

Some homiletical perspectives for the Netherdutch Reformed Church of Africa



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This article explores Professor T.F.J. Dreyer's definition for preaching that he developed for preaching in the Netherdutch Reformed Church of Africa (NRCA) three decades ago. Dreyer's own homiletical perspective towards preaching developed continuously through numerous philosophical paradigm shifts since 1989. His basis theory plays an important role in the theological training of the church's students today. The aim of the research is to reflect on the changes, following Dreyer's homiletical development over three decades. The research discovers a strong prophetic character in the homiletical approach of Dreyer and concludes by asking how a *kairos* moment of prophetic speech can benefit the NRCA.

Contribution: This research hopes to contribute to the existing research that was done in the homiletical field of traditional Afrikaans-speaking churches in South Africa. The research also contributes by identifying some homiletical perspectives that can help the church to proclaim the gospel in times of transition.

Keywords: practical theology; homiletical studies; reformation; new homiletics; new hermeneutics; inductive preaching; prophetic preaching; contextual preaching.

Introduction

Professor Dreyer (1989b) defined a homiletical approach for the Netherdutch Reformed Church of Africa (NRCA) three decades ago. Dreyer's homiletical approach towards preaching developed continuously over three decades. His original basis theory still plays an important role in the theological training of the church's students, as observed in a study guide, *From text to sermon*, which has been used during the last 30 years (Dreyer 1989a).

Dreyer (1989b) defined preaching for the NRCA in the theological 'framework' of the Reformation as follows:

Preaching is a pneumatological word event, where an ordained minister of the Word, via a communicative experience with scripture, leads the congregation, in their concrete situation, towards an encounter with the living God (freely translated by author). (p. 364)

The argument can be made that homiletical students of the NRCA were exposed to different homiletical theories at the University of Pretoria during this time. However, there has been no research found (in a study guide from the Netherdutch Reformed College [NRC]) to elaborate specifically on the development of Dreyer's research from his basis theory in 1989. The study guide for the students had not changed much for the last 30 years. The aim of the research was to reflect on the homiletical changes, following Dreyer's development over three decades. The research discovers a strong prophetic character of Dreyer's understanding of the role of the church in this tradition and concludes by asking how a *kairos* moment of prophetic preaching and witnessing would sound in the NRCA.

Dreyer's homiletical approach

Dreyer's homiletical approach is influenced by the theology of the Reformation and the modern research that in many aspects questions the authority of scripture as the Word of God. Important for Dreyer with regard to the heritage of the Reformation, as Luther has described it, is to continue to interpret preaching as being at the heart of the church (*cor ecclesiae*). Kommers (2017:8–10) described Luther's homiletical contribution of the Reformation, in its *exposition* and *application*, and the *Deus dixit* (directly translated means *God has spoken*). Christ becomes the only Word; he is the key to the revelation for the believer. Sermons had a *didache* quality for the congregation, they were meant to teach the people about the gospel. In this way, a sermon was *deductive*: a general truth is declared and then further explained in the application. Kommers (2017:9) described the

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preacher of the Reformation as an authorised expositor and witness of the Word of God (*Deus dixit*).

The theology of the Reformation became the framework or atmosphere, an idiom of understanding preaching in the tradition of the NRCA. Dreyer (1989b:355) remarked that the one metanarrative that stood out during and after the Reformation was that preaching could be viewed as the *Word of God*. In the pneumatology of the Reformation, the Spirit is viewed as the inspirator of the scripture and as the illuminator of preaching in the hearts of the congregation. The only way this could take place was when the preacher is an ordained minister. Three important criteria were kept through the birth of reformed preaching. Firstly, the tradition of preaching is always grounded in scripture. Secondly, preaching is Christ centred. Finally preaching cannot take place outside the boundaries of the creeds of the church (Dreyer 1985:378–386).

Craddock (Craddock, Sparks & Sparks 2011:10, 11) did find some joy in the thought that the Bible was given back to the people; however, he argues that the opposite could be true. He warns of the risks that preaching propositional truths to a congregation creates. The exegete becomes busy in his or her study to extract propositional truths using critical methods, while the hearer was living their lives in their world.

At about the same time that Dreyer published his definition for preaching, these homiletical changes in the context of understanding preaching in the traditional framework of the Reformation were being questioned. This led Dreyer to reflect on the hermeneutical impasse of his time when it came to a homiletical approach. Dreyer (1989b:350) proposed that the scientific exegetical research would bring the authority of preaching to a crisis. The *certainty* of God's Word during the Reformation became an *uncertainty* in modern times. Pieterse (2001:80) suggested that the historical understanding of the biblical text that began with the *Aufklärung* and is used in the historic critical method by the exegete now played an important role for the development of a critical stance towards the message of preaching. The Bible is a historical document that originated with the history of humanity, and therefore, there can be no absolute and eternal truth, and even the authority of the Bible is related to history; this, in turn, makes the Bible relative to history. In realising the historical value of the Bible as a document, it is the responsibility of the preacher to read the text through the lens of its sociocultural and historical context.

With a renewed interest in the historical-critical view, theology took a scientific lens to review the truth claim of the Reformation. Tension started to show between scientific theology and the traditional preaching in the church. The problem is one of authority, truth concepts that were accepted as logical in the times of the Reformation and that were used for so long in the past are questioned in a modern world. Traditionally, within the NRCA, preaching was always described as the Word of God, because the biblical text is the

Word of God. Therefore, *explication* and *application* of the text were acceptable. If the authority of the Bible is questionable the whole premise of *Deus dixit* becomes problematic.

The premise *Word of God* is at the root of Protestant preaching. During the last part of the 19th and early 20th centuries, Neo-Protestantism reached its highest influence. With Schleiermacher (1768–1864), modern theology formed an epoch that can be described as mostly subjective anthropological. The '*Religiongeschichte*' placed the Christian religion relative to the history and origin of religion, in general, thus, making Christian faith relative to other religions and therefore making truth claims also relative to the context of religion. Eventually, the historical-critical method dominated, which brought uncertainty to preaching and the message of the church.

Preaching as a hermeneutical endeavour

According to Dreyer (1989b:359), students of the NRCA have difficulty and become uncertain about their prophetic responsibility when confronted with the scientific method, especially to proclaim the Word of God during the sermon. Dreyer (1989b:360) asked how God's speech could be heard through preaching? The NRCA never defined what it understands preaching to be considering the *sola Scriptura* of the Reformation. It was always assumed that preaching is the Word of God. For this reason, Dreyer describes preaching as a hermeneutical action.

Dreyer (1989b:361) reminded the preacher of the importance of Ebeling's understanding of scripture. Ebeling (1962) rejected preaching that is simply a repetition of scripture because preaching must bring the Word into a new horizon of understanding. The same proclamation of the Word that happened in the past should happen again. The Word should have the same effect that it had in the past. He understands words and language as dynamic concepts that happened in time. To understand the nature of the Word, to understand the biblical text, the question is not just about the content but also what happens through the Word or because of the Word.

Dreyer (1989b:362–363) viewed the hermeneutical process of preparing for a sermon as integrated and consisting of a variety of components. He incorporates different understandings, for example, the fusion of horizons, the reorientation process from the New Hermeneutics and explains his hermeneutical process in two phases.

Firstly, the biblical text is embedded, through symbols, coded into a specific horizon of understanding. The implicit hearer understands God inside their horizon of understanding. The responsibility of the preacher is to enquire about the intention of the Word action when it was received in the past. The first phase is one of decoding, where the preacher not only uses exegesis (historical-critical method) to decode but also meditates faithfully on the Word of God. The second phase is

to re-encode the experience into symbols that can be understood by the congregation in their context, and that will lead the members of the congregation today in their specific context to a communication experience with God creating the same experience as that of the original intention of the biblical text. Dreyer calls this phase homiletical meditation. Accordingly, his theology has a hermeneutical function to combine the kerygma of the biblical text with the theological understanding of the congregation. There is a fusion of horizons in the understanding of both the exegetical and homiletical phases that takes place in the hermeneutical process. Dreyer calls this a pneumatological mystery because the Spirit functions as both *inspirator* and *illuminator*.

Likewise, Van Aarde (1985:575) understood the word event as connected to two poles: the congregation and scripture. The preacher connects the biblical context and the time of the modern-day hearer. The preacher's existential experience of God's imperative fuses the horizons of the Bible and that of the congregation. According to Van Aarde (1985:575), the scientific method helps with the interaction with the Bible by the congregation. The first interaction is affective while the second is cognitive. The repositioning of yourself as preacher, from another historical time accounts for cognitive activity and is not affectively possible. Both Van Aarde and Dreyer build on the new hermeneutical understanding of the biblical text to explain how to reach a homiletical approach. Dreyer recognises that the New Hermeneutics can help the preacher towards less authoritative preaching. Therefore, he describes preaching as an event that is inspired by the Spirit to where the Word of God is; the situation from where the Word originated, as well as to the situation where the Word can enter and transform today.

A new appreciation of the context

The New Homiletics critically asks questions about applying the context of the tradition of the Reformation to modern-day preaching. Tubbs Tisdale (1997:xi) argued that good preaching is not only skilled biblical exegesis but also requires a preacher to 'exegete' a local congregation and their contexts. To focus on the way the hearer experiences the message asks for more inductive and more participatory methods towards preaching. The exegete needs to move from the context of the hearer and the text together with the historical context of the text towards a sermon. Tubbs Tisdale (1997:99) explored the definition of preaching as a local theology and folk art. Instead of a text to sermon approach, Tubbs Tisdale suggests a 'context and text' towards sermon approach, where the context of the hearer plays an equal role in the exegeting process.

To be faithful to the context with a contextual theology does not mean that the preacher needs to be unfaithful to the biblical text. Scripture becomes the lens the preacher needs to reframe and from which to construct new realities. Cilliers (2016:71) described preaching through hearing the context: '[p]reaching takes place when God's voice is heard through

the voice of the text, in the voice of time (congregational context), through the (unique) voice of the preacher'.

Structure, movement and unity

The New Homiletics directs the homilist's attention to the structure of the sermon, the movements that are present in a sermon and the unity of a sermon in an inductive form of preaching (Venter & Bang 2005:81). The biblical content and form should be equally important to the preacher. Buttrick (1994:95) described a sermon as an introduction and conclusion in-between a series of moves. Eslinger (1987:123) concluded that preaching without movement in the outline of a sermon is a homiletical mortal sin. In the past, the thematic forms of preaching were used, where the points or subdivisions were distilled from the text without even giving a thought to the movements in the outline of the text itself.

As preachers, we must ask the question of how to present the gospel in an ever-changing and emerging human consciousness. In the New Homiletics, the structure and the movement found in the outline of the sermon become just as important for the exegetical process of preparing a sermon. Where a deductive approach was suggested in the basis theory of Dreyer (1989b), the value of the inductive approach is explored by the New Homiletics. The inductive approach moves from the specific observations to the broader generalisations. Deductive reasoning works from the more general to the more specific.

Preaching is not only just homiletical movement in the sermon and the unity or even the structure of a sermon, it is also about transformation. Cilliers (2016:21) proposed, that preachers not just construct or collect propositional truths but also co-create moments of encounter. Cilliers (2016:31) built on the hermeneutical principle of the Reformed homiletical approach, where simple *topos* space can evolve to *chora* space for the reimagining and rediscovering of meaning and life. Within this space, God dwells with us. An encounter as a homiletical event takes place within this space of reimagining and rediscovering in changing times.

Changing times for the Netherdutch Reformed Church of Africa

Dreyer took contextuality seriously in the preaching event. The need to focus on the context and cultural influences became much more evident in his later publications (Dreyer 2005, 2009, 2010). In 2005 Dreyer (2005:804) published an article in which he suggests that a contextual hermeneutical approach to preaching should have a say in the living reality of the community of the faithful. Dreyer argues that culture is an integral part of the context in which the gospel must be proclaimed.

Dreyer (2005:805) described the task for the NRCA as one where preaching can help the church to find an identity at a time of political and economic change. In the context of sociocultural and political transformation, the church has an important task to speak a prophetic word to the community,

for the church to become a prophetic community. Such prophetic speech requires a critical view of the cultural disposition of the communities of faith. Preaching can help the NRCA to discover its voice and identity in its context: a more contemporary dialogue that reintroduces a participatory approach. Dreyer describes a time of reorientation and transformation as a *kairos* moment for the NRCA (Dreyer 2009:428).

A reorientation needs to start with the homiletical approach of the Netherdutch Reformed Church of Africa

The traditional ecclesiological view of the NRCA comes under scrutiny in a post-Christian environment. People do not need to go to church to believe or to relate their spiritual experiences to others. According to Dreyer (2009:431) for many the institutional view of the church becomes a hazard and the only way out of this impasse is a radical change. It is in this context that Dreyer (2009) suggests Heitink's perspective about a concentric circle model for the ecclesiology of the NRCA. Where there is a movement from the inside to the outside and the outside to the inside it is important to free the church from self-isolation. Dreyer (2009) described the NRCA as a church that has stagnated in various forms, but it is still a spiritual home for many. One could argue that in some of the congregations of the NRCA, there has been a radical change towards an outward ministry; however, in most congregations, the traditional ecclesiological self-understanding and self-isolation of the congregations halt this process.

Throughout the last 20 years, changes in the ecclesiological thinking were visible in the sermons presented by moderators at the inaugurations of the General Assemblies of the NRCA (from the 66th to the 72nd). The sociopolitical and demographic changes in the context and the changes of the ecclesiological identity of the NRCA were reflected in the sermons of the moderators.

To Dreyer (Van Aarde & Dreyer 2011:3), the sermon remained the centre in the tradition of the Reformation for the congregation. If we listen to his definition in 1989 and his description of preaching in a conversation with Van Aarde in 2011, it shows the changes over time that reflect the change in his homiletical perspective.

Dreyer's description of preaching in a conversation in 2011 (Van Aarde & Dreyer 2011):

Every sermon becomes a creative hermeneutical artwork that delivers the riches of the gospel in content and form to the hearer and keeps the hearer engaged in his/her existential context. (p. 3)

This second description of Dreyer (Van Aarde & Dreyer 2011) indicated the differences or the development in his homiletical thinking. It provides the reader with a new understanding of preaching where the homiletical process

regards the context of the hearer and where every sermon becomes an aesthetic undertaking. The first *definition* (Dreyer 1989b) is authoritative and reflects a modern paradigm. The authority of the preacher is necessary for this paradigm. During the Reformation, this kind of authority was demonstrated in the office and calling of a minister, the creeds of the church and the authority the preacher had when a sermon was delivered. Therefore, the definition specifically describes the preacher as an ordained minister. The authority of the biblical text as the Word of God plays an important role in this definition. In the 1989 definition of preaching was that an event takes place when three elements – preacher, biblical text and God are combined. The definition combines the role players almost like a science experiment of which preaching is the result. Likewise, the definition mentions the concrete situation but falls short of an extensive exegesis of the contexts of the hearer. This definition can easily lead to a homiletical style where deductive reasoning can be upheld for propositional truths for a congregation. These kinds of truths can easily become a set of rules or customs that can become patterns for *iron rhetoric* in the NRCA.

The New Homiletics also originates from the Reformation, but this approach uses the New Hermeneutic understanding (to preach *as one without authority*). The context of the listener not only changed but the political and socio-economic changes in the world of the listener in the NRCA played an enormous role.

Prophetic preaching

Tubbs Tisdale (2010:36) explained how some congregations over time settled or developed into patterns of institutional life. When this happens, the focus is inwards and people within the congregations are content with self-preservation. According to Labuschagne (2016) this type of self-preservation or maintenance mentality is part of the culture in the NRCA. When a congregation settles into an inwardly institutional pattern, the homiletical approach of the preacher becomes a sympathising role towards the needs of the isolated congregation as an institution. This means that the preacher functions as a mediator. The preacher stands between the hearer and the biblical text, listening to the Word of God on the congregation's behalf. This can also be described as the priestly element of preaching. However, when the prophetic witness of the text is lost in the reality of the faith community, a community becomes numb.

Maybe the NRCA can ask the same question McMickle (2019:1) asked in his book: '[w]here have all the prophets gone?' Although the prophetic voice of the NRCA was heard from the moderators of the different general assemblies, a question the prophetic preacher in the NRCA needs to answer is: '[w]hat if the congregation struggles to embody the witness of God's prophetic voice?' This researcher will answer in the words of one of the church's most known preachers, Professor Dreyer, who said in an interview with Professor Van Aarde (Van Aarde & Dreyer 2011):

Maybe we've allowed that the conventions, customs and structures become more important than our mission – maybe even an obstacle. What must we do? This was the same question the people asked Peter after the Pentecost. His answer was short: Repent! (freely translated). (p. 9)

In these times, prophetic speech occurs as a phenomenon in the church. Van Ekris (2018) described the occurrence of prophetic speech as phenomenal:

When prophetic speech happens in the church, as was our intuition, it is not likely to occur in a vacuum, but in dialogue with historical developments, with political circumstances, with atmospheres in society and in the church, with 'extra-ecclesial voices' who have similar intuitions as the preacher concerning what is damaging society. (p. 8)

Preaching in the NRCA didn't happen in a vacuum. During changing times in the NRCA preachers communicated with listeners from the congregation from inside the 'inner circle' and at times to the society in general. In the past, there was a time that the dominant consciousness of Afrikaner identity was enforced from the pulpit. Voices were used to construct an iron rhetoric to ensure a status quo in the community of faith. Campbell and Cilliers (2012:191–216) identified an *iron rhetoric* or rhetoric that has no imagination and can easily be used as a method where exclusivity is being used as propaganda inside a culture of ideology. This kind of preaching teaches an ideology and the timelessness of a culture; this kind of theology was to strengthen the inner circle of people in the congregation holding on to the ideology. Cilliers (2019:45–47) identified three steps in such a stereotypical sermon. *Legitimation for the status quo* was carried out using biblical analogies. This meant that God became the personification of the ideas of one community, in this case of the NRCA – the Afrikaner, where national viewpoints were projected on a metaphysical level. Firstly, churches became monuments of these nationalised perspectives of one ethnic group. Secondly, the congregations were *motivated to guard over their morality*. They had to protect what they had and move inwards in their ability as religious people. If the ethnic Afrikaner group (*volk*) was able and strong then everything was going to be fine and the future would be secure. Thirdly, in some instances, those who were not associated with the chosen people (the Afrikaner ethnic group) were *turned into enemies*, a hermeneutical movement to the outside that projected guilt on the enemy. There was a very strong dualism between the in-group and the out-group.

Boesak (2014) described the churches in South Africa in a moment of crisis as a moment of *kairos* (a moment of prophetic discernment), drastically in need of a prophetic voice in South Africa:

The question now is, as it always is: No matter who is in power, do those in power serve justice, dignity, and humanity? Do they bring hope to the hopeless? (p. 8)

Boesak (2014:14) concluded that if someone chooses Christ, that person also chooses justice. If you choose Christ, there

can be no compromise in your commitment to peace and social justice.

Maimela (1998:112) described the prophetic speech as a conscious, systematic theological reflection on unjust experiences that developed through oppression, humiliation and suffering in white racist societies in North America and South Africa.

People of faith should not avoid politics according to Boesak (2014:21). The NRCA should strengthen its commitment to justice, peace and equity. The NRCA needs to enter the unjust spaces in the communities of South Africa.

Brueggemann (2018:Ch 1) explained prophetic ministry as follows: '...prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us'.

This description of prophetic preaching reminds me of Dreyer's (1989b) definition. Dreyer defines preaching as a prophetic proclamation of kerygma. It seems that Brueggemann continues this line of thought, but he describes it as to *nurture, nourish* and *evoke* a consciousness. It is not about searching for unjust issues in the social context but looking at the already existing perception of culture and criticising this dominant perception. It is about delegitimising the already structured consciousness and searching for and nurturing the alternative consciousness. Prophetic preaching will then not only criticise but also energise the congregation or community towards an alternative consciousness.

To be a prophetic preacher according to the definition by Brueggemann, is to evoke form, and reform, a community of faith's consciousness. This kind of description of prophetic ministry shows the prophet standing within a culture or dominant tradition or even idiom. The alternative consciousness leads towards a new reality for the community of faith, the formation and reformation of a social community. To my mind, a prophetic imagination that Brueggemann suggests is acceptable for the NRCA and its context of understanding their homiletical tradition. Prophetic preaching opens new imaginative possibilities for preaching in the NRCA. Brueggemann described the prophet's life in tension with tradition, but even if the prophet is shaped in the form of the tradition, reorientation is possible. Through criticising and energising the assertion of new freedom from God becomes a trademark of prophetic witnessing, a tradition rearranged, reformed into a new pattern. That is what the phrase of the Reformation and popularised by Barth means: *Reformata ecclesia semper reformanda*. The NRCA must keep on to reform.

This means that a dominant perspective in a congregation is to be revisited by prophetic preaching. McMickle (2019:Ch 1) argued that prophetic preaching shifts the perspective of the

congregation. The prophet tasks the congregation with the question of what their role is and how they should respond to events in their world and throughout society.

A homiletical approach towards prophetic ministry suggests that the ministry becomes busy with a counter-community of consciousness that replaces the dominant consciousness of an unjust community. The possibility of a counter-community for the NRCA is found in a spiritual approach that can answer to the changes and transitions of this world.

Prophetic preaching and the Christian congregation

Van Ekris (2018:34) described the Christian congregation as the surrounding or 'venue' (literally the place of action) for prophetic preaching. The Christian congregation is not an isolated community. It is theologically seen as a unique community with its own identity, which still have a very close relationship with the context it is part of. Cultural discourses and societal sensitivities do not surpass the internal narrative of a congregation of the church.

The prophetic can be interwoven with a congregation at different levels, for example, pastoral care, ecclesiology and diaconal presence. The prophetic speech is not unfamiliar to the liturgy of the NRCA. Van Ekris (2018:35–37) explained how the liturgy of many Protestant congregations reflect prophetic elements. The reading of Scripture and application, the prayer, lament and doxology happen in the habitat of the public. All these liturgical elements become part of God's communication with the congregation. The interaction takes on a certain form in the interaction with liturgy. Liturgy is seen as a sequence of moments where a reality is mediated. In different moments and in different form, for example, the reading of Scripture or in the commandments, God's redemptive presence is mediated to the congregation members.

In the preaching of the Word a redemptive dynamic happens. In these liturgical moments God's redemptive presence comes to the congregation in different modes. It is in these dynamic human-divine qualities in the congregation that the prophetic can be seen. The prophetic elements have grown into the liturgies that congregations use in their interaction with God.

Prophetic elements can be detected in different forms in the liturgy of the congregation. Through Scripture reading, that defines the NRCA's understanding of liturgy, prophetic texts are read and applied to the present during the sermon. The paradigm of the 'Word of God', wherein Scripture reading is understood brings the divine-human interaction element of prophetic understanding. The epiclesis prayer that precedes Scripture reading before the sermon in the NRCA is another example of divine-human interaction. It is a prayer for the Holy Spirit to be present, to illuminate the hearts and minds of the hearers.

Van Ekris (2018:37) made the point that in the Protestant tradition, the understanding of the presence of Christ in the liturgy is thought to include prophetic qualities.

A *kairos* moment for the Netherdutch Reformed Church of Africa

Prophetic preaching is not a new concept for the NRCA. The church has been a witness to this kind of preaching at mass events at several General Assemblies of the NRCA. Another form of prophetic witnessing is found on an academic level in the NRCA. In confusing times in the past and at times where the NRCA needed to find a way forward the 'academic' prophetic voices seemed to prevail. For example, five of these voices (Professors J. Buitendag, E. Van Eck, J.A. Loader, A.G. Van Aarde, and Y. Dreyer) joined in a public statement to reject the theological justification of apartheid (Dreyer 2014:5).

In this research, it is impossible to assess the academic influence these scholars had on the social transformation in South Africa and the NRCA. Each one of these individuals is rightly a prophet in her or his calling to be a voice for the church. Therefore, the research will use one *kairos* moment brought on by prophetic preaching that directed the NRCA on a path of prophetic witnessing. This research acknowledges them as role players and as an embodiment of a prophetic voice for the NRCA.

On the 27th of April 2006, Professor Johan Buitendag delivered the inauguration homily for the National Colloquium held at the Hammanskraal campus of the University of Pretoria. The commission of the General Assembly and Professor Buitendag (as moderator) was criticised because of this unorthodox way of conduct. A *colloquium* was not known to the church and initially, Dreyer (2014:4) described the reactions within the NRCA as sceptical.

Although being criticised, Buitendag's homiletical perspective at the inauguration sermon of the colloquium led to what this research identifies to be a *kairos* event and a good example of prophetic preaching in the NRCA.

He based the sermon on Matthew 9:14–9 calling it: 'New wine in new skins and the conservation of both'. Matthew distinguished between the old and the new with the ritual of fasting. From the biblical text, the question arises why Jesus and his disciples did not partake in this ritual as John and his followers had done. Matthew answers the reader with the words of Christ that fasting is for mourning and complaining over the dead at a funeral, but in these times (Jesus had come) it is a time of joy like as at a wedding. Fasting is not appropriate. The arrival of Jesus was radical and announced a progressive and revolutionary change in the customs of the dominant consciousness of his time, he came and turned around structures and religious patterns. The metaphors of a new piece of material stitched to an old rag or good wine in old skins show destruction or annihilation. Alternatively, new wine in a new holder conserves or maintains both.

New holders refer to a new situation, whereas the new wine refers to the new in Christ (Lk 22:20). In the life of the first hearer, they were confronted with the reality that had to keep to the heart of the gospel that needed to be contextualised to their situation (Buitendag 2006:343, 344). Buitendag explains that the gospel must repeatedly be recontextualised while keeping the tension of unity and diversity. This hermeneutical approach is dialectical in character and needs to be preserved.

Buitendag (2006:349) explained the identity that formed the NRCA for many years by taking the hearer back to a moment in time when the congregation of Sabie (a small town in Mpumalanga) was established in 1935. The preacher (A.J. Burger) led the sermon from a passage of Genesis 37. Buitendag (2006:349) continued the narrative where Burger ended the sermon with the call to the newly formed congregation to go into this community and seek out *Hervormers* (members of this church), even though there were already other traditional Afrikaans-speaking churches in the area. To illustrate this, Burger acknowledged two of the main characteristics of the church: *no equality* (resistance against equality) and *no domination of strangers* in the church.

This illustration by Burger shows the marginalisation and isolation that was part of the identity of the NRCA at that time. It explains the separatism between black people and white people, between Afrikaans-speaking people and English-speaking people ('strangers') then members of the church. This negative profiling found its way into the church law in 1951 with Article III, which declared that only white people could belong to the church. This was changed and replaced by Ordinance 4 in 1997, thereby replacing it with an ethnic identification (*volkskerk*). As a result, the NRCA's identity was one of specific (Afrikaner) culture, history, language and traditions.

Buitendag (2006:350) prophetically *criticises* the oppression that occurred in the identity of the context in the NRCA. According to Buitendag, the iron structures in the NRCA can never be final, and he suggests a more fluid way of being church. He *energises* the listener to *participate* in a declaration of intent. At the end of his sermon, Buitendag (2006:353) pleaded for a more liquid church, new wine to be kept in new holders: an identity for the church that is not unmovable like ice but becomes fluid like water, like the water in Ezekiel 47, which comes from one source to save the world.

Today, many of these declared intentions of the participants of the colloquium are already embodied in the activities of the congregational life within the NRCA. The identity of the church changed, and the missional approach and ecumenical relationship were re-established. The NRCA is part of the World Council of Reformed Churches (WCRC) and other ecumenical groups. On the congregational level, the church is finding more and more opportunities to work together with other churches.

Moderators over the last two decades showed integrity and character when they entered the pulpit. The inaugurations of each of these General Assemblies of the NRCA (from the 66th

to the 72nd) did not ignore the direct challenges and the immediate situation of the church (NHKA, 2001, 2004, 2007, 2010, 2013, 2016, 2019). From a homiletical perspective, the NRCA can benefit from prophetic preaching and witnessing.

Conclusion

The preachers of the NRCA should challenge themselves to prepare a sermon in a *non-linear* way. It is a good homiletical practice to spend equal amounts of time on the exegesis of the context and the exegesis of the biblical text. The hearer-orientated communication encourages the participation of the members of the congregation to a homiletical approach. The NRCA needs to be *creative* in its homiletical thinking. This does not mean that the thinking must be new or even adopted from another context; it must be creative to changes that challenge the church in the future, but not forgetting the theology of the Reformation from where preaching in the NRCA originated. The preaching should be meaningful and not fall victim to shallowness. The NRCA can look to the same theological depth of preaching as the church did in the past, but see it differently, creatively.

The research study shows the importance of being *faithful to scripture* for the NRCA. However, this research indicates that deductive reasoning can easily lead to linear movement and propositional truths. Therefore, this research suggests *inductive* as well as *deductive* reasoning in the exegesis process for the preacher in the NRCA.

In the New Homiletics, the *structure* of the sermon becomes important. Structuring a sermon is not as simple as putting everything back into the manuscript and it becomes the sermon. The preachers in the NRCA need to understand the different moves, plots, aesthetic possibilities, narrative approaches, and even imaginative and performative initiatives with which a sermon can be presented. In an inductive approach, the *unity* of the sermon engages and keeps the attention of the congregation.

The NRCA needs preachers who do not fall into the trap of a fixed homiletical structure to preach or reinforce conventions, customs and structures. If the isolation of the congregation is already established over years of preaching, it is possible to practise the art of local folk theology. Sweet (2009:155) even suggested a 'deconversion' that is built on the narrative of apologetic piety on what should be.

The preacher and the congregation create local theology together. This should be an inclusive and not an isolated community of faith. The preacher in the NRCA leads his or her congregation towards a *missional* church. This kind of ecclesiology can lead towards new spaces of worship, *new homiletical spaces*. Therefore, a preacher in the NRCA needs to preach *transformationally*. The NRCA also recognises new challenges in the community and the world, and therefore, the preaching in the NRCA is also *transitional*. The preacher of the NRCA has a prophetic calling in the church. Through

prophetic preaching and witnessing, the congregation together with the community can stand up against any kind or form of oppression or discrimination. The *situational and topical* aim of prophetic preaching can help the NRCA on the above-mentioned homiletical journey.

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H.D. and J.-A.M. contributed to the writing of the manuscript.

Ethical considerations

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