

LITURGY AT THE EDGES: BETWEEN DOXOLOGY AND DOMESTICATION

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Abstract

This article comments upon a dualism between biblical doxology and its domestication in practice, as found in the contentanalysis of sermons held on radio and television in South Africa in the last phase of the apartheid regime. Case studies reported at the 20th congress of the Societas Liturgica in 2005, on the theme of Liturgy and Reconciliation demonstrated that this dualism was a world wide phenomenon, present in most churches. The article describes at length how the liturgy, which could be a force in the moral discourses that took place in the country, was in actual fact made subservient to the existing sociopolitical ideology, thereby not transforming existing evil practices, rather conforming to it. Exceptions to this were the liturgy and litanies found in the services of the churches supporting the struggle. The article shows how the biblical imperatives were made blunt in the liturgy, how it influenced the total content, presentation and language used in the liturgy. In this sad story, the liturgy became an instrument of ideologies, actually legitimizing them! In the second part concrete suggestions are made how existing elements of the liturgy can be revitalised. It contains a strong plea for the role of lament in a broken, more pastoral liturgy. Finally, arguing from the perspective of inculturation, certain new elements are suggested for a liturgy living on the edges in the often vacant public square.

Key words: Doxology, Ideology, Inculturation, Lament, Liturgy

*I dedicate this article to the memory of the well-known Prof W D Jonker who passed away on August 27, 2006. His theology, manifested in lectures, publications, synodical activities and public appearances were based on expositions of the three Reformed solas. He lived and worked in faith and by grace alone, in obedience to the Word of God. Preaching, like the whole liturgy, was to be expositions of the Word of grace found in the gospel of the text for the Sunday service (see *Die Woord as opdrag*, 1976). In obedience to this Word, as the Word of Christ, he struggled against the corruption of the doxology, wherein the *solī deo gloria* could so easily become subservient to the non-theological, especially sociopolitical ideology of the day (see his autobiography in 1998). It is fitting that this article which echoes his concerns be published in *Scriptura*.*

In various of my articles (cf full bibliography in Muller 2002:27-32 on the role of worship in ethics, as well as Hauerwas & Wells 2004:1-50) I emphasized the formative power of liturgy as a shaper of new moral practices, opening up new social contexts and localities and creating spaces where a new moral order can be learned. I describe the need of such spaces where patience, endurance and mutual trust can be relearned, where the much

needed transformation of a divided and violent society can be practised, experienced and celebrated, while replacing old memories with new moral practices, not only with new moral principles! *Liturgical celebration has the potential to do just this*: It can provide a liturgical re-description of the so-called fixed realities in church and society. Liturgy has the ability to construct new living worlds, to liberate the imagination, to generate hope amidst injustice by training the faith community to look in a new direction and to dream of God's alternative new dispensation. As one of the many formational forces in the church and society, liturgy indeed has this creative power to produce, fashion and sustain the new world hoped for.

A liturgy serving these transformation processes inevitably becomes a prophetic, provocative liturgy, voicing God's new order that challenges and protests against the existing structurally embedded cultural, political and often ecclesial order. But this subversive, revolutionary, rather raw side of liturgy can easily be domesticated in an ideological servitude to existing or newly developed cultural and political strategies of dominant systems of power. As will be shown later in the discussion of worldwide case studies, liturgy can be used to uphold certain theological views bordering on becoming ideological. In the process, it thus no longer is a liturgy that transforms, but one that conforms to existing cultural and theological systems. It blunts the sharp cutting edges of an imaginative, dynamic and prophetic-critical liturgy. By this domestication of liturgy it becomes an instrument in the hands of an ideology; in fact, it actually legitimizes it.

Liturgical practices seem to live constantly at the edges between Doxology and Ideology. In a study on the immanent problem of power in Reformed theology, Peter Opitz (2005:13,27) argues:

“Es geht sowohl um dem Evangelium abgeleitete Machtkritik wie um das Einbringen des Evangeliums als Gestaltungsmacht ... Die bleibende Aufgabe (besteht) sich der Faktizität von Macht und Mächten zu stellen, und in der je eigene Situation in actu zwischen legitimer und illegitimer Macht, zwischen ‘Gottesdienst’ und ‘Götzendienst’ – innerhalb wie ausserhalb die Gemeinde – zu unterscheiden”. This will also be the ‘bleibende Aufgabe’ of the liturgy: To distinguish between ‘Götzendienst’ and ‘Gottesdienst’”.

Liturgy, domesticated by ideology, always becomes selective. Even the sermon becomes selective. For example, it can merely concentrate on Mary's servile attitude, paying no attention to the revolutionary sharp edges of the Magnificat in Luke 2. Singing of hymns become selective when, for example, Psalm 146 verse one (in the Afrikaans *Liedboek*) is sung with great passion, but verse four, which expresses God's care for the poor, is often disregarded in these services! We have so many examples of selective intercessory prayers, even selective celebrations of Holy Communion (cf Wepener 2002). It can even be a liturgy that tries to worship God as the Most High in a charismatic or dogmatically “correct” way ... In a self-sufficient and complacent way, the liturgical “play” proceeds, putting God on his throne, a venerable Object of worship ... But, He is no longer an “elusive presence” (cf Terrien's title, 1978) that breaks into our smug religious world, transforming our liturgy on the edges.

This ideological servitude also becomes apparent in the descriptive language of liturgy when the specific and sharp, prophetic and protesting *creative* language is exchanged for a mere decorative and *descriptive*, theologically correct language (cf Westermann 1965:22f on the dangerous move from declarative to descriptive language). The basic claims of God's new Kingdom are no longer audible. The transformative stories reminding the faith community of God's reconciliation and liberation of the world, which gives a creative new vision to the liturgical celebration “from below,” can be reduced to the “pure” spiritual

aspects of the Gospel. Very often, a one-sided theology of creation is used to legitimize the so-called unchangeable order seen as willed by God, and expressed in the existing order of things. In this way, liturgy is robbed of its invigorating and transformative power because, in the process, God is “robbed” of his evocative power. Liturgically speaking, God is “in a box.” He changes very little in the daily power structures in which the congregation exists! This sad story, can remind one of the prophets’ criticism of exactly this kind of liturgical servitude (cf e.g. Is 1:11-15 & Am 5:21-24).

1. Liturgical Case Studies – A Tale of Sad Stories

In the late eighties of the previous century, the last days of the apartheid regime, which resulted in a community that was culturally, socially, economically and often ecclesially in the throes of a power dominion, a research project was done, inter alia, on the dogmatic content and ethical impact of liturgy as manifested in public church services transmitted by radio and television (for full details, cf publications by Müller: 1984, 1989, 1991; and by Müller & Smith 1991 and 1994). These services were broadcasted from ordinary local congregations, meeting for worship in their usual venues and at normal times. Content analysis was done in order to quantify concepts that express the type of spirituality, the church’s relation to society, the ethical responsibility of believers and the church in accordance with scriptural and sound doctrinal principles, and also in terms of social issues mentioned in church debates and in official media news reports, amongst others, the radio and television. The research problem was to ascertain whether this “public” liturgy was in any way an agent of reconciliation in a divided society and in intergroup relations, and to establish whether it was in any way an agent of justice fostering the dream of an unjust society’s transformation, or whether an alternative new world was promulgated, giving hope to the existing old world that was falling to pieces ... *The results told a sad story.* Instead of being such a liberative and creative agent, it manifested a liturgy that, in actual fact, legitimized the ideology that formed the backbone of the existing cultural and one-sided theological power structure, of the accepted way of life, predominant in South African society. Let me summarize the findings: In general, the liturgy did not transform, but conformed to, and legitimized, this accepted way of life, and often presented religious arguments in support of it. It was indeed a public liturgy on the edges, but a public liturgy in splendid isolation – perhaps deeply “spiritual” and dogmatically correct, but robbed of its transformative power! Concepts concentrated on the individual’s spiritual life; the *intra nos* aspects of faith were completely dominant, so that it became obvious that the main intention of the liturgy was to “make religious people even more religious”!

Concepts dealing with the Christian calling in society amounted to a meagre 1%. The same percentage was found for concepts dealing with public justice, reconciliation between groups, the lamentable present conditions of suffering, or in defence of the powerless, the downtrodden or unemployed who were nourishing hope for a better future. Of these services, 60% had no ethical impact whatsoever.

Full details of this analysis can be found in Müller, *HSRC Reports* of 1984, 1989, 1992; Müller and Smith, 1991 and 1994, as well as numerous articles by them individually and combined in *NGTT* and *Scriptura* (cf a complete list in the Bibliography and also Cilliers 2006:1-15). No wonder that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) (1988, 65f, here 91) that reported on “faith communities as agents of oppression” who lacked the courage to testify, came to the conclusion that “Christianity, as the dominant religion in South Africa promoted the ideology of apartheid.”

This, evidently, was a liturgy that privatized all religious experiences, manifesting a problem-free and kind of triumphant religious life in which suffering, marriage and family problems, drug addiction, poverty, social and political injustices did not come into focus. The public square remained naked (cf Neuhaus 1984): The raw and abrasive sides of liturgy were either smoothed over in focusing on private religion, or were completely negated. Furthermore, the existing liturgy legitimized the accepted ideology. When this happens, liturgy becomes an extremely ideological instrument. *This, indeed, is a sad story!*

At the 20th congress of the Societas Liturgica held in Dresden, 8-13 August 2005, plenary addresses and case studies reported on the central theme of liturgy and reconciliation. Some of these case studies, reporting on liturgical practices in diverse countries, and churches told the same sad story! *This again manifested clearly that liturgy can form, but also malform, worshipping communities: They can heal and unite, but can also divide.* They demonstrated how liturgy could provide a sacred canopy for racial distinctions, and divine justification for social injustices and separation. Examples were found of the corruption of sacramental practices that sanctify separate structures in the society and church (cf Wepener 2005). Other examples described external factors connected to historical worship that strengthened class supremacy (worshippers' attire, cars parked in parking lots, etc. ... as reported in Scott Haldeman's case study). In addition, legalism and authoritarianism that are part and parcel of so many utopian liturgies. In short, these case studies told the sad stories of liturgies that form religious communities in ways that often betray the Gospel itself. Therefore, the meaning of liturgy often is not a product of the Gospel, but of socio-political factors, according to an address by Theresa Berger.

In conclusion: Many temptations face the church's worship, temptations to replace the one, strange, unique and powerful story by harmonizing it with the story of the popular and dominant culture – thereby stripping liturgy of all that makes it truly Christian. The creative tension between the Story and our stories is replaced by harmony. And this is a sad story!

2. Another Case Study: A Story that Generates Hope in a Broken World

It must be noted that, at the same time, some of the churches in South Africa supported the struggle against the unjust social and political dominant system. Consequently, the subversive, often revolutionary but liberating essence of the Gospel very often manifested in their liturgy. In many cases, it was the liturgy of the underground, literally a liturgy of the night. The voices of these liturgical practices and litanies were rarely heard in public or noticed in daylight. These services were rarely broadcasted: Their leaders often being jailed, their voices silenced. Characteristic of these liturgies of the night is: They did speak out against the system's atrocities and injustices. But, very often they merely recited stories of liberation in Scripture (e.g. Ex 2, 13, etc), which demonstrates the power of merely reading Scripture. It was liturgy more in a low key: Consisting of prayers, litanies and hymns ("We shall overcome" and so-called spirituals). They expressed lament as well as hope. The lamenting prayers became the fervent expressions of the dream of God's alternative new world. It was a liturgy full of the "dangerous whispers of the night." These were examples of what Brueggemann calls a liturgy "from below" (1988:178, footnote 3, with specific reference to the South African situation of a "contrast between controlling liturgies from above" and threatening liturgies "from below"; cf also 171, footnote 27 on the prohibition of the South African government on the singing of Christmas carols among so-called restless blacks because "carols were too emotional to be sung in a time of national unrest ... candles have become revolutionary symbols." The TRC Report (1998:91)

describes well how such faith communities acted as opponents to oppression – also in their liturgies they “boldly resisted apartheid,” paying a price for doing so.

In this way, another story emerged on the edges: That of a liturgy ushering in an imaginative new dispensation, nourishing a new world of transformation and reconciliation. And this is a story nourishing hope in a quiet, whispering way. And this is a story of hope!

But, in the new South Africa, this liturgy can, once again, become subservient to the new dispensation and social structures as new socio-political factors become meaning producers in the liturgy, as Müller and Smit proved in their analysis of liturgies in the period of transition after the 1994 democratic elections.

In the phase of transition and transformation, liturgy must live on the edges. The question is: How?

3. Living Liturgically on the Edges

3.1 Reshaping Existing Liturgical Elements by Means of Honest Critique

To move towards worshipping services that give strength to the witnessing community, while expressing its true identity and nourishing unity, there is an urgent need to reshape liturgy's dividing rituals and to be sensitive to the non-theological and often evil social factors that lie at the heart and grassroots level of many Christian rituals. Therefore, liturgical reforms and renewals must include an ethical test that examines the way the different social and cultural contexts, with which it must contend, influence existing rituals. A more profound and honest critique of existing liturgical practices must drive renewal and reform – a critique based on a liturgical hermeneutic of suspicion, attending to the realities in life that shape, disturb, distort, enrich, contest and encroach upon liturgy (cf Tanner 2002:228f). Only then, liturgical practices will encourage hope for new constructions of reality, creating new worlds of life and opening the future (on this role of liturgy, cf Lukken 2004:54f). This will result in:

3.1.1 Becoming more conscious of the brokenness of liturgy. Because the Divine Presence very often comes to us in the incarnate form of brokenness, this brokenness must be inscribed into the very heart of Christian worship as its most compelling and profound characteristic. For example, in the liturgy of the Eucharist, it offers the breaking of the bread as a sign of the redemptive restoration of a broken world (cf Chauvet 2001:236f; Culpepper 1997). In contrast to a utopian liturgy, this broken liturgy and liturgical humility should once more mirror God's gentle, friendly and pastoral countenance.

On 14 September 2005, in a lecture on: Challenges of being a Reformed Church in South Africa today, Prof Dirkie Smit referred to the meeting of Reformed Churches in Kitwe, which stressed the necessity of a comforting and pastoral interpretation of Scripture. He said: “Elke leerstuk van Calvyn kan slegs verstaan word teen die agtergrond van die trou van die lewende Verbondsgod, die drievoudige teenwoordigheid van die verhoogde Christus, die fontein van ontferminge in die hart van die genadige Drie-enige God.” This surely is what Karl Barth meant by his emphasis on God's “humanness.” But this broken liturgy can at the same time be a daring liturgy, loaded with a defiant doxology, defiant songs, prayers, sermons. Because liturgy implies a vision of alternative possibilities in the existing situation, defying the order of things and way of life, it is the place where the celebrating community can act out its true identity and vocation.

Once again, we must reconsider the profound connection between liturgy and pastoral practice, underlining the fact that renewal of our pastoral practice is connected intimately to the renewal of liturgy, and vice versa (in detail, cf Ramshaw 1987). We indeed live in a broken world of Aids, poverty, and abuse in thousandfold ways. A renewed liturgy must be celebrated in the midst of pain, *the pain* of broken relationships, fractured intimacy, illness and fear..., *the pain* of inner desperation suffering under the burden of a system that cannot be changed, resulting in people becoming docile and immobilized – or filled with rage ..., *the pain* of public life with its violence embedded in grand policies, public values ... Liturgies that lack this pastoral approach finally lead to the utter hopelessness of people existing at the edges often with a liturgy that denies the pain, a kind of make-believe “Sunday worship” in which no names are given to concrete pains, or giving it other nicer names A pastoral liturgy must make deliberate inroads into these manifold dimensions of pain, realizing that pain often is the matrix of liturgy. This liturgy must express vividly the concrete pain in order to assist in a powerful transition towards generating hope. Amidst bleak despair, liturgy must reshape pain into new counter-possibilities of life enriched by the experience of pain in the company of a worshipping community. The healing of these wounds must be rooted in a more gentle, more pastoral liturgy: From the call to worship, through the ministry of sacraments and the sermon to intercessory prayers and, finally, in the benediction (cf 1 Cor 10 & 11 on the intimate relationship between sacrament, ethics and healing). Here, wounded people and societies must be healed by an incarnative and “more gentle” sacramental liturgy where scarred people, living in scarred relationships, can look up into the face of a scarred God (cf also Nouwen 2003:144 on the breaking of bread being central to the human community).

This is the true sursum corda of the Eucharist where suffering is drawn into the sphere of God's grace and His benevolent understanding.

3.1.2 *The brokenness of liturgy will emphasize honest lament being included in every true liturgy* as part of the sacramental response to pain in its multiple forms and situations. In Reformed doctrine glorifying God is the heartbeat of a life of faith, in Sunday worship and in daily life (Westminster Confession). But the doxology should go hand in hand with an honest lament, in all its brokenness (see the Psalms). Also in the doxology God's ethos has to meet the human pathos in the liturgy. Thus, it becomes a liturgical space for healing, beside the more common pastoral spaces and practices. Brueggemann (cf *Praise*, 90: “Israel's transformative liturgy must dance and cry”) emphasizes that a liturgy of lament and honest confession always is an essential part of all good doxology, thereby counteracting the above-mentioned ideological servitude at the edges of all liturgy. At the edges of doxology and ideology, lament seems inappropriate, almost a scandal in a church obsessed with a triumphant liturgy and expression of its faith, especially in a social system that cannot be changed or criticized. Westermann (1965) quite rightly stresses the fact that, at least in the Psalms, pain is articulated, addressed to Yahweh in the process of Israel's liturgy. This liturgy of lament helps the church to move away from a hard, self-sufficient *theologia gloriae*, thereby liberating it to move sacrament-liturgically towards a broken world where God can be worshipped in areas of poverty, violence, hunger and injustice ... areas in which the praise of God must be heard in order to break the circle of hopelessness and grief (cf Ackerman in Botman 47-57; Arbuckle 1991). Brueggemann (1988:131 and more explicitly on pp 135 & 148; cf also his 1986:9-47,

57-71; 1984:51-77; 1974:3-19 and, in general, Westermann 1965), quite justifiably, says that the healing hope, the prospect of transformation can only be realized in the transactions of daily life where pain is surfaced and healing is articulated close at hand. Dorothy Sölle (1984:90) quite rightly says that all true theology begins in pain.

The experience of pain has to become more and more the matrix of all liturgies struggling at the edges.

3.1.3 The specific naming of private, individual and communal sins, such as anger, strife, racism, and disunity, in all their ecclesial and societal aspects, become important aspects of liturgy, especially in a divided society. The church needs to develop specific rituals where these concrete societal sins can be named, confession and remission of sin clearly and vividly be expressed, new promises of forgiveness be made and embraced spiritually, but also physically (cf Kanneson 2004:53-67). For example, the church in general was far too slow in developing such rituals in which the verbal confessions heard at meetings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission were brought into liturgical spaces of forgiveness and transformation. Such liturgical acts are very positive ways in which extremely painful memories could be dealt with: For example, the old liturgies of the so-called Day of the Covenant should be replaced also *liturgically* with a new liturgy for the Day of Reconciliation! (On reconciliation, cf Berkman 2004:95-109 and Katongota 2004:68-81 specifically on racial reconciliation.) In its liturgy, the church must always remember that, according to 1 Peter 4:17, judgement begins in God's household. It must confess that political, cultural and even quasi-theological issues have frequently overwhelmed it. By genuine confession in the liturgy, the community of faith can deal with these regrettable aspects of its own past and the painful stories of avoiding its prophetic task, its failure to speak a word against existing power structures in society and in the church, its disobedience to the call for reconciliation and unity – also for liturgies which side-stepped all these regrettable aspects in beautiful services of worship and praise, services in which the powerless and downtrodden' "whispers of the night" were not heard in its so very spiritual liturgies!

Liturgy is an exercise in the church's memory at the edges: It is liturgically an unlearning of these sad and extremely painful old stories and, in confession, replacing it with the celebration of new stories of hope.

3.1.4 *A new emphasis on the role of the credo, or confession of faith.* The credo, or the confession of faith, represents the core of the church's memory of its faith in situations experienced throughout its long history. It is much more than an often self-satisfied summary of its dogmatic principles. The credo is an affirmation of its permanent dependence on God (cf Mt 5:3), a confession of "the mighty acts of God" (Ac 2:11). These acts of God, emanating from His steadfast love, form the basis of the faith community's normative memory. The credo transforms struggling individuals and the community into a community that confesses 'we' believe – a confession that must be *renewed* in every new situation (cf Clines 1976 on this credo as a communal act). Regular credo renewal is required in liturgy, issuing in renewed trust in God, even in the darkest hour. This liturgical *celebration* of the credo "in the night" has the power to transform the pain, each new recital being the acceptance of the community of believers' shared faith – a community that must witness continuously to its

ecumenical foundations: “Called in one hope of its calling: One Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Eph 4:4b,5. On the central role of recital in the Old Testament, cf Von Rad 1966: 1-78; Wright 1952 and Walzer 1985).

3.2 The Role of Inculturation and Context in Developing New Liturgical Tools

In the development of new liturgical tools, it is important to notice that, in this development, a balance must always be found between liturgy that expresses the church’s identity and a transformative liturgy as a regenerative force in the lives of participants and worshipping communities who live in new social and cultural contexts.

3.2.1 In every age, liturgy must be studied in relation to other formational forces in society. This will help to relieve the church of the burden of many sad stories mentioned above. Liturgical inculturation must help the church to move beyond the dikes of liturgical “essentialism” towards generating new liturgical inroads in society, acting as agents of transformation, without destroying the church’s identity in its liturgical celebrations. (Cf Wepener’s plea for the role of liturgical enculturation to assist processes of transformation in society in his 2005 article. Arbuckle, 1990 discusses this in detail.)

3.2.2 Although social and cultural contexts constantly bring liturgy towards the edges, they must be seen as a necessary challenge, being co-constitutive in the production of new meaning in hackneyed liturgical celebrations. (In 2005, Berger worked this out in her presentation.) We must remember that meaning does not reside automatically, absolutely, or even primarily, in the existing liturgical texts. Worshippers, who live in concrete situations and who conspire with the old and new texts, *create* meaning – sometimes even opposing these texts. (Here, Ricoeur’s 1976 emphasis on the hermeneutical surplus of meaning becomes active. For the role of culture in meaning-production, cf Stringer 2000:365-379; Tanner 1997:128-138.) Therefore, these social and cultural contexts of liturgy require a significant *broadening* of our liturgical tools and this again implies a plurality of *new* liturgical meaning-making tools in order to become more meaning-full.

This is what was evident in the description and analysis of liturgical celebrations in South Africa. Abstract timeless texts did not determine liturgical meanings, but the specific timeframe in which these celebrations took place. The material, social, political and cultural realities were co-constitutive in the production of meaning, so that certain congregations found solace in these implied meanings, whilst others resisted them.

3.2.3 Therefore, in broadening liturgical tools and developing new rituals, it will be the task of liturgical traditions to continue opening new worlds *beyond* the religious flavour (and liturgical kitsch) of the day. Liturgy must be the midwife of a Divine Presence and *there is much more to the encountering of Divine Presence than that mediated by popular liturgical fancies of the day!* There is indeed a danger of idolatrous worship, of doxology without channels of God’s divine love for His entire creation. It can easily become worship abstracted from the politics of human need, to become a form of emotional and spiritual escape. In mediating the living Divine Presence, liturgy becomes filled with divine compassion in companionship of love and care. “In remembrance of Him” a new creative liturgy must be born in these new

contexts, a liturgy that imaginatively discloses the evangelical possibilities in impossible situations (cf Durand 2005). Thus, liturgy can assist in the symbolic opening of the future, nourishing new hope.

3.2.4 *The role of liturgy in creating new and safe spaces to provide momentum to much needed pastoral and ecumenical actions.* On account of liturgy's diaconological and missiological dimensions (cf Du Preez, 1988), it must not only provide a home for lonely congregationalists, but must also supply a home and shelter for people outside the church. Although the liturgy is focused primarily on the baptismal community of faith, there is a need for a more comprehensive, inviting liturgy that does not limit and confine God's blessing solely to this faith community. The horizon of the Gospel is never confined to the church, but looks beyond it to the larger horizon of the Kingdom, giving the nations access to the blessing of God. It must focus *simultaneously* on outsiders to help them find God-given foundations for life in all its complexities. In actual fact, God's blessing provides a foundation to all life, also that outside the church. (for this, cf Brueggemann 1997:83f). The Divine Presence and His blessing must be celebrated in social contexts that lie outside the classical church milieu. Outside the official church, many people live who have no experience of faith interpretation of situations of life, such as birth, marriage, illness or death. Traditional liturgy mostly excludes these people from the rites of passage that rituals apply to such changes in life. Hence, the urgent need to develop forms of liturgy and rituals that help outsiders to deal with these experiences in a significant way, helping them to make sense of the meaning of life in such situations. For example, the blessing bestowed on a newborn baby and on marriage in the name of God, the closeness of God and His people pronounced over people in difficult situations can impart new meaning to their lives (cf Westermann, 1965 on blessing). A need for rituals must also be developed to celebrate secular festivals, such as New Year's Day, Valentine's Day, Women's Day, etc.

In our résumé of sad stories, we noted that liturgies can also divide, can embody the divisive issues of faith and doctrine, church order, culture and history ... resulting in a divided Baptism and Eucharist, a disunity so blatantly obvious for all to see, lacking all credibility (cf Best's 2005 presentation). *Here, in the liturgy, the identity of the church is at stake.* Therefore, there is a need to reshape dividing rituals, to develop new liturgical celebrations and especially imaginative new locations by which, and in which, the identity of the church as one body of Christ can be embraced. In situations where discussions on unity become stagnant, these new ecumenical spaces of worship are extremely important. They often must be small locations where the ecumenical hope is celebrated hesitantly as a starting point – in the process, learning much needed patience and endurance. For the liturgy, to express the desire for unity often is fragile and timid – it needs “safe” places, giving hopeful protection in a liturgy where all become part of a new fellowship of trust. These are spaces where the faith community gathers around the *one* Table, where eating and drinking are affirmations of their complete obedience to the *one* Lord. Then, the space between discussing principles of unity, preaching the one infallible Word and celebrants living in divided worlds become flesh around the Table. The document on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (Faith and Order Paper 111*, par. 20, WCC Geneva 1982, referring to Mt.5.23, 1 Cor 10:16f, 2 Cor 11:20-22, Gal 3:28) quite rightly states:

The Eucharist embraces all aspects of life. It is a representative act of thanksgiving and offering on behalf of the whole world. The Eucharistic celebration demands reconciliation and sharing among all those regarded as brothers and sisters in the one family of God and is a constant challenge in the search for appropriate relationships in social, economic and political life. The same can be said of baptism as a ritual of obedience to God's overall plan and will for humanity (cf Ro 6:9f & Gal 3:27,28).

In this unity's liturgical embracing and fostering, lie liturgy's future greatest challenge, but also the opportunity to be the energetic midwife mediating the living God's power and presence amidst the worshipping community.

In summary, liturgy is an exercise in memory and also an exercise in eschatological hope. In this sense, it moves forward, continues to live on the edges ... While confessing its sad stories, it gradually unlearns them in the process of making new beginnings, eagerly striving towards the manifestation of "the revelation of the sons of God" (Ro 8:19f). In the final instance, liturgy is God's work in, for, and through His church. Therefore, liturgy can, and must be, an exercise in prayerfully waiting upon His Triune Presence. *Only then, liturgy becomes true doxology counteracting all forms of ideology.*

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