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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18820/23099089/actat.v37i2.4>

ISSN 1015-8758 (Print)
ISSN 2309-9089 (Online)

Acta Theologica 2017
37(2):51-68

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“AS IF NOTHING HAD HAPPENED”? KARL BARTH AND THE STUDY OF PROPHETIC PREACHING IN SOUTH AFRICA TODAY¹

ABSTRACT

This article explores the significance of Karl Barth's (homiletical) theology for the current study of prophetic preaching in South Africa today. In the first section, I explore and probe the significance in questioning the current study of prophetic preaching in South Africa, and whether one could relate that to the call of reading Barth's theology anew in the South African context. Thereafter, I explore both these focuses in more detail in their own right – the state of discourse and scholarship in our study of prophetic preaching, and the significance of revisiting and exploring the meaning in Barth's famous words to do (in the midst of crises) theology “as if nothing had happened”. In the last section, I will spell out some of these insights of Barth for the study and practice of prophetic preaching in South Africa today.

1. STUDIES IN PROPHETIC PREACHING IN NEED OF A PROPHETIC WORD?

There is indeed a great sense of concern among various social commentators in South Africa

1 This article was first presented on 18 January 2017 at the annual Society for Practical Theology in South Africa (SPTSA) conference in Stellenbosch with the theme of *Decolonising Practical Theology in South Africa*.

regarding the state and future of our country.² We sense an awareness among various theologians that the times are changing and that we need to rethink how to theologise in this context.³ Such acute social awareness has also been very prominent within the Society for Practical Theology in South Africa (SPTSA) over the past few years.⁴ In fact, the subdiscipline of Homiletics may symptomise this contextual awareness and concern the best with the highly productive output of scholarly work regarding *prophetic* (read: political, social, ethical) preaching in the past decade.⁵ On tracing the genealogy of the term “prophetic preaching” over the past 40 years (1976-2016) in the South African study of Homiletics, it is astonishing (contra our expectation) to note how it is much more prominent and dominant since 1996 than in the years of apartheid and struggle (Laubscher & Wessels, 2016). In short, the contextual concern and social awareness is especially present in this circle, so that “decolonising practical theology” self-evidently invites us to elaborate further on the importance and urgency regarding prophetic preaching in South Africa today.

However, that being said, this article will not again raise the question “Where have all the prophets gone?”, but rather “How prophetic are we in asking this?” An important distinction at work, in this instance, is to differentiate between the *practice* and the *study* of prophetic preaching and, for the moment, shift the focus more towards the latter. In short, for the moment, let us ignore the praxis of prophetic preaching and our lament with regard to the absence of prophetic preachers and sermons in our

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- 2 See Booysen (2016); Du Preez (2014); Eloff (2016); Habib (2013); Johnson (2017); Malala (2015); McKaiser (2015); Mbeki & Mbeki (2016), etc. This list of works is by no means exhaustive or completed, but indeed an indication of the intense concern regarding the state of South Africa twenty years after democracy.
 - 3 See Boesak (2014; 2015); De Gruchy (2016); Venter (2016), and Wepener (2015). This is by no means a completed list of theological works reflecting a particular concern regarding our context, but merely a few selected works to describe theology’s awareness and engagement regarding our challenging context.
 - 4 The themes of SPTSA of the past few years indicate the following: Practical theology and service delivery (North-West University, Potchefstroom, 2013); Religion and power (University of the Free state, Bloemfontein, 2014); Practical theology and waste (University of Pretoria, Pretoria, 2015); Faith and South African realities (University of Pretoria, Pretoria, 2016), and Decolonising practical theology (Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, 2017). These themes stand in stark contrast to Smit’s (2009a) echo of Pieterse & Burger (1991:71-72) regarding the absence of real contextuality in practical theology during the late 1980s. See also Dreyer (2012:513) who names the “antenna’s that reflect greater social sensitivity” as the last of five challenges for us.
 - 5 References to these sources will be cited and thoroughly discussed in the ensuing paragraphs.

cry the beloved country, and rather interrogate the (present or absent) prophetic state of our own academic work. There is seldom a right time for such uncomfortable questions, but we may perhaps, in this space and time, be so bold and whisper the following question: What if the work of the past few years is not addressing the challenge, but rather symptomises and illustrates how deep and intense the crisis really is? I am not suggesting that this is indeed the case, but at least to ponder the thought and grapple with it for a moment. Given the nature of prophetic preaching – and/or the assumptions and implications of decolonisation – the implied scholars in this field are also challenged to embrace a much more self-critical approach, introspective consciousness, and bold interrogative spirit regarding the state and nature of this particular dominant focus in our discipline.

I am well aware that there are various ways to engage and undertake such a challenge and that our conclusions and insights gained from such an endeavour are highly influenced by whom we are talking and listening to. My proposal is to engage with some of the very unique and challenging contours of Karl Barth's theology and discern its significance for our study of prophetic preaching in South Africa today. Barth's value for us lies especially in the sphere of *theologising* when it comes to prophetic preaching. In systematic theology, it is said that there is no way that we can escape the knowledge that we do theology "after Barth" (Webster 2005:249; Thomas, Brouwer & McCormack 2012), and I am probing to explore this insight also in the field of prophetic preaching in South Africa at such a critical phase of our present history. The question is not whether we agree with Barth or not, but rather whether we have engaged the "great man to learn to think theologically with" (Gunton 2007:xxiii). Smit (2009b:285) applauds Jonker and Durand for this, because they discovered in Barth "'a cause of joy' – although it also provoked some hesitations and reservations within them". However, I shall not be tempted to reserve Barth's theology for the dogmatic or systematic theologians in our midst, because Barth's theology is throughout aimed at aiding the church's preaching with critical ever-new occurring questions (Barth 1936:91, 284-315). Willimon (2006; Barth & Willimon 2009) hits the nail on the head when he trades the "red pastor" of Safenwill in for the "disturbed preacher" who notes proclamation behind, and in front of Barth's *Church dogmatics*. Barth's theology did not originate in the crisis caused by the Great War, or even because of the pedantic state of 19th-century liberal Protestantism, but rather in the crises of the Word and whether he could, in fact, preach to the congregation in Safenwill – and continue until the end with *Deliverance to the captives* (Barth 1978) in Basle's prison during his last years. In short, I will argue and show how the prophetic significance of Barth as interlocutor

engaging the theological quality of our homiletical work has also *still* “a strange contemporary ring to it” (Smit 2012:6-7).⁶

Before I proceed in doing so, I will problematise the above even further by referring to not only the challenging nature of reading Barth’s work, but also doing so specifically and consciously in South Africa today. There should be no illusions that, in having Barth’s prophetic voice in this conversation, we are tapping into a bigger and challenging task of responding anew to reading Barth in South Africa today. Not only has it been described as influential for the radical alternative it offers or its controversial and contested presence as a very peculiar site of struggle for justice in South Africa (Naudé 2015), but even more importantly (as mentioned earlier), it has still a very “strangely contemporary ring” to it (Smit 2009a:287-292; 2012:6-7). Whereas the current generation of Smit and Naudé are significantly self-conscious and reflective upon the diverse readings of Barth in South Africa, a new emerging generation needs to critically differentiate and explore creative and innovative tensions regarding what is meant with our “Barth”⁷. Part and parcel of this entails that we read Barth himself again and anew, cognisant and conscious of important developments both in Barth scholarship and in our context (like the emergence of “prophetic preaching” post-1994 in South Africa). There is indeed a very peculiar case to make for reading Barth’s theology as a very specific form of “prophetic” theology with almost self-evident promise and potential. In short, just to continue and/or engage Barth in South Africa anew is in itself significant, but to do this with regard to preaching and prophetic preaching, in particular, is what makes it really an exciting venture.

It is time to reconsider Long’s (2016:20-30) influential demarcation of Barth’s theology for Homiletics to the first part of the 20th century,⁸

6 See also Laubscher (2016).

7 See Smit (2012), where he comments on a famous last letter of Barth in which he himself highlighted the contextual nature not only of his own theology, but also of theology in general. I explored this particular idea of *our* “Barth”, which Smit argues in his article, further in another article on the similarities and differences between the Barth of Willie Jonker and Dirkie Smit (see Laubscher 2017).

8 In the first chapter of his very influential homiletical textbook, Long (2016:11-57) gives an overview of all the dominant images for the preacher during the 20th century, starting with Barth’s (initial [!] – ML) image of the *herald* for the first part of the 20th century, but showing then how it was surpassed by the images of *pastor* and *storyteller/poet* to eventually move and opt towards Long’s own “new” proposal of the preacher as a witness. In this instance, it is interesting to note that Long’s reading of Barth and his suggestion of the “witness” completely

interrogate and move beyond Buttrick's (1991:9) damning foreword to Barth's *Homiletics*,⁹ respond to Wilson's (2008:78) insight that the New Homiletic shifted the focus away from having God in the centre of our sermons, and thereby hearing anew that being truly prophetic in our preaching may imply that we do theology according to Barth's famous words "as if nothing had happened". However, before I do that, I will first examine the state of studies in prophetic preaching in South Africa today.

2. THE STATE OF PROPHETIC PREACHING IN SOUTH AFRICA TODAY

As noted in the first section, I am of the opinion that it is important to differentiate between the practice of prophetic preaching in South Africa, on the one hand, and the *study* thereof, on the other. This will help not only in having a much more self-critical approach towards the nature and state of our work, but also in consciously seeking to embody and model something of the prophetic preaching we seek and plead for; thus being in itself prophetic – and not detached, from a distance, excluded – in speaking with regard to prophetic preaching.

There is, however, another reason why this differentiation between practice and study is significant, and that is not only because practical theology is first and foremost an academic discipline, but also one that strives – as any other – to critically read and reflect upon fellow colleagues' work in the field. I know that we are a small community and that there is a vast community of international scholars with whom we can engage in the name of academic freedom on any other topics and themes that interest us, but a deeper turn to the social awareness and contextual concern noted earlier surely implies, among others, reading each other's work much more thoroughly and critically. The impression I got in reading the productive output on prophetic preaching within this community was that, if we do engage and comment on each other's works, we mostly complement and agree with each another regarding the nature and aims

ignore how important the concept of "witness" actually is in Barth theology – especially in the "end" of his *Church Dogmatics* IV/3, where it reaches an actual and particular "presence" and "revelation" under the prophetic office. I shall deal with this in more detail in the last section of this article.

9 Buttrick (1991:9) (in)famously stated the following: "While most of us would agree that a nervous, topical preaching based on ever-changing daily headlines may be deplorable, are we willing to tell Allan Boesak or Bishop Tutu to stop referring to apartheid in preaching – particularly if we are [W]hite Reformed church people?"

of prophetic preaching in South Africa.¹⁰ The nature of both academic discourse and prophetic preaching allows for such an appreciative and complementary approach, but there is also another more significant side to academia and prophetic preaching that lives from delivering critique, voicing theological concerns, identifying critical gaps, developing creative tensions and disguised contradictions among the various voices speaking in the study of prophetic preaching in South Africa today.

Instead of describing, summarising, discussing and reflecting upon each of the prophetic voices in the study of this practice, let me rather respond towards the above self-imposed challenge with three critical observations. First, most of the voices of my seniors in the field are, in fact, complementing and, to a great degree, concur regarding the aim and nature of prophetic preaching in South Africa today. They do not necessarily voice it like this, but it is clear from the contributions of Pieterse, De Klerk, De Wet, Nell and, to a lesser degree Cilliers, that prophetic preaching has to do with the practice of social ethics and justice in South Africa.¹¹ It is clear from their work that ethical issues and social justice concerns are what defines the scope and focus of prophetic preaching. Obviously, this is an important *element* in prophetic preaching, but should it always be so dominant, prominent, primary, at the fore, always mentioned and associated when we address the urgency of prophetic preaching in South Africa today?

Put differently: Is relating prophetic preaching to a particular social issue what defines our preaching and theology as being prophetic? Should prophetic preaching always start and aim towards addressing society and the greater public the church finds itself in? Is (prophetic) preaching not first and foremost addressed to the *church* and, therefore, more self-critical in its approach and assessment of its own being, presence and witness in the world? In short: Is it not also possible to be very prophetic (read: ethical and political) – and even more so – when we do not name and voice these social issues and ethical concerns in our preaching?

10 See, for instance, Tubbs Tisdale & De Wet (2014), in which article De Wet summarises the four contributions of Cilliers, Nell, Pieterse and Boesak precisely in the way of each complementing each other without any tension and/or contradictions among their proposals, or going further to indicate particular gaps and theological concerns or critique in their approaches. I wish to develop this critique from here on onwards.

11 See Pieterse (1995; 2000a; 2000b; 2013); De Klerk (2007; 2013a; 2013b); De Wet (2014a; 2014b); De Wet & Kruger (2013); Nell (2009), and Cilliers (2008; 2009; 2012; 2013; 2015a; 2015b; 2016).

Secondly, in my reading, I sense an important differentiation in the work of Cilliers when compared to others in the above field. Without necessarily phrasing it, there is a subtle hesitancy and reservation in Cilliers' work regarding explicitly naming and working with the term "prophetic preaching".¹² What characterises Cilliers' approach is that he often trades the concept "prophetic preaching" for political and/or ethical preaching, and also consciously tries to discern and develop some other forms, language, genres, moods and tones within the discourse on the practice and study of prophetic preaching.¹³ Compare in this regard Cilliers' very different reading and dealings with the preaching of Desmond Tutu (2015b) to that of Hennie Pieterse (1995); or the different kind of language and tone Cilliers and Campbell (2012:156) use with regard to that proposed by De Wet and Kruger (2015). In short, also in Cilliers' approach to prophetic (or ethical, just, political) preaching, there is a subtle yet clear difference and tension in the field regarding the way in which prophets can effectively voice their preaching in South Africa today.

12 Cilliers (2015a:373-374) differentiates himself from the others as follows: "In most of our ecclesiological traditions the notions of 'political' and 'eschatological' preaching would be combined and described as 'prophetical preaching', unfortunately often in a theological unsophisticated manner. Most of the times prophetical preachers are simply understood as those people who are addressing political issues from the pulpit, using, inter alia, eschatological (or apocalyptical) terms." In an earlier work, with Campbell (2012:156), it is even clearer: "These acts of interruption may at times be a form of prophetic preaching, a homiletical strand often neglected by the official church. Homiletician Leonora Tubbs Tisdale has asked a pertinent question: *Where have all the prophets gone? Perhaps they are closer than we think. Perhaps we overlook them, simply because they are not always the stereotypical strong and fearless figures, daring doyens of the pulpit who thunder against the powers that be.* Perhaps they often come to us now in the various, surprising guises of preaching fools." (emphasis added – ML).

13 Two aspects are important to note in this instance. First, in the elaborate and expansive text of *Preaching fools*, there is – especially in light of the above critique on Tisdale's use of the term "prophetic preaching" – ironically no rubric for "prophetic preaching" in the index with which they consciously and critically engage in their book. On the one hand, it clearly indicates particular reservations regarding the use of the term, but perhaps also (un)consciously assuming its actuality and relevance in the development of their own "foolish" proposal, on the other. Secondly, it is clear from Cilliers' other work (see especially 2009) that he seeks a different tone, language, mood, genre and approach towards prophetic preaching when "entering the clown" is linked with "subversive language", or "disrupting powers" with "human frailty" and "God's vulnerability".

Thirdly, a question or two regarding that particular issue that surfaces between the lines in the above two remarks, namely addressing the critical issue of putting “some” accent and emphasis on *listening, learning, discerning, and witnessing* in the act of prophetic preaching that is prior and primary – preceding the acts of *speaking, knowing already it all and just rushing to the microphone to voice it*.¹⁴ Is there not more to prophetic preaching than simply *just* preaching? Is the main focus in prophetic preaching really that of social ethics? Like public theology entails much more than simply social ethics, should that then not also be the case for prophetic preaching? Is there not more to prophetic preaching than simply social ethics and justice? Do we always need to voice and speak out against these issues in order to be prophetic preachers and homileticsians?

3. PREACH “AS IF NOTHING HAD HAPPENED”

Written on 24-25 June 1933 and published on 1 July 1933, Karl Barth’s (1933:9) fascinating theological position during the church struggle and the resistance against the Nazis is captured in “endeavour[s] to carry on theology, and only theology, now as previously, and as if nothing had happened”. The significance of this is that something meaningful did, in fact, occur a few months before Adolf Hitler and his National Socialists forced their way to power in Berlin. Prior to this, Barth had already told his students in class “only quite serious theological work can have any real significance” (Busch 1976:225). The controversy concerning these words is not whether Barth played a significant role during the church’s struggle and resistance against Nazism, but rather whether we sense the adequacy and relevance of this position for the study and practice of prophetic preaching.

The significance and theological meaning are easily obscured when taken on their own or read in isolation from the rest of Barth’s work and

14 See the insightful work of Clements (1995) in this regard. Significant quotations from this work are the following: “But there is a point where the desire for audibility and visibility witnesses to the spirit of the age rather than to the gospel.” (Clements 1995:xi); “... the adjective ‘prophetic’ has in our time become almost the sole monopoly of the advocates of ‘speaking out’ for social justice. In fact, ‘prophetic’ has become to mean virtually any outspoken or critical stance in relation to contemporary society, and usually the contemporary church as well. ... Far from wishing to debunk the idea of prophetic witness I wish to strengthen it and give it more content.” (Clements 1995:80), and “It is the interrogative mood which is most consistent with the role of the one who is being taught, who knows enough to want to know more. It is in the interrogative that teacher and learner, prophet and disciple, coalesce as one.” (Clements 1995:227).

its contextual setting. A key phrase in this regard from Barth's oeuvre, coming from the 2nd edition of Romans, is "deprive them of their pathos". Rasmusson (2007:371) writes with insight and convincingly when he shows that Barth is, in fact, not even commenting to Hitler's words and Nazism, but to 19th-century liberal Protestantism. The theological significance of these words by no means implies withdrawal, passivity or a-political existence by the church, but rather to starve the state (or any other form of natural theology) ideologically (Rasmusson 2007:371). In another excellent and insightful study with regard to Barth's summons to prophetic witness and preaching as doing theology as if nothing had happened in this context, Hancock (2013:72) comments that there was a deeper dynamic at work in this instance:

The church did not want to be left behind. It needed to be 'relevant' in the way that National Socialism was clearly relevant to many people.

And: "If they were to survive and thrive, they needed to be 'relevant' in the Third Reich to come." (Hancock: 2013:117).

In the South African context, much has been written on many occasions on the significance of these words in Barth's theology for church and theology in our own context. Greatly influenced by Barth's theology (and it's "as if nothing had happened"), Smit (2007:169-170) states:

The gospel is not spoken by the context but to the context. Not the needs of people and the interests of groups determine what is believed, but the gospel is spoken to the needs of people and the interests of groups, if necessary to criticize them. *The context provides the occasion, but not the content.* ... So, *the way the particular historical context is experienced and read becomes the occasion to confess, but it does not provide the norm or the content.* That should come from revelation, from the true gospel. ... That is why apartheid was deliberately not mentioned at all in the Confession of Belhar. ... Apartheid could not guarantee the truth of the act of confession, but only the gospel itself (emphasis added – ML).

Reformed churches confess under the pressure of the Word of God only and the authority of their confession depends on the Word itself. Circumstances can urge them to confess, but the content of what they confess should be an attempt to speak God's Word to the kairos. ... This essay [*Theological Existence Today! A Plea for Theological Freedom*] should also be understood in this way, as a *Wort zur Sache* and not as a *Wort zur Lage*, a word about the real theological issues at stake, and not mere commentary on the political situation (Smit 2009c:315-316).

Though, in this instance, Smit mostly writes and reflects on the significance of Barth's thought in the context of confessions, contextual and public theology, the meaning and importance for preaching is clear. Even more so when Hancock's study on Barth's *Homiletics* is allowed to speak to our context and challenges. At the time of his “to do theology as if nothing had happened”, Barth illustrated it by not only publishing his famous essay in this regard, but also announcing without anyone asking him to do so, that from the fall of 1932 he will give – despite Emil Pfennigsdorf already doing so – “Exercises in sermon preparation” at the University of Bonn (Hancock 2013:xiii). At a time when they had to do theology as if nothing had happened, deprive all the so-called powers of their pathos, Barth also realised the potential and relevance of the homiletical classroom as a special place of resistance and prophetic witness. By no means did preaching “as if nothing had happened” or “aiming our guns beyond the hills of relevance” (Barth 1991:118-119) ever imply abetting crimes against humanity¹⁵ – in fact, these ideas and text were rather “designed to disturb, unsettle the practitioners of a self-confident, instrumental, and ‘relevant’ homiletic” (Hancock 2013:192). Barth relentlessly wanted to deconstruct one kind of “preacher”:

the confident prophet with an unquestioned and unquestionable agenda, armed for battle – a pope, a visionary, an enthusiast, an idealist with ‘great thoughts’, a little Luther, a tyrant (Hancock 2013:325).

That he ignored his context, or did not respect his listeners, could not have been any further from the truth.

In the next section, I will need to elaborate on, and spell out in more detail what the above means for (prophetic) preaching “after Barth”. However, I conclude this section by noting that it is obvious that one should discard the facile presumption that theological writing and preaching must “sound political” (or “ethical, prophetic”) in order to be so (Jones 2008:178). If we really say preaching has its origin and end in the scandal of God's particularity in Christ, then that “entails a movement that begins ‘internal’ to Christ himself and resolves itself in the transformation of the ‘external’ world” (Jones 2008:180). Hauerwas (2010:265) was surely right against this backdrop when he stated:

I knew we were in deep theological trouble as soon as politicians and commentators made the claim that September 11 had forever changed the world ... For Christians, the decisive change in the

15 See footnote 10 with reference to Buttrick's damning foreword in Barth's *Homiletics*; Hancock (2013:xv).

world, the apocalyptic event that transformed how all other events are to be understood, occurred in A.D. 33. ... September 11 had to be considered in the light of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

4. STUDIES IN (PROPHETIC) PREACHING “AFTER BARTH” IN SOUTH AFRICA TODAY

Is Barth a prophet and does he convince us of a need for such a prophetic word regarding the nature, state and future of studies in prophetic preaching in South Africa today? In conclusion, I will briefly refer to other significant areas and implications of his theology to be explored anew that may finally convince us to start going “after” Barth.

First. We have just began to describe earlier the potency of reading Barth as a prophet. A major and significant part of Barth’s oeuvre is (still!) to be fully explored and comprehended in this regard. I am, of course, referring to Barth’s mature doctrine of reconciliation (*Church Dogmatics*, Volume IV), in which he restructures the *manus triplex* in order to put the prophetic office of Christ – contra tradition and contemporary thought – right at the “centre” where the whole “revelation as reconciliation” is actualised in Him who speaks eloquently and radiantly anew the history and presence of God who reconciled the world with Himself in Christ as our present moral ontology.¹⁶ This is a thick and mature sentence, impossible to unpack in this instance, but at least hopefully sensing that there is, in general, so much more to Barth’s take on having prophetic witness central to our existence, boiling it down in particular to

that *kerygma* – the proclamation of revelation in its present effectiveness – is an activity of the risen Christ. ... [whereby] the church is redefined as a community whose task is not that of making effective Jesus’ reality but of attesting its inherent effectiveness (Webster 1998:135).¹⁷

16 This condensed sentence draws on the works of Johnson (1997:113-115, 138-146) and numerous other writings of Webster (1995; 1998:125-149; 2004). Behind these works are, of course, the work of Barth in *Church dogmatics* IV/3, in which he breaks with any sequential order in the *manus triplex*, but for theological reasons places it last because – although it does not constitute a “further development of our material knowledge of the event of reconciliation” (Barth 1961:7) – “We could not actually have described it in the first two forms if it did not have this third and if we did not take preliminary account of the fact that it does take place in this form too” (Barth 1961:7).

17 During the past couple of years, numerous studies have emerged that sense something of the importance of Barth’s theology regarding the mission

Second. The above does not mean that contextuality, relevance, and social ethics are not important for Barth and preaching, but that they are derived from, and preceded by the actuality of Jesus’ speaking, relevant, actual, ever anew, and continuously prior to any other possibility. Preaching is thus not only prophetic in itself; it has more to do with describing than prescribing, so that we should never think or being tempted to believe that it is our task to make it relevant, actual, or even prophetic. His Word is never one that we can claim, master, know, have or possess in advance, but it is rather a *living Word* we continuously hear, receive and obey anew as relevant, actual, present in itself as a living Word for us, here and now. Note, however, that this turn towards the church, in which the living Word continuously addresses them with its witness, is, in essence, a turn towards the world to witness to His relevant and actual presence that encompasses and embraces – reconciled! – our total reality.

Hence, prophetic preaching has less to do with the courage to speak up and confront, but rather the courage to embrace silence, really listen, being addressed, and witnessed to, hear and obey His voice. The kind of witness prophetic preaching testifies to is contra one where we play God, have God, master his Word, and know it all. God is not a principle, a system, a thought, an idea, but living and free Word whom we need to hear again and again anew and respond to in living and free witness. Revelation is not only reconciliation, but also event, history, reality, actuality, to which we not only confess and witness to as we are called and turned towards the world. Therefore, we should articulate and formulate in a much more nuanced way regarding reading both Bible in the one hand and newspaper in the other. It is not a case of reading both, but rather doing so in a particular order, knowing where we need to start and whereto that road leads us.

Third. Prophetic preaching is also challenged to rethink the dominant idea and impression of the church as a counter-cultural community, with its polemical witness that (mainly) resents and opposes the (secular) world outside the church, because part and parcel of prophetic witness, according to Barth (1961:118), is also to see, acknowledge, confess, witness and point towards those places and instances where Christ is present and at work outside the confines of the church. Prophetic preaching, therefore, does not claim or even bear God’s Word, but rather witnesses, points a way and helps others travel this road of the Word to the world. Jesus the prophet is Victor, and his light shines brightly far beyond the confines of the Christian community so that they may see and acknowledge other lights,

of the church. See, especially, Flett (2010; 2016:319-328); Guder (2015); Johnson (2015).

voices, and parables of the Kingdom for what they really represent. Christ the Prophet cannot be reduced, boxed in by our preaching; therefore, our prophetic preaching is also relativised in order to be even more activated in speaking a prophetic word!

Surely, there is more to explore and ponder in this regard, but for now at least enough indication that Barth's summons to do preaching as if nothing had happened does not necessarily imply to continue with business as usual. Are there not more than enough glimpses and whispers to consider this thought anew and explore it even further for the study and practice of prophetic preaching in this instance (but also elsewhere) that may just stretch us and our witness far beyond the confines and borders of this particular circle? Obviously, going after Barth also entails going beyond him, "after him", considering and raising critique and objections, because *the decisive thing which I seek to bring to these problems today, is to carry on theology, and only theology, now as previously, and as if nothing had happened ...* but that is a story for another occasion.

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Keywords

Karl Barth

Preaching

Prophetic

South Africa

Trefwoorde

Karl Barth

Prediking

Profetiese

Suid-Afrika