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ON READING SOME OF KARL BARTH'S EARLY SERMONS IN SOUTH AFRICA TODAY?

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ABSTRACT

The work of Karl Barth has been quite influential in South Africa, but what about the value of his sermons and their influence on Barth's reading and mainline preaching in South Africa nowadays? After a short introduction, I discern, in four sections, the value and worth of reading Barth's early sermons in South Africa at present. I first hear anew the value of reading Barth in South Africa nowadays. Thereafter, I discern the current state of homiletics. Against this background, I pay attention critically to some of Barth's early sermons (1917-1920) while he was still a minister in Safenwil. Finally, I discern some of the value this project may currently have for theology and preaching in South Africa.

1. INTRODUCTION

Reading some of Karl Barth's early sermons in South Africa today is, in many respects, a challenging task. First, people often complain that most of the secondary work on Barth is "painfully boring" (Mangina 2004:xi), or, according to Gunton (2007:9), "[o]ne of the things you can say about Barth is that like most exciting theologians, the people that write about him are much more boring than he is." Thus, ironically enough, simply to engage Barth's work is quite an exciting challenge.

Secondly, to engage more specifically with his *sermons* seems extremely challenging. Besides this, we do not read sermons; we rather listen to them; we face a real challenge to hear them speak from there-and-then-to-them towards us-here-and-now. If it is true that we cannot enter the same pulpit twice, or preach the same sermon again, then it is surely

questionable why we would like to read these early sermons of Karl Barth in South Africa at present.

Still, given the challenge and questioning, I want to propose that this specific task – reading Barth's early sermons in South Africa nowadays – is indeed exciting and worthy of pursuit for an answer or two. Barth's influence in South Africa has been enormous (Smit 2009:275; cf. also Jonker 1988:29-40), and he has been read and re-read (Keet 1960:5-13; Engelbrecht 1967:62-78; Villa-Vicencio 1988; Jonker 2008; Smit 2009:275-294; 2012:3-14; Naudé 2015:267-287) in South Africa, but strangely enough without any interest in his sermons and their significance for our preaching.

Therefore, we should continue this tradition of reading Barth in South Africa, readjusting its focus with specific interest in his early preaching and sermons in order to establish whether it may not only stimulate the reading of Barth in South Africa nowadays, but also address some of the current trends and challenges in mainline homiletic literature. In short, Barth's preaching not only played a pivotal role in his development and significance as theologian – and, therefore, any reading of his theology in a particular context should, at some stage, also show particular interest in his sermons – but also, conversely, his theology may speak in significant ways to some of the challenges facing us at present, when we encounter the state of mainline preaching in homiletics.

2. ON READING BARTH IN SOUTH AFRICA ...

There are many reasons we believe why Barth's scholarship in South Africa today should not be neglected or be anything but boring. On the one hand, we are well aware of the popular tendency to view Barth in terms of the young energetic radical becoming a boring old conservative theologian (Gunton 2007:9). Put differently: Barth's influence and following are often depicted as being more towards the decades after the First rather than the Second World War, due to "his traditionalism failing to reflect 'the' experience of modern persons" (Mangina 2004:ix). It is as if some would argue that even within his own lifetime his work was viewed as obsolete, a thing of the past.

Currently, such a view is, however, seriously contested, because, even as some successors have tried to leave him behind, they "do their work 'after Barth'" (Webster 2005:249). The past two decades have shown a serious and continuous growing interest in Barth's theology worldwide (cf. Burnett 2013). From various places, we hear the call of a Barth Renaissance. In fact, some well-known and respected systematic theologians and Barth

scholars believe that Barth's contribution is still waiting to be received in modern Europe and North America (Webster 2004:1-2). This is not only a telling remark that signifies the importance and value of Barth's theology, but perhaps also something of the theological interests and agenda of the Northern hemisphere.

However, something about this remark may also be true for Barth studies in South Africa at present. When we revisit, for instance, the influential and well-known work *On reading Karl Barth in South Africa* (Villa-Vicencio 1988), we become very aware of the way in which Barth's theology relates to specific (socio-political) themes and challenges of the South African landscape in the mid-1980s. That work may indeed be "the best accounts of Barth as a contextual theologian" (Gorringer 1999:16), but the context for Barth in South Africa has changed dramatically since then. What has Barth to offer in terms of the issue of epistemological transformation for theology as a discipline in post-apartheid society (cf. Venter & Tolmie 2012)?

Despite Barth's well-known emphasis on human liberation, what is currently rediscovered and acutely stressed in Barth studies is his particular awareness and sensitivity for doing theology within a particular context. In terms of continuing doing theology – theologising: thinking theologically within a particular context – Barth indeed has a great deal to offer. McCormack (2008:17-18) mentions the following with regard to *Church Dogmatics*:

The cutting edge of Barth scholarship in the coming years will be centered in contextualized readings of Church Dogmatics. The day when Church Dogmatics could be read as though it had been written in the space of a single afternoon, as though every part were fully consistent with all the others, is over. The real challenge now is to understand how Barth's mind changed even as he was writing his magnum opus over the thirty five-year period from 1932 to 1967.

Inevitably, this means no copying or echoing of the man and his ideas (being 'Barthian'), but rather learning to think with, and against him – joining him in the call to witness to God's presence in a particular context. The value and importance of Barth's theology in South Africa is (still) this idea: *he teaches us to think theologically*. Gunton (2007:xxxiii) mentions that Barth is his favourite theologian, for this reason – "he learns us to think theologically ... [T]he older I get the more dissatisfied I become with the details of his work ... but he is a great man to learn to think theologically!" (Gunton 2007:10).

This idea is also Smit's (2009) point of departure when he reflects on the theme of "Reading Karl Barth in South Africa today". Smit (2009:275) not only draws on Jonker's well-known essay on Barth in 1986, in which he

famously said: "Theologically speaking, our generation was dominated by Barth", but he also continues along this line, arguing that even nowadays Barth has deeply influenced, in some way or another, some of the best-known South African theologians. Besides strengthening this idea of finding one's way as a theologian by coming into relationship with Barth, either by being influenced to think with, or against him, Smit (2009:284-285) makes a telling remark in this regard:

On the surface it may therefore seem that the influence of Barth in South Africa was primarily in the sphere of theology and politics, of church and state – but such a conclusion would in fact be a major misunderstanding. ... Such a surface impression, however, would be false. It was not Barth's own political ideas at all that were so influential in South Africa. His real impact was on a deeper, more fundamental level. ... The questions and themes that were truly at stake were theological questions and themes. The radical 'no' uttered against apartheid by Christians, theologians and churches rested on a deeper 'yes' ...

The importance of this insight is twofold. On the one hand, it indicates the value of Barth as a source and companion to learn to think theologically, especially in terms of how his theology helped clarify the theological identity and calling of the struggle theologians. On the other hand, it also questions how Barth was (mis)understood for being only "politically" relevant in some theologians' "use" of him in either their critique or legitimisation of apartheid.¹ Thus, over the past forty years, Barth's influence and reading was indeed deep and controversial, as he was used as an important identity marker for thinking either with, or against him.

Given this ambivalent and controversial presence of Barth in the South African theological landscape, it is in hindsight interesting to note the absence of theological reflection on Barth's sermons and his theological impetus on preaching itself.² It is really worth wondering what effect the reading of Barth's sermons in the mid-1980s could have had not only on the way in which Barth was read in South Africa, but also on the kind

1 Those arguing for an a-political theology did, of course, not realise that such a theology in itself was a particular kind of political theology!

2 The critique that Villa-Vicencio's work has not had any interest in Barth's focus on homiletics and the importance of preaching is softened by Willimon (2006:1) who mentions that "little has been done on Barth as preacher or Barth as a teacher of preachers". In Germany, Genest (1995) did an important study, but unfortunately not many in the English-speaking world have taken notice of this. However, new publications such as Hancock's (2013) work are slowly but surely changing all of this.

of theology in the struggle “for” or against apartheid, and even more importantly on the way in which the gospel was preached at that time. Not only are sermons some of the best windows and sources available to observe how we theologise within a particular context, yet even more so with a theology that views “preaching as the starting point and goal of dogmatics” (Barth 1991a:23ff.). Therefore, if we really want to pursue this tradition of reading Barth in South Africa nowadays, a reading of his sermons may be long overdue. The double significance of this is that it will not only stimulate and influence our reading of Barth in South Africa at present, but also contribute to how we reflect upon, and respond to the trends and challenges we discern in current homiletic literature in terms of current mainline preaching in South Africa.

3. ... AND DOING HOMILETICS TODAY

In the recent *Festschrift* for Smit on his sixtieth birthday, Müller begins his contribution appropriately with the story of the origin and motivation for the well-known and much used series *Woord teen die Lig*. The aptness of this remark is not only for Smit’s work and influence at the time of crisis in the 1970s, but also for the state of preaching in which we find ourselves again in South Africa at present. In a telling and insightful way, Müller (2011:338) remarks:

As in the 70’s I think that both of us believe that the church has once again reached a critical point with regard to the preaching event. It once more has become urgent to reflect on the essence of the preaching event as the fountainhead of the church’s ministry [italics original].

In some of his recent work, Cilliers (2010:72) observes this critical point in more detail:

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].*

In addition to the above, I find De Gruchy's (2004:223-260) description of "From church struggle to church struggles" a fitting description and naming of our present. Conradie (2009:15-19) echoed this line of thought that "consumerism as the ideology of our time" [my translation] is in a sense for the Christian faith even more challenging and powerful than the struggle against apartheid.

This critical challenge for preaching the gospel nowadays is, however, not limited or unique to the South African context. Conradie's take on consumerism as "the ideology of our time" is due to the fact that consumerism is, in fact, a global phenomenon. The North American theologian, Metzger (2007:112-3) mentions that we desperately need to

reconfigure our stories in view of all-consuming Scripture [where] we approach the Bible, God's storied world, from the standpoint that it envelops and consumes us when we consume it.

Interpreting Scripture, especially with the aim of preaching the Word of God, should never be *by us* as we interpret and read the text, but rather the other way around *where we are being read and interpreted by the text*. Put differently: Metzger's critique on consumerism within the liturgy is that Scripture should, in fact, master and consume us, rather than the other way around.

The above phenomenon is also well captured at its core with a very significant insight from Wilson (2008:78) who critically reflects on the developments within the so-called "New Homiletics" of the past 50 years:

That the New Homiletic consensus does not generally extend to theological matters, for example, the need for the sermon to focus on God and the gospel. Because God and the gospel for the most part were not a deliberate focus, many sermons that the New Homiletic produced seemed to fall somewhere short of good news.

This idea is also a crucial recurring theme in the work of Brueggemann, especially in his *The word militant – Preaching a decentering word* (2010). Willimon (Brueggemann 2010:v-vi) writes a provocative foreword that starts with:

Thank you for your help in the current preaching emergency ... He knows that our homiletic crisis is due to theological factors rather than rhetorical ones.

Brueggemann (2010:4) himself describes the crisis as follows:

The preacher is tempted to moralism, to 'relevance,' to entertainment, to conformity, to trivialization, to moral passion about the preacher's pet project or the congregation's needy circumstances. In service of such temptations, we have developed settled rhetorical strategies, most notably 'sermon introductions' and 'illustrations' that are designed, for the most part, narcotize the congregation and assure them that nothing odd will happen in this hour of utterance.

Another important voice in this particular choir is Long's *From memory to hope*, in which he laments the current loss of eschatology in preaching. In the 20th century, some crucial developments occurred in a wide range of disciplines and on many fronts in terms of appreciating the value and importance of eschatology, almost everywhere except within homiletics, and least of all on the pulpit (Long 2009:120). Long pleads for the need to move beyond the narrative phase, because we have compartmentalised or even isolated eschatology in terms of our understanding and practice of homiletics.

Lastly, it does not come as a surprise to hear Tisdale (2010:1-20) reiterating the question: "Where have all the prophets gone?" She identifies this loss of prophetic preaching as perhaps the reason for the current state of emergency within present-day preaching. It may simply be a coincidence that she had such a long extended visit (read: interest) in South Africa in April 2012.

Thus, given the crisis we are experiencing lately in terms of mainline preaching, let us turn our attention back to Barth, eager to see in what ways the reading of his early sermons and emerging homiletic theology may stimulate and contribute to reading Barth and preaching the gospel in South Africa nowadays.

4. ON READING BARTH'S EARLY SERMONS ...

Against the above background and the task facing us, the publication of Willimon's (2009) work is a most welcome resource and aid for our purposes. These fourteen sermons start at 4 March 1917 and end at 26 December 1920 – a time of crisis in several ways:³ the Great War, economic recession, serious social problems (strikes), the worst influenza in modern history, and

3 In his preface to the 6th and English edition (1932) on *The Epistle to the Romans*, Barth (1968:v) says of this time: "I beg my English readers to remember that this book was written eleven, or, to be precise, fourteen years ago. When I first wrote it – of the First Edition only the Preface now remains – it required only a little imagination for me to hear the sound of guns booming away in the north."

the Russian revolution. But, for Barth, the real crisis is fundamentally not any of these, but rather that provoked by the Word of God (Barth & Willimon 2009:ix)! The Barth we encounter in these sermons "does not come from the trenches, but from a Swiss village pulpit" (Barth & Willimon 2009:xii).

Barth's crisis is a theological one that begins and ends with the sermon (Barth 1957:100, 126). The incapacity of the liberal gospel and liberal form of preaching he experienced could not address his congregants' immediate situation *theologically*. During this period, he becomes painfully aware of how difficult it is to preach – what am I going to preach and say to the congregation – what does God have to say?

Thus the predicament in which Barth found himself when preaching was not primarily a technical and practical matter (*how* do I say it?), but a problem which concerned the basic content of preaching (*can* I, *may* I, speak of God at all?) (Busch 1976:91).

In fact, the *krisis* for him boils down to the dialectic of *both* the "impossibility" and "necessity" of preaching. As Barth (1957:186) famously stated: "*As ministers we ought to speak of God. We are human, however, and so cannot speak of God. We ought therefore to recognize both our obligation and inability and by that very recognition give God the glory* [Italics original].

Indeed, in discovering this great difficulty and need of preaching, he also discovered the promise and gift of preaching. Therefore, I am not that convinced that we should only think of Barth in terms of the so-called "Red Pastor" of Safenwil, because, by listening once again to Barth's theology from that time, and reading through Busch's biographical work on Barth, I am also getting the picture of the "Disruptive Preacher" from Safenwil. Willimon (2006:13) interestingly mentions the following:

Barth did not spend all of his time criticizing Safenwil industrialists; in fact, most of his efforts was spent on the Sunday sermon, with sermon preparation being his most 'political' activity.

He saw his principal task as that of writing a Sunday sermon, week by week; occasionally, the church committee asked him to go visiting more often (Busch 1976:61, 64). His way to the theological classrooms and studies of other ministers was from and via the pulpit in Safenwil. The need for Barth to preach was indeed a healthy corrective and stimulus in the development of his ideas (Busch 1976:84). Or, as Barth and Willimon (2006:211) mention, what "saved" Barth in the end was preaching, because he did not have "the luxury (or is it the temptation?) of being able to infinitely postpone proclamation". Because he was forced to come and tell, he was forced to go and listen.

Before I comment on some interesting issues and themes derived from the content, let me briefly make a few general observations in terms of the style, form and smaller details of these sermons.

- In these sermons, he often addresses the congregation with “Dear friends!” (Barth & Willimon 2009:1, 25, 37, 47, 57, 73, 80, 90, 95, 150). In the first part (1917-1918), he always starts with his opening line; thereafter (1919-1920), he moves it to some later stages in the sermon itself and less often, with the “introduction” getting straight to the point. Busch (1976:62) comments that this manner of addressing the congregation is due to following the liberal fashion of the time.
- The texts he chooses for his sermons are often very short – in many instances, it is simply a verse or a sentence and, in other instances, where he uses longer passages, it is often simply a phrase or a sentence from that particular passage. This feature of Barth’s preaching would indeed characterise his preaching throughout his career. In fact, it became even more so in his later years with famous sermons such as “Nevertheless!” and “All!”, which he preached in Basel’s prison (Barth & Willimon 2006:164). Put differently: What highlights his preaching at a very mature phase of his life was, in fact, already there and present in the beginning. It is remarkable how he could preach the gospel so fully and richly in only one sentence, one phrase, and later one word.
- His rhetoric is such that he loves to approach that sentence or phrase from different angles. He often complements his focus – that particular sentence or phrase – with other recurring phrases such as “we see ...” (Barth & Willimon 2009:59-60), “without God”, or “God is stronger than ...” (Barth & Willimon 2009:17-18, 21). These sermons already clearly show how Barth is not trying to illustrate or explain the gospel, but rather simply telling, describing and asserting.
- However, it is also interesting to note that midway through this four-year period (1919), he starts to structure his sermon numerically (1-3; some sermons even have more numbers). The shifts and transfers become more clearly and systematically focused, but also less exciting and surprising.
- His “introductions” and “conclusions” are often very short and brief. As we know from his later published lectures in 1966 on *Homiletics* (delivered during 1932-1933 in Bonn), for Barth (1991b:121-127) there is in principle only one kind of introduction and conclusion to the sermon. The main impression in these early sermons is indeed that he begins and ends with the text in such a way that the text will read us and get a grip on us, rather than the other way around. In one particular instance,

it is especially noteworthy to observe how his sermon begins where he stopped the previous Sunday, and ends with a few rhetorical questions, probing and promising that they need to continue next Sunday (Barth & Willimon 2009:111, 118). However, there are exceptions here and there. In some places, he mentions ("brings") the text very late into the sermon itself. In two particular instances (New Year's day sermon on Psalm 23, 1 January 1918, and an Easter sermon, April 1920), he has it more on specific theological themes (providence and resurrection) and (mis)uses the text as an add-on. In his commentary on the New Year's sermon, Willimon (2009:97) also expresses his surprise with Barth when he mentions:

About a fourth of the way into this sermon, Barth finally mentions his text: the Twenty-third Psalm. I confess that I don't think that this sermon has very much to do with this biblical text.

It is indeed a question for every preacher as to what extent s/he uses the text as a means to promulgate his theology and to what extent is the bringing out that which is textual? (Gunton 2007:25). (*Barth was very much painfully aware of the many shortcomings of these sermons. He, for instance, years later (1930's) when he visited the congregation in Safenwil, apologised for not preaching the gospel clearly enough to them. See Busch, 1976:64, 125.*)

I shall now pay attention to specific themes and ideas with regard to the content of these sermons. Barth's clearest form of ideology critique in these formative years was his struggle against religiosity. In fact, the impression is that it is an all-encompassing concept for him. "Barth is merciless on human religiosity" (Gunton 2007:68). A very important theme and focus in these sermons is: What was one of the great emphases in Romans that would later mature more thoroughly in *Church Dogmatics I/2* (1935).

However, it is very interesting to note, in these sermons, his development and struggle with it. Two particular sermons (1917 and 1919) can be highlighted. In the sermon on 2 Peter 3:12a on 29 April 1917, there are some strange formulations and thoughts. Halfway into the sermon, a sentence reads: "To this very human question the Bible gives this *answer*: ..." (27). This is surprising, because only "a few months before"⁴ Barth's line of thought in "The strange new world within the Bible" is that the Bible is, in

4 Sources differ on the actual date of this lecture. Busch (1976:101) dates it as 6 February 1917 – and the publication of the lecture itself in *The Word of God and the Word of Man* (1957:28) has a footnote at the start with the date as somewhere during the autumn of 1916. Another interesting point on small

fact, not there to respond to our questions, but calling us to answer them. Moreover, his struggle to cut loose from the impression of some point of contact between us and God, and stating clearly the independence of God's revelation is obvious when he states: "We all have something of God in us: a part, a splinter, a beam of God's light ..." (Barth & Willimon 2009:27). The major difference between the first and the second editions of Romans is well illustrated in this instance, as he moves from "organic" to "eschatological" thinking, from "God in revolution" to "God's revolution" (Gorringer 1999:58; Busch 2004:21). In fact, between the first and the second editions of Romans (in other words, between August 1919 and the autumn of 1920), he also gave his famous Tambach lecture ("The Christian's place in society"), in which this new development is quite evident in the argument that "Christ in us" actually includes "over us", "behind us", and "beyond us" (Barth 1957:273).

Despite the above struggle, there are also some clear indications in this particular sermon of how the dialectic nature of his thought that grounds both the No and Yes in God is beginning to take shape. Towards the end of the sermon, Barth (Barth & Willimon 2009:30) states:

We stand under the patience of God and under the judgment of God; and we have failed to recognize, have not wanted to recognize, God in either, in both. At one time we only want to hear the 'Yes' and so to be what we are, but not in and with God. At another time we only want to hear the 'No' and to renew and change ourselves, but without becoming anew with God.

Turning to the second sermon on Matthew 9:14-15, nearly two years later (9 February 1919), the development of the above becomes quite clear. "By 1919 Barth's sermons sound as if the young preacher is finding his voice, as if he has increasingly clarity and confidence about what he most wants to say." (Barth & Willimon 2009:107). In typical fashion, Barth (Barth & Willimon 2009:99) starts this sermon by getting straight to the point: "We always think we have to make it very clear that *we too are good, religious people.*" A few pages later, nearly a third into the sermon, there is an important twist when Barth (Barth & Willimon 2009:101) mentions: "One can almost say that the more seriously, courageously a person follows the way of the prophets and Pharisees, the greater the step becomes that one must take in order to come to Jesus." This is indeed a great theme in his theology from now on. In the 1922 lecture entitled "The problem of ethics today", Barth (1957:177) states:

technicalities concerning this famous lecture, is that the English translation adds the word "strange" to the title (see Webster 2012:130).

There is no way from us to God ... The god who stood at the end of some human way – even of this way – would not be God.

Barth (Barth & Willimon 2009:101) is particularly upfront in this sermon when he mentions the following: “The Pharisees and the disciples of John increasingly had the impression that *the Savior was not a pious person.*” [italics original]. Not only is he working the angles of the so-called “crisis” theology, but he is also clearly illustrating that his critique of religion is not primarily against other religions, but towards a very particular and dominant understanding of Christianity. There are indeed many ways of evading the grace of God, especially within the sphere of the church, with sermons as an important tool whereby one can hide from God!

In the remaining two thirds of the sermon, Barth addresses this thought of Jesus as no pious person from various angles. “So the most difficult hindrance lay not in the malice of worldly persons but in the righteousness of the children of God” (Barth & Willimon 2009:102). And:

it was always *the same thing*: Jesus is *not* on the right path; one *cannot* take him seriously, one does *not* get to heaven on the way he leads his disciples; he is *not* a pious man (Barth & Willimon 2009:103).

Barth goes on to motivate this: “Effectively he admits that he is not pious, so that we can almost hear him say, ‘It is true, I am not a pious man!’ And with cheerful words!” (Barth & Willimon 2009:104). Near the end, he (Barth & Willimon 2009:106) concludes with a beautiful statement: “Those who stand here stand on the *divine and heavenly side* of life. *That is why* they do not fast. *That is why* they do not have to be pious. *That is why* they may go a new way in a cheerfulness and freedom that is of God”.⁵ This clearly illustrates the liberation, freedom, joy and grace which the critique on religiosity brings forth in his theology.

Instead of viewing faith, heaven and God as open, present, accessible, easy, and cheap, Barth is deconstructing all of that. Whereas we may think that we as preachers should just start and continue to stress and emphasise the nearness and ever-ready presence and accessibility of God, Barth is, in fact, doing just the opposite! Instead of viewing the task of preaching in terms of lessening the gap between us and God, he is, in fact, widening it – precisely in terms to help us discern the nearness of God in terms of its otherness.

Flowing from the above development, it is fitting to hear Barth (Barth & Willimon 2009:135) mention in an Easter sermon of April 1920:

5 All italics in this paragraph – as elsewhere in the article – are original.

Jesus places us in a *final insecurity*, not only in our relationship to ourselves and other people, but also in our relationship to the world and all that is. ... As long as this final insecurity is not disclosed in us, we are still *sleeping*. But in Jesus we *awaken*.

To obtain a clear sense of the double-sided nature of the crisis of preaching, Jesus is certainly not the answer to our crisis of preaching, but rather the question we need to hear anew. Before we are able to preach and speak and answer, there is a living voice that calls, questions and addresses us in a specific context.

5. ... AND DOING HOMILETICS IN SOUTH AFRICA TODAY?

In conclusion, we are now faced with addressing both the significance of Barth's early sermons for reading him *and* doing homiletics in South Africa at present. However, the key insight that emerged in these brief ventures into the reading of Barth's theology in South Africa (section 2), with specific interest in his early sermons (section 4) and the state of mainline preaching in homiletics nowadays (section 3), is that we should not perhaps continue with this without making the necessary connections between the various sections. Instead of making specific remarks for either the reading of Barth, on the one hand, or the doing of homiletics, on the other, in South Africa nowadays, we are convinced with the insights gained from the above sections that we should not continue as if the one has nothing to do with the other. The reason for this is that we sense, in all three sections, the reference to *crisis*, and how we ultimately respond to the crisis is a serious theological matter. Not only have we noted how Barth responds to his time of crisis by situating the actual and real crisis within the act of preaching, but Smit (2009:285) also reiterated this. He emphasised the theological significance of Barth's work in a highly politicised context. Grounding this argument in the background of the role the crisis of the sermon played in Barth's development, we cannot but imagine the theological responsibility in continuing to read Barth (*and* his sermons!) *and preaching* the gospel in South Africa today.

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