

EXPOSURE TO VULNERABILITY AS A NEW OPPORTUNITY IN PREACHING THE GOSPEL TO VULNERABLE PEOPLE

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ABSTRACT

Preachers, white and black, in a patriarchal South-African society used to be in a virtually unassailable position of authority. Hence they could easily abuse their power and manipulate their listeners in sermons. Finding themselves in a situation of cultural change with the resulting changes in power structures, they are now in a vulnerable situation that calls for new possibility to open up new opportunities for finding a legitimate base of authority in making authentic contact with people living vulnerable lives in a vulnerable situation. In this article we research the impact of change on these preachers, their ability to adapt and opportunities posed by a position of vulnerability. Information obtained from sermon analysis and interviews culminate in the construction of initial theoretical guidelines for a new praxis.

1 INTRODUCTION

In the tradition of the Western culture the male white was embedded in a position of authority that opened a door to the possibility of abuse of power and manipulation in justifying and preserving a privileged and self-centred lifestyle. During the last few years the ethical implications of this phenomenon and its impact on the credibility of the preacher frequently surfaced in homiletic research (see Day 2005:4).

Focusing on trends in the South African society, it becomes clear that white and Western male preachers currently find themselves on the edge (in a very vulnerable position). Traditional structures that previously gave these preachers a safe launching pad for the possibility of abuse of power and for proclaiming a self-preserving message in authoritarian style are tumbling down. The authority and credibility of preachers from this context are increasingly questioned (Theron 2007:233–242). However, deep-reaching changes in a society determined by the principles of liberal democracy did not only expose the vulnerability of white preachers imbedded in the traditional Western context. Letšosa (2006:12–16) points out that also preachers from the black cultural background (previously disadvantaged but also embedded in power structures of male dominance) had to come to terms with exposure to vulnerability in new role expectancies like leading vulnerable people into the unknown territory of expressing new-found freedom and responsibility.

Rather than trying to sidestep the challenges posed by deep change and shifts in patterns of power and regressing to the safety of the known roles, vulnerability may pose a unique opportunity to enter in renewed and true communion with Christ and to truly minister the righteousness of his kingdom to the vulnerable men and women in the South African society.

In a first round of research we explored this problem field from the following vantage point:

Viewing the homiletic process as a pneumatological process, we asked what perspectives could be opened up when the preacher (finding himself in a situation of cultural change with the resulting changes in power structures) submits himself unconditionally to the guidance of Jesus Christ and the righteousness of his kingdom. We especially focused on the possibility that the exposed vulnerability of the preacher could open up new opportunities for finding a legitimate base of authority in making authentic contact with people living vulnerable lives in a vulnerable society (see De Klerk & De Wet 2008).

In the mentioned research we theorised that the homiletic process entails balancing the dynamics in the triangular communicative relationship consisting of text, listener and preacher:

- In the *biblical text* God reveals Himself with life-changing implications for preacher and listener.

- *Listeners* have a certain history with the text (partially based on previous sermons heard from the specific text and also partially coloured by the relationship with and perception of the preacher involved). The vulnerability of the listeners is exposed and cared for in the all revealing light of the Word of God and by ministering the righteousness of the kingdom of God.
- The *preacher* should be aware of the extent of his willingness to submit himself unconditionally to the message of the text, of predisposed ideas in his reading of the text and the level of his relationship with the listeners. In a pneumatological relationship with the text the exposed vulnerability of the preacher leads to authenticity in his relationship with vulnerable people.

The abovementioned framework for interpretation formed the basis of the case study that we made in this second round of research. The case study was constructed in the following way:

- Sermons produced by preachers from the context of the Western and also African cultures were evaluated with the abovementioned framework as primary criteria.
- Qualitative interviews were conducted with three preachers in the South African society concerning both a sermon delivered before political and cultural changes in South-Africa and a more recent sermon.

The information obtained from sermon analysis and interviews culminate in the construction of initial theoretical guidelines for a new praxis in this research report.

2 THE UNFOLDING OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT IN ITS DIFFERENT STAGES

Stark (2005^a:90–99) mentions the following stages in empirical research and states that homiletical empirical research follows the same basic pattern as usual scientific research:

- The first step is to *plan and frame* the research.

- The next step is to *gather and record information* by using different techniques of social sciences.
- Then follows the crucial stage of *analysing the information*.
- The research project is finalised when interpretation of the information culminates in the construction of theory.

We decided to structure our research project in a deductive way and the different stages of our empirical research and the report with regards to the different stages unfold as follows:

2.1 Planning and framing the research

The planning and framing of a research project is very important. The end must be already in mind when starting the project. A research statement, a topic, a specific, theologically defined question is needed in framing the research.

We used the results from our first round of research (as explained in the introduction) as the point of departure for framing the case study made in this second round of research.

We framed the area of interest for the case study with the following elements:

- the preacher in his relationship with the all disclosing biblical text and the God that reveals Himself in holy Scripture
- the preacher in his relationship with the (vulnerable) listener
- the preacher in his intra-personal handling of his own vulnerability

From this framework it is clear that this research project focuses on the dynamics of exposed vulnerability in changing power structures and its implications for authenticity in relationships.

We formulated the following research question:

“In what sense will the preacher’s relationship with the biblical text (in its truth disclosing power) and his relationship with the listeners (in their mutual vulnerability) be shaped by the measure in which his vulnerability is handed over in faith to Jesus Christ, the true source of authority and liberating power?”

2.2 Gathering information

During the second step of an empirical research project, data needs to be collected. The research question helps to choose a suitable method for gathering the information needed in a case study. The method of data collection has to correspond with the aim of the research, as expressed in the research question. According to Stark (2005³:90–91), theologically well-balanced concepts will often need a qualitative method like the personal interview.

With the theologically defined research question in mind we decided to gather the necessary information for our research project in the following way:

- We contacted three preachers from a particular denomination in the 16th century Reformed- Calvinistic tradition (two white preachers from a Western background and one black preacher from an African cultural background, all serving as ministers in the “Reformed Churches in South-Africa” (RCSA).
- We asked these preachers to participate in our research project by submitting two sermons each for the purpose of sermon analysis and by consenting to qualitative interviews with respect to their perceptions on their sermons.

As criteria for selecting the sermons we asked that:

- the first sermon should come from the period before political and cultural changes in South Africa (in the early 1990's) and the second from the recent past.
- Both sermons should have the profile of words spoken at events where it was expected of the preacher to indicate the way ahead for people finding themselves in times of crises and in need of direction.

2.3 Analysing the information

With the intent to identify a solid analysis method that actually tests and interprets what we set for ourselves as theologically defined research question, we considered – amongst others – the following method:

2.3.1 The method for sermon analysis designed and utilised by Stark

Stark (2005^b) developed a method of sermon analysis with the way in which preaching can be interpreted as Word of God as point of focus. As an example of this method being utilised in South African context we can refer to Pieterse's analysis of a sermon by Desmond Tutu (Pieterse 2005:110–128). In this method the following key stages in the process of analysis are identified:

- Phase one (“Verzamelen”) consists of selecting the sermon material and describing the context in which the sermon was originally delivered.
- Phase two (“Transcriptie en uniformering”) consists of transcribing recordings of the actual event where the sermon was delivered and comparing these recordings with the written text of the sermon and liturgical elements.
- During phase three (“Indeling van het materiaal”) the analyst identifies different sections (representative of different thought units) in the text and marks the keyword(s) in each section.
- During phase four (“Interpreterende analyse van het materiaal”) the analyst reckons with all the factors involved in the homiletic process and interrogates the text of the sermon with what it reveals about the different factors involved in the homiletic process. The text of the sermon is therefore not only analysed with respect to markers of its general structure (length, key words, preaching style, development lines) but also with respect to what the sermon reveals about the listener, the Biblical text, the preacher, the context (liturgical, ecclesiastical, cultural) and the pneumatological dimension. The analysis can be structured by consistently asking key questions regarding each of the factors involved in the homiletic process as revealed in the text. Key questions regarding the way in which the listener is involved in the sermon should be questioned like: Is the listener primarily viewed as addressed object or as participant? What theological anthropology can be identified from the way in which the preacher addresses the listener? Key questions regarding the deploy-

ment of the Biblical text could be: In what sense does the Biblical text colour the contents of the sermon? What can be concluded from the way in which the question of the authority of the biblical text is handled and the relationship between Biblical text as Word of God and words of men is defined? Regarding the preacher, key questions could be: What profile is revealed regarding the preacher's relationship with the biblical text, himself, and his listeners? Regarding the pneumatological dimension key questions could be: In what sense is the Holy Spirit involved in the homiletic actions? Are the actions of the Spirit connected with the presence of God and Jesus?

2.3.2 Explanation of the method of sermon analysis utilised in this research project

We decided to combine essential elements from Stark's method with the well-known Heidelberg method of sermon analysis (as designed by Gerhard Debus in collaboration with Rudolf Bohren, Ulrich Brates, Harald Grüh-Rath and Georg Vischer (1989:55–61)) and adjust the criteria for analysis and interpretation according to our theologically defined research question. The result was a method in which we designed a set of questions analysing respectively the preacher in his:

- relationship with the all-disclosing biblical text and the God that reveals Himself in Holy Scripture
- relationship with the (vulnerable) listener
- intra-personal relationship handling/coming to terms with his own vulnerability

In order to compare the results from our analysis of the sermons with the preachers' perceptions on their sermons we designed two sets of questions:

- questions formulated in theologically defined form for structuring the researchers' analysis of the text of the selected sermons

- questions formulated for conducting interviews with preachers with respect to their sermons in a way that does not pre-determine answers or reveal research hypotheses

We combined the question groups and compared the results in the following form:

Questions with respect to the preacher in his relationship with the all-disclosing biblical text and the God that reveals Himself in Holy Scripture	
Questions formulated in theologically defined form for structuring the researchers' analysis of the text of the selected sermons	Questions formulated for conducting interviews with preachers with respect to their sermons in a way that does not pre-determine answers or reveal research hypotheses
Are there any indications in the preacher's handling of the biblical text that reduced/ministered the authority of Christ and the righteousness of his Kingdom?	How would you describe your own development as a preacher from the first sermon to the last one in connection with your own attitude towards the Biblical text?
Are there any indications in the relationship of the preacher with God that enhanced or hindered the clarity of God's words?	How would you describe your development as an exegete from the first sermon to the last one concerning the specific place of the righteousness of the Kingdom of God?
How significant are the changes or developments to be observed in the preacher's relationship with the Biblical text from the first sermon to the more recent one?	What are the differences and similarities in your relationship with God and the way of working with the Biblical text when comparing the first and the second sermon?

Questions with respect to the preacher in his relationship with the (vulnerable) listener	
Questions formulated in theoretically defined form for structuring the researchers' analysis of the text of the selected sermons	Questions formulated for conducting interviews with preachers with respect to their sermons in a way that does not predetermine answers or reveal research hypotheses
What can be observed in the two sermons that point to the preacher's motive of maintaining a position of power or struggling with loss of power?	In what way did your view on the listeners undergo development from the first until the more recent sermon?
What are the indications in the two different sermons of authentic or feigned identification with the vulnerability of listeners?	In what way did you undergo development concerning your view on the relationship between your authority as a preacher and its implications for the listeners?
	In what way did you try to identify with your listeners?
How significant are the changes or developments to be observed in the preacher's relationship with the listeners from the first sermon to the more recent one?	What are the differences and similarities that you can observe in your relationship with the listeners when comparing the first and the second sermon?

Questions with respect to the preacher in his intra-personal relationship handling/coming to terms with his own vulnerability	
Questions formulated in theologically defined form for structuring the researchers' analysis of the text of the selected sermons	Questions formulated for conducting interviews with preachers with respect to their sermons in a way that does not predetermine answers or reveal research hypotheses
<p>What are the indications in the self-language that the preacher uses in the two sermons concerning</p> <p>1) not recognising or sidestepping the own vulnerability and</p> <p>2) regressing to old power modes like those present in patriarchy?</p>	What is your viewpoint on possible shifts from the first to the recent sermon concerning your authoritative position as a preacher?
What are the indications in the self-language that the preacher uses in the two sermons of submitting his own vulnerability to Christ?	How would you describe your own viewpoint on the similarities and differences in your development from the first to the second sermon concerning your own vulnerability?
What are the signs of development from the first to the second sermon in the way that the preacher experiences his vulnerability as expressed in possible loss of power and authority?	What are the differences and similarities that you can observe with respect to your own presence and sense of authority when comparing the first and the second sermon?

2.3.3 *Criteria utilised for interpreting the collected data*

Criteria for analysing the sermons and comparing the researchers' findings with the answers given by the relevant preachers were designed with the eye on the homiletic tradition that proceeded from the 16th century Calvinistic development line. In this tradition

preaching is viewed as ministry of God's Word. From the *Sola Scriptura* principle the preacher is viewed as a servant of the Word that may not add to or take anything away from the Biblical text in applying the message of God's Word in the lives of his listeners (see Parker 1992:22).

With the design of the sermon analysis in mind the following sets of criteria were utilised:

- Criteria for interpreting the preacher's relationship with the all-disclosing biblical text and the God that reveals Himself in holy Scripture:
 - Measuring factors that may hinder or enable God's revelation were determined by the following key questions from grammatical-historical and revelation-historical (salvation-historical) methodology (see De Klerk & Janse van Rensburg 2005) used in exploring Scripture: Does the particular sermon display a structure that deviates from the structure of the Biblical text? Are God's activities – as described in the biblical text – replaced by human activity in the sermon? Are the full Trinitarian revelation of God (All things from Him, through him, to Him) unfolded in the text of the sermon?
 - In determining possible distortions in the pattern of the Gospel message the balance in the relationship between indicative, imperative and promise elements in the language structure of the Biblical text was utilised as instrument for measurement. Indications that the full extent of the righteousness of the Kingdom could possibly be reduced in the sermon were measured according to the rule Jesus provided in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5: 20; 5: 43–48).
 - Possible development from one sermon to the next were measured on a scale of a Scripture- manipulating/Scripture-reducing point of departure to a Scripture-obedient attitude in which the full, all-disclosing light of Scripture shines without hindrance.

- Criteria for interpreting the preacher's relationship with the listener:
 - As possible indicators of distance and closeness the following criteria were used: Use of pronouns like "you" and "we"; use of language in text of the sermon that dissociates the person of the preacher from listeners or place him on a throne as judge over the lives of the listeners.
 - As signals that the preacher could possibly sidestep his discomfort with his own vulnerability by means of manipulation or pleasing the listeners, the following were used as criteria: language designed to make the listeners feel guilty; words that threaten listeners; a theological design that concentrates on *Theologia gloriae* without *the Theologia crucis*.
- Criteria for interpreting what the preacher's self-language reveals about his handling of/coming to terms with his own vulnerability
 - As possible indicators in the self-language of the preacher that may point to instances of side-stepping the own vulnerability and regressing to old power modes like those present in patriarchalism, the following criteria were identified: language that presents the own position as that of arrived, absolute knowledge; utilisation of assertive, over-simplistic, absolutistic language.
 - As indicators of submitting the own vulnerability to Christ, the following phenomena were looked for: language that conveys own humility, servant-hood in relation with Christ and amazement over the richness of Christ's glory; the presence of the mind and attitude of Christ which consists in being filled with awe for the will of his heavenly Father, self-sacrifice and gentle care concerning the suffering of vulnerable people.

2.4 Finalising the research project by interpreting information in construction of theory

In this final phase of documenting our research project we interpreted the information flowing from the comparative analysis and constructed praxis theoretical guidelines that can hopefully be utilised by preachers in rethinking the implications of their vulnerability in a changing cultural context.

2.4.1 *Interpreting information flowing from the comparative analysis*

By means of hermeneutical interaction between the theologically defined research question, as described in 2.1 and the research results from the analysis, we made the following interpretative observations:

- a) General observations when comparing the three sets of sermons with each other
 - It is clear that all three preachers find their homiletic model in a deeply rooted tradition departing from Scripture – a tradition in which authoritative (sound) preaching is associated with thorough use of the grammatical-historical exegetical method (combined with the revelation-historical (salvation-historical) method). Utilisation of this methodology was noticeably refined in the development from the first to second sermon.
 - The influence of a tradition that places the preacher in the predominant role of a teacher and leader in pastoral guidance (shepherd-flock-model) is evident in the homiletic relationship of all three preachers with their listeners. This role remained in place to a larger extent from the first to second sermons.
 - The influence of a theocentric tradition (sensitive to the obscuring role that anthropocentric elements can play) also seems to be a determining factor in the homiletic self-presentation of all these preachers. In this theocentric tradition (*Soli Deo Gloria*) it is not expected of a preacher to show something of himself (and therefore his vulnerability) in the process of preaching. Showing vulnerability (espe-

cially the display of emotion associated with it) could draw the attention away from the Word of God. This phenomenon basically remained intact in the development from the first to second sermons.

b) Specific patterns in the information flowing from each preacher's profile

- Preacher A is a white male with 42 years experience in ministry. His first sermon (Jonah 1 (focus verse: 3)) was delivered in a congregation in the Western Cape in 1978. His second sermon (1 John 1 (focus verses: 5 and 7)) was delivered at a convention of the RCSA in 2003.

- *Preacher A in his relationship with the all-disclosing biblical text and the God that reveals Himself in Holy Scripture:* Expository clarity with which the Biblical text is explained is one of the main characteristics of both sermons. The preacher makes use of text-to-text-comparison and there is a very strong focus on the text, the social-historical and cultural-historical background. The sermons follow the flow of the texts. In both sermons he followed a revelation-historical pattern. In some instances the authority of Christ in relationship with the vulnerability of the preacher and listeners are lacking. The very scientific-philosophical approach of both sermons focussed strongly on the Kingdom of God. His assumption is that terminology and concepts are clearly known by his listeners. The preacher is more intellectual in the approach of the recent sermon. In both sermons the preacher gave very interesting facts in a scientific-philosophical manner and this occurrence enabled him to dwell in a safe comfort zone. The scientific-philosophical terms are formulated by using dogmatic formulae. In both sermons the focus is on the meaning of the words. In the interview the preacher declared that he experienced a growing insight in the essence of Bible text and message, especially with respect to the concept of the Kingdom. Everything must be in service of the Kingdom. Growing insight in

the Christology played a much greater role in the preparation of sermons, because a sermon without the good news of Christ is as good as a lecture. The work of the Holy Spirit with the sermon is to deepen the relationship with God. These trends can be seen in Preacher A's development from the first to the second sermon. The strong points in both sermons are the solid exegesis, cultural-historical background and the theologically based arguments.

- *Preacher A in his relationship with the (vulnerable) listener:* The preacher and the listeners are together seekers of the truth and Scripture is the source of authority. Sometimes the preacher distances himself from the listeners. He does not want to maintain a position of power, but by his strong scientific-philosophical approach this could in fact occur. He used an open application in both sermons and did not focus it in an authoritative way. He made no reference to the listeners in the introduction and only indirectly in the body of both sermons. The application on the hearers' lives is implicit and not concrete. His identification with the hearers' vulnerability is only reflected in the form of a rhetorical question. In the first sermon he is part of the listeners whilst in the second sermon there are instances when he is very diplomatic, objective and distancing himself. There are very few indications of a shift in the preacher's relationship with the listeners from the first sermon to the more recent one. In the interview Preacher A made the remark of his greater realisation of the changing context in Southern Africa. The text had to be coloured in such manner to fit the context of the audience and therefore the application always had to change. The authority of the sermon lies in the ministry and not in the person of the preacher. The only way to stand firm in the ministry is when one realises that you remain a servant and the authority carried by the Word is the authority of God and not of the preacher. There are very few signs of identification with the hearers and in no instance explicit ways in

which the preacher handled the vulnerability of the listeners.

- *Preacher A in his intra-personal relationship handling/coming to terms with his own vulnerability:* The themes of both sermons gave the opportunity for the preacher to involve himself. But the themes are formulated in an impersonal and vague way, for example (sermon 1): “May a preacher flee from God?”, and not: “May we all as preachers flee from God?” In his scientific-philosophical way of preaching he showed signs of intending to express his vulnerability, but it is experienced in a very impersonal way. In only one sentence he shows a sign of his own vulnerability by using the words: “I plead with you” (sermon 2). In both sermons there are very few indirect signs of the vulnerability of the preacher and the fact that the act of writing the sermon hurts or touched the preacher. He appears that he is a messenger that carries his message without personal involvement. In the interview Preacher A stated that if one emphasises the servanthood in the proclamation of the Word, one would not feel challenged with regard to authority. There is a growing realisation of his own brokenness and shortages and of the fact that a preacher can’t always satisfy everyone. Preaching can be powerful but one remains vulnerable as you are but a treasure in a broken vessel. Preacher A, with a strong scientific-philosophical approach, preached from an indirect authoritative point of view and therefore covered his own vulnerability. This is the typical way of the Reformed Calvinistic approach to preaching in the past that prevails up to the present.
- Preacher B is a white male with 35 years experience in ministry. His first sermon (Deuteronomy 7:7–11 (focus verses: 7–10)) was delivered at a festival of the covenant on the Day of the Vow (16 December 1983). His second sermon (Zachariah 8: 1–23 (focus verses: 20–23)) was delivered at a convention of the RCSA in 2006.

- *Preacher B in his relationship with the all-disclosing biblical text and the God that reveals Himself in Holy Scripture:* The biblical text and confessional writings of the churches play an important role in the authority structure of both sermons. No instance of curbing the full impact and implications of the Biblical text can be observed in both sermons. The righteousness of the Kingdom of God is growingly portrayed with a missionary focus. Refinement in the use of the grammatical-historical/revelation-historical method can be observed in the development from the first to the second sermon. Consciousness of this refinement in the use of methodology is confirmed by the preacher in the interview with him. The confidence of the preacher in anticipating the thought patterns of God as if God himself has spoken it in both sermons, may point to a hint of an authoritarian element in the homiletic approach of this preacher. Childlike fear of the Lord growingly qualifies the profile of this preacher's relationship with God. In the interview the preacher confirms that he has developed a deeper understanding of the absolute necessity of praying and seeking the face of God, sometimes through fasting to be tuned in on God's will for himself and his people. This growth in spirituality can be observed in the development from the first to the second sermon.

- *Preacher B in his relationship with the (vulnerable) listener:* Both sermons were designed to make an impact on listeners and present challenges that need radical shifts in mind-patterns. The preacher remains in control in a leadership role as one speaking with authority and as one facilitating the process and interceding in prayer for the listeners. The preacher's own involvement and struggle with the full implications of his words and the vulnerability it causes are however not clearly expressed. Especially in the second sermon a deep level of consciousness of and empathy with the vulnerability of people involved seem to be present under the surface. It seems as if the preacher just need to take one

more step in communicating the humble, patient and understanding elements he feels to qualify his relationship with his listeners (as it is expressed in the interview).

- *Preacher B in his intra-personal relationship handling/coming to terms with his own vulnerability:* In the first sermon authority is communicated by using bold, assertive language, delivering fearless critique and clearly pointing out the way. Up to what extent own vulnerability has been exposed by this bold language, is not communicated to the listeners. In the second sermon development seems evident in the sense that amazement over the grace of God is expressed and sensitivity is communicated regarding the need for earnestness in the life of the church. He however speaks about this amazement mainly in the third person. The preacher refers to the need for newness in the relationship with Christ amongst his listeners, but his own need of this relationship is not explicitly displayed in the structure of the sermon. In the interview the preacher states that he has over the years become much more aware of his own desperate need of God's grace. He also realised that strength lies in acknowledging the own vulnerability. The analysis however reveals that self-expressive elements in the homiletic structure of the sermons will have to be adjusted to clearly communicate this acknowledgement.
- Preacher C is a black male with 20 years experiencing in ministry. His first sermon (Luke 24: 36–49) was delivered just before the elections of 1994 during a morning church service and his second sermon (Mark 9: 2–8 and 14–29) was delivered exactly ten years after the commencement of the new democratic dispensation in the same church.
 - *Preacher C in his relationship with the all disclosing biblical text and the God that reveals Himself in Holy Scripture:* Preacher C tries by all means to make his text clear to his listeners. He makes use of the revela-

tional-historical and grammatical-historical approach is his communication of the sermon. In some instances he directly links the socio-historical context of the Biblical text to the context of the current listener. There are little evident significant changes in the development of his approach from sermon 1 to sermon 2, despite the fact that according to his testimony in the interview that there are evident changes of growth in the handling of the Biblical text. The growth according to Preacher C regarding the disclosing of the Biblical text is that he now associates himself more in his sermon with the message than on the technical analysis of the Biblical text. He still struggles to place the righteousness of the Kingdom in its rightful context.

- *Preacher C in his relationship with the (vulnerable) listener:* In both sermons Preacher C expresses solidarity with situation of the listeners. In the first sermon Preacher C holds a shepherd-flock position by leading his flock to repent, to proclaim, to pray and to stop pointing fingers. His authority is disguised in his usage of “we” and “us” terms. In the second sermon his position of authority is more evident because there is a sense of blaming the hearers that their lives in the worship service and the everyday life differ. From the interview it seems that the preacher realises the importance of the relationship between the growth of the listeners and their understanding of the sermons. The preacher wants his listeners to have a similar understanding and interpretation of the sermon. His manner of determining the communicative effectiveness of his sermon is by obtaining feedback from the listeners. It is also apparent that he did not take a position next to them and sympathise with them. It is more a case of stating a situation where preacher and hearers share the same difficulties. There are less signs of identification in the second sermon. It may be concluded in this regard that the general nature of the portrayal of the situation of the preacher and his listeners and the vague, unqualified reference to actions that need to be

taken may point to the possibility that the utilisation of the first person plural gives the person of the preacher a safe zone to blend in with the crowd. It is easy to hide in the crowd of “us”, which allows the preacher the luxury of not having to come to terms with the far-reaching implications of the righteousness of the Kingdom of God in the personal life.

- *Preacher C in his intra-personal relationship handling/coming to terms with his own vulnerability:* In the first sermon that was preached before the advent of the new democratic dispensation in South Africa, the preacher identifies himself with the vulnerability of his context. He feels part of the suffering because of the unrest and the results of the demonstration for peace accompanied by violence. He is fully aware of the situation and thus communicates it as one who personally experiences it. The preacher addresses the hearers in both sermons by using “we” and “us” as an indication that he is identifying with them. Despite this, there are still very few signs in the first sermon that he feels the pain that people could have felt in that situation. He said: “People cry for peace”, but you cannot hear his own cry. He makes mention of external reasons that took their peace away, but not what the painful effect on him is. He did not say anything of his own repentance, but called for repentance. In the second sermon there is a greater indication that the preacher separates himself from the hearers. In sermon 2 that mentions that God is in control of the situation, it is evident how he sees himself as being part of the listeners in their lack of understanding God’s workings in this life. He identifies himself with the joy experienced in the presence of Jesus in worship and the pain and suffering once there worship is over. He does not make use of power or authority in speech over listeners. He covers himself and protects his own vulnerability with the use of “we” and “us” terms. In the second sermon the preacher describes the painful situation of “people’s” disbelief, but there is no indication of his own pain and

his own vulnerability. Therefore, it remains a question whether the preacher (in developing a deepening sense of the theocentric nature of the homiletic event) does not put a damper on the expression of the deep impact that the Gospel message made in his life (as someone who in turbulent times had to die with respect to the old life in order to rise with Christ into a newness of life that conquers the negative energy of the unrighteousness suffered in the past).

2.4.2 Theoretical departure points for shaping a new praxis (conclusion)

- a) Theoretical departure points for the preacher's relationship with the all-disclosing biblical text and the God that reveals Himself in Holy Scripture

The traditional structure of linking authority of the words spoken in a sermon to its correspondence with the structure and revelation-historical implications of the Scripture passage should be enriched and guarded from authoritarianism by including authentic elements of the preacher's humbling struggle with the all-disclosing biblical text. Without the element of authenticity, authority can easily become encased in authoritarianism. The preacher should in a time of cultural change (implicating a shift from automatic authority to authority confirmed by authenticity) anchor the departure point for the further development and re-alignment of his homiletic theory in the clear communication of the way in which the all-disclosing Word of God not only reveals the truth about the vulnerability of the listeners and the world in which they live in, but also about his own vulnerability:

- He is vulnerable in not always having ready prepared clever answers. He only sees a poor reflection in a mirror (1 Cor 13:12).
- He is vulnerable in that he is totally dependent on the grace of God and is in himself totally exposed to the onslaught of the enemies of God and his children.

- He is vulnerable in the sense that he constantly has to struggle against the blinding and heart-hardening power of sin in his own life.
- He cannot speak one word without communicating with his whole being that it is through grace alone that he can minister the Word of God.
- He acknowledges under guidance of the Spirit of Christ with his whole being (verbal as well as nonverbal communication) that without grace his words can lead to nothing else than being disclosed as empty, superficial, condemnable and utterly barren.
- The vulnerability of his temporal existence in a broken, transient world needs to be endowed with the eternal, life-fulfilling righteousness of the kingdom of God.

b) Theoretical departure points for the vulnerable preacher's relationship with the vulnerable listener

The traditional model for the relationship between preacher and listener (the shepherd-flock model) should be enriched and preserved from irrelevance by integrating the community/fellowship- perspective into the communicative structure of a sermon. The preacher should not exclusively see himself as one that has to give guidance to the listeners and needs to – from an objective distance – expose trends in their lives and needs to speak some life-application words. He is first of all a listener that has to get to terms with the full implications of the Word in his own life, before becoming a preacher that has to communicate these implications to fellow-listeners. He should consider the hermeneutic possibilities that can open up when communicating as a vulnerable human being to fellow vulnerable human beings. Nothing can replace the authenticity of actual lateral community: Community is to stand with people in the landscape of their vulnerability, as a vulnerable under fellow-vulnerable, looking up and being amazed and overjoyed together with them at the high, overarching mountain peaks of God's grace in Christ rather than sending a one-dimensional postcard photo of this grace composed in the preacher's study and mailed from the pulpit. Community is to look at the vulnerable landscape through the eyes of Jesus and be filled with his tender mercy and the burning zeal of his righteousness to conquer the powers that cause this brokenness.

- c) Theoretical departure points for the preacher's intra-personal relationship in handling and coming to terms with his own vulnerability

The traditional theocentric focus of the sermon should be preserved from transcendentalism and should be allowed to radiate its God-glorifying nature unhindered, by letting a man whose darkness had been cleared up, bear witness to God's work not only around him but also in him. A homiletic theory will fall into unrealism and insufficiency should it only warn overprotectively against ways in which the homiletic stance/presence of the preacher can disturb the theocentric focus of the Word by drawing attention to himself. Homiletic theory should not stare itself blind against the sinful aspect of the preacher's nature, but also have an eye for regenerated human nature. A homiletic theory is needed that will not only guide the preacher in delivering a sermon, but also in becoming a living sermon radiating God's glory freely. With its departure point in Matthew 5:16 a comprehensive homiletic theory should provide the correct angle for the preacher in not glorifying himself through his presence in the homiletic event but to let the presence of light in his life shine in a way that will lead men to see the works of his heavenly Father in the speaker's life. An important marker in identifying and implementing this correct angle can be found in the homiletic image displayed by the apostle Paul being weak in himself (displaying the homiletic image of brokenness as one dying with Christ, not speaking with wise, eloquent and persuasive words born in human power and technique) in order to be strong in Christ's power (in order for the wisdom and power of God to shine through) (2 Cor 12: 1–10; 1 Cor 2:1–5). Homiletic theory needs to guide the preacher in taking the one small step needed to be free in radiating the glorious work that God is doing in his vulnerable life, without fear of falling into the trap of self-glorification on the one hand or receding to the functionality of a mere mechanical stage-hand behind the stage of the dramatic homiletic event.

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