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ORIGINAL RESEARCH

# Naming and nurturing reality from a heart renewed by grace

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## ABSTRACT

This contribution investigates the unbearable tension between the homiletical act of *naming* reality (vs exposing, challenging and/or triggering creative forces in it) on the one hand, and *neglecting* this same hand, thereby causing it to return to an ignored, unchallenged and degenerated state. The author focuses on the tensions that are generated when preachers embark on the activity of naming realities in their proximate contexts and how they withdraw or distance themselves in a certain way when problematic elements (for instance the glaring unbridgeable inequality in the situation of Dalits) are opened up by the act of naming. By means of a critical reflection on the renewal of the heart by God's act of grace in Christ, the author attempts to identify key markers for how preachers will be able to link the *act of naming* reality with the *act of nurturing* (rather than neglecting) this name

## Introduction

Speaking and acting out prophetic words of redemption in a world in which patterns of marginalisation and deprivation are deeply entrenched and kept in place by dominant systems<sup>1</sup> proved to be no easy task.

Preachers, who meet with resistance against the far-reaching changes implied by their prophetic witness with debilitating challenges like the following:

- a deep feeling of powerlessness and inadequacy in the face of mountain-like challenges
- a discouraging feeling that it is better to remain silent than to give false hope
- a history of being part of the problem (authoritarian, marginalising language in a postcolonial setting) and a reluctance to speak boldly
- fear in the face of a system-challenging message being met with opposition (cf. Tubbs Tisdale 2014: 20)

At its heart, this tension field involves speaking truthful words, not later found to be lacking integrity. *Naming reality*<sup>2</sup> implies the boldness of attempting to voice the true nature of this particular manifestation and looking the consequences in the face. The prophetic rhetoric involved in an act of naming a situation of social injustice, for instance, is designed to break the bubble, to make contact with the facts on the ground. The neighbour is here (Brueggemann 2014:23). Once something that has remained 'unspoken' becomes spoken, you face the consequence of what you have said about it; otherwise your words become empty and untruthful. This involves allowing the true nature of a situation to be hidden from disclosure and therefore creating the need of decisive action. Neglecting reality also involves the unbearable scenario when a named reality is not met with serious action, but is allowed to disintegrate into an irreparable state.

The dynamics of the aforementioned problem field can clearly be traced in the theme that was chosen for the 11th international conference: 'Preaching vulnerability: Naming and neglecting reality'.<sup>3</sup> At its heart the tension lies with the unbearable tension between naming (exposing, challenging and/or triggering creative forces on the one hand, and neglecting reality on the other hand, thereby causing it to return to an ignored, unchallenged state). In her introductory reflection on the above-mentioned conference theme, Dawn Ottoni-Wilhelm (n.c.) identifies the homiletic challenges that have to be faced in the dynamics at play in this problem field as follows:

... it is the preacher's responsibility to name that of God among us as well as that which we have neglected. Whether we are worried about our own vulnerability or have ignored the vulnerability of others, we must name what has become 'unspeakable' and recognize what we have neglected in our preaching so that we can speak the Spirit's free, redeeming words for the church and world.

Ottoni-Wilhelm's statement reminds us that the act of naming does not have to end in a futile attempt to change a problematic element in reality, only to be restrained by our own vulnerability and the seemingly unchangeable nature of others find themselves in.<sup>4</sup> The act of naming does not necessarily have to end in an act of negligence, but is possible because God's redeeming presence can be visualised and voiced even in the most distorted situations. From a theological anthropological perspective this faith-visualisation of the redeeming presence of God works on the presupposition that humanity can be regenerated by the grace of God right up till the core of our existence. The act can proceed from a vulnerable heart that is in the process of being renewed by God's grace. In the act of naming, we can be visualised in which wounded, dejected and hardened hearts can be healed and opened up to a hopeful and regenerative grace.

The purpose of this contribution, then, is to focus on a particular aspect of our human vulnerability that is revealed in the extent to which we are able to commit ourselves to certain actions with integrity and are able to resist the possibilities for our existence in change-resisting proximate contexts. The aspect that we have in mind is the usage of *heart*<sup>5</sup> in its vulnerability; in its tendency to become hardened, confining the expressions of ex-

centredness in the process; and in its tendency to become half-hearted and divided, clouding the clarity for uncompromising change in the process.

The core questions that we ask in this contribution amount to the following: To what extent will a theological renewal of the heart be able to identify key markers for a homiletic theory that attempts to link the act of nurturing (rather than neglecting) this named reality? What will be the effect of a heart, that is renewed, on the prophetic vision with which a preacher and the prophetic communities that flow from reality?

In order to address these questions the following aspects will be considered:

- What it entails to name reality.
- Naming and neglecting reality from a compromised heart.
- Perspectives on renewal of heart from canonical Holy Scripture.
- Naming and nurturing reality from a heart in the process of being renewed by God's grace.

## What it entails to name reality

In this section we shortly reflect on the essence of the act of naming reality.

Insights from language theory help us to understand how we use language to name, order and codify creating and altering perceptions.<sup>6</sup> Armstrong and Fontaine (1989:8, 9) reflect on the power involved in naming something, a place is actively carved out for it to occupy in the perceptions of the one who names and the power involved in this act, however, also have a social dimension. A group of like-minded people (who represents them) can take on the ability to exclude or include, burden or empower other individuals.

The power of naming (in the process of taking advantage of the inscriptive, classificatory nature of language of 'arche-violence' that divides people into different categories, thereby separating them from each other) has the potential for conflict and violence. In this sense language can be seen to lend itself to violence, with the potential to become the most violent of all (Armstrong & Fontaine 1989:9; Siebers 1988:9, 83).

Our interest, as practical theologians especially lies in the action field that is generated where the act of naming and its consequences play out. We will, thus, focus on action fields (and tension fields) that are generated through critical discourse with each other, naming realities in the process and positioning themselves in the tension fields generated when problematic elements (for instance glaring inequality) are opened up by the act of naming.

In this regard, Paulo Freire, (Brazilian educator, philosopher and leading advocate of critical pedagogy) has a major contribution in describing the essence of what is triggered in the interhuman action field when the act of naming is during discourse.

In his influential work, *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, Freire (2007:87) identifies two dimensions in authentic praxis: that of reflection and that of action; the process of *naming reality* and the process of *changing reality*. There is always at the same time a praxis. Thus, to speak a true word, is to transform the world. Reflection alone is insufficient, mere verbalism. Action alone is similarly inadequate, mere activism, where the energy for choosing exists without awareness and direction. Naming always entails transformation because the process of naming renders a choice from among possible choices and therefore a limitation to be challenged. At the same time, action, transforming, always entails a new naming, because the emergence of reality is only possible through naming.

Freire (2007:88, 89) sees dialogue as the:

encounter in which the united reflection and action of the dialoguers are addressed to the world. In this world transformed and humanized, this dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person's 'depositing' ideas in another; nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas to be 'consumed' by the discussants. Becoming

an encounter among women and men who name the world, it must not be a situation where so  
behalf of others [and *dominate them in the process*]. (pp. 88, 89)

Since naming and transforming the world is an act of creation, this dialogue cannot be authentically or  
merely impose the own (unchanged and unchallenged) view of truth on the other party, without being  
search for truth. The only kind of domination implicit in authentic dialogue is that of the world by the  
conquest of the world for the liberation of humankind.

What are the implications of these ideas for a theological reflection on naming and neglecting reality?  
language philosophy and Freire's critical pedagogy provide thought-provoking perspectives for quali  
element and weighing the character of authenticity in communicative acts like preaching. When a pre  
problematic element in the world shared by the listeners (for instance the unbearable praxis of being  
despised by the prevailing dominant system that drives that particular society), without committing to  
authentic discourse can take place. When preachers, in the process of naming a problematic element,  
the others (a view possibly qualified by rigid fear, doubt and despondency), the problem can be coded  
*unsolvable* and no transformative creativity can be unleashed by the homiletic event. An element of vi  
naming process when the preachers impose a problematic element on their listeners. Listeners (both  
*privileged* and *unprivileged* sides of the spectrum) can feel that they are categorised in such a way that  
part of the problem and are violently estranged from their fellow members of the human race. This, fo  
privileged feel that they are irredeemably guilty of exploiting the marginalised, or can make the unpriv  
marks of their despised position and marginalisation cannot be dissolved and that their only option is

In the next section the act of naming and neglecting reality in preaching is discussed, with thoughts an  
homiletic reflection that illustrate how difficult it is to speak a liberating word in a context where marg  
and inequality are deeply entrenched in a particular human society. This discussion is done from a va  
with particular interest on how the motives that flow from the core of humanity (the human *heart*) are  
field of naming and neglecting reality.

## **Naming and neglecting reality from a compromised heart**

In this section the idea is to give descriptive accounts of what happens when preaching attempts to na  
taking the active role of the heart into account. When an act of naming proceeds from a heart that is no  
God's vision for this world and not committed to the far-reaching change (transformation) that is imp  
gospel, negligence will be the inevitable result; negligence that does double damage in the sense that  
presented itself as a disclosure of the true state of our reality and even created expectations for transfo  
let disclosure end in the violence of condemnation; and only to let the construction site of hope fall in

Childs (2003) sketches the all too familiar homiletic impasse that is created when the sermonic act of r  
element in our reality renders the listeners (in this case the *privileged*) to be captives of the problem w  
with a vision for a way out of the problem:

The preacher went on and on. He battered us with statistics. We now know the exorbitant amou  
variety of petty luxuries as compared with the relative pittance much of the World's population  
disposal for the very essentials of life. The sharp-edged numbers revealing our tiny affluent mi  
inordinately outsized share of global consumption cut deeply into the flesh of our consciences.  
these statistics was calculated to convert us to the cause of justice. In the preacher's mind it see  
sermon in the best prophetic tradition. However, for most of us his diatribe produced only feeli  
guilt. We were condemned, albeit justly, but not empowered. It was clear that we were part of th  
how could we possibly be a part of the solution? And when that question goes unanswered, fee  
quickly turn to feelings of anger and resentment. (p. 35)

By naming the problem in such a way that the listeners get the message that they are categorised as pa  
exploitive system (without imagining a viable alternative to this system together with the listeners), th

into an extreme form of disempowering and denigrating violence, as Childs (2003) states:

When we instill either guilt or fear, we are simply pointing out moral frailty. Guilt is engendered when failings are exposed to the critique of the moral law. Fear is engendered when punishment is a violation of that law. The existence of a threat of penalty to strike fear in our hearts is simply a way we don't threaten penalties, people will not do the right thing. This can be a self-fulfilling prophecy. If we may stay within the bounds of compliance, we can easily come to accept conflict and selfishness are denigrated. We are not empowered. (pp. 36, 37)

Words that are exclusively shaped to instil fear and guilt and to keep selfishness in its comfortable (hidden) cannot be authentic words. Words like these create death rather than life. Words like these bear witness from which they flow: a heart clouded and divided by fear and doubt; a heart that knows quite well what but does not take care to open up the resources of life in order for it to flow freely into the unknown towards humanity that God intends us to become. Words that name reality, but flow from a heart that is so concerned create an illusion of having disclosed reality prophetically, will not be able to be instrumental in liberating reality. Words flowing from a heart like this, can only fail regarding the essence of what true prophecy is becoming fulfilled words in the sense of bearing a kind of fruit that provides lasting health to the nation and accelerate disintegration and ultimately end in self-destruction.

The other side of the spectrum in the dynamic field of naming reality involves the dialogue with the unknown. Indian Christian communities for example face the challenge of having to address the 'Dalit'<sup>7</sup>-situation where deeply entrenched patterns of estrangement are being bridged in the process. Speaking about the injustice to suffer due to their abused, exploited and marginalised position in society, can become empty rhetoric if it is made to reimagine a truly integrated society, and reality is consequently neglected. Gnanavaram (1999) from a Dalit perspective, made the following observation at the 4th biennial conference of *Societas Homiletica* in February - 04 March 1999 at Virginia Theological Seminary, Washington, DC):

The worst crime the caste-people has committed against us has been to teach us to hate and pity ourselves. If non-Dalits have succeeded in planting within us self-pity and hatred because they have power and we are powerless. Their success is further enhanced by the institution of caste and the ideology of untouchability. Dalit Christian reality is not very different from the general Dalit situation. We Christian Dalits are not the only ones in Christian churches. (p. 50)

A case of hidden violence can occur when the problems involved in the Dalit situation are named in such a way that made to believe that they are mere passive objects of pity who cannot else than be kept in their allotted place. This engender this hidden form of violence, causes double hurt, as it is supposed to come from the mouths of those who themselves as bearers of the Word of the One, who promised to make all things new. The double hurt is violently open up and their failure to deal with the present reality are reflected in Alfred Stephen's (n.c.) observations on the Dalit situation. This was expressed in his presidential welcoming message prior to the 11th International Conference of *Homiletica* that took place in Madurai (India) from 25 to 30 July 2014:

The Christian Dalits undergo more sufferings and discriminations, both from within the church and from outside, thus they suffer multi-faceted alienation. Their stigma continues and discriminations intensify. The irony is that their socio-cultural reality does not seem to be a matter of concern both in doing theology and in preaching. The main contention is that preaching comfortably has eluded taking the socio-cultural reality of Dalits into consideration in the hermeneutical process, thus making preaching of the gospel difficult and the message irrelevant to the Dalits as it has failed to reflect their social and cultural reality.

Stephen's initial thoughts point out the important place of the current social-cultural situation people are living in when naming reality. The gospel's impact on naming reality cannot be reduced to imagining a futuristic, spiritual world isolated from human life and human community in its present state. But even attempts at contextualisation including the element of liberation in the *here-and-now* situation does not necessarily introduce elemental transformative integrity to the act of naming. Rajkumar (2010) queries the 'practical efficacy' of contextualisation in theology<sup>8</sup> in the following way:

Christianity in India in the twenty-first century is confronted with a paradoxical situation. On the one hand we have the growing academic influence of Christian Dalit theology as a form of contextual theology, and on the other we have the glaring discrimination of Dalits within Christianity as well as the continued pressure on the Church to engage in the issues of Dalit liberation. (p. 1)

Rajkumar (2010:2) quotes the following lines from *Shroud*, a poem by Dalit Marathi poet Baban Londhe, about the inefficacy and hidden violence of words that merely talk about socio-cultural change:

On a plain so vast our eyes could not reach  
They would make speeches to their hearts content  
and shout out novel slogans,  
blow a breath of hope on our over tired limbs.  
At times, to our shanty towns they would come,  
Careful not to rumple their ironed clothes  
crossing over lands and alleys,  
jumping across streaming gutters.  
When they stopped beside our doors  
we felt inexplicably moved.  
Viewing our pitiable state they would say  
'Truly this needs a socio economic cultural change,  
the whole picture needs to be changed'.  
Then we would sing their songs  
in sonorous full-throated tones.  
Acting innocuous, they would eat  
the marrow of our bones.  
Days passed by.  
Darkness pressed from all sides.  
We battled against sunshine and rain  
and like fools awaiting salvation  
we have stood our ground  
and are sunk to the neck in mire.  
But now they say plans are worked out  
for our salvation  
covering our wasted tombs



in a new shroud

with munificence!

The act of naming reality cannot fulfil the full spectrum of its task by merely mapping out contextual reality on the surface of our existence, expressing the need for change at this level alone and working with people as manipulatable objects in the process.

A theological theory that concerns itself with naming reality, with the aim on nurturing (and not neglecting) hearts, must have to take the depth level of our existence into account. It will have to deal with the way our vision of reality and our actions of committing ourselves to a certain course of action are channelled from the core of our existence, our hearts.

It will ultimately concern itself with the renewal of our hearts by the grace of God.

## **Perspectives on renewal of the heart from canonical Holy Scripture**

In this section the concept of *heart* as a descriptor for the innermost core of human life, in its renewal and its effect on how we view life and interact with life, is explored from the canonical Holy Scripture.<sup>9</sup>

### **The role of the heart as the innermost core of human life and its expressions**

In discussing the psychology of Paul, Ladd (1993:517-518) illustrates how the Pauline usage of *kardia* (heart) corresponds with the biblical usage of the Hebrew word *leb* as a designator of the inner life of a person and the various human activities (expressions of life) that spring from this innermost core of life: The heart is the seat of both good and bad (Rm 1:24; 2 Cor 2:4). *Kardia* is described as the source from which humanity's intellectual and moral judgement can be influenced to such an extent that it becomes lacking in understanding and incapable of discernment (Rm 1:21). Without enlightenment of the 'eyes of the heart' (Eph 1:18), the Christians' hope cannot be realised. *Kardia* is used to describe the seat of the will, leading a person to impenitence on the one hand, or to repentance on the other hand (Rm 2:5; 6:17). In order to get a hold on why a human being thinks in a certain way and decides to act in a certain way, the active role of the heart of that person should be considered (cf. Witherington 1994:291). The heart is what is on the surface level of human action and behaviour, that which lies beneath the surface and cannot be seen. The heart must be taken into account.

### **Renewal of the heart**

From a canonical perspective, the heart is in need of being renewed and sanctified as a space from which the gracious and merciful presence of the living God can flow into our lives. By the covenant presence and actions of God, a hardened heart and the rigid, divided, unrighteous expressions of life that flow from it can be renewed - becoming a source from which a fountain of undivided and unpolluted love for God and fellow humans can begin to flow. This need for renewal at the core of our humanity is expressed in the way a case is made in the biblical literature. Despite physical circumcision, the hearts of Israelites remained *uncircumcised* (Lv 26:41). According to Deuteronomy 30:6, God will circumcise the hearts of a future generation of Israel. Through the new covenant God promises that He will make a 'new covenant' with Israel in which He will purify the Israelites and their hearts (Jr 31:31-34; cf. 32:39-40). According to Ezekiel 36:26-27 it could even be expected that God would renew the heart and spirit of the Israelites with a new heart and new spirit (Stettler 2004:491).

Jesus pointed out the wickedness and violent, relationship-destroying forces that flow from a 'hardened heart' (Mt 23:10:5). With him the kingdom of God is inaugurated: sins are forgiven, hearts circumcised, and the Torah is written on the hearts so that they can begin to carry out God's will with a cleansed conscience (Rm 2:29; Col 2:11-23; cf. Stettler 2004:492).

### **The effect of renewal of the heart on the way we view life and interact with life**

What will be the effect of the renewal of the heart - in the context of the new covenant and in a time of crisis?

God is in the process of being inaugurated - on the way we view life and interact with life?

In his theological reflection on the purity of heart in Jesus' teaching as described in Mark 7:14-23, Stett how Jesus works with the contrast between purity that comes from outside (consumption of food according to the Old Testament with the idea that this act reminds us not to interact with anything that can defile us of heart (pure motives, words and deeds that flow from the inner life and can have a purifying effect on living environment). For Jesus, the purity which the Torah demands and guards points symbolically to embracing purity of the kingdom of God; a purity that cannot be effected by outward and superficial observance (without the core of our existence and the motives and actions that flow from this core being involved) achieved by cleansing of the heart.

Jesus challenges his disciples to comply fully with his ethics now that the kingdom of God is dawning a way that they will at its final revelation. He calls them already to live in the purity of the coming kingdom which is essentially one of the heart, out of which all words and deeds go forth pure, and which is free of 'offensive' and 'contagious' sense *[with a cleansing and clarifying effect on its life environment]*. (Stett 2004:494)

It is clear from this kingdom vision that Christians should be mindful of their heart. When a role is visible to be a blessing to this world, this blessing cannot be enacted from a life that is merely superficially devoted to existence. When the heart is not minded and actively submitted to the cleansing work of the Spirit of God, an unclouded, uncompromised account of the true life that God has in store for this world.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus visualises a new life for those who are drawn into the inauguration of the kingdom. By starting his sermon with the Beatitudes, Jesus expresses a surprising blessedness of life for people who have been violently suppressed and impeded by a discriminating religious system into thinking that nothing true can come from their lives. In the sixth Beatitude, Jesus states: 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.'

The 'pure in heart' blessed in the sixth Beatitude, according to Kelsey's (2009b:803) interpretation, are those whose orientation towards God is undivided. This Beatitude demands not a certain quality in the privacy of subjective existence, but an orientation in action in and towards one's public proximate contexts that decisively shapes one's thinking, and feeling in such fashion that one is active for fellow creatures according to the law's commandment. It seems to open a level of unified connectedness with our proximate contexts that clearly supersedes an objectified environment and isolates us from living contact with it. Reflecting on Jesus' teachings in this context, Bourgeault (2008) concludes:

His whole mission can fundamentally be seen as trying to push, tease, shock, and wheedle people out of their 'limited analytic intellect' of the egoic operating system<sup>10</sup> into the 'vast realm of mind' where they can access the resources they need to live in fearlessness, coherence, and compassion or in other words, a fullness of beings. (p. 37)

In the sixth Beatitude a life is visualised that culminates in 'seeing God'. Purity of heart is portrayed to be an opening up of an unclouded vision of God. A cleaner heart leads to a cleaner vision of God. In his reflection on the 'pure heart', Augustine suggests that humans are to be seen as beings that have corporeal senses by which they are connected to the physical world, as well as senses of the heart or the *homo interior* by which God, justice and beauty are perceived. Throughout this life this perception of God grows, but only in the resurrection will it be complete enough to see God 'face'. In this life the perception of God is increasingly clarified by means of an ever-growing likeness to God and more and more like God as the purification process of the heart progresses and the expressions of the heart increasingly resonate with God-likeness (Lootens 2012:63-65).

The development of perception that is opened up by means of seeing God with increasing clarity does not consist of a gradual purification from background impressions that restricted, objectified and polluted our cognitive field, but merely a matter of purification from cognitive elements that restricted our field of view to such an extent that we could not imagine a way forward over what seemed to be unbridgeable chasms. It is neither merely a matter of purification from cognitive elements that impeded our scope to such an extent that we were only able to imagine a small circle of vision, but a matter of seeing God has in mind for us - restricted to a vague future, isolated from our current existence. It is also a matter of



(experiencing) the heart of God in its undivided commitment towards opening up this fountain of life abundance through the redemptive work of his Son, Jesus Christ. This experiential seeing increasingly existence to integral, unified connectedness with our living environment, heartfelt compassion for others in action in ministering the fullness of God's love to them (cf. Pearmain 2001:76).

## **Naming and nurturing reality from a heart in the process of being renewed by the gospel**

What, then, will be the implications of these perspectives on renewal of the heart, for our quest to name reality that the act of this naming will not lead to despondent self-isolation from reality, disillusionment with reality, or negligence of reality that inevitably flows from these dispositions?

What will need to change in the homiletic praxis that we visualise for our sermons and the prophetic witness of these sermons? These changes must be made in order to reflect a kind of attunement with reality that is in tune into a rhythm that is starting to beat in sync with the heart of God. How can our acts of naming reality be a nurturing disposition towards reality that is bent on cherishing our proximate contexts with the eye of faith and not destined for?

When we prayerfully place ourselves under the sanctifying work of the Spirit of Christ - asking for hidden fears of self-centredness and fears, regarding being overburdened by proximate contact with the 'untouchable' - cleansed from our hearts - a new vision for our place in this world will begin to emerge. Rigid concepts of the unachievability of trying to transform deeply entrenched patterns in society, like those that caused unbridgeable gaps between the privileged (people who see themselves as having barely enough for themselves) and the underprivileged (people who are made to believe that they have nothing and are nothing), will begin to fade as we progressively become more open to this reality in its clarity and magnificence.

In a sermon with the title, 'A-cross-shattered church', <sup>11</sup>Stanley Hauerwas (2009:73) refers to John Howard Yoder's claim that the cross is neither foolish, nor weak, but natural'. This claim challenges the notion that nonviolence must be *unnatural* and irrational, which is why we have to work so hard to secure peace in a violent world. Yoder and Hauerwas, suggests that Jesus' cross challenges questions that ask how to get from here to there. The transformation of the world named by the cross means that the challenge is how the present world can be named as reality that it should be:

Thus we are not asked to love our enemies in order to make them our friends, but we are called to love them because at the cross it has been effectively proclaimed that from all eternity they were our sisters. We are not called to make the bread of the world available to the hungry, we are called to share it with awareness that it was always theirs. (Hauerwas 2009:75)

The implications of Hauerwas's sermonic wisdom are clear: Our naming of reality does not have to take place from the presupposition that we still have to try and bridge unbridgeable situations. This disposition is only possible where the heart from which we speak can easily become contaminated by doubts regarding the achievement of the gospel for the despised and marginalised. Becoming progressively aware of God's vision for this world from the process of being purified by God's grace, we can begin to name reality with a prophetic vision for a world in which enough flows for all from the unrestrained heart of God as it is revealed through his redemptive grace. Naming reality in which reality is named in this way will become like fountains flowing from uncompromised hearts, and clarifying waters for those who need to be liberated from their rigid and limited perceptions. It is only when we have been led to believe that they have no place in this world and that they have nothing of significance to offer to other human beings.

Sermons like these will likely pave the way for the formation of the kind of dialogical prophetic community that Stanley Hauerwas (1981, 1983), and missiologist David J. Bosch (1991). In these prophetic sermons the gospel can be proclaimed from a position of shared vulnerability, bearing witness to the way the fountain of life has shattered our rigid patterns of self-concern and rationalistic doubt. It is purifying our hearts from the blindness of self-interest and is opening up our existence into nurturing our reality with the fullness of heavenly life being entrusted to us.

In these communities those members who are reckoned to be privileged members of the dominant system do not have to remain trapped behind guilt-ridden, self-preserving facades. They can become free to share a life that flows from the redeeming grace that God has opened up in their hearts. In these communities Dalits of this world no longer has to be labelled problematic and their position in society no longer inhibited behind walls of isolation and disdain. From a heart purified by the grace of God, the violent impact of uneducated, untouchable categories in which the Dalits of this world have been named and framed can be accepted the new name and kingdom frame proclaimed to them by Jesus Christ. They can embrace themselves as the blessed people for whom the riches of God's grace in Christ are destined. They can become free to be nurtured previously been portrayed to be untouchable with the nurturing compassion of God flowing from the heart of God.

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This article is published in the section Practical Theology of the Society for Practical Theology in South Africa. 1.Brueggemann (2014) describes the dominant ideology (as it manifested in Old Testament Israel's royal ideology, which is echoed in the ideology of exceptionalism in contemporary US society) as follows: 'The dominant ideology is that of power and its wisdom, that you can compartmentalize and privatize; that you can declare unwelcome and irrelevant; that you can separate economics from neighborliness; that you can enjoy chosenness and ignore the demands of the others' (p. 23).

2.One's presuppositions in viewing reality and the effects this will have on naming reality need to be considered. Brueggemann (2010:107) illustrates how modern western thinking significantly changed the way we - who find ourselves in a particular culture - tend to view reality. In premodern times the primacy was with the spiritual world (theological) and its influence on the physical world. In modern thinking a 180-degree turn was made: the natural world and its observations that can be made in this natural world, becomes the only verifiable norms for our thinking. The 'spiritual word' came to be seen as a construct of human thinking or imagination, not having an objective reality (see Colson & Percy 1999:ix). The author, however, works with a theological presupposition that relinks world and spirit. In this sense that the 'spiritual word' and 'physical world' are viewed to be different aspects of one relational reality. In this sense in which the knowledge of our place in this world is intrinsically linked with how God makes Godself known (see Brueggemann 2004:317). The reality of the world we live in is then viewed as an objective environment that was brought into being for a particular purpose. From a Christian perspective this particular origin and purpose are then interpreted as being intrinsically linked with the work of the triune God, the Creator, Redeemer and Consummator.

3.The *Societas Homiletica* is an academic and international society for teachers and researchers of practical theology. Its main activity is a biannual international conference and the publication of its proceedings.

4.Theological anthropologist, David H. Kelsey's (2009a:537) description of human vulnerability reflects the interplay of well as interpersonal elements in the following way: creaturely personal bodies that are finite centers of being, internally in respect to the range and energy and externally in respect to the way they are impinged on by others and impinge on them in return, inherently vulnerable to damage, violation, disintegration, and death.' The creaturely personal bodies constitutes part of the multiple dimensions of our existence that God relates to. In this sense God draws human creatures into borrowed time by relating proleptically to them in eschatological blessing. The reality of the crucified Jesus in the midst of their ambiguous and distorted proximate contexts.

5.When referring to *heart* the author does not have the physical organ inside the human body in mind but the metaphorical sense that is intended. When we refer to *heart* in our daily metaphoric use of this concept we are referring to someone as having a 'black heart' or a 'heart of gold' or creative efforts as 'having a heart' or 'lacking a heart'. The concepts that can be conveyed are some particular dimensions of being and feeling that can be put into living in certain contexts. When Paul refers to *kardia* (*heart*) in his anthropological terminology, he clearly has the metaphorical sense in mind. With the Old Testament usage, the heart is seen to be the deepest seat from which thought, will and action proceed. It is the instrument of one's ego and can either be bad (as the source of bad desires and lusts that proceed from the heart) or it can be the seat of good desires and beliefs. It is the seat of belief in the confessing words and actions of a justified believer (Rom 10:1, 10; Witherington 1994:291).

6.Cf. for example Umberto Eco (1976), Michel Foucault (1970) and Roland Barthes (1972) for various perspectives on the use of language in the process of perception-creation or alteration.



7. The word *Dalit* comes from a Sanskrit root that is associated with things or people that are cut, split, or broken. The present use of the word *Dalit* presumably goes back to the nineteenth century, when a Marathi social revolutionary, Mahatma Jyotirao Phule (1826-1890), used it to describe the 'Outcastes' and 'Untouchables' and other marginalized and broken victims of a caste-ridden Indian society. It should, however, be noted that *Dalit* does not connote low-caste or impurity in itself (as does some of the other more derogatory terms used to describe the particular people in Indian society). It rather refers to the condition of brokenness to which this group has been reduced by social convention. For people who are subjected to abject poverty and experience that they are less than human beings, the name *Dalit* can even become a name they choose to give themselves, constantly reminding them of the age-old oppression that they still have to bear and serving as a communal expression of hope to regain their identity (Sandangi 2008:3).

8. Christian Dalit theology professes to be an identity-specific theology of liberation and has as its primary goal the liberation of Dalit communities. It is seen to be not only a prophetic theology for identification with Dalits, but also as a political theology for social action towards the transformation of injustice and oppression (Rajkumar 2010:1).'

9. The author's presumptions and methodological point of departure flow from a vision that the biblical texts (the Old and the New Testament) form an authoritative body of Spirit-inspired texts in which God reveals his relationship with his covenant community and this world. By naming this body of literature *canonical*, the author sees himself part of an interpretative community that acknowledge Scripture as a determinate set of texts for the employment by the community, as Kelsey (2009a:147-148) states, 'is the medium in, through, and under which we call the community into being; nurture and sustain it; and, when necessary, correct and reform the way of our common life to respond appropriately to God's way of relating with them.' Although the books of the Bible were written by different authors over a span of more than 1000 years, the reader of this body of literature seeks the guidance of the Spirit to trace lines and contingent patterns that flow from the history of revelation through these books; patterns of promise and fulfilment; patterns of foreshadowing and realisation with the coming of Christ as culmination point for these redemptive historical lines (cf. Greidanus 1999:48). These patterns of Scripture approach to studying Scripture utilised for the formation of normative theory. (Seeking guidance for our lives according to a way that is perceived to represent the fullness of what God intends for our lives.)

10. Bourgeault (2008:36) distinguishes between the 'egoic' system of perception (the cerebral way of perceiving the world up in different bits and pieces, in subject and object, in order to perceive it) on the one hand and 'spiritual perception' (as the wisdom tradition centres it in the heart) on the other hand: 'In wisdom, the heart is a highly sensitive instrument for keeping us aligned, as we journey along the horizontal axis of time, with the vertical axis of timeless reality: the realm of meaning, value and conscience. The heart perceives in a deeper and more integral way than our poor, Cartesian minds even begin to imagine.' In western tradition, the difference between *head* and *heart* in a very clichéd and dualistic way; as if 'thinking with the head' (objective thinking and 'thinking with the heart' has to do with a non-rational, emotional way of making a job, according to Bourgeault (2009:19), is to look deeper than the surface of things, deeper than the jurisdiction of our ordinary awareness, and to beam in on the deeper, ensheltering spiritual world in which our hearts call it the 'kingdom of heaven'.

11. Preached for the Duke Divinity School in the University Chapel on 02 February 2005 and is based on Matthew 6:1-8, Psalm 15, 1 Corinthians 1:18-31 and Matthew 5:1-12.

12. Hauerwas's concern, according to Graham (1996:115, 116), was to establish theological ethics as the basis for the development of authentic Christian character. He emphasised the idea that moral discourse has its roots in the stories and self-understanding of autonomous Christian communities, rather than universal rational principles. A Constantinian relationship, whereby the church simply reflects the higher values of secular society, and without challenging or questioning the validity of them, is abhorred. Instead the church exists to witness to the world living in this world as a 'colony of heaven' (Hauerwas & Willimon 1989). Kritzinger and Saayman (2010) conclude that he consciously elected not to work with a dialectical or conflict model, but rather to rally an oppressed group to rally around the cause of their oppression in order to put pressure on their oppressors. He favoured reconciliatory strategies, following the 'politics of Jesus' as expounded by John Yoder. This meant gathering together an alternative (and unlikely) prophetic community consisting of people from all sides of the conflict who were committed to humanity and start living the life of the future in the present. In this, Bosch saw the way of the cross that he believed to follow.



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