

Youth Worship in Protestant Contexts

A Practical Theological Theory of Participation of Adolescents

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1. Question and design of the research

Since the second part of the nineteenth century, young people have been considered more and more as a specific group. This development has grown since the second part of the twentieth century. Differentiation has also come in churches.¹ Youth Ministry has got shape, often with a missionary aim. Worshipping in the youth's own language also has become more urgent. In the 21st century, the church faces this challenge in a context that has its own tension: the context of a network society where many young Christian people live in a post-Christian setting. Moreover, the phenomenon of youth churches at the beginning of this century had put forward the topic of youth worship.²

The problem was that we did not have much academic insight into the field of youth worship and the perspectives of adolescents in this. A conceptual framework to interpret youth worship in the Protestant context in the Netherlands had to be developed. The question in this research was: how do adolescents participate in youth worship? The aim was twofold: firstly, to describe and explain how adolescents participate in youth worship, and secondly to formulate the contemporary concepts that can be helpful to gain a better academic insight in the field of youth worship. We sought to understand the perspective of young people on worship, their longings and motivations, their expressions and experiences. Our contribution to the study of participation in youth worship took place in the practical theology and more specific at the intersection of youth ministry and liturgical ritual studies.

* P.M. SONNENBERG: *Youth Worship in Protestant Contexts. A Practical Theological Theory of Participation of Adolescents* (self-published) 249p. (ISBN: 978-94-6108-911-3). Promotie: 18 februari 2015, Protestantse Theologische Universiteit, Amsterdam. Promotores: prof. dr. M. Barnard, prof. dr. M. Nel; co-promotor: dr. A. de Kock. E-mail: pmsonnenberg@pthu.nl.

¹ M.H. SENTER, et al.: *Four views of youth ministry and the Church. Inclusive congregational, preparatory, missional, strategic* (Grand Rapids 2001) 126; F. SCHWEITZER: *Postmoderner Lebenszyklus und Religion. Eine Herausforderung für Kirche und Theologie* (Gütersloh 2003) 24ff.

² This phenomenon is not only a Dutch phenomenon, see for example, the dissertations by J. HALL: *The rise of the youth congregations and its missiological significance* (PhD thesis, Birmingham 2003); a German research to a particular youth church is E. STAMS: *Das Experiment Jugendkirche. Die ersten Jahre der Jugendkirche TABGHA in Oberhausen. Eine exemplarische Fallstudie zur Problematik jugendpastoraler Neuorientierung* (Stuttgart 2008).

By studying the participation in youth worship we aimed to understand faith as it is expressed and appropriated in worship. Others already argued that participation is a quality of worship.³ We developed this concept of participation further because we used it for a field that has scarcely been investigated, namely the multiple and varied field of youth worship in Protestant contexts in late modern contexts, and because we operationalized the concept of participation in an empirical study. The concept of participation became more central in church and society during the twentieth century. In the liturgical renewal of the twentieth century, participation, or more precisely active participation, became the key concept.⁴ During the twentieth century participation more and more implies the (visible) joining and having room to discuss and criticize our opinions and views.⁵ No longer indisputable rules and norms decide our lives, but the subject has room to attribute meanings to, in our case, youth worship. This leads us to the concept appropriation as Frijhoff uses it. Appropriation is a concept that focuses on how a specific group deals with the culture that is embedded in or given to that group.⁶

We investigated both national youth worship events and local youth worship services, all considered within the liturgical-ritual framework. In line with Dutch research programs on liturgy (Lukken, Post, Barnard), liturgy is primarily investigated as a (Christian) ritual. As a consequence, cultural and anthropological contexts are explicitly included in the research, although, as expressed in the term liturgical, ecclesial-theological contexts are also included. In our fieldwork, we started with local Protestant services (in Reformed orthodox/evangelical, mainline ecclesial contexts, and one gathering in the liberal wing of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands (PCN)). We noticed in the explorative phase that the local youth and the local gatherings are related to national worship and worldwide tendencies. The youth worship domain varies from small groups (circa 5-15 adolescents) to crowded (inter)national events with 300 to 30,000 participants. Our respondents were adolescents from 15 to 19 years old (and for practical reasons a few 14 and 20 year olds) who were more or less related to the church.

We made use of ethnographic methods. The data in this qualitative research consist of the field notes of participant observations, the transcribed interviews,

³ Cf. M.J.M. HOONDELT: *Om de parochie. Ritueel-muzikale bewegingen in de marge van de parochie. Gregoriaans - Taizé - jongerenkoren* (PHD thesis Tilburg) (Heeswijk 2006) 328-329.

⁴ 'Plena, conscia atque actiuosa participatio' in: Sacrosanctum Concilium (SC) 14, www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html (accessed 27 December 2013); Hoondert: *Om de parochie* 199.

⁵ L. VOYÉ: 'Het begrip participatie in de sociologie en de verwachtingen ten aanzien van rituele praktijken', in J. LAMBERTS (ed.): *De actieve deelname aan de liturgie herbekeken. Honderd jaar na Pius X en veertig jaar na het Concilie* (Leuven 2004) 105.

⁶ W. FRIJHOFF: 'Toe-eigening: van bezitsdrang naar betekenisgeving', in *Tijdschrift voor de geschiedenis van het katholieke leven in de Nederlanden* 6/2 (1997) 99-118.

pictures, audio and video records, and (digital) documents. The question with regard to the participant observations was: what do adolescents participate in and in which way? The question with regard to the interviews was: which meanings do adolescents attribute to youth worship and its liturgical-ritual enactments? These are two perspectives of participation as we will explain later on.

We first describe the results of the research, then we consider the interdependence of the results. We end with drawing some further conclusions thus offering a deeper insight into participation in youth worship.

2. Results of the research

2.1. Modes of active participation⁷

By ‘mode’ we mean the way or process of the participation, like negotiation with peers about where to go at a festival. On the basis of the empirical data, we concluded that youth worship is shaped by the following modes: 1. negotiation, 2. eclectic appropriation, 3. bricolage, and 4. belonging to a plural authority structure. The four concepts are somewhat related but they are not strict causalities. We may say that they are concepts with their own emphasis in the same field of meaning. There were several kinds of negotiations regarding youth worship gatherings with regard to the content and form of the gathering. Besides, adolescents had possibilities to decide for themselves what to participate in, or what meanings they appropriate. Youth worship being characterized by bricolage is partly a result both of the process of negotiation and of the process of eclectic appropriation. The mode of bricolage refers in particular to a bricolage of contemporary culture and church traditions. We emphasize that there was not only the freedom to attribute new meanings and explore new forms, but also the continuity of meaning and tradition. The pre-existing theology of the adolescents and of the congregations influenced youth worship. Furthermore, an influence by evangelical worship expressions was noticed. These expressions were not only an appreciated standard, in particular in Reformed-orthodox/evangelical congregations, but also one that was criticized in both Reformed-orthodox/evangelical and mainline congregations. The three modes of negotiation, eclectic appropriation, and bricolage were connected with belonging to a plural authority structure.⁸ This structure characterizes the network culture in which we live. The plural authority structure means that there is no longer one single authority that works out liturgy. No longer prescribed liturgy is dominant, but a negotiated bricolage worship, which does not start with a fixed idea, but is composed from different materials and elements.

⁷ See P.M. SONNENBERG, M. NEL, A. DE KOCK & M. BARNARD: ‘Shaping youth worship. Modes of active participation’, in *Questions liturgiques / Studies in liturgy* 94/3-4 (2014) 216-236.

⁸ M. CASTELLS: *The information age. 2. The power of identity* (Oxford 1997/2004) 356, quotes D. HELD: ‘Democracy, the nation-state and the global system,’ in *Economy and society* 20/2 (1991) 138-172, p.161-167.

We use participation for a multiple and varied field of youth worship in Protestant contexts. This gave a new perspective to what participation in worship means. In the worldwide process of the liturgical renewal in the twentieth century, participation in liturgy was emphasized:⁹ kneeling, singing, burning candles, responses etc. Participation, however, is broader than participation in a fixed liturgy prescribed by tradition and professionals. The scenario and enactments exist and develop through participation.

2.2. Three qualities of participation

The analysis yielded three important qualities of participation: learning faith,¹⁰ recreation,¹¹ and being together.¹² By 'quality' we mean a central category that is a combination of the longings, liturgical-ritual activities, convictions, and experiences of adolescents.

Learning faith. The formative power of Christian worship

To describe the formative power of Christian worship, we referred to an article by Astley.¹³ He argues that the language of worship is 'performing non-cognitive'. We consider it an important insight that learning should not be isolated from a spiritual and performing dimension. In our research, however, explicit attention to the verbal-discursive elements and related cognitive elements was also included, because that was an important aspect for the respondents, especially in local youth worship services, although this aspect was not lacking in youth worship events. In our qualitative research, it appeared that learning is a keyword with regard to youth worship. The empirical results of learning faith concentrated on learning impulses and learning products. The dialogical dimension in youth worship gatherings, for example, appeared to be an important learning impulse. The content of what adolescents learn in youth worship gatherings may be regarded as a learning product. These products referred, among other aspects, to knowledge about God and the Bible, and to religious and socio-ethical application, which means that respondents valued and appropriated youth worship along the line of the do's and don'ts with regard to a Christian lifestyle.

⁹ SC II. 14-20, esp. 19!; III. 30-32; HOONDELT: *Om de parochie* 199.

¹⁰ See P.M. SONNENBERG & M. BARNARD: 'Educating adolescents through Christian youth worship. Reclaiming space for learning in liturgical context', in *HTS Theologies studies / Theological studies* 68/2 (2012) Art. #1111, 8 pages. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v68i2.1111>.

¹¹ See P.M. SONNENBERG & M. BARNARD: 'Youth worship as recreation', in *International journal of practical theology* 19/1 (2015) 138-163.

¹² See P.M. SONNENBERG, M. NEL, A. DE KOCK & M. BARNARD: 'Being together in youth worship. An empirical study in Protestant Dutch contexts', in *HTS Theologies studies / Theological studies* (accepted).

¹³ J. ASTLEY: 'The role of worship in Christian learning', in *Religious education* 79 (1984) 243-251.

We prefer to speak of learning faith as a discovery of meaning.¹⁴ Learning is discovering meanings, or liturgical-theologically speaking it is a discovery of the relationship between God and humankind, which takes place in liturgy. Relevant youth worship has a formative power for adolescents and as such youth worship is an educational space. Here, a functional dimension comes forward, while in Liturgical Studies the non-functional of liturgy is stressed.¹⁵ Although worship has its aim in itself, it does not mean that it has no functional qualities at all.¹⁶

The quality of learning faith should be explained and reflected on from the phase and setting in which adolescents are: the school context, the phase of adolescence with its central place for the ritual of debate,¹⁷ and the secular context or a particular religious background asking them questions about faith and Christianity. We also link this quality to the educative characteristics of Protestant liturgy and to the fact that a group of participants in youth worship doubt whether they believe in God's existence and Christian faith. This latter means that for them participation in youth worship can be considered a process of acquiring information about faith.

(Christian) Recreation. Transformed by the Word

The concept of recreation appeared to be helpful to explain the liturgical activities and experiences of adolescents. It described the (need for) vital, exploring, stirring and silent experiences in youth worship gatherings. Four recreational dimensions were distinguished: being free and informal, enjoying a stirring and silent atmosphere, exploring and actualizing the self, and recharging faith. These were obviously present in crowded national youth events, but were also (partly) visible in local youth worship services. These recreational dimensions showed how the cultural aspects of recreation were included in the gatherings (for instance, informal styles). It also showed how elements such as time for and concentration on faith were considered counter-cultural by the participants.

By the question of Christian recreation we mean refreshment or recharging of adolescents in relation to God, Scripture, Christian tradition, Christian symbols, and the church. We made use of the concept of juxtaposition, as the theologian Lathrop uses it, to elaborate this.¹⁸ Lathrop speaks of the Word that juxtaposed to a thing or matter 'breaks' this, e.g. bread is broken into a holy thing: (sign of)

¹⁴ B. ROEBBEN: *Godsdienstpedagogiek van de hoop. Grondlijnen voor religieuze vorming* (Leuven 2007) 111, 120.

¹⁵ P. POST: 'Ritualiteit als symboolhandelen', in M. BARNARD & P. POST (red.): *Ritueel bestek. Antropologische kernwoorden van de liturgie* (Zoetermeer 2001) 33-46, p. 43.

¹⁶ See for the discussion about functionality and liturgy M. BARNARD & C. WEPENER: 'Reclaiming space for learning in liturgical contexts. Cracks in the maxim of the uselessness of liturgical ritual', in *HTS Teologiese studies / Theological studies* 68/ 2 (2012) Art. #1184, 8 pages. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v68i2.1184>.

¹⁷ R. NAUTA: 'Mensen', in BARNARD & POST (red.): *Ritueel bestek* 94-95.

¹⁸ G.W. LATHROP: *Holy things. A liturgical theology* (Minneapolis 1993) 100.

the body of Christ. We may say that, for example, popular music is broken into holy music by the Word of the Gospel. The juxtaposition of the Word and its derivatives transform the recreational dimension into Christian recreation. We did not use the concept of juxtaposition in a dogmatic way, as Lathrop does, but empirically. What meaning do the adolescents give to what occurs in youth worship and its juxtapositions? Christian recreation is about what is juxtaposed and about how liturgical-rituals are appropriated. Intentional juxtaposition is an important and a complex perspective for the organizers of youth gatherings. Since the horizon of understanding of participants differs in various settings, we recommend both careful and creative liturgical and pastoral considerations in these.

Being together. The need for equality

Being together appeared to be a main quality of participating in youth worship. There were many references to cozy meet and greets, singing together, being in each other's presence, having face-to-face conversations, and seeing others moving. This quality of being together consists of four aspects.

Firstly, a worship community took place through a physical presence, and the visible and corporeal played a role. Or in terms of Collins: 'Once the bodies are together, there may take place a process of intensification of shared experience'.¹⁹ Not only peers, (authentic) artists, and youth leaders were important in this being together, siblings also played an important role in the participation of youth in worship. Younger brothers and sisters joined older siblings in the worship. These older siblings were motivations or reasons for their participation and they were also conversation partners. How respondents related to their parents in relation to worship and faith varied, but often adolescents compared their choices with the standards set by parents.

Secondly, an empathetic and emotional aspect was essential for adolescents. We borrow these terms from sociologist Maffesoli.²⁰ Being together in youth worship meant being together in unity, trust and in equality, as kindred spirits. There was a strong need to experience equality among adolescents (sharing the same feelings, same values, same ideas, same goals etc.). Equality stimulated the (cozy) connection between actors.

Thirdly, the theological aspect of being together could be described as sharing faith and being in God's presence. Being together is theologically discussed from Schleiermacher's theoretical notion of sharing of religious experiences.²¹ Theologically speaking, worship is more than that and can also be described in terms of an answer to God, or actualizing of Christ, etc. However, the aspect of sharing faith is what we highlight. Schleiermacher focuses on human affections,

¹⁹ R. COLLINS: *Interaction ritual chains* (Princeton 2004) 33.

²⁰ M. MAFFESOLI: *The times of the tribes. The decline of individualism in mass society* (London 1996).

²¹ F. SCHLEIERMACHER: *Die Praktische Theologie nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhange dargestellt* (Berlin 1850) 65.

but also creates some methodological openness to the divine. We formulate it in a directer way by saying that God works through inter human communications and relations.

Fourthly, being together in youth worship yielded – paradoxically- possibilities to cross intergenerational boundaries, because it created space for meetings between adults and young people. Furthermore, ecclesiological boundaries were crossed in particular at the events.

2.3. God in youth worship

To answer the question ‘how do adolescents participate in youth worship?’ we also investigated the relationship between the participation of adolescents in youth worship and God.²² This relation has multiple layers. It requires an understanding of God and the performances in youth worship and of the meanings that young people attribute to it. It also requires an understanding of how empirical and theological perspectives relate.

For paying attention to the (divine) ‘more’ that occurs in liturgical-rituals, we speak about engaged egos.²³ We know about this ‘more’ because of the youth engagement in these practices: the liturgical rites evoke metaphysical perspectives and the participants recognize it as such. We tend to keep openness that the engaged egos of adolescents in youth worship reflect an ontological reality which precede the meaning giving of people.²⁴ An experience of the holy Spirit in a song, which is connected by respondents with the well-known ‘goose flesh moment’, can indeed refer to the work of the Spirit, but we cannot determine it in absolute terms.

God was mediated; he was encountered in youth worship through discursive and embodied practices (including atmospheres and objects), and combinations of these. As such, youth worship is a place where adolescents can meet God. God is addressed, proclaimed, and discussed and the (musical) atmosphere and experience of community were important and convincing aspects for young people.

The way adolescents interpret God and worship varied. For some adolescents, God was present. The presence of God was a conviction, but also an experience that adolescents had. Adolescents orientated to God, for example, in praising, but they also said that God moved to them in liturgy. They spoke of God comforting them, guiding them, and giving directions. There were respondents who spoke of doubt. They had an image of God and their faith as a quest. This line of interpretation included an indecisive interpretation and we

²² See P.M. SONNENBERG: ‘God in youth worship’, in *Jaarboek voor liturgieonderzoek / Yearbook for liturgical and ritual studies* 30 (2014) 223-241.

²³ M. BARNARD, J. CILLIERS & C. WEPENER: *Worship in the network culture. Liturgical ritual studies. Fields and methods, Concepts and metaphors* (= *Liturgia condenda* 28) (Leuven / Paris / Walpole 2014) 157; D.S. LONG: ‘Making sense of Christian worship. Language, truth, and metaphysics’, in *Liturgy* 25/2 (2009) 62-91, p.64.

²⁴ This is expressed in the approach of ‘critical realism’, see section 3.4.

spoke of 'God as a question'. Another group of youths did not ask for or reflect on the relationship between God and worship. They 'just' joined. We indicated this as 'God?' which is distinguished from 'God as a question'. The latter referred to an active and conscious positioning to God and worship, the former did not. On the basis of the empirical differences, we concluded that the church background influenced some interpretations. The different interpretations of the respondents related to different liturgical-rituals in mainline and Reformed-orthodox congregations. In the mainline congregations we more often noticed a heuristic approach in the discussions, the youth leader and adolescents raising questions, the dominance of exploring rather than proclaiming a message with regard to God. In the Reformed-orthodox congregations, there was more room in songs and sermons for proclaiming messages about God's deeds in human life. This church influence was not exclusive and not total, because the differences also existed within the same gathering.

3. Results in their interdependence and further conclusions

In this section, we will reflect on the results in their interdependence. We will also set out some perspectives concerning future youth worship and further research.

3.1. The modes of active participation operate the qualities

The modes of participation can be considered an operating system of the qualities (expressions or outcomes) of participation. For example, with regard to the quality of 'learning faith' the educational function of worship is apparent through its dialogical dimensions. This dialogical importance means that not one voice is authoritative (as in sermons, exhortations, etc.) but that the dialogue between voices matter. The authority is not only of the minister or youth leader, but of all who participate in the dialogue. We also explained how various elements and words of the recreational scene were used for youth worship and how there was an emphasis on the informal way of making choices of their own in the program. We may conclude that the room for bricolage and eclectic appropriation operates worship as recreation.

3.2. The interdependence of the qualities of participation

For relevant youth worship, the participation qualities learning faith, recreation, and being together are important. There is some overlap between these distinguished qualities. Part of the recreation quality, for example, connects to a cozy being together and learning may happen by discovering new music styles, which is described as a dimension of recreation. We visualize the qualities of participation and its overlap in the following figure.



Figure 1: Qualities of participation

Although all of the qualities matter in the participation of young people in youth worship, there are different types of emphasis in youth worship as well. In general, participation at events for example, had a stronger recreational quality than in most local services. Furthermore, some respondents referred less to the quality of recreation than others and there were respondents or people within their network who criticized recreational elements. The quality of cognitive/reflexive learning was more dominant with regard to the participation in local worship than at events. For youth worship, not one single factor is decisive. In some youth worship or for some participants the quality of learning is the strongest, and for others it is the recreation element, or the importance of being together. Most crucial, however, is that all three of them together are crucial factors to adolescents in youth worship. One cannot think of youth worship, either local or national (European), without one of these qualities.

These qualities, on the one hand, have cultural-anthropological components: they are natural and existential. They are present in the living world of adolescents in school, leisure time, families, and friends. It is important to realize that if these three qualities are taken seriously in church, parameters for relevant youth worship will be found. On the other hand, the qualities have a theological component. These are qualities where God may reveal himself in the lives of young people, for example when they learn who God is or when God is experienced while people take part in a great music atmosphere.

3.3. Characteristics of youth worship

We asked in the article on learning faith whether there comes a moment when youth worship is no longer youth worship. In other words, are some characteristics needed for youth worship to be youth worship? In our reflection on recreation we already mentioned the importance of juxtaposition in speaking about worship. In addition to this, we summarize a few other relevant perspectives.

Our first point of view on the question of the characteristics of youth worship is that worship by adolescents is hardly conceivable without the three distinguished qualities. If one is lacking or minimally present, we may say that there

are fewer worship qualities for adolescents. These qualities may also hold for catechesis, but the relationship between learning and performing differs in catechesis and worship. In worship, the learning is through liturgical-ritual performance and worship is not only about the development of young people but also about worshipping the Trinitarian God. This brings us to a second perspective, namely the way of approaching God.

Our second point elaborates that the worship does not only exist because of the developments of young people, but is first of all an orientation and answer toward God. The perspective of how the congregation orientates to God and how the Word is performed is needed. This does not contrast with the qualities of participation because these qualities include the performance of the Word. The performance of the Word and as such the communication with God in youth worship takes place in various ways (discursive and embodied): praying to him and praising him, listening to Scripture, proclaiming or discussing him, all of these are crucial worship enactments.

A third point of view, when speaking of the characteristics of worship, leads to the aspects of repetition, regularity, and duration which are discussed in the literature. These are aspects of rituals.²⁵ In the article on shaping worship we discussed that criteria other than these are also needed to understand youth worship. Grimes does not only consider strict rituals as rituals, but he also creates openness to other fields and activities by his approach of ritualization and qualities of rituals.²⁶ In the discussion whether the qualities of formality, fixity, and repetition are intrinsic to rituals, McGann argues in line with Bell²⁷ that '...these qualities are actually strategies a community may use to embody its action. Informality, improvisation, and variability may likewise characterize the community's ritual.'²⁸ What about adolescents in youth worship jumping for Christ on the beat and to joyful music; is that worship? Spontaneous discussions in youth worship about a theme; is that worship? Events like the XNoizz Flevo Festival; is that worship? The theories of Grimes and Bell create openness to consider it a liturgical-ritual.

In addition to the ritual theory and for the sake of the discussion, we mention that in the literature comparisons have been made between art and liturgy.²⁹ The appreciation of informal, spontaneous enactments in the empirical data,

²⁵ Cf. R.L. GRIMES: *The craft of ritual studies* (Oxford / New York 2014) 194.

²⁶ R.L. GRIMES: *Ritual criticism. Case studies in its practice, essays on its theory* (Waterloo 2010²) 8-11.

²⁷ C. BELL: *Ritual. Perspectives and dimensions* (New York / Oxford 1997) 138-170; IDEM: *Ritual theory, Ritual practice* (Minnesota 1992) 106-117.

²⁸ M.E. MCGANN: *Exploring music as worship and theology. Research in liturgical practice* (Minnesota 2002) 32.

²⁹ M. BARNARD: 'Secular feast and Christian feast in Schleiermacher's practical theology and aesthetics. A theoretical contribution to the study of liturgy and the arts', in P. POST, G. ROUWHORST, L. VAN TONGEREN & A. SCHEER (eds.): *Christian feast and festival. The dynamics of Western liturgy and culture* (= Liturgia condenda 12) (Leuven 2001) 185-204.

questions whether Schleiermacher's approach, who speaks in his theory on the (religious) art of an expression that is muted by a reflective moment in the mood, can be uncritically used in liturgical studies. Schleiermacher stresses in his *Ästhetik* that a direct relationship between representation and affections does not exist in art. A moment of reflection is needed between affection and representation.³⁰ If we reflect on liturgy from this theory of art, we conclude that in comparison, youth worship also asks for moments of reflection, but that there is also room for more impulsive expressions. There are spontaneous expressions (small talk, jumping movements) in youth worship without a clear reflective moment. We include these type of situations in our understanding of liturgical-ritual performances

3.4. Cultural-anthropological and theological perspectives

The practice of participating in youth worship was explained from a cultural-anthropological (in a broad sense) as well as a theological perspective. This study is carried out in a practical theological research tradition that does not separate these perspectives but combines them. In this practical theological study, the question to God was answered by observing what occurred and listening carefully to the meanings people attributed to it. This is a complex and layered process. To answer the question to God in youth worship we do not opt for a social constructive approach or a positive approach, but for a position in line with 'critical realism',³¹ which acknowledges the ontological (divine) reality that exists independently of the epistemology of human beings, although human activity is needed to understand reality. That our knowledge is fallible does not mean that the reality does not exist. This critical realism is not a simple or direct realism approach, because it is open to criticism concerning the claims and the supposed connection with the being of reality. Critical realism says that divine action may be possible, but you cannot claim it. It may be true, but it may also not be true. We take this position seriously at two levels. Firstly, we ask adolescent to their experiences and interpretations; these may be impressions of God, and secondly, God's reality also exists beyond the researchers interpretations of the field and their own position as practical theologians.

As said, the entire liturgical-ritual gives scope to the communication between God and humankind. As such, worship is for adolescents a place where they

³⁰ Schleiermacher's 'Aesthetics' are edited notes from 1819 en 1825. R. ODEBRECHT: *Friedrich Schleiermachers Ästhetik* (Berlin 1931) 30ff.; BARNARD: 'Secular feast and Christian feast' 191.

³¹ A philosophical/social perspective of which sociologist R. Bhaskar is often regarded as founding father. The website of the American professor C. Smith offers an overview of publications on 'critical realism': [www.nd.edu/~csmith22/critical realism.htm](http://www.nd.edu/~csmith22/critical%20realism.htm) (accessed 21 June 2014); McGrath discusses 'critical realism' in several of his books among them A.E. MCGRATH: *The science of God* (London 2004) 139ff.; A. Root discusses 'critical realism' for the domain of practical theology in his recent book A. ROOT: *Christopraxis. A practical theology of the Cross* (Minneapolis 2014).

can find God. The cultural-anthropological perspective creates possibilities to investigate empirical phenomena and the theological perspective creates possibilities to understand these phenomena within the framework of the (speech) act between God and people. The two perspectives do not merge into one, but cannot strictly be distinguished either. We combine the cultural-anthropological and theological perspectives. The concept of participation, for example, has cultural-anthropological perspectives on participation regards the participants, the object of participation, the shapes of the rituals. From a theological point of view, this participation should be understood within the framework of theological keywords as revelation, faith, and church and the dynamic between these. 'Revelation as a free divine activity is an objective category, but it is also a very subjective category of the recognition of revelation in human experience that decides whether the free offer of divine grace will be accepted.'³² Faith is an answer of people, but it is also a matter of God. In church, faith gets a collective dimension and ceases to be a private response. Another example is that the concept learning faith asks for learning styles, but the word 'faith' explicitly refers to what we call 'discovery of a relationship between God and human-kind'. The concept of recreation has cultural-anthropological notions, of course, but in our question regarding Christian recreation, we reflect on the Word that without denying the cultural-anthropological characteristics of worship as recreation, places recreation in the light of the promise of the Trinitarian God and the cross and resurrection of Christ. We are in favor of the term juxtaposition, as handed to us by Lathrop.³³ It takes the common seriously (water, bread, wine), but clarifies that in a liturgical setting the Word is needed to break it into more than the common. It does not mean something besides the common, but the way in which the common acquires meaning and is experienced. In this, juxtaposition retains openness to a critical break. In our entire research, we searched for concepts with openness to both cultural-anthropological and theological perspectives and realize that the perspectives have their own merits.

4. Future worship and research

Of course we are not certain as to whether what is important for people in the phase of adolescence remains important when they are adults. However, adolescence is a formative phase in life and as such will influence the future, including the future of our way of worshipping. If we extrapolate the results in a time when adolescents are the new adults, it may be said that for future worship the following dynamics will be important.

Worship develops in our Dutch Protestant context into a very dialogical way of worshipping, a dialogue that includes room for a sermon or speech act, as

³² F. ŠTĚCH: 'Fundamental theology, dynamics of Christian life and identity', in *ET studies. Journal of the European society for Catholic theology* 5/1 (2014) 77-95.

³³ LATHROP: *Holy things*. This concept is elaborated on in SONNENBERG & BARNARD: 'Youth worship as recreation'.

part of the dialogue. There is not one authority who decides. There are plural authorities. There is not one space and time set aside for worship, but there are many worship spaces and times. Worship is not only the prayer by the brothers of Taizé in Rotterdam, but also the song in the metro station to the arena where the gathering was held. This dialogical and fluid element does not contrast with the mediation of God, but is room for God to reveal himself.

Worship develops where people learn, recreate, are together, and where these qualities are ‘broken’ by the Word, in other words, where the Word takes these qualities into the relationship between God and human, in particular the relationship to the cross and resurrection of Christ. Worship develops where God is addressed and performed in and through human ‘language’, which includes practices. With regard to the character of the ‘language’ we follow the line that ‘the how of our language is always cultural and natural’.³⁴ This does not exclude language from church traditions, but integrates the contemporary lives and relationships of people. This also influences the way of learning faith, recreation, and being together.

Furthermore, the extraordinary is not the only way, the local and particular remains important, either local worship or national worship with local groups and natural relationships.

In hectic times moments of worshipping will be considered as moments of rest. Maybe we can even say that it has some healing connotations in busy lives. People with creative and pastoral skills concerning juxtaposing cultural elements and (derivatives) of the Word will be crucial in the future worship of the church. A special task lies in reconsidering the sacraments, which are hardly present in youth worship.

The last point we mention on further worship is the challenge to help adolescents broaden their theology and (new) religious language and skills to name experiences in a religious way have to be developed. These skills are also important related to their longing for knowledge. When being surrounded by friends and relatives who do not have knowledge about Christianity, or when faced with their own lack of insight, people are longing for knowledge and skills to explain to their friends what they believe in or what is important in faith for them. This also matters in discussions with peers, teachers, and church leaders who have other opinions in particular concerning the topic of music in Reformed-orthodox settings. The knowledge that participants develop is not only about Christianity, but also about their own position, faith, and relationship with God. There is a need for clarity and for people helping them in this search.

For further research, we mention topics like the role of siblings and a comparative research between catholic youth worship and protestant youth worship. Learning and worship is a theme that asks for further research. From educational perspectives, there is much more to say, for example with regard to

³⁴ LONG: ‘Making sense of Christian worship’ 70.

the relation between performers/leaders and adolescents. We also argue that the relation between youth worship and the sacraments ask for reconsideration.