

W. Wessels
Rev. W. Wessels,
Minister of Word and
Sacrament, URCSA
Immanuel Standerton.
Doctoral Student,
Department of Practical
Theology, University of
Pretoria.
E-mail: wgpwessels@
gmail.com.

DOI: [http://dx.doi.
org/10.18820/23099089/
actat.v37i2.11](http://dx.doi.org/10.18820/23099089/actat.v37i2.11)

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

Acta Theologica 2017
37(2):188-206

© UV/UFS



CONTEMPLATING ALLAN BOESAK'S FASCINATION WITH *PREACHING* "TRUTH TO POWER"¹

ABSTRACT

Preaching can rightly be called "foolishness", an outdated form of communication and a feeble form of art. In democratic South Africa, preaching is certainly not assigned a place among the ranks of professions conveying "development". Allan Boesak, however, has not been swayed by the excommunication of preaching since the dawn of democracy. In this article, I will contemplate Boesak's fascination with *preaching* "Truth to power". Boesak, as a son of liberation and Black theology, is known for aspiring to a new world through the biblical witness. In essence, preaching the biblical truths to power. Therefore, when academics contemplate the state of preaching and express concern with regards to how power operates in our society and faith communities, Boesak certainly has a contribution to make. I briefly examine how power operates in the South African society. Boesak's publications and sermons are contemplated in the hope of uncovering his fascination with preaching truth to power. I conclude with some thoughts on how Boesak preaches truth to power for both the dismal state of preaching and how power operates in South Africa.

1. INTRODUCTION

Preaching is a central act of church and should thus be contemplated earnestly. Not necessarily with a stoic gravity, but certainly with thorough consideration. Recently, prominent voices in homiletical circles have made it clear that the state of preaching in South Africa is detrimental. Cilliers (2010:71) is

1 Presented in 2015 at the Society for Practical Theology in South Africa.

of the opinion that preaching has fallen into a “mode of maintenance”, where innovation is oriented towards “attraction and entertainment of people”. The preaching taking place is towards the goal of individual pietism and personal experience, whilst “ethical preaching that impacts on societal issues still seems to be glaringly absent” (Cilliers 2010:72). Müller (2011:338) is of the opinion that preaching has presently reached a critical point, as it did in the apartheid years of the 1970s. Tubbs Tisdale and De Wet (2014:1), writing from both the perspective of North America and South Africa, claim that

whilst there is much preaching in our countries, there is not always sufficient emphasis upon ... how that Word can become a living entity in the contemporary socio-political contexts in which we find ourselves.

I am of the opinion that Allan Boesak might present some interesting insights into preaching nowadays. Boesak, who “has always been fascinated by power” (Smit 2014:11), might bring forth some fascinating thought for preaching truth to power. At present, when we consider the plight of preaching in South Africa and the role of power in society and faith, Boesak needs to be one of the voices. Even though a *Festschrift* for Boesak has been published in 2014, I opine that Boesak’s homiletical contributions have not been reckoned sufficiently. This article is only a small step in that direction. Stated differently, this article makes a unique contribution at this point, where Boesak’s sermons contribute to public discourse and speak to power.

I decided to start with a short context analysis of South Africa from the perspectives of democracy and reconciliation. Both of these themes lay the groundwork for power structures in South Africa. With regard to democracy, we can get a picture of how political power is structured. With regard to reconciliation, we can note whether the powers of the past have been rearranged in order to benefit all people.

In my contemplation on Boesak, I will give a brief overview of some of Boesak’s publications and main themes, contemplating and describing Boesak’s public theology. I will then scrutinise seven of Boesak’s sermons from the perspective of Boesak as prophetic preacher *preaching* truth to power. In conclusion, some aspects will be underlined as Boesak’s fascination with preaching truth to power. To clarify, when speaking of Boesak as a prophetic preacher, I am referring to the generalised view that prophetic preaching is preaching that is aware of, and in conversation with the sociopolitical context and the powers that be within this context.

With regard to the methodology of this article, I recognize that the hermeneutical turn has shattered the myth of objectivity. Thus, the word "contemplation", as recurring in this article, carries with it the recognition that this article is rather a conversation with Boesak's work and not an objective deduction of what Boesak's work is. Following the methodological points of departure, Schoeman *et al.* (2012:137) propose, this article endeavours to be hermeneutical, critical, contextual and inductive. This entails an openness towards Boesak, listening to him, learning from him and engaging with him in open, non-blaming discourse within the context of contemporary South Africa.

2. POWER IN SOUTH AFRICA

Democracy in South Africa promised a new world for those who were oppressed during apartheid. Much could be said about the first twenty years of democracy in South Africa. Two themes carry a great deal of weight with regard to power in South Africa: democracy as a political paradigm and the way it plays out in South Africa, and reconciliation as a tool to rectify the skewed power relations of the past.

2.1 The promises of democracy and the overwhelming power of neoliberalism

According to Terreblanche (2014:Chapter 4), the African National Congress (ANC) adopted neoliberal policies and market fundamentalism between 1990 and 1994. Consequently, South Africa became part of the global neoliberal world, as a satellite state of the powerful American neoliberal global empire. This transition had the promise of bringing about development and economic freedom for the poor in South Africa. The free market rules, however, rapidly showed to benefit the macroeconomic private companies of the past, rather than the poor. Importation was cheaper than domestic production and, therefore, yielded a higher profit, while costing the poor their jobs (Streak 2004:275-277). In light of power relations, the powerful could not only become more powerful with the world as their playground, but also had the free reins to do so legally.

Tragically, from the perspective of the poor and most vulnerable in South African society, there seem to be no prospects for a better future other than to play by the rules of neoliberal capitalism. The dominant discourse in democratic South Africa has become that of neoliberal capitalism and the dominant action to strive towards success within this paradigm. According to the neoliberal discourse, inequality is good, competition is natural (Piketty 2014:Chapter 1), and success means to be

participants in the American dream. This is a shift from “being” to “having” (Ramphele 2012:5), which is participation in a consumer culture associated with debt (Slabbert 2013), the fuel for neoliberal capitalism (Terreblanche 2014:Chapter 2).

The route towards becoming part of neoliberal capitalism has time and again been interpreted as education (African Revival 2014). In this line of thought, education is “an investment in an individual skill that [makes] one more productive and employable” (Klees 2014). However, not only have 60 per cent of Grade 9 learners dropped out of school before completing matric, excluding them from this paradigm, but further education has often erupted in a mismatch between skills acquired and the actual demand (Klees 2014). Education as a means to financial well-being is a reduction of the potential of education as a societal force of change. From this point of view, South Africa’s majority will always be powerless and on the receiving end of an unjust empire.

The dominant discourse of neoliberal capitalism has not been fended off by the practices of the church. The most visible form neoliberal capitalism has taken in the church is the so-called Prosperity Gospel. The Prosperity Gospel sees no paradox with proclaiming that God wants Christians to prosper financially in a neoliberal capitalist society. In my opinion, the mainline churches, similarly, have not been able to produce an alternative language than that of the dominant discourse of neoliberal capitalism. Although less direct than the proponents of the Prosperity Gospel, mainline churches often employ the language of business and finance to justify the professionalisation of the ministry and being of the church.

2.2 The powerlessness of reconciliation

What I have sketched thus far is a dark picture for the people of South Africa. One has to wonder, with the strides that have been made regarding reconciliation in South Africa: Is there no way that the picture could be brighter?

Terreblanche (2014:Chapter 9) is of the opinion that strides have not been made in great enough measure with regard to reconciliation and that it could only be made if those who have been advantaged by apartheid are taxed in accordance with their historical advantage. However, because of corruption, such taxation is not an option. Mbembe (2008:6) states that redistribution has fostered unwanted cultures of corruption and bad work ethics. Whites, on the other hand, are of the opinion that affirmative action is no longer valid and that equality before the law, without systemic reconciliation, is satisfactory (Mbembe 2008:9). Much has already been

done as part of reconciliation, such as the inclusion of women in social and political structures and programmes to address the situation of the poor. However, these strides have not extended far enough as to alter gender relations or change the social fabric of classism (Johnson 2008:622). In other words, reconciliation has not been able to rectify the power relations of yesteryear to such an extent that it meaningfully changes the plight of the politically and economically excluded.

Other than governmental forms of reconciliation and redistribution there is also civil society, such as non-government organizations (NGOs), religious communities, trade unions, the media and other associations, which "provide the means whereby people can participate in pursuing social goals" (De Gruchy 2014:104). In other words, the church also has the ability to pursue reconciliation outside of government-sponsored programmes for reconciliation. Is the church pursuing reconciliation as a social goal, which promotes greater justice?

Boesak (2009:8) shows that, although it was true that the church of struggle stood up against apartheid working for justice, in democracy the church retracted to private matters of pietism. The apartheid sentiments of segregation are still present in the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC), which is part and parcel of the indolence of the reunification of the Dutch Reformed family. In a recent statement of the DRC, its members were asked to pardon the leadership of the DRC for their teachings during apartheid (NGK 2013:1). The statement proceeds to proclaim that White DRC members were also disadvantaged in apartheid, sustaining numerous kinds of trauma because of their White privilege (NGK 2013:2).

This is, however, not where we can end our discussion on the South African context. We cannot "adopt a cynical and pessimistic view that undermines the possibilities of democratic transformation" (De Gruchy 2014:108) simply because the current situation seems dire. The church should rather keep democracy in South Africa accountable to be exactly what it is, as stated in the South African Constitution, which is "a truly equal, responsibly free and socially just world order" (De Gruchy 2014:110-111). With regard to reconciliation, Hauerwas & Willimon (2014:Chapter 5) propose that the church should practise reconciliation among each other, as an alternative to the world, to witness to God's reconciliation with man.

3. WRITING TRUTH TO POWER

Recent publications of Boesak within the past decade include: *The tenderness of conscience: African Renaissance and the spirituality of*

politics; Running with horses: Reflections of an accidental politician; Radical reconciliation: Beyond political pietism and Christian quietism, and Dare we speak of hope? Searching for the language of life in faith and politics.

In these publications, two important themes emerge to rectify power in South African society. With regard to the power of politics, Boesak speaks prophetically and biblically to rectify the conscience of politics as it has been cultivated since the dawn of democracy. With regard to the rectification of skewed power relations of apartheid, Boesak proposes the radical reconciliation of biblical characters as God's plan of reconciliation.

3.1 The tenderness of conscience

Smit (2014:27) states that Boesak's book, *The tenderness of conscience: African Renaissance and the spirituality of politics* (2005) was an important impetus in terms of "national and international power politics". As a document of critical engagement with the concept of African Renaissance, Boesak puts forth a political proposal in the Calvinist tradition; "the tenderness of conscience" (Smit 2014:27).

Boesak (2005b:100-101) argues that politics should possess the tenderness of conscience of Jesus, as expressed in Philippians 2:5-11. Luke 4 and Isaiah 61 express God's solidarity with the poor, the oppressed and the vulnerable and so should political power (Boesak 2005b:162, 166). Boesak (2014b:Chapter 5) interprets both Jesus' death on the cross and his resurrection as rebellion against evil and work alongside the vulnerable. Jesus' tender conscience is a humble glory, unlike that of Caesar, whose glory is steeped in bloodshed (Boesak 2014b:Chapter 6). The biblical character of Joseph in Genesis is both a character to be reprehended when he thought the dream was his own and an exemplary character when he realises the dream is God's dream of freedom (Boesak 2014b:Chapter 6). In the first instance, Joseph symbolises politics of selfishness, but with time he learns a tenderness of conscience.

This tender conscience strives for social justice through transcending violence. Therefore, Boesak (2014b:Chapter 4) is adamant that violence has no place where such a conscience is present. It is either "nonviolent co-existence or violent co-annihilation" (Boesak 2014b:Chapter 4). The church's part is to keep the powers accountable in order to prompt such a tender conscience in their politics (Boesak 2005b:100-101).

It is clear that Boesak is critical about politics that hoard power, such as is currently happening in South Africa. He is also critical of policies that benefit the powerful, whilst excluding the powerless. Boesak does not

propose a different political paradigm, but rather a repentance of the whole conscience of politics and politicians. For Boesak, the problem of political power is not only systemic, but also steeped within the conscience of individuals. Boesak clearly articulates the need for a political conscience through using religious language. However, from a different perspective, Boesak is merely using religious language to campaign for values that are supposed to be inherent in the democratic endeavour. This implies, to my mind, that Boesak understands his purpose in democratic South Africa to be a vanguard of true democracy.

3.2 Radical reconciliation

The process of reconciliation symbolised a new beginning with equal power for all people. Boesak (2012d:134) is of the opinion that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and Desmond Tutu, in particular, have been domesticated under “a protective cloak for [W]hite power and privilege”. This domestication of Desmond Tutu turned the radical claims of reconciliation into the void expectations of false piety. For Boesak (2012d:136), this shift had immense implications for reconciliation:

False piety makes the poor voiceless and then presumes to speak on their behalf ... False piety aligns itself with imperial power and succumbs to subservience.

In writing about radical reconciliation, Boesak contemplates the Biblical characters of Rizpah (Boesak 2012a), Jesus (Boesak 2012b), and Zacchaeus (Boesak 2012c). Rizpah is an oppressed woman who sees through the cheap reconciliation of King David and works for true reconciliation (Boesak 2012a:39). From her story, Boesak (2012a:36-39) proposes that reconciliation cannot be defined by the powerful, nor be piled on the shoulders of the innocent, or bought with innocent blood (Boesak 2012a:36-39). Jesus of Nazareth, as one among the poor, the outcasts and the vulnerable, shows the way of radical reconciliation (Boesak 2012b:53), where the world cannot stay the same and the elite cannot hold power in the way they want to (Boesak 2012b:54).

Lastly, Zacchaeus was privileged by an unjust and oppressive system. However, he reconciled with God and his neighbours through real public means (Boesak 2012c:62). Boesak's (2012c:67-74) usage of Zacchaeus teaches the following about radical reconciliation. Reconciliation is complete only when sin is publicly confessed, remorse is shown, literal restitution is made, and relationships with God and the community are restored. With radical reconciliation allegiances will change, the oppressors will then stand where God and His justice stands, with the poor.

For Boesak (2012b:54-55; 2012a:31), all Christians are called to be agents of radical reconciliation, whilst the abuse of reconciliation by the powerful is “an assault upon the dignity and worthiness of God”.

To my mind, Boesak’s radical reconciliation is similar in perspective to his tenderness of conscience. Both seek to bring out the best possible political changes that benefit the most vulnerable in society. With regard to both virtues, Boesak is calling for the powerful to give away power, hoping for a democratisation of power and wealth. Boesak explicitly uses the virtues of a tender conscience and radical reconciliation, although religious in nature, as public theology. However, he does not view the church as the harbinger of these virtues. Rather, the political establishment is to be the forerunner of these virtues, something which is, to my mind, incompatible with the *Realpolitik* of a secular democracy.

3.3 Boesak’s theological perspective

Smit (2014:33-34) makes an interesting contribution with regard to Boesak. He is of the opinion that Boesak has two major leitmotifs throughout his work: “Jesus Christ is Lord” and “evil is real”. Both of these leitmotifs influence how Boesak views power. With regard to politics, all authority has to be accountable to Jesus Christ as Lord. This will indeed implicate that a conscience of tenderness is developed. If, on the other hand, that conscience is absent, evil will triumph. If reconciliation is abused by the powerful, evil will triumph, whereas Christ triumphs when reconciliation is radical.

These two major leitmotifs influence Boesak’s theological perspective. Through the perspective of Jesus’ ultimate Lordship, Boesak reinterprets the authors of a Christianity that enables White privilege. Calvin’s words about the equality of all people before God is used to criticize White privilege and power (Boesak 2005b:142). Boesak (2005b:33) borrows the concept of *the tenderness of conscience* from Abraham Kuyper.

Boesak (2005b:162, 166) also maintains that, in accordance with the insights of liberation theology, God is for the poor and Christians are called to stand with God. Boesak (2014b:Chapter 4) is adamantly against the use of violence for any end, along with Erasmus of Rotterdam, Martin Luther King Jr. and Gandhi.

I would like to propose that Boesak’s theological perspective is fourfold: Jesus Christ is Lord, evil is real, God stands with the oppressed, and God’s kingdom is peaceable. However, Boesak’s focus on these four perspectives is greatly biased towards evil being real. Stated differently, in Boesak’s work, the absence of the tenderness of conscience, a great

evil, can triumph over Christ. Likewise, evil triumphs when reconciliation is not sufficiently radical. Thus, in Boesak's theological perspective, Christ is only Lord once evil has been overcome by people. Does this imply that God is only God when people are good? Is God only God when the government is just?

I now turn to Boesak's sermons to scrutinise how he cultivates his theological insights from the pulpit.

4. PREACHING TRUTH TO POWER

Using the seven sermons Boesak preached over the past decade, I will examine how he preaches truth to power. Cilliers (2004:26) is of the opinion that the sermon encompasses four voices, that of the *biblical text*, of *God*, of the *context*, and of the *preacher*. Taking the cue from Cilliers, I will concentrate on Boesak's interpretation of evil within the context and discuss it before the contemplation of God. These two aspects symbolize Boesak's leitmotifs, as Smit (2014:33-34) proposes them. But, unlike Smit's order, first Jesus Christ is Lord and, secondly, evil is real, we order the naming of evil before the naming of God, in this instance, for two reasons. First, Boesak's theological writings seem to indicate his main focus on evil being real and, secondly, in his sermons, it appears that God has the last say. Therefore, in this section, I will contemplate how Boesak preaches truth to power by empowering the text to speak, disempowering evil by naming it, and naming God as the One who is ultimately powerful as Lord of lords. In conclusion, I will contemplate the power of Boesak's own voice throughout his publications and sermons.

4.1 Empowering the text

The biblical text resembles a different world than ours. Even within the historical context, the biblical text played the role of imagining a different world where God reigns. We have come to know from the experience of apartheid that the Bible can speak truth to power in imagining a better world (De Gruchy 2014:15). But, when the Bible is silenced, the status quo is upheld and the Bible is left powerless.

Boesak does not fall into the trap of snuffing the voice of the text. In his sermons, he spends time to let the text speak. Boesak (2013) uses the phrase "if we read the Bible carefully" to symbolize both the necessity to listen closely to the text and to let the text speak clearly. About Psalm 126, Boesak (2004b:64-66) states:

Let us take some time and wrestle a bit with this intriguing portion of Scripture ... The tears of the sower ... of verse 4 [are] ... out of genuine distress ... Israel wrestles not with her ungrateful heart, but with the complexity and incomprehensibility of life. The exile is over, but liberation has not yet come.

Boesak spends a great deal of time on this text, getting behind the text in its historical setting and into the psyche of the writer and the community.

In another sermon, we hear the following (Boesak 2004c:98-99):

In the words of Jesus our wisdom is turned upside down: those who find their life, shall lose it; those who lose their life, will find it. Finders, weepers; losers, keepers. Matthew chapter 10 is not, as we have been told so often, about the 'mission of the twelve' ... for those who feel 'called to preach the gospel to the heathen' ... It is about the hard truths about following Jesus, an honest and sober reflection on the cost of discipleship.

In this instance, when the text is allowed to speak, Boesak is able to rectify a misunderstanding brought forth by years of misuse of the text from pulpits.

About 2 Peter 3:1-8, we hear the following (Boesak 2004a:164-165, 168-169):

So Peter responds [to the believers' distress]: 'One thing you must not forget, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day ...' The delay of the promise is connected in the first place, not to the unpreparedness of the world, but to the unreadiness of the 'beloved'. In other words, God is waiting on us, on our conversion ... God is waiting; for one deed of justice, one word of truth, one act of faith, one sign of revolt against evil. God waits. That is why Peter says, 'one day is as a thousand years ...'. God almost does not make it, the waiting becomes too much, and one day is like a thousand years. That is how we should read verse 8 ... And the opposite? That one thousand years are like one day? God does not only suffer with us, God also surprises us: Four hundred and fifty years in Egypt – then suddenly: the exodus.

Again, Boesak gives a famous passage a new, intriguing interpretation. It has a historical ring to it, a pastoral interpretation and what this article has deemed preaching truth to power. God's delay becomes reason for the church to act according to God's way.

In one of Boesak's (2005a:16-22) homiletical commentaries, he states the following:

Genesis 21 is nie vertel om die establishment na die mond te praat nie. Wat hier gehoor word is die profetiese stem, die stem van die rebel, die stem van die bevryding ... Die teks maak duidelik: die onreg wat Abraham pleeg is teenoor sy vrou. Hagar word wel herhaaldelik die slavin genoem, maar sy bly desnieteenstaande Abraham se vrou ... Vers 17, reg gelees, is na my oordeel die keerpunt in die verhaal. Daar word van die stem van die kind inderdaad geen melding gemaak nie. Ismael se lyding is 'n stille lyding ... "Toe hoor God die stem van die seun" is ... die bevrydende bevestiging van die Naam van die Here.

Genesis 21 is not told in order to parrot the establishment. What is heard here is the prophetic voice, the voice of the rebel, the voice of liberation ... The text makes it clear: the injustice which Abraham commits is against his wife. Hagar is certainly repeatedly called the slave, but she nevertheless stays Abraham's wife ... In my opinion verse 17, when read correctly, is the turning point of the narrative. No mention, indeed, is made of the voice of the child. Ishmael's suffering is a silent suffering ... "God heard the boy crying" is ... the liberating affirmation of the Name of the Lord [my translation].

In this instance, Boesak lays down his theological perspective. For him, the text always speaks from the perspective of the oppressed, weak, poor and marginalised. Never from the perspective of the establishment's status quo.

Boesak's usage of the text in his sermons is a realisation that close reading in a historical context is necessary to grasp how the text was surprisingly powerful for the first readers and for us nowadays. Because of the classic nature of the Bible, misinterpretation and abuse can easily take place. Boesak, on the other hand, will not stand for a fundamentalist interpretation of the text; he will do the work necessary to get behind and into the text, showing that the text is indeed powerful for every new context.

4.2 Naming evil

As noted earlier, one of Boesak's leitmotifs in his theology is that evil is real. He is of the opinion that the evil in the world should be named. Naming evil is the moment when the church becomes aware of the calling of God to participate in the mission of God to abolish all evils.

Boesak (2013) gives the following oration with regard to Isaac's reconciliation with Ishmael:

[Isaac] understood, "it has fallen on me to make right what my parents had done wrong." ... I wish our generation today would learn that lesson from this man that they describe as unremarkable. My generation want[s] the benefits of the evil that the previous generation had done, but we do not want to take the responsibility to right what has gone wrong.

In this section, Boesak makes it clear that private evil and public (systemic) evil are interrelated. For Boesak, the private is public and he names it as such. This example shows it clearly (Boesak 2014a):

He is not thinking of other people and their sins. He is thinking of himself and his own sins. He is asking not, "how can I pray for them?" He is saying, "I am here, I am dying, I am next to this man, I need forgiveness and salvation." So he speaks to Jesus, "remember me when you come into your kingdom." ... We don't remember our own transgressions and we don't remember our own sins and we miss the moment of redemption.

As the example above shows, even an individual's private experience is speaking to "us", the whole of the church about the whole of their sins.

Boesak (2004b:69; 2004c:100-101; 2012e:2) does not shy away from naming the public, systemic and global evils that underlie even the most basic of private sins:

In South Africa, apartheid is over, but apartheid is everywhere. The oppressors of yesterday live as well as ever; the murderers of our children and the artists of the torture chambers walk the streets as cocky as ever. The power relationships have hardly shifted, and the grip of the old, [W]hite, moneyed establishment on almost every facet of life is fearsome. Racism, even though vehemently denied, continues to plague us, and fathers bitter injustice in our courts. HIV/[AIDS] is a raging beast that is seeking to destroy the future of our nation, and our politicians play word games. The gap between the new [B]lack elite and the poor [B]lack masses is as wide as any gap that ever existed, only more pain-filled.

The Bible never says that it is the will of God that [we] will be reviled, or persecuted, or tortured, or defamed, or killed. That is the will of evil and those who do the evil one's bidding.

By 1916, Sol Plaatje surveyed the consequences of all this: the devastation of dispossession, the slow strangulation of creeping impoverishment, the deadly grip of political oppression, economic

exploitation and the dehumanization caused by legalized violence and state terror.

For Boesak, to name evil as specifically as possible is to disempower evil. Evil is real, but it is in taking note of the guise of evil that people are empowered to participate alongside God in obliterating every new form of evil. Boesak is able to identify and name these evils and their consequences for people, usually those without a voice, and those in the trenches, on the margins of society.

Boesak concludes the majority of these sermons with naming God. First, because hope still remains and evil does not have the last word. Secondly, because through seeing injustice, suffering and need, people can see where God stands, works and where He calls them to stand, next to Him.

4.3 Naming God

Boesak is intent on naming God in very specific terms; naming Jesus as Lord. In my opinion, Boesak's sermons make it clear that God is ultimately the One with power, but not the coercive power of the world. The power of God lies in Jesus Christ.

Boesak's (2004a:162) point of departure when naming God is Jesus Christ:

[I]n Jesus, God has been revealed. We have seen God in what Jesus had done in this world for the weak, the poor and the needy, the dejected and despised. 'Who has seen me,' said Jesus, 'has seen the Father.' In other words, who has seen me act, has seen the father act. God's power, God's love and mercy, God's compassionate justice, have come to life in the words and deeds of Jesus of Nazareth.

Take note of Boesak's usage of *Jesus of Nazareth*. When he speaks about Jesus as the Christ, it is not in traditional Christological terms in such a way that the history of Jesus is subverted. Neither does he dangle in a historical Jesus other than what is revealed in the Gospels. For Boesak, Jesus Christ is the man next to the weak, Himself weak. God's revelation and power should be understood in those terms. In further exploring the concept that the Father is what Jesus has done, Boesak considers Luke 4 (Boesak 2012e:2) and Philippians 2 (Boesak 2004b:73).

It is the God of Jesus: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour" (Luke 4:16-19).

Human hardness is challenged by the love of God. Human unwillingness is subverted by the generosity of God. Human freedom is guaranteed by the freedom of the Living One who chose to become less than God for our sake.

In his observation about a sermon preached by Boesak in the late 1970s in South Africa, Cilliers (2013:10) states that Boesak is in favour of a *futurum* with regard to the actions of God, i.e. that God will only act in the future. Interestingly, in Boesak's sermons of the last decade included in this article, God is named as already acting today, as the first One to act. Let us examine the examples with which Boesak (2004c:109; 2013; 2014a) concluded three sermons:

'Now to him who is able to keep you from falling, and to make you stand without blemish in the presence of his glory with rejoicing, to the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority, before all time and now and forever, Amen.'

I know it is hard, but then the Holy Spirit revives us ... And the child of the slave girl and the child of the slave owner can sing together, 'There is a bright light somewhere. Don't you stop until you find it? There is a bright light somewhere.' So you, children of the slave owner, and you, children of the slave girl, you are here together today, because you have been called by a God who sees and hears. By a God who can break your thirst and by a God who can give you food to eat so that you will not go hungry. By a God who can make you see each other, so you can see the future. By a God who has opened up the wells of God's earth, so that the water can come up and we all can drink for strength, to march on today and tomorrow and the day after tomorrow until the place where all the world will hear this God who hears and worships this God who sees and this God who brings together in a way that we do not even understand. So that our unremarkable life, as that of Isaac, can be filled with this quiet persistent power that will never make us give up. That will never make us turn around. That will never make us say, 'It is enough.' That will never make us flinch. That will make us always believe. That will make us get up and walk even if we are beaten down because we know where we are going to. Because there's a God who hears. There's a God who sees. There is a power that is quiet, but there is a power that is persistent. There is a power that is consistent. This power is yours this morning. God bless you all.

But remembering Jesus and being remembered by Jesus. That is what turns this day into a good day. And that is why the church insists, 'This Friday is unlike any other day. It is a good day because

we are remembered and we can remember the One who really matters.' So if they ask us, 'What day is this?', we will say, 'It is a good day. It is a day of liberation. It is a day of salvation.' Cause this is the day that the Lord has made. We shall rejoice and be glad in it. Amen.

Certainly, Boesak made a huge move with regards to God's activity in the present. To state that Boesak views the current context of South Africa with a brighter light than apartheid South Africa might only be partly correct, because Boesak still names many present evils. I would propose that there is rather a maturity with regard to Boesak's understanding of God's activity in the present. It is also important to note, in this instance, that Boesak's sermons differ on this point with his writings, where God's activity is seemingly subject to the activity of people.

5. CONTEMPLATING BOESAK'S FASCINATION WITH PREACHING TRUTH TO POWER

The last voice Cilliers (2004:26) talks about as part of the sermon is the voice of the preacher. Throughout this article, I have in essence contemplated the voice of Boesak, how he contributes towards the plight of preaching and power relations in South Africa and the world. Thus, in conclusion, the following aspects are what I perceive to be Boesak's most fascinating contributions for homiletics at present.

First, Boesak has the ability to interweave our fragmented society. With Boesak, the worlds of politics, society, the Bible, faith communities and God are integrated. There exists no separation between the public and private spheres in his thought. Because of all of this, Boesak is able to take part in the public issues of power from a humanistic Christian and biblical perspective. In sum, Boesak speaks truth to power by *preaching* truth to power. Stated differently, he is always the preacher even if he is not on the pulpit.

Secondly, I propose Boesak's theological perspective to be fourfold, building on Smit's (2014:33-34) leitmotifs of "Jesus Christ is Lord" and "evil is real". Boesak also shows a strong favour for claiming that "God stands next to the oppressed" and that "Christians are to be peaceable and non-violent". The implications for power relations are immense. Power, if it wants to be in the tradition of Christ and accountable to His Lordship, cannot succumb to the comforts of privilege, but must be accountable towards the least of all people. Such power could also never be coercive, nor maintained through violent means.

Thirdly, with regard to the detrimental state of preaching, Boesak's rhetoric has the ability to empower a new generation of preachers to preach biblical truths to power. In other words, Boesak is clear that the Bible has specific sociopolitical relevance nowadays and, if the Bible is listened to, these truths have power. Boesak brings forth an interesting possible field of inquiry for homiletics, the naming of evil. The naming of evil is, to my mind, a greatly underrepresented component of preaching in homiletic literature. The component of naming evil produces a new urgency and energy with regard to the components of the biblical text and God. Where evil exists and the entire world is not automatically according to God's will, taking the biblical text seriously, in order to see who God truly is, becomes crucial to the task of preaching.

Lastly, some critical thoughts. Is Boesak not idealistic in thinking that politicians in a secular liberal democracy with a neoliberal capitalist foundation would be converted to the values already enshrined in the Constitution through religious language? Would the political philosopher or the economist not be more able to convince politicians of the benefits of an equal, free and peaceful society?

With regard to Boesak's understanding of God's mission (*Missio Dei*), as participating in the abolishment of all evils in the community, Boesak very nearly proposes that the Kingdom of God could be brought by human endeavours through political means. Should there not rather be the confession that the kingdoms of men can, without exemption, never be the Kingdom of God? Should preaching not embody this humble insight? Is the prophet not the one who reminds us that all earthly power and kingdoms are penultimate and not equal to that of God?

With regard to Boesak's audience, it does not sound as if he is speaking to the members who would be sitting in the pew on a given Sunday. Membership numbers of mainline churches in South Africa are dwindling, while membership is booming in charismatic and African independent churches. To my mind, this indicates a move towards both the Prosperity Gospel and fertility traditions within assimilated African religions. This implies that the majority of South African Christians believe strongly that God wants them to prosper financially and materially, whilst social justice is suppressed or even ignored. Should the South African preacher, who has become aware of the sociopolitical imperative of the Gospel, not rather preach as one without authority, looking towards the hope in God's promises that He is able to save us from this evil generation?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

AFRICAN REVIVAL

2014. African Revival. Our vision is of an Africa where children have access to education, opportunity and choice. [Online.] Retrieved from: <http://www.africanrevival.org/> [2014, 1 March].

BOESAK, A.A.

2004a. The three-mile-an-hour God: 2 Peter 3:1-8. In: A.A. Boesak (ed.), *The fire within: Sermons from the edge of exile* (Steenberg: New World Foundation), pp. 159-170.

2004b. The tears of the sower: Psalm 126. In: A.A. Boesak (ed.), *The fire within: Sermons from the edge of exile* (Steenberg: New World Foundation), pp. 63-74.

2004c. Finders weepers; losers keepers: Matthew 10:34-39. In: A.A. Boesak (ed.), *The fire within: Sermons from the edge of exile* (Steenberg: New World Foundation), pp. 97-110.

2005a. Met die oog van die een wat sien: Hagar en Ismael (Genesis 16; 21:1-21). In: A.A. Boesak (ed.), *Die vlug van Gods verbeelding: Bybelverhale van die onderkant* (Stellenbosch: Sun Media), pp. 16-22.

2005b. *The tenderness of conscience: African Renaissance and the spirituality of politics*. Stellenbosch: Sun Press.

2009. *Running with horses: Reflections of an accidental politician*. Cape Town: Joho Publishers.

2012a. Reconciliation, risk, and resistance: The story of Rizpah. In: A.A. Boesak & C.P. de Young (eds.), *Radical reconciliation: Beyond political pietism and Christian quietism* (New York: Orbis Books), pp. 25-40.

2012b. Jesus the radical reconciler: Two takes, one perspective. In: A.A. Boesak & C.P. de Young (eds.), *Radical reconciliation: Beyond political pietism and Christian quietism* (New York: Orbis Books), pp. 43-56.

2012c. "Just another Jew in the ditch": Incarnated reconciliation. In: A.A. Boesak & C.P. de Young (eds.), *Radical reconciliation: Beyond political pietism and Christian quietism* (New York: Orbis Books), pp. 57-74.

2012d. Subversive piety: The rereadicalization of Desmond Tutu. In: A.A. Boesak & C.P. de Young (eds.), *Radical reconciliation: Beyond political pietism and Christian quietism* (New York: Orbis Books), pp. 131-150.

2012e. Between us and despair: Romans 15:5, 13, 33; 16:20. Sermon preached at the African National Congress Centenary Celebrations Service of Thanksgiving, Beacon Hill Community Church, Atlantis, Western Cape, 21 February 2012. [Online.] Retrieved from <http://kairossouthernafrica.wordpress.com/2012/03/01/sermon-on-the-anc-centenary-by-dr-allan-boesak/> [2014, 6 March].

2013. A quiet, persistent power: Genesis 25:7-11. Sermon preached at New Millenium Church, Little Rock, AR, 10 March 2013. [Online.] Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O5Xs6cvnz9k> [2014, 9 July].

2014a. What day is this: Luke 23:32-43. Sermon preached at Zionsville United Methodist Church, Zionsville, IN, 18 April 2014. [Online.] Retrieved from <http://www.zumc.org/index.php/online-media/teacher/14-rev-dr-allan-aubrey-boesak.html> [2014, 9 July].

2014b. *Dare we speak of hope? Searching for the language of life in faith and politics*. [Kindle] Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans.

CILLIERS, J.

2004. *The living voice of the gospel: Revisiting the basic principles of preaching*. Stellenbosch: Sun Press.

2010. Preaching between assimilation and separation: Perspectives on Church and State in South African society. In: M. Lindhardt & H. Thomsen (eds.), *Preaching: Does it make a difference?* (Frederiksberg: Aros), pp. 67-75.

2013. Prophetic preaching in South Africa: Exploring some spaces of tension. *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Teologiese Tydskrif* 54(1-2):1-15. [Online.] Retrieved from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5952/54-1-2-299> [2014, 11 December]. <https://doi.org/10.5952/54-1-2-299>

DE GRUCHY, J.W.

2014. *A theological odyssey - My life in writing*. Stellenbosch: Sun Press.

HAUERWAS, S. & WILLIMON, H.W.

2014. *Resident aliens: Life in the Christian colony*. Expanded 25th Anniversary Ed. [Kindle] Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press.

JOHNSON, W.R.

2008. Are "Whites" in South Africa really ready for democracy? *Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture* 14(5):621-636. PsycINFO, EBSCOhost [2014, 25 August].

KLEES, S.J.

2014. Neoliberal policies destroy human potential and devastate education. *Mail and Guardian* 17 July. [Online.] Retrieved from <https://mg.co.za/article/2014-07-18-neoliberal-policies-destroy-human-potential-and-devastate-education> [2017, 13 October].

MBEMBE, A.

2008. Passages to freedom: The politics of racial reconciliation in South Africa. *Public Culture* 20(1):5-18. Humanities Source, EBSCOhost. [2014, 25 August].

MÜLLER, B.A.

2011. A homiletic credo – A firm belief in the preaching event. In: L. Hanse, N. Koopman & R. Vosloo (eds.), *Living theology. Essays presented to Dirk J. Smit on his sixtieth birthday* (Wellington: Bible Media), pp. 337-348.

NGK.

2013. Die NG Kerken apartheid. [Online.] Retrieved from: http://kerkargief.co.za/doks/bely/GD_apartheid.pdf [2014, 18 August].

PIKETTY, T.

2014. *Capitalism in the twenty-first century*. Translated by A. Goldhammer. [Kindle]. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

RAMPHELE, M.

2012. *Conversations with my sons and daughters*. Johannesburg: Penguin Books.

SCHOEMAN, K., LAUBSCHER, M., PALI, J. & VAN DEN BERG, J.

2012. Practical theology at a public university: The road travelled and the road ahead at the University of the Free State. In: R. Venter & F. Tolmie (eds.), *Transforming theological knowledge: Essays on theology and the university after apartheid* (Bloemfontein: Sun Media), pp. 127-146.

SLABBERT, A.

2013. Five million South Africans drowning in debt. *Moneyweb*. 5 November. [Online.] Retrieved from: <http://www.moneyweb.co.za/moneyweb-economic-trends/five-million-south-africans-drowning-in-debt> [2014, 26 February].

SMIT, D.J.

2014. Resisting "lordless powers"? Boesak on power. In: P. Dibeela, P. Lenka-Bula & V. Vellel (eds.), *Prophet from the south: Essays in honour of Allan Aubrey Boesak* (Stellenbosch: Sun Press), pp. 11-35.

STREAK, J.

2004. The gear legacy: Did gear fail or move South Africa forward in development? *Development Southern Africa* 21(2):271-288. Business Source Complete, EBSCOhost [2014, 29 July].

TERREBLANCHE, S.

2014. *Verdeelde land: Hoe die oorgang Suid-Afrika faal*. [Kindle] Kaapstad: Tafelberg.

TUBBS TISDALE, L. & DE WET, F.W.

2014. Contemporary prophetic preaching theory in the United States of America and South Africa: A comparative study through the lens of shared Reformation roots. *HTS Theological Studies* 70(2). Art. #1337, 8 pages. [Online.] Retrieved from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v70i2.1337> [2015, 12 January]. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v70i2.1337>

Keywords

Allan Boesak

Preaching in South Africa today

Public Theology

Preaching truth to power

Trefwoorde

Allan Boesak

Prediking in Suid-Afrika vandag

Publieke Teologie

Prediking van waarheid tot mag