


# Prophetic witness in the Eucharist: A response to Robert Vosloo's 'Prophetic witness in weakness'



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In his article, 'Prophetic witness in weakness', Robert Vosloo asks what it means for believers, faith communities, churches and ecumenical bodies to be authentic witnesses in the public sphere in light of the life-denying realities we are faced with on a daily base. He articulates three aspects of authentic prophetic witness, namely prophetic solidarity, prophetic imagination and prophetic performativity. In response, this article focuses on the sacrament of the Eucharist, especially in terms of the notion of prophetic solidarity that Vosloo illuminated. In particular, this response article is informed and shaped by liberation theologians. It is argued that one valuable form of qualification is to take the Eucharist as our point of departure and to argue that authentic prophetic witness can be born from the 'weakness' celebrated in the Eucharist.

**Keywords:** Eucharist; Hope; Liberation theology; Prophetic witness; Public theology; Solidarity.

## Introduction

In his article, 'Prophetic witness in weakness', Robert Vosloo (2019:1) begins by asking the question of what it means for believers, faith communities, churches and ecumenical bodies to be authentic witnesses in the public sphere in light of the life-denying realities we are faced with daily. He (Vosloo 2019:2) articulates three aspects of authentic prophetic witness, namely prophetic solidarity, prophetic imagination (p. 3) and prophetic performativity (p. 5). In responding to this article, I would like to focus on the sacrament of the Eucharist,<sup>1</sup> especially in terms of the notion of prophetic solidarity that Vosloo illuminated, although I wish to argue that both other forms of authentic prophetic witness are clearly visible also in the Eucharist. Vosloo (2019:2) states that the authentic prophetic voice requires solidarity with the addressees and their times, and it is this communion with others that I would like to emphasise in my response. The Eucharist is also imaginative, seeing the present through the lenses of the future prophetic witness, grounded in hopeful imagination. It is further something that is acted out and, in doing so, emphasises the necessity for not only speaking, but also acting, performatively.

In this response article, I begin by bringing Vosloo's argument for prophetic witness in weakness, as prophetic imagination, in conversation with the Eucharist, followed by noting how prophetic action is also visible in the Eucharist as prophetic performativity. Afterwards, the focus of this response article, prophetic solidarity in the sacrament of the Eucharist, is discussed before concluding by drawing these three facets together to make the argument that prophetic witness in the Eucharist can be seen as an example of the type of prophetic witness in weakness that Vosloo argues for in his article. The dissonance between the confessed transformed community of the Eucharist and the concrete reality of socio-economic and racial divisions that still exist extensively in the South African context, 25 years after democracy, however, clarifies that this is not an uncomplicated argument. The South African context with the ecclesiastical inheritance of racial segregation and the legacy of Apartheid still significantly visible is also addressed as the concrete situation in which the Eucharist, as prophetic witness, calls out for transformation and liberation.

In particular, this response article is informed and shaped by liberation theologians. Gustavo Gutiérrez formulates the task and content as liberation theology as being at a crossroad, attempting to bring together a way of speaking about God and hope on the one hand, and the reality of

1. In this contribution, I am not interested in discussing different positions on the state of the elements of the Eucharist; in other words, different arguments on transubstantiation and how the mode of Christ's presence within the Eucharist is understood. For a full discussion of this topic and recent arguments on different perspectives, see James M. Arcadi's *Recent philosophical work on the doctrine of the Eucharist* (2016) or George Hunsinger's *The Eucharist and Ecumenism: Let us keep the feast* (2008). Additionally, the focus of this contribution is also not on the historical development of Eucharistic thought within the discipline of church history. E. Glenn Hinson's *The Church Triumphant: A History of Christianity up to 1300* (1995) presents these developments skilfully and in a detailed manner.

weakness, of poverty and injustice, on the other. It is within this 'context of suffering and joy, uncertainty and conviction, generous commitment and ambiguity' (Gutiérrez 1999:36) that a prophetic witness is and should be born. Communicating 'the gift of the Kingdom of God revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus' (Gutiérrez 1999:37) is the intersection of these two languages. This life that we witness in the resurrection, life in all of its forms, is celebrated in the Eucharist (Gutiérrez 1999:37). Gutiérrez (1999:37) remarks that the celebration of the Eucharist is the 'first duty of the ecclesial community', and that the breaking of bread is 'both the point of departure and the destination of the Christian community'. The space of the church's mission, Gutiérrez (1973:262) also states, is at the place 'where the celebration of the Lord's Supper and the creation of human brotherhood are indissoluble joined'. The Eucharist and prophetic solidarity will then form the main focus of this contribution in reflecting on and responding to Vosloo's understanding of prophetic witness in weakness. While Vosloo does not refer to the work of Gutiérrez, many of these ideas are implicit in his discussion as I will attempt to indicate in this contribution.

## Prophetic imagination in the Eucharist

'Authentic prophetic witness is imaginative. It helps us to see better and in the process it is hope giving' (Vosloo 2019:3–4). The hope, found in authentic prophetic witness, however, is not 'cheap optimism', but 'a hope born from lament' (Vosloo 2019:4). This echoes statements were made by South African liberation theologian, Russel Botman (2004:516), whose work will be returned to shortly and who noted that hope is not 'hope fullness', 'simple optimism', 'wishful thinking' or 'false hope'.

Botman also writes this within the field of liberation theology where this aspect is also especially prevalent. In liberation theology, born in Latin America and concerned especially with the pain and suffering of the poor (Kamitsuka 1997:185), the focus is on language about God. Accordingly, liberation theology can be said to be the attempt to make the kingdom and the life witnessed to in the resurrection, present within 'this world of oppression, injustice and death' (Gutiérrez 1999:37). Liberation theology 'often takes the form of lament' (Kamitsuka 1997:183). In this sense, it serves as an excellent example of the type of hope that Vosloo views as prophetic witness, being born from lament but providing hope founded on prophetic imagination. Vosloo (2019:5) refers to Emmanuel Katongole's remarks that hope is not and should not be made abstract from lament and suffering, and that lamentation is more than academic or theoretical knowledge; it is intimately linked to personal knowledge and participation in 'God's anguished love for God's people'.

In order to then live faithfully in the 'godforsaken present' (Bonzo 2009:4), Bonzo indicates that, for Jürgen Moltmann, the church has to think eschatologically. In Moltmann's view, it is only the future that breaks into the forsaken

present that can offer hope. Bonzo (2009:4) continues; 'only by experiencing the current conditions with the hopeful eyes of the future can the church find direction for living with blessing and grace'.

David Kelsey (2005:98) notes that imagination is a human ability that encompasses the ability to distinguish and appreciate 'the pattern in a complex whole that makes it the whole it is, and the capacity to use that pattern in several ways'. Theological reflection, says Kelsey (2005:101), therefore carries within itself the intrinsic attribute of being imaginative, as it is the manner in which we can represent that which is not immediately and obviously accessible. This describes the sacrament of Eucharist particularly well.

John de Gruchy (2013:26) further states that imagination is more than merely the visualisation of the future. It also encompasses living in the here and now, living a meaningful life in the present, and properly and applicably recollecting the past. The act of remembrance necessitates imagination, and De Gruchy (2013:26–27) remarks that it is through imagination that 'our memories are retrieved'. Accordingly, imagination cries out for a response to reality that is creative, open, healing and socially transformative (De Gruchy 2013:28).

A focus on the present is also prominent in liberation theology. Gutiérrez (1975:56) notes that liberation theology is public theology, because it is rooted in communion and community which means that the gospel needs to be lived out – not as 'an ideology justifying some determined social situation', but as 'the Word of the Father who loves us in a free and gratuitous manner'. For Gutiérrez (1973:262), the Eucharist is also where the first task of the church takes place, namely to joyfully celebrate the gift of God's saving work that has been 'accomplished through the death and resurrection of Christ'. The Eucharist is, accordingly, a sacrament of commemoration and of thanksgiving. In remembering and giving thanks, the Eucharist then becomes an imaginative space – one where prophetic witness is imaginative.

Also within the tradition of liberation theology, Botman (2004:516) speaks of transforming hope – a hope that is rooted in 'transformed imagination' and which can lead to 'the development of an imagination of hope'. Hope, says Botman (2013:10), needs to spring from our theological imagination. Dirkie Smit (2015:611) remarks that Botman, already in his doctoral dissertation, studied Bonhoeffer 'as a theologian of transformation', being intensely mindful of the shifting context of South Africa in the early 1990s, and 'born in socio-ethical concerns about the future'.

Gutiérrez (2005:176) further remarks that Jesus' crucifixion, the vital event within Christianity and also the event commemorated in the sacrament of the Eucharist, is a political event. Accordingly, Gutiérrez (2005:178) states that it is impossible for us to 'live a life in faith without historical,

social and political consequences'. This imaginative prophetic witness, especially as also found in the Eucharist, therefore necessitate action. Similarly, in his discussion of hope, Botman lists a number of things, which was noted previously, that hope is *not*. Hope, says Botman (2004:516), is not 'hope fullness', 'simple optimism', 'wishful thinking', or 'false hope'. At times, while hope can be said to have become the 'narcotic of the people' (Botman 2002:27), this is when it leads to apathy, quietism, passivity and paralysis.

Nico Koopman (2009:121) discusses prophets as visionaries, remarking that 'prophets see a new world in which the strife and suffering that we currently experience are overcome'. While this vision of a new world might include the indictment of the present and the current 'broken reality', the main function of prophetic witness is not to accuse, but to appeal to people to 'act concretely and to attempt to approximate it' (Koopman 2009:121). Therefore, prophetic imagination, as authentic prophetic witness in weakness and also as exemplified in the Eucharist, necessitates action. In the following section, the prophetic action in the Eucharist will be discussed.

## Prophetic action in the Eucharist

Prophetic action is 'witnessing pertaining to the issues that need to be addressed in enhancing justice and order in this temporal life' (De Wet 2014:4). Such a prophetic vision for a societal future ensues from the notion that society can only truly be transformed by Christ at his Second Coming. It comprises of groaning that yearns for 'consummation whilst bearing witness to a lost and dying world' (De Wet 2014:4). What better example of this prophetic witness could there be than the Eucharist?

As prophetic theology, Koopman (2009:120) articulates, public theology undertakes to reflect on, express, define, lead, go along with and 'be informed by the prophetic calling of churches in public life'. He makes the connection between the office of Christ as prophet and the kingdom of God, and articulates the prophetic duty of the church as witnessing to and standing in 'the service of this kingdom and divine justice, this kingdom that Paul describes as a kingdom of justice, peace and joy' (Koopman 2009:120). Koopman (2009:121) argues that for credible and sincere prophetic speaking, more is necessary than only utopia and critique. Friedrich de Wet (2014) also states further that the prophetic role of Christian communities:

their engagement to mend the world, to foster human flourishing and to serve the common good, is nothing but their identity in Christ projecting itself outward in word and deed. (p. 7)

In her study of public theology, Elaine Graham comes to the conclusion that, in the public arena, the only shape that Christianity can take, is that of action, which is also one of the arguments that Vosloo (2019:5) makes, when he states that 'authentic prophetic witness is about more than mere words, utterances and even public statements. Rather it is

aligned with embodied presence and action'. Graham (2013) argues that:

an apologetic public theology is concerned less with words than actions, and that a defence of faith is to be found in its power to liberate and transform situations of injustice and human suffering. (p. 212)

It is 'actions, not words', which establishes the paramount qualifications and authority of the Christian message in the public sphere (Graham 2013:214).

This prophetic action is especially concerned with the vulnerable as is evident in Vosloo's focus on prophetic witness *in weakness*. Vosloo (2019:5) remarks that such vulnerability is, in the words of the Belhar Confession, 'standing where God stands' which is 'against injustice and with the wronged'. This vulnerability is stressed in the Eucharist where the vulnerability of God's own broken body is evoked and commemorated. In eating the broken pieces of bread, we commemorate the broken body of Jesus Christ and remember his vulnerability. In drinking the wine that recalls the spilt blood of Christ, we remember his weakness. Over and against a triumphant Christology, in the Eucharist we commemorate the suffering Christ.

In discussing the vulnerability of the triune God, Koopman (2008) notes:

In the death and suffering of Jesus Christ, we see, as Barth says, the fatherly sympathy (*vaderlike medelye*) of the triune God; or in the words of Moltmann, the compassion of the Father (*patricompassianisme*); or as Berkouwer states, the compassion *bewoënheid* and sympathy of God. In the suffering of Jesus, God identifies with suffering humans. (p. 241)

The weakness and vulnerability of God reaches its culmination in the crucifixion events. The breaking of the bread, Gutiérrez (1999:37) notes, represents the 'profound communion with human suffering caused in many cases by the lack of bread'. Therefore, it is done in the recognition of the resurrected Jesus in whom our hope is, the One who 'gives life and lifts the hopes of the people brought together by his acts and his word' (Gutiérrez 1999:37). It is the cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ that we celebrate in the Eucharist (Gutiérrez 1973:263) – the very symbols of the suffering God.

Nico Keyser and Martin Laubscher (2016:97) further make the connection between the Eucharist and prophetic action when they reflect on economic justice and 'the link between liturgy (Christian worship) and social ethics'. They (Keyser & Laubscher 2016:97) indicate that a sensitivity to the social meaning and implications of Christian worship has been part of the initial development of the act. This is also emphasised by Daniel Migliore (2014:307) who notes that an inherent connection exists 'between responsible participation in the Lord's Supper and commitment to a fairer distribution of the goods of the earth to all its people'. In the conversation on justice, it is necessary to 'develop an alternative vision that

adds something unique to this debate' (Keyser & Laubscher 2016:99). The Eucharist is one of the places where this alternative vision is particularly formed and outlined.

The Eucharist, state Keyser and Laubscher (2016:102), 'opens up a space where just communion is envisioned in its peculiar openness – especially towards the particular, local and poor'. Prophetic performativity, especially in terms of vulnerability is thus underlined in the Eucharist. This vulnerability also refers to solidarity with the vulnerable in our communities and society – another element that the Eucharist emphasises. In the last section of this contribution, I now turn to how this prophetic solidarity, which Vosloo also speaks about, can be found in the celebration of the Eucharist.

## Prophetic solidarity in the Eucharist

Vosloo (2019:2) argues that 'an adequate theological description of prophetic witness requires an identification or solidarity with the times'. This 'solidarity with the times' applies to 'the hope and crisis of our age as well as with the people to whom we witness' (Vosloo 2019:2). In his discussion of solidarity, Vosloo draws especially on the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer (1996 [1987]:31) notes that true solidarity, true community, is based on the foundation of the united body of Christ; through Christ people belong to one another. The Christian community, the solidarity and commonality of believers, is especially emphasised in the Eucharist. Of this community, Bonhoeffer (1996 [1987]:31) further says that others are needed 'for the sake of Jesus Christ', that 'a Christian comes to others only through Jesus Christ', and that we have been chosen in Jesus Christ 'from eternity ... accepted in time, and united for eternity'.

The Holy Communion is the sacrament that celebrates this union with God and also with each other. In article 35 of the Belgic Confession, it is noted that by the 'use of this holy sacrament we are moved to fervent love of God and our neighbours', and especially, that 'we engage together'. This holy sacrament, received 'in the gathering of God's people', refers to all of God's people – also across borders. In reflecting on what Vosloo has put on the table regarding prophetic action as solidarity, I now turn especially to the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches' (WCC) 1982 document 'Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry' (BEM), as this prophetic witness is also made manifest in ecclesial meetings and ecumenical documents such as the Kairos document and the Confession of Belhar that Vosloo also mentions in his article and that was referred to earlier.

BEM puts forward that 'the Eucharist is a sacramental meal which by visible signs communicates to us God's love in Jesus Christ, the love by which Jesus loved his own "to the end" (Jn 13:1)' (WCC 1982:8). Public theology considers the love of the triune God for the entire world. As such, the Eucharist is intrinsically part of the public confession of the Church:

The eucharist is essentially the sacrament of the gift which God makes to us in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Every Christian receives this gift of salvation through communion in the body and blood of Christ. In the eucharistic meal, in the eating and drinking of the bread and wine, Christ grants communion with himself. (WCC 1982:8)

This communion with Christ is also of particular importance for our communion with others as can be seen in the discussion on *The Eucharist as Anamnesis or Memorial of Christ*:

Christ himself with all that he has accomplished for us and for all creation (in his incarnation, servant-hood, ministry, teaching, suffering, sacrifice, resurrection, ascension and sending of the Spirit) is present in this *anamnesis*, granting us communion with him – self. The eucharist is also the foretaste of his *parousia* and of the final kingdom. The *anamnesis* in which Christ acts through the joyful celebration of his Church is thus both representation and anticipation. It is not only a calling to mind of what is past and of its significance. It is the Church's effective proclamation of God's mighty acts and promises. (WCC 1982:9, *italics in original*)

In the Eucharist, we are therefore called to also visibly represent our spiritual unity, but also anticipate the eschatological final unity we expect and eagerly await. 'United to our Lord and in communion with all the saints and martyrs, we are renewed in the covenant sealed by the blood of Christ' (WCC 1982:10). In the Holy Communion, we are united with Christ, but also with each other across all borders – also of weakness and vulnerability. It is therefore that BEM can claim: 'The eucharistic communion with Christ who nourishes the life of the Church is at the same time communion within the body of Christ which is the Church' (WCC 1982:12). Accordingly, BEM (WCC 1982) continues to note:

The eucharistic celebration demands reconciliation and sharing among all those regarded as brothers and sisters in the one family of God and is a constant challenge in the search for appropriate relationships in social, economic and political life. (p. 12)

Gutiérrez (1973) indicates that, in the representation of the Last Supper in the gospel, the Jewish Passover forms the background – a celebration of the liberation from Egyptian slavery and the covenant at Sinai. He (Gutiérrez 1973:263) remarks that the 'Christian Passover takes on and reveals the full meaning of the Jewish Passover', namely that political liberation is at the heart of liberation from sin. Communion with God and communion with others, Gutiérrez (1973:263) notes, 'presupposes the abolition of all injustice and exploitation'. The unifying setting of a meal, forming the common bond between those who eat and drink together, is also important in the establishing of solidarity in the Eucharist. Accordingly, Gutiérrez (1973:263) further remarks that the objects used in the Eucharist 'recall that brotherhood is rooted in God's will to give the goods of this earth to all people so that they might build a more human world'.

Robert McAfee Brown (1990:51, *italics in original*) indicates that Juan Luis Segundo, a Jesuit priest, has indicated that all

liberation theologies take as their point of departure the claim that *'the world should not be the way it is'*. This is especially true for the exploited and the poor – in short, the most vulnerable and weak of our societies. Vulnerability was referred to earlier, but the prophetic solidarity of the Eucharist is also then especially solidarity with those who are vulnerable, defenceless and weak (Brown 1990:51). Prophetic witness (while indicating imagination and performativity), as indicated earlier, also especially underlines the importance of solidarity, as Vosloo emphasises. As has been indicated in this contribution, the Eucharist in particular encapsulates these notions, especially when viewed through the lens of liberation theology. Prophetic witness in the Eucharist can then be said to be prophetic witness in weakness. However, this is not unproblematic given the concrete South African reality with its high levels of unemployment, poverty, suffering and divisions, which are also visible within the Church.

## The Eucharist as prophetic witness in South Africa

In the South African context, the notion of solidarity and the Eucharistic fellowship has been contentious 'ever since the 1830s when a Dutch Reformed congregation ... requested the use of different cups for former slave and former slave owners' (Conradie 2013:30). Ernst Conradie (2013:30) notes that, accordingly, the polemic of the Eucharist also maintains a profound implication, taking into account the divisions of race and class as well as of language and cultural identity. Although this is not only true of the South African context, in South Africa, 'Sunday 10h00 remains the "most divided hour"'.

Mary McClintock Fulkerson and Marcia Mount Shoop (2015) remark that, while the liturgy and habit of the Eucharist foster the expectation of a shared narrative that can be embodied in its practice when we gather at the table:

there is a thoroughgoing dissonance that signals rupture and betrayal as well as particularity and possibility, estranged relationships are allowed to splinter, and instead of seeing all nations and tongues represented at the table, often we look around and see people just like us. (p. 2)

Accordingly, in order to comprehend how the Eucharist can reproduce social brokenness, but also hold the potential to aid in the transformation of brokenness, McClintock Fulkerson and Mount Shoop (2015:3) state that a framework that is aware of the 'complexity of social trauma, race, and embodiment' is necessary. A fundamental aspect of our Eucharistic legacy includes the discord between the 'Divine promise of transformative community and the human reality of ruptured relationships and violence' and the resulting complexity of embodying these ideas within our realities and conditionings (McClintock Fulkerson & Mount Shoop 2015:26). Disparities between our lives and the story of Jesus will always exist and the human condition, our very nature, is interwoven with such conflict. Accordingly, the Eucharist

is not a practice that transforms through 'correct' practice, but 'God's effusive love embodied in Christ's startling presence among us' (McClintock Fulkerson & Mount Shoop 2013:145).

The failure of many Christians to replicate the restorative meals of Jesus with outsiders, McClintock Fulkerson and Mount Shoop (2013:145) indicate, is usually not intentional, and churches recognise themselves as inclusive communities that welcome all, viewing all people as God's children. Speaking from the American context, McClintock Fulkerson and Mount Shoop (2013:145) note that the majority of white churches maintain they have moved on from racial segregation and allege to be 'colour blind'. The same can be asserted of the South African context with its history of Apartheid and racial segregation preached from the pulpits and practiced in the Eucharist – an inheritance still visible in many mainline churches.

Something more is then necessary in order to 'understand the function of Eucharist in both reproducing and potentially aiding in the transformation of brokenness ... We need attention to the connections between embodied practice and theological imagination' (McClintock Fulkerson & Mount Shoop 2013:146). These two elements, performativity and imagination are also then fittingly emphasised by Vosloo. These two aspects, prophetic performativity and prophetic imagination, hold the potential to support the establishment of the third: prophetic solidarity in the Eucharist. The Eucharist is more than the reiteration of a normative story; it should also influence the performativity of those that participate to implement and enact community – a community 'distinctly defined in relation to radical hospitality and beloved community lived out by Jesus and illustrated in his meals with outsiders and with his friends' (McClintock Fulkerson & Mount Shoop 2015:30). In such a community, these related themes call out for '*liberative remembering*' which 'somehow opens practitioners up to viewing the contemporary situation with a new capacity for liberative performance *in response to their particular situation*' (McClintock Fulkerson & Mount Shoop 2015:30, [*italics in original*]).

In South Africa, intentionally seeking this prophetic solidarity in weakness implies that power is given up and shared, and that, in the partaking of the Eucharist, members also see themselves and allow themselves to be vulnerable together that alleged hospitality and inclusiveness be replaced with true openness to the 'other'. Prophetic witness in weakness entails taking the complexity of our shared history of traumatic oppression, 'othering' and racial segregation seriously, and not maintaining to have 'moved on' from racial divisions at a surface level when the majority of mainstream churches remain segregated. The prophetic imagination of the Eucharist can provide hope to the oppressed, the prophetic performativity of the Eucharist calls out for concrete action in the interest of the vulnerable, and the prophetic solidarity of the Eucharist compels us to enact true community across socio-economic and racial divisions.

Accordingly, the concrete reality of widespread injustice, poverty and oppression in the South African context calls out for the liberation and transformation of the Eucharist. Koopman (2008) refers to the previously mentioned Belhar Confession and remarks that the Reformed tradition has given explicit attention to the confession of God's distinct association with the marginalised. Several of the early Reformed theologians, pastors and congregations suffered persecution, and 'much Reformed theology was conceived in exile, poverty, amidst adversity, and in the struggle against social and ecclesiastical tyranny' (Koopman 2008:248). Doing theology from the viewpoint of the poor declined when Reformed Christians became part of societal sectors that held dominant political power, but regained emphasis when confronted with liberation theology regarding God's preferential option for the poor (Koopman 2008:249). This prominence of liberation theology, which was discussed earlier, not only necessitates that the concerns and interests of the poor be seen as an important issue for social ethics, but also that it should be seen as a theological issue. As Gutiérrez (1973:110–116) indicates, how we react to society's poor has to do with how we react and respond to God – also in the South African context.

## Conclusion

Kevin Vanhoozer (2014) remarks that in the Eucharist, an amalgamating of past, present and future is found. Additionally:

the Lord's Supper also encapsulates the three dynamic marks that characterize the communion of the saints ... fidelity, generosity, and hospitality. For all these reasons, the Lord's Supper represents a condensed summary or summation of the climax of the drama of redemption – the creation of a new, unified body of Christ, the prime exhibit of God's kingdom on earth – and hence a summa of the gospel. (Vanhoozer 2014:160)

In the community of the Eucharist, power is redefined and worldly notions of power, defined as having 'power over' the other, is overturned. Moltmann (1992:258) notes that it is exactly with the subjugated and oppressed, the individuals who had been pushed out of society, that Jesus celebrated 'the messianic feast'. For Moltmann, the self-giving love of Jesus Christ is made visible in this solidarity within the paradigm of God's fellowship with humanity and true fellowship between human beings. Solidarity with those who are suffering and in pain was also mentioned earlier in the discussion of liberation theology. This visible solidarity, also the visible solidarity of prophetic witness in weakness, is nowhere better embodied and confirmed, imaginatively, actively and in solidarity, than in the messianic feast of the Eucharist.

In the Eucharist we are reminded of the reality of our dependence on the grace of God: 'The Eucharistic meal also reminds believers that our very being and existence is dependent on God's grace' (Kotzé 2017:177). Rowan Williams (1982) powerfully observes:

We do not work our salvation in offering the Eucharistic oblation; we witness to the share we have been given in the glorified life of Christ, manifest in the rest of our lives as charity, humility, and pity. And the purity of our offering depends upon our commitment to the Christ through whom it is offered. (p. 11)

True sacrifice, Norman Wirzba (2011:129) further remarks, occurs when we 'cease to strategize to appease or bribe God'. It is when we no longer make our offerings out of fear or anxiety, or in the hope that they will lead to glory and status in the world – when our offerings become genuine (Wirzba 2011:129). True sacrifice is living in such a manner that our lives creates communion.

It is this life of communion that can be said to be a form of prophetic witness in weakness where the Eucharist also informs how such communion is lived out. Vosloo (2019) concludes by remarking that it is the:

'other grace of God' ... that holds the key to the redemptive nature of prophetic speech and action, and provides a clue to the mystery of the strange strength of prophetic witness in weakness. (p. 6)

The grace of God – imaginative grace, performative grace and, especially, grace in solidarity – become visible especially in the Eucharistic community. McClintock Fulkerson and Mount Shoop (2015:66) remark that, within the Eucharist, lies the capacity for an altered kind of memory – one that is interrelated with our 'human and social identities and memories' that can both exemplify and represent this different memory in order to transform and transgress. It is a memory 'intended to open up and address the concreteness and brokenness of our contemporary situation' (McClintock Fulkerson & Mount Shoop 2015:66). For prophetic witness to be authentic, Vosloo (2019:6) argues, prophetic solidarity, prophetic imagination and prophetic performativity is required, but these aspects need to be qualified.

It is my argument that one valuable form of qualification is to take the Eucharist as our point of departure and to argue that authentic prophetic witness – witness with the capacity to transform our present reality of vulnerability, oppression, injustice and death – can be born from the 'weakness' celebrated in the Eucharist.

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The author declares that no competing interest exists.

### Author contributions

I declare that I am the sole author of this research article.

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## Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

## Ethical consideration

This article followed all ethical standards for carrying out research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

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