Stellenbosch Theological Journal Supp. 2019, Vol 5, No 2, 51–64
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.17570/stj.Supp. 2019.v5n2.a03
Online ISSN 2413-9467 | Print ISSN 2413-9459

Inter Alia: Johan Cilliers and the homiletical imagination

Campbell, Charles L
Duke University Divinity School, Durham, North Carolina, USA
campbellc@CTSnet.edu

Abstract

This essay will explore the homiletical imagination through one of Johan Cilliers' favourite phrases: *inter alia* ("among other things"). The phrase captures the unsettled restlessness not only of Cilliers himself, but of homiletics. Homiletics really has no centre; it can never close in on itself because there is literally no there there. Homiletics is an "among-other-things" discipline. It exists only *among* many other disciplines; it depends on the connections it makes with biblical studies and theology and history and rhetoric and performance. But that is just the beginning. For the homiletical imagination comes *alive* only as it makes these same connections with virtually *everything*: the Karoo or a garden or a joke; a photograph or a painting or graffiti; jesters, clowns, iimbongi. The homiletical imagination lives *inter alia*. It ceaselessly plays among other things, restlessly exploring multiple connections as it seeks inspiration and understanding. Through his extraordinary work, Johan Cilliers models this kind of imagination and invites all homileticians to a richer understanding of what we do.

Keywords

Homiletical imagination; homiletics; aesthetics

Throughout his extraordinary body of work, Johan Cilliers frequently turns to the Latin phrase, *inter alia* – "among other things." It is a phrase one is tempted to rush by with little thought. On one level, that may be appropriate. The phrase can simply be a brief, academic qualification, a way for Cilliers to remind readers that more is involved in a topic than his current focus of attention permits him to discuss. *Inter alia* is the phrase of the careful scholar recognizing his or her limitations. The reader can skim over it and move to the substantive points in the argument.

But for Cilliers the phrase runs much deeper than that. I want to linger with it because I believe that little phrase, *inter alia*, represents a central aspect of Cilliers' contribution to homiletics. The phrase in fact goes to the heart of Cilliers' work because of his own endlessly playful and fertile imagination. When Cilliers is thinking and writing, he is always – *always* – *inter alia*; he is moving restlessly and exuberantly among (*many*) other things. His imagination is boundless. At one moment he is wandering mystically through the open landscape of his beloved Karoo, pondering the meaning of space. In the next, he's back in Stellenbosch creating the wild space of his garden, which, with its fanciful array of colorful plants and structures, resembles nothing so much as a botanical version of Willie Wonka's Chocolate Factory. Then he's engaging in reflections on time through Salvador Dali's painting of melting clocks. Or he's pondering the horrors of the Holocaust through Jan Wolkers' art installation in Amsterdam entitled *Never Again Auschwitz*. But just as quickly he's back home in South Africa discussing the poetry of iimbongi, the laughter of Desmond Tutu, or the practice of Ubuntu. And before one has time to settle, he's exploring, in good Reformed, iconoclastic fashion, the dangers of architectural monuments or biblical typologies that seek to capture God in granite forms or rigid figures. And if that's not enough, before you know it, he's showing you his own paintings: an open door looking out on the vistas of the Karoo with a walking stick by the threshold ready to be put to use. Or a mysterious Christ figure created when Cilliers covered himself with paint and spread his body out on a canvas.

It never ends. Not surprisingly, Cilliers is not a linear thinker or writer. Indeed, when we were co-authoring *Preaching Fools*, our editor told us, "The writing is much too circular. Please, can you make it a bit more linear." That job fell to me. For Cilliers, *inter alia* is not merely an academic phrase or qualification. It is where he lives: among other things, always playfully and profoundly exploring the connections among them all. And all of them – *all of them* – inform his homiletical reflections.

Maybe it does go back to the Karoo. What Cilliers writes about the Karoo actually describes his own imagination. The Karoo, for Cilliers is a "wide and wild free space," the space of freedom and transcendence that

reaches for the sky.[1] It is a liminal space through which to wander, always anticipating something more, something new. The Karoo points Cilliers to a space that "transcends the borders of the imagination" with surprising, unsettling possibilities.[2]

Another artist describes a similar experience in the open space of the Mississippi Delta in the United States:

> That endless horizon line on the flat plane of the Delta is so much a part of why I am interested in the space between things; where one thing becomes another. The place where things shift along a line, the negative space between elements on a page, the pairing of shapes. For me, these are all a way to experience expansiveness, tension and balance.[3]

In that imaginative space, one can never be settled, but one is always on the move, imagining ever new possibilities and pairings. It is a space of "endless horizon" where one has never arrived, but, in the Apostle Paul's phrase, one is always "*being* saved" (1 Cor 1:18; 15:2). It is no wonder that Cilliers returns again and again to *inter alia*. The phrase is not simply a form of academic qualification; it is the character of his imagination, the character of the playful and wondrous grace of God in which we are "being saved." When we engage with the living God, there is no settling down, but a never-ending exploration of the transcendent "wide and wild free space" suggested by *inter alia*.

It is thus not surprising that Cilliers has developed an *aesthetic* homiletic, rather than a *dogmatic* one. Art is always multivalent, open to myriad interpretations; it invites us to make connections, often among things that seem unrelated, even paradoxical. Art creates liminal spaces where imagination comes alive with new insights and possibilities; it is not easily managed or controlled, but challenges and unsettles. Art opens up, rather than closing down. Dogmatics, on the other hand, often becomes univocal –

---

1 Johan Cilliers, *A Space for Grace: Towards an Aesthetics of Preaching* (Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2016), 3–5.

2 Ibid., 13.

3 From printmaker Eileen Wallace's artist statement; [Online] Available: https://www.eileenwallace.com/contact [Accessed: June 22, 2019].

defining, clarifying, limiting, excluding. As theologian Willie Jennings has described "academic theology": it "flows from an intellectual posture created through the cultivated capacities to clarify, categorize, define, explain…." This posture, he notes, eclipses theology's "fluid, adaptable, even morph-able character."[4] Such theology, as Cilliers has reminded us, often circles the wagons, seeking to uphold a narrow orthodoxy; it often becomes "*iron* theology."[5] And as Cilliers knows from South African history, such theology can become the tool of frightening oppression, the rigid foundation of apartheids, rather than the open-ended grace of "being saved." Cilliers has no patience with iron theology or iron homiletics. So, he turns to aesthetics, which keeps homiletics "fluid, adaptable, morph-able." Always *inter alia*.

Through his playful, imaginative work, Cilliers reminds us that homiletics is an *inter-alia* discipline. Homiletics only exists *among other things*. It is always decentered. It can never close in on itself because it exists only among many other disciplines; it depends on the connections it makes with biblical studies and theology and history and rhetoric and performance. But that is just the beginning. Homiletics really comes alive only as it makes these same connections with virtually *everything*. Like preaching itself, homiletics lives only as it imaginatively makes connections with a painting, a photograph, a jazz performance, a political cartoon, a glass of wine, a walk in the Karoo.

Homiletics is a playful discipline; it explores and imagines connections with virtually everything around it. It lives by these dynamic pairings, not by any carefully defined or circumscribed disciplinary rules. It lives in the liminal space in which we are always "being saved," never settled and secure. In this space homiletics remains open to new insights, new movements of the Spirit. A primary requirement is imaginative play, which reaches out exuberantly to every possibility in God's creation, asking, "What does this have to do with preaching?"

---

4 Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale University, 2010), 8.

5 See Charles L. Campbell and Johan H. Cilliers, *Preaching Fools: The Gospel as a Rhetoric of Folly* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012), 63–66.

As a creative, unending practice of homiletical imagination, the homiletician's work – and the discipline of homiletics itself – may be viewed (*inter alia*!) through three different, but related, lenses. First, the homiletician lives as a fool in the unsettled, liminal space of God's apocalyptic interruption of the old age with the new creation. Second, in that space the homiletician's body of work is what the philosopher and literary critic, Mikhail Bakhtin, calls a "grotesque body."[6] Finally, the stance of the homiletician is shaped by the disruptive, playful, humble laughter of "open seriousness."[7]

1. The homiletical fool at the turn of the ages

1 Corinthians 1:18–25 is possibly our earliest Christian homiletics text. In it, Paul does what homileticians do: he reflects imaginatively on the nature of preaching:

> For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written,
>
> "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
> and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."
>
> Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

A few chapters later, Paul continues his homiletical reflection by turning his attention to the character of the apostolic preacher: "I think that God

6 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 303–436.

7 Ibid., 122

has exhibited us apostles as last of all," he writes, "as though sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to mortals. We are fools for the sake of Christ …" (4:9–10).[8]

In these verses Paul presents his understanding of preaching through one of the most daring and consequential acts of homiletical imagination in history. He pairs preaching with the figure of the fool in the Roman theater. Christian preaching, he declares, embodies the folly of the buffoonish character in the drama who dashes unexpectedly onto the stage and disrupts the entire play with shocking words and antics. The preacher, Paul declares, actually plays the role of this disruptive, unsettling figure, subverting the dominant players' understandings of wisdom and power. In pairing preaching and the theatrical fool Paul exhibits the character of the homiletical imagination for everyone who follows him. That imagination is *inter alia*; it lives "among other things"; it dares to explore the most startling, unexpected pairings – even that between preaching and the disreputable figure of the fool.[9]

Paul's pairing would have been jarring, but it also creatively engaged the character of preaching at the "turn of the ages." Paul's turn to the fool was, in fact, also a profound act of *theological* imagination – more specifically, *apocalyptic imagination*.[10] At the heart of this imagination is a theology of interruption.[11] Apocalyptic imagination, that is, lives in the space where the new age has interrupted the old in Jesus Christ. It lives in that threshold space in which the new creation *has* decisively broken in and changed the world, but in which the old age continues aggressively to exist in tension

---

8 The translation of these texts is from the New Revised Standard Version.

9 On Paul's appropriation of the figure of the fool in the Roman theater, see L. L. Welborn, *Paul, the Fool of Christ: A Study of 1 Corinthians 1–4 in the Comic-Philosophic Tradition* (London: T & T Clark).

10 Contemporary New Testament scholars have moved beyond viewing apocalyptic narrowly as a literary genre like Revelation and have argued that the apocalyptic imagination runs through many different literary genres in the New Testament, including, particularly, the letters of Paul. See, for example, J. Louis Martyn, "Epistemology at the Turn of the Ages," in *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 89–110; Alexandra R. Brown, *The Cross and Human Transformation: Paul's Apocalyptic Word in 1 Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press), 1995.

11 See Lieven Boeve, *God Interrupts History: Theology in a Time of Upheaval* (New York: Continuum, 2007). My discussion of interruptions is taken from Boeve.

with the new. That is the character of interruptions. There is a twofold dynamic at work – both continuity and discontinuity. What is interrupted – in this case, the old age – does not cease actively and even persuasively to exist. At the same time, however, what is interrupted does not continue as if nothing has happened. There is thus a conflictual dynamic to apocalyptic because of the unsettled, tensive relationship between the old age and the new creation.

As a result of this apocalyptic interruption, Christians stand, as New Testament scholars put it, at the "juncture of the ages" or the "turn of the ages."[12] We stand "in-between," in a kind of liminal or threshold space where the two ages overlap, where the old is passing away while the new has not yet fully come. This space, like all liminal spaces, is an unsettling space; it is a dynamic, fluid space of movement from one place to another, in this case movement from the old age to the new. And this movement is never complete until the final coming of the new creation.

Within this larger apocalyptic imagination, Paul seeks to understand the character of preaching. And in so doing, he accomplishes an imaginative *tour de force*: he pairs Christian preaching with the cultural figure of the fool. It's a daring and brilliant move, for fools thrive in the liminal space of apocalyptic interruption. Unsettled, liminal spaces are the very places where fools live and move and have their being. Fools, in fact, both instigate and sustain liminality. They "melt the solidity of the world," just as the inbreaking new creation "dissolves" the old age.[13] Fools do not allow life to become narrow or settled or secure. They keep things fluid and open and on the move. In Paul's terms, they continually remind believers that we are "being saved." Fools in fact, keep our vision from becoming myopic; they keep us living *inter alia*, open to new connections and new possibilities.

Paul's early homiletical reflections thus indicate the complexity and boldness of the homiletical imagination. Paul's theological imagination leads him to a creative pairing of the Christian preacher and the theatrical fool. And the preaching fool envisioned by Paul keeps alive this homiletical

12 Martyn, "Epistemology," 89, 92; Brown, *Cross and Human Transformation*, 124.

13 Enid Welsford, *The Fool: His Social and Literary History* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1966), 223; Brown, *Cross and Human Transformation*, 13.

imagination by sustaining liminality, keeping our vision open, and inviting us to further unexpected pairings as we live *inter alia*. In his work, Johan Cilliers has continued the bold imaginative work of both the Apostle Paul and the homiletical fool.

2. Homiletics and the grotesque body

Many years ago, in a working group at the annual meeting of the Academy of Homiletics, there was a discussion about homiletics as an academic discipline. The group of well-known homileticians sought to address a question radically at odds with the role of the homiletical fool: What, precisely, defines the discipline of homiletics? The conversation was a mess. The various proposals ranged from a narrow definition that confined homiletics to a form of rhetoric to expansive ones that sought to integrate all the theological disciplines through the lens of preaching. By the end the best homiletical minds in the United States and Canada could come to no resolution or agreement whatsoever. As I look back on that meeting, I now see it not as a cause for concern, but for celebration. In fact, that lack of resolution suggests the porous boundaries of homiletics and invites all of us to live into a foolish body of work that might best be understood, not as a neatly defined academic discipline, but as what Mikhail Bakhtin calls a "grotesque body."

Bakhtin's concept of the "grotesque body" emerges from his exploration of carnival; it provides a helpful lens for considering the homiletician's body of work – and the discipline of homiletics itself. Bakhtin distinguishes the grotesque body from the classical body. The classical body is an entirely finished, limited body, with clear and sharp boundaries around it. It smoothes out the protuberances and cavities of the body and closes itself against the surrounding world.[14] Today we might say it is the hard, sculpted body, with its taut and rigid boundaries – the body celebrated in the media from magazines to films to television. Or it is the hand-sanitizer body – the body that pulls out the little plastic bottle of sanitizer after contact with another person in order to ward off the potentially harmful consequences

14 Ola Sigurdson, "The Christian Body as the Grotesque Body" in *Embodiment in Cognition and Culture*, ed. John Michael Krois, et. al. (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 2007), 254.

of that contact. It is the body with sharp, clearly-defined and well-protected boundaries. That is the classical body, individualized and closed against the surrounding world.

In contrast to the classical body, there is the grotesque body. It is the body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed, but continually growing and created; and it also grows and creates other bodies. The grotesque body emphasizes those parts of the body that engage and interact with other bodies and the surrounding world. We breathe through our protruding noses – and in the process we are profoundly connected with others, though we rarely think about that. We are all breathing each other's air; none of us is an isolated individual. We eat and drink from the earth, taking the earth into our bodies. And when we defecate and urinate our waste returns to the earth and even fertilizes it for new growth. Most of us have sex at some point, connecting ourselves to others; many menstruate, some give birth, some breastfeed – all part of the process of procreation. We die and return to the earth – from dust to dust – which continues to generate new life. The grotesque body is never a finished body; it is never demarcated against other bodies or the earth. The grotesque body is generative, always transgressing its own boundaries. For the grotesque body, the drama takes place at the *margins* of the body, as these margins are transgressed – just as when we breathe and eat and have sex and defecate and urinate and breastfeed the margins of our bodies are transgressed.

Mary Russo has concisely summarized these two kinds of bodies:

> The classical body is transcendent and monumental, closed, static, self-contained, symmetrical, and sleek; it is identified with the "high" or official culture of the Renaissance and later, with rationalism, individualism, and the normalizing aspirations of the bourgeoisie. The grotesque body is open, protruding, irregular, secreting, multiple, and changing; it is identified with the non-official, 'low' culture or the carnivalesque, with social transformation.[15]

---

15 Mary Russo, *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess and Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 8. For more on preaching and the grotesque, see my Beecher Lectures, *The Scandal of the Gospel: Preaching and the Grotesque,* forthcoming from Westminster John Knox Press.

The grotesque body of carnival actually provides an alternative to the exclusive, oppressive iron theologies that so concern Johan Cilliers. The grotesque body is a constantly changing body. It resists rigid binaries and boundaries; it does not build walls. Rather, it lives at the margins, in the interactions with other bodies, different bodies. There is no fear of change and transition, for that is the very character of the grotesque body's life. It is dynamic, open, changing. That is what carnival is all about: the dying of the old oppressive structures so a new, dynamic whole may be born. Iron theologies have no place there.

Even the church has celebrated this unsettled, fluid grotesque body. On certain carnivalesque feast days, in the church's liturgy itself, a child becomes the bishop. Both men and women engage in cross-dressing. Congregants bray like donkeys. Dung is burned as incense. Binaries and boundaries explode. As Russo writes: "The grotesque body was exuberantly and democratically open and inclusive of all possibilities. Boundaries between individuals and society, between genders, between species, and between classes were blurred or brought into crisis in the inversions and hyperbole of carnivalesque representation."[16]

In its imaginative, porous fluidity, homiletics is a grotesque discipline. Speaking metaphorically, I would argue that homiletics can never have a classical body, but is always a grotesque body. Maybe that is why the academy rarely considers it a "classical discipline." Homiletics itself is elusive; it resists clear disciplinary definitions and categories. The field is "open, protruding, irregular, secreting, multiple, and changing." And this unsettling, second-class academic status actually frees homileticians to live imaginatively and playfully into the grotesque body of our discipline.

Homileticians never apply hand sanitizer, but dare contact with anything and everything that might unsettle and enrich the impossible calling to preach – just as Paul dared to interpret preaching through the figure of the theatrical fool. The homiletician listens to John Coltrane's version of "My Favorite Things." Or he engages the video of the Russian Punk Rock performance group, Pussy Riot, when they invade the all-male preaching space in Christ the Savior Cathedral in Moscow to perform their punk

16 Ibid., 79.

prayer, "Mother of God, Take Putin Away." Or she ponders elaborate quilts crafted by an African-American folk artist.[17] Or he simply wanders through the Karoo. And all the while the homiletician asks, "What can I learn from that about preaching?" At our best, homileticians are fearless, unconcerned about the rigid standards of a guild. We cultivate the grotesque body of our discipline, which is always *inter alia,* always porously incarnate among all the other aspects of God's creation. As a result, homileticians can laugh at ourselves and our foolish work. Maybe that's why Johan Cilliers laughs so much. Maybe laughter is a fundamental virtue of the homiletician.

3. Homiletics with a laugh

Like the apocalyptic interruption I discussed earlier, laughter interrupts, fractures, breaks up, unsettles. The imagery we use when talking about laughter is revealing. We say we "break up" laughing. Or we exclaim that a joke really "cracked me up." Or we report that the crowd *erupted* with laughter. Laughter shatters. It breaks up; it cracks up. It interrupts the neat totalities by which we often seek to control and make sense of our lives.[18] Laughter disrupts, even if just for a moment, the myths and rationalities by which the world is neatly ordered and managed.[19] Like the fool or jester, laughter tends to "melt the solidity of the world"; it interrupts the conventions and assumptions (including disciplinary ones) that are supposedly written in stone; it keeps reality fluid. Indeed, we are often unable physically to control laughter; it seems to take over even our bodies. It often feels as if something is "laughing us."[20]

Not surprisingly, no single theory has achieved mastery over laughter. Laughter has been analyzed from every conceivable perspective: evolutionary, physiological, medical, philosophical, ethical, theological,

17 Donyelle McCray, "Quilting the Sermon: Homiletical Insights from Harriet Powers," *Religions* Vol. 9, No. 2, 2018, pp. 46–52.

18 D. Diane Davis, *Breaking Up [at] Totality: A Rhetoric of Laughter* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000); Charles L. Campbell, "Ministry with a Laugh," *Interpretation 69* (April 2015): 196–208.

19 In this sense, laughter plays a role similar to lament, which also interrupts the status quo. Not surprisingly, laughter and tears often belong together. On the relationship between laughter and lament, see Campbell and Cilliers, *Preaching Fools*, 127–151.

20 Davis, *Breaking Up*, 23.

and many more. But no one has gotten a firm handle on it. Laughter eludes capture by any overarching theory. Say one thing about laughter, and a diametrically opposed claim may also be made. Laughter creates community. But certain forms of laughter also exclude from community. Laughter can aid in healing. But laughter can also destroy people. Laughter is related to comedy. But laughter also occurs in the midst of tragedy and trauma; it is sometimes not far from lament.[21] Laughter is a form of resistance to injustice and oppression. But laughter can also be a means of domination and degradation. Even the claim that laughter "melts the solidity of the world" confronts its opposite: laughter can also be used to dehumanize others, reinforce the solidity of the world, and dismiss those calling for change. But this very fact suggests that laughter does indeed break up and crack up; it interrupts all the theories that seek to explain it or get control of it. Laughter is too fluid, too unruly to dogmatize; it fractures whatever system would seek to contain it.

Amidst all the forms of laughter, Mikhail Bakhtin's understanding of carnivalesque laughter is critical for homileticians. For Bakhtin, carnivalesque laughter is not frivolous or trivial. This laughter "does not deny seriousness but purifies and completes it." Laughter, according to Bakhtin,

> purifies from dogmatism, from the intolerant and the petrified; it liberates from fanaticism and pedantry, from fear and intimidation, from didacticism, naivete and illusion, from the single meaning, the single level, from sentimentality. Laughter does not permit seriousness to atrophy and to be torn away from the one being, forever incomplete. It restores this ambivalent wholeness.[22]

This purified seriousness is what Bakhtin calls *open seriousness*.[23] This kind of seriousness is "always ready to submit to death and renewal. True open

---

21 See Jacqueline Bussie' important study, *The Laughter of the Oppressed: Ethical and Theological Resistance in Wiesel, Morrison, and Endo* (New York: T&T Clark, 2007). As Bussie demonstrates, comedy and laughter need to be distinguished. Comedy implies some kind of positive resolution, whether it results in significant laughter or not. The laugher that fractures and breaks up, however, occurs in tragedy and in irresolvable paradox.

22 Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 123.

23 Ibid., 122.

seriousness fears neither parody nor irony, nor any other form of reduced laughter, for it is aware of being part of an uncompleted whole."[24]

Homiletics is characterized by laughter's open seriousness. Before he begins to preach, Moses himself learns this lesson when he encounters the living God at the burning bush. Moses's ministry begins with God's radical interruption. Possibly uneasy with this interruption, Moses tries to get control of God by asking God's name. In response, God engages in an unsettling and ironic act. God *does* give Moses the divine name. But, *ironically*, God's name preserves God's freedom: "I am who I am." "I will be who I will be." "I will be with you as I will be with you" (Ex 3:13–15). There is a divine "Ha!" implicit and almost audible in the name "Yahweh."

Preaching – and homiletics – in the service of this free and living God will be characterized by open seriousness. Because homiletics has to do with God, it is serious.

But because it has to do with God, homiletics always remains open. For there is no controlling God. Indeed, laughter may be the only way to engage seriously with the living God. For God's Spirit continues to blow where the Spirit chooses (John 3:8), disrupting seriousness when it becomes closed, dogmatic, and idolatrous – when it becomes iron theology. The incarnate, crucified, resurrected Christ continues to work through the Spirit, interrupting, fracturing, cracking up in order to move people toward the horizon of God's purposes. Consequently, homiletics, as a grotesque discipline, remains open to the disruptive surprises of the Spirit. Faithful homileticians laugh with open seriousness, engaging in work that is never complete, but is always "being saved," always living in the dynamic and fluid movement between the old age that is dying and the new that continues to be born.

This orientation is particularly important today, not simply because we serve the living God, but because of the context in which we preach. Churches and denominations are in transition. The old ways seem to be dying, but there is no clarity about the new that is being born. Preaching takes place in a liminal space, an in-between, threshold space in which old identities are being left behind, but new identities remain uncertain and

24 Ibid.

fluid. And the death of the old can be frightening; it can lead to a kind of narrow, dogmatic seriousness. Circle the wagons! Fix the boundaries! Maintain orthodoxy! Uphold the tradition! The seriousness is warranted, for these are challenging times. But the narrowness is misplaced. There is no reason for closed seriousness. Rather, preaching in this context calls for laughter's *open* seriousness. Faithful preaching celebrates the open seriousness of carnivalesque laughter that cracks up the old structures of domination and welcomes new forms of community. Homileticians dare the laughter that fractures rigid, dogmatic systems and exposes the old-age powers for what they are – not the givers of life, but the agents of death. Faithful preaching embraces laughter that lives free from the fear of death and open to movements of the Spirit wherever they might lead.

Carnivalesque laughter is the appropriate stance for homileticians as we foolishly attempt to understand and describe the impossible task of preaching. For this laughter is an unsettled, renewing, universal laughter that celebrates a reality larger than our finite selves. This disruptive and renewing laughter sets us free from the reactionary either-or mentality that remains captive to the very oppositional structures of power and domination that Christ has "cracked up." It sets us free from iron theologies and iron homiletics by breaking up rigid, conventional assumptions and offering new possibilities for life and community.[25] As the Apostle Paul proclaims, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female" (Galatians 3:28). Through this disruptive proclamation, the old-age binaries have been fractured by the preaching fool. The rigid boundaries of the classical body have been replaced by the "open, protruding, irregular, secreting, multiple, and changing" character of the grotesque body. And in this unsettled, liminal space – *inter alia* – the homiletical imagination thrives.

25 Davis, *Breaking Up*, 141.