

## A short history of empirical homiletics in South Africa

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### Abstract

In this article I am telling the story of the history of empirical homiletics, in particular the use of the Grounded Theory methodology of doing content analysis of sermons and other documents, such as interviews, to ascertain in a scientific way the contents of documents. This is an exercise in reflexive-biographical exploration of empirical homiletical methodology. I first discussed the analysis of sermons using *quantitative* methods in my book *Communicative preaching* and the thesis of Julian Müller. There was a growing urge amongst homiletics to study the contents of sermons. The Heidelberg analytical method is a form of qualitative sermon analysis. Qualitative methodology suits theologians better than quantitative methods. I have discussed this method and referred to the work of Johan Cilliers in this regard. The next development of sermon content analysis is the Grounded Theory methodology. We made use of the first stage of the development of *qualitative* Grounded Theory methodology in the analysis of Desmond Tutu's sermons and statements. After the international publication of this book, Prof. F. Gerrit Immink started using the upgraded form of Grounded Theory by Kathy Charmaz for the empirical homiletical research of his doctoral students at Utrecht University in the Netherlands. I also discussed my book *Preaching in a context of poverty* as the theoretical part of my later research with Grounded Theory analysis of sermons on poverty. Then I discussed my six yearlong content analysis of sermons preached with Matthew 25:31–46 as sermon text by means of Grounded Theory methodology. Important is the chapter by Müller & Wepener in an international publication, and the article on angry preaching by Wepener and Pieterse which was published in an international journal. Lastly, I have mentioned the post-graduate research with the Grounded Theory method by students. The value that is being added in this article by doing this historical survey is to show the development and to signal what might be waiting in the near future for our discipline.

**Keywords**

*Empirical homiletics; content analysis of sermons; quantitative analysis; qualitative analysis; Grounded Theory methodology; research by professors and students*

## 1. Introduction

The contemporary discipline of Practical Theology has its roots in the turn in theological thinking from 1960 after World War II. The name of the discipline came from Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1864). In the past this discipline was viewed as the application in practice of theological ideas in Systematic Theology and Biblical theological insights, but against Karl Barth's theology, H.D. Bastian wrote an article with the striking title *Vom Wort zu den Wörtern* (Bastian 1968:25–55). It is not the Word of God alone in Christian practice, but also the words we speak in our *communication* of the Word of God. J. Firet formulated it in Reformed terms as "Er is een dialectiek tussen Gods komen tot de mens en 's mensen komen tot God" (Firet 1987:300). He therefore sees Practical Theology as the study of Christian communicative actions in service of the gospel in preaching, ritual liturgy, pastoral care and counselling, teaching and diaconal work in the congregation and wider in the community (Firet 1987:260–272). In this he followed the classic essay of Rolf Zerfass (1974:164–177). The problem that faced our discipline then, and up to today, is the theory-praxis problem. How should we research this problem in, or in the study of, practical theological theory and practice? By means of theological empirical research (Spiegel 1974:178–194). We name it as *theological* empirical research because the practice we research is of theological nature, while the empirical strategy and approach and formation of the empirical instruments of research or strategies are informed by theological theories (cf. Van der Ven 1985 (ed); 1990). In my work as homiletiician I have adopted this approach, spelled out by Zerfass, Firet and Van der Ven, to do Practical Theology (cf. Heyns & Pieterse 1990).

In this article I will describe the history of empirical research in empirical homiletics on sermon texts in South Africa, printed or written as documents after it has been preached, in which we have tried to ascertain the *contents* of the sermons. This is an exercise in a reflexive-biographical exploration

of homiletical methodology. First, I will discuss two studies as the first attempts for content analysis of typed sermon documents by means of *quantitative* research. Then I will put forward content analysis by means of *qualitative* research. The Heidelberg analytical approach, which is a form of qualitative analysis, is the first discussion. Lastly, I will discuss a range of studies with the Grounded Theory approach to content analysis. The *value* that is being added in this article by doing this historical survey of empirical homiletics is to show the development and to signal what might be waiting in the near future for our discipline.

Content analysis of sermons by means of empirical instruments is important to ascertain in a scientific way how the sermons in practice differs, or approach, a sound theory of preaching, in order to improve the practice of preaching. Then, in a hermeneutic interaction between the results of research on the practice of preaching and theory, also improve the theory from insights gained in practice. In Practical Theology, we called it the theory-praxis interaction.

## **2. Empirical research of content analysis of sermons by means of quantitative instruments**

For many years homiletics wanted to do empirical research on preached sermons. There was a sociological research done by Sterk (1975) on sermons and the reaction by the listeners, which immediately stimulated me, and at a later stage also F. Gerrit Immink, also a homilician (2009:296). Therefore, I decided to embark on an extensive quantitative research project on content analysis of sermons from February 1983 to March 1984 in the population of preachers in Pretoria (Pieterse 1986; English translation 1987). At this time quantitative research was viewed as scientific and qualitative research as not that scientific.

Quantitative empirical research functions as the *testing of theories* in the everyday reality. In my research I endeavour to test the homiletical hermeneutic theory I developed for preaching (Pieterse 1979). I then addressed the problem of bridging the gap hermeneutically between the world of the text (horizon of understanding) and the contemporary context of the listeners to the sermon (our horizon of understanding (cf. Gadamer 1975; Ebeling 1975). In this content analysis of sermons by means of a

quantitative research I wanted to find out how this theory (Pieterse 1979) functions in the practice of preaching. I suspect that in practice there will be three modes of sermons: scripturally-oriented, situationally-oriented and topical (relevant) sermons where my theory will function.

The *problem* I addressed was whether the theory works in practice, and the *aim* of the research was to test this homiletical theory which I have developed for the practice of preaching. I therefore had to construct *ideal types of sermons*. Goodman and Marx described the ideal types of Max Weber as that it generates hypotheses and gives direction to empirical research not by reflecting reality, but by providing an abstract concept against which reality can be viewed (Goodman & Marx 1978:558). The concept of ideal types for three types of sermons provided me with the *hypotheses* to use in this research namely, scripturally-oriented sermons, contextually-oriented sermons and hermeneutically-oriented (bringing text and context together in a topical sermon).

I selected at random as a *sample* twenty preachers in Reformed congregations amongst the population of Pretoria. I wrote them a letter inviting them to submit to me their preached sermons, recorded during the service and typed afterwards. All of them agreed. Five of these ministers could not be used in the eventual study for a variety of reasons. Each minister submitted seven sermons so that I could analyse 105 sermons. I was fortunate to make use of advisors – a sociologist and a psychologist, both of whom were colleagues at our University of South Africa (Unisa).

The *procedure* of the research was a form of *content analysis* as it was developed mainly in the USA, passing through several phases. Content analysis is defined by Berelson as “a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication” (Berelson 1952:18). In content analysis it is important to devise *categories* of content. This kind of analysis stands and falls with categories. Each category must be exactly defined and there must be no overlapping of pieces of contents. “Since the categories contain the substance of the investigation a content analysis can be no better than its system of categories” (Berelson 1952:147).

The *technique* of the research was a *schedule* as a measuring instrument. In the schedule we included a list of *biographical* particulars of the

respondents and a list of the *Scripture readings in Bible books*, and the chapters and verses in the sermons was also included in the schedule. Then followed a list of the *contents of the sermons* divided in “Scripturalness,” Biblical contextuality, contextuality at the time of the sermon; language and concepts of the sermons; dialogical character of the sermons; aspects of the sermon; hermeneutic character; sermon form; and type of worship service.

The *tables* that followed in the book (Pieterse 1987:52–58) reflect the results of the research by means of biographical profile of the preachers; the procession of data analysis and interpretation of the data. In the data *procession* four levels of statistical techniques for measurement was enacted by the computer, namely two chi-square tests and two variance analyses producing percentages, percentage media and standard deviation.

The *results* were that three ideal-typical preaching styles came to the fore: unclassifiable 12,4%, topically-oriented 39,0%, scripturally-oriented 31.4%, situationally-oriented 17,1%. All the styles are preached by younger and older preachers. Age and level of education played no role. I was delighted to see that most of the sermons (39.0%) were topically oriented. These preachers understood how to work hermeneutically with text and context. Otherwise I was disappointed that 17.1% preached situationally-oriented – they did not know how to let the Biblical text function in the sermon (cf. Jonker 1976).

In South Africa Julian Müller, former professor at the University of Pretoria, did a quantitative research on the homily as one of the forms of preaching, in which he also afterwards made use of interviews in order to get a deeper level of meaning (Müller 1984).

In 1983 I invited prof. Frans Haarsma of Nijmegen in the Netherlands as my guest professor in our department of Practical Theology at Unisa. He was also present at my inaugural lecture as professor on 20 September 1983. In 1984 on my way to Princeton in the USA as guest of Thomas G. Long, I visited Prof. Haarsma in Nijmegen and met on that occasion Hans (J.A.) van der Ven. He was at that time well-versed in quantitative theological empirical research. He asked me whether I have published empirical research results. I promised him that I will send him the results of this qualitative research that I was working on at Unisa. In 1988 I was in Nijmegen again where

he discussed my book of 1987 (*Communicative Preaching*) with me. His comment was that the schedule (screen) of analysis I have used was too wide so that I could not get hold of some of the important content. At the same time the book of Fred Wester was published (Wester 1987) which I bought while I was in Amsterdam. After I had read this book, I abandoned the idea to do quantitative research anymore. In Wester's book there was a chapter on Grounded Theory analysis as a research strategy (Wester 1987:45–153). The *reason* why I have abandoned the effort of content analysis of sermons by means of a quantitative methodology is the fact that it is not able to capture the finer nuances of content in the sermons. Grounded Theory has the promise to do just that.

### 3. The Heidelberg analytical method

This method was developed by Rudolf Bohren (cf. Bohren 1974:544–553) where he stated the beginning of developing this method of content analysis of sermons. I had a conversation with him in December 1978 in Heidelberg where he said that we must be critical on how preachers preach by studying their sermons. On my question of how the preaching in Germany was, he answered: "Sehr schlecht." With the help of G. Debus he developed this method in which a network of questions is asked of the sermon. The Heidelberg analytical method is as a form of qualitative research of sermon content. The method concentrates on four aspects of the questions asked of the sermon: God, the Bible text on which the sermon is built, the congregation and the preacher. (Moehn 1996:3–5).

The *first* group of questions asked about the Name of God. How is God coming to speech in the sermon? What does the preacher do with the name of Jesus Christ? What role does the Holy Spirit play in the sermon about the bringing of the message of salvation?

The *second* group of questions asked whether the sermon used the language of the Bible, Old and New Testament. In which way the preacher quotes the biblical language? What does the preacher do with the text and its message? How is the text applied in the sermon? Are the concepts and images of the texts explained in the context of the listeners? What is the connection with theology of the text in the sermon?

The *third* group of questions related to the listeners. What is the historic and societal context of the listeners which function in the sermon? How is the preacher's view of his congregation? How is their lifeworld addressed in the sermon?

The *fourth* group of questions has to do with the person of the preacher. Can we see in the sermon whether the preacher shows his responsibility as called by God to bring the message of the Gospel and that he is responsible to his people?

The researcher is free to phrase more questions which suits the situation and the sermons that she/he wants to analyse.

In South Africa Johan Cilliers, former professor of homiletics at Stellenbosch University, did original content analysis of sermons with the Heidelberg analytical method. In his doctoral thesis he designed a sermon analytical model based on the Heidelberg methodology. He has written another two important books in which he made use of this form of content analysis of sermons (cf. Cilliers 1982; 1994;1996).

#### **4. Qualitative Grounded theory approach to content analysis of sermon documents**

In the late 1980's the apartheid policy of the government in South Africa led by the National Party had such a devastating effect on the black people of our country that protest was rife. There was one man, Archbishop Desmond Tutu of the Anglican church, who prophetically and peacefully has critiqued the government in his preaching. The churches, with Desmond Tutu in the forefront, played a remarkable role in the liberation of South Africa. His forceful sermons and speeches based on the texts of the Bible had a huge influence in the change in our country after Nelson Mandela was freed from 27 years in prison and the black political parties, of which the ANC was the strongest, was unbanned. Negotiations followed and in 1994, after a general election, the new democratic South Africa was born (Pieterse 2001:9–25).

As a preacher I was amazed by the influence that preaching such as Tutu's preaching could have on a country. It was not long after the change that followed since February 1990 that I decided to do content analysis of Tutu's

sermons in order to learn in our discipline how to preach prophetically. I collected 12 sermons, speeches and statements of Tutu in the period 1980–1990 up to the day of liberation which he called a miracle of God. Most of the documents was published, but he also submits to me the few later sermons. My wife, Jos, put the texts of the documents on the computer and I was ready to start with content analyses. I therefore fetched Wester's book on Grounded Theory from the shelf and started reading it (Wester 1987).

In 1990, when I was in the Netherlands again, I visited Fred Wester in Nijmegen and told him that I want to write a book on Tutu's sermons, and asked if he was willing to assist me. He is a very friendly man and agreed immediately. He is a sociologist of religion and we put up a working group in which we include Hans van der Ven (Practical Theology), and Peer Scheepers, also a sociologist – all lecturers at Nijmegen University. The collaboration with Wester and the other colleagues was a great pleasure. Of all the six chapters I have written, Scheepers has written with me in two chapters, Wester also with me in two chapters and Van der Ven one chapter in which he discussed the moral and religious self of Tutu.

#### 4.1 Desmond Tutu's message

Desmond Tutu's documents was put in the Kwalitan computer program (Pieterse 2001:119–128). The first counting of words in the documents had the result that Tutu used the word ‘God’ the most in his sermons, in a few speeches and in a statement! This deep religious attitude he kept until today. There were more prophetic preachers against apartheid in South Africa, but the deep religious being of Tutu addressed me in my own being. Furthermore, to do two or three preachers' sermons in one research project *at that stage* would have been a great challenge. I did not have the money and capacity to do more preachers. It was a practical decision to analyse Desmond Tutu's sermons.

In the Grounded Theory method of content analysis, which we used in this research, was the first, beginning phase of this approach. We used the book by Glaser & Strauss (1967) and when Glaser parted with Strauss and put the method on a good track, we used his book (Glaser 1978) as well, and of course, Wester's book (1987). At this stage the Grounded Theory method could only provide themes, an argumentation structure, key words and a network of codes with categories and concepts, with a central concept

which related to the other concepts, put into a scheme (Pieterse 2001:136–149).

We started off with the following *research questions*: What themes can be found in the documents? What is the frequency of their occurrence? How are these themes related to each other? Does their occurrence vary in relation to time, public or situation? (Pieterse 2001:129). We selected one sermon for a pilot analysis. One of the researchers divided it into segments, put a theme label on each segment and we put it on the Kwalitan database. The document was then read line by line and coded.

With a good result of the pilot study we started the *first stage* of analysis with three documents including the one used in the pilot study – all the documents were from the same context: funeral sermons. They were coded in 66 different codes and were assigned 157 times to segments. We discovered some structure in the codes and the themes “political themes,” “general theology,” “liberation theology,” and “situation specific” came to the fore (Pieterse 2001:130–131).

A new group of three documents was selected to be analysed in the *second stage* of analysis. These documents originated in another situation as those in the first stage. We have divided it in segments making use of the themes of the overview of themes we produced in the first stage. Through line-by-line analysis in the Kwalitan work file, relevant codes were assigned to the segments. Besides codes already in use new codes were formulated. A new overview of codes was now produced (Pieterse 2001:132). Then we scanned the ten documents which gave us an overview of the word usage in the entire database. The codes we formulated were adjusted to the words used in the documents in case they have overlapped. Code adjustments were processed and finally Kwalitan presented a new overview of the codes in use. The structure of themes, subthemes, key words and codes were discussed and adjusted to new insights. This led to a relatively fixed scheme of concepts to be used in the analysis (Pieterse 2001:132–133).

In the *third stage* of analysis we analysed two complementary documents. We transcribed and coded these documents. The coding was discussed and registered in Kwalitan. The total file of twelve documents was now definitely coded. One of the aspects of a speech is its rhetorical nature. The rough structure of the arguments was reconstructed by means of our

scheme of concepts and codes. The aim was to examine in what way the themes were used in relation to each other (Pieterse 2001:135). The themes we found in the documents, each theme with a range of sub-themes, were theological themes; political themes; liberation theology and the role of the church in South Africa (Pieterse 2001:137–141).

When the book was published (Pieterse 1995), Unisa's Chancellor's Prize for Research was awarded to me in 1997.

#### **4.2 Gerrit Immink's doctoral student group**

After the publication of the book on Tutu's sermons in the Netherlands Prof. F. Gerrit Immink of Utrecht University invited me to lecture on the methodology of Grounded Theory to a group of doctoral students who were in the beginning phase of their research. After the meeting at tea he told me that they have used in Utrecht the Heidelberg method of analysis for the thesis of Moehn (1996). He was not satisfied with it and wanted to use the Grounded Theory methodology in the future. He invited me over the years on four occasions to sit with him and his students to discuss their work with Grounded Theory analysis.

The new refinement of Grounded Theory in the work of Charmaz (2000; 2006) was published. The methodology was now further developed and fitted exactly on the content analysis of *sermons*. I decided to abandon the Kwalitan way of content analysis by means of the first stage of Grounded Theory as we have done in the Tutu book and wanted to work in future with the new development in Grounded Theory. The *reason* was that my first effort could only find themes in the sermons and an argumentation structure. Charmaz's method could sifted the contents of sermons more accurately. The doctoral group of Immink studied and applied it thoroughly. I was now learning from them how to work with this updated and good developed methodology. The results of their doctoral research work were excellent. The first good thesis by Theo Pleizier was published in 2010. It was well received in that critical community of scholars. Then followed André Verwij's thesis in 2014, a man from whom I learned a lot. And finally, Pieter Boonstra's thesis was published in 2016. This updated Grounded Theory content analysis of sermons was now internationally well established.

#### 4.3 Preaching in a context of poverty and my project of analysing sermons on Matthew 25:31–46

The new government initiated several country wide empirical research teams on poverty. These are the project for statistics on Living Standards and development (PSLD 1994) conducted by the University of Cape Town; the quantitative empirical study on poverty and inequality by May and Govender (1998) with a large research team funded by the South African and Dutch governments, the World Bank, the United Nations and the United Kingdom which was a report for the Executive Deputy President; and a qualitative study (SA-PPA 1997).

In my book *Preaching in a context of poverty* (2001) published in the year of my retirement at the University of South Africa, I made use of the abovementioned research projects to write a profile of poverty in South Africa (Pieterse 2001:32–70). I also conducted interviews with poor people, sometimes going to their homes (Pieterse 2001:107–110). My conclusion in this book was that we should aim for a preaching practice that addressed the situation and needs of the poor. This must be done in a diaconal church where the church *for* the poor (a better off congregation) reach out to the church *of* the poor in order to give assistance in a process of transformation. In this process of listening to the poor and respecting their human dignity and pride, members of the church for the poor who want to become involved, will first have to form a partnership with the latter on an equal footing. This entails creating a forum where they can meet. The church for the poor must listen to the people to hear what they see as their needs and where help can be effective. The poor must state their own needs and be helped to liberate themselves (Pieterse 2001:116).

After my retirement at Unisa I was appointed as an Extra Ordinary Professor at the University of Pretoria in 2002 to teach homiletics. One of the tasks they asked of me was to apply for a National Research Foundation (NRF) rating in order to conduct a research project over six years. This application succeeded. I decided to use the updated Grounded Theory approach as formulated by the doctoral study group at Utrecht to do content analysis on sermons with Matthew 25:31–46 as sermon text and started this research process in 2009 (Pieterse 2010:113–129). I have asked my ex-doctoral students in eight provinces of our country to identify preachers

in the DRC (Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk) and the URC (Uniting Reformed Church) by means of a theoretical sample and asked them to preach a sermon in their congregations on this Bible text in Matthew, and then submit it in a written or printed-out text. I visited the provinces, collected the sermons and had conversations with the preachers on the contexts of their congregations (Pieterse 2011:99). In the end I received 26 sermons from 26 preachers – 12 from the URC and 14 from the DRC.

The leading *research question* was on how preachers deal with sermons on poverty with Mathew 25:31–46 as sermon text. The sensitizing concepts in order to open up the documents were derived from my theoretical view on this kind of preaching as formulated in my book of 2001, were the following: solidarity of Jesus with the poor and destitute; alleviation, healing in the broadest sense; promise of the Kingdom of God; hope; sermons as an event; homiletic situation – the existential situation of people in the context of the congregation (Pieterse 2011:96; 98).

I conducted an *open coding* content analysis on 6 DRC sermons and 6 URC sermons which I received in a first round of sermon collection (Pieterse 2011:99–104). This round of analysis produced four initial main categories: faith participation with Jesus; identifying of the followers of Jesus with the poor; appealing to the listeners; and caring for the poor and humble by present-day congregations (Pieterse 2011:105). To be able to construct an open coding analytical model from the contents of the sermons researched, I had to progress from analysis to conceptualisation. Therefore, the next exercise is to find the relationships between the main concepts derived from the main categories and put them in a model.

All three initial main categories are linked and connected by the fourth main category: the idea of how the preachers go about in appealing to the listeners that can be conceptualised in a sequence. The sermons mainly followed the following argumentation strategy: faith participation with Jesus, then: identifying with Jesus as He did with his relationship with the poor; identifying by the followers of Jesus with the poor; and then followed the appeal to the congregation: care for the poor and humble in our context and vicinity (Pieterse 2011:107). The open coding analytical model presented a core concept: appealing to the listeners, to which the other concepts are in a relationship (Pieterse 2011:109–110).

The next step was *selective coding*. To do this I collected 14 more sermons from DRC and URC preachers in all the provinces, in cities and rural areas. The content analysis produced the following main categories:

- Charity projects by congregations, with the subcategories: provision of food; provision of clothes.
- Projects of empowerment, with the subcategories: relationships with the poor; financial support; medical support; educational support; building support; self-help support.
- Calling for participation in that congregation's projects to the poor.

I then sent my whole project and its results to Prof. Immink and his students for critical reading of it. I met them at the University of Utrecht, and he invited a whole group of doctoral students who filled the room. They were in the main positive about my work and helped me to formulate the concepts more precisely. André Verweij (2014:272–273) referred in his published thesis to the publications of my project in *Acta Theologica*.

From the whole coding process (open, selective and theoretical) I could formulate concepts from the categories in order to build an emerging grounded theory for the practice of preaching on poverty in South Africa from Matthew 25:3–46 as sermon text. The main concept is “Calling for participation in projects of charity and empowerment of the congregation in the sermon.” Three other concepts which are in relation with the main concept, are “Exegesis”; “Rhetorical structure of sermon”; and “Religious motivation; and “a typology of congregational projects” (Pieterse 2013:191).

#### **4.4 Chapter by Müller& Wepener and the article with Cas Wepener**

The first publication in a book from South African practical theological scholars was the contribution by B.A. Müller and Cas Wepener in which they made use of Grounded Theory content analysis (Müller & Wepener 2019). The sermons which were analysed were preached in an African Independent Church (cf. Müller 1992).

In the years 2016 –2018 and ongoing there was a general feeling of anger amongst South Africans. Many of us felt that we are not coming to our own after the eight years of government under the leadership of former President Jacob Zuma. As a result of this boiling pot he was forced by our

parliament to resign before his second term was over. In this context my colleague Cas Wepener and I decided to study sermons on anger by means of Grounded Theory content analysis. We first collected four sermons on anger from Afrikaans Reformed preachers for the open coding phase, and for the selective coding phase another five sermons (cf. Wepener & Pieterse 2018:410–415).

The *open coding* phase of the content analysis produced four initial categories: all people are angry; anger is bad for health, spirituality and relationships; and bring your anger to God in worship. We then collected five more sermons for the analysis of the next phase.

In the *selective coding* phase of content analysis, the sermons produced a wealth of codes. The four initial categories were tightly strengthened by new codes, especially the category 'bring your anger to God in worship.' Furthermore, four new categories came to the fore: love other people as God does; trust other people; communicate anger in a Christian way; and make peace with those you are in conflict.

We were now able to construct a scheme of categories (concepts) of which the core category of 'bring your anger to God in worship' was in relationship with the other categories. This emerging theory from practice could help preachers of what themes to address in their sermons when they preach on anger. We closed the article with a homiletical/liturgical discussion on angry preaching. One of the astonishing aspects of the contents of the sermons was that they did not address the rituals in the liturgy which could help to address their anger on a deep level.

#### 4.5 Grounded Theory studies by students

I am delighted that professors regard Grounded Theory as a viable method for content analysis of preached sermons or other documents, e.g. Cas Wepener, Yolanda Dreyer and W.C. Coetzer. The fact that students are using this method for content analysis of sermons and did well in the examinations, is proof that this methodology is internationally accepted as a good scientific method of capturing the contents of sermons.

Shaun Joynt was the first doctoral student to use this method in his doctoral thesis (Joynt 2013; cf. also Joynt 2017). Jan du Preez analysed with this updated Grounded Theory methodology the contents of interviews

with Koevoet veterans for his PhD – these veterans of war who are in a bad situation, living in poverty and within their religious experiences (Du Preez 2019). Jaco Barnard did a fine thesis using Grounded Theory analysis in studying the contents of the preached sermons he analysed for his PhD (Barnard 2020). Marileen Steyn worked on her MDiv dissertation (Steyn 2017) and her master's dissertation in an excellent way with this methodology (Steyn 2020).

## Conclusion

In this survey of studies using Grounded Theory for content analysis especially for sermons, I have tried to show how it was used from the first stage of development in the book on Desmond Tutu's sermons and statements, until the methodology was further developed and found maturity through the work of Kathy Charmaz and the application thereof on sermons and interview documents by the doctoral students of Gerrit Immink in the Netherlands. I have used this updated Grounded Theory methodology in my extensive research on sermons with Matthew 25:31–46 as a sermon text that inspire members of churches to reach out to poor communities. This specific research was also recognised internationally. The final argument for the suitability of this methodology to do scientific analyses of sermon documents was the fact that students used it effectively in their post-graduate research.

The value that is being added in this article by doing this reflexive-biographical exploration in a historical survey of empirical homiletics, is to show the development and signal what might be waiting in the near future for our discipline.

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