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PREACHING AND CARTOONING: AN EXPLORATION OF THE PROCESSES INVOLVED IN DEVELOPING A SERMON AND A NEWSPAPER CARTOON

ABSTRACT

This article explores the similarities and differences between the process followed to develop a sermon and that followed to develop a cartoon. It first examines the representation of the jester or clown in some recent publications by homileticians before describing the process of development of a sermon, as proposed by three homiletic sources from namely North America, South Africa and The Netherlands, respectively. The article describes the process followed in the development of a cartoon in a similar way. The article concludes by presenting some observations on the preacher as cartoonist with reference to the process followed in the development of a cartoon. It argues that the cartoonist may currently be viewed as a metaphor for a preacher that could enrich existing images of the preacher such as the clown or jester, especially because of the similarities in the processes for writing/preparing a sermon and drawing a cartoon.

1. INTRODUCTION

In his poem “Saturday evening”/“Saterdagavond”, the late South African poet-minister and preacher I.L. de Villiers (1972:58) describes the experience many preachers often have when words or at least ideas and thoughts must be put on paper for preaching on Sunday.

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Saturday evening¹
 I sit and make dots
 in front of me on the paper.
 The ballpoint pen hinges
 my right hand.
 Intellect
 will
 spirit
 mood
 come
 to
 a halt.
 Tomorrow the congregation will celebrate the Sabbath
 and I am making dots
 on blank paper.

At least, De Villiers's experience stimulated his creative impulse to write a poem about it; this is more than many other preachers can manage. However, preachers are not the only ones who are regularly faced with a deadline while staring at a blank piece of paper. This experience of waiting for the creative impulse is also well known to many creative professionals such as writers, composers and sculptors.² These artists, however, do not always have an audience waiting to hear a sermon at 9:00 in the morning. This preached word for which they are waiting should preferably not be a variation on a theme they heard the previous week. Hearers of weekly sermons are not an easy audience to satisfy and many preachers feel the pressure of pulling an all-new sermon rabbit from the hat of the homiletic process every week. The cartoonist is one artist – there will, of course, be more – who understands this pressure, to which the creative process is subject, as well as a preacher does, if sometimes not even better.³ The

1 My English translation, CW.

2 In this instance, one can qualify and add that creativity should also be a way of life for preachers. Cf. in this regard, for example, McKenzie (2010) for her advice on cultivating the imagination, especially inspired by the work of novelists; Vos & Wepener (2014) work with a literary-aesthetic approach to worship and preaching. However, for many preachers, there still remains that moment when everything must come together and be given in the form of a sermon that can be preached.

3 I have had many informal conversations about these similarities with Brandan, who is the cartoonist for, among others, the following South African newspapers: *Business Day*, *Rapport*, *Weekend Argus*. Cf. <http://brandanreynolds.com/> [2014, 16 April]. Journalists also feel the pressure caused by a deadline; however, there is a difference in reporting on current news events and in-depth journalism that requires more reflection and interpretation in order to write the article.

typical preacher faces this blank sheet of paper once a week, but not often more than three times a week. A cartoonist who practises his/her art form as a full-time profession often has to face this blank sheet of paper daily. S/he also experiences this creativity under pressure.

Such creativity that influences the dynamics of the creative process is but one similarity between the process followed to develop a sermon and that followed to develop a cartoon. In the past, many parallels have been drawn between preachers and artists, one of the most famous being that of the jester/fool/clown. Currently, the cartoonist fulfils, to a large extent, the role that the jester fulfilled in the past.⁴ However, it is not only his/her person, but also and especially the process involved in the development of a cartoon, that helps the cartoonist fulfil that role in a specific contextually relevant manner; this is not necessarily the case with a circus clown, for example.

This article explores the similarities and differences between the process followed to develop a sermon and that followed to develop a cartoon. It first examines the representation of the jester or clown in some recent publications by homileticians. Then it describes the process of the development of a sermon, as proposed by three homiletic sources from namely North America, South Africa and The Netherlands, respectively. The article also describes the process followed in the development of a cartoon in a similar way, by presenting the processes used by the American cartoonist Steve Brodner and the British cartoonist Christian Adams. The article concludes with some observations on the preacher as cartoonist with reference to the process involved in the development of a cartoon. It will be argued that, in our own day and age, the cartoonist may be regarded as a metaphor for a preacher that could enrich existing images of the preacher such as the clown or jester, especially because of the similarities in the processes involved in writing/preparing a sermon and drawing a cartoon. The article pays specific attention to the process rather than to the metaphor as such. This could be the subject of future research.

4 When I first shared this idea, in 2010, of exploring the similarities between the preacher and the cartoonist with two of my colleagues in The Netherlands and South Africa, Marcel Barnard and Johan Cilliers, they were very positive and supportive of the idea, which served as an encouragement for me to explore it further. At the time of conducting the initial research for this article, I had exploratory conversations on the subject with cartoonist Brandan Reynolds between mid-2010 and mid-2012, as I could not find another homiletician who draws a comparison between a preacher and cartoonist.

2. THE PREACHER AS JESTER/CLOWN

The South African homiletician Johan Cilliers (2008; 2009; 2010) has studied the image of the preacher as clown or jester. With reference to Long's well-known images or metaphors for preachers (cf. Long 2005:18-51), Cilliers suggests the image of the preacher as clown or jester. Like Campbell (2008:1), he traces the image back to Paul (1 Cor. 1:18, 21)⁵ and links the idea of the Gospel being scandalous and laughable to the notion of the vulnerability of the church, both of which find expression in the image of the clown. The clown is an apt image, he argues, especially in a state of liminality. It appears that the liminality, to which Cilliers refers, is liminality both in the theological sense of the church and believers being aliens and sojourners (1 Pet. 2) and in the South African context of transition from apartheid to post-apartheid.⁶ Furthermore and very importantly, Cilliers points out how the clown is also an image of the frailty and vulnerability of God, and refers to the role of the jester in addition to the image of the clown that can assist in unmasking the powers that be. With reference to the work of Campbell, Tisdale (2010:59-60) also refers to this role of preaching in her chapter entitled "Speaking truth in love". According to Tisdale (2010:60), adopting the role of the court jester, who lampoons the powers that be, can be one strategy for a preacher to speak truth in love by making use of burlesque and humour.

The image or metaphor of the clown or jester is a rich image to explore as a metaphor for a preacher, but this is not the aim of this article. As stated earlier, the aim is to take up and explore the image of the cartoonist, as I believe it can be a similarly enriching exercise to explore the image of the preacher as cartoonist in the tradition of considering the preacher as clown/jester/fool. In this article, I am more interested in the process involved in the development of a cartoon compared to that involved in the development of a sermon. Of course, a sermon is not to be equated with the act of preaching, but it is one element of preaching (cf. Long 2005:15-16). However, the specific way in which a cartoonist develops his/her cartoon has much to offer for the way in which preachers can develop their sermons. Because of some of the similarities, not least the deadline (remember De Villiers's dots on the blank sheet) involved in both processes, it is proposed that the image of the preacher as clown or jester

5 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God (1 Cor. 1:18, NIV). For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe (1 Cor. 1:21, NIV).

6 With regard to liminality in relation to preaching and worship, cf. Burger (1995); Barnard, Cilliers & Wepener (2014); Wepener (2009; 2011).

in our day be enriched with the image of the cartoonist as pertaining to the process of developing the cartoon/sermon.

In order to illustrate the similarities and thereby the aptness of the image of the cartoonist and cartooning process, I shall first give examples of the processes of both sermon development/preparation and cartoon development; I shall distil homiletic qualities⁷ from these descriptions (cf. Post 2001).

3. THE HOMILETIC PROCESS

In the Homiletics modules of the Department of Practical Theology, students are introduced to three (related) homiletic processes in the development of a sermon. First, in the “Introduction to Homiletics” course, the lecturer uses some chapters from Long and Tisdale’s book (2008). The second Homiletics module in the fourth academic year is entitled “Preaching and worship in a context of poverty” and a primary textbook for this module is Pieterse’s book (2001). The final Homiletics module, before students do their practical year in congregations, focuses mainly on Van der Meulen’s book (2008). I shall now briefly present these three processes, one American, one South African and one Dutch.

3.1 *Teaching preaching as a Christian practice*

Once students have been challenged on a basic level to reflect on questions such as “What is a preacher?” and “What happens in preaching?”, the course takes a cue from Old (cf. Old 2002:59-90) to present a bird’s eye view of the history of preaching; this is supplemented with other themes such as the theology of preaching and Long’s (1989) work on “preaching and the literary forms of the Bible”. Building on this and being reminded by Long (2005:12), quoting Campbell, that “Sundays come toward the preacher like telephone poles by the window of a moving train”, students are presented with a first method of how to approach the biblical text (Thompson 2008:61-74), the congregation (Tisdale 2008:75-89) and the wider social context (Harris 2008:90-100) in their preaching. Of course, there is also a liturgical and hymnological phase in each module; in this article, I shall only mention the homiletic work covered. All the sources used emphasise the importance of the homiletic process, which includes various phases, taking into account both the current context and the Scriptural text(s) in the process of interpretation, in order to develop the sermon. The Zimbabwean homileticians, E. Nhiwatiwa (2012:16-28), also emphasises

7 The Dutch liturgist Paul Post works with the notion of ritual-liturgical qualities in the field of Liturgical Studies. I apply this in the field of Homiletics.

the importance of this process. He urges preachers from Africa, who are, according to him, generally good at speaking without preparation and notes, to take the process of sermon preparation seriously.⁸

3.2 *Preaching in a context of poverty*

In his book, Pieterse (2001) situates Homiletics within Practical Theology as a hermeneutic communicative act in service of the gospel in the congregation and in society. In his approach, Pieterse emphasises the importance of a thorough contextual analysis, a hermeneutical approach as well as the connection or link between preaching and other communicative acts in the congregation such as diaconical community development. With the aim of preaching in a context of poverty, he finally develops a homiletic theory for praxis. As part of this module and supplementing Pieterse's excellent and much-needed contextual approach, students are also introduced to McClure's (1995) book as a practical way of engaging some people in the audience in the homiletic process as well as an approach regarding liturgical interculturalisation, which discusses the issue of power relations in the homiletic process (cf. Wepener 2010).

3.3 *Als een leerling leren preken*

The process followed in Van der Meulen's (2008) book was developed by the homiletician Gerrit Immink and is taught at the Protestant Theological University in Amsterdam and Groningen, The Netherlands. Basically, the process consists of eight steps with separate phases within certain steps (Immink 2008:9-20).

- Step 1: *The concrete life-world and social context* (the homiletic situation) in which the context is being exegeted on various levels (cf. Brouwer 2008:21-34).
- Step 2: *Encountering Scripture* has four subsections, namely the first reading, exegesis, interpretation, and conversation with a church member. In this step, some of the phases have a more literary and historical character, whereas others have a more hermeneutic and theological character (Immink 2008:15-16; cf. also De Zwardt 2008:50-59; Van Ek 2008:60-70; Muis 2008:71-79).
- Step 3: *The focus and function* is a strategy from the work of Long that is included in this instance. Before a student starts to write the

8 It is beyond the scope of this article to provide a detailed account of all the aspects of the modules. I shall highlight only those sections that directly relate to the process of developing a sermon and the prescribed sources.

sermon, s/he must formulate what the biblical text wants to say and do (cf. Van der Meulen 2008:80-89).

- Step 4: *Reflection, meditation, prayer* is more than a step, as the authors explain; it is a whole approach towards the process and the unity of *logos, pathos* and *ethos* (cf. Immink 2008:17).
- Step 5: *Structure and design*, in which the preacher approaches the blank sheet of paper before him/her (cf. Immink 2008:18) with the formulated focus and function in mind. The preacher goes further, designing and deciding on an introduction and a conclusion as well as a scheme for the body of the sermon (cf. De Vries 2008:100-110).
- Step 6: *Interpretation and communication* (what Long would call 'refining the form') is about finding suitable illustrations and language that can communicate the message (cf. Bregman 2008:111-120; Immink 2008:18-19).
- Step 7: *Writing* deals with the question of whether a sermon should be written in full or not. Immink (2008:19) opts for writing out the sermon in full as an important part of the overall creative process during which ideas are ordered; this helps to concentrate on various aspects of this creative process.
- Step 8: *Preaching and discussion* will receive less attention in this article, which is more focused on the creative process. This entails the delivery of the sermon as well as the importance for student preachers to hold discussion groups after sermons (Immink 2008:19-20; cf. Borger 2008:121-131; Van Leeuwen & Struijs 2008:144-154).

This preaching process is also supplemented by introducing students to one particular aesthetic approach, namely an intertextual-inculturating homiletic approach (cf. Wepener & Vos 2013). Throughout their training, the majority of the students who are preparing themselves for the ministry also participate in practical formation courses taught by their respective churches in which preaching also receives attention.

3.4 Main features of the homiletic processes

Although there are similarities and differences in the homiletic processes described earlier, I shall focus on the similarities. All three processes explicitly focus on the context, the homiletic situation. The hearers and their life worlds are taken seriously. Some homileticians more than others make a plea for a thorough contextual analysis as part of the process; however, all agree on the importance of taking the actual context of the hearers seriously as a starting point for the development of the sermon.

Along with the context, a second important emphasis is the text or texts and, in particular, the Scriptural text(s) used in the preparation process. All homileticians come, broadly speaking, from the Reformed tradition and agree on the importance of exegesis and hermeneutics. Long's image of the witness rests strongly on the work of Ricoeur (Long 2005:45-51). Pieterse, for example, uses the work of philosophers Gadamer and Ricoeur in his book (2001:71-78); Van Ek (2008:60-70) also wrote a chapter on hermeneutics as an integral part of the overall process.

A third aspect, along with the consideration given to the text and the context, is the phase in which the actual sermon is designed. It is generally agreed that there should be some focus, that creativity should be encouraged, and the hearers be taken into account. Along with this, the actual creative process of writing out the sermon, whether the text will be taken into the pulpit or not, is encouraged.

A final aspect that can be termed a spiritual dimension is also emphasised. In the overall process, what Osmer (2008) calls priestly listening is important: listening to the context, the text, yourself, and God. In other words, the pneumatological dimension of the homiletic process is considered part of the overall process.

With this brief overview of the homiletic processes, as expounded by South African, North American and Dutch scholars, I shall now turn to the work of cartoonists and, specifically, their processes for developing a cartoon for a newspaper.

4. THE CARTOONING PROCESS

In this section, I shall present the views of two international cartoonists on the process of developing a cartoon. I shall capture and describe only the main features of their respective processes. As in the previous section, I shall distil some qualities or features and integrated these with those from the previous section in the conclusion of this article, in order to further the overarching argument.⁹

4.1 Steve Brodner

In an interview with Ambrosino (2014:1), Brodner, a political cartoonist, made some interesting remarks that are helpful in this inquiry. According

9 For a brief general overview of the relation between comics and philosophy, cf. Lent (2009:18). Cf. the website of the Department of Fine Arts of Stellenbosch University and, specifically, the section devoted to cartoons at the Centre for Comic, Illustrative and Book Arts. <http://www.cciba.sun.ac.za/>. [2014, 17 April].

to Brodner, his aim is to bring to the surface that which is hidden and to provide insight. He states that it is consequently crucial to have sufficient knowledge about the subject: “You have to read, boned up, been exposed to news stories and books” (Ambrosino 2014:1). To simply caricature by either exaggerating the features of people, or doing the opposite and denigrating them, is not real cartooning. According to Brodner, you need true knowledge in order to make a point. Furthermore, he regards the role of cartooning as going beyond the news, as mere facts being shared, and asking why, for example, politicians do things. It is thus about a deeper inquiry than merely reporting on the surface. Historically, cartoons in newspapers also have entertainment value, because newspapers were viewed as entertainment (Ambrosino 2014:2). In the process of actually drawing the cartoon, Brodner explains that you need to have a point, a clear direction of where you want to go; once you start the creative act, there is a dialogue between your subconscious, you and what you know, which means that the cartooning can take interesting directions. Ultimately, it is sometimes necessary to “carve a lot of the stuff away” and to omit detail, in order to get to the point (Ambrosino 2014:2).

4.2 Christian Adams

According to Adams (2008:1), his aim as cartoonist is to make people laugh, think and become aware of something they were not aware of previously. In the hope of achieving this through his cartoons, he listens to the news, reads newspapers, and constantly asks the question as to what will the majority of the viewers be able to relate. At times an idea comes to him immediately and, at other times, it takes hours. However, according to him, it is indeed amazing what a deadline can do. He will then make a couple of rough sketches related to ideas and show them to his editor, who will then also help decide which one should be developed further. Thereafter, he will devote most of his time to thinking before he finally takes up the pen. The drawing of the cartoon itself can take anything between one and three hours depending on some variables. He then subjects the cartoon to a further editing process and always feels that, if he had more time, he would have been able to turn it into a masterpiece.

4.3 Main features of the processes

As in the previous section on preaching, I shall now address some relevant qualities from the above two outlines. In the conclusion, I shall integrate these qualities with the homiletic qualities for an enriched theory for praxis for the homiletic process.

There is a specific emphasis on reading as a form of research on a specific subject. As the aim of a newspaper cartoon is more than simply reporting, it is imperative to have sufficient knowledge about the subject. According to Brodner and Adams, reading as research can be regarded as a first and essential step in the process of developing a cartoon.

A second step is, in fact, an aim and part of the overall process rather than simply an additional step; it entails realising the ideal of bringing what is hidden to the surface. The aim of the cartoonist is to unveil, or, in the language of Wink (1996), to unmask. In order to do so, an idea must come to mind. The popular expression “the penny drops” could possibly be apt for what is being hinted at, in this instance, and this is indeed part of an overarching hermeneutical process.

According to these cartoonists, they must have a point that they want to make. However, in the process of drawing with that point in mind, there are also subconscious processes at work. This emphasises the importance of creativity. It is interesting to note that a deadline is not necessarily considered a hindrance to creativity, but could indeed stimulate it.

Both cartoonists mentioned the importance of entertainment as an aim of the cartoon. In their work, they highlight and focus on one aspect of the subject matter, in order to unveil something that also makes the readers smile or laugh.

Lastly, they highlight the importance of the process of editing. The cartoonists themselves edit their cartoons, but other persons such as editors also have an opportunity to provide input, which the artists can use in editing their cartoons.

5. ENRICHING THE PROCESS OF SERMON DEVELOPMENT WITH REFERENCE TO THE WORK OF CARTOONISTS

In this last section, I shall first highlight the similarities between the two processes and then formulate some homiletic qualities for an enriched theory for the praxis of the homiletic process of developing a sermon, as guidelines for preachers.

In both processes, the multilayered contexts in which preachers and cartoonists work must be thoroughly researched; these contexts range from international politics and world events to matters regarding local municipalities, as well as the listeners and readers and their denominational affiliation or political views. For example, there is a big

difference in developing a cartoon for *Beeld*, *Mail & Guardian*, *Rapport* or *Sunday Times*. Similarly, there is a difference in preaching in a Pentecostal, Reformed or Roman Catholic congregation or parish. In both processes, a text is interpreted. In the case of preaching, it is usually a biblical text and, in the case of cartooning, the text comes from the news events and can, for example, be a state president. In both processes, there is simultaneous interaction between text and context; these can thus be characterised as hermeneutic processes aimed at conveying a message in a specific context and not simply at repeating facts. Creativity is important in both processes.

In light of this exploration, I wish to return to the poem that introduced this article, namely the situation in which one is making dots on a sheet shortly before one has to preach and one does not know what to say. What can preachers do in such a situation? I conclude with some suggestions.

- First, none of these suggestions will be helpful, if the typical steps described in part three of this article have not been taken, including a thorough study of both the text and the context.
- Secondly, the aspect of humour in the work of cartoonists should not be overlooked. Preachers in such a situation should perhaps not view their situation and what they have to do as too serious, but as an act of unveiling that which makes the listeners smile. There is thus a need for lampooning not only the powers that be, but also the preacher. This relates closely to the ethos of the preachers, who should remind themselves to be true to their own character in the process of developing and delivering the sermon. In most instances, this will also include a lighter, more humorous approach. Especially in a postmodern context, listeners will appreciate an approach in which the communication is less authoritarian.
- Thirdly, it could be helpful to look at cartoons. Nowadays, it is fairly easy to do an internet search of cartoonists' work, especially cartoons from the past week that can help the preacher scrutinise how the artist interpreted the current context, thereby shedding new light on it. The preacher could then reflect anew on his/her own text and context and gain some inspiration from the work of the cartoonists.
- Fourthly, a deadline is helpful for some and not for others. In her book, homiletician McKenzie (2010) provides good tips for preachers based on the creative processes followed by writers. For example, she suggests keeping a journal; practising free-writing in which one practises writing about anything at all and not necessarily a sermon; listening to music, or going for a walk (McKenzie 2010:39-44). One could add having a

bath (as Archimedes did), or sleeping on the subject. Such practices can help preachers be more attentive, as writers (and cartoonists) must be prior to the deadline, and acquire habits that can relieve the pressure associated with the deadline, on the one hand, and stimulate creativity, on the other.

- The need for editing cannot be over-emphasised. In addition, preachers would do well by not approaching the whole homiletic process as the Lone Ranger, but by including people who can critically reflect on the sermon before it is delivered. In this instance, I do not mean what McClure (1995) describes as his roundtable pulpit approach, but something more basic such as asking your spouse, partner or friend to read or listen to your sermon and critically comment on it, like an editor comments on a cartoon prior to publication. Informal discussions on the initial ideas for the sermon can benefit the preacher and thus prevent him/her from simply jotting down dots on a blank sheet of paper.

These guidelines could assist preachers in their weekly task of developing a sermon. The homiletic process that preachers follow can, to some extent, also be of value to cartoonists when they face their blank sheets of paper.

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