse 2001:81).

With the congregation's context clearly in mind, a preacher can approach and meet the chosen biblical text to discover its message for the sermon. Furthermore, the context in which that text has spoken to the first listeners should be studied and a variety of commentaries should be consulted. When a preacher has uncovered the context and the situation of first listeners, who had experienced God's work in their lives, a confrontation with the preacher's world and the world of the text takes place. Ricoeur speaks of readers entering the world of the text and then undergoing a metamorphosis because the text opens new possibilities of human existence for them. The preacher

will receive the 'self' of the text tantamount to admitting a new 'self' into their lives (Ricoeur 1976:99–105). That is to say, the process of understanding the text's message conveys the concern, the matter in the written text, which opens up new worlds to the interpreter-preacher, honing and refining his or her prejudices or biases, putting the preacher in a new light and even changing her or him.

In the current postcolonial South African context, a concerted effort should also be made to listen to the text in particular ways, to ask whose perspective in a certain text is silenced, and to deliberately choose multiple perspectives in the text. In teaching homiletics, a meaningful practical exercise in this regard is to have students act out a biblical text and thus force them to embody a plurality of perspectives within the text. This kind of exercise can be helpful for preachers to sensitise them to the fact that they often represent a dominant and sometimes even powerful and affluent perspective within the South African society. In this regard, the preacher is not only a sponge absorbing dominant perspectives but also a sponge that actively challenges dominant discourse by absorbing multiple perspectives and decentring dominant perspectives. This process, accompanied by prayer and trusting the work of the Holy Spirit, which becomes operative when biblical texts are read in such a way, can reveal the message for a sermon (Hogan 2006:94; Pieterse 2001:82; cf. also De Gruchy 1991:86–91). In next Sunday's sermon, the preacher will basically witness to the congregation of the experience with the text and what the text did to her or him (Long 2005).

After such an experience with the text, a period of meditation and prayer follows, in which the preacher will try to put the ideas of the sermon in a logical arrangement. Preachers should ask themselves what they want to say in the sermon. Also, and importantly, what they want to accomplish with the sermon? What is the focus and function of the sermon? (Long 2005:82). How can the four pages of the sermon be arranged (Wilson 2018) or what can the narrative plot look like (Lowrey 2001)? A sermon is like a story – it has a beginning, a middle and an end – and preachers should keep this in mind in their preparation (cf. Wepener 2019).

Listeners of a sermon interpret the sermon message through filters (Henau 1982:63; Quivik 2009:23–24). The listeners of the sermon have a certain understanding of that text built up through the years. They have their own lifeworld, their own questions, problems and experiences. They interpret the message of the sermon which the preacher preached to them by making a small sermon for themselves in their own circumstances. They apply the message in their own existential situation. This is not a problem. If the sermon message says something to them in their own lifeworld, the message of the text reached them (Allen 2000:21–41). The Spirit works during the worship service when a word from the Bible is preached. The Spirit applies it in the lives of the hearers.

A description of preaching as an event

We see preaching not as an act, but as an event (Pleizier 2010:34). Thomas Long introduced the idea of preaching as an event in a satisfactory manner. A dictionary style definition would inevitably miss much of the richness and mystery of the preaching event (Long 2005:15). Albrecht Grözinger says that preaching is a cultural, aesthetic and religious phenomenon (Grözinger 2008:327). Long describes the event of preaching in four interrelated parts that describe the totality of the preaching event.

The integrated parts are the following: The *local congregation* comes to listen to the sermon. Every Sunday, they experience the liturgical worship preaching of which is an integrated part. The *preacher* is also part of the local congregation and therefore also part of the preaching event. He or she has the task to witness in the sermon the experience with the text during the week, which has existentially changed the preacher's view of the current problems and questions of their context. The sermon in action constitutes the preaching event. It is an event of *speaking and hearing* in which the listeners should understand what the preacher wants to say. Speaking and listening together create the preaching event – it is an interactive event. The *presence of Christ* is experienced as a promised reality. In the preaching event, God is actively present through the work of the Spirit (Long 2005:17).[7] Inter-human discourse and divine discourse in a preaching event are bound together in a complex act of communication (Pleizier 2010:36; Verweij 2014:13).

The goal of preaching

The goal of preaching is to bring the gospel from the texts of Scripture to the listeners in a specific context and situation (Lischer 1981:16). But the texts' witnessing of the gospel's message has multiple meanings. It is like a diamond that shines a certain light if you hold it in a certain way to the light and changes when you hold it in another way to the light. It shines its light into every situation. Therefore, the biblical texts are suitable for many contexts and situations, as well as different goals of preaching.

Preaching can be a *proclamation* of the saving deeds in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for us and when we believe the gospel, we can have life-changing experiences and start living a new life in Christ. This way of preaching should not be from above and in a removed authoritative way, but with love in a dialogical way taking the listeners' lives and situation into account. In this regard, Pui-lan (2015:18) sees the aim of postcolonial preaching as the creation of 'a multivocal and dialogical faith community committed to justice' and she adopts Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia for this purpose, namely, 'the co-existence of a diversity of voices, styles of discourses or points of view'. It seems as if postcolonial preaching takes McClure's (1995)

7.Johan Cilliers (2004) also makes use of these four parts and calls them voices.

well-known 'roundtable pulpit' further, as the aim is not only that the preacher learns from congregational members and integrates their insights into her sermon preparation process but also 'interrupts the dominant discourse with other voices' (Pui-lan 2015:18) and part of the dominant discourse can be the preacher herself (cf. Travis 2015). This aspect will be further explored towards the end of this article.

Another goal of preaching is the *teaching* of the congregation to build up their spiritual life and faith and learn more of a life in Christ. This is the task of spiritual equipment for the members of the congregation by means of preaching in the worship service (cf. Pieterse 1988:32–34). In the sermon, the preacher can also *pastorally care* for the sorrow, the need for consolation and the wounded spirit of people in pastoral preaching (cf. Campbell 1981; Capps 1984). The aim is thus the formation of a caring community with a special emphasis on caring for the marginalised and vulnerable in the community. From a postcolonial perspective, Travis (2015:52–54) argues that the good news of postcolonial preaching may not sound like good news for those who benefit from empire. However, the good news that may sound like bad news is the good news of the freedom from the bondage of oppressive systems, which is in the end good news to those who suffer and those who are benefitting.

Finally, the goal of preaching is to inspire and equip the congregation to *reach out* to those in need in the vicinity of the local church – the poor, the sick and all who need help (cf. Pieterse 2013:175–195) – and simultaneously challenge dominant and oppressing political and economic discourses. It is also to call on the congregation to reach out in mission into the world according to the assignment of Jesus in Matthew 28:19–20. In this regard, Travis (2015:50) reminds us that this kind of help should be performed in a decentred way, so that binaries such as helpers and those who are helped are not kept in place like man and woman and coloniser and colonised. Travis (2015:50) quotes Spivak who warns against 'neocolonizing anticolonialism' and preachers who must take care that preaching does not perpetuate colonial structures regarding the do's and have dont's. This warning is reminiscent of David Bosch's (1991:296) critique of the way in which mission work was executed, which kept some churches dependent on others and which he called 'benevolent paternalism'. Preaching should actively resist any forms of benevolent paternalism.

The liturgical or ritual context in the worship service in which preaching takes place

The worship service should form a whole or unity and it is within that whole that preaching seamlessly fits (Wepener & Klomp 2015). Kloppers (2003) refers to the liturgy as an artwork in which all the different parts come together as in a *Gesammtkunstwerk*, such as an opera. The preacher should take the *ordo,* or story or drama of the liturgy (cf. Long 2001), into consideration and foresee how a specific sermon will,

for example, function as part of the 'Service of the Word' (synaxis) after the 'Gathering' and before the 'Table Service' and the 'Sending' and serve the flow of the overarching liturgical order of a given Sunday. Many variables influence this liturgical order, such as the liturgical calendar, the lectionary or other texts from Scripture used in preaching, the global and local contextual realities and, of course, the liturgical tradition within which the worship service is being celebrated as well as the liturgical tradition of a local congregation.

Barnard (2008) provides practical advice in this regard and points to the various liturgical contexts that a preacher should keep in mind when preparing a sermon. He asks for a careful consideration of not only the kind of worship order in which the sermon is preached, as has already been discussed previously, but also the architecture and thus the space in which the sermon will be delivered, as this impacts the message. He also asks for consideration of the liturgical music, close cooperation between preacher, liturgist and those involved with the music, as well as consideration for the way in which the music supports the sermon. Robert Webber (1992:196–197) also points towards the role of music in worship and how important it is that a preacher understands the role of various sounds of music. We would add in this regard that special attention should be paid to the music right before and after the sermon.

In her discussion of postcolonial preaching, Pui-lan (2015:12) points to the fact that preaching takes place in the matrix of Christian worship. In this regard, she asks for a critical scrutiny of all aspects of worship. A sermon preached from a high pulpit can, for example, reinforce a power discourse, the authority of the preacher and a separation of clergy and laity and is 'monological and, as such, does not create a plurivocal and dialogical community' (Pui-lan 2015:13). We would like to add that participation by as many role players as possible in both the planning and celebration of the liturgy, which is imperative, as participation is connected to issues of power (cf. Wepener 2006).

In the wake of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (cf. Van den Berg 2019) and a global network culture (cf. Barnard, Cilliers & Wepener 2014), it is necessary to take a new and fresh look at all these factors. During the COVID-19 lockdown time in South Africa, many worship services went online, but often with much shorter liturgies and little music and with the sermon becoming the main focus point taking up most of the time (cf. Wepener & Cilliers 2020) and mediated via a screen. Much research is needed to explore online liturgy and its impact on preaching. Some work has been made by scholars such as Berger (2018), Post and Van de Beek (2016) and Matthee (2019). These developments should also be scrutinised in the light of postcolonial homiletics as there are not only danger but also some potential. So, for example, online sermons can be made in creative ways that assist in a heteroglossia and that challenges strict distinctions between, for example, the clergy and the laity. However, in contexts where many people do not have access to data, technology

or internet connectivity, online liturgies and sermons can be in service of furthering inequality in an already highly unequal society such as South Africa.

Personality of the preacher

The personality of the preacher has an impact on the worship service and the sermon because as the minister he or she leads the procedures (Van der Geest 1981). But it is exactly this position as a preacher who may speak about God's message for God's people, which requires humility from him or her. Johan Cilliers formulates it well: 'The small I in service of the great I' (Cilliers 2004:181). Humility *and* authority characterise a preacher (Cilliers 2004:182). The preacher must not try to be popular or speaking in a way in which he or she will never speak with family at home.

Preaching is not only determined by the biblical text of Sunday morning's sermon but also by the listeners and the personality of the preacher. The spiritual life and maturity of the preacher, and what she or he is as a believer in Christ amongst the members of the congregation, have an influence on the trust the listeners have in their preacher to believe the message on Sunday brought by that preacher (cf. Müller 1986:20). A life of prayer is a *sine qua non* for a preacher who must preach Sunday after Sunday in the same congregation (cf. Lischer 1981:96; Pieterse 1988:71). The preacher who is a good communicator, who has a caring personality, somebody who can be trusted and is a good pastor, will more readily be accepted by the members of the congregation. She can then, in the words of Tisdale, speak truth in love (Tisdale 2010:41–62) and practise prophetic preaching with a pastoral approach.

1 Timothy 3:3–6 (The New English Bible) lists the characteristics of a leader in the Christian church which should be:

> sober, temperate, courteous, hospitable, and a good teacher; he must not be given to drink, or a brawler, but of a forbearing disposition, avoiding quarrels and no lover of money. He must be the one who manages his own household well and wins obedience from his children and a man of the highest principles.

A spiritual leader in the church will do well if he or she is open to feedback from the congregational members, even criticism, which can lead to an acceptable solution in an open conversation. In postcolonial homiletics, the preacher should also be actively self-reflective (Go et al. 2015:4) and continuously scrutinise who he or she is in relation to the preaching event and homiletical process. In previous work, we have furthered the notion of a 'spirituality of liminality' (Wepener 2015) whilst conducting research and we want to apply the notion of a 'spirituality of liminality' also here with regard to the sermon preparation process and call for reflexivity on the part of the preacher (cf. also Travis 2015). In postcolonial theory and postcolonial homiletics, the issue of identity is a rich topic in which identity is viewed as continuously constructed. This should be further explored regarding the person and identity of the preacher within a South African homiletical context.

Inter-human communication during the sermon

As has already been mentioned, a major development in contemporary homiletics is the turn to the listener. Ernst Lange was first in Europe to articulate this turn to the listener in homiletics (Lange 1976). New focus came on the interrelatedness of the human condition and the gospel. In the English-speaking world, Fred Craddock's inductive preaching was to create a movement in the sermon that contributed to the communal experiencing of the Word and enabled the listener to participate in the sermon (Craddock 1971). Craddock's approach led to various creative models of preaching that include the listener as an active participant (cf. *inter alia* Buttrick 1987; Lowry 2001; Park & Wepener 2016). The members of the congregation attending the worship service are no longer seen as just receivers of what is offered, but as active participants in liturgical rituals and the sermon. There is an inter-human communication going on in the reception of God's message for them in the worship service. Preaching is an inter-human communicative practice as well as a religious event.

Preaching is therefore an instance of both religious and human communication. It is the dual nature of preaching. Homiletic interaction is what preacher and listener do together and is open to what might happen religiously in this social activity, which is a conversation (Pleizier 2010:33). The listeners also send signals with their non-verbal communication to the preacher.[8] Speaker and listener together create the preaching event. Preaching is an event in which the living voice of the gospel is heard.

There is a blending of voices in the preaching event – it is the living voice of the gospel when God speaks; the living voice of the gospel when the biblical text speaks, the living voice of the gospel when the congregation speaks and the living voice of the gospel when the preacher speaks (Cilliers 2004:22, 38, 88, 130, 180).

Our age confronts preachers with autonomous listeners, which put a great responsibility on preaching as an open-ended sermon. Preachers should refrain from telling listeners what they should do in light of the sermon message. Leave it for them to decide how to apply it in their own lives. There is no place for power plays and violent speech, especially also not for the marginalised members in churches and in our society (cf. McClure 2001). Whilst speaking kindly and lovingly to listeners, preachers should, in the words of Pui-lan (2015:11), 'dislodge the audience from common sense (which usually serves the status quo) and challenge the legacy of colonialism and the legacy [*of*] empire'.

8. Cf. in this regard the book *Performance in Preaching* edited by Childers and Schmit (2008).

Conclusion

Preaching is a complex practice. Many classical sources, such as the work of Ricoeur, are still of value in the subject of homiletics in our own day. Homiletical theory should on a continuous basis be revisited, scrutinised and updated. This was also the aim of this article, namely, to do an initial theoretical exploration of the event of preaching in the light of older sources as well as newer developments. We put a current homiletical theory on the table to be revisited within the overarching research project and specifically after our empirical research of the practice of preaching has been completed. It is clear that much work remains to be performed in South Africa pertaining to postcolonial homiletics and preaching in a digital age, but the wheel of homiletics should not be reinvented; however, some alignment and empirical research are needed.

Acknowledgements

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