

The Sacramental Nature of Peacemaking Rituals: A Case for a Sacramental Spirituality of Reconciliation

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Abstract

South African scholar and peace activist John de Gruchy sees a close relationship between sacraments and peacemaking processes. Even though a Protestant, he calls the church a sacramental community and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) a ‘civic sacrament.’ This raises the question of the relationship between processes and rituals of peacemaking and sacramentality. Moreover, how does reconciliation, as a core doctrine of Christian theology, relate to sacramentality and peacemaking efforts in society? Is reconciliation sacramental? Hans Boersma’s sacramental ontology provides a theological basis for an affirmative answer. Furthermore, the notion of Christ (and the church) as primal sacrament(s) (Semmelroth, Schillebeeckx) gives a further basis to see processes of peacemaking as sacramental. The article argues for a sacramental spirituality of reconciliation (Schreiter). However, applying the arguments to two concrete cases, the TRC and the twinning of Coventry and Dresden, show some difficulties with claiming sacramental status for reconciliation efforts.

Keywords

Sacraments, reconciliation, peacemaking, spirituality, Hans Boersma, Otto Semmelroth, Edward Schillebeeckx, Robert Schreiter

Introduction

South African scholar and peace activist John de Gruchy sees a close relationship between sacraments and peacemaking processes. Even though a Protestant, he calls the church a sacramental community and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) a ‘civic sacrament.’¹ Because most Protestants recognise only two sacraments – Eucharist and Baptism – and Roman Catholics only seven, this raises the question of the relationship

¹ de Gruchy, *Reconciliation*, 95.

between processes and rituals² of peacemaking and sacramentality. Moreover, if reconciliation is a core doctrine of Christian theology, how does this relate to sacramentality and peacemaking efforts in society? These questions are important for at least the following reasons. First of all, if engaging in the work of reconciliation is sacramental, it means that those working for peace and reconciliation are fundamentally participating in the life and ministry of Christ. Sacramental participation gives the work a thorough spiritual motivation and underpinning. Second, in such a view it can be no question whether Christians are called to engage in the work of reconciliation, whether within or outside the boundaries of the church. Third, the notion of sacramentality is increasingly widening in scope. This tendency is present in the Liturgical Movement of the last century, and particular brought into focus by Vatican II. Here we should also mention the important publication of *Gestures of God: Explorations in Sacramentality*.³ Recently the widening scope of sacramentality was underlined by a number of papers at the 2017 conference of the *Societas Liturgica* on sacramentality. The present case for the sacramentality of peacemaking provides a test case and application of the widening scope of sacramental theology.

The central question of this paper is whether and how processes and rituals of peacemaking (or reconciliation; I will use the terms interchangeably as they are arguably closely related) can be called sacraments. I argue that when Christians engage in the process of peacemaking, they participate in the graceful life and work of God. This argument is founded on a sacramental or participatory ontology, and on the notion of Christ (and the church) as primal sacrament(s), and the idea of Christ being *Urbild aller Sakramentalität*. On this basis I will plead for a sacramental spirituality of reconciliation. The first part of the paper briefly introduces the complexity of peacemaking and the many rituals that can take place in the process. The second part discusses the concept of a sacramental ontology (with reference to Hans Boersma), and Christ as *Urbild aller Sakramentalität* (Otto Semmelroth) or primal sacrament (with reference to Edward Schillebeeckx). The third part brings this together in a sacramental spirituality of reconciliation (with reference to Robert Schreier), before applying the arguments of this article to two concrete cases: the TRC and the reconciliatory twinning of Coventry and Dresden.

² In his study of rituals of reconciliation South African theologian Cas Wepener lists the TRC among a host of reconciliation rituals. Wepener, *From Fast to Feast*, 99.

³ Rowell and Hall, *Gestures of God: Explorations in Sacramentality*.

Which rituals, what peace?

The process of reconciliation consists of many elements and the ‘degree’ of reconciliation can differ according to the aims of the particular process. Cecilia Clegg, for example, distinguishes four types of reconciliation: political, societal, interpersonal, and personal. Forgiveness and repentance are not necessary for the first two types, whereas they are paramount for the latter two (for personal reconciliation Clegg speaks about compassion instead of repentance).⁴ Immediately all kinds of questions arise. What does forgiveness look like at different levels of reconciliation? Does forgiveness depend on repentance? Is reconciliation possible without forgiveness? Not so according to the title of Desmond Tutu’s famous book *No Future without Forgiveness*.⁵ Indeed, it is hard to think of full reconciliation on all levels without forgiveness. Implicitly Clegg acknowledges this by stating that without persons who reconcile on the interpersonal level, societal reconciliation is not possible.⁶

Several other writers distinguish between individual and societal reconciliation, for example Robert Schreiter and Cas Wepener.⁷ The distinction underlines the fact that peace-making is a process, because, as Schreiter asserts, societal reconciliation will be always beyond our grasp. Therefore reconciliation on this level is eschatological.⁸ Societal reconciliation is not possible without reconciliation on the individual or interpersonal level. Miroslav Volf illuminates the tension between the hope for societal reconciliation and the impossibility to achieve it. He is critical of grand narratives and projects that aim for final reconciliation, because they betray an underlying ideological totalitarianism. Yet Christians cannot live without the hope for final reconciliation. However, this final reconciliation is God’s work, it is eschatological, and an expression of God’s love instead of “a self-enclosed ‘totality.’”⁹ Final reconciliation, at least on the societal level, is beyond our reach, and as Wepener testifies, reconciliation is still needed after reconciliation rituals are performed.¹⁰ Nevertheless, a Christian perspective holds on to the hope of final reconciliation as the ultimate aim.

We have very briefly indicated various levels of reconciliation. On each level rituals have an important function. Wepener studied rituals of reconciliation in his country, South Africa.

⁴ Clegg, ‘Embracing a Threatening Other’, 175–77. John de Gruchy speaks of almost the same four levels: theological, political, social, and interpersonal. de Gruchy, *Reconciliation*, 26.

⁵ Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*.

⁶ Clegg, ‘Embracing a Threatening Other’, 174.

⁷ Wepener, *From Fast to Feast*, 43–44; Schreiter, *The Ministry of Reconciliation*, 111–16.

⁸ Schreiter, *The Ministry of Reconciliation*, 19; cf. de Gruchy, *Reconciliation*, 28.

⁹ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 101–10, phrase quoted on p. 110.

¹⁰ Wepener, *From Fast to Feast*, 224.

Showing the wide variety of rituals and a number of different ways to classify or typify them, he suggests one typology could be the following:

- **Protest** rituals – marches; writings such as declarations; acts of abstinence such as fasting, refusing to buy or sanctions; silence;
- Rituals of **confession** – verbal confessions of guilt; documents such as acknowledgments of guilt and declarations; time for silence;
- **Healing** or **therapeutic** or **purification** rituals – talking through; the telling of stories; making works of art (clay; paper; poems, etc.); pasting of slips of paper to a cross and burning them; exorcism, including gathering at places where injustice has taken place;
- **Acceptance** or **forgiveness** rituals – embracing; shaking hands; prayers; smoking; blessing; washing of hands; the use of crystals;
- **Reintegration** or **binding** rituals – eating and drinking together; declarations; register of reconciliation; symbolic funeral; sprinkling (with blood, for example); dancing;
- **Reparation** rituals – symbolic graduation ceremonies; the return of property; verbal acknowledgement.¹¹

Wepener states that each of these six types is part of the reconciliation process, although the rituals play a role in different aspects of the process. “Each is a type of reconciliation ritual in its own right and fits within a specific context and situation where reconciliation is needed.”¹² This comment applies also to the levels of reconciliation we just reviewed. Some rituals will play a more important role in societal than in individual reconciliation. Furthermore, the typology again shows that reconciliation is a process: the end goal of a more elaborate peace-making process. For example, at the protest stage reconciliation is not achieved, although it may be in view. The number of possible rituals is endless. The typology helps to distinguish some common functions of certain rituals, even though some of them could function within another stage of the reconciliation process as well.

The various levels of reconciliation and Wepener’s typology indicate the wide variety of rituals and complexity of reconciliation. In this article we will focus our attention on peace-making in general and the question how that may be sacramental. The inclusion of some

¹¹ Wepener, 113, bold type in original.

¹² Wepener, 113.

sacraments in the list of rituals of reconciliation (eating and drinking in Wepener's typology can include the eucharist) suggests that sacraments and reconciliation can be meaningfully connected. In order to draw out this connection, we first need to outline some aspects of a sacramental theology.

Sacramental theology

In this section we will review a couple of sacramental-theological notions that will help us to answer the question whether and how sacraments and peace-making processes may be related. First we consider a basic approach relevant for our topic: the mess and mystery of sacraments. We then outline aspects of a sacramental or participatory ontology. Finally, we look at Christ (and the church) as primal sacraments or *Urbild aller Sakramentalität*.

Mass, mess, and mystery

In his well-known book *For the Life of the World*, the Greek Orthodox writer Alexander Schmemmann is critical of a (Western) approach to discussions of the sacraments and sacramental theology which tends to become highly technical and abstract.¹³ Studying sacramental theology one cannot help but agree with Schmemmann. While appreciating that the discussions Schmemmann refers to are necessary and relevant in a particular way of doing theology and in a particular context, here I would like to propose an alternative starting point. The first notions with regard to sacramentality and peace I suggest, then, are messiness and mystery.

Conflict, as the context for peace-making, is messy and chaotic.¹⁴ In a sacramental theology conflict plays an important part. For example, in baptism and eucharist the chaos caused by the conflict between God and humankind is overcome. In baptism the person baptised dies with Christ to their old self and rises with Christ to their new self, now being in communion with Christ and partaking in the loving life of the Trinity. Similarly the eucharist points to the death of Christ and the new possibilities of the Kingdom of God.¹⁵

How the transition from old to new life exactly happens is a mystery. We can only say *that* it happens and reflect theologically (or otherwise) on it. There is something deeply mysterious about the language of dying to an old self and raising to a new self; about partaking in the life of that other mystery, the Triune God; about becoming part of a community in which we are somehow appropriately called brothers and sisters. It is even more mysterious to claim that

¹³ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 34.

¹⁴ Cf. Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 103–4.

¹⁵ Cf. Williams, 'Sacraments of the New Society', 2014.

the eucharistic bread and wine become to us the body and blood of Jesus Christ, by invoking the Holy Spirit (epiclesis). The word ‘sacrament’ is one translation of the Greek *mysterion*, from which we also derive the word ‘mystery.’ For a proper understanding of the sacraments and sacramental theology, I suggest that we place the meaning of sacrament as mystery, although not as magic, to the forefront of our discussion.¹⁶ Sacraments are performed in the messiness of human existence, yet they are mysteriously transformative.

Taking the starting point of a sacramental theology in the idea of messiness and mystery forms at once a response to the objection that the messiness of reconciliation cannot possibly be sacramental. True, reconciliation is elusive, especially on the social level. As we saw above, full reconciliation always remains eschatological. One needs to look at the situation in South Africa only briefly to see that the rainbow nation has not made it to its full potential yet. Even the process of reconciliation is criticised by some.¹⁷ However, the sacraments start exactly from that messy place of conflict, chaos, darkness and death – the messy place of life without God. The sacraments have a power to transform because they bring order into chaos, because they move from death to life, from without-God to with-God. Those caught up in the messy process of peace-making, and even those who see their efforts fail, are in the company of anyone who enters into the sacramental life – a life of acknowledging messed up efforts and a world in chaos; a life acknowledging the need for God’s gracious and loving intervention.

Sacramental ontology

In the last decennia a number of theologians and liturgical scholars have argued that the sacraments should be understood in a wider framework of a sacramental ontology.¹⁸ For example, Schmemmann argues that all of creation is meant to lead us back to God; “The world was created as the ‘matter,’ the material of one all-embracing eucharist, and man (sic) was created as the priest of this cosmic sacrament.”¹⁹ Creation should not be seen as something external which bears no relation to God, but as pervaded by God’s grace. From the outset

¹⁶ Note that ‘mystery’ is not used in the technical sense of a sacrament in the New Testament, see for example the brief discussion in Berkouwer, *The Sacraments*, 27–28; and Brown, ‘Re-Conceiving the Sacramental’, 24–25. For an extensive discussion of ‘mystery’ in the New Testament and in relation to liturgy and sacraments, see Casel, *Das Christliche Kultmysterium*.

¹⁷ For example, Mayo, *The Limits of Forgiveness*, chap. 3.

¹⁸ Arguably this argument goes back to a much earlier date. James White calls F.D. Maurice, who wrote his influential *The Kingdom of Christ* in 1837, one of the pioneers of ‘sacramentality.’ White, *The Sacraments*, 27. See White’s first chapter for a brief history of the sacraments in Protestant worship.

¹⁹ Cited in Boersma, *Heavenly Participation*, 8; cf. Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 15.

Schememann wants to get rid of the false dichotomy between natural versus supernatural.²⁰ Roman Catholic theologian Edward Schillebeeckx also understands the sacraments to be much broader than the seven sacraments which are usually thought of in the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Church. All saving activity of God as it becomes visible in our world is sacramental, according to Schillebeeckx, although he clearly distinguishes the place of the traditional seven sacraments from other sacramental activity.²¹ Thus we can identify already two salient issues for a sacramental ontology: a denial of the natural/supernatural dichotomy and therefore the affirmation of God's presence in the created world; and sacramentality does not need to be limited to the two or seven major sacraments.

Reformed scholar Hans Boersma argues that the early church had a sacramental worldview and that the Western church gradually lost this worldview because of an ever widening gap between the natural and the supernatural. Through his study of the *ressourcement* movement of the *nouvelle theologie* in the Roman Catholic church in the 20th century, he seeks to retrieve the sacramental ontology of the church fathers. A keyword for Boersma is 'participation.' He argues that "[u]nlike mere symbols, sacraments actually *participate* in the mysterious reality to which they point."²² In the sacrament *signum* and *res* do co-inhere. Likewise, according to Boersma, the whole world participates in "some greater reality."²³ Thus when we speak of a sacramental ontology we can also speak of a participatory ontology. Boersma finds this way of thinking with the church fathers, but also in Scripture, for example in Acts 17:28: "For in him we live and move and have our being"; and Col. 1:17: "He [Christ] is before all things, and in him all things hold together." On this basis Boersma argues that "[a] sacramental ontology insists that not only does the created world point to God as its source and 'point of reference,' but that it also subsists or participates in God."²⁴ The participatory language starts to make sense when we see that Boersma wants to overcome the sharp distinction or even separation between natural and supernatural. Participation stands over against this dichotomy and is key in Boersma's sacramental ontology.

The many references in the letters of St. Paul to being 'in Christ' (Eph. 1:3-4; Gal. 3:23-27; cf. Rom. 6:3; 2 Pet. 1:4) and the Johannine images of the vine and its branches (John 15:1-

²⁰ Schememann, *For the Life of the World*, 14.

²¹ Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament*, 5, 15.

²² Boersma, *Heavenly Participation*, 23, italics original.

²³ Boersma, 24.

²⁴ Boersma, 24, citations from Scripture quoted on the same page.

11), the church fathers and Eastern Orthodox Christianity all point in the direction of an intimate connection (and indeed, participation) between creation and Creator. When in recent times the case has been made for a sacramental ontology, this has not been a novelty, but might be seen as a recovery of a way of thinking that lies at the root of the Christian tradition.

Christ (and church) as primal sacrament and Urbild aller Sakramentalität

The renewed vigour with which liturgy and sacraments were studied since the beginning of the twentieth century not only led to a recovery of sacramental ontology but also yielded creativity with regard to the place of Christ in sacramental theology.²⁵ Karl Barth states that Christ is “the one and only sacrament,” and theologians like Otto Semmelroth, Edward Schillebeeckx and Karl Rahner argue that Christ – and by implication the church – is the primal sacrament.²⁶ In what follows I outline these aspects of a sacramental theology with reference to Semmelroth and in particular to Schillebeeckx, and show how they help to answer the question whether peace-making can be viewed as sacramental.

Schillebeeckx roots the argument that Christ is the primordial sacrament in his salvific acts:

Because the saving acts of the man Jesus are performed by a divine person, they have a divine power to save, but because this divine power to save appears to us in visible form, the saving activity of Jesus is *sacramental*. For a sacrament is a divine bestowal of salvation in an outwardly perceptible form which makes the bestowal manifest; a bestowal of salvation in historical visibility.²⁷

In other words, sacraments reveal grace. When people met Jesus, they met grace in an embodied, tangible way. And so Schillebeeckx can argue that “[t]he man Jesus, as the personal visible realization of the divine grace of redemption, is *the* sacrament, the primordial sacrament, because this man, the Son of God himself, is intended by the Father to be in his humanity the only way to the actuality of redemption.”²⁸ Schillebeeckx emphasises the

²⁵ The twentieth century gave birth to what is called the Liturgical Movement. Its roots are often traced to *inter alia* 1909, when the Benedictine monk Dom Lambert Beauduin from the Keizersberg in Leuven, Belgium gave an address at the National Congress of Catholic Works, in which he pleaded for the ‘fully conscious and active participation’ of laity in the mass. At that time this was a quite revolutionary plea. The Second Vatican Council took up this language in document it published on liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.

²⁶ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/2:55; Semmelroth, *Die Kirche Als Ursakrament*, esp. 38-43; Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament*. For the church as sacrament, see Semmelroth; Schillebeeckx, 49, 52, Rahner, *The Church and the Sacraments*, 18–19.

²⁷ Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament*, 15, emphasis original. Also Semmelroth emphasises sacraments as ‘invisible grace made visible.’

²⁸ Schillebeeckx, 15.

suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus as the events that show God's grace in particular, although he acknowledges the whole of Jesus' life as sacramental. His life was one filled of God's love and grace and therefore healing and sacramental throughout.

It is worthwhile for our discussion to see that Semmelroth captures a similar argument in slightly different terms. He argues that Christ is "*Urbild aller Sakramentalität*": archetype or prototype of all sacramentality. The word *Urbild* is of significance, as it includes the idea of primal or primordial, as in Schillebeeckx, but it says more. The German *Bild* means image, picture, or even painting. The prefix *Ur* means first or 'arche.' If Christ is such an archetype, a primal image of all sacramentality, it implies that all sacramentality somehow takes after Christ. All sacraments are in his likeness as it were. To say that Christ is *Urbild* is not only to say that he is first, as in some logical priority, but also that all sacraments find their source in him and need to reflect him.

A consequence of Christ as primordial sacrament or *Urbild* is, according to theologians like Casel, Semmelroth and Schillebeeckx, that the church is the "earthly sacrament of Christ in heaven," and therefore primordial sacrament or *Ursakrament*.²⁹ The church is the earthly extension of Christ's salvific acts as Christ's body; "The earthly Church is the visible realization of this saving reality in history. The Church is a visible communion in grace."³⁰ In light of the various images the New Testament uses to describe the unity of Christ and his community of faithful followers the argument is defensible, think about the image of the vine and the branches or the primary image Semmelroth and Schillebeeckx refer to, the Body of Christ.

Schillebeeckx' sacramental theology offers various points which may help us to answer the question whether we should consider rituals of peace-making as sacraments. First, if Christ is the primordial sacrament, we can wonder what it means to be 'in Christ.' Being in Christ, the ministry of peace-making or reconciliation may be called sacramental as it is a ministry in the footsteps of Christ the Reconciler (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17-21, esp. 19).

²⁹ Schillebeeckx, 47–54, esp. 52; Semmelroth, *Die Kirche Als Ursakrament*, 41–45. This sounds strange as only one thing can be primordial; nevertheless, this is what Schillebeeckx says, on the basis of a fundamental unity between Christ and the church. Semmelroth keeps a clearer (and helpful) distinction between Christ and the church by pointing to their analogical character (42), and by linguistically distinguishing Christ as *Urbild* from the church as *Ursakrament*.

³⁰ Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament*, 47.

The second point is the emphasis Schillebeeckx places on the sacramental nature of the meeting between people. He calls these meetings encounters with Christ.³¹ Schillebeeckx argues that the love of God should be incarnate in the life of Christians, so others may be attracted to their faith. The step to peacemaking is not difficult to make. Peace-making is the opposite from living with indifference or even hatred. Indeed the Christian peace-maker needs to embody the love and grace of God, for which they need to be filled with the grace of God themselves. Schillebeeckx would perhaps at this point refer back to the sacraments, and the Eucharist in particular as the focal point of the sacramental life, where grace is administered.

The third salient point in Schillebeeckx' work on the sacraments is the central place of the church. We have already noted the close connection between Christ and the church. Here we are also reminded of De Gruchy's description of the church as a sacramental community. According to Schillebeeckx sacraments are personal acts by Christ, or acts by the church, and therefore in his thought it is not possible to have sacraments outside of this Christological and ecclesial framework.³² Similarly, Semmelroth argues that the seven traditional sacraments are particular instances, 'forms,' of the sacrament which is the church.³³ So what is the relationship between the church and the peacemaking ritual? The sacraments empower the faithful to live their lives as Christians, in other words, as reconciled children of God. The ministry of reconciliation flows from the reconciliation Christians have found in God through Christ (2 Cor. 5:17-21). Following Schillebeeckx, peace-making rituals can be called sacramental at least when flowing from this foundation. "We must show a real love for our fellow men (sic), and this love must truly be the sacrament of our love for God."³⁴ Those involved in peace-making can be such sacraments of encounter with God. Thus such sacraments of peacemaking flow from an ecclesial foundation and context. Having said this, traditional Roman Catholic or Protestant views of the sacraments, whether they number seven or two, leave little or no room for adding peace-making as a major sacrament.

The question of peace-making as sacraments is much harder to answer outside the explicit context of the church. For Schillebeeckx, because of his emphasis on the faith of the church

³¹ Schillebeeckx, 206, 211.

³² This is clear when he discusses the possibility that sacraments in other churches (Protestant) can be valid sacraments, to which his answer is firmly 'no,' although he does affirm that they can be "fruitful." Schillebeeckx, 184–95. Obviously, those of other Christian tradition will protest at this point to Schillebeeckx' classic Roman Catholic position. However, the central place the church has in the sacramental life of its members will be affirmed by most, if not all, churches.

³³ Semmelroth speaks of *Einzelsakramente* of the church, Semmelroth, *Die Kirche Als Ursakrament*, 46ff.

³⁴ Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament*, 208.

which should be present in all sacramental action, peace-making cannot be called a sacrament outside of this context, and even if it is a sacramental, then still it is hard to call it such if it is not within or at least pointing to the church. Even if one argues that in a secular reconciliation ritual the grace of God is at work, then the very acknowledgment of this grace points to Christ and therefore to the church (at least in Semmelroth's and Schillebeeckx' thinking) because of the inseparable bond between Christ and the church. Also in Protestant thinking the church is central in relation to the sacraments because the church is the context in which the sacraments take place, even if they have not such a high view of the church and do not necessarily think of the church as sacrament as theologians like Semmelroth, Schillebeeckx and Rahner do.³⁵ In sum, it seems hard to think about the sacramental character of peace-making without reference to the faith community.

However, here we should refer to the work of David Brown, who argues that the Christian community does not have a patent on sacramentality, and that God can be encountered outside this community and even without reference to a Christian framework. Without such reference the interpretation of the encounter with God (e.g. through nature, architecture, music) remains partial, but nevertheless sacramental.³⁶ It is outside the scope of this article to go into this debate. We can conclude, even if tentatively, that the holy encounter between God and humankind can happen anywhere in creation, and therefore outside the context of the Christian community. At the same time, Christian faith claims that peace and reconciliation in all their fullness are only possible in God.

Sacramental spirituality of reconciliation

We are now ready to draw the contours of a sacramental spirituality in relation to peace-making. The sacraments, as visible signs of invisible grace, are celebrated primarily in the context of the church and the sacramental life flows out from that context.³⁷ Reconciliation is at the heart of the sacraments – think of baptism, eucharist, and the sacrament of penance

³⁵ For example, John de Gruchy argues for the central place of the church in the work of reconciliation. As we have seen, he calls the church a “sacramental community.” He explains: “Thinking sacramentally about the Church means that we understand its empirical, material existence as that which God transforms and uses, rather than positing an invisible ideal as distinct from a real and visible Church.” By way of analogy he calls the TRC a ‘civic sacrament’ (de Gruchy, *Reconciliation*, 95. He refers to Bonhoeffer’s “celebrated formula: ‘Christ existing as Church-community’ (*Christus als Gemeinde existierend*).” de Gruchy, 91.

³⁶ Brown, ‘Re-Conceiving the Sacramental’.

³⁷ Cf. de Gruchy, *Reconciliation*, 79–108; Calivas, ‘Experiencing the Justice of God in the Liturgy’, 289–91, 296.

which is also called the sacrament of reconciliation.³⁸ Therefore a sacramental spirituality can be meaningfully connected to a spirituality of reconciliation. It is to this connection that we now turn, after a brief introduction of a spirituality of reconciliation on the basis of Robert Schreiter's work.

Robert Schreiter asserts that peacemaking is not a technique to be mastered, but rather a disposition, indeed a spirituality, necessary in the parties involved. Or in the words of Phil Groves and Angharad Parry Jones, "Reconciliation is not an action: it is a way of being."³⁹ The language of spirituality fits well with the emphasis in this paper on sacraments, and the considerations in this paper may be read as an argument for developing a sacramental spirituality of reconciliation or peacemaking.

Schreiter distinguishes between the social aspect of reconciliation, at the level of the state, and the spiritual aspect. The first has to do with getting processes and structures in place so that it becomes possible to live in a just and trustworthy civil society. The spiritual aspect

has to do with rebuilding shattered lives so that social reconciliation becomes a reality. The state can set up commissions to examine the wrongdoing of the past, but it cannot legislate the healing of memories. The state can offer amnesty or mete out punishment to wrongdoers, but it cannot guarantee forgiveness. Social reconciliation sets up conditions that make reconciliation more likely, but those conditions cannot effect it."⁴⁰

Strategies are necessary to create the conditions for reconciliation, but there is something elusive about reconciliation. It is not something self-made or even human-made. Schreiter contends that experience shows that reconciliation often begins with the victims, who are often caught by surprise when they feel reconciliation becomes a possibility.⁴¹ This is the spiritual aspect of reconciliation, and from a Christian perspective we need to say that this is a moment of grace.⁴²

Reading the story of Peter's restoration and commissioning in John 21:1-17, Schreiter distinguishes four moments in the process of reconciliation: accompaniment, hospitality,

³⁸ It is noteworthy that some churches of the Reformation have kept the practice of the rite of reconciliation, even if not as an official sacrament. For a historical overview of penance, specifically in the context of peacemaking and reconciliation, see de Gruchy, *Reconciliation*, 100–108; Wepener, *From Fast to Feast*, 51–66.

³⁹ Groves and Jones, *Living Reconciliation*, 11.

⁴⁰ Schreiter, *The Ministry of Reconciliation*, 4.

⁴¹ Schreiter, 15, 95–96.

⁴² Cf. Anderson and Foley, *Mighty Stories*, 182–83.

reconnecting, and commissioning.⁴³ In this process little is about human initiative. In the first two moments human beings have most agency. We can decide to accompany those who are hurt and in need of reconciliation. We can decide to listen to both parties of the conflict and hear their pain and grievances. Furthermore, we can deliberately try to create hospitable environments in which all of this can happen. But the moments of reconnection (to God, oneself and one's community) and commissioning (often victims become reconcilers themselves) often come as a surprise – they “are both very much the work of God.”⁴⁴ So we come back to where we started in this section: the work of reconciliation and peacemaking requires a spirituality of reconciliation.

How is a spirituality of reconciliation related to peacemaking as sacramental? The Christian life that engages in the frequent celebration of the sacraments becomes a life marked by a sacramental spirituality. As we saw above, reconciliation with God and people is at the heart of the sacraments, and therefore at the heart of a sacramental spirituality. Christian spirituality refers to a life lived with God, and arguably the liturgy and sacraments take a central place in such a life. Liturgy and sacraments set examples of hospitality and accompaniment: we accompany others – and we are in the company of Christ every time we celebrate the sacraments; we create a hospitable environment in which stories can be told – and Jesus host the sacramental meal, in which the defining story of reconciliation is told. These moments in the peacemaking process create the conditions for us to be surprised by grace, made visible when people reconnect and are commissioned.

The relationship between a spirituality of reconciliation and sacramental peacemaking can be seen in other ways as well. Firstly, many scholars have argued for the central place of the Eucharist in the Christian life.⁴⁵ Baptism is the entry into the Christian community, and the Christian life is nurtured and nourished by the frequent celebration of the Eucharist. In most major church traditions the centrality of the eucharist can be seen by the weekly celebration of the rite, and other churches have other ways to signify the importance of the eucharist. The sacraments are about reconciliation with God and with each other. A spirituality of reconciliation is fed by the observance of these sacraments, and when it is, we can speak of a sacramental spirituality of reconciliation.

⁴³ Schreiter, *The Ministry of Reconciliation*, 83–96. For another argument for a spirituality of peace, see Archbishop Demetrios of America, ‘A Christian Spirituality’.

⁴⁴ Schreiter, *The Ministry of Reconciliation*, 95.

⁴⁵ E.g. Eggemeier, *A Sacramental-Prophetic Vision*, 25.

Secondly, Christian spirituality is a life lived with Christ. According to Schillebeeckx and others Christ is the primal sacrament, the first and the foundation of all other sacraments. A Christian spirituality will always build on this foundation. In the image of Semmelroth, Christ is *Urbild* – we can argue that the Christian life mirrors that image. Therefore any work of peace-making that is done in the Spirit of Christ can be named sacramental and can be seen as a sacramental in the Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox sense of the word. We saw how Schillebeeckx could even call the meeting between people sacraments (and this would certainly include reconciliatory meetings), although he distinguishes such sacraments from the traditional seven.

Finally, in a sacramental or participatory ontology, as Boersma argues for, all creation participates *de facto* in the life of God. Of course, the Fall means we can choose to opt out, but when we are oriented towards God, our actions participate in the Kingdom to come. The Kingdom is one of peace and justice and joy, ruled by the Prince of Peace. Peacemaking is shalom-making. When we participate in Christ, we participate in the life of the Prince of Peace. In this perspective, peacemaking is surely sacramental.

Two case studies: Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa, and Coventry-Dresden

Are all peacemaking rituals sacramental? In order to answer this question, we will discuss two case studies and refer back to Wepener's typology. It will be helpful first to summarise the main arguments so far. Following Schmemmann and Boersma, we argue that the whole of creation can be seen as pervaded by God's grace, and therefore is in some sense sacramental. All of creation participates in "some greater reality,"⁴⁶ although creatures can choose to opt out and not acknowledge their relationship to the Creator. In such a sacramental ontology, sacramentality is not limited to a particular number of sacraments. Second, Christ is the primal sacrament, or the *Urbild aller Sakramentalität*. This implies that all sacramental activity derives from this 'archetype' of sacramentality, and therefore needs to reflect that which makes Christ as primal sacrament – grace made visible – and therefore Christ himself. Saving grace made visible is the source and telos of all sacraments. Third, in the thought of Casel, Semmelroth, Schillebeeckx, Rahner, and many other Roman Catholic scholars, if Christ is the primal sacrament, the church has the same status by being Christ's Body on earth. It is necessary, however, to keep a distinction between Christ and the church. Only Christ is the Son of God; his followers are so only by adoption (Rom. 8:14-17). Even if many Protestants do not see the church as *Ursakrament*, it is clear that in Protestantism the

⁴⁶ Boersma, *Heavenly Participation*, 24.

sacraments are set within the context of the church. Finally, peacemaking is a process which requires a spirituality of reconciliation. Such a spirituality can be fostered by the sacraments – hence our plea for a sacramental spirituality of reconciliation.

Looking at Wepener’s typology of rituals, are some rituals more likely to be seen as sacraments than others? Each of the six types that Wepener mentions (protest, confession, healing/therapeutic/purification, acceptance/forgiveness, reintegration/binding, reparation) belongs to the more elaborate process of reconciliation. The arguments in this article have pointed in the direction of seeing reconciliation as sacramental, even though in concrete cases the argument needs nuance, as we will see shortly. Looking at the individual rituals, some may certainly be seen as sacramental. This is already clear from the fact that some rituals in the typology are sacraments in the church (or in some churches), in particular confession/forgiveness and eating and drinking together (eucharist). Some other rituals are sacerdotal, such as blessing. We could extend the list of examples with baptism, which can arguably fall into various categories of the typology. Whether any of these rituals is sacramental depends on a number of factors. Part of the difficulty is captured in a statement by Groves and Jones: “Reconciliation is impossible to define: but it can be described by the stories of the people who live it.”⁴⁷ If reconciliation is impossible to define, then that makes pinning down a particular ritual of reconciliation as sacrament elusive. Nevertheless, elusive as reconciliation may be, it is real, and so is its sacramental reality. We will now turn to two concrete examples of what can be called rituals of reconciliation: the TRC in South Africa and the reconciliatory twinning of the cities of Coventry and Dresden.

The TRC in South Africa was greatly inspired by the Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu and by Nelson Mandela. Mandela envisioned a ‘rainbow’ nation in which peoples of all colours would live together in peace and harmony. Like Mandela, Tutu saw that if the peoples of South Africa were to live in unity, the way forward was not revenge, but forgiveness. Giving victims the opportunity to tell their stories in the TRC hearings gave them a voice which no other platform could have given, according to Tutu. The TRC was the third way, avoiding the “two extremes of Nuremberg trials and blanket amnesty (or national amnesia).”⁴⁸ The hearings did not only give voice to the victims, but the perpetrators were given the chance to tell the (or their) truth of the crimes committed, in exchange for amnesty.

⁴⁷ Groves and Jones, *Living Reconciliation*, 7.

⁴⁸ Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, 33–34. Citation on p. 34.

The story of Coventry starts late 1940, when on November 14th, the city and its cathedral were heavily bombed. Six weeks later, on Christmas Day the provost of the cathedral, Richard Howard, spoke words of reconciliation in a national radio broadcast. He pledged to work for reconciliation with former enemies when the war was over, “to build a kinder, more Christ-like kind of world.”⁴⁹ One way in which reconciliation has taken shape is through the many partnerships the city of Coventry has with twin cities around the world, most remarkably in terms of reconciliation perhaps the twinning with Kiel (1947) and the severely bombed city of Dresden (1959).⁵⁰

To what extent can we call the TRC and the twinning of Coventry with Dresden sacramental acts of reconciliation? Viewing these processes (which include particular rituals or ceremonies) in light of the main arguments of this article as we just summarised, we first note that, in a sacramental worldview, the processes take place in a world which is pervaded by grace. Of course, these acts of reconciliation follow from atrocities which make the world look like it is a place pervaded by evil. Reconciliation is the graceful response to evil deeds and create space for a common future. From a faith perspective one can see acts of reconciliation as God’s grace made visible in a broken world.

However, some questions remain. In a sacramental worldview, participation in the life of the Trinity, by being united with Christ, is a key concept. The sacraments of baptism and eucharist have the unity with Christ at their core. Does taking part in the TRC hearings make one participate in Christ? Do some parties participate in Christ and others not? Only those who are in effect reconciled with each other, or also bystanders, witnesses, those who chair the meeting, ...? Similar questions can be raised with the twinning cities of Coventry and Dresden, and here the question who is reconciled to whom can even be raised.

Secondly, sacraments should reflect the *Urbild aller Sakramentalität*. Do the TRC and twinning cities reflect, find their source and telos in Christ? All sacramentality is derived from its archetype, Christ. As such any act of reconciliation can be seen as reflecting the ministry of Christ. The spiritual underpinning in both the case of TRC and Coventry’s work of reconciliation finds its source in Christ, and for Christians involved it may indeed find its telos in Christ. Nevertheless, both cases include many people from other faiths and none. It would be highly questionable to impose a view of sacramentality on their work of

⁴⁹ Kaczka-Valliere and Rigby, ‘Coventry–Memorializing Peace and Reconciliation’, 585; cf. Oestreicher, ‘Spirit of the White Rose’.

⁵⁰ In the following we refer to Dresden for the sake of readability, but one can include Kiel as well.

reconciliation. Furthermore, Christ's ministry was not only to reconcile people with each other, but also with God. Reconciliation with God is not emphasised in TRC and the twinning of Coventry and Dresden, if noticed at all. These processes and acts of reconciliation do resemble the *Urbild* to the extent that reconciliation is at the heart of Christ's ministry on earth. He did not shy away from truth-telling and is the example of forgiveness. Yet Christian reconciliation in all its fullness would include reconciliation with both people and God.

Thirdly, Christian sacraments take place in the context of the church. Neither the TRC nor the twinning of Coventry and Dresden are activities of the church, nor do they point to the church, even if churches played a major role. It is noteworthy that Tutu used to start the hearings of the TRC with prayer. However, that does not make the hearings church activities, and it should be said that he and the TRC have been criticised for the religious outlook that Tutu in particular gave the hearings.⁵¹

Finally, reconciliation is more than a set of actions: it is a way of being or even a spirituality. In concrete processes and rituals of reconciliation, such as the TRC and the twinning of Coventry and Dresden, such a spirituality is materialised (incarnated?). Tutu and Howard embodied a sacramental spirituality of reconciliation, which contributed greatly to the creation of the TRC and the partnership between Coventry and Keil and Dresden. Other people involved may have been inspired by a similar spirituality, or at least a similar moral framework, but they may have worked from other perspectives, religious or not.

In conclusion, the least we can say in response to the question whether the TRC, and the twinning of Coventry with Dresden, are sacraments, is that they shares a number of key elements with the sacraments as traditionally understood. The work of the TRC and the twinning of Coventry and Dresden takes place in a sacramental world and God's grace is at work and made visible where reconciliation happens. Both works of reconciliation were inspired by a Christian vision of forgiveness and peace. However, the Christian roots of that vision were not shared by all who participated. Organisationally these works did not take place in the context of the Christian faith community. Some may have encountered Christ through the TRC, and if even simply encountering the other is already sacramental (Schillebeeckx), the TRC and the twinning can be regarded as a sacraments. Nevertheless, not everyone involved would acknowledge such an encounter with Christ, or view their meeting with the other as sacramental, and would be highly uncomfortable to describe their

⁵¹ Mayo, *The Limits of Forgiveness*, chap. 3.

work in those terms. Therefore, from a certain perspective one might argue that the TRC and the reconciling work of Coventry and Dresden are sacraments, or at least sacramental, but the many questions such a view raises should make one cautious to make definite statements.

There is another reason why I hesitate to make a definite claim. I was never involved in the TRC or the Apartheid in South Africa, nor in WWII or the Coventry-Dresden relationship. Therefore it is not up to me to make definite claims about the sacramentality of either works of reconciliation. These works provide examples of processes and rituals of reconciliation, and similar processes and rituals (should) take place in all areas torn by conflict. This article is written not to make definite claims about any act of reconciliation, but a very small contribution to this work of peacemaking, showing how it might be viewed as sacramental, reflecting the *Urbild aller Sakramentalität*.

Conclusion

Peace-making happens in the messy context of conflict and mysteriously brings transformation (in the ideal situation where embrace (cf. Volf) is possible). Sacraments signify, and depending on which theology one adheres to also cause, grace. As Boersma states, sacraments are more than just symbols, signs apart from the signified. Bread becomes body, wine becomes blood, water cleanses inwardly, and, dare we say, the embrace is God's love present in those reconciled. As members of the body of Christ the faithful participate in Christ himself, and therefore in the life of the Trinity. It is this participation that makes peace-making sacramental. In Schillebeeckx' words, the encounter of fellow human beings is the sacrament of the encounter with God. "The sense and purpose of the whole sacramental event is to bring about encounter with Christ."⁵² Applying the image of the vine and the branches in John 15, we can argue that Christ himself as *Urbild aller Sakramentalität* is present in all places where those who are in Christ work for peace. A sacramental life that springs forth from this *Urbild* undergirds a spirituality of reconciliation. However, in concrete cases it may be difficult to pin down specific processes or rituals as sacraments, even if they bear resemblance to sacramentality as understood in this article. Having said that, at least as a general principle we can conclude that reconciliation is sacramental, a ministry in the footsteps of Christ, the *Urbild aller Sakramentalität*.

⁵² Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament*, 133.

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