

From fast to feast

A ritual-liturgical exploration of reconciliation in South African cultural contexts¹

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The need of reconciliation in South Africa is still voiced by many. Along with this need, the absence of church unity between the Dutch Reformed Church and Uniting Reformed Church, churches that are still divided along racial lines, remains a sad reality. A division which has its origin partially in a reconciliation-ritual of commensality which was inculturated in Africa on wrong unscriptural grounds. Within this South African and Reformed context the question of this research was born, namely:

Which rituals can be inculturated in South Africa in general, and in the liturgy of the Dutch Reformed Church and Uniting Reformed Church in particular, to assist with the processes of reconciliation and church unity?

The South African and Reformed context is briefly sketched in the first chapter. The second chapter develops the methodological and theoretical framework of the research. The methodological starting points in the research process entail firstly that Post's liturgical-scientific research methodology of interference and intuition is used as an overarching approach. Secondly, along with this, in the initial phase of the research the methods of ethnography and participatory action research is used for the collection of the ritual data. Within this methodology the theoretical starting points center around the concepts of ritual, reconciliation and liturgical inculturation. And within the field of Practical Theology this research process moves with a spiral movement between practice and theory. The basic theoretical starting point is that within the field of Liturgy a ritual approach is used, and for this reason partners were found within the domain of Ritual Studies to examine the phenomenon of reconciliation-rituals. The ritual theory of some experts, in particular Gerard Lukken and Ronald L. Grimes, on this topic is presented with which the collected data was later evaluated. Along with this ritual theory, liturgical inculturation is explored and used as a critical reciprocal steering concept, which also involves both the tradition and theology in a criterium for the evaluation and formation of rituals. A last theoretical con-

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cept that is explored is that of reconciliation, and this is done by making use of the work of some South African theologians.

Based on this methodological and theoretical departure, five ritual probes are conducted in a multi-disciplinary fashion with regards to ritual and reconciliation. In chapter three a cultural anthropological, a Biblical and a liturgical-historical probe is conducted, and in chapter four an actual descriptive and a South African ethnographic probe.

In the cultural anthropological probe the work of Victor Turner is used in order to shed light on reconciliation as a ritual process. Turner's notion of the so-called Social Drama gives insight into the process and phases through which people move when they experience change, and to a certain extent this is comparable with what happened in South Africa and the Dutch Reformed Church. These phases also show some remarkable similarities to the phases of the grieving or dying process and help to ascertain where in the overall process ritual comes into play. Like the Afrikaans poet Antjie Krog remarked in her book on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, "Yes. Piece by piece we die into reconciliation." Along with the phases of the Social Drama, Turner's work on the phases of ritual is also important for a study on reconciliation rituals. Therefore the concepts 'liminality', 'communitas' and 'societas' are explored, because it is important that reconciliation rituals can create a state of 'liminality' and a 'communitas' time so that people may arrive at a 'societas' of Christian reconciliation.

Given the fact that the research was conducted from a Reformed theological perspective, the next probe is a Biblical probe. Making use of Vernon K. Robbins' socio-rhetorical exegesis, Luke 14, 7-24 was explored as a good example of Luke's use of table fellowship as a rhetorical technique. From an exploration of the inner-, inter- and social- and cultural textures of this text, some Biblical guidelines concerning reconciliation and reconciliation rituals, especially pertaining to rituals of commensality, are formulated. These guidelines are used in the conclusion where suggestions regarding the inculturation of rituals of reconciliation in South Africa and the Reformed tradition are made.

The third and last probe of chapter three entails a rather comprehensive diachronical liturgical-historical exploration of Christian rituals of reconciliation. Firstly the rituals of reconciliation (i.a. penance, confession) are described and some conclusions are made and thereafter the Lord's Supper. Just like the ritual of reconciliation the descriptive exploration of the Lord's Supper starts out in the Early Church, but is later narrowed down with the confessional and geographical denominators Reformed and South African. The findings of this diachronical description are in the next chapter confronted with a synchronical South African description of the same rituals. This helps to get a balanced no-

tion of the interaction between tradition and renewal, which is important for the appropriation for new rituals.

In chapter four, firstly an actual descriptive probe is undertaken, whereby the current state regarding reconciliation rituals is described. Once again the focus is mainly on Africa, although not exclusively, and described under ten headings. Out of this description six typologies regarding reconciliation rituals are formulated. Each of these typologies fits to greater or lesser extent into the different phases of the reconciliation process.

The last probe is a South African ethnographic probe. For a period of two years reconciliation rituals were collected in communities (one Black, Xhosa speaking; one White, Afrikaans speaking and one Brown, Afrikaans speaking) in and around Cape Town, South Africa. Along with descriptions of the rituals, several techniques (i.a. focus groups and interviews) were used in order to establish, among other things, how the people who participate in these rituals, appropriate the rituals. In this probe the contexts of the rituals are firstly described, and thereafter the ritual data are selected and described, and some ritual critical comments are made.

These five ritual probes brought several findings to the fore which can, within an African and Reformed context, be systematized within the context of the process 'from fast to feast' as an overarching metaphor. Drinking and eating together, or the intentional absence thereof, coupled with reconciliation, is present throughout all the probes like a *leitmotiv* and is also the central finding of this research. More findings concerning reconciliation rituals however came to the fore in each probe. These findings are summarized at the end of each probe and will help to stimulate the ritual imagination concerning reconciliation.

The finding of this research that is presented in chapter five basically attempts to show that a variety of rituals can be inculturated within the processes of reconciliation and church unity in the Dutch Reformed Church, Uniting Reformed Church and South Africa. The process 'from fast to feast' gives insight into the 'what', 'when' and 'how' concerning the inculturation of reconciliation rituals within an African and Christian context. 'Fast and feast', which amongst other things also entails eating and drinking together or the absence thereof, runs like a golden thread throughout all the probes. Rituals showing these qualities of commensality are pre-eminently suitable to serve as reconciliation rituals, although they have sometimes in the past had the power to do exactly the opposite. Therefore the finding of this research is that this feature of commensality can be developed within South African and Reformed reconciliation rituals, but in such a way that it serves reconciliation and church unity. And for this purpose some ritual-liturgical guidelines for the inculturation of rituals of recon-

ciliation are presented under the headings ritual time, ritual objects, ritual space, ritual sound and language, ritual identity and ritual actions.

The dissertation also include an addendum with raw ritual data collected in the ethnographic probe. The main reason for the inclusion of this information is the fact that much of this indigenous knowledge is only available in South African oral culture and has not yet been documented.