



Timing grace in lockdown liturgies. South African and Dutch responses compared

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Abstract

The similarities and differences regarding responses in the media to the phenomenon of lockdown liturgy in the Netherlands and South Africa is firstly explored in this article. The findings of Goyvaerts and Woude, which is based on their study of discussions in Dutch media, is briefly presented and thereafter compared to responses in the South African Afrikaans media. Based on this comparison, core themes are identified and discussed as creative liturgical theological tensions pertaining to lockdown liturgies. These tensions include: Excarnation – Incarnation; Global – Local; and Prophetic – Pastoral. Revisiting and exploring these tensions are invaluable for reimagining the *liturgia condenda* pertaining to lockdown liturgy specifically and online liturgy in general.

Keywords

liturgy; ritual; lockdown; Practical Theology; Covid-19; hermeneutics

1. Introduction

In the Dutch *Yearbook for Ritual and Liturgical Studies* Sam Goyvaerts and Fokke Wouda (2020) published an informative article entitled “Dutch Responses to Lockdown Liturgies. Analysis of the Public Debate on Sacraments During the COVID-19 Pandemic”. In this article the authors present their findings regarding responses in Dutch media to lockdown liturgies with an emphasis on the celebration of the sacraments (cf. also Post 2021:90–94 & 102). They analysed newspaper articles, not the lockdown liturgies themselves, and gained insight on the public debate regarding lockdown liturgy and the celebration of the online sacraments in their

country. By looking at responses in the Dutch media they could trace the theological discourse embedded in the various responses and formulate the liturgical responses as typologies.

The work of Goyvaerts and Woude (2020) stimulated the curiosity of the authors of this article, and in the light of our Dutch colleagues' work, we wondered about the similarities and differences that we would find when analysing similar sources in a South African context. This is also the first aim of this article, namely, a brief presentation of South African sources from the media and to engage in a comparison between the findings of our Dutch colleagues and our own findings. Secondly, based on this comparison, and importantly, to also develop central themes as creative tensions related to the topic of lockdown liturgies for the South African liturgical context.¹ We believe these themes as tensions can assist worship planners and leaders with a liturgical hermeneutics, which we here refer to as “timing grace” (Cilliers 2019), when engaging in lockdown and online liturgies. The main categories and conclusions of Goyvaerts and Woude, we also identified in the South African Afrikaans media from the same period (2020), however, there were also significant differences. These differences we believe have to do with liturgical hermeneutics and the issue of timing grace.

We will firstly describe the content of articles on the same topic in the South African Afrikaans media. Thereafter compare the categories, or typologies, of Goyvaerts and Woude to the categories that we observed in South Africa in 2020. Lastly, we will conclude with a selection of three creative tensions we recognise in the South African context regarding lockdown liturgies which are significant for reimagining the *liturgia condenda* pertaining to lockdown liturgy specifically and online liturgy in general.

2. Lockdown liturgy in the South African Afrikaans media

Goyvaerts and Woude (2020) found many articles, thirty-four in total, in the Dutch media, even though they only looked at articles in two Dutch newspapers. The newspapers they included in their study are also not

1 In a study of missional liturgy Wepener (2008) also formulated creative liturgical-theological tensions.

specifically church newspapers or newspapers that serve as theological mouthpieces of specific denominations, but general newspapers.²

We initially surveyed a wide variety of media publications regarding this theme in South Africa. In the South African English media, the reality of lockdown liturgies was mentioned as a phenomenon a few times, but we could not find any in-depth discussions on the topic by theologians, ministers of religion or other scholars stating opinions.³ In Afrikaans newspapers, *Beeld*, *Die Burger*, *Volksblad (Netwerk24)*⁴ and *Vrye Weeklad*, a total of five articles were published.⁵

Three of the articles were by journalists who just provided a general description of lockdown liturgy as phenomenon and only briefly referred to the possibility of cyber communion (De Kock 2020; Marx & Lawrence 2020; Smith 2020). Three articles did engage in a discussion of online liturgy and cyber communion of which two (Wepener & Matthee 2020a & 2020b) provided a positive appreciation of online worship and rituals with an explicit focus on the possibilities that technology provides despite challenges in combination with explorations of themes such as embodiment

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- 2 The Dutch newspapers they included in their study are *Trouw* and *Nederlands Dagblad* (Goyvaerts & Woude, 2020: 2).
 - 3 Monama (2020) refers to the phenomenon in an article in the English newspaper *The Star*; Asala (2021) in *Africanews*; Sonjica (2020) in *Sunday Times*; and Msibi (2020) in *News24*. There are several similar English newspaper articles available, but they all only state the fact of online worship and describe the phenomenon, sometimes also the loss of income of churches as a consequence of lockdown measurements and sometimes also quoting ministers' and members' experiences, but none of these articles engage in any discussion, let alone a theological discussion, of lockdown liturgy or online sacramental celebrations.
 - 4 These three Afrikaans newspapers are published online in what is collectively called *Netwerk24*.
 - 5 We do not include in our discussion Afrikaans church newspapers such as *Kerkbode* or *Die Hervormer*. The main reason is that we want to compare articles published in roughly similar newspapers in the Netherlands and South Africa, however, even in the newspapers of denominations we could not find theological explorations of the theme of online liturgy or virtual sacramentality. One exception is an article by Greyling (2020) on online liturgy and embodiment. There was also one article in *Kerkbode* by Scholtz (2020) in which he provided a general description of Dutch liturgical responses to lockdown, but this was not nearly as informative and systematic as the work of Goyvaerts and Woude. In other South African Afrikaans news media, for example *Maroela Media*, the phenomenon was mentioned, but not discussed.

and community.⁶ In *Volksblad* (also published on *Netwerk24*) there was a response that focused specifically on cyber communion (Rossouw 2020). This article was written by a Professor of Philosophy at the University of the Free State, who is also an ordained Greek Orthodox priest.

Apart from these three articles, the absence of a deeper discussion in the South African media regarding online liturgy or sacramentality, compared to the Dutch responses published in two Dutch newspapers, is as such significant. In our view it points toward the fact that the desirability of online liturgy and sacramentality as such was clearly not a core issue in a country where 84% of the population belong to the Christian religion (cf. Schoeman 2013). Theological issues pertaining to desirability or appropriateness of lockdown liturgy was skipped and practical issues pertaining to how liturgy can best be celebrated online, was engaged with in the media.

The first aim of this article, after this description of responses in the media, is to compare the categories of Goyvaerts and Woude (2020) with the categories we could identify in both the articles and via informal observations and engagement in lockdown liturgies, which is also what we will do in the next section. We therefore should mention that our hunch regarding the absence of a discussion in the media regarding lockdown liturgy, is that it on the one hand points to the fact that liturgy is to a certain extent viewed as preaching (speaking and reading) in South Africa; on the other hand that the pandemic inspired ministers and theologians in South Africa to focus more on socio-economic issues such as poverty and inequality that was exacerbated by the pandemic, and also engage in discussions in the media on these topics, than on liturgy and sacramentality. It is our intention to contribute to this existing lacuna regarding a discussion of lockdown liturgy in our context by means of this article as we believe that *leitourgia* and *diaconia* cannot be neatly separated as is sometimes done in literature.⁷

6 For a general discussion of the experience of “unfinished rituals” during lockdown times, see Wepener (2020).

7 For recent work on postcolonial liturgy in which binary thinking is challenged, see Carvalhaes (2020 & 2021).

3. Dutch and South African categories compared

Goyvaerts and Woude (2020) focusses their article specifically on lockdown liturgies and debates pertaining to the celebration of the sacraments. They identified four categories or types of responses to the celebration of the sacraments which includes, abstinence, spectator liturgy, private domestic liturgy, and embedded domestic liturgy. We recognize all four categories that they identified in the Netherlands also in the South African lockdown liturgical landscape, but sometimes in a qualified sense, as well as one more category that they did not identify in the Netherlands, which is in fact the largest category in South Africa.

3.1 Liturgical abstinence

Liturgical abstinence, which meant that worship services were cancelled, and that members, ministers and theologians were explicitly critical about the possibility of online celebrations, or that abstinence means solidarity, is the category that we encountered least. The only exception is the article by Rossouw (2020). The liturgical abstinence that Goyvaerts and Woude (2020; see also Post 2021:103–4) refers to was largely inspired by solidarity with those who suffer, and liturgical abstinence thus meant co-suffering, through liturgical sacramental abstinence, with others. Rossouw's (2020) motivation for liturgical abstinence is based on his understanding of liturgy and church, of ritual embodiment and community, and the impossibility that liturgy as a bodily action can be mediated via technology.

Rossouw's argument prompted us to look at the webpages of the Roman Catholic Church in South Africa to see how priests and parishes from a more sacramentally orientated liturgical tradition than our own Dutch reformed tradition responded liturgically during the pandemic in South Africa. In Cape Town, for example, most parishes had sacramental worship during lockdown⁸ which are either forms of spectator or embedded online liturgies and we could not trace the category of abstinence.

We did not do an in-depth study of lockdown liturgy in Roman Catholic parishes; however, we did do empirical research in the Dutch Reformed

8 See for a list of live streamed masses and online liturgies of Roman Catholic parishes in Cape Town <https://adct.org.za/ongoing-live-streamed-masses-and-devotions-in-the-archdiocese-of-cape-town/>

Church during 2020, especially pertaining to preaching during lockdown (see Steyn, Pieterse & Wepener 2020; Steyn & Wepener 2021) and to a lesser extent regarding liturgy (Wepener & Cilliers, 2021). At grassroots level liturgical abstinence was a foreign idea in most denominations and congregations. Later in this article we will go deeper into the reasons for this choice against abstinence, however, we can mention here that we suspect that it has to do with the fact that ministers and theologians are keenly attuned to the pastoral needs of faith communities in trying times, that they hold a conviction that forms of online liturgy play an important pastoral role and that abstinence will thus be the opposite of solidarity with suffering people. Choosing for or against liturgical or sacramental abstinence is related to the already mentioned hermeneutical notion of “timing grace” (Cilliers 2019) to which we will return later.

3.2 Spectator liturgy

With spectator liturgy Goyvaerts and Woude (2020:7–8) refer to “a physically celebrated rite, streamed, recorded, or live broadcasted through television.” This category was indeed present in South Africa. The term spectator liturgy, however, needs some clarification for the authors of this article who are both from a Reformed theological tradition. From the perspective of preaching and the discipline of Homiletics, we wonder whether a sermon heard by worshippers in a living room over a television set or computer, even in an asynchronous way, is really “spectator” liturgy? The term spectator implies passivity on the part of the worshippers and restricts them to the category of audience, but what about the inner dynamics of the hearing process of the worshippers and even the act of seeing the liturgy on a screen? We wonder whether the term “spectator liturgy” does not point to a certain approach to embodiment where notions such as hearing, and understanding are removed from the category of embodiment? Of course, we understand that the authors needed typologies to get a grip on phenomenon, but the choice of this terms also prompts a discussion of hierarchy involved when it comes to the body and the senses. In Homiletics listening and hearing is not associated with passivity, but with active engagement of worshippers in the preaching and worship event. Cilliers (2009:54) puts it as follows: “Certain senses or capabilities cannot be crystallized as being the primary or most basic. It is not feasible to abstract a core (for instance, cognitive, or verbal, or manual, or optical,

etc.) and elevate this as being the apex of humanity or the sole interpretative medium. We are bodies, with all of our senses and capabilities being part of a complex whole. God reveals God self to, and through, all of our senses, for the simple reason that we are bodies.”

3.3 Private domestic liturgy

This category the authors describe as “makeshift liturgies at home” and also that they “often take place independent of church ministers and congregations” (Goyvaerts & Woude 2020:8; see also Post 2021:90). This category we recognize in our own South African context, but in a qualified sense. Private domestic liturgical rituals were often encouraged, but almost always as connected to what the authors call “embedded domestic liturgy” (see next category and discussion). In South Africa worship leaders often encouraged worshippers to augment the online liturgies in which they participated with a variety of domestic liturgical rituals. A Grounded Theory analysis of sermons preached during lockdown in South Africa (see Steyn, Pieterse & Wepener 2020) showed that many sermons encouraged a practice in which domestic liturgical rituals, as a kind of para-liturgy, were connected to the online liturgies. These domestic liturgical rituals were participated in at home during the online liturgy or after or before the online liturgy, for example liturgical actions at home in which families were encouraged to build a Lenten scene with rocks and wood in their living rooms and which was explicitly connected to the Good Friday liturgy. The typology “private domestic liturgy” should thus be qualified for the liturgical lockdown praxis in South Africa as a practice that was not completely makeshift or independent, but deliberately connected to the liturgy of a congregation.

3.4 Embedded domestic liturgies

In their article Goyvaerts and Woude (2020:9) describe embedded domestic liturgy as: “virtually connected or embedded domestic liturgy includes the participation of the faithful connected through the internet. One could say that the internet extends the sacred space of the church building to the homes of the faithful.” The category they describe here is what most of the congregations in mainline affluent churches with members with Wi-Fi access, or at least enough internet data, in their private homes as well as

good network connectivity also developed. A platform called “Kieskerk”,⁹ comparable to the mentioned platform of the Roman Catholic churches in Cape Town, was also developed where many congregations registered and made their embedded domestic liturgies available.

Depending on perspective, for example a South African middle-class Dutch Reformed or Roman Catholic perspective, an observer can easily make the mistake and take this category of embedded domestic liturgy as the dominant lockdown liturgy category in South Africa. To Goyvaerts and Woude’s four insightful categories from the Netherlands, we add a fifth South African category which we describe as digital textual liturgies, and which is definitely the largest of the South African lockdown liturgy categories.¹⁰

3.5 Digital textual liturgies

Based on preliminary informal observations and conversations with ministers and members,¹¹ it soon became clear that, because of a variety of factors, but mainly economic ones, digital textual liturgies were the main type of lockdown liturgy in South Africa. What we describe as digital textual liturgies were liturgies in which a minister or pastor would type an order of worship, almost always with a message (homily/sermon), also prayers and references to hymns, and send this text as liturgy via applications such as WhatsApp or SMS, sometimes also social media platforms such as Facebook, to members of congregations. The members would then in their own time engage in a variety of ways with the digital textual liturgy.

These digital textual liturgies are probably not liturgies that can be termed sacramental worship, but it was telling regarding lockdown liturgy in South Africa. Sometimes these digital textual liturgies sent via SMS or WhatsApp

9 See the website <https://kieskerk.com/>

10 In Post’s (2021:105) overview of online liturgies during the pandemic in the Netherlands this category we add here is also absent.

11 One of the authors of this article also presented Continued Ministerial Development courses for ministers and congregations on the topic of online liturgy in this period and participants were encouraged to share their experiences with the presenter. It very soon became clear that even in more affluent congregations in the countryside, where they had little internet connectivity or where a minister or congregation was not comfortable with using technology, digital textual liturgies were used. This category was thus not restricted to poorer congregations.

included instructions on how and when to celebrate the Lord's Supper, so even if the celebration of this sacrament was probably a peripheral phenomenon in the overarching category of digital textual liturgies, it is not excluded from it.

There are at least two sets of reasons why this category was used most often. Firstly, poverty and the cost of data in combination with poor network connectivity in some parts of the country, meant that the live streaming of liturgies were either too expensive or technically impossible. Secondly, celebrating the Lord's Supper and other sacraments is for most Christians not the main issue when it comes to worshipping during a pandemic in South Africa, but rather the question how an (encouraging) sermon or message and prayer can be communicated to members.¹²

4. Three creative tensions

Very few articles were published in the South African media and the typologies of celebrations we identified during 2020 were largely comparable to those that were present in the Dutch context; however, for the largest part of the South African population lockdown, liturgies took on a different format than it did in the Netherlands, namely digital textual liturgies – which of course is not surprising for a number of reasons.¹³ In the light of our comparison, we now list and discuss three creative tensions that we think should be explored further in South Africa.¹⁴ On the one hand these creative tensions can assist in better understanding why lockdown liturgies took the form they did in South Africa and on the other hand, and importantly, they can assist in reimagining the *liturgia condenda*

12 During 2020 one of the authors of this article presented online courses on liturgy during which ministers from across South Africa could provide feedback and send in information regarding their situations pertaining to online liturgy during lockdown. Some of the information shared here are insights gained from that feedback and conversations.

13 There are a number of liturgical-historical and empirical studies from the South African context that can assist in understanding the current liturgical landscape and why faith communities, theologically speaking, developed lockdown liturgies in the ways that they did (cf. Barnard 1981; Burger 2003; Wepener, et al 2019).

14 Paul Post (2019 & 2021) also recently explored online ritual and rituals during the Corona pandemic in which he formulated and explored important notions related to online liturgy and ritual.

pertaining to the development of lockdown liturgy specifically and online liturgy in general as a hermeneutical act.

4.1 Excarnation – Incarnation

Throughout his book *Heilige Onrust*, Dutch theologian Frits de Lange (2016) emphasizes the importance of the human body in faith and religion and the fact that religion is something that humans do with their bodies. However, during lockdown, human bodies with their five senses were locked in by walls and what these bodies could physically do, was restricted. Screens, such as televisions, computer monitors and cell phones locked open the confined spaces so that bodies could liturgically do something, albeit in a new way.

In a recent publication Richard Kearney (2021) explores the issue of excarnation and asks whether humans are losing touch with their senses as human experience becomes more and more mediated via technology. This is a critical question that online lockdown liturgies should also engage with. The examples where congregations attempted to augment the online liturgies with tactile domestic liturgical rituals is a promising sign that some are already taking this challenge seriously. Kearney (2021:5; see also Kearney & Treanor 2015) argues, as we do in this article, that technology can overcome distance, however he adds that it does not always bring nearness, and this is where the importance of the senses and especially touch comes in. As we enter deeper into a technological age, the creative tension between excarnation and incarnation should, also with regard to online liturgy, always be kept in mind. Kearney (2021:38) writes: “Touch keeps us susceptible to the world as it commutes, like Hermes, between inside and outside, self and other, human and nonhuman. Tactility is our most refined means of transition and translation.”

Lockdown liturgies reminded us on a deep level of the importance of embodiment in general and touch in particular and Post (2021:109) reminds us that we must be careful of the opposition of virtual versus physical. Moving forward, online liturgies will, amongst other things, have to develop in a direction where whole bodies and all five senses are taken very seriously, otherwise we will develop bodily and sensory anaemic liturgies. In the meantime, we can again and anew appreciate the anamnestic possibilities that liturgy brings, including online lockdown liturgy, as

spatially restricted bodies were via liturgy in the present, connected to a specific past, and as such connected to God's future, but never forgetting that the Christian liturgies celebrated are anchored in the incarnation of Jesus Christ and the worshippers (cf. also Wepener & Cilliers 2021).

Cilliers (2009:53) writes as follows about worship and embodiment, which to our mind is also applicable to the various forms of lockdown liturgies:

God's (bodily) presence amongst us seems to entail at least two dimensions, namely *divine self-presentation* (even *divine disclosure*) and *human re-presentation*. The Spirit has body (or perhaps we should say: the Spirit is body), and without this body it would be difficult, if not impossible, to experience God's presence with us. The Spirit is God's embodied accommodation to created reality, and this can be experienced in and through the church, the latter being Christ existing in the form of the congregation. God's embodiment amongst us is therefore an *accommodation* to our limitations and peculiarities, but not an eradication of them.

4.2 Global – local

Worshipping bodies were in lockdown liturgies simultaneously sociologically rooted in a private space and connected to other worshipping bodies in a network culture, importantly, however, these bodies, were theologically rooted in the sacred space of a private confined space and connected to the ontological reality of the liturgy which is a divine human encounter. We are convinced that, pastorally speaking, Christians in South Africa needed lockdown liturgies, including a variety of ways in which the sacraments were celebrated during lockdown as recent research in our context pointed towards religious social capital that is generated by liturgies and rituals in poor communities which included eating and drinking and water rituals (see Wepener, et al 2019). The South African context differs fundamentally from that of the Netherlands and the idea of abstinence and solidarity is largely foreign to our context, as has already been argued. Sacramental participation and the creation of liturgies enabling that participation would in our context rather be experienced

as solidarity.¹⁵ The subheading “Global – local” can also read “Between reacting to liturgical need and unintended ecclesiological consequences.”

Many worshippers in South Africa were financially speaking poor and unemployed and already struggling to survive even before the Covid-19 virus arrived. At the end of their article Goyvaerts and Woude (2020:16) remarks that some people in the Netherlands could have focused so much on making liturgy available, that they could have forgotten diaconia. This is an important observation. In our view, making liturgy available during lockdown in South Africa, also online sacramental worship, was of course *leitourgia*, but it was as *leitourgia* also (in service of) *kerygma* and *koinonia*, and as such lockdown liturgy as *leitourgia* was (also) *diaconia* (cf. also Wepener 2012).

On the one hand making lockdown liturgies available to worshippers can potentially serve in important needs, however, ecclesologically speaking, there were and are potentially some unintended consequences to freely available online liturgies. In non-lockdown times, people largely attend worship in specific local congregations in South Africa, even though so-called church hopping is not excluded. Worshippers also often make their financial, and other contributions, in the local congregations where they attend worship. In a tradition such as the Reformed tradition, these contributions are critical for the salary of the minister and others employed by the congregation, but also community development and diaconical work of the congregation in their local community and beyond. Spectator and online lockdown liturgies meant that the phenomenon of church hopping, or what Goyvaerts and Woude (2020:14) calls “find ‘one’s pick’”, could increase.¹⁶ Often more people, even from overseas, started to attend liturgies with well-spoken preachers, well thought out orders of worship, “meaningful” celebrations of the sacraments and especially good music, for example congregations with especially gifted organists. This liturgical

15 South Africans would probably have appreciation for the abstinence and solidarity position mentioned by Goyvaerts and Woude, as long as they are not expected to also abstain.

16 In some cases, members of congregations, because of a variety of reasons, did not attend any form of lockdown liturgy of their local congregation and concomitantly also did not make any financial contributions as they usually would during the time of offerings or collection.

church hopping had detrimental consequences for some congregations who did not have the same resources as other congregations at their disposal. In general, however, and with reference to the digital textual liturgies, this was not the case and those liturgies and text messages functioned as lifelines. In lockdown, liturgies locked open those who were locked in. However, the same liturgies also unlocked some other doors behind which some less positive and unintended consequences were lurking.

The homiletician Nora Tisdale has done important work on what she calls “exegeting the congregation” (cf. Tisdale 2008; Troeger & Tisdale 2013). According to her, preachers should not only do exegesis of the biblical text that they preach on, but also the congregation, the hearers for whom they will preach a specific sermon. Tisdale’s advice to do exegesis of a local congregation and that all people are like all other people, no other people, and some other people, should be kept in mind when lockdown liturgies are at stake. Often it is clear that a particular lockdown liturgy has a very specific local congregation and its members in view and thus engages with the joys and sorrows of specific people in a local contents, whilst simultaneously remaining globally connected keeping the larger social context in mind (cf. Harris 2008). When a specific local congregation is no longer kept in view and worship leaders and preachers in lockdown liturgies start to deliberately make their liturgies available and attractive for a much larger online worshipping “audience”, critical questions should be asked.

4.3 Prophetic – pastoral

As already mentioned, in South Africa, as elsewhere, the virus reached a nation in which many people were already facing many challenges. It was also the time when many people (re-)read Albert Camus’s *The Plague*. The priest, Father Paneloux, delivers a sermon at the beginning of the plague in Oran and another several months later. In his descriptions of the second sermon Camus informs readers that Father Paneloux’s tone changed, he spoke softer in the second sermon, and he used “we” instead of “you” (cf. also Steyn, Pieterse & Wepener 2020).

Nora Tisdale’s (2011) work regarding prophetic preaching in a pastoral tone, can be valuable when developing lockdown liturgies in trying times. Some of her homiletical wisdom includes that truth should always be

spoken in love; preachers should stand in the shoes of another and view the world from a different perspective; and that preachers should stand with the congregation and not opposite the congregation. When this is the mode of preaching, prophetic means pastoral and pastoral becomes prophetic and sacramental worship and my hermeneutical understanding of what should and what should not liturgically and sacramentally happen during lockdown, is informed by the prophetic-pastoral creative tension. To our mind, and in a South African lockdown context, it will entail that the Lord's Supper is celebrated as far as possible via lockdown liturgies as a prophetic-pastoral act.

Cilliers (2016:115–116) writes as follows about this paradox:

This theology and consequently preaching of affirmation is not innocuous; on the contrary, it protests against any form of destructive ideology or so-called eternalized systems that refuse to believe that God has no, or no longer has any, compassion with this world. Preaching Promise as affirmation within the paradoxes of life is to say that this universe is not cold and empty; not without the compassion of a faithful God. It is to unmask all powers and notions and movements and ideologies that destroy the dignity and identity of humans as *humans*. In this sense, preaching God's Promise as affirmation is not simply saying no!; it is rather saying yes! – because God is continuously saying Yes! to this world and its peoples.

5. Conclusion

In Shakespeare's last play, *The Tempest*, Gonzalo remarks: "My dear Lord, the truth you speak doth lack some gentleness and time to speak it in, you rub the sore, when you should bring the plaster." Truth is a hermeneutical reality, as the Gospel of John reminds us in the Farewell Discourse (cf. Wepener 2014:79–88), also liturgical truth in which the Spirit leads worship planners and leaders. However, the liturgical truth for Dutch worshippers and the truth for the South African worshippers pertaining to the praxis of lockdown liturgies and sacramental worship will thus most probably not be the exact same truth. A Dutch sermon preached in the Netherlands during lockdown can impossibly be the same sermon preached in South

Africa during the same time. Lockdown liturgies and online sacramental celebrations will thus, to our mind, remain an ongoing hermeneutical challenge and we suggest that the creative tensions discussed in this article can assist those responsible with the development of these celebrations to “time grace” in their own contexts.

For this, there exists no recipe, or quick-fix methodology. It calls for daring, indeed for being unsettled, for becoming fluid and flexible – to move. Perhaps timing could be called the “art of improvisation”. Timing in fact hinges on improvisation ... Timing implies the ability to juggle more than one ball in the air, knowing when to catch, and when to release, to keep the “circular movement” going. (Cilliers 2019:26).

The art of timing, i.e. improvisation does not negate the knowledge of (liturgical) structures and traditions – on the contrary: you can only improvise if you have, at least to a certain extent, mastered the fundamentals of liturgy. But only repeating these fundamentals speaks of a lack of wisdom, indeed of a need of discernment. We need to time the moment, and to improvise the liturgy that fits into this moment – in South Africa, the Netherlands, and elsewhere. This can indeed be unsettling. But, because it is the timing of *grace*, it is also liberating, beyond words. Post (2021:113), with reference to Stephen O’Leary, aptly writes that online culture is an invitation to rethink our concepts and approaches to ritual (also liturgy) in our study thereof, otherwise we will keep on seeing online worship as not the real thing.

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