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Ritual failure in Romans 6

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Ritual studies are slow to make a large impact on New Testament studies, despite a number of notable exceptions. This notwithstanding, rituals occur frequently in the New Testament, in particular when there is a problem with a ritual. In this article, recent anthropological work on 'ritual failure' is used to address Paul's discussion of Roman practices concerning baptism in relation to a person's walk of life and to argue that this can be understood well as a case of 'ritual failure,' in which a ritual fails, from Paul's perspective, to achieve what it should. This leads both to challenging the attitude of the Romans concerning baptism and to a reconsideration of its significance.

Introduction: Ritual and ritual failure in early Christianity

Ritual played a role of tremendous importance in the world of early Christianity (understood as part of the broader spectrum of post-70 Judaisms in their Greco-Roman context) (cf. DeMaris 2008),[1] as well as within it, as discussions concerning table fellowship, liturgical behavior (e.g. speaking in tongues, exercising the right to speak, the wearing of head covering, etc.) circumcision, and, as this contribution will address, baptism, a rite of initiation, indicate. Nonetheless, attention for the ritual aspects of early Christianity is often limited. Even more limited is the attention for the dynamics that takes place when a ritual goes wrong, is identified as flawed or failed, and leads to the renegotiation of the ritual practice of a community, which involves aspects such as the explication of ideas about the correct performance of, participation in, meaning of and expectations attached to a ritual, as well as the reordering of power relations in a community between (e.g. former and new) ritual specialists (often also community leaders) and the broader community. In an earlier exploratory study this dynamic, known as the dynamic of 'ritual failure', was studied in relation to Paul's remarks about the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:17–34 (Smit 2013a:165–195), and, given its illuminating effect and heuristic value, the same will be attempted here with regard to another ritual that Paul comments on: baptism. The question that will be asked is: does, the application of the perspective of 'ritual failure' help to further the understanding of Romans 6:1–14,[2] where Paul develops his argument from an initial thesis statement in verses 1–2 (cf. Agersnap 1999:233–261),[3] an extensive argumentative substantiation in verses 3–10, concluding upon it in verse 11 and building upon it for his exhortative conclusion in verses 12–14 (Boers 2001:664–671), and if so, how? This passage has been selected from among the Pauline texts that mention baptism (apart from Rm 6:1–14: 1 Cor 1:12–17; 12:13; 15:29; Gl 3:26–29) because it can be considered the 'key … baptismal passage in Paul' (Ferguson 2009:155). In doing so, this article goes beyond more classical historical research into the origins and meaning of early Christian baptism, such as that of Ferguson (2009; cf. Guerra 2005:132),[4] or Hartman (1997:68–78),[5] which pays hardly any attention at all to ritual theory, which also applies to Agersnap's work (Agersnap 1999:14–49),[6] or studies that understand Paul´s references to ritual as ways of seeing each other through an image or metaphor (Fowl 1988:293–308)[7], whilst it also goes

1.Especially DeMaris provides an eloquent account of the importance of ritual in the first-century Greco-Roman world, indeed the 'ritual world' of the New Testament.

2.On the demarcation within Romans 6, subdividing it into a first section (vv. 1–14) and a second one (vv. 15–23), based on the two questions in Romans 6:1 and 6:15, see e.g. Talbert (2003:53–63). For a more extensive substantiation, see e.g. Teresa Kuo-Yu Tsui (2013:297–314), which includes an impressive documentation of further scholars taking this view.

3.Agersnap notes that verses 1–2 contain the 'leading questions' of what follows.

4.Anthony J. Guerra notes that Romans 6 is not read in its rhetorical context often enough and too often mined for a doctrine of baptism. Too much attention for rhetoric, however, also leads to obscuring the fact that Paul is dealing with a ritual here, see e.g. the analysis of David Hellholm (1994:119–179).

5.Hartman (1997:76) focuses fully on a 'theology of baptism' in Romans 6:1–14 without paying much attention to the ritual aspects of the text, even though he notes that the various theological motifs associated with it have their ritual focus in baptism.

6.Agersnap (1999:14–49) also provides a critical overview of research on Romans 6:1-14.

7.Fowl (1988:296) reduces baptism to metaphor: 'To explain how and why Christians have died to sin Paul employs another, but more familiar, metaphor: being baptised into Christ. In all of the cases where Paul uses this metaphor it basically expresses the view that those who have been baptised have entered into the community defined by whom or whatever they are baptised into (cf. I Cor.I:13; 10:2; 12:13; Gl.3:27). If the image of death provides Paul with a metaphor with which to talk about being freed from past political commitments, then the image of baptism provides him with a metaphor to speak about entering into a new polity. Hence, in Romans

beyond studies such as those of Meeks (2003:140–163), Neyrey (1990:87–88)[8], Strecker (2011:1383–1440; cf. 1990), DeMaris (2008), Klostergaard Petersen (1998:3–28) and Groenewald (2005), in that it does not just ask how early Christian initiatory ritual functioned and related to its context, but also how it developed through a process of ritual failure and ritual negotiation. In doing so, another scholarly insight will be taken up, that understood Paul as both to take baptismal experience into account as well as to notice that Paul does not speak about baptism as such in this pericope, but rather utilises baptism as a vantage point for the rest of his argument (Kuo-Yu Tsui 2012:395–417).[9] Still, this contribution goes widely beyond both contemporary approaches, utilising ritual criticism and earlier approaches noting the place of baptism in Paul's argument, by showing how the two are interrelated, not just in terms of argumentative structure, but also in terms of ritual dynamics, specifically by viewing it all through the lens of the dynamics of ritual failure.

Thus, not only the interrelationship between mythos, rite, and ethos of a community in relationship to its context will be considered (Theissen 1999:2–4), but also how the interplay between these three aspects of a religious tradition furthers the development of this tradition as soon as a case of ritual failure (which is at the same time identified as an ethical problem and a problem related to the misinterpretation [and ritual appropriation] of the foundational myth of the community) occurs.

A particular reason for addressing Romans 6 from the perspective of ritual, specifically ritual failure, is that much research into this texts tends to neglect the ritual basis of Paul's argument, or pays only lip service to it, without addressing the particular dynamics of ritual (and ritual failure) that might help to further understand the text and especially Paul's way of thinking. In spite of this, it can be argued that Paul bases much of his argument, which is aimed at the walk of life (ethos) of the Roman community and has its basis in the foundational story of the early Christian community (mythos), on a case of ritual disagreement. Therefore, it constitutes an interesting case for testing the theory of ritual failure as a heuristic tool for the history of early Christian thought and praxis. Before doing so, some outline of the understanding of ritual as it will be used in this study will be provided, whilst also the theory of ritual failure as such will be presented as such.

Ritual studies and early Christianity

Before moving on to ritual failure and ritual negotiation in particular, it is necessary to outline some general characteristics of the value of ritual studies for the study of the New Testament. As can be easily observed, ritual studies and ritual criticism are slowly beginning to have a larger influence on New Testament studies (cf. Uro 2010:220–232; Kranemann 2013:151–173; Lamoreaux 2009:153–165; Klawans 2006:17–73; Klingbeil 2007:45–126; DeMaris 2008:11–71)[10] notwithstanding a heritage of suspicion vis-à-vis rituals in early Christianity.[11] This is to be welcomed, as the study of rituals addresses an important aspect of many New Testament texts involved: so many texts are related to rituals, such as circumcision, sacrifice, baptism, and ritual meals. Even if the historical rituals to which New Testament texts refer are no longer directly accessible – as are all historical events 'behind' the texts – the study of their probable shape and functioning can still inform the exegesis of the texts themselves.[12] This is of significance, given that many early Christian texts are concerned with ritual. In fact, as will be argued below, many of the New Testament texts about rituals can be understood, not only as texts 'about'

(footnote 7 continues...)
6:3 when Paul talks about believers as having been baptised into Christ, he is talking about those who have entered into the community ruled and defined by Christ'. For a critique of this view of ritual see, e.g. Rappaport (1999:104–138).

8. Neyrey provides an extensive overview of ceremonies, rites, and ritual in Paul, including a brief treatment of baptism.

9. See e.g. Kuo-Yu Tsui:2012 focusses on Paul's thoughts, rather than on ritual experience, such as on 400: 'Though Paul does not intend to present his baptismal theology in Romans 6, Paul's reference to baptism there nonetheless reveals his thoughts on baptism in relation to Christ's death'. Also, Boers (2001:668), remains on the level of thoughts and their expression when he states: 'Like Thyen, many scholars who recognise that Romans 6:1–14 is not an exposition of Paul's understanding of baptism; nevertheless understand baptism to be what governs Paul's reasoning in the passage. The tendency is then to understand the passage as a clarification of the meaning of the believer's existence, interpreted by means of an exposition of the meaning of baptism for that existence.' Then, he approvingly quotes Wedderburn (1987:49–50): 'Granted that motifs which can also be applied to Christian existence as a whole can also appropriately be applied to that rite which marks the beginning of that existence, and vice versa, [it is too often] assumed that the movement, the influence, is from the rite to the understanding of Christian existence, and not the other way round. Certainly in the present case the latter seems more probable language used of Christian existence in general is in Rom 6 applied to baptism.'

10. See also the contributions in D. Hellholm, T. Vegge, Ø. Norderval & C. Hellholm (ed.), 2011, and S. Al-Suadi (2011:49–109). In Old Testament studies, ritual theory is also making an impact, see e.g. G.A. Klingbeil (2007) and also *I. Gruenwald (2003).*

11. Klostergaard Petersen (1998:3–5) suspects that Protestant prejudices and presuppositions played an important role in this respect. He finally refers to the following observation by Z. Smith: 'The same presuppositions (i.e. Protestant anti-Catholic apologetics), the same rhetorical tactics, indeed, in the main, the very same data exhibited in these early efforts underlie much of our present-day research, with one important alteration: that the characteristics attributed to 'Popery', by the Reformation and post-Reformation controversialist, have been transferred, wholesale, to the religions of Late Antiquity.' (Smith 1990:34). Also the encompassing overview of the discussion concerning early Christian initiation rites offered by Strecker (2011:1420) notes the necessity to take ritual seriously as such, rather than as a way of expressing dogma in a different way; the movement is rather the other way around; therefore, ritual or liturgy appears as a kind of 'primary' theology. The general rituality of conversion, as noted by Strecker, is discussed more extensively by Thomas M. Finn (1990) in his work titled *From death to rebirth: Ritual and conversion in antiquity.*

12. With respect to this, the fact that one is dealing with texts, not the rituals themselves, does not need to be a problem, when for example, Strecker's six ways in which text and ritual are, or can be, connected, are taken into account, most of which seem to apply to the text under consideration in this contribution. See Strecker (1990:78–80). DeMaris (2008:5–6) follows Strecker and gives a helpful English paraphrase: '1) A text includes instructions or commands for carrying out a rite. Strecker has in mind imperatival language embedded in a ritual setting, like "Do this in remembrance of me" (1 Cor. 11:24) or texts in which the performance of a rite is ordered (Ac 10:48). 2) A text reports the execution of a rite. Examples include Jesus's baptism (Mark 1:9–11), the Last Supper narrative (Mk 14:22–5), and the designation or initiation of new church leaders (Ac 6:1–6). 3) A text concerns itself with the meaning, function, or implementation of a rite. For instance the synoptic gospels are filled with debate over the significance and value of Sabbath observance, purification, and fasting (Mk 2:23–8; 7:1–23; 2:18–20). Likewise, Paul poses interpretative questions like, "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ?" (1 Cor 10:16) 4) A text stems directly from ritual use. Confessional and liturgical formulas have made their way into the New Testament, such as the Christological hymns of Philippians 2:6–11 and Colossians 1:15–20. 5) A text has a ritual function in and of itself, such as the greeting and benediction at the end [of] Paul's letter (e.g. Phlp 4:21–3) ... 6) A text is connected synecdochically with a rite. What Strecker means by this is that a text may echo, allude to, or refer to a rite, even though the text may not be about ritual per se. For example, in reflecting about his efforts on behalf of the Philippians, Paul clearly alludes to ritual activity: "But even if I am being poured out as a libation over the sacrifice and the offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you – and in the same way you also must be glad and rejoice with me" (Phil 2:17–18).' Of this list, the numbers 3 and 6 apply to Phlp 5–11 in as far as crucifixion is concerned, 4 applies to the text as such. See on the possibilities and restrictions of social-science methods for New Testament exegesis in general e.g. the succinct considerations of Stephen C. Barton (2002:277–289), as well as DeMaris 2008: 5, noting that anyone who studies the world 'behind' the text of the New Testament will have to take recourse to the analysis of ritual.

rituals, but also as part of a community's ritual praxis itself or a community's interpretation of a ritual praxis, given that the evaluation of a ritual belongs to such a ritual praxis, as will be argued below. Put differently: a text like 1 Corinthians 11:17–34 is not just about 'how Christians should celebrate a meal', or what the meaning of this meal is, but, precisely because it asks questions about ritual, about 'who Christians are'. The same applies to a text like Philippians 2:5–11, it is not just a text that says something about how crucifixion functions, but it also says something about who Christians are as followers of the crucified (and exalted) Christ (see Smit 2013a). By approaching rituals as rituals and not on the basis of understandings of rituals as material vehicles for meaning that they convey in a symbolic way, as was, for example, argued forcefully and influentially by Mircea Eliade (1961), thus expressing a strong preference for the importance of the mind over that of the body and the spiritual over the material. In more recent theorising about rituals, their own character, notably in relation to the body, to bodily experience, and to enactment as a fundamental mode of identity, has been stressed, e.g. by scholars such as Grimes, Bell, and Rappaport. Rappaport, for example, argues the following:

> Ritual is not merely another way to 'say things' or 'do things' that can be said as well or better in other ways. The form that is ritual is surely without communicational equivalents and thus, possibly, without functional or metafunctional equivalents. That ritual's abilities are intrinsic to its form an in indissoluble association only with its form, goes far to account for its ubiquity (Rappaport 1999:138).[13]

For this reason, and as will become clear throughout this contribution, the approach chosen here is critical of interpretations that understand Paul's reference to baptism in Romans 6:1–14 as a demonstration of a theological thesis (Guerra 2005:132), rather than vice versa: the theological thesis is a consequence of a ritual practice as experienced and reflected upon by Paul.

At this background, the 'rediscovery' of ritual in early Christian studies has rightly underlined the importance of rituals, such as baptism, meal fellowship and circumcision, and the reflection upon them for the development of early Christian identity. Through the enactment or performance of a ritual, a community's identity is set in scene and reconstituted.[14] What is enacted may be described as the 'script' or 'grammar' – terms that are equivalent in this context – of a ritual. In the study of rituals, as well as in their actual functioning, these notions indicate a set of rules according to which a ritual needs to proceed in order to function. With regard to some rituals, the 'script' or 'grammar' has been made explicit to a very considerable extent see e.g. the use of a missal with its rubrics for the performance of the ritual of the Mass, in other cases the 'grammar remains much more implicit. Paying attention to this 'script' or 'grammar' is helpful, as it sheds both light on a ritual's structure and because it provides a tool for the analysis of rituals:

> ritual behaviour is structured and … many of these structures can be represented in such a formalised way that general rules surface. The description and analysis of these structures and rules are nothing else than a grammar, the grammar of rituals … (Michaels 2012:11)

This grammar, especially as it is used, explicitly or implicitly, by a community performing a ritual, also contains ascriptions of meaning to (parts of) a ritual (Michaels 2006:247–261),[15] as well as expectations about the (desired) outcome of a ritual (Michaels 2010:7–28).[16] In this way, the notion of a ritual 'grammar' goes beyond being a 'mere' set of rules concerning ritual actions and makes perspicuous why also the evaluation of a ritual is an inherent aspect of its performance. When using the notion of 'grammar' in the sense proposed by Michaels, the impression that a ritual 'grammar' is entirely static can be avoided: it can change, even if it does so at a slower pace than its sequential performances. One reason for a grammar to change or be changed is precisely ritual failure and resulting ritual negotiation, as will become clear below. At the same time, due to its function as the set of norms inherent to the ritual, the grammar can also provide a corrective to particular kinds of its performance, should they be perceived as 'failures' or 'mistakes' when compared to earlier versions of the ritual or to its significance (Hüsken 2007:337). In order to evaluate the identity that is constituted and exists concretely in its embodiment by people through the performance of a ritual according to a particular grammar (or 'script'), it needs to be related to this 'script' or 'grammar' itself.

At this point, there is a potential criticism of the use of modern theories, such as theories concerning rituals and, below, ritual failure, to ancient texts, such as Romans 6:1–14, namely the question as to the appropriateness of such a potentially anachronistic approach. Whilst this question is certainly legitimate, it may also be considered answered by the productive contribution that has been made by the application of sociological models to the study of the New Testament in general (Strecker 1990:23–31). The danger of anachronism, which lurks whenever a new model is applied to an old text, can be avoided by ensuring that the results from the (primarily heuristically-oriented) use of a particular model in the exegesis of a text do indeed have a basis in the text itself and not in the model only. With regard to ritual criticism in particular, it may be noted that this field of study generally assumes the transcultural character of particular ritual patterns, which also legitimates the use of models stemming from the analysis of one culture or cultural group for the analysis of rituals of another culture or cultural group.

13.See also the broader argument of F. Flannery (2008:13–18) in 'The body and ritual reconsidered, imagined, and experienced' as well as the general theoretical background provided by C. Bell (1992) in 'Ritual theory, ritual practice'.

14.A very broad view of ritual reaches a point where nearly all behavior can be understood as the performance of an identity. See J. Lieu (2004:147-211), as well as, in relation to early Christian meals, H. Taussig (2009:173–192) and Al-Suadi (2011).

15.See Michaels (2005) on the problems involved concerning ritual and meaning.

16.On the language of 'script', 'grammar', its potential and limitations see Michaels (2010). On the expectations associated with a ritual see Hüsken (2007:337–366).

Having outlined all of this, the notion of 'ritual', as it was introduced above, can be specified somewhat more, which is necessary, both in general and because the identification of crucifixion as a ritual requires some argument and this argument needs to have a basis in a somewhat more precise understanding of ritual. A starting point can be found in Becker's statement that '[r]itual refers to an elaborate sequence of individual rites which, following an established ritual syntax, are logically connected within a certain functional context' (Lamoreaux 2009:154). Such an understanding, which depends on the notion of 'script' or 'grammar' as outlined above, can be developed further with the help of the theoretical framework provided by Michaels, who argues that rituals can be understood to have the following five characteristics:

> 1. Rituals are always related to causal change (*causa transitionis*), pertaining to circumstances that can be biological, physical, social, or natural in character; 2. A ritual is always intentional: some kind of ritual intention needs to be there and be expressed (*solemnis intentio*), examples are oaths, vows, promises, or verdicts; 3. A ritual is characterised by certain formal criteria of action, that is in order to be a ritual, an action must be stereotypical, formalised, repetitive, public, irrevocable, and often liminal (*actiones formaliter riterorum*); 4. Rituals always contain modal criteria of action (*actiones modaliter ritorum*), expressing the functional dimension of rituals, pertaining either to 'societas' (functions of ritual relating to society: solidarity, hierarchy, control, standardisation, etc.), 'religio' (rituals performed because of the transcendental value attached to them), or 'impressio' (rituals understood in relation to the emotions of participants); 5. Rituals are related to change in identity, status, role, or competency (*novae classificationes, transitio vitae*).[17] (Michaels 1999:23–47; cf. Kreinath, Snoek & Strausberg 2007:295–296)

Baptism as a ritual

Early Christian baptism obviously fits these characteristics, being related to a change in a person (1) (Groenewald 2002:283–299; cf. Wedderburn 1987:363), performed intentionally (2),[18] it has stereotypical characteristics (3) (Ferguson 2009), it is related to all three of Michaels' modalities (4), and clearly leads to a change in a person's status (Van Staden 2001:576–592). The result of the ritual of baptism in Romans 6:1–14 can, from a ritual perspective, aware of the fact that the text can also be read from the perspective of more conceptual notions, such as justification, be described as follows, in fact, as the way in which a person becomes incorporated in the 'story' of justification which is the story of Jesus' death and resurrection in its significance for others (Yarbro Collins 1989:28–46).[19] Given the subversive character of the story of Jesus death and resurrection as that of the victorious life of a religio-political deviant whose execution was botched by the intervention of a marginal, colonialised deity, incorporation into it through baptism, a subversive act as such, also meant the incorporation into an alternative kind of ontology based on this story. Participating in the story of Christ, however, also means to be oriented towards one's own resurrection, which, as such, is not a fact, even if the believer already participates in the appertaining newness of life. In other words, although baptism itself transfers a person from one status to another, the newly acquired status, between the dead of the old person and the full realisation of the new person in one's full participation in Christ's resurrection is, in fact, also liminal in character, as has been noted by Klostergaard Petersen:

> The order of being into which the Christian is incorporated by baptism is ideologically conditioned as liminal. It is a mode of being characterised by its proleptic essence and the fact that it is oriented towards a final stage, which Christ alone is living. The future resurrection with Christ is anticipatorily and partly experienced. Christian life is eschatologically defined in the field of tension between an 'already' and a 'not yet'. (Klostergaard Petersen 1998:16)[20]

It seems, however, that in Romans, the character of the liminal existence of the baptised, in terms of their embodiment of their death to sin and walking in the newness of life due to that, is disputed; in fact, it constitutes the core of the ritual failure noted by Paul. This is a situation that is akin to the one at stake in Philippians, where Paul also discusses the characteristics of the 'intermediate state' of those living on earth, but already 'in Christ',[21] albeit that in Philipians the question of suffering is an issue, whereas in Romans the question of the appropriate form of participation in Christ's new life in terms of walking in newness of life is at the centre.[22] This state of affairs, however, also means that there is no reason to assume that Paul addresses a front of 'enthusiasts' in Rome; the dispute is not so much about whether or not one participates in newness of life already or whether one is between death to sin and full resurrection, but what the

17.This approach, which does not follow earlier 'grand unified theories' concerning the study of ritual, but focuses on a number of characteristics of rituals, can be justified by referring to the lack of any one current 'grand unified theory' for the exploration of ritual in the New Testament world and recent calls, such as by Uro (2010), for a 'piecemeal approach' to early Christian ritual that utilises a combination of approaches and insights regarding ritual. 'Theoretical and methodological problems in the study of early Christian ritual can be best addressed by a piecemeal approach in which different aspects of early Christian behaviour, as reflected in our sources, are examined in view of the insights and knowledge gained from ritual and cognate studies.' (Uro 2010:34)

18.Baptism does not happen spontaneously, or accidentally.

19.See Yarbro Collins (1989:42): 'Romans 6:1–14 the ritual of baptism is explicitly interpreted as a reenactment of the death and resurrection of Jesus in which the baptised person appropriates the significance of that death for him- or herself. In this understanding of the ritual, the experience of the Christian is firmly and vividly grounded in the story of the death and resurrection of Christ.' Yarbro Collins' opinion is noted and seconded by Groenewald (2005:193). See along similar lines: Kuo-Yu Kuo-Yu Tsui (2012:405): 'Baptism as baptism into his death inserts the believers into this process of transformation to be consummated at the eschaton. 'The Christian is not in baptism resurrected with Christ, but he is following from his incorporation by baptism into a sphere defined by Christ with an inevitable certainty oriented towards the future resurrection with Christ.' Tsui follows Klostergaard Petersen (1998:16–17), who argues that '[t]he resurrection is not completed but is partly and anticipatorily experienced in the liminal phase.' Tsui is furthermore in line with R.P. Carlson (1993:256), who notes that 'the negation and inauguration brought about by Christ's death and resurrection are consistently tempered by the strong note of anticipation that looks for the future Parousia of Christ.'

20.See also the comments of Agersnap (1999:294), on the use of the future tense in Rom. 6:2.5.8: 'Christians will continue to be linked to that which is similar to Christ's resurrection, that is the new life which rests upon the same power.'

21.See for a discussion of similarities, e.g. Kuo-Yu Tsui (2011:65–80).

22.Smit (2013b) argues that one of Paul's main aims in this letter is to convince the Philippians that it is part of being incorporated into the story of Christ to suffer and look forward to an eventual resurrection. The liminal nature of existence 'in Christ' is of pivotal importance here. Agersnap (1999:357–360) proposes the notion of a 'precursor-Christology', which would suit this argument well: Christ is the precursor (and trailblazer) of a trajectory to be followed by all those who are 'in Christ', he, however, has already completed it (and opened up this road for others), whilst those following him are still on the way.

nature of one's walk of life is in this liminal phase in between.[23] The current article builds up on this insight, but also takes it a few steps further, in particular by observing that if the behaviour displayed by those inhabiting the liminal identity of being 'in Christ', being dead to sin, participating in newness of life, and looking forward to full resurrection with Christ, in fact contradicts the nature of this identity, that is by living as if one has not died to sin, then the entire ontology implied by this liminality is questioned and with that the force and reality of the Christian narrative. On this basis, it is now possible to consider the notion of 'ritual failure' in some more detail.

Ritual failure and circumcision in early Christianity

Ritual failure and ritual negotiation

Ritual failure refers to cases in which a ritual is imperfectly performed, giving rise to its discussion and (re)negotiation in relation to the ritual community's developing identity (= 'ritual negotiation') (Hüsken & Neubert 2012:1–17). A fledgling field itself, this approach to rituals, especially as it is understood in this contribution, has yet to begin to be introduced in New Testament scholarship.

Rituals may fail due to a number of reasons, all related to the 'grammar' of the ritual,[24] including expectations with regard to its procedure, the persons and items involved, and the outcome. A broadly received proposal for the classification of ritual failure has been introduced by Grimes, who is widely regarded as one of the most important and influential theorists in the field of ritual studies. The typology that he offers includes a variety of kinds of failures that are not (mutually) exclusive; also, a ritual can be successful on one level for some and a failure on another level for others (e.g. a fertility ritual that fails to produce fertility, but does contribute to group cohesion) (Grimes 1990:191–209).[25] Furthermore, it is of importance to note that ritual failure is always failure from someone's perspective: rituals can fail in multiple ways and succeed in multiple ways as well, as well as both include failure and success simultaneously, depending on one's perspective and expectations – the Romans were, in all likelihood, quite fine with their baptism (see Rm 6:1–14), just as the Corinthians, or at least most of them, were quite good with their Lord's Supper (see 1 Cor. 11:17–34) (Smit 2013b). In fact, this makes for much of the dynamics of ritual failure which, as will be outlined below, always involve questions of power.

23.According to Klostergaard Petersen (1998:24), '[t]he eschatological reservation may be understood within the frame of an ideologically conditioned liminality. Contrary to the predominant view, this explanation has the great advantage that it renders Paul's eschatological reservation understandable without assuming Paul to be fighting an enthusiastic front. Paul simply maintains that postbaptismal life constitutes a liminal order of being.' This argument of Klostergaard Petersen is in line with a line of thought proposed by B.J. Oropeza (1999:69–86) with regard to the Corinthian community.

24.On this helpful notion, see the following observations by Michaels (2012:11): 'ritual behaviour is structured and … many of these structures can be represented in such a formalised way that general rules surface. The description and analysis of these structures and rules are nothing else than a grammar, the grammar of rituals …'

25.See also the theoretical considerations offered by Michael Ing (2012:38–56).

According to Grimes (1990:204–205), the following cases of ritual failure can be distinguished:[26]

1. Misfire (act purported but void)
   - 1.1. Misinvocation (act disallowed)
     - 1.11. Non-play (lack of accepted conventional procedure)
     - 1.12. Misapplication (inappropriate persons or circumstances)
   - 1.2. Misexecution (act vitiated)
     - 1.21. Flaw (incorrect, vague, or inexplicit formula)
     - 1.22. Hitch (incomplete procedure)
2. Abuse (act professed but hollow)
   - 2.1. Insincerity (lack of requisite feelings, thoughts, or intentions)
   - 2.2. Breach (failure to follow through)
   - 2.3. 'Gloss' (procedures used to cover up problems)
   - 2.4. 'Flop' (failure to produce appropriate mood or atmosphere)
3. 'Ineffectuality' (act fails to precipitate anticipated empirical change)
4. 'Violation' (act effective but demeaning)
5. 'Contagion' (act leaps beyond proper boundaries)
6. 'Opacity' (act unrecognisable or unintelligible)
7. 'Defeat' (act discredits or invalidates others)
8. 'Omission' (act not performed)
9. 'Misframe' (genre or act misconstrued)

This typology, which is primarily of heuristic value, as it allows one to discover kinds of ritual failure, will be used in discussing Romans 6, but before doing so, however, some further observations with respect to the nature of ritual failure should be made.

To begin with, it is of importance to note that the evaluation of rituals is an inherent part of the communities performing them; according to Hüsken, 'Evaluation is an intersubjective process, executed by groups or individuals. It is based on certain sets of values which might stem from canons which the participants themselves have not created, but it might equally be based on the expectations, intentions and agenda of individual participants …' (Hüsken 2007:339). Or, as Grimes has it, 'Ritual criticism goes on informally all the time, and its contexts are various – both popular and scholarly. Criticism is not restricted to scholars. Ritual criticism is implicit in the normal course of conserving, transmitting, enculturating, and adapting rites' (Grimes 2004; cf. Hüsken 2007:339).[27]

Furthermore, as Hüsken, has pointed out, based on the analysis of a collection of studies on ritual failure, cases of rituals going awry contribute much to the discovery of the meaning of a ritual for a community and to the further development of the rituals as such. As she states:

26.The ritual theory followed here is indebted to Hüsken (2007:337–366) for which Grimes (2007) forms an important background.

27.R.L. Grimes, 'Response to the contributions presented on the occasion of the panel "Ritual mistakes and failures" during the AAR conference, held in 11/2004 in San Antonio (Texas),' [unpublished], quoted by Hüsken (2007:339).

> [P]articipants and spectators alike learn more about the 'correct' performance of a ritual by deviating from, rather than by adhering to the rules. One might even say that solely the definitions and examples of 'ritual failure' and 'error' – and how they are coped with – prove the existence of decisive norms for ritual actions, even when the former are imagined deviations from imagined norms. (…) 'Failed ritual' directs our attention to 'what really matters' to the performers and participants and others in one way or another involved in a ritual. (Hüsken 2007:337)

Another aspect of the dynamics involved in the detection and discussion of ritual mistakes or ritual failures that is of significance, is that of the ritual competence that performers of rituals and/or its critics have (or claim) and/or deny others. Only 'ritual specialists' may be seen to have the right to deviate from ritual norms, others may be regarded as lacking this specific authority (Hüsken 2007:344–346, 361). Power is always part of ritual, therefore, and certainly also of its criticism.

Next, the 'creative power of deviations' should be considered (Hüsken 2007:346–347). This is an important aspect of the dynamic of 'ritual failure', given that 'breaches of [ritual] rules can – and frequently do – instantiate the creation of new ritual rules in practice' (Hüsken 2007:346). Of interest is also Hüsken's remark that such creation of new ritual rules takes place 'frequently under the pretext of 'returning to older (severer) rules'' (Hüsken 2007:346). Thus, the breaking of ritual rules and their correction can be seen as a creative process as well, in which new ritual forms are created, or new meaning is given to rituals.

Finally, a coping process concerning ritual failure, called 'Ritual negotiation' needs to be mentioned; it has been described by Hüsken and Neubert as the process of 'interaction during which differing positions are debated and/or acted out' in relation to a particular ritual and the community performing it, noting that 'a central feature of ritual is its embeddedness in negotiation processes, and that life beyond the ritual frame often is negotiated in the field of rituals' (Hüsken & Neubert 2012:1). These insights, which also imply that a process of evaluation is an inherent part of a ritual praxis, further develop three aspects of what is already brought to the fore by the study of ritual failure:

1. the importance of rituals as a focus for the (re)negotiation of the life of a community or group;
2. the significance of power relations with regard to the performance and criticism of ritual;
3. the importance of (perceived) failure and disagreement for triggering critical thinking and reflection (Hüsken & Neubert 2012:1–4).

It goes without saying that such (re)negotiation of rituals also points to the often masked but fundamental instability and fluidity of rituals and their performance. Initial explorations in the field of 'ritual negotiation' have led to the identification of three main themes associated with it:

1. Questions of participation, both in the ritual as well as in processes of negotiation regarding it often are of central importance;
2. Questions relating to the 'subversion of ritual prescriptions, ritual roles, and the power relations surrounding the ritual performances' (Hüsken & Neubert 2012:4) often seem to be the trigger of processes of ritual negotiation;
3. Questions concerning the context of a ritual, specifically the web of social (power) relations within which it has a place and the kind of differences it negotiates move to the foreground more when processes of ritual negotiation are taken into account.

Baptism and ritual failure in Romans 6:1–14

Ritual failure in Romans 6:1–14?

When turning to Romans 6:1–14, a first question that needs to be addressed is whether there is reason to consider it from the perspective of ritual failure at all. Is Paul not just providing further teaching on the basis of something that the Romans already know? (Ferguson 2009:155–156). Certainly, Paul takes his point of departure in a ritual known to both the Romans and himself,[28] but, at the same time, his argument also seeks to develop this initial knowledge about a ritual and its meaning further. In doing so, Paul seeks to ward off potential ritual failure and at the same time, whilst engaging in ritual criticism, to further develop, or 'rediscover', the meaning of a ritual, quite in line with the dynamics of ritual failure and ensuing ritual negotiation as they were described above. In order to further substantiate this, attention will be given briefly to the ritual basis of Paul's argument and to concrete instances of references to ritual failure that may be found in it.

To begin with, in Romans 6:1–14 Paul's entire argument, which has itself to do with avoiding a misrepresentation of his gospel of grace as antinomianism (Ferguson 2009:156; Guerra 2005:131–133), is based on a common experience and attribution of the same ritual, which, as such, is a striking observation; despite all diversity within early Christianity, the fact that Paul had not founded the Roman community, nor had ever visited it before, he can assume a joint 'theology' of baptism, albeit *in nuce*. Indeed, rather than just being the outward expression of an inward idea, the ritual itself is the basis for Paul's attempt to convince the Romans of a particular view of things concerning sin and grace. Even if the use of the first person plural in this pericope (e.g. v. 2: ἀπεθάνομεν; ζήσομεν; v. 3: ἐβαπτίσθημεν (2x), etc.) may be the effective use of a *pluralis sociativus*, this only works if there is indeed some commonality to address, which, in this case, must be a

28.For considerations on the widespread character of early Christian baptism, see Michael Labahn (2011:366–367): 'Die Texte setzen allesamt eine frühzeitig verbreitete und weiträumig akzeptierte frühchristliche Taufpraxis voraus. Die in den späteren Texten erkennbare Sinnbildung muss die Taufpraxis nicht neu begründen, sondern will in jeweiligen narrativen und/oder rhetorischen Kontext aus der Taufpraxis Sinn, d.h. Verstehens- und Handlungsspielräume für die Adressaten in ihrer jeweiligen Kontext generieren. Die widerspricht nicht der Vermutung, dass Sinnbildung durch historische Erinnerung erfolgt und Impulse für historische Konstruktionen vernehmbar sind."

common experience of baptism,[29] a very concrete and ritual experience indeed,[30] mediating the incorporation into Christ's death and new life.[31] In fact, Paul assumes so much common ground regarding baptism between himself and those he addresses in his letters that he never provides a 'theology of baptism' *per se* (different, e.g. the relation between 'church' and 'Israel' in Romans 9–11), but generally refers to it when addressing another topic, in the case of Romans 6: the problem of sin and life in Christ, likely as part of a defence of himself against 'antinomianism'. As such, it provides an organic continuation of the preceding argument on faith and related matters (3:21–5:21) (Agersnap 1999:200–232)[32] and, as Fitzmyer notes, leads into Romans 7 and its discussion of the law just as naturally,[33] continuing the discussion started there in diatribic fashion.

Having argued this, it is now possible to look for reasons to consider Romans 6:1–14 informed by the theory about ritual failure and its ensuing dynamics. Three main points can be made. Firstly, in verses 1–2 (as well as in the remainder of the pericope), Paul argues against a way of life, that is in sin, that would void the meaning or effect of baptism: new life in Christ and being death to sin. In Grimes' terminology, this would be a 'breach' (subcategory of 'abuse', instances in which a ritual act is professed but appears to be hollow), a failure to follow through as far as the actual content of the ritual is concerned, or, alternatively, a case of 'defeat': the intended outcome of a ritual (new life in Christ, being dead to sin) is defeated by something else, that is a continued practice of sin. Secondly, if the position of Paul's interlocutors in his diatribe, imaginary or not, holds true, that is when life after baptism is about the same as before, then baptism as a ritual is a 'flop', that is it does not change anything and certainly does not produce the outcome – new life in Christ – that it promises. Thirdly, taking into account the broader scope of Paul's argument in Romans 5–7, especially the underlying issue of 'antinomianism' that Paul seeks to defend himself against or distance himself from, the kind of ritual failure that Paul seeks to address in Romans 6:1–14 can also be understood as a case of 'misframing', that is the ritual of baptism is misconstrued in the sense that it is either seen as a 'stand alone' ritual without any substantial consequences for the lives of those that participated in it, or, in fact, as a ritual that liberated its participants from any legal or moral obligation whatsoever, freeing them to sin as much as they felt like, so that grace would abound (see v. 1: Τί οὖν ἐροῦμεν; ἐπιμένωμεν τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ, ἵνα ἡ χάρις πλεονάσῃ;), a position that Paul rejects vehemently (v. 2: μὴ γένοιτο), immediately beginning to substantiate this with his take on baptism and its meaning (v. 2: οἵτινες ἀπεθάνομεν τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ, πῶς ἔτι ζήσομεν ἐν αὐτῇ;). As such, the Roman baptism could be described as a failure, given that it is an ineffective ritual.

On this double basis of emphasis on the ritual basis of Paul's argument in Romans 6:1–14 and two initial indications of ritual failure, either due to something voiding a ritual (due to instances of 'breach' or 'defeat') or due to a ritual being a 'flop' or an ineffective ritual, it is now possible to consider the pericope at stake somewhat further from the perspective of ritual failure and its accompanying dynamics of ritual negotiation, of which two aspects will be considered: the return to older tradition as a way of navigating and negotiating the situation of ritual failure and the question of power relations that is at stake in any situation of ritual negotiation. By thus considering Romans 6:1–14 as an instance of ritual failure from a number of perspectives, in line with the fact that rituals can fail (and succeed) in a number of ways simultaneously, and by drawing attention to significant aspects of the dynamic of ritual negotiation, additional light can be shed on the pericope at hand, as will be indicated in the conclusions.

Forms of ritual failure and aspects of ritual negotiation in Romans 6:1–14

Failure to follow through: Ritual failure as due to 'breach'

A first way of looking at Romans 6:1–14 from the perspective of the study of ritual failure is by applying the category of

29.See, with emphasis on the mystical language that Paul uses when speaking of baptism Segal, *Paul the Convert,* 58–70; also (Groenewald 2005:214–215), 'To become a member of the new group, described as the "family of God" by the earliest Jesus-followers, was therefore a major step.' Esler (2003) utilises Paul's letter to the Romans as an example to explain this issue. On the grounds of Paul's frequent usage of the first person plural in Romans 6:1–8, Esler (2003:212) is of the opinion that there is a strong personal dimension to what Paul writes in this pericope. He contends that this is the case because the Jesus-followers in Rome and Paul have something in common, namely the ritual (baptism) by means of which they entered into the "mystery of Christ's death and resurrection" (Esler 2003:212). In Esler's view, from a social identity perspective, Paul uses the repeated first person plurals to strengthen his claim to exercise leadership over the Jesus-followers in Rome, by making clear that he shares the same identity with them as well as the same means by which they acquired it.' See Agersnap (1999:263), emphasising that Paul refers to something that the Romans really must know, although without reference to ritual or experience.

30.This is different from Moo's reference to Paul's drawing out the implications of the faithful's experience of grace; the experience is ritual and the ritual involved is baptism. See Moo (1996:356).

31.See also Sabou (2004:219–229), who argues that for an interpretation of ὁμοίωμα in v. 5 in terms of 'representation', this would seem to provide a good fit with the 'reality' of the ritual of baptism, ritually representing dying with Jesus and thus mediating participation in it. Agersnap (1999:334–339) (and elsewhere) is very critical of such interpretations, arguing, for instance, that simultaneous participation in both crucifixion, dead, burial and resurrection of the believers in all of these aspects is impossible. In this way, he argues against a 'sacramentalist explanatory model', according to which Christ's death and resurrection are repeated in baptism (Agersnap 1999:334). It would, however, be hard to find such a 'sacramentalistic' interpretation, given that most would argue that baptism involves a participation in newness of life (in the present) access to which is gained through baptism (once, in the past, understood as dying with Christ and to sin), while such participation in newness of life is also understood as participation in resurrection life, the fulfillment of which is still a thing of the future. This, in fact, is well in line with what Agersnap himself understands as the reactualisation of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection at baptism, that is their soteriological significance and impact becomes an actual reality for the baptised. This, in turn, comes close to Tannehill's earlier interpretation: '[D]ying and rising with Christ cannot be understood as a repetition of Christ's death and resurrection, or as the result of some subjective or sacramental process by which Christ's death and resurrection are made present, or in any other way seeks to supplement the death and resurrection of Christ as particular events in the past and thereby make up their deficiencies. Provided that dying and rising with Christ is understood in the context of Paul's eschatology, it is clear both that the death and resurrection of Christ are particular, past events and that the believers participate in them, for these events involve the old and new dominions as wholes, and so also those who are included in these dominions.' (Tannehill 1967:30). Apparently Tannehill is suspicious of interpretations that are 'sacramental' in nature; his argument, however, implies that Christ's death and resurrection must be present in the time of the believers' at least in some way in order for the believers to participate in them. However, this does not require an understanding of Christ's death and resurrection as somehow deficient events in the past; it is rather because they are (abundantly) sufficient that they can be present in the believers' lives in such a way that they can participate in them through being incorporated into the dominion governed and determined by these events.

32.See e.g. the extensive discussion of the relationship between ch. 5 and 6 offered by Agersnap (1999) understanding Romans 5 as a prelude to 6.

33.Fitzmyer *Romans*, 429.

'breach', this concerns the performance of a ritual, e.g. taking a solemn vow, but not fulfilling it (Wright 2001:113), and that therefore is to be considered as failed. In Grimes' categorisation, 'breach' is a subcategory of kinds of ritual failure described as 'abuse' and that are characterised by the profession of an act and the failure to follow through on it.

It is relatively perspicuous to see how this category can be used to further understand the dynamics of Romans 6:1–14. Whilst Paul understands the Romans, or at least most of them, to have been baptised in Christ Jesus and consequently to have been baptised into his death, that is to have been buried with Christ through baptism in his death, in order to walk in newness of like just as Christ had been raised from the dead through the glory of the Father (6:3–4), he also understands them not to follow through on this (in v. 3, ὅσοι may leave room for catechumens as well). The latter follows from Paul's exhortations in the verses 12–13: 12 Μὴ οὖν βασιλευέτω ἡ ἁμαρτία ἐν τῷ θνητῷ ὑμῶν σώματι εἰς τὸ ὑπακούειν ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις αὐτοῦ[13] μηδὲ παριστάνετε τὰ μέλη ὑμῶν ὅπλα ἀδικίας τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ, ἀλλὰ παραστήσατε ἑαυτοὺς τῷ θεῷ ὡσεὶ ἐκ νεκρῶν ζῶντας καὶ τὰ μέλη ὑμῶν ὅπλα δικαιοσύνης τῷ θεῷ. This is nothing else, but the well-known combination of indicatives (vv. 2–10) and imperatives (vv. 11–14) in Romans 6:1–14, as it was recently addressed by Kuo-Yu Tsui in a convincing manner:

> That is, Paul's indicative expresses his apocalyptic vision of the new life in Christ. The imperative follows the indicative, exhorting believers to cultivate this apocalyptic vision of the new life and live it out. (Kuo-Yu Tsui 2013:300)[34]

Thus, whilst Paul assumes that the Romans, or, if the diatribe is fictive: his fictive interlocutors, and he share, at least in principle (see below on the question of invention of tradition), the same understanding of baptism (not the references to shared knowledge in v. 3 and v. 9),[35] he indicates that they ought to indeed follow through on their baptism and the reign of grace in them by offering themselves to God as alive from the dead and their members as instruments of righteousness to God (6:13). The issue at stake, therefore, is not so much, as in other instances (e.g. concerning the Lord's Supper or circumcision), the (shape of the) performance of the ritual as such, but rather its effect, or, with emphasis on the subject that has performed the ritual and thus changed his identity accordingly, with all new patterns of life that that involves, its consequences and ensuing walk of life.

Whilst understanding the identification of the Roman baptism (or the baptism of Paul's fictive interlocutors) as ritual failure by Paul in terms of a 'breach' places emphasis on the performers of the ritual and their behaviour and indicates that their behaviour post-ritual (i.e. post-baptism) turns the ritual into a failure, the application of other categories of ritual failure to Paul's utterances can complement the picture. A next pair of categories 'flop' and 'ineffectiveness' will make one travel the reverse route by concluding from the unchanged behaviour of its performers on the quality of the ritual.

Failure to produce: Roman baptism as a 'flop' or an ineffectual ritual

Two categories of Grimes' list of kinds of ritual failure focus on a ritual's failure due to a lack of anticipated outcome, either in terms of its 'failure to produce appropriate mood or atmosphere' ('flop') or due to its failure to 'to precipitate anticipated empirical change'. The difference between the two is that the one is more concerned with social or psychological effects (e.g. a Christmas family dinner that ends in a fight rather than in singing under the Christmas tree would be a case of a 'flop') and the other more with physical changes, e.g. a healing ritual that fails to produce healing.

Both the category of 'flop' and of 'ineffectuality' might be of relevance for the analysis of Romans 6:1–14, given that Paul is much concerned with the precise outcome of a ritual, rather than with its correct performance in the narrower sense of the word (different from, e.g. the case of the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor 11:23–26, or his criticism of circumcision for Gentiles throughout his letters). According to Paul, the desired outcome of baptism is being dead to sin and alive in Christ (see 6:2.4), rather than being dead to sin 'formally' (i.e. because one has been baptised) and still living in sin (v. 2); if his appeals to live according to the reality that one actually is in, that is dead to sin and alive in Christ, in Romans 6:1–14 are not just rhetorical in nature, but have something to do with his real estimation of the walk of life of Roman Christians, then he considers their baptism to have been either a flop or an ineffectual ritual or, in fact, both. The obvious contrast that emerges out of this, that is of a ritual that (according to Paul) should produce something that it does not produce in the Roman community, is for Paul reason to register ritual failure and to engage in a process of rethinking the ritual practice of the Romans in the form of a diatribe, as part of his longer discourse on grace,

34.See also Kuo-Yu Tsui (2013:311): 'As demonstrated above, in the scheme of Pauline apocalypticism, the indicative does not mean that sin and death have been empirically eradicated; rather, it envisages an apocalyptic vision in which sin and death have lost their lordship to Christ. Believers, having their perception transformed by the apocalyptic truth that Paul proclaims, have henceforth the freedom to live as transformed people. As a consequence, their actions flow from the freedom they have perceived and reflect the quality of this freedom. The renewed mind is the foundation of their life of transformation. The way to transformation ultimately lies in acquiring and cultivating the apocalyptic vision of the new life in Christ, which has engaged them in Paul's proclamation.' – Kuo-Yu Tsui, however, does not reflect on the ritual aspects of this, which is done in the current contribution.

35.See Kuo-Yu Tsui (2012:395), who argues in favour of the traditional character of v. 3 (as does Wedderburn 1987:41–44) and also provides an overview of the relevant exegetical opinion. Here, both v. 3 and v. 9 are seen as appeals by Paul to shared knowledge and experience, given the formulations that he uses (v. 3: ἀγνοεῖτε, v. 9: εἰδότες) and the consideration that such appeals, intended to strengthen Paul's argument, yes, even to provide its basis, would have made little sense and certainly would have failed to convince would they not have been real appeals to knowledge that Paul at least assumed that the Romans had – at the very least, Paul's acquaintances and friends in Rome may be assumed to have this kind of knowledge (see the names in Rom. 16:1–15). In line with Wedderburn, Boers (2001:677) notes that 'Paul's purpose with the statement about baptism in verses 3–4b is not to provide his readers with information about baptism as such, but, drawing on baptism as an accepted practice, to bring out those features that are relevant for what he is driving at in the first Christological statement, "Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father" (v. 4cd), which he connects to those features by means of ἵνα ὥσπερ, and then clarifies what the Christological statement means for his readers, "so also (οὕτως καί) we might walk in newness of life" (v. 4e)—the "newness of life" in Christ to which they are called.' Thus, the basis of Paul's argument is an (assumed) agreement with his addressates. See further also Tanghe (1997:411–414), as well as Hellholm (2011:415–495) and Betz (1994:84–118).

law, freedom and sin in Romans 5–7. The result of this, as will be suggested below ('Return to the real meaning …'), a new reflection, or at least a reflection that may well be relatively novel to the Romans, on the meaning of baptism, the result of ritual negotiation because of a perceived case of ritual failure.

In the case of baptism, however, there is a further dimension to the ritual failure at stake. This has to do with the fact that the ritual of baptism also communicates the power of YHWH to overcome the powers of death and sin (Strecker 2007:133–153) in the name of a crucified Lord, therefore also challenging the power of empire. If the ritual of baptism does not produce what it claims and not really overcomes the power of sin in the lives of those baptised in the death of Christ and sharing in his resurrection and the resulting newness of life,[36] then this has all sorts of negative repercussions for the lordship of Christ and, by consequence, of YHWH, working through Christ's death (Black 1984:430).[37] In other words, the 'order of being' into which a person is initiated in baptism, would appear to be invalid (Klostergaard Petersen 1998:3–28; cf. Aageson 1996:75–89).

Thus, so far the failure of the ritual of baptism in the Roman community can, from Paul's perspective, be understood as 'breach' (due to the failure of the participants' behaviour to follow through on the ritual) and as a 'flop' or as an 'ineffective' ritual (as evidenced from the participants' behaviour *post-festum*). Now, the focus can be turned to yet another kind of ritual failure: failure due to misframing, that is misunderstanding, the ritual.

Misframing?

Having considered different ways in which the Roman baptism can be understood as a case of ritual failure – from Paul's perspective, to be sure – yet another option needs to be studied. This is the option of ritual failure due to misframing. In Grimes' theory, this concerns rituals that are considered failed because they are placed in the wrong framework. An example of misframing, one may suspect intentionally, from the letters of Paul would be his jab at the 'circumcision party' in Philippi, referring to circumcision as mutilation (Phil 3:2); by placing circumcision, a ritual intended to perform the inclusion of a person into the people of God, in the same category as castration, something that would exclude someone from the people of God (see, e.g. the further argument of Phlp 3, as well as Gl 6), Paul misframes – and discredits – circumcision, by presenting it as a failed ritual, in fact, as an instance of 'violation'. Unintentional examples of ritual failure due to misframing could be adduced easily as well.

The notion of 'misframing' is helpful for understanding what kind of ritual failure Paul thinks is at stake in the Roman community and at which level he seeks to address it. This is to say: for Paul's identification of ritual failure in Rome, it is striking that there is nothing in Romans 6:1–14 that suggests that Paul thinks that there is anything wrong with the Roman ritual practice in the narrower sense of the word, there is nothing to suggest that, for example, a person of the wrong gender baptises, that an incorrect kind of baptism is used (e.g. only that of John, not that of the Spirit, see Acts 18:24–19:6), that too much hierarchy is involved (see, e.g. 1 Cor 11), or that an incorrect substance (e.g. rose petals instead of water) is being used. Still, something is the matter. This something concerns the outcome of the ritual and the significance that it has for the walk of life of those that participated in it. Paul seems to suggest that the Romans misframe and therefore misunderstand and, when including the appertaining change in the walk of life into the ritual as its desired outcome, misperform it, because they either do not see it as something that involves dying with Christ to sin sufficiently (see Rm 6:3) and therefore do not connect it with a changed walk of life or as a ritual that liberated its participants from any legal or moral obligation whatsoever (see, the contrast to such a position presented by Rm 6:12–13). Whether and if so, why, this was the case remains difficult to establish because of a dearth of sources beyond Paul's letter to the Romans itself.[38]

Having thus argued that Paul's argument in Romans 6:1–14 can be understood as based on his observation of (what in the 21st century can be called) ritual failure, it is now possible to turn to two important aspects of the process of ritual negotiation, a process that always takes place whenever ritual failure is observed in a community; as had been described above. Two aspects will be highlighted in particular: the 'return to the sources' that is typical of this process, often resulting in an 'invention of tradition' and the question of power that also is of significance in this process.

Return to the real meaning and/or invention of tradition in Romans 6?

As it was observed above, it is part of the dynamics of ritual negotiation that, as a reaction to an instance of ritual failure, an attempt is made to return to an older, more authentic ritual practice (Hüsken 2007:346).[39] In the letters of Paul, an example of this dynamic can be found in 1 Corinthians 11:17–34, the pericope in which Paul makes an attempt to

36.As Agersnap (1999:274) puts it succinctly, 'that the eschatological power has penetrated the life of the baptized'.

37.See, for emphasis on this, Black (1984:421–424; 430) which points out that Paul's references to Christ's death in Romans convey supranatural, eschatological implications (Rm 6:3, 4, 5, 9, 10 ,11; 8:34b; cf. 14:9). This emphasis on the interrelationship between the church's performance of its identity as a reconciled communion in Christ and the reality of this reconciliation is also emphasised by Stalder (1984:265–266), who even considers the church 'proof' of reconciliation in Christ; see also Ploeger (2008:200).

38.Should there have been a disjunction between participation in a ritual and walk of life, it is tempting to hypothesise that this might have had to do with the disjunction between ritual participation and religiously motivated morality that is often assumed to have been in place in Roman religion in general. However, given that involvement in 'Roman' religion and certainly in mystery cults also meant aligning oneself with a particular order of things, the notion that Roman religion had little to do with morality may well be questioned – a case in point is the condemnation of Thecla because of impiety, whereas the 'sin' consisted of social disobedience and a refusal to fit into the fabric of society as planned by her mother (cf. Smit 2013c:105–130).

39.Hüsken remarks that the creation of new ritual rules takes place 'frequently under the pretext of "returning to older (severer) rules"'.

correct the Corinthian praxis of the Lord's Supper (Smit 2013b). Given that Paul harkens back to what the Romans know already, one may wonder whether a similar dynamic is not at stake in Romans 6:1–14 as well. In order to consider this, it is first necessary to consider the relationship between a community's memory and argument (i.e.: the argument based on the memory that Paul evokes) in this pericope, and to ask then to what extent Paul indeed seeks to 'modify' the memory of the Romans, that is to say: to attribute a new meaning to the tradition that he shares with them, or, indeed, engage in the invention of (the meaning of) tradition.[40]

When turning to the question of the relationship between memory and argument based on this memory, the following can be said. Clearly, Paul makes reference to a memory, or rather: an experience with a particular interpretation attached to it that is common to the Romans and himself: baptism. More specifically, this memory concerns a specific understanding of baptism, as Paul asks ἢ ἀγνοεῖτε ὅτι, ὅσοι ἐβαπτίσθημεν εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν, εἰς τὸν θάνατον αὐτοῦ ἐβαπτίσθημεν; (Rm 6:3) (Wedderburn 1987:67). Thus, Paul makes reference both to being baptised (ἐβαπτίσθημεν εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν; the formulation with ὅσοι may also leave room for catechumens as well that may not remember baptism, but can relate to this interpretation) and the interpretation of this bodily event, c.q. ritual: εἰς τὸν θάνατον αὐτοῦ ἐβαπτίσθημεν. With this, it could be argued, Paul ceases already to evoke the memory of the Romans – it is very brief indeed – in order to start building an argument on this memory from verse 4 onwards, drawing a first implication in the sentence starting with συνετάφημεν οὖν already, with οὖν indicating the start of an argument. These implications pertain to the further unpacking of the meaning of (the memory of the experience of) this ritual for the current walk of life (see περιπατήσωμεν in v. 4) of the Romans. This continues in v. 5, using an argumentative syntax, structured by εἰ γὰρ … ἀλλὰ καὶ.

In verse 6, however, Paul again refers to knowledge common to himself and the Romans, by stating τοῦτο γινώσκοντες ὅτι ὁ παλαιὸς ἡμῶν ἄνθρωπος συνεσταυρώθη, ἵνα καταργηθῇ τὸ σῶμα τῆς ἁμαρτίας, τοῦ μηκέτι δουλεύειν ἡμᾶς τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ. The evocation of this knowledge may well continue into v. 7: ὁ γὰρ ἀποθανὼν δεδικαίωται ἀπὸ τῆς ἁμαρτίας. Verse 8, however, has the characteristics of an argument again: εἰ δὲ ἀπεθάνομεν … πιστεύομεν ὅτι … In verse 9, however, Paul returns to a knowledge that the Romans share with him – or at least, so he assumes –: εἰδότες ὅτι Χριστὸς ἐγερθεὶς ἐκ νεκρῶν οὐκέτι ἀποθνῄσκει, θάνατος αὐτοῦ οὐκέτι κυριεύει. Verse 10 can be understood as a partial restatement of this knowledge, at least, it does not have the characteristics of an argument building up on this shared knowledge: ὃ γὰρ ἀπέθανεν, τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ ἀπέθανεν ἐφάπαξ· ὃ δὲ ζῇ, ζῇ τῷ θεῷ. This changes rather abruptly in verse 11, where the references to shared experiences[41] and shared knowledge make place for imperatives that further unpack the meaning of Paul's earlier injunction ἡμεῖς ἐν καινότητι ζωῆς περιπατήσωμεν (verse 4). First, the Romans are called upon to reckon themselves as dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus (v. 11: λογίζεσθε …); second, Paul states that, therefore (οὖν) sin must no longer reign the mortal body of the Romans (μὴ οὖν βασιλευέτω, verse 12) and that for the same reason (μηδὲ indication continuation of a line of thought, verse 13) the Romans should not present (μηδὲ παριστάνετε, verse 13) their limbs for the service of injustice and sin, but rather (ἀλλά, v. 13) present them as instruments of God's justice. Paul concludes all of this with a final substantiation in the last verse of the pericope, 14: ἁμαρτία γὰρ ὑμῶν οὐ κυριεύσει· οὐ γάρ ἐστε ὑπὸ νόμον ἀλλὰ ὑπὸ χάριν. The double use of γάρ indicates both that twice a reason is given for what had just been stated, and gives a rhetorically effective repetitive character to the verse. Thus, Romans 6:1–14 presents as a text in which memory and argument based on memory are closely intertwined. When looking at this from the perspective of ritual failure, which, according to Paul is imminent or already happening in Rome, and the dynamics of ritual negotiation, including aspects of the invention of tradition, the following may be observed.

First, when considering the shift from verse 3 (shared memory/experience) to verses 4–5 (argument), it seems that Paul in so far further unpacks the implications of the ritual as the Romans and he know it, on the basis of a shared interpretation of it, to be sure, that he connects a particular walk of life, characterised as ἐν καινότητι ζωῆς, to the notion of having died with Christ in baptism (verse 4), which is backed up with the additional argument in verse 5.[42] This line of thought, which indicates to the Romans what the meaning is of what they think or remember concerning baptism, is intended to avoid imminent ritual failure in the sense of the 'defeat' or 'breach' of the ritual of baptism, or it turning out to be a 'flop'. Although Paul does not explicitly refer to a return to the original sense of baptism, his line of thought here does indicate that the current walk of life of the Romans does not accord with the meaning of baptism, which Paul unpacks for the Romans, likely in a way that is new to them, or to at least some of them – or even for Paul himself![43]

Second, when considering the remainder of the pericope, Paul can be seen to largely repeat the same procedure: shared knowledge is evoked in verses 6–7, a conclusion is drawn in verse 8, further shared knowledge is appealed to in verse 9, upon which Paul launches into his final argument, which is, again, presented as drawing conclusions from the meaning

40.In this way, this contribution is critical of Hellholm's view, according to which it is a misunderstanding that 'Paul here is introducing the doctrine of baptism or a new understanding of baptism instead of realising that he is arguing his case'. In fact, Paul argues his case by arguing for a particular understanding of baptism (Hellholm 1994:142).

41.Paul's own experience of baptism also plays a role here in all likelihood (Labahn 2011:359).

42.On the future tense ἐσόμεθα in v. 5, see esp. the detailed note by Kuo-Yu Tsui (2009b:294), arguing convincingly that '[i]n the context of Romans 6, the future employed in verses 5 and 8 is best understood as the gnomic future, expressing the omnitemporality of the fact that the believers will certainly be or live with Christ as a result of their death with Christ.'

43.See Hellholm (2011:470): 'Der Apostel Paulus hat nicht eine systematische Entfaltung der Tauftheologie vorgenommen, sondern jeweils in der Begegnung mit konkreten Fragen und in Auseinandersetzung mit den in den Gemeinden vorhandenen Anschauungen dargelegt, was die christliche Taufe bedeutet' (quoting Eduard Lohse 1973:235).

of the ritual that he and the Romans share. Thus, quite an analogy to what happens in the verses 3–5, Paul presents himself as reminding the Romans of the meaning of the ritual that they know and remember, whilst simultaneously indicating how their practice of not walking in newness of life (v. 4) should be adjusted based on the real meaning of the ritual, that is dying to sin with Christ, rising to new life with Christ and living accordingly.

Thus, in Romans 6:1–14, like in 1 Corinthians 11:17–34 (Smit 2013b), Paul returns to the meaning of the ritual, develops an argument on its basis, and uses this to adjust the praxis of the community, or at least to strongly recommend such adjustments. This way of operating is well in line with the dynamic that Hüsken and others identified as being part of 'ritual negotiation' in the context of coping with ritual failure (or the imminent danger of such failure).

A question of power?

The discussion of ritual failure in a process of ritual negotiation always involves power relations, given that establishing that a ritual has failed, for whatever reason, always means questioning the competence of the ritual expert(s) in charge of it and with that the legitimacy of their embodiment and performance of a group's identity or tradition. This is the case in Romans 6:1–14 as well, and it is also indicated by Paul's shift from a more descriptive discourse in chapter 5 to a more direct way of addressing the Romans in chapter 6, which will continue into chapter 7. Whilst this means on the one hand that Paul is able to address the Romans in a more immediate way, it also means that he can question their position, having laid out his own view in the preceding chapters. His opting for a diatribic style suits this purpose very well, of course, whilst this also leaves the possibility open that Paul addresses the Romans by way of addressing a fictive interlocutor in the diatribe. Even though no one is singled out as either lacking in knowledge concerning the dynamics of baptism (dying with Christ to sin) or lacking in vivacity when it comes to living in newness of life and offering oneself to God, nor is anyone singled out in the letter's address (1:7), it will be those that are in charge of baptism and its appertaining catechesis as well as those that model newness of life, or even regulate this, that will have been the most immediately addressed by these remarks – remarks that were, to be sure, read out in public. With his letter and his criticism of the Roman ritual practice of baptism in relation to the walk of life of the members of the community, Paul engages in a competition with the leadership of the Roman community, disputing, or at least questioning their ritual (and moral) competence and expertise and strongly asserting his own, which is all part of the process of ritual negotiation (and eventually renewal) that Paul seeks to draw the Roman community into.

Conclusions

When concluding on the above observations, a number of elements can be highlighted, pertaining both to the study of early Christianity, especially Paul, in general, as well as to the development of early Christian, notably Pauline, understandings of baptism.

First, as has become clear above, ritual is the basis of Paul's argument – and it is through ritual that he approaches the desirable contours of life in Christ. In Romans 6, his starting point is not in the least a theological thesis, a revelation, a creed, but instead: ritual, in particular the ritual entrance of a person into life in Christ. As was suggested, this mode of operating of Paul is different from simply supplying a picture instead of an (abstract) idea, or from presenting ritual as the symbolic representation of something that can be expressed in a more noetic, disembodied form as well. No, the Romans addressed by Paul are who they are and are living their lives as they are living them, (even if imperfectly) based on their participation in the ritual of baptism; that is what has made them into who they are, that ritual and its outcome (being dead to sin, living in newness of life) is what they should live out and continue to perform in their walk of life.

Second, Paul's intensive engagement with the (flawed) ritual practice of the Roman community, his return to what the Romans and he can be thought of as sharing in experience, memory, and knowledge regarding baptism, also gives an impression of how early Christian views of baptism – and the appertaining, in this case: moral, practice – developed. A disagreement concerning the moral practice that is (or is not) part of life in Christ – at the same time the main theme of Romans 5–7 – leads to a reconsideration of the common basis and a further development of the thought pertaining to the ritual of baptism as such and the ensuing walk of life. Just as the Corinthians (or anyone else, for that matter) may not have been aware all that much of the required praxis of equality at the Lord's Supper before Paul unpacked the shared tradition concerning it (the *paradosis* in 1 Cor 11:23–26) anew, after things had gone wrong in Corinth and divisions had appeared in the community, thus presenting the community with a new teaching in the shape of the 'authentic meaning' of the old tradition (Smit 2013c); in the same way, Paul may well be teaching the Roman community something that is (at least for many of them) new with regard to the interrelationship between baptism and walk of life. It is the (perceived) failure of a ritual practice that propels Paul's thought – and that is precisely what the study of ritual failure is interested in.

Third, in the course of the discussion of various possible kinds of ritual failure, it became clear as well that much more than 'merely' a question of ritual is at stake in Romans 6:1–14. The failure of the ritual to produce its results, for whichever reason, in fact, would also indicate the failure of the narrative into which it initiates people; in other words: if the ritual fails to produce people that are indeed dead to sin and living in newness of life, then the lordship of Christ and ultimately YHWH is denied, or, worse (from Paul's perspective), to be a claim only, without any basis in reality. Failure of the ritual,

as indicated by lives of initiates that were still ruled by sin, would indicate the reign of sin and the impotence of Christ's death and dying with Christ to change this in any meaningful way.

Fourth, it also became clear that behind the discussion of ritual is effectiveness and implications, there is also a considerable struggle for power and authority going on – quite in line with the purposes of Romans as a whole. The diatribe that Paul uses, with imaginary interlocutors or not, functions, because there is so much at stake, as a means of establishing Paul's competence and authority in relation to the authentic continuation of life in Christ as a reflection of the lordship of Christ and YHWH. Both the contest about the authentic meaning of baptism and its implications are related to this.

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