

# Human Tears, Divine Tears

## A Narrative Analysis of Anglican Liturgy in Relation to Stories of Suffering People

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The relation of liturgy to suffering is the topic of this dissertation. At the heart of the Christian community is its liturgical celebration. Suffering is a universal phenomenon. Therefore the topic of the relation between liturgy and suffering is most relevant. **Chapter 1** demonstrates the tension between the often optimistic tone of worship services and feelings of grief and anxiety people may bring to the liturgical celebration. An overview of literature on liturgy that addresses suffering shows that the topic is not extensively dealt with in academic liturgical-theological discourses. The gap that this overview shows is twofold: first, there is little attention to the points of connection between liturgy and stories of suffering; second, the discourses lack substantial empirical underpinnings. The present research seeks to fill this twofold gap. The research takes place in the context of the Church of England in the Archdeaconry of North West Europe (geographically this is the Benelux). The liturgical text analyzed is *Common Worship, Order One*. This is an apt context for this research as *Common Worship* balances a core of fixed liturgical texts with virtually limitless space for creativity and use of sources in other parts of the liturgy. The project contains three specific research interests. The first is to ground the research in empirical reality. The second is a pastoral interest, and the third is emancipatory. The latter two interests explain why the starting point of this project is suffering, and that it seeks to give a voice to suffering in the academic liturgical discourse, which hopefully will bear its influence on the praxis of the Church. If the three main branches of liturgical studies are historical research, liturgical-theological research, and ritual/empirical research, then the focus of this research is clearly in the latter, although it does include liturgical-theological reflections on the empirical results. The main research question is: How does or can Anglican liturgy in the archdeaconry of North West Europe in the Church of England's diocese in Europe address and connect to people with regard to their narratives of serious negative life events?

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**Chapter 2** outlines the narrative theoretical and methodological framework for this project. On the basis of Stephen Crites, Paul Ricoeur, and others, it is argued that human beings understand their world by using narrative structures. We live in a storied world. Therefore both the liturgy and experiences of suffering can be framed narratively. Furthermore, in several ways the liturgy itself tells a story. It tells a story by means of the liturgical calendar, it tells a story in each worship service, it contains many stories in each worship service (for example in the Bible readings), and its texts contain many narrative referents, i.e. texts that refer to other stories, usually from Scripture. Also stories of suffering people are narrative in themselves, both because of how these people tell their stories and because of the meaning-making process that is going on in each situation of suffering.

From this theoretical framework the chapter moves on to find and develop a methodological framework that can be used to answer our research question. Input for the methodological framework is threefold. Firstly, the project builds on the four tasks for practical theology as outlined by Richard Osmer. These tasks include empirical description, interpretation, normative reflection, and strategy for action. Secondly, Ruard Ganzevoort has made narrative theory applicable for empirical and practical-theological research. His methodology includes four readings-steps and six narrative elements. The reading steps include the first global reading of the text, discerning the storylines or main themes, distinguishing the storylines according to the narrative elements, and interpretation of patterns. The six elements are structure, perspective, experience/ tone, role assignment, relational positioning, and audience. The latter two demonstrate that this model emphasizes that narrative is performance. Storytelling has an aim, which is to begin, enhance, change or end relationships. Thirdly, input comes from the narrative and ritual approach of Herbert Anderson and Edward Foley. Their proposal to see narrative and ritual through the lens of several polarities is used in combination with the narrative model of Ganzevoort. The polarities Anderson and Foley mention are myth/parable, concealing/revealing, private/public, individual/communal, and moment/process. These are expressions of the underlying 'paradox of faithful living.' As such, other polarities may be found. All data sources are analyzed and interpreted on the basis of the combined narrative and liturgical models of Ganzevoort and of Anderson and Foley.

The research took place in four churches, ranging from high to low liturgical. Apart from analyzing *Common Worship, Order One*, 21 people who had experienced significant negative life events or issues were interviewed, as well as seven chaplains and readers from the four churches. Furthermore, one worship service in each church was observed for analysis.

Chapter 3-7 are the data chapters. **Chapter 3** contains a detailed analysis and interpretation of the liturgical text, *Common Worship, Order One*. This is the text that is used for the public liturgical celebrations in most parishes and chaplain-

cies in the Church of England. The chapter established as the three storylines of the text: wholeness, including the process towards wholeness and the state of being whole; glory, in the sense of glorifying God and the glory of God; and living a particular lifestyle. Relating the storylines, one can say that in a condition marked by wholeness, people can live to glorify God. The aim of the liturgy is to restore and enhance the relationship between God as greater party and people as lesser party. The liturgical text scarcely addresses suffering (i.e. major negative life experiences) on the part of the people. The suffering that plays a part is the suffering of Christ, most explicitly in the Eucharistic prayer and its concomitant rite. It is a matter of debate whether sin includes suffering as well. If yes, then suffering is addressed throughout the liturgy. However, the text defines sin rather in terms of personal wrongdoing than in terms of suffering that happens to people and for which they are not to blame. The conclusion is that suffering as negative life experiences is not a significant theme in the liturgical text. Furthermore, the text does give a few clues to foster solidarity with suffering people, but no more than that. In terms of method the analysis of the liturgical text made clear that some narrative elements were hard to address, especially perspective, experience and relational positioning. Here the method makes clear that liturgy cannot be studied just by the text, but that it must include the experiences of people and observation of the liturgical performance.

**Chapter 4** presents the analysis and interpretation of the stories of the participants in worship. These stories are at the heart of the dissertation. The chapter first outlines the sample and interview method that was used, and gives a somewhat detailed example of the analysis of one story. How the narrative elements and polarities come to the fore in the various stories is commented upon briefly. The application of the analytical model to the interviews yields a number of themes and issues that the participants mention. All participants mention community as important in times of suffering, and almost all mention the Eucharist as an important point of connection with their situation. More than half of the participants also refer to liturgy as a safe place, to the role of clergy, and to their experiences of God. Other themes and issues that came up were: the contrast between churches, the expat setting, healing, putting on a brave face, experiences other than liturgy, and liturgy as the cause of suffering. A number of conclusions follow from the stories and experiences of suffering people. First, the narrative method brings specific themes to the surface that might otherwise remain less clear. For example, the narrative element of role assignment brings out clearly the characters of the liturgical story and their place in it. Especially the role of the clergy in the stories is clear. Second, the analysis shows the importance of community and Eucharist, and other themes. Third, liturgy is important for people in times of suffering, for better or worse. Fourth, no blueprint exists for how the connection between liturgy and suffering ought to be made. Fifth, the connection is made by the participants themselves, although the liturgical presider does have an important role in it. Sixth,

in all four churches people make the connection between liturgy and life, regardless of liturgical style.

**Chapter 5** presents the results of the analysis and interpretation of the interviews with liturgists, i.e. clergy and lay readers. The liturgists mentioned several of the same themes as the participants: community, Eucharist, putting up a brave face, experiences other than liturgy, the expat setting, liturgy as a safe place, and healing, and the contrast between churches. Again community is key: it is the 'liturgy after the liturgy' where a lot of suffering is addressed. On top of these, other themes that come up are the pastoral awareness the liturgists (claim to) have, and the awareness that preparing and presiding in liturgy is a craft. The liturgists think of *Common Worship* as a rich liturgical resource and also mention that it needs to be used with imagination. The liturgists are optimistic about the potential of liturgy to address suffering and to connect with narratives of suffering people. The connection can be made throughout the liturgy. Liturgy tells a story and each participant in liturgy is in a process of grafting their own story onto the story of Jesus.

**Chapter 6**, the observation of worship services, functions primarily as a 'reality check.' The chapter asks whether the worship services confirm the storylines of the liturgical text and the views of the participants and the liturgists. The narrative elements function again as analytical tools, while the element of experience/tone is extended to include atmosphere. The storylines wholeness, glory, and living are present in all four worship services, although colored by the theme of the service, and sometimes a storyline is added. The particular story the liturgy tells is more colored by the time in the liturgical year than by the participants. The chapter shows the active role participants have in worship, but also the spatial distance between liturgical 'professionals' and the audience. The analysis confirms the views of the other data sources. Most themes mentioned by the participants can be observed in the liturgical performances. *Common Worship* is used extensively and proves to be a rich resource. Pastorally and liturgically sensitive liturgists can make use of it to address suffering. Sometimes suffering is addressed explicitly, sometimes more implicitly.

In **Chapter 7** the four data sources are compared with each other. Here the narrative method comes to full fruition. The chapter starts with a discussion of who the authors or storytellers and audiences of the liturgy are. Authors and storytellers are the liturgical text (and behind the text its composers and authorizers), the liturgical presider, the participants in worship, and, in a sense, God. Audiences are the participants, the liturgical ministers, and God. The dialogical nature of the liturgy reveals the constant shift of roles. Authors become audiences, and audiences become authors. The chapter continues by comparing the narrative elements, the polarities, and the themes as have been analyzed and interpreted in the various data chapters. On the basis of these comparisons it

answers the subquestions that were formulated for each chapter. Finally it comes to an empirical answer to the primary research question of the project.

An important part of that answer regards the narrative space that is given to each narrator, or, in other words, the level of agency each narrator can exercise. God and the people are the main characters in the liturgical story yet they receive the least space. The liturgical presider has more narrative space and therefore her responsibility is huge to enable as far as possible the connection between the story of the liturgy and the stories of suffering people. The analysis of the data sources shows that the liturgical text as such scarcely addresses suffering as major negative life experiences, but that the more flexible parts of the liturgy have most potential to do so. The polarities show that most suffering stories, as well as the liturgical story, contain elements of both myth and parable. The polarity individual/communal proves to be most significant as can be inferred from the participants' and liturgists' emphasis on community. The themes that give most direct input to answering the research question are community, Eucharist, liturgy as a safe place, clergy and pastoral awareness, and healing. Other themes still add to the picture and complete it, but the themes just mentioned provide the most significant contours. Important issues that keep coming back are that liturgy happens in the wider context of church life, and the discussion whether suffering is included in sin, because that makes a huge difference to the answer to which extent suffering is addressed in liturgy.

**Chapter 8** moves from the empirical research to liturgical-theological reflections. It connects the results of the empirical chapters to the academic liturgical-theological discourse, and also sets these results in a theoretical and theological framework. It does so on the basis of a spirituality of reconciliation. Anderson and Foley suggest that this spirituality expresses the 'paradox of faithful living' which underlies the polarities. The chapter finds an additional starting point in Nicholas Wolterstorff's suggestion that the connection between the divine and human stories, or between the story of the liturgy and the stories of suffering people, lies in the connection between the tears of God and the tears of people. In the beatitudes Jesus invites his followers to become mourners with those who mourn, and God himself when he suffers with people. Wolterstorff furthermore argues that happiness and sin and forgiveness have a biblical language to them and are thus expressed in liturgy: the language of praise and of penitence. The biblical language to address suffering is lament, but one is hard pressed to find that in modern Western churches. According to Wolterstorff suffering does get attention in liturgy, but its sound is muffled. Key to both Wolterstorff's argument and to a spirituality of reconciliation is the concept of remembrance. The chapter continues to deepen this concept and demonstrates how crucial it is in narrative theory, in the Scriptures, and in liturgy, especially in the liturgical concept of *anamnesis*.

Building on the concept of remembrance, the issue of the narrative space of God and people is picked up. The narrative space for God is found in the dis-

inction Terrence Fretheim makes between God's suffering because of, for, and with people. The liturgy expresses the first two, but the third is much harder to find. This underlines Wolterstorff's argument. To enlarge the narrative space for God, in other words, to tell the story of God with regard to suffering more fully in the liturgy, God's suffering *with* people should be more emphasized in different parts of the liturgy, especially in the celebration of the Eucharist. To enlarge the narrative space and competence of suffering people, the chapter discusses the language of lament. This language is most capable of expressing suffering while addressing it to God. At the same time, the typical form of prayers of lament in Scripture, and especially of the psalms of lament, moves from the elaborate lament to petition and then to praise. Thus the lament moves from despair to hope. Lament remembers suffering and reframes it. As such it can become an important liturgical feature in the meaning-making process that is going on in times of suffering. Important in remembrance are both memory of the past and imagination of the future. Through these time dimensions meaning is made for the present, and identity is formed. The question is to what extent liturgy contributes to this if it does not give space to the language of lament and therefore misses an important liturgical resource to remember suffering. When liturgy does remember the suffering of God and the suffering of people, the two stories come together. When the liturgy provides narrative space for authentic storytelling, two worlds come together and transformation takes place. The scattered pieces of the stories of human suffering find wholeness in the overarching story of God. At the same time human beings find that they are not alone in their suffering. God has joined them on their mourning bench. When this happens, healing may occur. Following Bruce Morrill, the chapter briefly comments on healing, as it is the counterpart of suffering. Healing is found in the story of Jesus, most explicitly in his suffering, death and resurrection. Healing does not necessarily mean physical cure, but it means finding new meaning and wholeness, and being restored to the community.

In the end chapter 8 returns to the spirituality of reconciliation, taking into account Robert Schreiter's writings on this. It is argued that a communal and liturgical spirituality of reconciliation gives the best context for addressing and connecting to people who suffer. The empirical results make clear that no blueprint exists for addressing suffering. It can happen throughout the liturgical performance, but also the context is most important. The context is made up in the first place by other people, the community. Therefore a spirituality of reconciliation needs to be communal. Both the research and the liturgical-theological reflections show the many and powerful possibilities liturgy has for addressing suffering. Therefore a spirituality of reconciliation needs to be liturgical as well. Such a community bears several characteristics. It is marked by embracing contradiction, honoring the other, welcoming the strangers, and when it has the courage to do so, it will be surprised by grace. It is a community that accompanies the broken and creates zones of safety to tell stories. It helps reconnecting people to their own identities and to the community, and it sees

people being mandated to help others in turn. It recognizes the human efforts that can be made for accompaniment and creating hospitality and it sees the grace of God when connections are made and people are sent out. Liturgy celebrated in the context of a community that has a spirituality of reconciliation in its DNA will address and connect to stories of suffering, and transformation will take place.

**Chapter 9** concludes this study. The narrative theoretical and methodological framework has proven to be very helpful for addressing the research question, both on the basis of empirical research and on the basis of liturgical-theological considerations. The narrative method made clear that the analysis of liturgy needs to take into account various aspects (or data sources) of liturgy. In order to see how authors and audiences negotiate meaning and positions, it is necessary to study text, participants, liturgical ‘professionals,’ and the performance itself. Especially when these aspects come together, the narrative method proves to be a helpful analytical tool and then it also demonstrates its value most clearly.

Suffering is addressed in liturgy. However, this statement needs qualification. The participants find many points of connection with their story and also the liturgists are optimistic about liturgy’s potential to address suffering. Community and the Eucharist are the most important aspects. Yet our close analysis of the liturgical text, together with input of Wolterstorff and Fretheim, shows that suffering that has not come through one’s own fault is not explicitly addressed in liturgy. It is neither absent nor obviously present. Emphasizing God’s suffering *with* people as well as reintroducing the language of lament will help to address suffering more explicitly and to connect to narratives of suffering people.

Chapter 9 draws out several themes from this research that will resonate in other contexts than the four Anglican churches in this project. The universality of suffering and central place of liturgy in church life may evoke the interest of others for the present study. The importance of community, the Eucharist, and the role of clergy is probably central in other churches as well. Furthermore, the diminished place in the liturgy of God’s suffering *with* people may not be limited to Anglican liturgy. The focus on sin rather than on suffering is likely also to be found in other liturgical communities.

The chapter ends with a brief narrative rendering of a liturgical performance that takes suffering fully into account. This ‘tour’ through the liturgy picks up many issues that have come up from the research, and in that way provides a narrative liturgical answer to the research question.

