

Studia Homiletica 11

# *Preaching Promise*

within the  
Paradoxes  
of life

Johan Cilliers

Len Hansen

**EDITORS**

Conference 

*Preaching Promise within the Paradoxes of Life*

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# EDITORS' FOREWORD

When one hears the word “South Africa”, chances are good that the word “apartheid” will also, if not immediately, come to mind. And, when one hears the word “South Africa”, chances also are good that the name “Nelson Mandela” will, immediately, come to mind. These two notions (apartheid/Nelson Mandela) underline, perhaps most clearly, that South Africa is a place of paradox, as a matter of fact, a place of many paradoxes.

During the summer of 2016, about 120 delegates from across the world gathered in Stellenbosch, South Africa, to discuss not only the paradoxes in South Africa, but also the paradoxes that have become characteristic of many parts of the globe. Paradoxes such as poverty and privilege, empire and oppression, migration and enclave-seeking, war and peace, justice and injustice, reconciliation and revenge – and the list goes on.

Stellenbosch is in itself a place of paradoxes. The university that is situated here was formerly known as the place where the idea of apartheid was conceived in part and later fervently defended. Stellenbosch still is home to one of the leading universities in Africa. And, although apartheid officially came to an end in 1994, the town today has the dubious distinction of being the town with the highest income inequalities in South Africa ...

However, the *Societas Homiletica* conference of 2016 did not only revolve around the notion of paradox – we discovered and rediscovered that, as preachers, we have been called, inter alia, to preach promise within these paradoxes of life. This promise is made to us through the grace of God and the gospel of Christ, the promise is embodied in and through us by the Spirit of Christ. This promise may take many forms and calls for discernment; it often interrupts our status quos in a surprising – sometimes shocking – ways. It is a promise that interrupts, in order to comfort.

We, members of the *Societas Homiletica*, were enriched by the contributions in the form of keynote addresses, papers, workshops, discussion groups and sermons from colleagues from countries as diverse as Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, the United States of America, Brazil, India and, of course, South Africa. As often at conferences, the many informal discussions between presentations and during our excursions were of particular significance, especially in forming and strengthening new and old ties and friendships for years to come.

Because this was such a historical occasion, being the first time that the international conference of the *Societas Homiletica* took place in Stellenbosch, the editors decided to include as much as possible of the events that took place, i.e. not only the keynotes, responses, and papers, but also the workshops and sermons. We hope that this will serve as a documentation of the richness of the conference, representing the variety of voices, styles, methodologies and epistemologies.

The Stellenbosch conference was organised by the then president of *Societas Homiletica*, Johan Cilliers, in conjunction with a very able international board and in partnership with the Faculty of Theology at the University of Stellenbosch. In this regard, the name of Ms Helette van der Westhuizen needs to be mentioned as she was instrumental in executing the plans for the conference. We are also extremely grateful in this regard for the support of the staff of the Department of Practical Theology and Missiology at Stellenbosch University.

We also thank our publisher AFRICAN SUN MeDIA for their willingness to publish this book, in particular Emily Vosloo, for the courteous, professional and patient manner in which she cooperated with us on the project. As editors, we express our gratitude to those who made financial contributions towards, not only the conference, but to the publication that resulted from the conference. In this regard, we are especially grateful to the Dean of the Faculty of Theology, Professor Eugene Cloete, Vice-Rector Research and Innovation at Stellenbosch University and the joint curatoria of the Dutch Reformed Church and the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Stellenbosch for their substantial and indispensable contributions.

May the Promise be with us, in all of life's paradoxes.

Johan Cilliers and Len Hansen  
Stellenbosch, July 2018

# PARADOX AND PROMISE: VOICES FROM THE BOOK

Throughout the history of Christianity, social justice has served the wind beneath the wings of many churches and individuals. When the prophetic teachings of the Christian faith are fully understood and internalised by the faithful, including the teachings of the biblical prophets and Jesus himself, many of the faithful become motivated to apply their faith to situations and circumstances in the world around us. ... The work of social justice is good and necessary, but, God may be calling us to something more. God may be calling us to embrace a vision, an image of what the world can be and who we can be as a people.

– Debra J Mumford

Prophetic preaching is seeking to be the faithful presence of God's promises for God's people in a world shaken by deadly convulsions. And these are the unshakable, unchangeable promises of a God who hears the cry of God's people, who sees their misery, who knows their suffering and comes down to rescue them...

– Allan A Boesak

How happy we are does not require us to retreat from the real world as we preach God's promises, but to "withdraw" to it. Seen from this perspective promises are windows onto that real world. *God's promises are decisive, although they do have the character of paradox, and often seem to be deceitful.* For this concept of decisiveness two reasons are offered, namely that, on the one hand, we preach from a Christological pulpit but, on the other hand, we also preach from an eschatological pulpit. Preaching those promises in the midst of the paradoxes of life will result in truly *pastoral preaching* when seen from this double perspective on the pulpit.

– Maarten Kater

[!]If we release our preconceived notions of what constitutes preaching and pay closer attention to the musicalities that fill the world, do we begin to notice proclamation happening in every place? ... The world proclaims the glory, judgment and mercy of God in the midst of the human condition ... Noticing, interpreting and dialoguing with the homiletic witness of the world in all of its variety and complexity are crucial endeavors for becoming thoughtful and relevant preachers for Christ.

– Gerald C Liu

From the perspective of the pew the preaching event is not primary about understanding the gospel or the sermon. The encounter between the listeners' inner experience and the preachers' outer words facilitates ... a third room in which the listeners, in internal dialogue, create a surplus of meaning that was previously not present in either the preacher's intent or the listener's frame of reference ... The preacher cannot control the production of meaning, but must rather surrender to the preaching event. Thus the preacher is not the creator ... of the third room, but the third room is depended upon the preachers' willingness to serve as the tool.

– Marianne Gaarden

# Presidential Address – Preaching Promise within the Paradoxes of Life



Johan Cilliers<sup>1</sup>

## Paradox?

“A nation of paradoxes.” This is how Mary Robinson, the United Nations Human Rights Commissioner and former president of Ireland, described South Africa when she delivered the 10<sup>th</sup> Nelson Mandela Annual Lecture in Cape Town in August of 2012.<sup>2</sup> In a moving address and speaking as “an outsider, but a genuine friend”, Robinson listed a number of reasons why this country could indeed be called a place of paradoxes. She mentioned, amongst other things, the grinding poverty and hopelessness of the population in the Eastern Cape in contrast to her experiences in a so-called rich enclave in the town Paarl in the Western Cape – and the fact that she found it hard to believe that these two realities exist in the same country. She praised the remarkable progress being made in female representation in the political arena, noting that, at that time, 41% of cabinet positions were held by women; that five of the nine provincial premiers were women and that 42% of the seats in parliament were occupied by women. However, she added, “There is a darker side”, referring to rape and murder statistics and the still-prevalent and increasing abuse of women. She was amazed at the apparent thriving civil society in South Africa, but lamented the fact that this same society, inclusive of the religious leaders, often and paradoxically, seems disengaged. She stated:

*Are they doing enough? Are they truly working to hold government to account for the inequities, the imbalances, the injustices they witness close to home? Or are they more concerned with their own survival, their own advancement, to the detriment of that wider common purpose of achieving a constitutional democracy: that vision of a united, non-racist, non-sexist, democratic and prosperous South Africa?<sup>3</sup>*

1 Professor in Homiletics and Liturgy in the Faculty of Theology, University of Stellenbosch, South Africa.

2 *Freedom, truth, democracy: citizenship and common purpose*. Online at: <https://www.nelsonmandela.org/news/entry/transcript-of-mary-robinsons-nelson-mandela-annual-lecture> (Accessed: 28 February 2016).

3 *Freedom, truth, democracy: citizenship and common purpose*, 5.