

The struggle for hope continues. The Christmas sermons of Archbishop Thabo Makgoba, 2009 – 2019.

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Introduction

There are a number of famous Christian pulpits globally, for example the one in the Riverside Church in New York and Martin Luther's pulpit in Wittenberg. When one shifts the focus to the continent of Africa, there are thriving African Independent and neo-Pentecostal churches such as Action Chapel in Ghana, or Moria, the headquarters of the Zion Christian Church in South Africa. These newer churches are thriving across Africa, as well as in South Africa, and the older mainline churches are in serious decline. Yet, we are convinced that to this day the most famous and still very active pulpit in South Africa, is the one in St. George's Cathedral in Cape Town.¹

St. George's Anglican Cathedral is the seat of the Anglican Archbishop and the pulpit was made famous by Emeritus Archbishop Desmond Tutu. To some extent, it has come to be known as a pulpit of struggle, seeking to understand the context of South Africa (and the world) in the light of the good news and the implications thereof for the everyday struggles of South Africans. And even though the Anglican Church in Southern Africa is relatively small compared to the nascent Christian traditions, that pulpit and the sermons of the current Archbishop, Thabo Makgoba, exerts much influence in the country.

A particularly famous and popular sermon preached annually from that pulpit by Archbishop Makgoba, is the Christmas sermon preached during the Midnight Mass of Christmas Eve. The people attending the service hear it, but in the days to follow it is published in full length in newspapers²; referred to in columns and articles³; uploaded onto the internet⁴ and it becomes a centrepiece of many conversations, not just of Anglicans.

On the one hand it was the popularity and the weight of the homiletical tradition that comes with it that served as strong incentives for us to choose the preaching of Makgoba as subject for this chapter. Despite these factors, there was also something else that struck us and made us curious about the relation between these sermons and the South African and global social contexts:

¹ Many of Thabo Makgoba's predecessors at St. George's Cathedral, such as Joost de Blank, were outspoken critics of apartheid (cf. Makgoba 2017: 114-115).

² See for some of his Christmas sermons see the South African newspaper *Daily Maverick* <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/author/thabo-makgoba/>

³ See for example the website <https://www.biznews.com/leadership/2020/02/14/unlikely-year-orange-overalls-paul-hoffman-corruption>

⁴ See <http://www.sabcnews.com/sabcnews/makgoba-hopes-2020-will-be-a-year-of-orange-jumpsuits-for-the-corrupt/> which includes a video of the sermon; see also the website of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa <https://archbishop.anglicanchurchsa.org/>

On the 24th of December 2019 Archbishop Makgoba acknowledged in his Christmas sermon the feeling of distress and discontent of many South Africans. Regarding 2020, he said: “Here in South Africa we hope it is the year of the orange jump suits, a year of reckoning.” These words made a clear allusion to the awaiting trials of people in high positions (including the former president Jacob Zuma) regarding alleged corruption and state capture. These trials have come to form a climax of sorts following a decade of growing unrest, dissatisfaction and concern among many South Africans, as this article will soon indicate in more detail. Therefore, as we read this in a newspaper, we immediately wondered: what was his message a decade ago and how did this message change during this extremely tumultuous time in South Africa?

Looking at his sermon in 2009, we were first of all struck by the difference in terms of Archbishop Makgoba’s reference to the context within which he was preaching, focussing on global challenges such as the credit crunch and climate change. In this sermon, he encouraged people to use the gift of Jesus towards personal transformation, to communicate Christian values and to change their world. Not only did the content of the two sermons differ vastly, but the 2009 sermon was also in a completely different tenor than the 2019 sermon. Aside from the vastly different foci and functions of the two sermons, the 2019 sermon (unlike that of 2009) also had a sense of urgency, akin to a latent holy anger undergirding the performance and presentation of the sermon’s content.

Thus, the difference between the two sermons were, to our minds, stark. Where the 2019 sermon was deeply rooted in a specific context that could only be preached in Cape Town, the 2009 sermon could fit into any context and could have also been preached in Canberra, Calcutta or Cologne. Where the 2019 sermon made specific calls towards action, the 2009 message spoke of general Christian values. This is exactly whence the question we address in this chapter arose, namely: what is the relationship between Archbishop Thabo Makgoba’s Christmas sermons and the South African social dynamics of the past decade (2009 to 2019)?

In this chapter we thus explore a decade of Christmas sermons preached from the pulpit made famous by Bishop Desmond Tutu, but preached in a completely different context to that of Bishop Tutu. We will do this by looking at the content of the sermons, in addition to (and importantly) connecting it to the performance of these sermons on Christmas Eve. We continue with a word on theory, method and context.

Context, Theory and Method

To contextually situate Archbishop Makgoba’s sermons, it is necessary to keep a larger transitional period in South Africa in view. During the 1990’s and especially after the first democratic elections and democracy that came in 1994, scholars referred to South African society as being in a transitional state and as such in liminality (Burger 1995; Hay 1997; Wepener 2009). Various scholars made use of the insights of especially the early work of

Victor Turner and his theory and field work regarding the so-called Social Drama⁵ and rites of passage, in attempts to explain some of the social dynamic of this period.

South Africa as a nation and many institutions in South Africa, such as faith communities, were after 1994 no longer in a state of *societas* characterised by apartheid, but entered a *communitas* period characterised by liminality. South Africa of that era has not yet entered a new *societas* that comes into existence after the Social Drama occurred (cf. Turner 1969; Turner 1996: 511-519; Turner 1972: 390-412, as well as Arbuckle 1991). The fact that a society has experienced the process of a Social Drama means that relationships, the social life, in fact that whole society, cannot be the same as it was before the breach (Hay 1997).

The insight that South Africa and South Africans were in liminality was very helpful in 1994 and a decade afterwards, but we are not convinced that it is a comprehensive explanation of where the South African society finds itself by 2021. Nor is it helpful in understanding the social dynamics that existed over the past decade in South Africa and in the time of Archbishop Makgoba's Christmas sermons that are discussed in this chapter. Liminality entails being betwixt and between and in a space where new identities are acquired in a *communitas* period, a period during which old and fixed positions of the *societas* before 1994 are no longer in place and a new *societas* is awaited. This is not where we will situate the South Africa of the past decade in Turner's scheme.

With reference to Victor Turner's theory, we are of the opinion that South Africa has already started to enter a new *societas* and is busy figuring out the new roles and structure of positions within this new *societas* (cf. Wepener 2012: 293-307; Wepener 2015: 1-8).⁶ In biblical terms, and with reference to the Exodus narrative, South Africa is no longer in the slavery of apartheid, nor in the desert of a transitional period, but have crossed the Jordan, entered a promised land and must now actively give shape to something new. However, the first years of a new *societas* is a very challenging time. Therefore, we highlight in this regard a few characteristics of South African society over the past decade which forms part of the canvas against which Archbishop Makgoba's sermons should be viewed.

Apartheid belongs to the past. However, according to the South African Reconciliation Barometer (SARB)⁷ of the past decade there have been serious shifts regarding people's attitudes towards reconciliation. During the first polls of the SARB in 2003 and thereafter, the emphasis was on unity and nation building, whereas the debate shifted in recent years to radical economic transformation and spatial justice. There is also the remaining issue of the non-engagement of many white South Africans in the reconciliation process, a serious decline in trust in leadership, and a persistent view of some that apartheid was not a crime.

According to the SARB, the country was seen as being vulnerable in the face of violence, unstable economic circumstances, xenophobic attacks, and violent service delivery protests

⁵ At the beginning of the Social Drama existing social relationships in a society, also called *societas*, are broken down and the group moves to a time of looser and more informal relationships called *communitas*.

⁶ Of course, it is not possible to generalize in this regard and various groups and individuals will find themselves in different spaces with regard to a transitional period.

⁷ See <https://www.ijr.org.za/south-african-reconciliation-barometer-survey-2019/> for the latest surveys of the SARB.

between the years of 2008 and 2017. The death of Nelson Mandela in 2013 was experienced by many as a call to action regarding reconciliation and justice. In addition, the SARB's findings showed that the only two institutions trusted to facilitate honest dialogue regarding reconciliation in this time are the public media and faith communities (see Van der Merwe 2019).⁸

The SARB captured important challenges regarding the South African context of 2009 to 2019. However, we will augment it with aspects that are important in order to situate Archbishop Makgoba's sermons. On an economic level the country was and is facing many challenges, such as inequality, poverty and unemployment (cf. Pieterse 2001; The South African Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan 2020:5). The news headlines between 2009 and 2019 were dominated by concepts such as state capture, corruption, crime, mounting anger and several #student movements which included a call for the decolonisation of the curriculum at tertiary institutions (cf. Wepener 2015).

This is in brief the social context in which these sermons were preached, a time in which a country was searching for a new *societas* whilst being plagued by various challenges. In the course of the decade under discussion, certain challenges were more prominent in certain years than in other years. The details will be highlighted as we discuss the content of the sermons. In summary, the decade saw mounting unhappiness under the leadership of former President Jacob Zuma (in office 2009 - 2018), a spurt of hope in 2018 when President Cyril Ramaphosa became president, but soon afterwards a renewed unhappiness, but with different emphasis.

For the purpose of this paper, we find the later work of Victor Turner, in addition to his earlier work, especially helpful, specifically texts in which he revisited liminality and social drama (Turner 1979; 1982; 1986). In this phase of his career, he integrated his insights gained from social drama and aesthetic drama (see Schechner 1987:7) and concepts such as the quotidian, performance, liminoid, public liminality and plural reflexivity became core to his thinking. We will return to Turner's work in the conclusion and will now briefly focus on method.

After collecting the sermons, we conducted two independent first readings of the Christmas sermons preached from 2009 to 2019. There were thus eleven transcribed sermons in total.⁹ In both researchers' preliminary analyses there were broadly speaking three clear lines distinguishable. Firstly, that the sermons were situated in very specific South African, African and global contexts that are described in the sermons and sometimes very explicitly named. Secondly, all the sermons contain what can be described as a theological indicative

⁸ For a summary and discussion of the findings of the SARB between 2003 and 2019, see Van der Merwe (2020: chapter 3), as well as Van der Merwe, Wepener & Barnard (2019). In this time South African homileticians focused on a variety of these challenges in their publications. Pieterse (2013) explored preaching in a context of poverty; Nell (2009) looked at preaching and xenophobia; Kruger (2019) at preaching and corruption; Wepener and Pieterse (2018) at preaching and anger; Wessels (2020) at postcolonial preaching; Müller and Wepener (2019) at preaching and social capital formation, and several homileticians, such as Laubscher (2017), explored the theme of prophetic preaching in a changing South African context.

⁹ The sermons were accessed on the website of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa. See <https://archbishop.anglicanchurchsa.org/2019/12/archbishops-sermon-for-midnight-mass.html>

and thirdly also an imperative that builds on this indicative. This indicative and imperative basically entails an incarnational theology in line with the liturgical context of Christmas, the lectionary texts and the ethical implications of that theology.¹⁰ However, it is important to note that what is not to be found in the transcribed texts, but in the liturgical context and the preaching performance of the sermons, is how Archbishop Makgoba's performance of the sermons in the context of Christmas frames the indicative and imperative in the subjunctive. This is a fourth line that we add and to which we will return.

As we read through the sermons, we initially used coding to analyse the content of the sermon contents, with the intention of using Grounded Theory (a form of content analysis) as methodology. From our collective experience in Grounded Theory (Steyn 2016; Pieterse and Wepener 2018; Steyn 2019; Steyn, Wepener and Pieterse 2020), we soon realised that Grounded Theory would not be the appropriate methodology as it would not indicate the development of the sermons over the course of the decade as desired. The focus in Grounded Theory is more on theory generation and less on comparing content from individual pieces of content. We thus chose for a method through which we could identify themes, compare the themes with the specific context in which they were preached and as such performed by the preacher.

Mayring (2000) points out that content analysis can focus on two levels of content: primary content, which focuses on the content and themes as is (as is the case in Grounded Theory), and latent content which focusses on context. Content analysis that focusses on latent content applies theories in order to analyse and understand data (Kleinheksel, Rockich-Winston, Tawfik and Wyatt 2020). It is a form of analysis in which the hands of the researchers are more clearly visible as they sift through the text using certain lenses. Following our preliminary analyses, we analysed the (latent) content according to the three lines set out above. Keeping in mind the theory of Long (2004: 108-116), we identified the context, and formulated the focus and function statement of each sermon and systemised it into a table.¹¹ We thus firstly asked what the sermon in broad terms is about, what is the core message or theme of this sermon (focus) and secondly, what does the sermon want to do or accomplish in the hearers (function).

It was important to identify the function in addition to the focus, as these sermons are public performances within the context of St. George's cathedral, but also within South African society at large as it is broadcasted and posted on social media. These focus and function statements were used as the basis for a summary of the core themes and intentions of these sermons

In the next section we turn to the analysed sermons which we will present in a chronological and narrative style, spanning the already mentioned decade. We start each year with a brief description regarding main contextual national and international events that are important

¹⁰ It should be noted that Archbishop Makgoba consistently worked with the lectionary texts, so every year, he is preaching on very similar readings from Scripture, just twelve months apart. In some cases, instead of Luke chapter 2, John chapter 1 is, for example, used. Thus, even though the texts differ, thematically the biblical texts deal with similar themes and theology, such as incarnation.

¹¹ This table can be found at the end of the article after the bibliography.

to keep in mind in order to situate the sermon. Thereafter we explore only some of the themes that surfaced in the sermon that year in an exemplary fashion to show the development that occurred in Archbishop Makgoba's preaching over the course of this decade. The complete sermons are available on the internet and the full table with themes presented after the narrative.

The struggle for hope continues

2009: A vague beginning

At the outset of 2009 Kgalema Motlanthe, who replaced Thabo Mbeki, was the President of the ruling African National Congress (ANC). In April 2009 the ANC won the general elections and in May 2009 Mr. Jacob Zuma was appointed as President. As was the case before 2009, there were protests in the country pertaining to a variety of issues, but specifically also regarding poor living conditions in townships. Simultaneously there was mounting national excitement regarding the hosting of the FIFA Soccer World Cup in 2010 in South Africa.

On Christmas Eve in 2009 the focus of Archbishop Makgoba's was: God, as the source of hope, is with the hearers; God steps in amidst their darkness and thereby dispels fear and moves them into action. The function of his sermon was to comfort hearers amid challenges and inspire them towards personal and societal transformation. As example of this, we quote: "Jesus stands with us, and we can put our hands in his. He will be with us, through thick and thin – a listening ear, a shoulder to cry on, a source of strength, a voice of encouragement. This is why we call him Emmanuel – 'God with us'."

Latent in this first sermon is the combination of incarnation and hope, where hearers were called on to display Jesus' presence in their lives and contribute towards ecological issues, HIV/Aids and ethical living. The sermon promoted a link between incarnation and ethical living. When this happens, namely when the hearers start to live from the incarnation, they become agents of hope. This combination of incarnation and ethics remain the basis for all the sermons to follow, but here the implications were still rather vague. In other word, there was not yet many clues regarding what exactly hope as a lived reality entails in the life of the hearers, even though the link between faith and ethical living was suggested. The concluding sentence of this sermon captures the content and atmosphere of the entire sermon well: "So, tonight, come and receive the greatest gift, the most valuable treasure of all – Jesus himself – and let yourselves be transformed by him, to share his treasure with the world."

2010: An Incarnation with seemingly little ethical implications

In 2010 South Africa hosted the FIFA Soccer World Cup. The World Cup created a very vibrant atmosphere, while civil servants staged nation-wide strikes. Yet, some opine that the year was the best of the decade, with very little issues of significance surfacing (McNamee 2019; Pather 2019).

Despite the overall positive tone of the year, Archbishop Makgoba's sermon of 2010 was one of consolation. The focus was that Jesus is God's greatest gift, which in this sermon meant that the hearers did not have to be afraid as they follow God's call to discipleship.

The function was to comfort hearers that God is meeting them and to trust God and move towards discipleship.

The essence of the sermon is roughly the same as the one from the previous year and, compared to the sermons that follow, these first sermons were rather short sermons. One development from the previous year was that the preacher, along with elections in Sudan, had named an issue concerning human dignity which is more contextually bound to South Africa. He said: "Jesus will meet the people of Makhaza, as they seek dignity, health, safety through the toilet saga."¹² What is noticeable is that the hearers were not placed between the incarnation and ethics, but Jesus himself is said to meet the people in need. This accent changed in the sermons that followed and the emphasis on the hearers as agents of hope became all the more prevalent.

2011: The ethical implication becomes clearer

During 2011 the ANC youth leader, Mr. Julius Malema, was suspended by his party for bringing the ANC into disrepute. During the local elections, the official opposition, the Democratic Alliance (DA), doubled its share of the votes.

The focus of 2011 was that God helps the hearers to grow into a mature faith and full potential by being "God with us" through God's love for the hearers. The function was to encourage hearers towards mature faith that trusts God and that moves beyond worship towards deeds.

Once again, the theme was incarnational theology that impacts ethical living. However, this time, there is a stronger call upon the hearers to act ethically. We quote from this sermon: "It takes guts to commit ourselves to saying the right thing, doing the right thing – especially in a world where it is seen as clever to be bending the rules, cutting corners, telling white lies, jumping the queue – everything short of being found out." Compared to the 2010 sermon, it is noticeable that no specific issues were named, and with regards to ethical living there was a general reference to corruption. However, the hearers themselves were called upon to take a stance. This is a development regarding the theology of hope embedded in all the Christmas sermons we analysed.

2012: More contextual, more direct

In the year 2012, there were several challenging events in the country that Makgoba also references in his sermon. Examples include Western Cape farm workers' strikes and the Marikana mass shooting where 34 workers at a platinum mine in Marikana, North West Province of South Africa, were killed by police firing on them, leaving 78 more injured and more than 200 miners arrested. In addition, the Limpopo textbook saga involved the non-delivery of textbooks for the first six months of the school year to schools in the province of Limpopo. Amidst these challenges Pres. Zuma is once more elected president of the ruling ANC party.

¹² In his book Makgoba (2017:136) writes on the topic: "In Makhaza, a flashpoint was created when toilets were installed without any walls or doors giving their users no privacy" and how he, because of his activism in this regard, was named "the toilet archbishop".

In 2012 the focus was that God “is with us” and therefore Christmas announces a new beginning in the face of a dire need for change in society. The function was to inspire hearers to let God’s love be channelled through them and to be agents of change and a new beginning through prayer.

Once again, ethical action was embedded in an incarnational theology. However, the hearers now had a much clearer picture regarding what the implications of this theology could be and what their roles were to be in that regard. The preacher said: “2012 has been a hard year, in many ways – we can look back on the Limpopo textbook fiasco; the Marikana shootings; the Cape farm workers’ strikes.” The preacher continued to name issues elsewhere on the continent of Africa and the rest of the world and continues: “President Zuma may have been re-elected President of the ANC – but we say to our politicians and all in positions of leadership and influence, it cannot be ‘business as usual’. There has to be a greater urgency, a deeper commitment, to doing more and doing it better.” Later he continued: “...so that we too may be channels of love and peace in God’s world.”

The naming of where the need in the country and the world was, was more articulate. The preacher was becoming more explicit in naming issues and even persons in his Christmas sermon. This is also the first Christmas sermon under discussion in which the archbishop specifically addresses the country’s leadership. The general tone of what ethical involvement in these issues should look like, still has a pastoral and comforting tone, as in the previous years. This tone changed in the successive years.

2013: Gaining momentum

President Jacob Zuma is criticised in 2013 by the anti-corruption ombudsman regarding a 20 million Rand upgrade to his private home in Nkandla, KwaZulu-Natal Province, South Africa. The Western Cape Farmer worker’s strikes continue. In December 2013 former president Nelson Mandela died at the age of 95.

The focus in December 2013 was that God intervenes and is not aloof amid people’s plight and fear. The function was to comfort the hearers in times of fear and inspire them to demand justice and living the justice through proclamation, and the asking of questions towards social transformation.

The general Christmas theme based on the lectionary texts was continued, but it was more to the point and the urgency is telling. This time, ethical living grounded in incarnation theology sounded as follows:

“God declares, in the company of his heavenly host that he has seen in our world religion being politicised and the persecution of Christians globally escalated; He has smelt the rot and pain of inequality in our midst and the resultant humiliation and exclusion of many from the economic order in his world of plenty; God declares that he has sensed our anxiety and fear, our shame and disgrace when we cannot afford a maternity ward and have to give birth in a shack or a taxi after being sent off home from a local clinic; God puts his feelings on his sleeve and opens up his heart, and his heart is as heavy and broken as are ours by our personal struggles and the global systemic problems

of this mortal life. God sends us his heavenly host to call us back from our straying away from what creation was intended to be; to unveil a road back home.”

If Archbishop Makgoba’s decade of Christmas sermons is to be compared to a race, then here, in 2013, halfway into the decade under discussion, the preacher is gaining momentum. The incarnation theology in his sermons was no longer framed in the language of Jesus as gift, but incarnation entailed Jesus’s incarnation into the deepest needs of the world. And this incarnation demanded solidarity from the hearers with those in need. The implication of incarnation for the ethical living of the hearers is becoming clearer and also that the link between incarnation and ethics entails hope.

2014: A wider audience, an act of courage

In 2014 the ANC won the South African general elections, thereby introducing President Jacob Zuma’s second term in office. In addition, talk about so-called state capture and government corruption became more prevalent in newspapers. The most significant being the final report by Public Protector Thuli Madonsela on the R246, 000 000 owed to the South African public following the upgrade to President Zuma’s private residence. Eskom introduces “load shedding” (scheduled power outages) for the second time and introduces stage 3 as the highest level of load shedding.

The focus of the Archbishop’s 2014 sermon was that Christmas brings hope that calls the hearers to see light in the darkness, confront wrong through courage, knowing that God has already triumphed. The function of this sermon was to motivate hearers to have courage towards a new struggle in order for South Africa to become a “we-society”.

Contextually the preacher especially focussed on leadership issues and in particular leadership that brings hope. Hope in this sermon is understood as having a vision and the courage to turn the vision into reality. From this Christmas sermon in 2014, it is also clear that the preacher was by this time very aware of the fact that his hearers were not only the Anglicans sitting in front of him in the pews of St. George’s cathedral. He shows awareness that he was busy with a very public act and that he was also addressing South African politicians.

The thematic analysis of this sermon shows that as the preacher was performing in that pulpit, he was defying the powers, and speaking fearlessly against issues of corruption. The analysis and interpretation of these sermons will thus, to our minds, be incomplete if the public performance of the sermons is not also taken into account in this chapter. During this sermon he exclaimed: “My children and grandchildren deserve better.’ Only by being pro-courage can we really be anti-corruption. We truly begin living when we say, ‘Enough is enough and I want more for my family, my community and my country!’” The sermon became an act in which what was called for (courage grounded in the hope that comes from the incarnation) is demonstrated in the pulpit by a preacher who engaged the powers by means of his sermon.

2015: Pertinent about the present, introducing social imagery

In 2015 there was once more a spate of xenophobic attacks across South Africa. Government officials also received allegations of bribery to secure the FIFA World Cup bid and criticism for allowing Omar al-Bashir, former president of Sudan, in the country despite warrant for his arrest by International Criminal Court. Across South Africa student movements calling for free education and the decolonisation of curricula is in full swing. Thousands march in protest as they ask for the removal of President Jacob Zuma.

That God comforts hearers with God's presence and rejoices in their responses to the cries of the world, was the focus of the archbishop's sermon of 2015. The function was to encourage hearers to hold onto the belief that challenges can be overcome and to get involved in the New Struggle¹³, thereby creating hope through love.

The tendency of the preacher to name issues that should be addressed continued in this sermon, but it now became even more articulate. He said for example: "Growing, deepening discontent is palpable in South Africa, a discontent that is causing even the most beautiful of days to be invaded by the pervasive smell of the rot which is being spread by the moral pollution of our public life." He also stated: "The sheer recklessness of the firing of Nhlanhla Nene¹⁴, the failure to consider the needs of the nation, and particularly the needs of the poor, was staggering."

Theologically the preacher continued to connect incarnation and ethical living, but in this particular sermon he took it a step further and started to provide solutions. So, for example he said: "we need to build strong systems and institutions which cannot be undermined by one party or person's whim", also later in the sermon "join together, organise, lobby and embark on what I call the New Struggle, the struggle to ensure that the sacrifices that so many made for our liberation are not wasted, the struggle against greed, corruption and nepotism, the struggle for true justice, including economic justice, and the peace from God that flows from justice." A last example of the content of this sermon towards its end is: "This Christmas, let us recognise that if we are to be signs of the new dawning Kingdom, it will involve a journey away from all that blinds us to the suffering and misery of others, from inherited forms of privilege and wealth, and from a world view that is comfortable with excluding from the resources of the world the other who is different to us."

In 2015 the preacher not only continues to, and more pertinently, name the issues in South Africa that hearers must respond to by means of ethical living and action, he also paints the first outlines of what is possible. A kind of social imagery starts to take shape in this sermon. This is a new development in his Christmas sermons.

2016: A homiletical crescendo, explicit conflict

In 2016 the supreme court ruled that President Jacob Zuma violated the constitution for not repaying public money to improve his private residence. President Zuma tells churches to

¹³ This refers to new issues in a postcolonial context, thus a new struggle after the struggle against apartheid and colonialism.

¹⁴ Nene was Finance minister who was controversially removed by President Zuma on December 9th 2015, to be briefly replaced by Des Van Rooyen succeeded by Pravin Gordhan.

stay out of politics and pray for the leadership instead. The student movements continued at all universities across the country.

The 2016 sermon's focus was that, amidst fear and troubled circumstances, God is still with the hearers, and that God's preferred terrain of work is in the margins and in brokenness. The function was twofold and aimed at two audiences. Firstly, it was directed at the hearers in general to dispel fear and encourage actions promoting God's will, including lamenting injustice and being in solidarity with those suffering. Secondly, the function was also to inform President Zuma that his call for the church to stay out of politics in the course of 2016 will be ignored. Noticeably, this is the first Christmas sermon in which there is explicit conflict with the leadership of the nation.

Christmas Eve of 2016 in the St. George's Cathedral in Cape Town was no silent night where everything was calm and bright as the words of the famous Christmas carol "Silent Night" goes. Although the preacher calmly began by connecting the brokenness of the incarnation with the miracles that often happen amid brokenness, he swiftly moved from the brokenness of the stable in Bethlehem to a broken South African society exclaiming that South African communities yearn for hope and courage from leaders. The incarnation, according to the 2016 sermon, compels all hearers to live in solidarity with those on the periphery of society and who are suffering most. This sermon is significantly longer than the first sermons from this decade and the preacher also asked questions such as: "People of faith need to begin asking: At what stage do we, as churches, as mosques, as synagogues, withdraw our moral support for a democratically-elected government?"¹⁵ and "When do we name the gluttony, the inability to control the pursuit of excess? When do we name the fraudsters, who are unable to control their insatiable appetite for obscene wealth, accumulated at the expense of the poorest of the poor?"

There is a homiletical crescendo that can be detected in the foci and functions of the sermons from 2009 to 2016 in which the implications of the theology of incarnation for ethical living are more and more fleshed out in the sermons. Incarnation flows over into ethics concretely in the behaviour and conduct of the hearers so that ethical living makes hope concrete in the South African society. The indicative in the sermons thus remains the incarnation, but the imperative that is elicited by the specific indicative, became more apparent. The possibility for hope was thus created through the sermons in the twofold way of naming the issues, but also imagining the possibilities of addressing these issues which. The new line of imagining that started in 2015 was thus continued in concrete ways in the preaching of 2016.

2017: Rising conflict, clearer vision

Controversially, President Jacob Zuma dismissed finance minister Pravin Gordhan and the credit rating of the country was cut to so-called junk status. Pressure of state capture and corruption by the President and several government officials also mounted. The President survived his eighth motion of no confidence while marches asking for his removal resurge.

¹⁵ Makgoba (2017:183-184) himself refers to this sermon in *Faith & Courage*.

In the Christmas sermon of 2017, the focus was again that God is with those suffering in the margins, conquering oppression and injustice, bringing hope to the personal and social lives of hearers. Once more, the function for two audiences, namely, to motivate hearers to dream, name and get involved in the fight against injustice, and to ask Mr. Cyril Ramaphosa to take action and cut the umbilical cord with President Jacob Zuma.

A similar line to that of the 2016 sermon was followed in this sermon. The call to care for marginalised people continues, but there was also a strong call that President Zuma should be replaced as president of South Africa and that a cabinet reshuffle was needed. The preacher called for a new vision, namely that hearers and leaders would dare to see their country through the eyes of the poor, and to, unlike the three wise men, look for God in places of power. He called on all hearers to dream, but to also realise their dreams. We quote from the sermon:

“After our liberation, too many of us folded our arms and waited for the government to fulfil our dreams. We didn't take lessons from other democracies; we didn't realise that good governments are there to create the environment in which we are guaranteed equality of opportunity, guaranteed the space in which we can get our hands dirty, do things for ourselves.”

The theological line of combining incarnation and ethics in which the preacher hermeneutically links the lectionary texts and the changing South African context, is continued, but what is needed, the dream or social imagery and how it can be accomplished, is being made much more concrete in this sermon.

2018: A sigh of relief

The Zondo commission inquiring into allegations of corruption and state capture was formed. President Jacob Zuma resigned under pressure over corruption charges and President Cyril Ramaphosa was chosen as his successor. Gender Based Violence was also an on-going issue in the country.

That God's vision of hope lies with the marginalised and the spirituality of Christmas empowers believers, was the twofold focus of Christmas 2018's sermon. The function was to motivate hearers to help root out corruption and examine their own behaviour, especially regarding the levels of aggression in the country.

Even though the theology and theme of the sermon was in direct continuity with the previous Christmas sermons, the tone was completely different in 2018. The preacher said that he senses “a renewed energy in our country.” In the light of the change in presidency, the preachers continues: “This Christmas, I believe we're about to re-enter a new age, an era where we define the new South Africa. So tonight, thankfully, I don't feel compelled to spend as much time as at past Christmases speaking about the need for our leaders to become more enlightened, more illuminated and more conscious about our country's social and economic crises.”

Archbishop Makgoba continued to encourage hearers, specifically to work towards achieving outcomes not by means of violence. The tone of the sermon is captured in these

words: “Tonight I want to focus on the biblical themes of hope and light facing us, and somewhat less on the challenges of darkness and sin. It’s a time for us as South Africans to speak about finding our cultural confidence, a time for us to remember our national values and mostly, a time to begin trusting again.” Violence is named as a problem, but now the general focus is much more on possibility. The homiletical crescendo that has been mentioned before, was interrupted in 2018 with a sermon in a completely different register that to a certain extent sounded like a sigh of relief.

2019: Disappointment, yet hope

Ramaphosa is president of South Africa and the Zondo Commission of Inquiry looks at cases of state capture and corruption that occurred. Xenophobic riots resurge. Large protests against gender-based violence take place. South Africa won the Rugby World Cup. Eskom power-outages, known as “load shedding” is escalated to level 6 – a first in the history in South Africa.

The focus of the last of the eleven sermons to be discussed here was that challenges are recognised, but not accepted, and naming problems and differences and mobilising people to overcome them are acts of hope. The function was to inspire leaders and hearers to take matters into their own hands and reflect God’s hope in their personal and communal lives by demanding justice.

The sermon of 2018 made it sound as if the tide that was building up between 2009 and 2017 was turning with a new dawn inaugurated by the change in political leadership in South Africa. However, in 2019 the theological-ethical line from before 2018 is continued. In general, the Christmas sermon of 2019 seeps of disappointment. The preacher starts out by calling 2019 “a difficult year for South Africans” and that “dark clouds are hanging over us.” He then continues, stating that there is still hope, but that hope has to do with naming, with mobilising and with acting in order to overcome challenges. In this last sermon of the decade, the preacher was critical of the leaders of government who, according to him had, in two years that they were given, not gotten their act together.

The following expression from this sermon became quite famous in South Africa afterwards and we quote it again in this chapter, this time more extensively: “Here in South Africa, we hope it is ‘the year of the orange jump-suit’, a year of reckoning for those whose greed has driven the country to the brink of disaster. On this night, of all nights, I don’t want to appear vindictive. Nor do I want to join the ranks of those who would put undue pressure on prosecutors to rush their work.” He further said:

“Botched prosecutions and widespread acquittals would be a disaster, sending the wrong signals to the corrupt and plunging the country into despair. But there must be consequences for corruption, both for those in the private sector who facilitate it and those in the public sector who take advantage of it. The justice, the peace, the reconciliation and the abundant life which a flourishing democracy promises will be achieved only if those who threaten to subvert it are held accountable. So I pray that our hope is not misplaced.”

After these fairly harsh words, he continued to sketch in the sermon possibilities, such as having courageous conversations in South Africa and the possibility of creating new global economic frameworks that could transform the market economy to become more equitable and less exploitative. At this point the theology embedded in Archbishop Makgoba's Christmas sermons had reached a certain theological maturity. This may also be the homiletical line that will continue in the years to come, namely that ethical conduct of all his hearers, from those in the pews to those in parliament, should be grounded in the incarnation which entails that God is in solidarity with the poor and marginalized, which entails a combination of continuously naming what is wrong and imagining what is possible. According to the sermons we analysed, lives that embody this is hope incarnated.¹⁶

Conclusion

In the course of just more than a decade Archbishop Makgoba developed a theology of hope in his Christmas sermons. This development can be seen most clearly when looking at excerpts from 2009, 2014 and 2019, each of which work with the themes of darkness / light, hope and the ethical implication on people:

2009: Hope incarnated: God who struggles

“Where is there darkness in this world? ... Jesus... is the light who shines in every darkness; and no darkness can ever extinguish it... Where is there no peace? Where is there injustice? Where is there a lack of righteousness – where is there dishonesty, malice, and downright evil? Jesus will step in – if we invite him, if we make space for him... Yes, Jesus is the source of all hope – real, concrete hope. His zeal will see to that.”

2014: Hope emboldened: a nation who struggles

“To say as Christians that we must live in hope does not imply that we should sit by passively and indulge in wishful thinking for that which has no prospect of being realised to come about... Hope confronts wrong and the abuse of power; it is risky and requires patience and endurance... But there is another characteristic they shared that is particularly powerful in converting hope to reality, and that is courage... So this Christmas let us commit ourselves to a new struggle ... The good news is, as Christians we struggle with a firm hope, that Christ our light and our hope, has already triumphed and broken all barriers.”

2019: Hope embodied: a people who struggle

“God is a god of all, not just for Christians, and the Incarnation calls us to witness to God in almost everything; to bring God's light to where there is darkness, and to witness to the light wherever we are... No, I am hopeful because to hope is to be determined to name our problems and highlight our differences, precisely in order to mobilise people to overcome them. As Denise adds: “To live out my

¹⁶ The narrative that we presented we also systematized in the columns at the end of this chapter where readers can see in a different format what the contextual issues were that the preacher addressed in a specific year. Thereafter in slightly different wording what the focus and the function was.

hope is to try to make that which I hope for come about – sooner rather than later.”

As already pointed out, there is a growing tension between the theme of darkness and its encroaching threat and resulting response by the hearers as a result of the coming of the Light of the world. Whereas Archbishop Makgoba initially situated hope within the acts of Jesus alone, he came to expand hope to include the struggle of a nation and eventually Christians in general (without negating that Christ has struggled and triumphed). It is a hope that is rooted within the incarnation, but that drives people forward through calls towards ethical action.

Ultimately, Archbishop Makgoba simultaneously named the demons and inspired social imagination. This is needed to give direction to individuals and a nation who are building a new *societas*. In the search for, and also struggle for, a new *societas*, the preacher kept hope alive as a means of fostering a social imagination in the hearers. In a new *societas* all citizens have their role, comparable to the structure of roles in an old *societas*, but different to it as well as to a time of liminality and *communitas*. The content of the theology of hope is embedded in the indicative and imperative identifiable in all the sermons, however the ritual performative frame of the public liminality of Midnight Mass, and the performance of the sermons by the preacher, adds the subjunctive to the indicative and imperative, which connects with the social imagination the sermons elicit.

In a religious and strongly Christian country such as South Africa, the preacher legitimises his calls and claims theologically by means of the incarnation. In *Faith & Courage* Makgoba (2019: 27) writes: “We must stand in the gaps between feeling hopeless and hopeful, between hurting and being healed.” What is telling about Makgoba’s Christmas sermons, is how they built up as if the archbishop was more inspired by a kind of holy anger that is akin to lament every year. The sermons themselves can be seen as expressions of anger, cries of lament and as such embodying what Katongole calls a “theology of hope” (cf. Katongole 2017). However, there is also a frustration in the analysed sermons in which the expression of anger does not remain on the level of expression and a cry of lament, but later, in addition to the expression, the longing that the anger is also heard by those who should hear it (see also Wepener & Van der Merwe 2021).

In the light of Victor Turner’s later work regarding ritual and performance, the Christmas sermons of Makgoba can be viewed as public meta-social rites in which Midnight Mass in St. George’s Cathedral, which is also broadcasted on national television, with a Twitter feed and Facebook posts, become a kind of public square.¹⁷ The performance of these Christmas sermons sets up a frame in which a momentary public liminality occurs during which *communitas* weighs structure (Turner 1979: 468). This public ritual performance dramatizes, to a certain extent, secular, legal and political relationships in which lampooning can occur and the powers are challenged (Turner 1979: 474, as well as Campbell & Cilliers 2012). Turner (1979: 476) calls this kind of public liminality the “eye and eyestalk which society

¹⁷ See in this regard also the work of Mirella Klomp (2020) and her book *Playing on. Re-staging The Passion after the death of God*.

bends round upon its own condition". This type of performance as part of public liminality elicits plural reflexivity on the side of participants. It is thus important to note that not only the content of the sermons preached were important as it engaged the social dynamics of a new *societas* in South Africa, but simultaneously also the annual performance of these sermons.

Makgoba thus utilised public liminality created by the frame of Midnight Mass and the performance of his Christmas sermon. This public liminality is, in the words of Turner (1979: 465-466; see also 1986: 25) "full of potency and potentiality", is "similar to the subjunctive mood" and the "reflexive voice". Both the content and performance of the sermons, act as mirrors of society and as agents of change as the performative reflexivity that it fosters, assists a society to reflect back on itself and scrutinises the quotidian world of South Africa (see Turner 1986: 24-27). Archbishop Makgoba furthermore also utilised the playful mood and mode of Christmas Eve to actively encourage public reflexivity which, according to Turner (1979:466), is the reason why public liminality is dangerous to the powers-that-be. "Public liminality can never be tranquilly regarded as a safety valve, mere catharsis, 'letting off steam'. Rather it is *communitas* weighing structure, sometimes finding it wanting, and proposing in however extravagant a form new paradigms and models which invert or subvert the old."

In summary, Archbishop Makgoba's Christmas sermons are theological texts containing a specific theology of hope, but hope that is augmented by the meaning implicit in the public performance of the content and as such engaging the social dynamics of a young democracy.

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2009	Contextual challenges	Credit crunch, Climate change; Pastoral challenges: depression, despondency, dejection, despair; Socio-political challenges: Conflict, injustice, lack of righteousness, dishonesty, malice, downright evil; HIV/AIDS; Conflict in Palestine and Israel
	Focus	The gift of Christ as Emmanuel, God with us, ridding us of our fear. Jesus is the source of hope out of his zeal for justice and righteousness, healing and hope
	Function	To display, wear, use and eat the gift of Jesus Christ. To heed the call to live as his disciples.
2010	Contextual challenges	Makhaza toilet saga; Sudan's referendum
	Focus	Receiving baby Jesus as the gift of Christmas, but live like the man on the cross.
	Function	To let go of romantic notions of faith and follow Jesus and do things God's way. Trusting and following Jesus.
2011	Contextual challenges	ANC sacks Julius Malema
	Focus	God is Emmanuel, God with us, who holds us and helps us become who we were created to be.
	Function	To worship God on knees, but to stand up and follow Jesus' example. Trust God and do things his way.
2012	Contextual challenges	Predicted end of the world; Limpopo text-book fiasco; Marikana shootings; Cape farm workers' strikes; Conflict in the DRC; Conflict in South Sudan Massacre at Shady Hook in Newtown, Connecticut; Socio-political challenges: Poverty, unemployment, inadequate health care and education, corruption and inefficiency, environmental degradation; Pres. Zuma re-elected; Madiba ill; Justice in the DRC, Southern Sudan, Syria, Egypt, Israel and Palestine. Own lives, homes, families
	Focus	We need a new beginning. Christmas is God's revelation of God's true self, as Emmanuel, God with us. About seeing the world differently.
	Function	Challenge leaders that things cannot be 'business as usual'. Let us pray and let God's love be channelled through us.

2013	Contextual challenges	Passing of Madiba; Socio-political challenges: Inequality, humiliation and exclusion of many from economic order, poverty, dehumanization; Pastoral challenges: Fear and anxiety, shame, disgrace; Conflict in South Sudan; Discord in CAR; Killings of Syria; Bombings in Egypt; Xenophobic violence inflicted on economic refugees; Socio-political challenges; Marikana massacre; Burnt shacks in Valhalla Park.
	Focus	Joy for all as God intervenes and does not remain aloof, because God is Emmanuel, God with us.
	Function	To ask questions. To worship, proclaim (demand for peace and justice) and plead for social transformation
2014	Contextual challenges	Mismanagement by and absence of leadership; Socio-political challenges: Economic inequities, related consumerism, service delivery inequality, healthcare inequality, education inequality, inequality of opportunity
	Focus	The light that shines in the darkness. Hope is to have the courage to see that light and participate. Christ is our light and hope that has already triumphed and broken all barriers. But we too are called to hope by seeing light in dark-ness and imagine a better world. It's about a way of life that is courageous as it confronts the wrong with patience and endurance.
	Function	Become a we-society that takes responsibility for one another. Commit with courage to new struggle to confront socio-political challenges.
2015	Contextual challenges	Conflict in South Sudan, Burundi, Northern Nigeria, CAR, Mali, Syria, Palestine and Israel; Climate justice (Paris agreement); Discontent and moral pollution in South Africa; #FeesMustFall; Nhlanhla Nene firing; Corruption in education system; Corruption and mismanagement by leadership; National mobilization against failures of leaders; Racism and xenophobia; New struggle for values and institutions rather than personalities; Against greed, corruption and nepotism (economic) injustice
	Focus	All of us are lovable because God, by coming amongst us, God has made us lovable. Is doing that which promotes the dawning of the New Kingdom.

	Function	To recognize that we, as signs of the new dawning Kingdom, must journey away from comfort zone towards a commitment to works of justice and peace and bring good news to others. We must act on belief: join together, organize, lobby, and embark on New struggle.
2016	Contextual challenges	Church asked to stay out of politics; Lack of trust in political leaders; Ruling party at war with itself; Land and reconciliation; Religion and politics; Aleppo; Burundi; DRC; Gambia; Nigeria; South Sudan; USA; Zimbabwe.
	Focus	To create spaces of silence in order to be able to recognize miracles in brokenness. God is Emmanuel, God with us, and therefore we are not alone and that makes us in solidarity with the marginalized. Hope is also to act.
	Function	To look to and stand with people in the margins and to deal with fear out of a place of silence and discernment. To lament with brokenness and to ask questions about naming our problems.
2017	Contextual challenges	New leadership ANC and their promises; Pres. Zuma's corruption and the need for action against him; Socio-political challenges: Floundering economy, unemployment, corruption; Division within ANC; Land and economic reform Socio-political equality: Equality in: education, service delivery, access to clean water, excellent healthcare, opportunity & equality of equality
	Focus	Recognizing God in other places and the breaking the yoke of oppression, allowing justice and peace to embrace, for hope to shine in dark places. Is that God is with us, Emmanuel, and not in structures of power.
	Function	To think differently, to dream bigger and to imagine more comprehensively. Imagine the near impossible and ensure equality for all. Act on the matter of President Zuma and make clean break with Zuma era.
2018	Contextual challenges	New age in light of new presidency; Joy and energy in country; Elections of DRC Leaders more enlightened; Mining, schools and service delivery protest; Attend to high levels of aggression in society.
	Focus	Hope is huge leaps that take place in unlikely places as God is the God of small things and marginal people. Hope does not reside in institutions of power, but in small things and marginal people.
	Function	To see the new born babe in marginal places where He invites us to adore Him. Examine our behaviour and institutions. Responsibility is not just that of the leaders, but of all South Africans.
2019	Contextual challenges	Eskom load-shedding; Zuma era that has passed; Greed in South Africa; Success of Springboks; Lambeth conference coming up; New decade coming up, but South Africans worried; Socio-political challenges: Hunger, deadly conflict, human rights violations, gender-based violence, refugees and displaced peoples Year of judgment: Pres Trump in US; Brexit in UK; Orange jump-suit in SA reckoning for greed and consequences for corruption; New economic order

	Focus	About something new, unheard of that comes with the new dawn. Hope is to name our problems, highlight differences in order to overcome them.
	Function	Discern God's work in the margins. Start taking actions ourselves.