

What happened last night in Sweden?

To preach without fear in a Scandinavian Folk Church, in a situation when populist nationalism rises in the context of migration.

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Abstract

This article focuses on the situation in the Church of Sweden, one of the largest Lutheran churches in the world. The links between the state and the church in Sweden were only recently cut. Political parties still engage with church policy and form the majority of the Church Assembly as well as many local Church councils. When nationalistic parties also are involved in church policy this becomes a challenge. Homiletics is taught at the Church of Sweden Institute for Pastoral Education as part of the final, ministerial year. At the Institute we make use of North American literature by authors like Brueggemann, Lose, Tubbs Tisdale and Troeger. There are many differences between the Scandinavian and the North American contexts. This paper seeks to investigate how homiletical training in one context is carried out with the use of textbooks from another, different context. How can homiletics based on North American theologies fit into a Folk Church context? How does a North American homiletic approach encourage Swedish students to preach a prophetic word of God, without fear, in a situation when populist nationalism rises in the context of migration? How can prophetic preaching, as described by for instance Brueggemann and Tisdale, be contextualised in this situation? This article discusses when and how prophetic preaching inspired from the Biblical example, with its narratives and with metaphors and poetic language, should be used and when a more confrontational, head-on witness is needed.

Prelude

“[Y]ou look at what’s happening last night in Sweden. Sweden, who would believe this?”¹ 19 February 2017 the 45th President of the US made a comment about the situation in Sweden. The

¹ Sewell Chan, “Last Night in Sweden”? Trump’s Remark Baffles a Nation. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/19/world/europe/last-night-in-sweden-trumps-remark-baffles-a-nation.html> [Accessed 2018-07-22].

statement was applauded by some, ultra-right wing Swedish politicians. Most of the Swedes were left baffled.

Introduction

As in the rest of the world, migration is a contested phenomenon in Sweden. Recently a bold stance against racism was taken at a conference held in Rome on “Xenophobia, racism, and populist nationalism in the context of global migration” organized jointly by the Vatican and the World Council of Churches. The statement recognized the context of fear, both in the sense of fear of the other and the fear that migrants experience. At the same time the conference declared racism to be a sin “in both its personal and systemic expressions, radically incompatible with the Christian faith.”² I am writing this article with “fear of the other” in mind, when I discuss how prophetic preaching may be taught at the Church of Sweden Institute for Pastoral Education.

The link between populist nationalism and preaching has already been established in the public discourse. On Tuesday, 5 October, 2010, Right Rev. Eva Brunne preached this in Storkyrkan, the Diocesan Cathedral of Stockholm. The tradition is that a Church Service is held just before the opening of the Parliament. Most of the parliamentarians are present.³ There is nothing provocative in the sermon until she mentions a nation-wide manifestation that has been held the night before in a number of Swedish cities. People have been protesting to the fact that the ultra-right wing party, the Sweden Democrats, has managed to take seats in the Parliament.⁴

Last night thousands of people gathered in Stockholm and in different parts of the country to voice their opinion. Shouting their disgust about the showing of partiality. The racism that says that you don’t have the same worth as I have. [...] And this based on the notion – that we happen to be born in different parts of the world. It is not worthy of a democracy to show partiality. [My translation].⁵

² *World Council of Churches*, Message from the conference “Xenophobia, Racism and Populist Nationalism in the Context of Global Migration”. Available at: <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/message-from-the-conference-xenophobia-racism-and-populist-nationalism-in-the-context-of-global-migration-19-september-2018> [Accessed 2018-09-26].

³ Since 2012 an alternative, secular, ceremony is held simultaneously at another venue: *Humanisterna*, Riksmötets öppnande. Available at: <http://humanisterna.se/riksmotets-oppnande/> [Accessed 2018-07-22].

⁴ *Sveriges Radio*, Stor manifestation mot SD. Published 4 October 2010. Available at: <https://sverigesradio.se/sida/artikel.aspx?programid=103&artikel=406780> [Accessed 2018-07-03].

⁵ ‘I går kväll samlades många tusen människor i Stockholm och i olika delar av landet för att ge sin mening till känna. Ropa ut sin avsky mot det som gör skillnad på människor. Den rasism som säger att du är inte lika mycket värd som jag. [...] Och detta av en enda grund – att vi råkar vara födda i olika delar av vår värld. Det är inte värdigt en demokrati som vår att göra skillnad på människor’ (*Expressen*, Läs biskop Eva Brunnes predikan – ord för ord. Published 5 Oct 2010. Available at: <https://www.expressen.se/nyheter/val-2010/las-biskop-eva-brunnes-predikan---ord-for-ord/> [Accessed 20180703].

The Bishop never mentions the Sweden Democrats directly, but it is obvious that she speaks about them. At this point most of the Sweden Democrats leave their seats and exit the Church.⁶

Since the year 2000, the Church of Sweden is no longer a state church. However, due to a number of remaining links⁷ between Church and State, the political parties are, with no exception, involved in Church politics. The majority of the Church Assembly consists of members who have been elected via a party political nomination list. There are only a few nomination groups⁸ without direct or indirect links to political parties. Paradoxically Sweden is regarded as one of the most secularised countries in the world.⁹ This may, however, be contested. Around 70% of the population is organised in various faith communities.¹⁰

Prophetic preaching addresses power. One specific challenge in the Church of Sweden is that political power and church power often are combined in the same organisation. How will we preach on the day when [if] the Sweden Democrats become the largest party in the Parliament? Or even the largest nomination group in the Church Assembly? And even more challenging: how do we teach students to preach prophetically, in a church context were polls claim that up to 25 percent are prepared to vote for a policy that is described as populist nationalistic?¹¹

⁶ *Aftonbladet*, SD lämnade Storkyrkan. Ber kungen om ursäkt. Available at: <https://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/a/WL6Mnd/sd-lamnade-storkyrkan--ber-kungen-om-ursakt> [Accessed 2018-07-03].

⁷ With the exception of Stockholm and Tranås, the Church of Sweden is responsible for all cemeteries in Sweden. Even the Jewish and Muslim graveyards are generally looked after by staff employed by Church of Sweden. The constitution states that the regent of Sweden has to belong to the Evangelical Lutheran Confession. 'Såsom 2 § i 1809 års regeringsform uttryckligen stadgar, att Konung alltid skall vara av den rena evangeliska läran, sådan som den, uti den oförändrade Augsburgiska bekännelsen, samt Uppsala mötes beslut av år 1593, antagen och förklarad är [...]'. ['As 2 § in the Constitution of 1809 states, the regent of Sweden has to abide to the true Evangelical doctrine, adopted and explained in the Augsburg Confession and by the decisions of the Convocation of Uppsala.' My translation] *Sveriges riksdag*. Successionsordning. Available at: https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/successionsordning-18100926_sfs-1810-0926 [Accessed 2018-07-31]. Other faith communities may apply to the receiver of revenue to get help with the collection of Church fees. Church of Sweden, however, is guaranteed this service. Other religious functionaries may apply to be marriage officers. Pastors of the Church of Sweden are guaranteed this. As a matter of fact there is a specific law that describes what kind of denomination Church of Sweden should be and how it should be organized.

⁸ *Nomination group* [nomineringsgrupp] is the technical term for an organization, often a political party, which participate in Church elections.

⁹ Richard F. Tomasson, How Sweden Became So Secular, in: *Scandinavian Studies* Vol. 74.1 (2002), 61–88. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/40920355?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents [Accessed 2018-07-31].

¹⁰ According to statistics from Church of Sweden, the denomination consists of 6.1 million members. *Svenska kyrkan*. Available at: <https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/english> [Accessed 2018-06-18]. There are a number of other faith communities. The Swedish Agency for Support to Faith Communities is a governmental body supporting approximately 40 different faith communities with grants. Adding the members of these faith communities – 795 482 – to the 6.1 million, the number of organised believers in Sweden would count close to 68 % of the population. Myndigheten för stöd till trossamfund. *Statistik om trossamfund*. Available at: <http://www.myndighetenst.se/kunskap/statistik-om-trossamfund.html> [Accessed 2018-06-18]. Sweden has 10 151 588 citizens. *SCB*, Population statistics. Available at: <http://www.scb.se/en/finding-statistics/statistics-by-subject-area/population/population-composition/population-statistics/> [Accessed 2018-06-18].

¹¹ *Reuters*, Anti-immigration Sweden Democrats poll record high ahead of September election. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-sweden-election/anti-immigration-sweden-democrats-poll-record-high-ahead-of-september-election-idUSKCN1I00TA> [Accessed 2018-07-31]. At the general election held 2018-09-09 the Sweden Democrats remained the third largest party in the parliament but increased their percentage of the votes. In

I visualise, as an example listener, a young, frustrated man, who is brought up in Church, with a mother active in the Parish. When his father – the parents are long time divorced – joins the Sweden Democrats, the young man decides to take this opportunity to get closer to his dad and begins to show interest in the party. How do I preach to this church member? At the Church of Sweden Institute for Pastoral Education we need to prepare the students for this and similar challenges.

How can a prophetic Kairos¹² be described in the Church of Sweden?

When I teach prophetic preaching to both Pastors- and Deacons-to-be, I have asked them about which *Kairos* they see in their context. A variety of answers have been offered. Some mention climate change either in general or more particularly as a matter of animal rights. Human sexuality and the rights of LGBTI persons are also common themes. Mental illness is another suggestion and linked to that the challenge with a high rate of suicide, especially amongst the youth. Xenophobia and more especially Islamophobia also comes high on the list. Common to all classes is the lack of consensus.

These different expressions of Kairos could all be linked to an overarching concept used by Brueggemann, namely *military consumerism*. According to him it is “the dominant narrative of our time.”¹³ He continues:

In our time and circumstance, the narrative of US military consumerism and the YHWH narrative of social transformation, justice, and compassion are deeply intertwined and there is a great resistance to sorting them out.¹⁴

It resonates with Lose’s concept *hyperconsumerism* which is opposed to the Christian story.¹⁵ A Swedish theologian, Patrik Hagman, introduces a related concept.

Capitalistic Honor Culture is a way to be human where we define our relationships to each other through consumerism. In other times and in other cultures honor was achieved through one’s position in the family, clan, profession or through deeds.

2014 they got 12,86% and in 2018 17,53%. *Valmyndigheten*, Valresultat2018. Available at: <https://www.val.se/valresultat/riksdag-landsting-och-kommun/2018/valresultat.html> [Accessed 2018-09-21].

¹² For an extended discussion about the *Kairos* concept, see: *Anders Göransson*, *The Prophetic Voice of the South African Council of Churches after 1990 – Searching for a Renewed Kairos*. Salty Print, Cape Town 2011, 32-36.

¹³ *Walter Brueggemann*, *The Practice of Prophetic Imagination. Preaching an Emancipating Word*, Minneapolis 2012, 3.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁵ *David J. Lose*, *Preaching at the Crossroads. How the World – and our Preaching – is Changing*, Minneapolis 2013. 24.

Today we defend our honor through consumption of goods, thoughts and relations.

[My translation].¹⁶

This could be one way of focusing a *Kairos* in our time and our context. It also challenges the nationalistic narrative, that we see develop in many countries, where Sweden is but one example. The Sweden Democrats describe their vision like this, explaining what they want to achieve through their engagement in Church Politics:

Our vision is instead a broad and radical folk church where the Christian identity is strong and the love for one's own Country has a natural place next to the more general humanity. A Church that confirms its role as bearer of culture and defender of a Swedish, Nordic and Western cultural heritage.¹⁷

Members of this party are found in congregations and church councils. I can foresee a situation when preachers need to take a firm stand against this ideology. As already mentioned, even today, these sentiments are present in every congregation and this fact needs to be included in the preparation of a prophetic sermon.

Irrespective of how the students discern the *Kairos* or describe competing narratives in their contexts, they are bold in their preaching. But the way I experience the sermons held by students at the institute, social activism in different forms are often expressed in a way that Brueggemann would describe as *prose reductionism*.¹⁸ By prose he refers “to a world that is organized in a settled formulae, so that even pastoral prayers and love letters sound like memos.”¹⁹ There are examples when they manage to use another language, but not seldom their sermons are phrased the way Brueggemann describes. I agree with Tubbs Tisdale and Sharp when they write:

We hear too few “I Have a Dream” sermons that inspire the people of God with a new vision for the future of justice and equality that God intends, and too many sermons dedicated to analyzing the social ills of our day, calling people to accountability but offering little in terms of hope for the future.²⁰

¹⁶ ‘Den kapitalistiska hederskulturen är det sätt att vara människa där vi bestämmer våra relationer till varandra genom konsumtion. Då man i andra tider och i andra kulturer uppnår heder genom den plats man har genom sin familj, släkt, sitt yrke eller genom de handlingar man utfört, får och försvarar vi vår heder genom att konsumera varor, tankar och relationer’ (*Patrik Hagman*, Om sann gemenskap. Att leva i en kapitalistisk hederskultur, Skellefteå 2014).

¹⁷ ‘Vår vision är istället en bred och offensiv folkkyrka där den kristna identiteten är stark, där kärleken till det egna landet har en naturlig plats vid sidan av den allmänna människokärleken. En kyrka som bejakar sin roll som kulturbärare och förvaltare av ett svenskt, nordiskt och västerländskt kulturarv’ (*Sverigedemokraterna*, Tro och tradition. Available at: <https://sd.se/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/kyrkomanifest.pdf> [Accessed 2018-06-18]).

¹⁸ *Walter Brueggemann*, Finally comes the poet. Daring Speech for Proclamation, Minneapolis 1989, 141.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁰ *Leonora Tubbs Tisdale and Carolyn J. Sharp*, The Prophets and Homiletics, in: Carolyn J. Sharp (ed.), The Oxford Handbook of the Prophets (E-book), Oct 2016.

Inspiration from North American homiletical frameworks

Tubbs Tisdale and Sharp define what the term prophetic preaching means. First, it signifies a “preaching that confronts and challenges the status quo in light of the witness of the Scriptures.” Second, it can also be said about, “preaching that mediates for contemporary believers any of the dimensions of truth-telling and identity formation performed by the prophetic books.”²¹ Tubbs Tisdale claims that it is easier to experience prophetic preaching (and theology) when the church is oppressed or stands with the oppressed. She refers to her encounter with South Korean prophetic witness.²² According to Tubbs Tisdale, a prophetic preacher must however be clear that the task is either to be “afflicting the comfortable” or “comforting the afflicted” depending on context.²³ This is an important insight. If the preacher has not discerned in which context s/he is preaching, prophetic preaching becomes difficult. Most preachers do not preach to the parliament, like Bishop Brunne in the introduction of this paper. Most of the time, the listeners are ordinary citizens. How do we preach prophetically to them and to ourselves?

Tubbs Tisdale refers to Brueggemann when describing the role of the prophets of old. They “*criticized* the old order” but they also “*energized* the hearers with a vision of the new reign of God that was to come.”²⁴ Brueggemann elaborates on how the prophets both lament and proclaim hope. One example is Isaiah who “at the beginning and at the end, lines out *the drama of loss and the possibility of restoration.*”²⁵

When Tubbs Tisdale develops a “spirituality for activism” (with the terminology borrowed from James Forbes) she warns about a divide, where churches either focus on the interior or the exterior life of faith.²⁶ Brueggemann on the other hand, is not satisfied with this distinction. He notes that the Old Testament prophets were no social activists.²⁷ He then suggests that today’s prophetic preaching must be more than the *prose reductionism* just mentioned.²⁸ His inspiration are the prophets:

More important to them than concrete social issues is the fact that they characteristically spoke in poetic idiom with rich metaphors, so that their language is

²¹ Ibid.

²² *Leonora Tubbs Tisdale*, *Prophetic Preaching. A Pastoral Approach* Louisville 2010, xi.

²³ Ibid.. xiv.

²⁴ *Tubbs Tisdale* (note 22), xii.

²⁵ *Brueggemann* (note 13), 99.

²⁶ *Tubbs Tisdale* (note 22), 22.

²⁷ *Brueggemann* (note 13), 2.

²⁸ *Brueggemann* (note 18), 141.

recurringly teasing, elusive, and evocative, with lesser accent on instruction or didacticism.²⁹

Tubbs Tisdale brings in the specific role of parish pastors. They “are called to be both priests and prophets.”³⁰ From the early years of her ministry she learnt that “the prophets’ style of confrontational, head-on witness didn’t play very well in the Parish.”³¹ Her “goal is to discern how preachers can ‘speak truth in love’ in ways that enable congregations to genuinely hear and respond to the Word.”³²

This is also my objective. With my example listener in mind, I ask how I as a teacher assist preachers-to-be in finding a way to preach truth in love. Like De Gruchy³³ applies this bible quotation³⁴ to both the struggle against *apartheid* in South Africa and the German *Kirchenkampf*, it is a fitting approach in many other contexts.³⁵ Is there a risk in the Western world in general and therefore also in Sweden, that we might end up in a situation similar to the German or the South African? We are not there yet. But it would be naïve to say that there is no risk.

In order to reach to congregants in this context I find myself, more and more, longing for narratives, poetic language and metaphors in this world that Brueggemann describes as *Prose-Flattened*.³⁶ For myself and the students I teach, I seek to find a language that goes beyond instruction or didacticism. Therefore it has been natural to use course literature by homileticians like Brueggemann.

Other perspectives

Even though the textbooks that are used at the Church of Sweden Institute for Pastoral Education come from a different continent, the books are written by authors who have a similar social location as most ministerial students in the Church of Sweden. With few exceptions, students come from the white middle class. This is a challenge. The members of the Sweden Democrats, a majority being members of the same white middle class,³⁷ are however experiencing some kind of alienation.

²⁹ Brueggemann (note 13), 2.

³⁰ Tubbs Tisdale (note 22), xii.

³¹ Ibid., 41.

³² Ibid., xiii.

³³ John W. de Gruchy, *The Tension between Confessing Christ and the Unity of the Church in the Struggle for Justice in Living on the Edge. Essays in Honour of Steve de Gruchy, Activist & Theologian*, James R. Cochrane, in: Elias Bongmba/Isabel Phiri/Des van der Water (eds.) (Cluster Publications: Pietermaritzburg, 2012), 4.

³⁴ ‘But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ’ (Ephesians 4:15 NRSV).

³⁵ See also Anders Göransson, *How to speak the truth in love – Lutheran unity in diversity or mere division?* SMT 102.2 (2014), 113–137.

³⁶ Brueggemann (note 18), 1.

³⁷ Scholars from the renowned SOM Institute at the University of Gothenburg claim that supporters of the Sweden

Anders Hellström³⁸ refers to both the occasion when the Sweden Democrats left the Church service already mentioned and the fact that their party leader, Jimmie Åkesson, was not invited to the prestigious Nobel Banquet in 2010. These events are both important, national Swedish rites, where national unity is displayed. The fact that the Sweden Democrats either are excluded or exclude themselves from such events, supports the idea that they are alienated. If one claims that a prophetic sermon challenges the establishment – what does it mean in the Swedish context? Sweden Democrats who describe themselves as Christians might suggest that their presence on the scene is an example of a prophetic voice. As a matter of fact, there are some voices in the charismatic churches that do exactly this. A proponent of the prosperity gospel in March 2018, on a positive note, prophesized and stated that “the Sweden Democrats constitutes the only alternative for a change of political course.”³⁹ It would therefore be interesting to explore how pastors that sympathize with the Sweden Democrats would preach. It might however be difficult to find such pastors in the Church of Sweden. In a survey made by a Church publication, only 2.4 % of Pastors and Deacons in Church of Sweden answer that they are prepared to vote for the Sweden Democrats.⁴⁰

So the question is dire: who are the marginalized groups in Sweden? If prophetic preaching takes the standpoint of the oppressed – who are they? And how does this influence the prophetic voice? In this respect it would be helpful to bring in voices from other contexts than Western Europe and North American white middle class.

When Tubbs Tisdale and Sharp state that prophetic preaching today all too often “aligns itself with one political party or another, advocating its agenda and criticizing its opposition”⁴¹ they clearly have the US in mind. One can question if this, generally speaking, also could be said about Scandinavian preaching. Be that as it may, the preacher is always part of a context and that matters.

With the help of Marvin McMickle I realize that both preachers, homiletical students, and homileticians need to make decisions, based on which social location they find themselves in. McMickle highlights the fact that some Christians worship in “neighborhoods that look like bombed out war zones”⁴² while others never see this.

Democrats are ordinary members of the society. Cf. *Anders Sannerstedt*, Sverigedemokraternas sympatisörer, in: *Mittfåra och marginal. SOM-undersökningen 2013*, 445–458, 451.

³⁸ *Anders Hellström*, Varför vi älskar att hata Sverigedemokraterna, in: *Det vita fältet II. Samtida forskning om högerextremism. Specialnummer av Arkiv, Tidskrift för samhällsanalys No. 2, 2013*, 69–99, 72.

³⁹ “[...] SD utgör det enda alternativet till en ändrad politisk kurs” (*Lars Enarson*, Omvändelse är enda räddningen!, in: *Dagen*. 1 mars 2018. Available at: <https://www.dagen.se/debatt/lars-enarson-omvandelse-ar-enda-raddningen-1.1107919> [Accessed 2018-09-21]).

⁴⁰ *Lennart Lundberg*, Annie Löf – när präster och diakoner får välja, in: *Kyrkans Tidning*. Available at: <http://www.kyrkanstidning.se/nyhet/annie-loof-nar-praster-och-diakoner-far-valja> [Accessed 2018-09-07].

⁴¹ Tubbs Tisdale/Sharp (note 20).

⁴² *Marvin A. McMickle*, Where Have All The Prophets Gone?, in: *Ashland Theological Journal* 2005, 8. Available at:

For those who live and worship in exurbia and who never get close enough to the grimy side of America for anything to rub off on them, prophetic preaching becomes even more urgent.⁴³

During my years in South Africa I constantly moved between different spaces as part of my ministry. In my present position this is not the case. It might be the same with a majority of the students. When I teach students at our institute this perspective therefore needs to be included. Not only in theory. In order to fully grasp the importance of our location, we need to go from theory to practice. On the contrary, some of the students do carry that experience in their bodies, so it will be crucial to allow them to share their experiences.

At the same time, it will be of importance to take into consideration the diversity not only in social location but also in political views, both amongst students and parishioners. How the prophetic sermon can be heard by the churchgoer, irrespective of her or his ideology, is a challenge. This brings us to the issue of defense mechanisms.

Defense mechanisms

In my doctoral thesis the question was how the South African Council of Churches (SACC) had managed to find a renewed *Kairos* after 1990, when the African National Conference (ANC) had been unbanned and the SACC therefore had changed and become more of a mediator than a liberation organization.⁴⁴ The addressee of statements and resolutions was often the Government of South Africa. In analyzing the prophetic voice, I made use of Brueggemann's distinction between Davidic and Mosaic trajectories.

The Mosaic tradition tends to be a movement of protest which is situated among the disinherited and which articulates its theological vision in terms of a God who decisively intrudes, even against seemingly impenetrable institutions and orderings. / [...] [T]he Davidic tradition tends to be a movement of consolidation which is situated among the established [...]⁴⁵

When I ponder the role of the Church of Sweden a few decades after the separation between Church and State, I wonder if more of the Mosaic trajectory needs to find its way into the sermons.

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ashland_theological_journal/37-1_007.pdf [Accessed 2018-09-27]

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Anders Göransson, *The Prophetic Voice of the South African Council of Churches after 1990 – Searching for a Renewed Kairos*, Cape Town 2011.

⁴⁵ Walter Brueggemann, *Trajectories in Old Testament Literature and the Sociology of Ancient Israel*, in: Norman K. Gottwald/Richard A. Horsley (eds.), *The Bible and Liberation. Political and Social Hermeneutics*, Maryknoll 1993, 202.

On the other hand, ordinary parishioners, like my example listener, are persons without any political power. Preachers therefore need to be able to preach in a way that both addresses those with power and those who regard themselves (or are regarded by others) as people without power. Not least in relation to the migration issue the vision *to speak truth in love* is important.

In this regard it is crucial to show respect to the listener. Tubbs Tisdale states that "... one of the most difficult challenges in prophetic preaching is how to gain a hearing."⁴⁶ Together with Troeger she uses the word *resistance* in a way that could be problematic in a Swedish context. When writing on how to address congregational resistance through preaching they are aiming for "a style and mode of communication that helps people set aside their initial resistances to what Scripture may say to them, and open themselves to a fresh hearing of it."⁴⁷ In an ordinary Swedish Parish context a critical distance to the Scripture is usually encouraged.

They have in a previous chapter, with inspiration from Barbara Lundblad, stated that fear of change is at the heart of people's resistance to sermons. Inspired by James Dittes they also underscore that "the 'No' from congregants may indicate the minister is dealing with something of crucial importance to them."⁴⁸

Tubbs Tisdale points to the risk of a "style of confrontational, head-on witness."⁴⁹ From especially Brueggemann we can learn to make use of poetic language, narratives, and metaphors in this regard. In relation to people with power, Brueggemann writes:

Those like Nebuchadnezzar, insulated in their self-deception and surrounded by 'yes-men' and 'yes-women', cannot be addressed frontally [...]. It is that fanciful communication, made when the royal muscles are relaxed and the king is vulnerable, that creates a fresh moment of discernment.⁵⁰

More important, however, is the objective to reach people with less power – the ordinary church member. We can get some help from pedagogy in order to problematize what we mean with resistance. Illeris writes about barriers to learning. He makes a distinction between *defense* and *resistance*.

Whereas the defense mechanisms exist prior to the learning situation and function reactively, resistance is caused by the learning situation itself as an active response.

⁴⁶ Tubbs Tisdale (note 22), 41.

⁴⁷ Thomas H. Troeger/Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *A Sermon Workbook. Exercises in the Art and Craft of Preaching*, Nashville 2013, 97.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 94.

⁴⁹ Tubbs Tisdale (note 22), 41.

⁵⁰ Brueggemann (note 18), 136.

Thus resistance contains a strong mental mobilisation and therefore also a strong learning potential, especially for accommodative and even transformative learning.⁵¹

If we aim to utilize this learning potential, then response, feedback and a possibility of opposition to what the sermon entails, cannot be underestimated. An open conversation around the sermon between preachers and parishioners is essential. An open-ended preaching style is helpful here. I find resonance in the use of the concept of imagination, as used by Brueggemann,⁵² with a definite aim of both giving lament, relinquishment, and loss enough time but also to paint hope with prophetic imagination.

One side of this respect is to avoid rushing away from situations of despair. With Brueggemann we get inspiration from the prophets, who realized that “loss was a consequence of failed fidelity. In the depth of the night, however, theological reprimand is not what is needed. What is required, rather, is the honest voicing of the reality of loss.”⁵³ Tubbs Tisdale supports this when she refers to Emilie Townes and invites her congregation to stand with LGBT⁵⁴ persons in their suffering. She quotes the sermon of Townes:

but we often move too hastily to console the wounded
assuring them that everything will be alright
in our rush to help
we cover up their pain
diffuse their agony
and ignore their misery
before *they've* had a chance to even experience the pain for themselves.⁵⁵

Equally important is the answer to this. Brueggemann continues: “The divine response, in lyrical force, each time overpowers the lament.”⁵⁶

Conclusion

⁵¹ Knud Illeris, *A Comprehensive Understanding of Human Learning*, in: idem (ed.), *Contemporary Theories of Learning. Learning Theorists ... in their own words*, London/New York 2009, 7–20, 16.

⁵² Brueggemann: 2012. 22.

⁵³ Brueggemann (note 13), 81.

⁵⁴ Tubbs Tisdale uses the acronym like this. Tubbs Tisdale (note 22), 48.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 48.

⁵⁶ Brueggemann (note 13), 83.

In this paper I have started to map out a simple but manageable form of prophetic preaching based on thoughts from especially Brueggemann. The question is still how we as preachers express loss and relinquishment in a Swedish set-up, when too much lament could play into the hands of ultra-right wings? The question: ‘What happened last night in Sweden?’ has many answers.

To express hope is even more challenging. The motto of the Sweden Democrats is Security and Tradition.⁵⁷ Bishop Eva Brunne, in her sermon, tried to express something different. Her motto comes from James 2:1, “show no partiality.”⁵⁸ The challenge is how to paint a picture that has the potential of becoming hopeful to both convinced antiracists and to church members and citizens who are fearful when it comes to migration.

In the present situation and in an ordinary congregation, I believe that this could be achieved with prophetic preaching inspired from the Biblical example, with its narratives and with metaphors and poetic language. There might come a situation when a more confrontational, head-on witness is needed. Especially if the Sweden Democrats grow. Their objective is to take over the church. There are also signs that other political parties have changed their policies in a more xenophobic direction.

Swedes have for a long time regarded the nation as a unity. We have much to learn from homileticians like Brueggemann and Tubbs Tisdale, who write from a more diverse context. Likewise, we would benefit from perspectives that Sharp and McMickle can give from yet another point of view.

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⁵⁷ ‘Trygghet och tradition’ (Sverigedemokraterna. Available at <https://sd.se/> [Accessed 2018-07-22]).

⁵⁸ ‘Gör inte skillnad på människor’ (*Svenska kyrkan Stockholms stift*, Biskop Eva Brunnes valspråk – Gör inte skillnad på människor. Available at: <https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/stockholmsstift/biskop-evas-valsprak> [Accessed 2018-07-31]).