1 Introduction

There is good reason to introduce the cultural-anthropological notion of ritual into practical theology. As we have shown elsewhere¹, the notion forces the researcher who uses the notion to be constantly aware, not only of his or her own cultural roots, but also of the anthropological and cultural contexts in which the rituals he or she investigates are performed.

1.1 Ritual and its Cultural and Anthropological Context

The notion of ritual finds its origin in cultural anthropology rather than in (practical) theology. It is, however, obvious that a religion without rituals is not conceivable. Burnt paper offerings in Chinese ancestral worship, the hajj to Mecca in Islam, the Passover Seder in Jewish religion, the Eucharist or the Holy Supper in Christianity, they are just as many rituals, even though each religion still has separate indications for those rituals. Since this handbook examines religious practices related to specific cultural contexts and positions, the cultural-anthropological notion of ritual presents itself as a very suitable one. Ritual is indeed determined by its anthropological and cultural context, and this also holds true for religious ritual. That does not exclude that denominational, ecclesiological, and theological notions also play a role in the design of religious ritual, but that is not the primary focus of this chapter.

1.2 The Contexts of the Authors and the Contexts Investigated

Although as authors of this article we work in different continents – Europe and Africa – we are all three white and male, to a high degree trained in Western methodologies and theologies, and teach at academic theological institutions that have Protestant, mainly Reformed, roots. However, the institutions we work at – and we ourselves – have developed extensively ecumenically speaking over the past decades. Moreover, we are ordained ministers in established Protestant Churches in the Netherlands and South Africa. Thus, we write from particular perspectives, in


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the awareness that this is only one option among others. More so, we are well aware that our perspective is a very dominant perspective, that all too often has outstripped or overpowered other perspectives.

Nevertheless, we were part of a team that researched worship practices of an African Independent Church, which have hardly been academically studied before (Wepener et al. 2019). The songs of the congregation, the dancing feet circling around in the Xhosa hut, the sermons of the pastor, the evil spirits that fled the power of the Holy Spirit, the talking drums and the sonorous sound of the vuvuzelas, and the smell of the burning herbs in the worship space, were almost never before presented to the wider academic community of practical theologians. We aimed to introduce these churches and their members to the academic discourse of Liturgical Studies. Thus, our project challenged the nature of practical theology and Liturgical Studies and their more Western and ecclesial interests. In the research project, we worked closely with people from those churches and the culture in which they are embedded. In other words, we chose an academic research practice of transcultural and, in a sense, transreligious understanding. By doing so, we did not forget our own localities and positions, nor did we cherish the naïve illusion that our report of the investigation would bridge all cultural differences. We identified the culture of the described worship as rich traditional, rural African (Wepener 2015).

On the other hand, we also focused our attention on an annual meeting in a hypermodern hospital somewhere in the Netherlands commemorating people who died in that hospital over the last year. Relatives came to the meeting and wrote the names of their deceased loved ones on a stone, which was laid on a table with all the other stones during the meeting, while the names of the deceased were called. The presiding chaplain said that the collecting of the stones had its parallel in people collecting their memories and thoughts “with the wish that memory will give power for the future” (Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener 2014, 23). Here it was much more our intention to make clear how religiosity takes shape in highly secularized societies. Consequently, the culture that determined the ritual was therefore mainly identified as a secular one. It is no coincidence that a new ritual is ‘invented’ in such a context (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1999).

In another research project, conducted by principal investigator Dr. Rima Nasrallah from Beirut, we learnt of the experiences of Lebanese women from Maronite or Orthodox backgrounds who married a reformed husband (Nasrallah 2015). Abiding to Lebanese norms, they became reformed by marrying, that is to say, nominally. However, in reality they developed a unique and hybrid spirituality mixing different traditions and dynamically moving between them. Icons, rosaries, and a Bible are found in the same room. The women celebrate the three holy days of Easter in for instance the Orthodox Church but visit the reformed church on Sunday. “The physical objects and ritual acts are used to complement the highly verbal and cerebral spirituality they meet in the Protestant church. On the other hand, the Reformed emphasis on scripture and theological reflection is laid as a background for the elaborate repertoire of spiritual expression they have developed”, writes Nasrallah (2015).
Incense-burning and singing protestant hymns go hand in hand. Here culture is understood as hybrid.

In all cases, ritual is an adequate term to describe the religious act and the symbols that accompany them. We would say that a ritual is Christian liturgy when Christian sources and beliefs play a role in a ritual practice.

2 Culture and Cult; Ritual Criticism

In this section we discuss the relationship between culture and religious rituals, that is, the relationship between culture and cult. They can both be described as play in the sense of coming into contact with an outside. The close connection between culture and cult requires a critical approach to ritual practices: rituals confirm, but can also criticize, existing social, political, and religious practices.

2.1 Culture and Cult as Play

It is characteristic of humans to reach out to the outside world, eventually even to a world beyond the empirically observable. The Dutch phenomenologist and theologian van der Leeuw calls this reaching out playing. He says:

Man is playing man. His whole life is nothing but an attempt to reach out of himself, to come into contact with something outside. He wants to play something. Breathing (...), eating (...), growing food (...), fighting (...), hunting, dressing, creating an image (...) are slightly different than just the product; they are a game and represent communication with the ‘outside’ according to certain rules. They are the origin of culture, but also of religion: while man cultivates (collere, culture) the world, he civilizes (‘bildert’) himself: while he civilizes himself, he also cultivates the world (van der Leeuw 1949, 249–250).

So, playing means reaching beyond you, breaking open a closed reality. In this play, two worlds or domains come together, and this is indicated by the notion of ‘symbolizing’. The word symbol – from the Greek word συμβάλλειν – literally means bringing together. Playfully we enter into contact with another outside of us, and that game takes place according to agreed rules. The world is only accessible by means of playing, or, by means of symbols. The main symbol is language through which we know the world. If we write the other outside of us that we enter into contact with in a lowercase letter, we call the game culture. If we write Other with an uppercase letter, we call it cult. Culture and cult are in line with each other. “Inspiration and revelation, symbol and sacrament, culture and worship, poetry and prayer, art and religion are connected by all kinds of routes, although they are also separated by certain borders” (Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener 2014, 41).
2.2 A Ritual-Critical Approach

Before we go on to explain some central notions, we will first make a comment about the relationship between ritual and culture that has direct consequences for how practical theologians study rituals.

Not every outside movement is in accordance with the holy texts of a religion, not every communication with the outside involves faith accordance to that religion. In other words, there are continuities as well as discontinuities between culture and religion, as famously elaborated for Christianity by H. Richard Niebuhr in his book *Christ and Culture* (1951) in five “typical answers” (Niebuhr [1951] 2001, 39–44): Christ against culture – which claims the exclusive authority of Christ and “resolutely rejects culture’s claim to loyalty” (Niebuhr 2001, 45); the Christ of culture – which accommodates Christ to culture and identifies him with a specific culture; Christ above culture – which is neither anti-cultural nor accommodating, but searches for a synthesis of Christ and culture (roughly the roman-catholic position); Christ and culture in paradox, – which wants to honor and distinguish both “loyalty to Christ and responsibility for culture” (roughly the Lutheran position) (Niebuhr 2001, 149); and Christ the transformer of culture, which sees culture as “under God’s sovereign rule, and that the Christian must carry on cultural work in obedience to the Lord” (roughly the reformed position) (Niebuhr 2001, 191). Even when rituals are critical of a specific culture, they take their symbols, language, and movements from that culture: “the stream of worship flows in the bed of culture, prayer is performed by way of poetics, the sacraments employ symbols, religion translates itself into the language of the arts” (Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener 2014, 41; Lutheran World Federation, 1996, 1998).

Niebuhr’s ‘typical answers’ can be applied to Christian rituals, but we should bear in mind that Christian reality is nowadays more complex than fitting in five – or six, or seven, or eight – ‘typical answers’. First, Niebuhr’s model counts with established church traditions, which are declining in the world. His ‘typical answers’ may be of some use in practical research that is rooted in denominationally oriented institutions, but we should bear in mind that Christian rituals are often liquefying. Second, an accurate observation, description and analysis of a ritual as it is performed in practice often carries more nuanced and complex ‘answers’. After all, human actions are always muddier than the theoretical and theological beliefs and convictions humans claim to adhere to: people do not always do what they claim to do. Third, in late-modernity hyper-diversity and hyper-complexity, also in ritualty, prevent an easy classification of practices. The well-known scholar in Ritual Studies, Ronald Grimes points out that certainly in the European and American West, where institutions are losing power, old rituals are radically adapted to the times, and new rituals are consciously cultivated or invented. He speaks of ritualizing in this context:
Unlike rites, ritualizing does not typically garner broad social support; it seems too innovative, dangerously creative, and insufficiently traditional. So deliberate ritualizing happens in the margins and is alternatively stigmatized and romanticized. Since ritualizing implies the invention of a tradition, it can feel contradictory, because traditions are not supposed to be inventible. Whereas rites depend on institutions and traditions, ritualizing, at least in the European American West, appeals to intuition and imagination. However, when sustained, ritualizing may eventuate in rites, with their own attendant institutions and power struggles. (Grimes 2000, 29)

Practical theologians therefore as a rule do not assess rituals that they investigate primarily from ‘typical answers’ but rather start from questions such as: What is going on in this or that ritual practice? How can we understand it? How do participants in rituals themselves perceive the rituals? Do they experience them as religious, and if so, in what sense? (Post 2000; Stringer 1999).

These questions result in critical rather than in ‘typical’ answers. This critique acts on two levels. Firstly, it affects the level of the research itself. How are ritual practices approached academically? All too often, religion is explicitly or implicitly equated with Protestant faith and reduced to beliefs, while neglecting its physical, spatial, temporal, and material aspects. As rituals are embodied practices, they ask for researchers to immerse themselves in the rituals, in other words, for an empirical approach. As researchers we felt the heat in the Xhosa hut in which the African Independent Church conveyed, we smelled the sweat of the dancing Christians, we felt the talking drums thumping in our stomachs. That is the primary way in which we must become acquainted with the ritual to at least understand something of it (Jennings 1996). In other words, ritual theory and theorizing about rituals always go back to the practically performed rite itself (Grimes 2014, 165–184; Kreinath, Snoek, and Stausberg 2006).

In addition, the perspective of academic research is all too often white, male, and European or American. This of course relates to which universities, institutes and churches have the most resources and which research is funded. This leads to a lack of diverse perspectives. A ritual-critical approach can critique ritual practices and/or culture, for example from the perspective of people without power, and from groups living under oppression. For example, feminist methodologies can seek to navigate this, along with Participatory Action Research (PAR), which makes the investigated group of people co-researchers and co-owners of the study and thus breaks the subject–object division between researcher and researched and aims towards emancipation. In the descriptions of research projects that we introduced in the opening section of this chapter, Nasrallah’s (2015) study of Lebanese women’s experiences gave voice to a group of women who had previously had no voice on this subject because their actual ritual practices were not desirable objects of inquiry from the perspective of the powerful established traditional churches. Obviously, their ’answers’ were not ‘typical’ in the sense in which Niebuhr spoke about it (Niebuhr 2001, 39–44). On a different level, the Participatory Action Research in and with the described African Independent Church contributed to the growth of the dig-
nity of its members who felt proud to be part of a research project and of their church and worship being raised on a wider podium.

Methodological approaches can also draw on human rights, focusing on human dignity, or on postcolonialism to critique actual ritual practices. All too often rituals trample on human dignity and prosperity. You only have to think of the notorious Nazi rallies to know that political rituals can reinforce or propagate clearly abject ideas. Below we will see how sacramental theology in the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa during apartheid was driven by racist motives. That brings us to the second level of critique.

Secondly, critique of rituals affects the level of ritual practice itself. Which values and conflicts of values do rituals refer to? Who determines what a ritual looks like? How do rituals themselves exercise power? Could they be seen to manipulate people or empower them? Description and analysis on the level of the ritual practice itself may reveal unbalanced gender relations in specific rituals, or a predominant role of adults in children’s rituals, for example.

Rituals can also be critiqued from specific theological or even ecclesiastical positions. Cas Wepener (see the chapter on ‘Holy Supper / Meal / Sharing Food’ in this volume) gives a good example when critiquing divided Eucharistic practices in so-called white and so-called colored churches. The strong link between cult and culture showed a fight between ‘the Christ of culture’ and ‘the Christ against culture’ (Niebuhr 2001, 83–115; 45–82). Wepener criticizes this separated practice simply from the word of Jesus about approaching the altar while remembering that your brother has a grievance against you: “First go and make peace with your brothers; then come back and offer your gift” (Matt 5:23). He then proceeds by quoting the Bible as it is referred to in the liturgical form in the Dutch Reformed tradition during the distribution of bread and wine: the body and blood of the Lord are given “to a complete reconciliation of all our sins” (Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener, 2014, 349–350). On a less dramatic level, we have criticized the abundance of words that are often common in protestant worship, to the degree of a “merely outward show of cliché”, from the conviction that God is present “in absence” and that the word of God is born out of silence (Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener 2014, 159). The church service is not merely Christian information and entertainment, God must be prayed to, and is not naturally present. This requires an attitude of expectation, silence, and prayer (Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener 2014, 159). Obviously, both the examples given in this section of Holy Supper during apartheid and the description of silence as the womb of language could also be approached from political and cultural perspectives, viz. human rights, and anti-racism, and an all too noisy culture that we live in.

Summarizing what we have said about ritual criticism we quote Ronald Grimes:

Criticism involves discovering, formulating, utilizing, and questioning presuppositions and criteria. It is an exercise of judgment that makes value-commitments and value-conflicts overt. Unlike theory, the aim of which is to explain, criticism aims to access. And unlike interpretation,
which is the effort to understand in general, criticism is an attempt to understand specifically in
the service of practice.

Ritual criticism is the interpretation of a rite or ritual system with a view to implicating its
practice. Because ritual criticism is itself a practice, it implies a politics and an ethic, as well
as an aesthetic or poetics. Because the practice of criticism recontextualizes rites in a way
that makes overt their means of negotiating and utilizing power – no matter how that power
is conceived, sacralized, or explained – one cannot escape its conflictual nature (Grimes

3 Key Notions

In this section we will discuss the notions that have already emerged in the descrip-
tion of ritual practices in rural Africa, the secularized Netherlands, and multi-reli-
gious Lebanon with which we began this chapter: ritual, symbol, and performance. The order in which we discuss these notions may seem somewhat illogical at first glance. Because a ritual consists of symbols, symbol acts and symbol language, we must first remember what a symbol is. Furthermore, it is important to remember that rituals never exist in the abstract but are always performed; rituals are practices. Finally, in the wake of Ronald Grimes, we look at qualities or elements of rituals.

3.1 Ritual as Assemblies of Symbols, Symbolic Language,
Symbolic Acts

Rituals can be described as an assembly of symbolic acts, symbolic language, and
symbols. The Eucharist is a ritual, its symbolic acts are taking, breaking, sharing, eat-
ing, etc.; its symbolic language is “This is my body” (Matt 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke
22:19; 1Cor 11:24), and the symbols are bread and wine. Because rituals are a compo-
sition of symbols, acts and language, they always include the physical existence, the
body. This holds true for all language, which is spoken and toned with the throat,
vocal cords, tongue, lips, and cavities in the head, or read with the eyes, or heard
with the ears.

As it has been said, the world and certainly the world of religions is only acces-
sible through play, or through symbols. We mention several qualities of the notion of
symbol and, as a consequence, of ritual. When we do so in this section, the notion of
symbol is seen as inclusive of symbolic language and acts (Lukken 2005, 16–27).

First, symbols have a community-forming quality (Chauvet 1995, 112). Symbols
are culturally determined. For a specific group (a people, a club, a church commu-
nity) they are the expression of what binds them together; they are identifying
signs. In the example we just gave, bread and wine are signs of recognition for
the Christian church. Like the water of baptism, the Paschal candle, a well-known
hymn, or the Bible. The French theologian Louis-Marie Chauvet writes:
These words, gestures, objects, people transport us immediately into the world of Christianity to which they belong; each of them, because it belongs to the order of Christianity, immediately ‘symbolizes’ our relation with Christianity. Like every group, the Church identifies itself through its symbols, beginning with the formulation of the confession of faith, called appropriately the ‘Symbol of the Apostles’ (Chauvet 1995, 112).

Now these are culture-transcending symbols that apply to the vast majority of Christian traditions. However, there are also more regional symbols. For many in the western world, the organ will be a symbol that has become inextricably linked to the church and the world of faith. It is quite possible that the same applies to the talking drums and vuvuzelas in an African Independent Church. That means, secondly, that symbols presuppose participation. Only when we participate in the game, do the symbols have meaning. Water only has meaning in baptismal liturgy when it is related to the participant who is involved in celebrating the liturgy. So only when water is related to the baptismal formula ‘I baptize you ...’ and to the great water narratives from the Bible: the flood, the baptism of Jesus in Jordan. If I place myself outside that narrative and remember that water is in fact no more than H$_2$O, the meaning is gone. From this follows a third characteristic of a symbol, namely that it acquires its meaning from the entire symbol system of which it is a part (Chauvet 1995, 114). To stay in the same example: water isolated from the baptismal ritual no longer has any symbolic value. Conversely, a symbol within the symbolic order calls for the whole of that order. Fourthly, symbols, like works of art, are gratuitous and are of no use, they are not part of an economic, financial, calculative, utilitarian, functionality. In the chapter on Aesthetics in this volume, we quoted Martin Heidegger’s passage about the farmer’s shoes as Van Gogh painted them. We said that an open-minded vision of the pair of shoes grants passage to being itself. In other words, the work of art, like every symbol, “touches what is most real in our world and allows it to come to its truth” (Chauvet 1995, 117):

the work of art, like all symbolic work, shows what the truth is: not something already given beforehand to which one has to adjust oneself with exactitude, but rather a ‘making-come-into-being’, an ‘advent’ which, like a ‘fugitive glimpse’, gives itself only in simultaneously “holding itself back’ to the person who, against every utilitarian tendency, knows how to respect the ‘vacant place’ where it discloses itself (Heidegger, quoted at Chauvet 1995, 117).

Analogously, in the celebration of the Eucharist, the breaking of the bread grants passage to Christ for whoever approaches him with an open mind. From this follows a fifth characteristic of a symbol. From a void ‘another’ discloses itself on me that escapes the laws of utility-driven life. Thus, the symbol “assign[s] a place to the subject in its relation to others” (Chauvet 1995, 119); it “imposes a law of reciprocal recognition between subjects” (Chauvet 1995, 118), – be this subject a human or a divine, an animal or even a work of art (Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener 2014, 325–326). Sixth and lastly, a symbol must be distinguished from a sign. A sign points
to the utilitarian world: the word Amsterdam on a traffic sign points to the city of Amsterdam, the colour red in the traffic light indicates for vehicles to stop.

3.2 Performance

Rituals share their key dimension with theatre, drama, and spectacle: “the deliberate, self-conscious ‘doing’ of highly symbolic actions in public” (Bell 1997, 160). This is the performative dimension of ritual. In the context of practical theology, this performative dimension of rituals is especially important: performances are practices, acts, and these are the objects of practical theology. Catherine Bell mentions four qualities or aspects of performances. First, she states, “performances communicate on multiple sensory levels” (Bell 1997, 160): there is always an aesthetic dimension in the manner that the senses are involved in ritual performances (see Barnard’s chapter on ‘Aesthetics and Religion’ in this volume). As we indicated above, this has consequences for the methods with which we study rituals. Researchers in Ritual Studies themselves enter the ritual field to immerse themselves in the rituals with all their senses. In other words, the study is empirical in nature, and theory follows empirical observation and analysis of the data. Second, performances are always set apart from ordinary life; there is ‘the dynamics of framing’:

Intrinsic to performance is the communication of a type of frame that says, “This is different, deliberate, and significant – pay attention!” By virtue of this framing, performance is understood to be something other than routine reality; it is a specific type of demonstration. [...] Although this overt identity is make-believe, by virtue of the way in which the theatrical framework set his words and deeds off from day-to-day reality, the performance is credited with the ability to convey universal truths by means of an experience not readily accessible elsewhere (Bell 1997, 160).

Third, Bell says, “such frames not only distinguish performance as such, they also create a complete and condensed, if somewhat artificial world” (Bell 1997, 160). Although the ritual is entirely connected to the culture in which it is performed and, as a rule, also derives its symbols from it, it is nevertheless separate from it. It is precisely in this connection and distance between ritual and culture that the identification and criticism of culture takes place. From here it is only a small step to the next dimension of performance that Bell mentions. Fourth, performances shape the world, because they give meaning to their world and present it in a meaningful and coherent, albeit simplified, form. Here the possible transformative power of performances is on the scene (Driver 2006). Lastly, closely linked to the previous quality, in performances people actively reflect on their community and society (Bell 1997, 75).
3.3 Qualities or Elements of Rituals

There are many definitions and descriptions of ritual (to name a few: Grimes 1990, 13–15; Grimes 2014, 237–241; Lukken 2005, 13–147; Rappaport 1999, 23–68; Snoek 2006). Many scholars, including those mentioned above, prefer not to present a strict definition of ritual, but rather to give several qualities or elements or characteristics that a practice to a greater or lesser extent may meet. Per consequence, that practice is more or less a ritual.

Ritual is not a ‘what’, not a ‘thing’. It is a ‘how’, a quality, and there are ‘degrees’ of it. Any action can be ritualized, though not every action is a rite (Grimes 1990, 13).

The qualities that Grimes lists are not exclusive for rituals. Think in this regard for instance of symbol and performance as we have discussed above. Rituals are symbolic, but not every symbol or symbolic act is a ritual. Rituals have a performative dimension, but not all performances are rituals. In this sense statements about rituals are provisional. Consequently, we must put in perspective the two characteristics that we discussed above, symbolic and performative. They are of particular importance within a theological discourse but have no exclusive significance for rituals.

To not make it unnecessarily complicated, we limit ourselves here to Grimes 1990 and 2014. In 1990, Grimes speaks of qualities of ritual, and he distinguishes fifteen clusters, each of which is subdivided into three to six qualities; he contrasts them with what rituals are not. It is striking that the “performed” and “symbolic” qualities are only two of the fifteen (Grimes 1990, 14). As mentioned, they are of outstanding importance for a theological discourse, because religion always reaches out to an outside and therefore always symbolizes. Moreover, practical theology focuses on practices and that reason performance is an important quality in the context of this handbook.

Qualities of Ritual (Grimes 1990, 14)

- Performed, embodied, enacted, gestural (not merely thought or said)
- Formalized, elevated, stylized, differentiated (not ordinary, unadorned, or undifferentiated)
- Repetitive, redundant, rhythmic (not singular, or once-for-all)
- Collective, institutionalized, consensual (not personal or private)
- Patterned, invariant, standardized, stereotyped, ordered, rehearsed (not improvised, idiosyncratic, or spontaneous)
- Traditional, archaic, primordial (not invented or recent)
- Valued highly or ultimately, deeply felt, sentiment laden, meaningful, serious (not trivial or shallow)
- Condensed, multilayered (not obvious; requiring interpretation)
- Symbolic, referential (not merely technological or primarily means-end oriented)
- Perfected, idealized, pure, ideal (not conflictual or subject to criticism and failure)
- Dramatic, ludic (i.e., play-like) (not primarily discursive or explanatory; not without special framing or boundaries)
- Paradigmatic (not ineffectual in modeling either other rites or non-ritualized action)
Mystical, transcendent, religious, cosmic (not secular or merely empirical)
Adaptive, functional (not obsessional, neurotic, dysfunctional)
Conscious, deliberate (not unconscious or preconscious)

It is certain that now, thirty years after the publication of this schema, some negative qualities (‘a ritual is not...’) are valued differently. Ritualizing has become an important feature of ritual practice and as a consequence, of Ritual Studies. Increasingly, especially in the Western world, many rituals are becoming more personal, improvised, and idiosyncratic, recently invented, and determinately secular. An example is the ritual in the Dutch hospital that we described in the introduction to this chapter.

In 2014, Grimes discerns seven of what he calls ‘elements’ of rituals: actions, actors, places, times, objects, languages (written, words spoken on and off stage, creeds, etc.), and groups (referring to social, political, economic domains) (Grimes, 2014, 237–241). For each of those elements, Grimes asks very practical “sample research questions” that relate to the empirical reality of the rite (Grimes, 2014, 237–241). To give some examples: “Are some actions more important than others?”; “Who enacts? Who witnesses?”; “Who sits beside whom? Who walks behind whom?”; “How does time unfold within the ritual itself?”; “To what times does the ritual refer of allude?”; “How are ritual texts handled?”; “What social dimensions or discriminations are in force?” (Grimes 2014, 237–241). These are very practical questions, but at the same time these elements also refer to discourses that are conducted in the humanities and in practical theology. Many of Grimes’ elements indeed refer to accents and turns that, consecutively or, depending on the author, simultaneously come to the fore in the humanities and in practical theology: the action-based approach; the anthropological turn, that put humans first; the spatial turn, that primarily looks at space and place; the material turn, that starts from material elements in religion; and the language turn as it was proposed by post-modern philosophers in the wake of Heidegger. In other words, Ritual Studies, and practical theology in so far it is concerned with rituals, are embedded in broader humanistic academic discourses.

4 Contribution to Practical Theology in General

Religions have many dimensions. Glock and Smart discern six dimensions: the intellectual, ideological, and cognitive dimension, the dimension of social ethics, the institutional dimension, the aesthetic dimension, the psychic dimension and the ritual dimension (Auffahrt and Mohr 2006, 1611–1612). These dimensions often overlap, as we have seen in this chapter. The question of power in rituals touches on the dimension of social ethics. The aesthetic and sensual are important dimensions of rituals. Rituals are often initiated and also determined by institutions. Yet the ritual dimension of religion also has something very specific. In its countless qualities or ele-
ments, the ritual as a coherent whole of symbols, symbolic acts and symbolic language pre-eminently grants passage to being, to the divine, and eventually to God. In this way it touches on what is most real in religion and allows it to come to its truth. It is no coincidence that rituals are often understood as the most central elements of a religion (Girard 2013). It is also no coincidence that in Christianity, worship forms the core of the community, its beliefs, and practices. A well-known statement says: *lex orandi lex credendi*, which can be translated as: what one prays is also what one believes. And another dictum says: the church is known by its feasts, meaning that it is known by the liturgy. In that sense it can be argued that the study of rituals forms the core of practical theology.

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