

Researching preaching beyond the (transcribed) text in (South) Africa: Methodological considerations

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Abstract

In (South) Africa, preaching should in addition to textual studies of recorded and transcribed sermon texts, also be studied as an enacted performance and thus beyond the transcribed text. This article develops an argument regarding the need for the field of Homiletics in (South) Africa to firstly broaden the object of empirical homiletical research and study preaching as an enacted or performed liturgical ritual and secondly, augment its existing research methodologies accordingly. Such a methodology will take African epistemologies and ontologies more seriously than traditional methodologies that only study transcribed texts and to a large extent ignore the significance of the performance of the sermon. Recent methodological developments in Liturgical Studies can be helpful in this regard and a discussion between the two disciplines are encouraged, as well as insights gained from other fields such as Ritual – and Performance Studies. The article ends with some implications that the broadening of the research object may have for homiletical research methods in Africa.

Keywords

Homiletics; preaching; methodology; Africa

1. Introduction

The act of preaching is part of a performed or enacted ritual-liturgical event.¹ The meaning of preaching is embedded in the words uttered by the

1 Cf. Jana Childers and Clayton Schmit, (eds.), *Performance in Preaching. Bringing the sermon to Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008). Herein, twelve scholars explore preaching as performance from various angles. See also the work of Ian Nell on this, for example Ian Nell, “Preaching and performance: Theo-dramatic paradoxes in a South African sermon.” *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 3, no. 1 (2017): 309–326. In

preacher, but also in the whole preaching event which includes the bodily performance of the preacher, the appropriation of the sermon by the hearers, the concomitant liturgy, and the divine self-performance.² Thus, in order to research preaching, it is necessary to firstly document the performed preaching event in its totality and within its multi-layered contexts, before an attempt at an analysis of the data can commence. According to Victor Turner,³ a drama text is incomplete before it has been performed and the same can be said about a sermon text.

In this article the need for this kind of homiletical research, homiletics beyond the text, in (South) Africa is firstly explored arguing that African ontologies and epistemologies should be taken seriously when research methodologies for researching preaching are developed. Thereafter a conversation is initiated with recent developments in ritual-liturgical research in Liturgical Studies, Ritual Studies, Performance Studies, and especially Ritual-Liturgical Studies,⁴ a sub-discipline within Practical Theology that has been researching liturgy as performance beyond the text for some time. In the last part, possible implications for research methodologies in Homiletics are explored that can be employed for data collection. In another article the analysis of this kind of data will be the focus.

The aim of the article is not to provide a how-to guide, but to highlight issues and aspects that should be taken into consideration in a homiletical research project in (South) Africa and to cultivate a methodological

this article “performance” refers to “The public presentation of a sermon” and not the performative nature of language in preaching (cf. John McClure, *Preaching words: 144 Key terms in Homiletics* (Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 102.) According to Ward “Performance’ is a richer, more integrative schema for putting the elements of language, action, and form, together with speech, gesture, and embodiment in the event of preaching”; Richard Ward, “Preaching as a Communicative Act: The Birth of a Performance,” *Reformed Liturgy and Music* 30, no. 2 (1996): 2.

- 2 See Immink’s discussion on developments in Homiletics and his discussion of Bartow’s work about which he writes “In the *homo performance*, we meet the divine action”; Gerrit Immink, “Homiletics: The Current Debate,” *International Journal of Practical Theology* 8 (2004): 94.
- 3 Victor Turner. *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York: PAJ Publication, 1986), 27.
- 4 See in this regard for example the journal *Yearbook for Ritual and Liturgical Studies* at <https://ugp.rug.nl/jvlo>

attitude in this regard.⁵ This article forms part of larger research project⁶ which focuses specifically on preaching in South Africa and therefore the methodological considerations in this article are aimed at researching preaching in a (South) African context which is similar, but also different, to other contexts.

2. Researching preaching in (South) Africa: the current landscape and the hiatus

The practice of preaching is thriving in Africa, however, Homiletics as a discipline has to date not yet truly been embraced in Africa for Africa, in spite of some attempts.⁷ Admittedly Homiletics in South Africa has a long and proud tradition in Faculties of Theology with an origin in Reformed theological traditions; however, it is often exactly this heritage that hinders the discipline to approach preaching as it is practiced in (South) Africa, namely as bodily performance situated within a spiritual ontology. Homiletics often operates with a certain normative point of departure which is a Reformed theological understanding with an emphasis on Biblical exegesis and hermeneutics. The need for a truly African Homiletics which is anchored in homiletical research that fits the continent where the sermons are performed, is great.

5 For the importance of such a methodological attitude, see Ronald Grimes, *The Craft of Ritual Studies* (Oxford/ New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 37.

6 The project is entitled “African Homiletics. An ethnographic exploration of the homiletical process of three South African preachers” and funded by the Research and Formation Group of the Western Cape Synod situated at the Faculty of Theology of Stellenbosch University.

7 Cf. Cilliers explores a concept such as African time in his book *Timing grace*; Johan Cilliers, *Timing grace: Reflections on the temporality of preaching* (Stellenbosch: SUN Press, 2019). Pieterse has done much work, also empirical work, on the connection between preaching and poverty. See Hennie Pieterse, *Preaching in a context of poverty* (Pretoria: Unisa, 2001). A few projects have looked at preaching in AIC’s, see for example Bethel Müller, *Skrifgebruik in die Onafhanklike Afrika Kerke: ’n Hermeneutiese Ondersoek na die Skrifgebruik en Kommunikasieproses in ’n Steekproef* (Pretoria: RGN, 1992). Cas Wepener and Mzwandile Nyawuza, “Sermon preparation is dangerous: Liturgical formation in AIC’s.” *JTSA* 157 (2017): 172–184. Bethel Müller and Cas Wepener, “Belief, behaviour and belonging: the changing ritual of preaching and worship,” in Cas Wepener, Ignatius Swart, Gerrie ter Haar and Marcel Barnard (eds.), *Bonding in worship: a ritual lens on social capital in African independent churches in South Africa*. Liturgia Condenda 19, (Leuven: Peeters Press, 2019), 209–228.

There is firstly a shortage of books and articles dealing specifically with preaching in Africa.⁸ Books on Homiletics published in South Africa exist,⁹ but they all approach the subject from a Western perspective and seldomly approach the African realities on a deep ontological and epistemological level. It is currently almost impossible to adhere to the call for the decolonisation of the curriculum of Homiletics in Faculties of Theology, as most Homiletics books come from Europe and the USA and the existing South African books are mostly a continuation of the Western scholarly tradition, which in itself is welcome, but not enough.¹⁰ Looking at the bibliographies of some of these books and also the content, it soon becomes clear that when an author deals with the subject of preaching in Africa, Africa is only introduced after the conceptualisation of the book has already taken place and “Africa” is spread over the chapters like icing on a cake. And the icing is usually just a few ideas from John Mbiti’s work regarding African religion such as the importance of storytelling and proverbs in African cultures and thus the importance thereof for sermons is emphasised.

Secondly, very few homiletical research projects that engages preaching on the continent takes cognisance of African worldviews, sources and preaching methodologies.¹¹ In South African homiletical research projects,

8 A noticeable exception are the two books by Zimbabwean homiletician Nhiwatiwa; Eben Nhiwatiwa, *Preaching in the African Context: How we preach* as well as *Why we preach* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources International, 2012a & 2012b). In addition, there are a bulk of articles with a focus on (neo-) Pentecostal preaching with a special emphasis on so-called prosperity preaching.

9 Scholars who have published extensively in Homiletics in South Africa over the past fifty years include: Bethel Müller, Hennie Pieterse, Cas Vos, Ben de Klerk, Johan Cilliers, Ferdi Kruger, Ian Nell, Cassie Venter and Fritz de Wet. There are also some scholars who have published on a smaller scale, such as Rantoa Letšosa and Maake Masango as well as some young scholars entering the field, such as Wessel Wessels and Marileen Steyn.

10 By the time of submitting this article Wessel Wessels has just submitted a PhD thesis entitled *Postcolonial Homiletics? A Practical Theological Engagement with Postcolonial Thought*. His work is of utmost importance for the future of Homiletics in South Africa. Volume 40 number 1 of the journal *Homiletic* is devoted to the theme of postcolonial Homiletics, however there are no contributions in that volume from Africa or articles that engage African realities.

11 Cf. Stephan Ellis and Gerrie ter Haar, “Religion and politics: taking African epistemologies seriously.” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 45, no. 3 (2007): 385–401. Tinyiko Maluleke, “Black and African theologies in the new world order: A time to

books and articles, the sermons included for study are usually transcribed texts that narrowly focus on the sermon in the worship service, specifically also the content of the sermon and are analysed, making use of only textual modes of sermon analysis.¹² There is a lot to learn from the existing South African homiletical research which has a long and rich tradition. This textual approach to the field within a (South) African context is needed, but, I will argue in this article, insufficient and reduces preaching as a faith practice to words on paper which is far removed from the lived reality regarding this faith practice on our continent. This state of affairs has probably to do with the identity of most full-time academic homileticians and the concomitant vantage points from which they approach their subject, which is traditionally a Reformed and somewhat Eurocentric position.

Thirdly, in South African homiletical research projects, the actually preached/performed sermons within their multiple contexts are also not studied as such and in very few cases have the authors of books on Homiletics left their studies in order to document preaching as a performed and appropriated faith practice in its natural (liturgical) contexts.¹³ There are almost no examples of “Homiletics beyond the text,” in other words a study of preaching and religious speech that takes into consideration the complete homiletical event, as is done with regard to liturgy and ritual in modern Ritual-Liturgical Studies of which there are numerous (South African) examples.¹⁴ In the words of the South African poet Peter Blum,

drink from our own wells.” J TSA (1996): 3–19. My inaugural lecture at the University of Pretoria addressed this topic: Cas Wepener “The Department of Faith Practices at the University of Pretoria. A spacious House Accommodating a Postcolonial African Pneumapraxis where an Academic Spirituality of Liminality is fostered.” Inaugural Lecture, University of Pretoria. (2015).

- 12 In the past the main methodology employed was the Heidelberg Method and the work of Johan Cilliers is a good example in that regard, and more recently Grounded Theory has become popular of which Hennie Pieterse is the most notable South African exponent. A recent publication using this method is Marileen Steyn, Cas Wepener and Hennie Pieterse, “Preaching During the Covid-19 Pandemic in South Africa: A Grounded Theoretical Exploration.” *International Journal of Homiletics* (forthcoming 2020).
- 13 One exception is Bethel Müller and Cas Wepener, “Belief, behaviour and belonging,” 209–228.
- 14 A key publication in this regard is that of Post: Paul Post, “Introduction and application. Feast as a Key Concept in a Liturgical Studies Research Design,” in Paul Post, Gerard

homileticians often “do not know on which continent they are farming,”¹⁵ and as long as we just remain in our studies, we will also not find out. When empirical work is indeed done, it usually only focuses on the words of the sermon which gets transcribed as a text which is then analysed, removed from the context and the preacher who performed the sermon. And as Farley states: “... gestures made by any public speaker not only augment the words spoken but visually speaks nuances not found in uttered words.”¹⁶ According to Victor Turner “... the difficulty of translating sights and sounds into language ... haunts anthropologists of ritual,”¹⁷ has been incorporated into research methodologies by liturgists, but it seemingly does not haunt homileticians who also study a performative genre. There is a recent tendency to interpret these sermon texts within its liturgical context, which is a commendable development, but not nearly enough. Preaching as performance is an important topic within Homiletics,¹⁸ but this focus has strangely not made its way to South Africa.¹⁹ With regard to

Rouwhorst, Louis van Tongeren and Ton Scheer (eds.), *Christian Feast and Festival: The Dynamics of Western Liturgy and Culture* (Leuven/ Paris/ Sterling: Liturgia Condenda 12 (2001a): 47–77. A recent Dutch project is that of Klomp, namely Mirella Klomp, *Playing on. Re-staging the passion after the death of God*, (Leiden: Brill, 2020). This approach has been developed further for the African context and employed in several research projects to date. See for example: Cas Wepener, “The object and aim of multi-disciplinary liturgical research.” *Scriptura* 93 (2006): 384–400; Cas Wepener, *From fast to feast: A ritual-liturgical exploration of reconciliation in South African cultural contexts*, Liturgia Condenda 19 (Leuven/ Paris/ Dudley, MA: Peeters Press, 2009); Cas Wepener, Ignatius Swart, Gerrie ter Haar and Marcel Barnard (eds.), *Bonding in worship: a ritual lens on social capital in African independent churches in South Africa*, Liturgia Condenda 19 (Leuven: Peeters Press, 2019); Cas Wepener and Gerrie ter Haar, “Sacred sites and spiritual power. One angel, two sites, many spirits,” in Paul Post, Philip Nel and Walter van Beek (eds.), *Sacred Sites, Contested Grounds. Space and ritual dynamics in Europe and Africa* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2014), 89–104.

- 15 See Peter Blum, *Steenbok tot Poolsee* (Cape Town: Nasionale Boekhandel, 1955), 8. The original Afrikaans reads: “Maar as die bergwind so rukkerig waai/ ... – dan, dan/ weet ons op watter vasteland ons boer.”
- 16 Todd Farley, “The Use of the Body in the Performance of Proclamation,” in Jana Childers and Clayton Schmit (eds.), *Performance in Preaching. Bringing the Sermon to Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 119.
- 17 Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance*, 30.
- 18 Cf. for example Childers and Schmit, *Performance in Preaching*.
- 19 South African scholars who critique the existing Homiletical material, also remain in their studies whilst doing so. Homiletics in South Africa thus, to a large extent with only a few exceptions, remains in a textual tradition far removed from the actual preaching event, even though it is in its essence a performed faith practice. See Martin

liturgical research Stringer²⁰ remarks for example “the study of Pentecostal worship as such cannot follow the normal patterns of liturgical study because it does not contain the kinds of texts that liturgical scholars choose to focus on.” This is also true with regard to preaching in many church traditions in (South) Africa.

Lastly, it is important to mention that all the existing books on preaching from South Africa have also been written by white South African males. Race and gender should not exclude us from making a contribution to an African Homiletics. However, it does entail that we, if we embark on this kind of research, firstly should approach what we do and how we do it, in a very particular fashion or mode. This approach has implications for the person of the researcher and one way is to try and embody an academic “spirituality of liminality” as research mode.²¹ What is furthermore needed is the use of a new methodology and methods and techniques when conducting this kind of research.²²

It is not possible to start with the development of a new preaching research methodology and methods; the issue goes much deeper and it is necessary to understand why and how preaching in Africa differs from preaching in for example parts of the West. So, for example, Zimbabwean homiletician Eben Nhiwatiwa²³ shows how the core image of a preacher in the West can for example be the Herald as Tom Long²⁴ points out, but in Africa it is the Spirit Medium. And concerning prophetic preaching he writes: “Unlike the West where prophecy means proclaiming a courageous message without exception to persons and institution, in Africa prophecy means the powers of seeing through an individual’s life and foretelling the future.”²⁵ Even if a

Laubscher, “Schleiermacher as preacher: A contemporary South African perspective.” *HTS Theologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 75, no. 4 (2019):1–8.

- 20 Martin Stringer, *A sociological history of Christian worship* (Cambridge: University Press, 2008), 234.
- 21 Cf. Cas Wepener, “Burning incense for a focus group discussion. A spirituality of liminality for doing liturgical research in an African context from an emic perspective.” *International Journal of Practical Theology* 19, no. 2 (2015): 271–291.
- 22 Cas Wepener, “Researching Rituals. On the use of participatory action research in liturgical studies.” *Practical Theology in South Africa* 20, no. 1 (2005), 109–127.
- 23 Nhiwatiwa, *Preaching in the African context*, 56.
- 24 Thomas Long, *The witness of preaching* (Louisville, KY: WJK, 2005), 19–28.
- 25 Nhiwatiwa, *Preaching in the African context*, 59.

researcher is uncomfortable with these accents, this fundamental difference should be acknowledged and even embraced and the development of research methodologies and methods, should be preceded by two steps which will be briefly explored in the next section.

3. The inescapable Triduum for an African Homiletics

What, to my mind, should happen for a white South African researcher of preaching like myself and also the Western-dominated discipline of Homiletics in South Africa – which is part of Practical Theology with its strong roots in Europe and North America²⁶ – in order to do this kind of work and to embrace African preaching as object of research and study it with integrity, is comparable to the Easter event, or specifically in liturgical language I believe we need an academic Triduum for (South African) Homiletics and (some) homileticians.

3.1 Good Friday

The Triduum refers to the three days completing Holy Week on the liturgical calendar, namely Good Friday, Quiet Saturday and Easter Sunday. In our (South) African context, in order to execute a research project entitled “Homiletics for Africa” and to develop research methods apt for such a project, the researcher and discipline must firstly enter Good Friday, which is a day of death. This is the day, or first phase, in which an exclusively Western worldview which still dominates in the minds of the researchers and the DNA of the discipline in South Africa, must be crucified. This first phase also entails other concomitant processes, such as Ngūgī wa Thiong’o’s decolonisation of the mind.²⁷ An attempt at this kind of research

26 Cf. Jaco Dreyer, “South Africa,” in Bonnie Miller-McLemore (ed.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Reader in Practical Theology* (Malden, MA/ Oxford: Blackwell): 505–514.

27 Ngūgī wa Thiong’o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1986); also see, Emmanuel Lartey, *Postcolonializing God: An African Practical Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2013). See in this regard also Ellis’s inaugural address at the Free University of Amsterdam and his concluding remark: “We should cease believing almost instinctively that ideas emanating from Africa must be wrong, since our underlying assumption is that they are destined to be replaced with ideas made in Europe. This will break the habit of decades, even centuries. We Europeans, too, have to decolonize our minds.” Stephen Ellis, *South Africa and the Decolonization of the Mind* (Amsterdam: VU University, 2009), 17. Here I thus take this phrase to also refer to the minds of homileticians working in Africa.

should in the very first place not commence, if there is not at least an attempt whereby a researcher critically scrutinises his/her preconceptions regarding both Homiletics and Africa. These preconceptions should be crucified so that the ontological veil can tear, allowing the discipline and researcher to include the spirit world of Africa in the research, or at the very least take notice of it.²⁸ In this regard the reading of relevant literature is imperative, but the real conversation that is needed only happens when field work is conducted by means of participatory observation. What is needed is also a decolonisation of methodology²⁹ and from a postcolonial perspective this entails that not only theory be engaged, but that empirical field work becomes imperative and in a way that is apt for the context. Scholarly entry into this spiritual ontology only becomes a possibility, even though very provisional and incomplete, after the crucifixion of much of what is currently cherished.³⁰

3.2 Quiet Saturday

After the crucifixion the researchers and discipline enter Quiet Saturday. This is a phase of being quiet and instead of talking, to just be quiet and listen. Differently phrased this means that after a researcher becomes aware of his/her own preconceived frameworks with which the field is approached, it then becomes time to take African epistemologies very seriously, as Ter Haar and Ellis already called for many years ago and to, in the language of Maluleke and other theologians before him, “drink from our own wells.”³¹

28 Cf. Allan Anderson, “African Initiated Churches of the Spirit and Pneumatology.” *Word & World* 23, no. 2 (2003): 178–186; Abamfo Atiemo, “Chapel Priests’ and ‘Real Priests’: the world of spirits and pastoral care in Ghanaian traditional churches” (Unpublished article University of Ghana, used with permission from the author, 2015); John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, Second edition, (Gaborone: Heinemann, 2008 [1969]); David Ngong, “Protesting the Cross: African Pentecostal Soteriology and Pastoral Care.” *JTSA* 150 (2014): 5–19; Daisy Nwachuku, “West Africa,” in Bonnie Miller-McLemore (ed.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology* (Malden, MA/ Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 515–524; Jacob Olupona, *African Spirituality: Forms, Meanings and Expressions* (New York: The Crossroads Publishing Company, 2000).

29 Cf. Linda Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, Second Edition (London/ New York: Zed Books, 2012).

30 Of course, what is currently cherished is not to be abandoned, but instead to be appreciated after engagement with empirical realities.

31 Tinyiko Maluleke, “Black and African theologies in the new world order,” 3–19.

As was already referred to, Zimbabwean homiletician Eben Nhiwatiwa, for example, shows that the core metaphor for a preacher in Africa is the Spirit Medium.³² This is an indication of the different worldview to that of the West within which much preaching happens in Africa and that there is accordingly a whole new domain of sources that should be explored which, whilst not excluding, moves beyond various kinds of biblical exegesis, Western philosophical reflections on hermeneutics and rhetoric (without negating any of these), and tapping into existing cultural forms. Entry into African ontologies opens a whole array of African epistemologies, also regarding preaching.

3.3 Easter Sunday

Only from the ontological crucifixion of Good Friday and the epistemological listening of Quiet Saturday, can the resurrection of new researchers and research methodologies for preaching become a possibility. Often in the past, in research projects, the preferred research methodology was (only) the close readings and coding of transcribed texts.³³ The insights gained from these projects were and are valuable, but they are completely inadequate and reductionist for an African context in which much of the meaning of the sermons is embedded in the delivery/performance of the sermon, the response of the hearers, the larger liturgical bedding of the sermon, the whole homiletical process that stretches much further than only Sunday morning and the working of the Spirit. As one AIC bishop in Atteridgeville told us during an interview: “sermon preparation is dangerous.”³⁴ By this he meant that there should not be one single moment in the course of the week that his pastors (preachers) are not actively preparing their sermons, they should always be “in the spirit” and if they confine sermon preparation to, for example, Wednesday mornings, they will not be in the Spirit on Sunday when they deliver the sermon.

32 Eben Nhiwatiwa, *Preaching in the African Context*.

33 See in this regard the upcoming article by Hennie Pieterse in which he discusses the history of empirical research in Homiletics in South Africa as it moved from quantitative methods, to more qualitative methods such as the Heidelberg Method and later also Grounded Theory. Hennie Pieterse, “A short history of empirical Homiletics in South Africa,” (forthcoming article, 2020).

34 Cas Wepener and Mzwandile Nyawuza, “Sermon preparation is dangerous,” 172–184.

The Heidelberg Method, for example, is a very important analytical tool, but it is inadequate for the towns of Heidelberg in Gauteng and the Western Cape Provinces of South Africa. As a homiletical research methodology, it is valuable, but insufficient in our context, and so new, more encompassing methodologies for Homiletics should be developed. A discipline such as Liturgical Studies has already undergone significant methodological advancements over the past decades in South Africa by researching the liturgy beyond the text and fostering alliances with disciplines that can assist with this type of research, such as Anthropology, Ritual Studies, and Performance Studies and their use of ethnographic methodology.³⁵ Developing a research methodology, specifically for homiletical research in an African context that can also research the performance of the sermons and its concomitant meaning, is necessary, but can only be done after the cross of ontology and the tomb of epistemology have been visited. This will however have serious implications for methods and techniques employed for data collection and analysis. I will now turn to possible implications for data collection.

4. Methodology

In this section, some route markers will be formulated of how the research of Homiletics beyond the text and as an enacted ritual-liturgical event, can be documented.³⁶ As already mentioned, the analysis of the documented data will be dealt with in another article. The route markers presented here are just starting points and should, specifically for researching preaching as performance in Africa, be worked out in detail by each individual researcher, because as Grimes puts it “conducting fieldwork is radically particular.”³⁷

35 Scholars whose work can be considered in this regard, include amongst others, Victor Turner and his later work on ritual, theatre, public liminality and plural reflexivity; Irving Goffman and his study of interaction ritual, and Richard Schechner and his work on theatre and performance.

36 Hennie Pieterse already in his inaugural lecture at UNISA in 1983 called for the use of video recordings of sermons in South Africa. See Hennie Pieterse, “n Evalueer van ondersoeksmetodes vir die prediking as kommunikasieveld.” *Theologia Evangelica* 17, no. 2 (1984), 12.

37 Grimes, *The Craft of Ritual Studies*, 37.

Paul Post³⁸ developed a matrix for studying liturgy beyond the text which is, along with the work of Grimes, of value for researching preaching beyond the text. Post explains how in the past liturgy was just studied as a book and students were obliged merely to study the book and practice the contents. In the course of the twentieth century, and given the rise of the historical method, many liturgical traditional were discovered and compared, new methodologies employed, and this gave depth to the research. In addition, there as a turn to the worshipping subjects and the bodily and sensory reality involved in worship and liturgy, which entailed that disciplines and their concomitant methodologies, such as Cultural Anthropology and Participatory Observation was also included in the study of liturgy. Post furthermore points to the importance of using both primary and secondary sources in the research as well as to include appropriation and designation in a research design in which appropriation refers to the way in which society itself appropriates the liturgy through a process of giving meaning to what is being experienced (bottom-up), and designation refers to how the same liturgy is discussed by third parties (top-down), e.g. academics and church authorities. In addition, the multi-layered context in which liturgy is performed should also be taken seriously and the study should be conducted within the tensions of tradition, thus with a view to both the past and future of liturgy.

This shift regarding the object³⁹ of liturgical research, from the study of texts to the study of the fully enacted and appropriated ritual-liturgical performance, had obvious methodological implications. In what follows, I will explore some of the methods and techniques that might be useful for documenting preaching as a ritual liturgical performance which functions as part of ritual and symbolic system within multiple cultural contexts. What one needs to document includes at least the preaching event as part of a liturgy and as performed by both preacher and hearers, the flow of the performed sermon, the preacher's homiletical process which involves

38 Paul Post, "Introduction and application," 47–77; Cas Wepener, *From fast to feast*, 21–23.

39 Cf. Cas Wepener, "The object and aim of multi-disciplinary liturgical research," *Scriptura* 93 (2006): 384–400.

much more than just the delivery of the sermon, and the appropriation⁴⁰ of the sermon event by the hearers and the preacher. And for this documentation, field work by means of participatory observation is needed which will include at least field notes, visual documentation, and various kinds of interviewing. The researcher can of course still choose what will be analysed and what not, depending on many variables, for example what he or she has time for.

4.1 Field notes

In *Beginnings in Ritual Studies* Ronald Grimes⁴¹ developed six ritual categories or elements to document rituals. In *The Craft of Ritual Studies*,⁴² these elements are adapted and elaborated upon. They include ritual actions, actors, places, times, objects, languages and groups and the idea is that researcher will document the ritual in as much detail as possible. The impact that the adoption of these elements can have on researching preaching, is significant. As already stated, in some homiletical research in the past the sermon would have been recorded, transcribed and analysed. If Grimes' elements are used, what will be documented for analysis will also include, for example, the following:

Actions

- preparatory action preceding the preaching (the homiletical process); how the performed sermon fits into the entire plot of the liturgy; the rhythm and style of the preaching; reactions or responses to the sermon; mimetic actions (allusions to something that is enacted in the sermon, but not verbally uttered);

Actors

40 For the concept appropriation see Willem Frijhoff, "Toeëigening: van bezitsdrang naar betekenisgeving." *Trajecta* 6, no.2 (1997): 99–118.

41 Ronald Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies* (rev. ed., Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 23–38. The work of Geertz is also important for the methodology, for example his well-known chapter on thick descriptions in which he states that "Analysis, then, is sorting out the structures of signification," and also "Behaviour must be attended to, and with some exactness, because it is through the flow of behaviour – or, more precisely, social action – that cultural forms find articulation"; Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 9, 17.

42 Ronald Grimes, *The Craft of Ritual Studies*, 237–283.

- bodily motions (of both preachers and hearers); gestures and postures; senses and sensing; self-awareness; participants talking about the performance;

Places

- the placement of the preacher and symbolic positioning (on the pulpit or deliberately not); sets, backdrops, staging; natural settings (e.g. AIC preaching at a river, at a sacred place); indoor/outdoor;

Times

- duration; kinds of time (e.g. an Easter sermon, during a pilgrimage); seasons and cycles; timing and appropriateness;

Objects

- costumes and dress; foodstuffs; animate and inanimate (e.g. do the dead act?);

Languages

- words said and sung; non-linguistic utterances (e.g. in tongues); performative utterances; backstage talk and after the sermon; sources of knowledge (e.g. libraries, oral culture); expressions of worldview;

Groups

- social distinctions in the group; collective ideas; values.

What is listed here is just a small selection of what Grimes⁴³ offers and what might be of particular importance when documenting a sermon. Grimes also adds lists of possible questions along with his seven elements of ritual which can be used in the research. It is clear that the usage of these elements will make it possible to document much more than just a transcribed text of the words uttered by the preacher. I want to suggest that for researching preaching beyond the text, texts of scholars such as Farley, which are used to teach in performance in preaching, can be valuable in researching preaching as performance. In a chapter, Farley focusses on “the body that speaks, the body that re-embodies ink,”⁴⁴ and emphasises posture, rhythm and gesture and, very importantly for this article, body

43 Ronald Grimes, *The Craft of Ritual Studies*, 237–241.

44 Todd Farley, “The Use of the Body in the Performance of Proclamation,” 117.

symbolism. Farley discusses all the various parts of the body that plays a role when communicating, from the head to the feet, and states: “In every culture in the world, the parts of the body have symbolic and communicative meaning.”⁴⁵ This means that the bodily symbolism at work in the preaching by an isiXhosa speaking AIC preacher and that of an Afrikaans speaking Reformed preacher in South Africa, is not necessarily the same and should be accounted for when preaching is the object of research. The first step in this regard is obviously to document these bodily gestures and Farley’s work can serve as the basis for augmenting the elements actors and actions presented by Grimes. Another aspect is the rhythm which impacts the flow and as such the appropriation of the sermon by the hearers.

According to Grimes, all ritual is embedded and “The methodological consequence of this premise is that we understand a ritual more fully by studying it in its setting.”⁴⁶ In this regard a researcher will have to make choices based on the core questions and aims of the research project, as the focus can easily be lost. The focus must remain on the preaching event, the layered contexts within which preaching as liturgical ritual is enacted should also be observed and documented, but without losing the focus and writing mostly or exclusively on the layered contexts, rather than the preaching.

4.2 Visual media

It is advised that the researcher record the preaching event by making use of a video camera. An example of an ethnographic study in which Protestant ritual was studied and in which the researcher made use of a video camera, is Stephenson’s *Performing the Reformation*.⁴⁷ What was already listed under Grimes’ elements of ritual can assist the researcher holding the camera in making choices of what to capture, when, for how long, what to leave out, etc., thus in sensitising the recorder of the performance. In this regard videography⁴⁸ is also important.

45 Ibid., 121.

46 Ibid., 41.

47 Barry Stephenson, *Performing the reformation: Public Ritual in the City of Luther* (Oxford: University Press, 2010).

48 See for example Hubert Knoblauch, Alejandro Baer, Eric Laurier, Sabine Petschke and Bernt Schnettler, “Visual Analysis. New Developments in the Interpretative Analysis of

4.3 Interviews and focus groups

Regarding his own field work Victor Turner⁴⁹ remarked: “But it is one thing to observe people performing the stylized gestures and singing the cryptic songs of ritual performances and quite another to reach an adequate understanding of what the movements and words mean to them.” Of course, a researcher cannot ask the act of preaching itself what it means. The meaning of the preaching event is to be found in a number of sources and especially in the combination of these sources. Firstly, the preached words, secondly the concomitant bodily performance, and the liturgical and cultural contexts in which the sermon is performed, the intention of the preacher, the appropriation of the preaching by the hearers which includes the bodily gestures and auditory expressions of hearers as part of the listening process. The elements of Grimes can serve to develop a protocol to document and record the words and gestures, but this can be augmented with interviews and focus groups of the preacher and the hearers, depending on the specific research question that is explored. Part of such a protocol that focuses on performance, may include questions pertaining to what the hearers perceive as “mistakes” in the performance of the sermon.

4.4 Reflexivity

There are many more aspects to consider in the initial steps of the research which is sometimes referred to as “entering the field,” however these will not be expanded upon here.⁵⁰ However, reflexivity, “being aware of and articulating one’s own position”⁵¹ is of critical importance. There is no endeavour such as innocent research and as Smith⁵² states: “Research is one of the ways in which the underlying code of imperialism and colonialism

Video and Photography.” Forum: Qualitative Social Research 9, no. 3 (2008): 1–15.

49 Victor Turner, *The ritual process: structure and anti-structure* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), 7.

50 See in this regard insights gained in a previous research project: Cas Wepener and Marcel Barnard, “Initiating research on AIC ritual,” in Cas Wepener, Ignatius Swart, Gerrie ter Haar and Marcel Barnard, (eds.), *Bonding in worship: a ritual lens on social capital in African independent churches in South Africa*. Liturgia Condenda 19 (Leuven: Peeters Press, 2019), 192–210.

51 Ronald Grimes, *The Craft of Ritual Studies*, 46.

52 Linda Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 8.

is both regulated and realized.” She emphasizes that it is important for the researcher to answer questions such as who owns the research and who will benefit from the findings. This kind of reflexivity should be a core value throughout a research project that engages preaching as a performance.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this article was to develop an argument regarding the need for researching preaching in (South) Africa (also) beyond the (transcribed) text and to provide a few comments pertaining to research methods. In an African context this is imperative, and Homiletics in Africa should therefore embrace new research methodologies that takes cognisance of African ontologies and epistemologies. Research methods that have been in use in other disciplines that study religious actions, such as modern Ritual and Liturgical Studies as well as Performance Studies, can in this regard be adopted and adapted for homiletical research in (South) Africa.⁵³

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53 The documentation of the data is the primary focus in this article, in another article the analysis of the documented data will be the focus.

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