

After Johan Cilliers: On the strange beauty of serving the Word?

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Abstract

We find ourselves in the privileged yet intimidating position of doing homiletics and liturgy in South Africa after Johan Cilliers. He has not only been enormously productive over the past three decades (and gracefully not yet done) but has also ever continuously transformed and impacted immensely with his insights and creativity on the strange beauty of serving the Word within our context. An appreciative acknowledgment and critical reception of his work are called for as we identify and explore some perspectives and ways in which we find ourselves after Cilliers' work. After a brief introduction, we chronologically explore his oeuvre with four key perspectives, each time primarily from a particular monograph. In short, to the man who revealed and taught us so much about the strange beauty of preaching and worshipping in South Africa, we owe after all a proper and critical reading of his work in order to seek and serve the ever-strange beauty of serving the Word anew.

Keywords

Johan Cilliers; prophetic preaching; homiletical theory; liturgy; aesthetics

1. Introduction

If there is one teacher who taught me – and my generation – the most about preaching and worship, then it is for sure Johan Cilliers. Although he only became our lecturer at Stellenbosch in my final year, his *Die genade van gehoorsaamheid – Hoe evangelies is die etiese preke wat ons in Suid-Afrika hoor?* was our first undergraduate prescribed text in homiletics. After my main assignment in that module (“Write your own homiletical credo”), our lecturer Prof Bethel Müller wrote in his feedback to me that I should go and study under Johan Cilliers. Though I never did that, I continued to

follow and study his work closely in the years thereafter. When I myself started a few years ago to teach preaching to undergraduates in our B.Div programme, there was no hesitation whatsoever to prescribe Cilliers' *The living voice of the gospel – Revisiting the basic principles of preaching*. In fact, currently our students study his work also in the MDiv (usually in their fifth year) and in the Postgraduate Diploma in Theology (usually their sixth year).¹ In short, being with Johan Cilliers in various positions in the classroom has taught me a lot about his thought. His influence is indeed at more than one faculty of theology in South Africa, and he has (in)formed more than one generation of students in the art of preaching and worship.

Thus, in recognition of his contribution of the past three decades, I would like to argue and show how we may continue to do homiletics and liturgy after Johan Cilliers. First, he has made various substantial contributions to the current state of scholarship within our various fields and discipline. In this regard I would like to discuss four specific perspectives of significant impact in his oeuvre. Second, going truly after someone, implies also to think with them, and at some point, even to go beyond – and if needs be, even against – his thought and work. In each of these four perspectives there are also critical questions and concerns worth raising for further exploration.

2. A prophetic voice?

It is a little bit ironic that we start with an interest in the prophetic voice of Cilliers' work, because he actually seldom mentions this term explicitly in his oeuvre.² Few and far between there are some direct references to

1 In our newly revised 2018 M.Div curriculum that specialises in interdisciplinarity, we have a module called "Celebrating and the Divine" in which the disciplines of Liturgics, Spirituality and Film Studies (our partner in the Arts) are grouped together. Cilliers' main work in Liturgics, *Dancing with Deity – Re-imagining the beauty of worship*, represents liturgics prescribed textbook in that interdisciplinary exploration. In the Post Graduate Diploma in Theology, where our students are for most of the year in congregations doing their practical work and internship, we practice and assess with Cilliers' *A space for grace – Towards an aesthetics of preaching*, the actual quality of beauty in preaching and worship in South Africa today.

2 Although the rest of this section's main text will explore this statement further with various perspectives from predominantly one of his earlier and very influential texts in his oeuvre, it is probably good to state already here in the footnote one exceptional illustration in his later work which illustrates and reveals some of these particular

the concept in the titles of his work (cf. Cilliers 2013; and 2015a), but his engagement and even embodiment of a true and real prophetic voice surely goes deeper and stretches farther than just some mere occasional references here and there. In fact, a close reading of his output reveals a clear double irony in this regard. Not only will it become clear that he is constantly embodying a prophetic presence in South African theology without necessarily using or claiming this label for his work, but also transcending the prophetic by moving beyond the mere concept to point and reveal the actual theological truth which is at stake in a given matter. Moreover, what makes Cilliers' prophetic presence so unique and valuable for us, is that he often reimagines, reframes, redefines and transform the actual study and practice of prophetic preaching by revealing numerous new layers of meaning to the practice/art of being-and-speaking a prophetic voice. Lastly, when he actually and explicitly uses the term, there is a clear internal critical function within his understanding of prophetic preaching. All of these significant characteristics in his work provide us with more than enough interest and reason to enter our quest here in going after his legacy.

Most of the monographs Cilliers published over the years reveal a significant prophetic sensitivity and intelligence without deliberately claiming that concept or title for itself.³ Already with his doctoral thesis in 1982, *Soos*

nuances and contours in his thought. In *Preaching fools – The gospel as a rhetoric of folly*, co-authored with Charles Campbell, and probably his best known work internationally, it strikes one to find no rubric for the prophetic in the indexing at the back, while on the other hand the mere title and whole argument of the work is focused upon to reimagine and redefine the practice of “prophetic” preaching. (In the rest of the main text the latter will be explored and elaborated at length; though some of it is already revealed in the quotation below.) In a seeming desolated reference to the prophetic in this text, Campbell and Cilliers (2012:156) reveals the following: “These acts of interruption may at times be a form of prophetic preaching, a homiletical strand often neglected by the official church. Homiletician Leonora Tubbs Tisdale has asked a pertinent question: Where have all the prophets gone? Perhaps they are closer than we think. Perhaps we overlook them, simply because they are not always the stereotypical strong and fearless figures, daring doyens of the pulpit who thunder against the powers that be. Perhaps they often come to us now in the various, surprising guises of preaching fools.” It is this unique take on the prophetic voice – and in itself so prophetic – which we want to elaborate and explore further in this section.

- 3 In this section we shall predominantly focus more upon Cilliers earlier work. The reason for this is twofold: First, some of his later and more recent works will feature during other parts of the article, though we could easily also have drawn from them to develop and state our argument here. Secondly, starting here with his earlier work helps

woorde van God. *Ontwerp van 'n preekanalitiese model*, he engaged with two preachers and key political figures at the time, namely sermons of Drs. Allan Boesak and Andries Treurnicht. The findings of the study caused such a stir in the media that the Conservative Party even threatened Cilliers with legal action at the time (which never materialized) (Cilliers 2019:18). However, it is especially in his next phase of collected monographs during the 1990s where Cilliers' particular prophetic antenna and insights came sharply to the fore. In all four of his (closely related) monographs during this decade (cf. Cilliers 1994; 1996; 1998; 2000), it became clear that he had a critical voice with some unique insight into the South African theological landscape at the time.

In the first of the four monographs, *God vir ons – 'n Analise en beoordeling van Nederduiste Gereformeerde volksprediking (1960–1980)*⁴, he states upfront his intention as a “process of being made aware [which] must not be viewed as clinical *censure*. The intention is to *teach*.” (Cilliers 2006:2). He does not refer to Brueggemann (1978) in this regard, but the differentiation between a “royal consciousness” and a “prophetic imagination” seems to be an integral part of Cilliers' thinking. Cilliers prophetic imagination represents itself throughout this work in a deeply settled concern in how to actually hear and proclaim *the Word of God*; or to state it differently and more in the negative: Cilliers' prophetic imagination is here predominantly one of sensitising us how *not* to preach a certain (Afrikaner and apartheid) politics and culture per se as “gospel”. In short, is important to realise already here from the outset that his main concern is here with what happened to *preaching* during the Apartheid years⁵. There is a very specific

us to see some of the groundwork and foundations, continuity and growth, for his later and more recent (and further matured) thought. In this way we are also “after Cilliers” in terms of how it actually chronologically developed.

- 4 This was also translated in 2006 in order to become prescribed material at various overseas universities.
- 5 It is important here to comment on why the emphasis is here on the former (preaching) and not the latter (apartheid). What makes Cilliers work so obviously and inherently prophetic, is that it was always concerned about how the preaching itself functioned within a particular setting and context. He does not work with a reductionist understanding of the prophetic which is only or even mainly concerned about social-ethical and political concerns. Stated differently, these studied sermons reveal for sure something of the so-called ideological faith during the heyday of the apartheid years, but still that in a sense is only secondary, because primarily we are actually taken back

and deeply settled prophetic concern here at work – and it is so obvious and self-evident that it is not even necessary to state it.

In only one of two mere uses of the concept of the prophetic I could find in his text, Cilliers (2006:23) pointedly states that such apartheid preaching actually “represents a particular form of anti-prophecy that does not dare to jump ahead, but rather arrests time and reproduces history.” Again, the remote use of the prophetic here in the negative assumes and implies a great unsaid homiletical and prophetic insight, namely that true preaching is actually and inevitably supposed to be prophetic speech. He does not coin nor emphasize prophetic preaching per se, because it is not as if he does not mean, assume nor imply this when he sensitises us for what he believes preaching to be in its core. Again, the mere fact the he rarely use the concept here does not mean it is marginal or somewhere isolated in his thought, but rather so central and integral that it is not even necessary to state the obvious.

To provide more perspective unto the seeming obvious presence of the prophetic in his thought, it is important also to state that in all of this Cilliers is actually at pains to show us the dangers of a strange kind of *political* preaching at work. In a first of three hermeneutical moves, taking “our” (Afrikaner and apartheid) history back into (salvation) history to find some form of theological legitimization and sanctification for ourselves, we see how one can get with such an analogical schematization the particular nature and order of political preaching completely wrong

into the heart of – with the intention “to teach” and not to “censure” – what is (not!) supposed to happen in the preaching event itself. In sum: His concern is first and foremost about preaching, and then always in such a way that the self-evident political (social and ethical) concerns begin to speak loud and clear. The prophetic edge of his thought is not (primarily) to comment, critique or even transform society, but rather (primarily) focused upon to make sure that we do the theological (preaching) task we are called to do. This is just another way to describe and see how all the different characteristics of the introductory paragraph of this section are entangled and present in Cilliers prophetic voice. (It grounds and qualifies its prophetic voice not with the use of the concept ‘prophetic’ as such, because the concern is clearly here about a specific – deeper – theological truth/act which is at stake, and how theologically-aesthetically pleasing we use, implement and embody language in the process, do indeed matter. Moreover, among these lines it also makes completely sense why his prophetic concern is first and foremost addressed to the church – it is about preaching! – because he understands how the internal critical function of prophetic theology’s responsibilities has immense societal consequences.)

(15–40). It is key to stress here that Cilliers is not against political preaching per se – arguing for instance for a shift from political preaching towards a-political preaching – but rather simultaneously against *this* particular kind of political sermons *and towards (pro-phetically) those* of a totally different kind of politics, which is of a strangely other (more beautiful and playful) order and Lord.⁶ Thus, if I hear and interpret Cilliers correctly, it is not as if we cannot preach political sermons – as all language, and for that matter preaching too, is always political – but rather a question of whether it is truly prophetic or not. Or, to put it even more bluntly (into the familiar terms of trilogy that followed soon hereafter; cf. Cilliers 1996; 1998; and 2000): Prophetic preaching always hinges on the critical event of whether “the extermination or revelation of God on the pulpit” occurred or not ... and if it is a case of the latter – *Die uitwysing van God op die kansel* – then *Die genade van gehoorsaamheid* may indeed transform South African society.⁷

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- 6 Concerning the way in which Cilliers reframed and redefined the manner in which we envision and embody prophetic preaching, we already referred earlier in footnote two to the work he and Charles Campbell did in this regard. Thought this kind of ideas concerning the use of irony, satire, humour, comedy, cartooning and lampooning the powers, and lamenting injustices, would only be to the fore during the latter phase of his career (cf. also Cilliers 2009), it is important to see that significant foundational work and preparation in terms of what were to come, was done already during these early writings on the philosophical and ethical use of language (cf. Laubscher & Cilliers 2018:7). Furthermore, to really see and appreciate how he revealed new layers of meaning to the practice of prophetic preaching, one can for instance just compare the manner in which Cilliers’ reading of Desmond Tutu’s sermons differs from another influential South African homiletician, Hennie Pieterse (cf. e.g. Cilliers 2015b with Pieterse 1995). Behind much of this is of course the deeper shift in Cilliers’ orientation that occurred over the years, namely: “Whilst theoretical reasoning is aimed at establishing the distinction between the true and false, and practical reasoning the distinction between right or wrong, aesthetical reasoning now raises issues such as beauty and ugliness, specifically also in their social forms.” (2012:57).
- 7 Though it is impossible to go into too much detail or depth of any of these three books, it is crucial to state that they substantiate a lot of what we have said so far. All four the characteristics we outlined in the beginning of this section regarding the nature of Cilliers’ prophetic voice, deepens further as we listen to his prophetic utterances throughout the three texts. For instance, just recall the familiar prophetic tone with which Cilliers (1996:1) starts *Uitwysing*: “Ek wou nie hierdie boek skryf nie” ... Die saak waaroor dit in die volgende bladsye gaan, het egter so dringend geword dat dit nie langer ongesê gelaat kon word nie. Ek móés, voor enigiets anders, my hand op papier waag rondom hierdie tema.” Totally different, but closely related and integral to any prophetic imagination, is the beginning of *Uitwysing*: “Ek wou hierdie boek skryf ...” (1998:3). Thus, not just prophetic insight and critique on what is wrong in this situation, but also the prophetic vision and energy on *Who and what* is really and actually present

In the second and only other reference to the concept of the “prophetic” in the text I could find, Cilliers says that this kind of “anti-prophecy” usually ends up in the precarious homiletical counterproductive state which not only obscures an open view on the Biblical text *and* the contemporary South African reality at the time, but also any “prophetic insight, perspective and outlook” (38). Again, the limited and seemingly lonely use of the prophetic in his text is clearly countered with an emphatic articulation and vision he has of the concept as such. This line of thinking is further affirmed when we hear later in the text that these apartheid sermons is in fact not characterised by any lack of references to Christ; in fact, on the contrary one may say its flood of Christological and typical Reformed sayings we often encounter in these sermons only serves as a smokescreen “that must conceal, rhetorically, more profound theological deficiencies often characterize legalistic sermons” (59).⁸ Cilliers prophetic ability to see through it all (the false facades in this case); not falling for

in the midst of all of it. In the third book, *Genade van gehoorsaamheid*, he not only shows how preaching of salvation, sin and thankfulness intimately belongs together, but also that only such preaching may actually do something within the transformation process of the South African society. In the emphasized words of Cilliers (2000:37) himself: “Ek skryf hierdie boek met die oortuiging dat net één ding die prediking mag vervang: beter – dit wil sê meer evangeliese-prediking.” In fact, in revisiting and rereading these works again for this article, I was struck by how an important backdrop these three books are in the later crystallization of his introductory textbook to preaching a few years later. Much of what is there assumed and between the lines, are spelled out in trilogy earlier. The fruits of The living voice of the gospel, has his seeds and roots – and gradual development – clearly in the preceding trilogy. It remains (with God for us) indispensable reading for anyone who wants to understand the crisis we are experiencing now for so many years within (at least some circles of) Reformed preaching in South Africa.

- 8 This crucial theological insight he often repeats in the works hereafter on moralistic, legalistic and pietistic preaching that he studied in the books hereafter. Like in *Uitwissing* Cilliers (1996:41–42) writes: “Hierdie vorm van wettisme is dikwels die moeilikste om te ontmasker. Op die klank af klink sulke preke evangelies, veral ook waar dit begelei word met h oorvloed van Christologiese formules. Die vraag is eger of die blote aanhaal van sulke formules noodwendig saamgaan met die ontginning van die evangeliese kwaliteit daarvan. Dikwels word die wettisme juis verberg in h opeenstapeling van Reformatoriese solas of vermom in h gewaad van Christologiese korrektheid. Maar dan vorm dit alles in werklikheid slegs h voorwoord tot die prediker se *eintlike* woord: die verkondiging van moraliserende appêlle” [all bold and italics sections in the text(s) are original] (41–42). Again, as stated earlier, it is important to see the continuity and development of this in his work when he writes later on the use of stereotypes, clichés and the presence of bla-bla-bla in our sermons and liturgies (cf. Cilliers 2008.)

what is seemingly present on the surface; schooling us to see what (Who!) is (actually and thus supposed to be) present on deeper level; dealing not merely with just the contextual/political/cultural issues and matters at the time, but with an actual and specific theological matter(s) at stake; first and foremost for the church and the pulpit as its heartbeat; speaks for itself when he says:

The tendency to implement Reformed and biblical concepts generously is significant, but frequently separate these concepts from their original contexts, abstract them and use them as key words and slogans for the ideal of national stability and national identity (77). ... Preaching itself is misunderstood as a medium to realise and deepen certain national ideals. In my opinion, the analyses convincingly indicate this: preaching here no longer functions as an alternative, critical and therefore liberating word of God in the nation's situation, but merely as a sanctioning and stabilizing word (78).

Although we recognize up until here a few acoustics of Cilliers' prophetic voice that reverberates in our minds anew, we also need to qualify this brief overview and introduction to his prophetic voice with admitting that it is impossible to do justice to his prophetic voice in such limited space and amount of words available to us – even despite the help of a number of long footnotes already! Not alone is there still so much more within *God for us* that we did not address, but many other monographs – and many other academic articles, and other popular and devotional writings within his total output – that can add prophetically to his witness.⁹ Still, even if we

9 I know this is pushing it, but just listen to the crisp prophetic soundings within is later and more recent works:

On the current state of preaching (post-apartheid) within the Dutch Reformed Church, Cilliers (2010a:72) says: "On the one hand, preaching has become *more tentative* than before, no longer emanating from a stable and fixed 'truth'. On the other hand, preachers tend to be very pragmatic in their approach, desperately trying not to rock the (sinking) boat too much. Preaching has to an extent taken on the mode of maintenance, rather than being an expression of innovative theology. ... *The hermeneutical movement of the apartheid era into the potential of the people's pietistic reserves now takes on different forms: no longer to rectify the state of society according to certain nationalistic ideals, but simply to escape from all responsibilities regarding the new South African society* [Italics original]."; on explaining his interest in exploring the relationship between art and liturgy, Cilliers (2012:42) says: "History has shown that art apparently has the ability

may continue deeper in this or any other text of him, the basic trajectory/argument would stay the more or less the same. Surely there is more than enough reason to do a more extensive study on his work from this angle alone.

Thus, let me briefly end here with one particular probing concern that may situate the open-endedness of this discussion even further. I do find it interesting that Cilliers (2019:11–18) in his online CV (Research profile) summarises the three closely related phases within his research over the years – philosophy of (religious) language, aesthetics as cultural expression, and the African cultural context – with the integrative key-concept of “cultural hermeneutics.” Of course one sees the common

to ask religious questions, to depict prophetic judgement and mercy, to generate and communicate religious meanings and religious insights about human existence as few other media can. ... When it comes to ‘reading the times’ artists are often light years ahead of the church and theology, reading cultural vibrations like seismographs long before the church or theologians became aware of them.” (2012:42); with regards to the so-called “liturgical renewal” that occurred in many Reformed churches in South Africa after 1994: “Liturgy as play reminds us that the worship service is first and foremost about (the playful) God. This perspective helps us not to confuse so-called ‘liturgical renewal’ with superficial changes in the liturgical order or mere re-arrangements in the liturgical space of church buildings, but rather confronts us with deeper-seated questions. ... The first question that should be posed is not about rulings on order, but rather: does it serve the glory of God? ... *Everything that works is not necessarily true.*” (2012:118, 119); qualified introspectively further with: “Dare I say, had there been, for example, more ‘dancing theologians’ in SA, apartheid would probably have been dismantled sooner and we would have begun the healing process much earlier?” (2012:174); together with: “In the Reformed tradition in SA one sometimes has the impression that eschatology is watered down by liturgy in at least two ways. *Firstly*, it has practically no impact on worship services any longer; congregations become so engaged with themselves, so *intra muros ecclesiae*, that there is no longer any view of any reality elsewhere. This could be a result of political changes in SA. White Afrikaners have lost their political power and now pull up a laager in the church; political disempowerment has led to a kind of pietistic flight into religiosity. Many Reformed white South Africans seem to be forming the wagons into a circle – which unfortunately is not the same as joining the circle dance of the trinity! *Secondly*, eschatology is understood in practically exclusively apocalyptic categories, as end-time events, cosmic and catastrophic events to come. This one-sided understanding of eschatology robs it of some of its ontological character, of the reality of the *eschaton*, here and now. Ironically this also represents a kind of withdrawal from reality.” (185); and not just eschatologically suspect, but probably also to a large extent unethical: “Because the church is turned inward, it loses not only the art of anticipation, but also that of transformation – at least in the social sense of the word. The church is called, also via liturgical processes, to publicly protest against any form of fragmentation, any form of distortion of the circle dance in which the Trinity wants the whole of creation to participate.” (2012:217). This is by no means exhaustive, but I think the point is clear beyond doubt.

denominator of “culture” in all three these phases, and surely he did raise penetrating cultural insight, critique and vision, but is there in light of our argument thus far, especially by reading closely and drawing deeply from his text(s), not a deeper and more significant truth – a unique prophetic (and theological!) voice reverberating and – at work in and through all of this? I know he says that he says that “Theological hermeneutics form part of my understanding of cultural hermeneutics, as a matter of fact, I am of the opinion that practical theology exists and thrives exactly within the tension (or collaboration) between cultural and theological hermeneutics.” (2019:11), but is it not first and foremost because he believes in the preaching/Word-event, rooted in being a theologian, that plays itself out here? Is it just the exploration of a creative tension between cultural and theological hermeneutics we see over the years at work here, or is it actually possible and permitted to prioritize a prophetic imagination in the midst of all of this? On the reasons why theological hermeneutics (with its prophetic insights and witness) takes a seeming backseat with regard to cultural hermeneutics, I am aware that we should be careful not to speculate, but could it be that the (primary) theological task within practical theology is in need of (proper) recognition by even the one of the leading theological voices in its midst?¹⁰ I can understand if a prophet is not recognized and honoured in his own land, but why not by himself? Is Cilliers reservations for this particular discourse so strong that he is even hesitant in the end to state the theological and prophetic up front in looking back to what he did all these years?¹¹ Or, is it perhaps something of the crystallization towards

10 This kind of critique is indeed often heard. See for instance Michael Welker (2015) on the question of “What makes theology theology?”, and then states for instance: “We wanted to work against a tendency in Old and New Testament exegesis to develop itself into merely philological, historical, and cultural studies disciplines. Moreover, we wanted to work against all sorts of reductionist systematic and practical theological thinking which often replaces theology by self-made popular religious philosophies and leads to self-secularization and self-banalization in contemporary theologies and churches.” (164); and then later even more pointedly with: “In our days, many colleagues are quite happy to see themselves transformed into scholars of religious or cultural studies, into philosophical theologians, historians, or sociologists – maybe with a specific competence in theological issues. But with all due respect to a seemingly pure academic ethos, we should calmly acknowledge that this approach offers many ways not to “make,” but rather to distort or even destroy theology within theology.” (165).

11 Cilliers (2015a:373–374) reveals his hesitancy and qualifies his reservations with the following telling remark: “In most of our ecclesiological traditions the notions

the end of this article that is present here? Again, let us not speculate and rather state what we have come to know thus far, namely that what is seen here, and especially in terms of what it is truly concerned about, and to whom it is addressed primarily, we must admit that here is a special prophetic voice that on a very deep level made much of this possible. And for this to truly happen, we are very always dependent on encountering the witness of *viva vox evangelii*; hearing, seeing and sensing the living voice of the gospel, to which we now need to turn to.

3. Four voices in preaching?

We now turn to another central aspect of Cilliers' thought, namely the basic structure of the so-called "blending of four voices" in his homiletical theory that produces the living voice of the gospel (*viva vox evangelii*) in the preaching event. As already stated, Cilliers' introductory textbook to preaching, *The living voice of the gospel – Revisiting the basic principles of preaching*, has been for a number of years the prescribed undergraduate textbook in our classroom. Much of what we encounter here is indeed a result of many years of work before that and continues to speak and echo hereafter.¹²

of 'political' and 'eschatological' preaching would be combined and described as 'prophetical preaching', unfortunately often in a theological unsophisticated manner. Most of the times prophetical preachers are simply understood as those people who are addressing political issues from the pulpit, using, inter alia, eschatological (or apocalyptic) terms."

- 12 Though there are already indications of Cilliers' basic theory in his most early publications (cf. 1992; and 1994:9–18), it was actually only in *Uitwysing* (1996) and *Uitwysing* (1998) that we saw how the four specific voices of "God, biblical text, congregation, and preacher" were stepping to the fore. Most interesting to note is the play and variations in the order and structure of these so-called voices in the outline of these different books. In *Uitwysing* the order is: Bible, the listeners, preacher, and God; whereas in *Uitwysing* it is: God, Bible, preacher, and congregation/listeners. In *The living voice of the gospel* (2004) it is: God, Bible, congregation, and preacher. In the most recent *A space for grace* (2016:57–62) he restates this basic definition and order within preaching. Though it is not a set (formal and hierarchical) order, there are for instance some significant meaning to read into the setting of the preacher's voice derivatively at the end; following instead of leading! ("Last and not least" only in terms of how one receives – in light of the previous – one's voice, and not in an independent and possessive use or manner.) The preacher eventually speaks only because (s)he had listened and heard. Though we usually associate preaching with a preacher and the speaking act, there are indeed substantial words and other deeper realities preceding that.

Cilliers' (2004:32) whole homiletical theory is captured in the following definition: "Preaching takes place when God's voice is heard through the voice of the text, in the voice of the time (congregation context), through the (unique) voice of the preacher. When these four voices become one voice, then the sermon is indeed *viva vox evangelii*." In four separate chapters he then continues to discuss what is meant, assumed and implied with each of these four differentiated voices in his basic definition of preaching. On the one hand it is extremely important to stress the differentiation and distinction of the four voices in this definition, but that the real secret of preaching eventually lies in the discovery how the four eventually become one voice. Stated differently, and key in understanding Cilliers basic theory, is that differentiation, knowledge and even insight and mastering of the four different voices (God, Bible, congregation and preacher) are still no guarantee for hearing the eventual voice and Word of God. In short, besides the fact that differentiation, knowledge and insight in each are inevitable and crucial for preaching, we always need to keep in mind the following qualification and outcome Cilliers (2004:29) provides:

By "the theological integration of the voices" I do not mean that they should be brought, more or less, into equilibrium, or that they always necessarily should have the same weight. The amalgamation of the voices is not like a *chemical mixture* to which the ingredients are added in exact equal measures or weights. The voices are not inanimate materials but *living phenomena that imply mutual relations*."

Against this background, let me make three brief, short, critical remarks of what experience in the classroom (including the worship services and sermons evaluations!) has taught me over the last couple of years. First, despite Cilliers' emphasis that we need to move and shift from distinction and differentiation in the various voices to embody the eventual blending of voices into one clear voice speaking to us, students often get-or-remain stuck in what can be called a first movement of ticking the various boxes of voices. The distinction of four voices often leads to the actual envisioned outcome of indicating and speaking four separated voices, with the implied outcome that one voice overpowers so much the others that even the so-called voicing of a voice collapse in either mere silence or noise (cacophony)! The assumed and implied second movement of (Chalcedonian) blending

(hypostatic union) between the voices does not materialize. Despite them actually learning something about preaching – namely that its basic constituents consist of these four voices – they mostly end up contradicting its most basic insight, namely the blending of these voices into the living voice of the gospel. Thus, don't we need to differentiate furthermore in our differentiation amongst these four voices? *The real and actual theological secret-or-crisis concerning the preaching event is often related to where this differentiation leads to separation and isolation, and not rather to intrinsic being-in-relatedness.* In short, differentiation should loosen up without separating or isolating the one from the other; creating space for an even deeper embrace and embodying of the other voices/elements in this theory.

Secondly, and closely related to the above, still pondering the depths of the paradox we find ourselves within, I wonder whether it is not crucial to stress and emphasize the actual difference and otherness in these four particular voices. The good news really comes to the fore the moment we sense/hear how what seemed to be separated, alienated and irreconcilable are actually connected, reconciled, and at-one-d! *The actual synergy lies when we sense and appreciate the a-symmetry between and amongst them.* Stated differently: It does not help us to portray and describe these four voices as if they are all on the same level, plane or nature. There are indeed in the differentiation an order amongst these voices. Bluntly and to the point: We need to differentiate in our differentiation! Voice of the congregation/context is not on the same level as the voice of Scripture, just as the voice of the preacher is not comparable or in the same league as the voice of God. Yes, they are related, and yes there is a dynamic communion, but in the end, it is always this one who speaks and the other one who wants to listen and obey. In the end it always boils down to preaching which is not primarily defined by voicing and speaking, but rather listening, hearing, obeying, witnessing. In this sense Cilliers is quite correct in placing the voice of the preacher last in his order, because it is indeed a gifted and received Word which is voiced in the preaching event. In short, there is more to the order in which these differentiated voices are presented to us. Where we start, differentiate, order and ends, matters indeed, if we do not want to mistake the one for the other.

Lastly, in the light of the above, should we not then continue to stress a fundamental differentiation and even difference between a voice on the one

hand and texts on the other? Would it not make more sense to refer to the *words of Scripture*, congregation and preacher in order that the *voice of God* maybe clear to us? Instead of merely naming the secret blending of four different voices, is it not more responsible and rewarding to take one's point of departure from the *tension, contrast and particular order* amongst the three texts of Bible, congregation and preacher, and then to listen and hear how God's voice strangely and surprisingly appears and speaks from this a-symmetrical relatedness to us? Is this not helping us further not to be misdirected to see God's voice as either equated with the other voices-or-better-put-texts; and furthermore, not to be tempted to see, portray or embody the other texts as obvious and guaranteed "possessors" (claimers) of God's voice per se?

In sum: What I propose in these three brief interrelated critical remarks of Cilliers' textbook, grows out of a deep stimulating and appreciative reading of his work in the practice of teaching preaching in South Africa today. Deeper differentiation in our differentiation (between voices and text; and the texts amongst themselves) may strangely enough lead to a more vivid hearing and appreciation for the voice of God – and thus to an even deeper appreciation of the theological significance of the practice of preaching itself. Or, in light of the previous section: Might this not help us to see and go after his prophetic voice and imagination in more than one way? Moreover, might this not also help us to see the deeper and differentiated presence of the Word throughout the liturgical *ordo*?

4. With a liturgical intelligence?

What I did not mention in the introduction with regards to my undergraduate years at Stellenbosch, was that I cannot remember any formal module or class in liturgy as such during my six years of training for a life and career in ministry.¹³ However, strangely enough I did learn

13 Wepener and Bartlett's (2014:1–2) remark in this regard helps us to explain and understand this situation a bit better when they say the following: "Die Liturgiek of Liturgiewetenskap is in Suid-Afrika 'n besonder klein dissipline met weinig teoloë wat al oor die jare op hierdie bepaalde teologiese akker geploeg het. Hierdie toestand is heeltemal verstaanbaar gegewe die sterk Protestantse tradisie wat vir lank aan teologiese fakulteite aan Suid-Afrikaanse universiteite gehandhaaf is, en dan ook met 'n bepaalde Gereformeerde teologiese aksent. Die gevolg was dat die Bybelwetenskappe

somehow right from the start a lot about liturgy in the process of being formally busy with Cilliers' homiletical thought. In fact, one of the other great characteristics and contributions of Cilliers' legacy is that he has such a significant and sensitive liturgical antenna and intelligence in his work. Studying his work teaches one that preaching as such is always done implicitly within a liturgical context. Moreover, it is important to state that it also goes the other way around, namely that his (later) work that focused on liturgy as such has similarly a lot to say and teach about the practice of preaching. In short, we cannot go after Cilliers and do justice to his work if we do not recognise this implicit unity between homiletics and liturgy in his thought over the years.

The first sign of this was already clearly present in *Die Uitwysing van God op die kansel*. Besides its very first sentence with its characteristic prophetic tone – “Ek wou nie hierdie boek skryf nie.” (1996:1) – he continues to state: “Op my agenda was eerder iets met ‘n titel soos *Die kuns van prediking*.” (1). In his counter and follow-up text he surely succeeded in doing so; and note the typical (artistic) wordplay already present in the title, *Die Uitwysing van God op die kansel*.¹⁴ Besides the noteworthy and again characteristic prophetic tone at the start – “Ek wou graag hierdie boek skryf.” (1998:3) – he continues to elaborate on his homiletical credo in such a way that it speaks to the whole order of the worship service and its liturgy. The embodiment and liturgical celebration of the service of the Word is clearly in the forefront of his imagination when he states in the introduction “Daar is

en die Sistematiese Teologie tot 'n sterker tradisie ontwikkel het, terwyl die Homiletiek in die Praktiese Teologie as die kroon van die subdissiplines beskou is.”

- 14 Only highlighting the literary artistry in the titles of these two respective works, surely do not do justice to both these (and other!) works of his. Nor would mere associations with many of his paintings or others' works of art suffice in underlying the artistic quality of his work. Cilliers is first and foremost very crafty and artistic in how he works with words (in the service of the Word). His insights into the inner ethical workings and use of words and language – his so-called earlier focus into the philosophy of language – and later more dominant interest in aesthetics, are indeed closely related to each other. In fact, to see these focuses as separated, or even linear development, do not do justice to either of his earlier or later work, because ethics and aesthetics belongs together (also in Cilliers' work). See for instance the intimate bond between his ethical and aesthetical antennas in the following formulation in *God vir ons*: “Die teologie van predikers blyk in die reël nie soseer uit hulle eksplisiete dogmatiese verklarings nie; eerder in die woordevloed van hulle preke self, in die spraakbeweging daarvan. ... Uit dié woordevloed blyk watter gees die prediker en preek inspireer. Hier, in die groter en kleiner taalbeweging van die preek, staan of val, inderdaad *alles*.” (1994:10).

hopeloos te min verootmoediging en hopeloos te min verwondering in ons eredienste.” (9–10). In his quest towards the art of imaginative preaching and what we see though Scripture, he pointedly asks and wrestles with the question of how the actual presence of the Word and the centrality of the sermon in the rest of the liturgy should be understood (69–90). Though we shall shortly go into the details of what is said here, it is important to note how the liturgical setting and order is very much part of his homiletical imagination. In fact, what makes this particular section unique is that the usual sermon example at the end of a particular chapter – and from here on a common and characteristic practice in his homiletical texts – is here also presented with a fully written and worked out liturgy for the worship service (81–90).

The above grows and develops further when we turn towards *The living voice of the gospel – Revisiting the basic principles of preaching* (2004). For instance, the central and very important chapter on “When God, the present One speaks”, deals extensively with not only the presence of God in preaching, but also in the worship service (the liturgy) as such. Moreover, as already outlined in the preceding *Die uitwysing van God op die kansel*, and later even further intensified and developed in *A space for grace* (to which we shall shortly get to), we find again a rather implicit liturgical framing in Cilliers objective to all preaching when he states, “that hearing also becomes seeing” (204:38ff). There are indeed numerous places in the text to reference from, like:

When people lose their sense of God’s mystery in the worship service – as, in my opinion, currently happens anew – then *liturgical familiarity* follows, as it were, automatically. Then, the elements of the liturgy flow easily from one to another, joyfully and carelessly, as though the worship service is but another item on our weekly program that we must put behind us. We are never shocked into silence or led to (true) humiliation or to amazement – we muddle along, busy with our “God-talk” and our little God-fabrications. Thus, the worship service becomes so unanimous with what happens outside, becomes so adapted to the fashion, that one no longer knows whether there is any difference between church and concert,

between liturgy and television, between a worship service and shopping¹⁵ (2004:41).

Besides the above, we also find in the last chapter on the preacher's voice ("When the preacher speaks"), a relative short but substantial discussion on the importance of the relationship between prayer and preaching. Cilliers is indeed correct when he states: "It is significant how few homiletical books take prayer as their principal point of departure. ... *Prayer modulates your preaching voice.*" (186–187). In fact, he feels so strong about this that he goes on to say in the end that "Sermons not only need prayer, but in a certain sense, they are prayer. ... In short: those who cannot pray, cannot preach." (188).¹⁶ Against this background it makes completely sense that in another essay of his a few years later, he continues to stress the intimate link between "preaching as language of hope" and "reclaiming the language of lament" (cf. Cilliers 2007).¹⁷

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- 15 Other substantial formulations are: "God's presence is not guaranteed by stilted correctness. The intense following of tradition is no concrete sign of God's presence. On the contrary! God is greater than tradition, greater than historical phases or centuries-old liturgical formulae. There is no magical or godly power in the mere repetition of liturgical or dogmatic jewels of the past. ..." (2004:42); or "God's presence cannot be produced, but the experience thereof could indeed be hindered or obstructed by slovenly, unbelieving or insensitive liturgists. We can reveal a *liturgical style of expectation or wreck it.* ..." (43); or "From what I have said thus far, it is clear that our liturgy cannot but be *paradoxical (dialectic) by nature.* This is exciting in the true sense of the word!" (44).
- 16 Though Cilliers is only stressing here in general the intimate and crucial relationship between prayer and preaching, he unfortunately does not go into specific detail with regard to the significance of the epiclesis prayer in particular for preaching (and, importantly, also for serving the sacraments). This is not the only place that we found this in his work, because also in the conclusion of *Uitwissing* (1996:136) he emphasizes the importance of prayer for preaching, but again in more general terms. However, from that text we also learn that this interest and sensitivity of his between preaching, prayer and the Spirit, was already at the foreground in his Masters in 1979, entitled *Veni Creator Spiritus. 'n Homileties-sistematiese besinning oor die belang van die Reformatore, Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann en Rudolf Bohren vir die pneumatologies-begronde preekleer.* To this critical (and/or creative?) tension in his work, we shall go into more detail in the next section dealing with the peculiar and particular aesthetics in work.
- 17 The liturgical tenor of Cilliers' (2007:171–172) homiletical thought is now really coming to the fore with statements like the following: "[W]e need to reintegrate the sermon within the *liturgy*. We need to be reminded of the fact that preaching is not all that takes place within the worship service – important as it may be. ... the liturgy offers links and settings for the ritual embodiment and enactment of that which was preached in the sermon. The sermon need not, indeed cannot, do everything on its own, and should be

What makes the above extremely noteworthy is that Cilliers is not only right in highlighting this, but also in reforming the Reformed tradition in South Africa and teaching us way more in terms of what it actually means to serve the Word. He sees a particular gap of knowledge within our state of scholarship, and he addresses it thoroughly with a substantial and creative contribution. In fact, in a recent newly revised postgraduate module in which we read and compare various homiletical textbooks with each other, it was indeed one of the strengths of Cilliers' work that was highlighted during that discussion. Between the prescribed texts of Brownlee (2018), Buttrick (1987), Long (2016), Pieterse (2004), Travis (2014), and Wilson (1999), it was only to a lesser degree the older work of Craddock (1985), and the more recent and highly recommend book of Brown & Powery (2016) who understood and echoed the liturgical sensitivities (of especially prayer) found within Cilliers' text.

When we shift our attention towards his main text in liturgy, *Dancing with Deity – Re-imagining the beauty of worship* (2012), it is important to note how the very same logic and argument of the above also still applies in the reversed order. Reading this primary text in liturgics with the very same students of the homiletics class the year before (or again with another text the year hereafter), surely helps in making sure (double checking) whether everyone in class already heard it when he said it previously in either homiletics or liturgy. For instance, just listen and compare paragraphs like the following with the previous ideas found in the homiletical texts:

The act of portraying God can be both risky and enriching.
 On the one hand, God can be domesticated through images; a commodification and instrumentalizing of God can be the result. ...
 On the other hand, images can also create new identities, can help to destabilize petrified God images, can liquefy fundamentalism ...
 (2012:43)

freed from its *liturgical isolation* – especially in the Reformed tradition. The creative collaboration of sermon and liturgy also prevents the latter from slipping into an easy and predictable pattern. Liturgy acts as a critical sounding board, and the challenge would be to create liturgies, inclusive of the sermon, which enfold the rich diversity and potential of the complex, disturbing, and liberating testimony of the Biblical text.”

Words that bear images, communicate endlessly better than words that simply logically-analytically string (abstract) concepts together. There is a difference between the statement: “You help your friend in such a way that you do not put him or her in danger,” and the metaphor or image: “You don’t remove a fly from your friend’s nose with a hammer.” The one you hear, the other hear and “see” – and perhaps even “feel” imaginatively! (102)

... that our words, when we use them, should carry the aura of silence, of the gravity of an encounter with God. Our words should be weighted and carry weight. They should not be uttered as emaciated orphans (201).

There are indeed numerous other passages in his text one could have quoted here at length to illustrate the intimate and reciprocal bond between homiletics and liturgics in Cilliers’ work.¹⁸ The same is true – and perhaps

18 Like the following: “Beauty, understood in theological-aesthetical sense, is not annihilated by the ugly and horrific. On the contrary, the beauty of God is often revealed exactly under such circumstances: the ugliness of the cross is the strange ‘beauty’ of God, *par excellence*.” (63); “The notion of embodiment has decisive implications for our understanding of epistemology. Truth becomes a multi-dimensional and multi-sensory experience and event.” (78); “[T]he gospel of the (ugly) cross does not shrink away from the ugliness of life, does not gloss over it, and does not try to dish up a sanitized version of it. Kitsch does exactly that.” (92); “[A]n inverted and simulated form of aesthetics that tries to wear the masks of beauty, goodness and truth. Herein lies the essence of kitsch: *it presents itself ‘as if’ it is the original, but in fact denies it*. It sidesteps all that is truly human, sugar-coating it in a haze of sentimentality.” (94); “Kitsch cannot endure life’s struggles. ... It cannot look at the ugly beauty of the cross.” (98) & “Kitsch cannot face the truth. ... It views life through rosy lenses. It bypasses the truth of reality ... has not political or critical edge: it excels in acquiescence, not in disrupting the status quo. ... When it does speak, it may once again sound correct, but in fact is wrong. [Moreover:] Because kitsch, also in its liturgical form, constitute the hallmarks of sensationalism and entertainment and speaks the language of the fashionable, using the jargon of the masses to full effect, it does not understand the need for lament. ... [In short:] Truth is generalized, robbed of its sharp edge.” (99); “In short: kitsch does not, in fact, cannot, understand the presence of God (his beauty, goodness, and truth) within the realities of life. Therefore, it cannot fathom the ugly beauty of the cross.” (101); “Metaphorical speech, also called by some iconic language invites us to enter a new language space in which we can become creative, in which we can change – so that we can also talk about God in a new way. Metaphorical language rebels against stereotyped, coagulated language formulas about God, and wants to talk about God in a new and often surprising way. ... [as] multisensoric language.” (103) “Images can become dormant or won out. ... monuments of a theology-that-came-too-late. Icons can become idols.” (105); “It would be wrong to see the verbal merely as something disembodied and the non-verbal as embodied. No, the Word is also body,

even more so – when we continue to study his most recent monograph in homiletics of a few years ago, namely *A space for grace – Towards an aesthetics of preaching* (2016). Again there are numerous passages in this text that stretches far beyond the confines and borders of homiletics per se, like writing on “the space before God’s face” he says: “This holy space – where God’s face is revealed – is constituted by the faces of the marginalized; as a matter of fact, God’s face cannot be seen without the faces of the marginalized.” (2016:14). On the significance of liminality as concept – a key feature within his liturgical work (cf. 2012:195–198) – we hear potent formulations like “God is also pictured as being liminal. Indeed, *God is a God that moves. God is not a monument, but movement.*” (2016:17). This space before God’s face deepens further when he explores it from the perspective of “the space in Christ” whereby any “closed space and fixed identity are fundamentally and continuously transformed” (21), and thus “cannot and should not be monumentalized” (21). He concludes this chapter on “in search of space” with a very good summary that echoes many of the themes we came to hear from him over the last two decades, namely:

In this “tent of transit”, in this space-time tabernacle, time and space are not eternalized or postulated as cyclical and fixed, but experienced as a space-time *event*, constituted by the *interplay of relationships*. Here we find no finalities frozen in time and space, but foam floating in and with time and space; no perfection, but play; no monument, but movement (25).

As with the previous text, so too we can go on and on to quote and reference extensively to show on the intimate bond and inseparable unity between homiletics and liturgy in Cilliers work.¹⁹ However, as is often the case with

that is visual and image.” (106); “Words that are worth their weight are born in silence.” (199); “We must read what the poets have written – not only the lines, but also between the lines; not only their words, but also the blank spaces on their pages; not only what they are saying, but also what they are not saying. Perhaps we may experience some silence lingering there.” (204)

¹⁹ Instead of numerous quotes to illustrate this, I rather draw your attention to the particulars portrayed and outlined in the table of contents in this work. For instance on what we heard previously in terms of on how to deal and appreciate the metaphorical, full and abundant nature and meaning of words in worship, is now thoroughly explored with different chapters on “a space called home” (31–56), “a space for hearing” (57–76),

particular strengths, it may also easily result into a possible weakness. On the one hand we appreciate the stronger growing bond and reciprocal connection between homiletics and liturgy in his thought, but on the other hand we began to wonder whether there is any difference between the one and the other? Is it really about preaching or actually about liturgy? What is distinctively homiletical or liturgical about this? It seems to be clearly speaking to both these sub-disciplines that indeed belongs to each other, but what if the lines become so blurred that there is no real difference anymore? On the one hand we appreciate the fullness of thinking more in terms of serving the Word in its fullness and totality, appreciating and showing the overlapping unity between preaching and liturgical embodiment and celebration (and that it is not about either one or the other), but on the other hand the particularities and uniqueness of either the one or the other (the particular manifestations details within serving the Word throughout the *ordo*), becomes a question. Moreover, does it matter that what we hear here could easily be said of (or coming from and/or applied to) any other (at least) sub-disciple in practical theology? Again, the question is interested in the specific homiletical, liturgical and theological origins of our thought and work. To explore this further in depth, we turn to our last section on the place and movement of the peculiar and the particular theological aesthetics in Cilliers' work.

5. A peculiar and particular aesthetics?

It is not the first time that a question like this surfaces in the reception of Cilliers' work. In a recent interview by Martin Laubscher, Cilliers was specifically asked about the particular movement, order and flow in his theology from the concrete particularity – like the cross of Christology – to the general, inclusive, and universal reality.²⁰ Cilliers responded to this in

“a space for seeing” (93–122), “a space for touching, tasting, smelling” (123–146), and space of grace that is eventually summarized with “timeless time and placeless space” (147–165). Most interestingly is to note in terms of our argument the title of the middle chapter, namely “Interlude: the sound of music” (77–92). The liturgical intelligence and sensitivities of this text is indeed one of its main characteristics.

- 20 The full question addressed to Cilliers, was as follows: “On the one hand, you play with the idea of the beauty of worship and preaching, and on the other hand, the arts and beauty as lived theology in their own right. I do by no means doubt the legitimacy or necessity of both ways, but I am wondering about the order and preference in

the following telling manner: First, he acknowledges that this a “complex, or rather, richly layered question”, and that it perhaps hinges “on the way we understand the *relationship between creation and salvation*.” (Laubscher & Cilliers 2018:11). He continues then to state that South African Reformed theology has a solid soteriological content, but “lacks a *mature theology of creation*.” (12). In typical Cilliers manner he states playfully on the order between creation and salvation with reference to “Luther’s notion of *ideo universa creatura eius est larva dei* – every part of creation form part of God’s masquerade” that helps him “towards a spiritual archaeology, and in understanding my love for a space called the Karoo” (13). Cilliers’ response concludes with some resistance for any preference towards a clear and set order in this regard:

Every time I see a leaf on a tree (especially after the drought), and every time I eat a piece of bread (especially if it was baked by a local!), I am looking at, and handling, a mask of God – a mask that both reveals and conceals. I touch the cloth with which God is covered. So, did I say this because re-creation preceded creation, at least in my thinking? Or the other way round? Compelling question ... (13)

In response to this one might first of all acknowledge that perhaps the reference and emphasis on a specific “order” here is probably misleading and not revealing the actual issue and question at stake. Instead of asking with regard to the (systematic) order, it is perhaps better to ask and question whether – even irrelevant of the (systematic and set) order – there is a clear movement and unity between the two. The actual issue at stake is less about the so-called order – though it is there and does help to guard against certain ills – and more about that we do not speak and continue with the one removed and isolated from the other. (The stress on order is in this light only precautionary to guard and guide us that we speak about it in

this regard. Is the former not crucial and inevitable for us to see and acknowledge the latter? Is the general and universal possible without the knowledge and presence of the particular and specific? Have we not learned that liberation, re-creation, and eschatology precede creation? In short, given your own antenna and experience with the legacy of natural theology in Reformed preaching in South Africa, would you not think this theological order and logic should spur us on in the way we approach reality?” (Laubscher & Cilliers 2018:11).

such a way that it is critically informed by the other.) In short: Rephrasing the question thus asks whether the particularity and peculiarities within the intimate bonding of either homiletics and liturgy, creation and salvation, or any other partnering in theological loci, stays clear in the process?

Similar kinds of concerns were recently also voiced in the work of Jeremy Begbie (2018a:2) when he wrestles with the following question: “What kind of theological weight can be given to the language of divine transcendence when it is associated with the arts? More succinctly: How, if at all, might the arts bear their own kind of witness to divine transcendence?” Deeper into his text, he qualifies this question even more pointedly: “[T]he most fundamental issue to clarify to clarify is, *who* is the God believed to be transcendent? And, following from that, *in what ways* is this God transcendent?” (127). Begbie’s argument in response is twofold: On the one hand he cautions against the pervasive trend “to invest the arts with a false transcendence, to overestimate (or to underestimate for that matter) their transcendent potential, can only redound to our harm” (12) by stating on the other hand explicitly that “I am not primarily concerned with the transcendentals [truth, goodness and beauty] but with the transcendence of the God of Israel testified in Scripture and made known in Jesus Christ.”²¹ In another text of his he qualifies this further with underlying insights of both Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar made in this regard (Begbie 2018b: 3–4; 186–187).²² The crux of the matter is probably when he says “My intention is to show some of the ways in which Scripture’s

21 Begbie also formulated this earlier in his text as follows: “I will argue if we pay greater attention to the highly distinctive contours opened up by a ‘scriptural imagination’ and the creedal traditions that resonate with them, we will be led to question at least some of the more common ways transcendence is being related to the arts today, and discover far richer resources for engaging constructively what is undoubtedly a widespread conviction that the two are in some sense profoundly linked.” (3).

22 In reference to Barth he says: “Hence Barth will not allow beauty to be a ‘leading concept’ in the doctrine of God. It is secondary to God’s glory, an ‘explanation’ of it; beauty is the form of God’s glory. ... One might wish Barth had developed these views more extensively, especially to creaturely beauty, but his *methodological* concerns, I would suggest, are to be seriously heeded.” (4); and with regards to von Balthasar’s “theological aesthetics”, it is important to note that “he is principally concerned not with the arts (though he certainly engages the arts at length) but with beauty as a dimension of theology.” (186) For von Balthasar it is from the economy of salvation that we must think after God’s beauty; or, in the words of an earlier reference to him: “Divine beauty is discovered not in the first instance by reference to a doctrine (still less a philosophy of beauty) but by strict attention to a movement in history enacted for us –

unsettling strangeness can form and re–from our understanding of divine transcendence, and ... to ask what difference this might make to the way we view the transcendent potential of the arts.” (78).

Obviously, there are strong and clear resemblances in the brief and introductory references to both Cilliers and Begbie’s work. For instance, in later section where Begbie cautions against “treating God as an object of disengaged contemplation” – the so-called “aestheticizing of divine presence” – he continues to state in words very familiar in Cilliers work, namely: “[I]t is striking how in virtually every case, God’s transcendent presence is, so to speak, a presence on the move, energized by love, directed toward change.” (124). However, whether there is also such a strong emphasis on particularity, the specificity of theology’s God, specifically and thoroughly Trinitarian approach, and a very peculiar orthodoxy present in a possible dialogue (and comparative study) between them, is according to my reading filled with immense (creative) tension.²³ These clear and strong and similarities in foci and interest between them, but seemingly also differences and tensions, is probably most clearly to the fore towards the end of Begbie’s book where he comments on the question of the “artist as transcendent creator?” with the following:

In sum: there is a limited and qualified sense in which we can speak of the artist as transcendent in a way that is analogous to the way we speak of God as transcendent. The artist in indeed other than the physical world in which she is set and is given a calling not shared by other creatures, a calling that is part of a wider vocation to exercise “dominion”. But the nature of that otherness and dominion, and the way it is worked out in practice, must be read strictly through what has been enacted in Christ and has been made possible in us by the Spirit – a creaturely participation in God’s yearning to bring the created order to a fullness of praise. (2018a:152).

supremely the story of Jesus Christ the incarnate Son, living in the Father’s presence in the power of the Spirit. Trinitarian beauty has so to speak, been performed for us.” (4).

23 Begbie (2018a:126) expresses himself so strongly in this regard that he even feels compelled to comment in a footnote with: “I am always a little puzzled when in some Christian theological circles my writing on the arts is relegated to a particular zone or category labelled ‘a Trinitarian approach.’ What else do we want a Christian theology of the arts to be? Unitarian?”

In short, the question of a (theological) order between creation and re-creation with which we started this section, and against the backdrop of the previous section's enquiring towards the homiletical and/or liturgical particularity in Cilliers thought, is indeed here further to the fore with the emphasis of Begbie on even more particular scriptural (and for that matter also Trinitarian, as well as specifically homiletical and/or liturgical) sense and imagination. Such an exploration in general into this question, and in particular a comparative study and dialogue between the work of Cilliers and Begbie, is surely in terms of its possible creative potential and theological tension, worth exploring further.²⁴

6. Conclusion

And so, we have come to a clear preliminary end in our state of being after the strange beauty of serving the Word in South Africa today that we received in Johan Cilliers' work. I say, "preliminary end", because to do homiletics and liturgy after Johan Cilliers is an indeed daunting challenge for the next generation(s) of scholars. We do our work after him because he has impacted the (playing!) field substantially over the years. Just as he taught us that we are actually never done with our sermons, so too we are not that easily done with his work. There is just no way we can ignore his work, legacy and contribution on us over so many levels the past decades. He has formed and informed us in numerous ways, and for that we cannot thank him enough. On an intellectual and personal level, we do and continue as colleagues with our/this work after him.

Secondly, and more in particular, we are after the strange beauty in his work because we are clearly also not done with even the four perspectives we have identified in his work. It is surely no comprehensive and final word on especially his whole legacy, nor on even these four different perspectives. In fact, as is often the case with prophetic voices (not being honoured or

24 Besides the merits of bringing their two main texts – Cilliers's *A space for grace* and Begbie's *Redeeming the transcendence in the arts* – into a possible fruitful dialogue with each other, it might be even worthwhile just to compare on a smaller scale two other shorter essays of them with each other. See Cilliers 2010b, "The unveiling of life: Liturgy and the lure of kitsch", and Begbie's (2018b:25–48) "Beauty, sentimentality and the Arts."

even heard in their hometowns), the real and actual reception of being after Cilliers still awaits many in (at least) South Africa.

Thirdly, besides the fact that each of these different perspectives probably still have some travelling and exploration to do, there is also other aspects to his work we not even had space and time to acknowledge and explore further. A separate article is surely worth the while to re-searched other aspects like how he developed inculturation and Africa in his work; or how he transformed and still envision the Reformed tradition in South Africa; or how he not just developed homiletics and liturgy as such, but also on how he redefined practical theology as discipline within and beyond South Africa; or analysing the relationship between his popular and devotional writings and sermons with his more academic material; and so we can go on.

Lastly, we do this work after him, because not only do we need to affirm and appreciate so much we have received from him, but also truly respond and question because we want to take his work further as we go after him. In fact, we have raised a few inquisitive questions and critical remarks too, because he taught us so much about the trade and craft of this calling and life. I truly hope this preliminary work of doing it all after him, does him justice.

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