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Multicultural worship in Pretoria. A ritual-liturgical case study

ABSTRACT

The main aim of this article is to develop a theory for praxis with regards to multicultural worship in South Africa. With this aim in mind qualitative research was undertaken in three denominationally different congregations namely Dutch Reformed, Roman Catholic and Charismatic. The research question was “what are the ritual-liturgical qualities that make sustainable multicultural worship possible with the goal of enhancing social cohesion and reconciliation?” After a discussion of the theoretical points of departure of the research project the congregations and collected data are presented and ritual-liturgical qualities are identified. The article concludes by revisiting these qualities and rephrasing them into a preliminary theory for praxis which could possibly enhance the development of more sustainable multicultural worship services in the South African society.

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

During a small scale research project conducted in 2011 amongst worshippers attending a weekly multicultural communion service in a Dutch Reformed Church in Pretoria, the worshippers identified the multicultural nature of the worship as not only important, but also essential (Kleynhans, 2011:91). The South African society is diverse in many ways, but that is not always the case if we are looking at worship services. Research findings suggest that people need to feel part of the diverse South African society when attending worship services, therefore the need for multicultural worship services. Robert Schreiters’ notion of local theologies describes this diversity quite well. He defines “... local theologies can have nuances in the theological tradition of a church denomination as a result of a congregation’s history, context and diversity in spirituality. A congregation is a cultural web. In this cultural web beliefs, interpretation of the confessional creeds, history of congregation, spirituality, attitudes, morals, customs, specific practices of a certain pastor, and the environment form an intertwined whole that is a cultural web” (Schreiter, 1985:3).

In this article the researchers use a ritual-liturgical approach for researching multicultural Christian liturgies (cf. Wepener 2009). The researchers deem rituals in liturgy as agents on the road towards reconciliation in our country. Five concepts are important as a theoretical framework for our research namely multicultural worship, ritual, liturgical inculturation, reconciliation and social cohesion as a result of social capital. The researchers use the following working definitions or descriptions for the concepts.

Firstly *multicultural liturgy* comprises the inclusion of a diversity of South African cultures in one shared liturgy in our context. We regard our multicultural situation as an asset which

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should be celebrated (Wepener 2009:116-117; also Degenaar 2000). The following quote from a well-known singer and songwriter emphasise the potential that the multicultural South African society inhibits. "Every day in South Africa I am confronted by bizarre contradictions: in a hardware store I buy *riempie*⁴ from a Chinese man who speaks seemingly fluent Zulu to his customers; an Afrikaner Nationalist who gives extra lessons in English, decorates her lounge with a reed mat, beads and assegais⁵; I order a cold *Lion*⁶ from a Xhosa waiter who wears a red fez and white gloves; drive past a block of flats called St Tropez; watch lions and elephants in a circus that tours Southern Africa with a ring master in top and tails; a pot-bellied 'witch doctor' dressed in skins and beads opens the door of luxury motor cars outside a four-star hotel; a Ndebele woman paints the pictures of windows on the mud wall of her home...It is a complex and exciting world and one searches for the beacons and sign posts. Yet apartheid denies all this. It erected fences, it separates, it avoids the future..." (Van der Merwe, 1996:78; see Kramer, 1986:54).

Ritual can be phrased as follows "Rituals can often be repeated, self-evident, symbolic actions, that are always interactive and corporeal, sometimes accompanied by texts and formulas, aimed at the transfer of values in the individual and the group, and of which the form and content are always culture, context and time bound, so that the involvement in the reality which is presented in the rituals remains dynamic" (Wepener 2009:36). All the above mentioned characteristics work together to form a ritual landscape and within this specific ritual landscape people attach meaning and value to certain symbols. "*Liturgical inculturation* is a continuous process of critical-reciprocal interaction between cult (liturgy) and culture so that a totally new entity comes into being, namely an inculturated liturgy" (Wepener 2009:42). The importance of liturgical inculturation is as Senn describes it "This is because every generation of Christians has been concerned that its worship be relevant, at least to them." (Senn, 1983:38). With this in mind, the South African context is in dire need of multicultural liturgies bearing the message of reconciliation and social unity.

The fourth concept of *reconciliation* is defined as "the continuous process through truth and justice aimed at the restoration of broken relationships, so that a new reality which is qualitatively different to any previous relationship comes into being" (Wepener 2009:49; cf. also Nürnberger 1989:12). De Gruchy in his book *Reconciliation, Restoring Justice* emphasises the journey of reconciliation "... a journey from the past into the future, a journey from estrangement to communion, or from what was patently unjust in search of a future that is just." (De Gruchy, 2002:28). The last concept, social cohesion, can best be understood against the background of the use of the concept social capital in recent literature in South Africa.⁷

Generating *social capital* in liturgy leads to social cohesion. Three dimensions in social capital come to the fore: bonding, bridging and linking (De Roest & Noordegraaf 2009:217). We must be aware of the danger of an insignificant intellectual discussion of social capital in our context. Wepener and Cilliers (2010:419) have made a contribution in this respect. They decided to attach an added dimension to the "linking" aspect of the three: bonding, bridging and linking. With "linking" the possibility for ideological discussion and conflictual dialogue is

4. An Afrikaans word for a leather thong used on chairs (Van der Merwe, 1996:89).

5. An assegai is a traditional African spear which is traditionally used for self-defence; it can also be regarded as a symbol of manhood (Van der Merwe, 1996:89).

6. It was a beer locally brewed in South Africa (Van der Merwe, 1996:89).

7. For more work on social capital and ritual/liturgy see for example Barnard, Mbaya & Wepener (2012), Wepener (2009a) and Wepener et al (2010).

held open. In other words, the dominant economic model and status quo are not protected in any way ... Matters like equity and justice, power, and the redistribution of wealth and assets come into play. The one-way movement from those who “generate” social capital to those who “receive” it is transformed into an equitable partnership where holders of power (political, economic and social) are confronted and invited into a truly reciprocal transformation of society. This is not a neutral, stance on, or discussion about social capital, but a process of linking in which ideological presuppositions are not only questioned, but also shattered and transformed (Wepener & Cilliers 2010:419). Therefore they add a fourth dimension to the three dimensions of social capital which is generally accepted, namely that congregations are spaces within which a new ethos is born and nurtured, an ethos that confronts structures and constellations of power, and works in collaboration with other relevant agencies towards a real transformation of society in terms of equity and justice (Wepener & Cilliers 2010:419).

The working hypothesis with which we have worked in this research project is that in multicultural liturgy this kind of social capital can be generated. The goal of social capital is social cohesion and inclusion (Swart 210:326). *Social cohesion* takes place where the values of trust and reciprocity are cultivated in multicultural ritual-liturgical celebrations. Social cohesion cannot take place without trust and reciprocity as enrichment of the cultures (Worthington, 2006:268). Worthington concluded “Society needs a plan. The plan needs to be negotiated by all voices at the table so that relationships can be built and trust can grow. This will occur mostly as the warmth-based virtues and altruistic motives – such as grace, mercy and conciliation – are emphasized, and tolerances can be brought about even in some of the more extreme members of each group.” (Worthington, 2006:268).

Where this happens social cohesion is fostered in communities (Eigelaar-Meets, Gomulia, Geldenhuys 2010:48). Therefore our working hypothesis is that rituals in multicultural liturgies can create a home for all where social cohesion is growing (Eigelaar-Meets, Gomulia & Geldenhuys 2010:46). Then reconciliation becomes possible. Based on the empirical data generated from three worshipping communities we will in conclusion formulate a preliminary theory for praxis concerning multicultural worship. However, these preceding five concepts formed the theoretical basis for the case study that was conducted in this research project.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION DESCRIPTION

In 2012 multicultural worship services were identified and participated in by means of participatory observation⁸ in Pretoria. A selection of three worship services in the Pretoria region were made which was provisionally termed as being ‘sustainable multicultural’ worship services. These three worship services were studied by means of a ritual-liturgical inquiry in a qualitative research⁹ of half-structured interviews¹⁰ in order to identify the so-called ritual qualities (cf. Grimes 1990) that contributed to making the multicultural nature of the worship sustainable and that can eventually be inculturated in liturgies in South Africa.

8. “Participant observation is a method in which a researcher takes part in daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture.” (De Walt & De Walt, 2002:1).

9. “Qualitative research typically is enacted in naturalistic settings, draws on multiple methods that respect the humanity of the participants in the study, focuses on context, is emergent and evolving, and is fundamentally interpretive.” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011:2)

10. “The interviews are usually not entirely pre-structured with respect to content, formulation, sequence and answers. Neither are they left entirely open.” (Boeije, 2010:62)

The research question we were investigating is:

“What are the ritual-liturgical qualities that make sustainable multicultural worship possible in furthering social cohesion and reconciliation?”

Our research program followed the steps in the approach to Practical Theology of Richard Osmer (Osmer 2008). This will be:

- a descriptive-empirical task: what is going on?
- an interpretative task: why is it going on?
- a normative task: what ought to be going on?
- and a pragmatic task: how might we respond? (Osmer 2010:4).

Therefore in this article after this introduction the ritual-liturgical data will be presented and thereafter in conclusion the central concepts will be revisited in order to establish whether these services indeed further the above mentioned processes.

Already mentioned above is the choice for three sustainable multicultural churches in the Pretoria region, firstly Dutch Reformed Church Pretoria (Arcadia), secondly Elim Full Gospel Church and thirdly Roman Catholic Church St Pius X. The reason why we chose to use three churches in different denominations, rather than three Dutch Reformed Churches is because of diversity. We argue that the diversity amongst the three different denominations in terms of worship services, liturgies and even people attending the services will broaden the significance of the study. Before presenting the ritual-liturgical data we want to shortly explain the context of each congregation as this is very important for the presentation of the ritual-liturgical data.

The Dutch Reformed Church Pretoria (Arcadia) started with a multicultural ministry in the early 1990's even before the election in 1994, called the Pretoria Faith Community. This congregation is situated in Pretoria Central; the multicultural worship service is a well-established part of the congregation. On a regular basis you will find South African (black, brown, Indian and white) citizens, Asian (Chinese and South Korean) citizens as well as citizens from other African countries (Congo, Kenya, Zimbabwe) attending the service. The cultural composition of the focus group at the Dutch Reformed Church Pretoria (Arcadia) consisted of one brown male, two Congolese males, two South African black females and two South African black males.

Elim Full Gospel Church is part of the Pentecostal tradition. Ever since the early 2000's the congregation focused on being multicultural in essence serving people from different cultural backgrounds. The congregation is situated in the Hatfield area and is therefore a popular attraction for students. On a regular Sunday morning you will see a wide variety of cultures attending the worship service, mostly South African citizens (black, brown, Indian and white). The cultural composition of the focus group at Elim Full Gospel Church consisted out of one white male, two white females, one coloured male, one coloured female and two black South African females.

For some years the Roman Catholic Church St Pius X is serving a multicultural community. On an average Sunday morning at the 09:30 mass one finds different cultures attending the worship service. This parish is situated in the Waterkloof area where many diplomats reside. On any given Sunday the following cultures can be expected at the morning mass from black, white and brown South Africans, East Asian people such as people from Indonesia, Malaysia,

Japan and Thailand, African Americans, Europeans and black people from the rest of the African continent. The focus group at The Roman Catholic Church St Pius X consisted out of two black South African males, one black South African female, one Kenyan female, one white American male and one Lebanese male.

The following six questions were asked in no specific order in the three focus groups. Subsequently a detailed presentation of the data collected through means of a focus group discussion:

2.1 Why do you choose to worship at this specific church?

The focus groups repeatedly mentioned a specific atmosphere surrounding the three different worship services. They used adjectives such as comfortable, openness towards everyone, the friendliness and the warmth of the people attending the worship service. The fellowship people experiences at the three worship services are in their words the same experience as being part of a family. Another reason mentioned by all three focus groups is the fact that everyone is given the opportunity to participate in all of the ministries, in their own unique way, through means of their own strengths and gifts. The praise and worship were emphasised by all three focus groups as well. One of the South African black males participating in the Roman Catholic Church focus group made this powerful statement:

“When I worship in a multicultural faith community, I represent the South African society inside the church walls.” (Respondent R2, 2012).

2.2 What is it about the worship service that keeps you coming back?

In the Dutch Reformed Church the whole focus group stated that the teaching part (sermon) is one of the reasons why they keep attending the worship service. It is practical and you feel equipped afterwards to spread the word of God to other people not knowing about Him yet. The focus group at Elim Full Gospel Church also said the teaching part (sermon) as they feel that the sermon sustain them for their whole lives, that is why they come back each Sunday. The Roman Catholic focus group said the Eucharist, for them the Eucharist is the centre of their liturgy, actually the centre of their life. All three focus groups mentioned the praise and worship which creates a moment where they really experiences the presence of the Lord. All three focus groups talked about the atmosphere created by the worship service and the people attending the worship service:

“I like the way the congregation gets a chance to greet each other, giving the congregation a chance to meet new people, invite them for tea after the service to get to know them a bit more. To make them feel welcome and share the love and peace of God with them.” (Respondent A1, 2012).

“When I feel sad and step inside the church there is always someone caring for me, either with a smile, a hug or a short conversation.” (Respondent E5, 2012).

“For me when I am busy praising the Lord together with fellow Christians, it is a cleansing experience.” (Respondent R4, 2012).

2.3 What skills or capacities do congregants/pastors need when churches and worship are multicultural?

The skills mentioned by all three focus groups are communication skills, people skills, understanding of different cultures, flexibility, sensitivity, tolerance and a specific personality type, someone who is open and friendly towards people. One of the skills mentioned by all three focus groups is a teachable spirit:

“We can all teach each other something, we must just be prepared to learn from each other.” (Respondent E1, 2012).

2.4 Do you think that the multicultural nature of the worship service promote reconciliation and social cohesion?

Most respondents were positive about the multicultural nature of the worship service promoting reconciliation and social cohesion. A respondent in the focus group at the Dutch Reformed Church said

“This congregation give people the opportunity to tell other people their experience. Most people have certain opinions which are untrue because of their ignorance. Therefore, being able to share our experiences with other people through means of telling our stories promotes reconciliation.” (Respondent A2, 2012).

They also said the teaching part of the sermons is always based on reconciliation with God and fellow human beings as this is the vision of the congregation. The focus group at Elim suggested that in this multicultural congregation

“They made a choice and take the effort to befriend each other. We reached out towards people from different cultures and backgrounds, each one should participate in this outreach. When this happens reconciliation happens naturally.” (Respondent E1, 2012).

2.5 What is your personal opinion about reconciliation and social cohesion in the South African society?

The three different focus groups admitted that a lot has been done in terms of reconciliation, but there is still a long way ahead for reconciliation to happen. A lot has been done in terms of racial reconciliation in South Africa, which the focus groups define as the traditional understanding of reconciliation between black and white people. The groups feel that the term reconciliation lacks a broader definition; including reconciliation between rich and poor, between people from South Africa and all over the world. The focus group at Elim suggested that we struggle to forgive one another.

“When you forgive one another you lose your power and might over the other one. We do not want peace, people want dominance and then reconciliation will never happen.” (Respondent E7, 2012).

The Roman Catholic focus group said that you can change the laws of the country, but reconciliation will not just happen; you need to change the hearts of the people of the country. The mass can make a difference changing the hearts of people, if the message of reconciliation of Jesus Christ is taught people will understand and change.

2.6 Do you think the church can and should play a role in terms of reconciliation and social cohesion in South Africa? If yes, how do you think the church can make a difference promoting reconciliation and social cohesion?

The groups were unanimous that the church can and should play a role promoting reconciliation and social cohesion. One of the ways one of the focus groups mentioned is the concept of diversity. We live in a diverse society in terms of race, culture, languages etc. In the Bible Paul talks about unity in Jesus Christ: yes we are different in many ways, but in Jesus we become unified, we are now equal human beings. The focus groups said that people need to start small in their own communities spreading the message of reconciliation, not just by words but also through action for example to host a multicultural worship service once a month.

The following qualities were identified in promoting reconciliation and social cohesion through multicultural worship services: An open and friendly atmosphere during the worship service

- Fellowship
- A teachable spirit
- Telling stories to one another
- Making an effort to reach out to strangers (hospitality)
- The power of forgiveness
- Unified in Jesus Christ
- Context
- Leadership

In what follows these qualities will be arranged into a preliminary theory for praxis concerning multicultural worship.

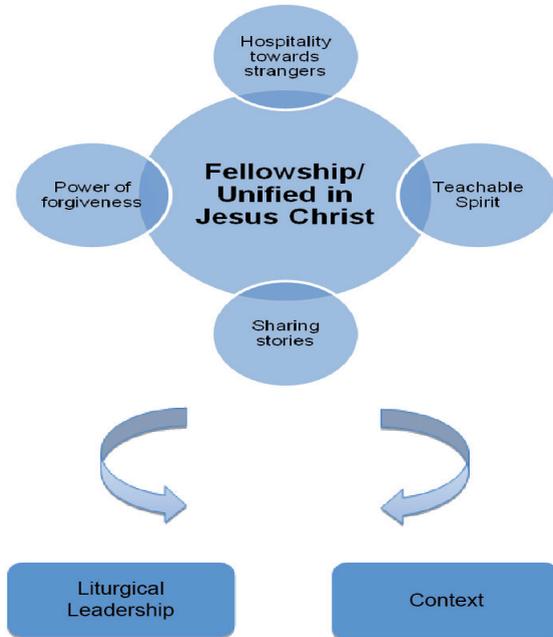
3. CENTRAL CONCEPTS REVISITED

literature on the concept social cohesion is overwhelming and diverse (cf. Cantle, 2005; Dexter, 2004; Friedkin, 2004; Kunene, 2009) going back to the work of French sociologist Emile Durkheim. From this array of possibilities regarding possible definitions of social cohesion we opt for Cantle's (2005:62) description offered in bullet format, namely:

- There is a common vision and sense of belonging for all communities;
- The diversity of people's different backgrounds and circumstances are appreciated and positively valued;
- Those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities; and
- Strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods.

With this definition in mind we revisit the qualities. The central quality distilled from the field work was in our mind "fellowship" and that in combination with "unified in Jesus Christ".

These two in combination we posit as a centre around which the rest of this theory for praxis can emerge. There is however also strong interference (in the positive and creative sense, cf. Post 2001) between this centre and the qualities of “hospitality towards strangers” as well as having a “teachable spirit” and in turn these latter two qualities which are also closely related to particular attitudes of worshippers interfere again on their part with the qualities regarding the “sharing of stories” and the “power of forgiveness”. All these qualities that are interlinked do however rest on the edifice of the qualities regarding “liturgical leadership” and “context” without which none of the above will be possible.



With the above in mind it is important to note that social cohesion can be both positive and negative (Kunene, 2009:6&7) and according to Dexter (2004:viii) the real challenge in the South African society is that of building social cohesion and simultaneously “recognise, protect and give expression to difference”. It is well known that ritual has a social dimension or function and that worship or liturgy has the potential to bind a group together. However, it is important to acknowledge the fact that both mono- and multi-cultural worship services promote social cohesion, but most probably different types of cohesion. Inclusion and exclusion are two sides of the same coin when it comes to the generation of social cohesion by means of worship services. It is therefore essential in our view to expand somewhat more on a renewed theory for praxis regarding multicultural worship; based on the data obtained from the fieldwork. And at its core we propose that the sociological concept “social cohesion” should be *baptized* in the front of the biblical notion of “hospitality” and that this core should be the principle which shapes the form of multicultural liturgies.

In our presentation it has been stated that during a study in 2011 the worshippers identified the multicultural nature of the worship as not only important, but also essential in their

appropriation of the worship in which they are participating. In addition, all respondents in the current 2012 research project were positive regarding the multicultural nature of the worship they attend. This means that the worshippers appropriate the liturgy in which they are participating as positive, even though some of the elements of worship are not of their own cultural background. In contrast to our findings the Dutch Lutheran liturgist Mirella Klomp comes to a different conclusion. In her research project published as *The Sound of Worship* she studied by means of Liturgical Musical Ethnography the sound of worship in a Surinamese and a Ghanaian congregation in the Southeast of Amsterdam. We quote her final conclusion which is relevant for our research: "Although worship may still become sacramental when it takes unfamiliar shapes, when it does not embody the faith of the performer, or when a performer is confronted with the shapes in which fellow Christians encounter Christ, the establishment (or creation through mergers) of cross-cultural churches would in the long term probably lead to serious problems concerning the possibility for worship to become incarnational: too many shapes that do not embody people's faith, will impede the possible encounter with Christ of several performers" (Klomp, 2011:262). This conclusion of Klomp is of course based on a very specific context of worshipping minority groups in the Netherlands, but it is helpful in our research in order to challenge our own findings. Therefore this conclusion of Klomp, however true, raises several serious questions within our unique South African context, but also as such presents a challenge.

Our unique South African context of 2012 in which we are still on the road towards reconciliation, liturgies that serve the goal of greater social cohesion we believe should be promoted. From the empirical findings it became clear that multicultural worship services can indeed serve this common goal in a very unique way. Therefore our renewed theory for praxis posits that a multicultural liturgy that promotes greater social cohesion by 2012 is a liturgy that promotes the values of belonging, the appreciation of difference, the fostering of relationships across certain perceived boundaries (to name but some of the characteristics of social cohesion), but in such a way that the Spirit of Christ can continuously deconstruct any liturgical *ordo* in which inclusion yet again becomes exclusion. Good liturgical leadership and the right context cultivate the space for this whilst the right attitude of worshippers is also imperative, but in the centre of such a theory is a sense of fellowship that stems from the Spirit of Him who was excluded so that other may be included.

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KEY WORDS

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TREFWOORDE

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