

THE PRAYING ANIMAL

by *Robert W. Jenson*

Abstract. Ritual cannot be interpreted by a root metaphor of evolution, without reducing ritual's necessary intention. We must rather understand ritual as humanizing revolution. We have therefore two questions. First, What part does ritual have in human reckoning with reality? Second, What part does ritual have in the step to the specifically human? To the first question, the answer is proposed: ritual is that embodiment of our discourse with God and one another, by which we are made available and vulnerable to reality. To the second question, the answer is proposed: as embodied prayer, ritual is the complement to that address of God which posits our ontologically specific humanity. Parodying Aristotle, we may say that we are the sacrificing animals.

My assigned task in this essay is multiple. I shall of course attend to the theme of this issue of *Zygon* as a possible task of my discipline, systematic theology of the Christian gospel. I shall also attend to the peculiar situation of my discipline among those here represented by essayists: my official intellectual responsibility includes the cultivation of an actually occurring system of religious ritual. Indeed, I suppose I was tapped as an essayist partly because of my involvement in devising the rubrics now more or less governing the ritual of American Lutheran congregations. I am, that is, a priest among the analysts of priestcraft. Thus I shall inquire how the scientific study of ritual and the reflection involved in cultivating ritual may be fruitfully related. Finally, as the concluding essayist I will make some comments on points raised elsewhere in the issue.

We are to consider the theme of ritual as "human adaptation." A theologian already must have some problem with this phrase; "adaptation" to what? If our culture's standard association of terms is to be

Robert W. Jenson is professor of systematic theology at the Lutheran Theological Seminary, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania 17325. He presented this paper at a symposium on "Ritual and Human Adaptation" in Chicago on 12-13 November 1982. The symposium was sponsored by the Institute on Religion in an Age of Science in association with the Center for Advanced Study in Religion and Science, the Chicago Theological Seminary, the Disciples Divinity House, and the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago.

[*Zygon*, vol. 18, no. 3 (September 1983).]

© 1983 by the Joint Publication Board of *Zygon*. ISSN 0044-5614

followed, "adaptation" is to the "environment," a term devised on purpose to bracket out the reality of God. Now by no means is all ritual, also among Christians, expressly directed to God, but the association of ritual and prayer is nevertheless pervasive and is founded, as I will later describe, in reality. If our theme is to be taken as a task of theology, then ritual's direction to God must not be reductively explained in advance. But would one ever speak of "adapting" to *God*?

It also belongs to normal usage, that talk of adaptation is controlled by the metaphor of evolution, and this control is apparent in the phraseology of our theme. But use of evolution as a root metaphor, as it must be used if it is to tell us anything very interesting about religion, is incompatible with use of the Christian gospel's root metaphor, its identification of God by the resurrection of a crucified one, that is, by the most radical possible disruption of continuity and development.

It is decisive for any reality we might call God that he/she is eternal, is reality in which the ever-threatening divorce of past and future is averted, in which what we have been and what we must or will be somehow rhyme to make a coherent whole. More precisely, religion is behavior over against eternity somehow identified; if eternity is so identified as to make it plausible to *address* it, it is in such cases that we use the word God. Thus it is always appropriate and decisive to ask about a putative God or other putative eternity, Is temporal discontinuity here supposed to be overcome in openness to the future or in the persistence of a past? We live in the present, but the content of the present is memory and anticipation in some mutual interpretation. We must ask, Is a particular putative eternity an interpretation of the past by the future or of the future by the past? It is not at all my original observation that evolution, as a root metaphor, is an eternity of the persistence-sort, rhyming the future with the past by interpreting all temporal emergence as the appearance of what was really there all along. The God who raised Jesus from the dead, on the exact other hand, is eternal as "the unsurety of the future."

We can go deeper. Only a God from the future irreducibly belongs to reality, has more than analytic status. Only a God from the future needs to be adapted to. If an eternity is the persistence of a past, address and response must belong to a reducible level of reality, to the mere manifestation of the eternity; for in address and response it is the future that appears, in and by other persons and their challenge to us. If eternity is the persistence of a past, the wholeness of eternity must be in itself a unity deeper than the unity of community, of discourse between persons; it must be a unity in which I am you and so cannot address you or respond to your addresses. Thus a God who is eternal by persisting must be a mere accommodation, made by an eternity not itself properly

conceivable as God; and ritual directed to such a God must be and properly understand itself as the phenomenon of a preliminary level of spiritual activity. Now we can see why it is funny to speak of "adapting" to God: trust in evolution and its devices as a universal context of understanding is but one case of the religion of persistence, and the reduction of God within such trust but one instance of what always happens in such religion.

So I must reformulate the theme to obtain a task for my discipline. The language for my purpose must be "ritual as humanizing revolution." I have no doubt that ritual can be explained as evolutionary adaptation. But if there is God as an irreducible partner of ritual, then ritual is in its own meaning rather the intrusion of the uncontrollable future, the appearance of what precisely is not given in the status quo, the location of that very freedom which explanation within an evolutionary metaphor must explain away. This critique of certain assumptions behind our theme was of course stated before I knew what other essayists would say. It is gratifying that it touches some themes that have been developed by other authors in this issue, as I will mention at several points.

In this reformulation, humanity has reappeared, after a brief bracketing. It is *human* adaptation with which we are concerned. Our theme asks at once about the adaptation that humans make and about the adaptation by which there come to be humans. I thus have two theological questions. First, What part does ritual have in human reckoning with reality? Second, What part if any does ritual have in the step to the specifically human?

Finally in this introductory section, I can begin to absolve my secondary assignment, pointing to an initial way in which modern study of ritual and theology of ritual are positively related. Such argument as that in this section obviously depends on the work of such writers as Mircea Eliade, although of course he would deplore my use of it. In the present situation of the Christian church in the world, the church's own life and mission depend greatly on clear perception of Christianity's commonality with other religions and, perhaps even more, of its particularity among them. We will unashamedly take all the help we can get.

HOW DOES RITUAL DEAL WITH REALITY?

I turn to the first theological question. The role of ritual in human life happens to be one of those few points on which the Western church has effective dogma. Saint Augustine looked at the church's ritual and laid down a dictum, cited by all theological parties since, that the church's ritual is the *visibility of the word*: "The word comes to an element, and so

there is a sacrament, that is, a sort of visible word."¹ This was both an observation of the general role of ritual in human life, specified for the Christian community, and a dogmatic assertion appropriate to the dominant place of the word in Christian life and understanding. Augustine's definition was of sacrament, God's ritual word to us, but it equally well applies to sacrifice, our ritual word to God; and the church has in fact always applied it to both. The life of the church, by Augustinian lights, is an antiphony of our words for God, which if true are God's word to us, and our words to God. The whole antiphony is both linguistic and "visible." Moreover, if the analysis is correct for the Christian community, it must in its nearly empty formalism be true for all religion, at least up to the descent of mystic silence, since in itself the analysis is independent of the question of religious truth.

In this analysis, "audible" words are propositions of language, that is, they are signs constructed by syntactical and semantic rules to communicate meanings equally well conveyable by other signs. Such communication is not yet ritual because linguistic signs, in their overt reality as acts, are always replaceable through suitable application of the language's rules. The theological tradition's habit of referring to such words as audible over against visible, or simply as words over against visible words, rests on the evolutionary contingency that our ability to generate sounds with great freedom of modulation makes them the initial and permanently most convenient artifacts for use as linguistic signs.

No actual act of human communication occurs sheerly as the transmission and reception of propositions; neither does the Christian gospel or Christians' prayer. The preacher's uttering is not only an emitting of propositions; it is a posturing, an incanting, and so forth. The act of specifically human communication is given only in the ensemble. In our society, if I come close and say "good afternoon," but do not extend my hand, my utterance misfires. The forgiveness of sin is promised not by sentences only but by sentences with a bath—that is, by baptism. It is all our communicative action over and above proposition-transmitting that the theological tradition calls visible words, even though much of such action is in fact acoustic—or tactile, olfactory, or gustatory. The use rests on the simple circumstance that sights, by further evolutionary contingency, make the dominant content of our more-than-linguistic communication. It is this aspect of community, in religious context, that is religious ritual. Repetition is so prominent a feature of ritual just because irreplaceability is, over against linguistic utterance, the distinguishing character of visible words. And it is observable that the visibility of human communion increases precisely as the communion is religious, as it comes to involve eternity. I will consider shortly why this is so.

Not all such ritual bears all the marks of "ritual" as the term is used in some scientific hypotheses. For example, not all ritual in Augustine's sense has any more pronounced rhythmicity than does human intercourse in general; a sacrificial aetiological recital, in its more-than-linguistic aspect, may or may not be notably rhythmic utterance. Whether we use "ritual" as I do or narrow its reference to ritual that is also "ritual behavior" is of course a matter of terminological decision. But there is powerful reason to retain the older usage. It is surely strained usage that would not allow the Lord's Supper, celebrated in all haste on a battlefield, or a quick oblation to a household deity, to be a "rite," and an odd explanation of religious ritual that would not cover them. The narrower usage seems to abuse analogy in a way likely to confuse understanding: "ritual behavior" is identified in other human situations and in other animals by analogy to human rites, then characteristics of such behavior not notably shared by the original referent are made decisive for the word's use.

Indeed, I cannot but suggest that some of the problems between scientific sects in this matter result merely from failure to honor the Venn diagrams. Surely the case is that some but not all ritual is "ritual behavior" and that some but not all ritual behavior is "ritual." Moreover, that being the case, it is even unlikely that the overlap is structural and not merely the result of common attraction to certain material contents of experience. Thus a mechanism of cortical overdrive by rhythm, if it exists as apparently it does, may explain some of several exceptional states sometimes in the experience of some persons, concomitant with the performance of some very few kinds of religious ritual, by a characteristic—rhythmicity—not more notably associated with religious ritual than with several other sorts of human performance. To call a theory containing this explanation a theory of religious ritual is a muddle.

I may now pose the question of adaptation, that is, of why visible discourse is needed in our dealing with reality. There is a standard Western-Christian answer; I give it according to Thomas Aquinas: the human person is "composed of soul and body, to whom the sacramental medicine is proportioned, that through a visible thing touches the body and through a word is believed by the soul."² It is by visibility, sacramentality, that God's word to us is no mere transmission between pure spirits, that is, pure memory-and-computation devices, but is a communication between persons. And we may continue, saying nothing but what the tradition has always tacitly assumed, that it is by visibility that also our word to each other and to God is the communion of embodied persons and not an exchange between mere spirits. In our communion with each other and God, my body is myself insofar as by my address to you I make myself your object and do not only make you

my object, insofar as by my address to you I make myself the reciprocal destination of your address, locatable by you, available and even vulnerable to you. But it is by the visibility of my address that this happens. Thus, when community is the horizon of our analysis, we may equate visibility and embodiment; we may even say that my body is the ensemble visibility of my address to you. So the God whose word to us is sacramental is the God who not only claims us but gives himself over to us, who not only speaks but makes himself available to us to be spoken to, who has body and blood.

Let me insert an excursus relating to discussion elsewhere in this issue of *Zygon*.³ When Charles Winquist rightly said that language is now threatened by lack of any body but its own act of speech, I hoped it would then be said—since I think it is true—that ritual, “visible” speech is the very place where language, indeed reflecting back only on its own act, nevertheless is just so adjudicated by a language-transcendent body. Indeed, is not Michel Foucault’s theory of language merely description of a de-ritualized, Enlightenment, that is, “monologic” practice of language? Would not the “liminality” of theological discourse be precisely its refusal to go along with this in fact everyday practice of language? Of course, if it is impossible to resist the Enlightenment at this point, that settles the matter; but if the Christian God—and perhaps other candidates—is, resistance is not impossible, since that God is precisely a word with body and blood.

Since our topic is human adaptation, we are more concerned with sacrifice than with sacrament, with the ritual reality of our word to God and with one another. What does my ritual accomplish between me and the rest of reality? I suggest that it makes me *available* and therefore *vulnerable* to the world beyond me, to the rest of you, and to the God who encompasses all. It is by the ritual of my communication with the world that I—more nilly than willy—precisely give up control of the world. Rather, it is by addressing me ritually and so demanding my ritual address that reality takes control from me. Insofar as my address to reality is embodied, is sacrifice, it is indeed “sacrificial.”

Is such behavior adaptive? It is in any case revolutionizing. It disrupts the continuity of my developing project of control. From my side, it is the desperate effort to make a new beginning of history within history, to break control by what is. History’s sacrificers and revolutionaries are the same persons.

It is, of course, possible that revolution is always based on illusion, but if there irreducibly is God, then he and not I in fact controls events, and then new beginning is mere realism. Then the ritualization of my addresses to reality reckons rightly with the metaphysical case, which is that indeed there is interruption and the hope of new life athwart the

path of mere development. Of course, if there is not irreducibly God, then the interpretation of ritual just offered leaves the persistence of ritual unexplained, and some explanation by origins and development will have to be extended to be the whole truth. Indeed, the *origin* of ritual may well be the attempt to control, since control is what the Bible means by sin and sin is notoriously original.

A first explanation of the association of ritual and religion may now be offered. However we may interpret our prayers and however we may address or misaddress them, if their partner is in fact God, then prayer is the situation of all situations in which we cannot escape being also objects and not sheer objects, in which our controlling runs into its limit. So long as we keep talking over against God, we will find our talk becoming visible, making us visible, embodying us forth. We can escape only by eschewing God and ritual even as preliminary manifestation and tactics, by turning instead to meditation in the currently usual sense and to its goal of union with an ineffable eternity. Two great types of religion stand here systematically opposed. It is because Christianity is unambiguously on the one side, that it never willingly dispenses with ritual, with sacrament and sacrifice. The sort of union with eternity in which silence permanently falls has always been suspect as an alien phenomenon within Christianity; and meditation in the central Benedictine tradition has not meant emptying consciousness, except as a preliminary tactic, but rather the exclusive and concentrated filling of consciousness with one particular text or memory. For the same reason, deconstruction of the texts (or talking in tongues) can never make the whole event by which the Biblical God is brought to speech.

Finally in this section, we may note a second way in which the scientific study of ritual and theological reflection on ritual may be positively related; again I report a benefit of the former to the latter. If ritual is visible words, then those who study how ritual works in the context of community, abstracting from the question of ritual's truth, may be regarded as grammarians of ritual, in the same sense in which philosophers in their analytical capacity are grammarians of language. Surely grammarians of ritual are then at least as vital to the work of theology as are grammarians of language. Of course, anyone engaged in a discourse can, if compelled to it, reflect back upon its grammar; and Christian theology has always made grammatical observations about ritual. But since theology is itself a linguistic enterprise, theology is strongly tempted to suppose that ritual's sense is guaranteed by correct propositions about it, that a visible word says whatever theologians propositionally assure us that it does. If some current theology is ever so slightly less fallen to this temptation, we have the grammarians of ritual in large part to thank for it.

Let me give an example. The history of baptism is mostly a lamentable history of progressive visible incoherence. In the third- and fourth-century church baptism was visibly an initiation, a classic rite of passage clearly structured in three acts, including a time of exorcistic and disciplinary liberation from the old life, the starkly liminal naked immersion itself, and the rite to give the Spirit, that is, to inaugurate new life in the church. The dismantling of this drama was accomplished by a variety of historical contingencies, but at each step the dismantling was legitimated by a theology that abstracted from ritual meaning. Finally theology asked only two questions seriously: first, What really—as *against* visibly!—happens at baptism? And second, What must we ritually do to make this happen? To the first question, the standard Western answer has been “justification,” an answer not wrong but notably undramatic. To the second and disastrous question, the official answer has been that application of water, with proclamation of the triune name, suffices. At the end of the historical dismantling, we have our familiar damp-finger pettings of the cute infants.

By the inherent grammar of visible discourse, baptism as now mostly practiced cannot say visibly any of what we keep propositionally insisting that it does. It cannot say end-and-new-beginning, and this is surely much of the reason for the feeble self-identification of Christian congregations. None of us in fact believes that entering the church is death and resurrection or that remaining in it is risky, for we regularly see with our own eyes that we enter by a harmless rite, a rite that speaks, if of anything, of continuity and the sanctification of the given. The modern liturgical movement in all denominations is informed by awareness of this deficit and by understanding of the need to recover a ritual structure analogous to that of ancient baptism. The clear analysis of how initiations work, provided by Victor Turner among others, was decisive in the emergence of the liturgical movement’s insight.

HOW DOES RITUAL HUMANIZE?

To deal with the second question, I must recite some Christian theology, of whose unsecured situation in the context of this issue of *Zygon* I can only say I am aware. I have to sketch nothing less than the doctrine of creation if I am to say what sort of adaptive step ritual is in the coming-to-be of humanity, since the coming-to-be of things is the matter of the doctrine of creation.

The primal Christian assertion about all reality other than God is that it exists by God’s word, because and only because God said and says it shall. There is, of course, an ancient problem here: since this assertion makes God’s word anterior to the creature, as God is, to whom is this anterior word addressed? The doctrine of the Trinity is in part an

answer to this question. God rightly identified, the doctrine says, is to and from all eternity both subject and object of an address and its response; indeed, his being is specifiable as *conversation*. Thus the more precise form of the claim that all but God is by God's word is the claim that all but God is by and in its place in the triune conversation. Stated metaphysically, the final Christian insight into reality is that all reality is intended in a consciousness and a freedom and that this personhood is not abstract but constituted in address and answer, as are all persons.

As an excursus, I suggest that language's modern "wound," by which it is alienated from nonlinguistic body, is precisely its abandonment of that particular object that answers back, that is *objectively linguistic*, the conversation partner. And it seems to me that our discussion of psychic symptoms as invitations to a ritual partner should be relevant at just this point.

The actual God, according to the Christian gospel, is the one who can be named "Father, Son and Holy Spirit." There are many ways to get at the suitability of the name; I will develop further some ideas already discussed. Any eternity is a putative triumph of identity over temporal discontinuity. The normal way of positing such identity is by abstracting from time to putative timelessness, by digging in against the future's threatening novelties under the protection of a serenely persisting identity, one that gives no hostages to time, that is impassibly all that it is. But if God is "the one who raised Jesus from the dead," or "the one who rescued Israel from Egypt," then God is not as this move needs him to be. There is only one other move—to appeal not to the cancellation of time but to the success of time, to take a plot in and of time as in itself the transcendence of temporal discontinuity. One plot offers itself.

The infamous trinitarian relations—that the Father begets the Son, that the Son is begotten by the Father, and that the Spirit is breathed by, or by and through both—are initially but a summary of the plot of the biblical history of God's acts, of the temporal and personal structure of what is said to have happened and to be going to happen between Jesus the Christ, the transcendence he dared address as "Father," and the rest of us. The assertion of this summary as relations subsisting in God is the assertion that the plot of saving history is real not only for us and as a context of our lives but for God and as a context of his life, which of course must be himself. Just thereby it also is asserted that what is true of the identity through time of any plot, that it is conversational, is also true of God's identity with himself, of the relations to himself in which his self is constituted. We are back where we began: the self-identity that transcends time is not one in which personhood and discourse are obliterated; it is rather personhood's and discourse's own kind of victory through time, occurring absolutely.

Thus God can rightly be named, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, because his life is not that of a monad or solitary but is the conversation of Christ and his Father in their Spirit. The Father loves and sends the Son, and this act is not a dumb act but a self-address of the Father to another. Jesus obeys his Father; and this obedience is real audible and visible prayer. The actual divine Spirit is not just any arbitrarily upsetting numinous impetus, but the Spirit of this specifically contentful conversation. Finally back to the doctrine of creation: other reality than God Father-Son-and-Spirit comes to pass in that it is mentioned in this conversation that is eternity, in that the word that is God is so spoken as to posit referents other than God. God says, "Let there be . . .," and just and only so where there was and would be nothing there is now obedience to this *Torah*, this beneficent mandate.

The great problem of theological anthropology has always been to stipulate the difference of human creatures from others. The traditional Western procedure, in and out of theology, has been to stipulate characteristics that are supposed to fit only humans. Thus Aristotle, and following him most Christian theology, defined humans as the rational animals, marked off from most other creatures by interior vivacity and from other animals by rationality. I have modulated the doctrine of creation as I have to set up a quite different sort of proposal.

First let me quickly say why the traditional method will not finally do for Christian theology. The point is straightforward. All delimitations of humanity in the style of Aristotle are compelled to put the concept of potentiality at the center of reality. To stay with our example, humans in fact rarely act rationally, so that the proposition that humans are rational must be qualified to be that humans are potentially rational. The same will be found with any stipulation in this style, where the defining characteristic is simultaneously a value. Thus all such patterns of thought eventually generate the root metaphor of development.

We can of course avoid this outcome by finding a value-free differentiation, perhaps simply by boiling the moral demand out of the concept of rationality. But it is the utter unacceptability of this move for Christians, which posits no ontological difference between humans and other creatures, that led Christianity to make such prompt common cause with the heirs of Socrates. For to abandon the claim that humans fit in time differently from other creatures, that we are whatever we are in a way that is different from the way in which other creatures are whatever they are, is to give up any ground in reality for treating humans by standards different from those by which we treat creatures of other sorts. And if humans do not demand different standards, then why not, for example, weed out the human population as we weed out the equine population? Adolph Hitler's policy about Jews depended on

the spectacularly erroneous empirical assertion that Jews are deleterious to the gene pool. But what if the assertion were correct? It was against the threat of declining antiquity's moral nihilism that Christians once made common cause with Socrates' heirs, once the philosophical question about kinds of being had been raised also for the Christians; and the threat is now yet more severe. Believers insist: humans are a particular ontological sort.

Humanity must therefore begin with an event athwart mere development. What event that is, is supposed already in my claim that there is one. Creatures are what God speaks about other than himself. I now suggest: among creatures some are distinguished in that God speaks not only about but to them. They are taken as not only referents but addressees of the conversation that is God. It is by this role that we are to recognize sisters and brothers among the creatures. No doubt our species—or species (pl.)—is created equipped with whatever active and dispositional properties are requisite for this part. But it is not by these that we are human, nor need we suppose any monopoly of them in order to specify our humanity. If we are not ontologically different from other animals, then the search for a line between pre-human and human is unimportant; if we are, then the line does not necessarily coincide with any developmental step at all.

Humanity thus begins with God's revelation (a dubious term but handy here). All branches of Christian theology suppose that believers are sent to speak God's word in the world; our sisters and brothers among creatures are those to whom this sending draws us. All branches of theology suppose also that God speaks to all these sisters and brothers—whoever they may be—also before we arrive with the Gospel, in the discourse of their polities and religions. The standard term for this general word of God is "the law," humans' word to each other insofar as it claims absolute authority. Who were Adam and Eve? They were the first community of our biological ancestors to hear in their mutual discourse, "It is in any case good for us to . . . ," that is, to overhear the Trinity.

An odd sort of behavioral specification of humanity is thus after all possible. The unproblematic complement to an address, unless all goes wrong, is a response. If the triune conversation takes us as additional hearers, he thereby solicits us as additional speakers. That is, we are bidden to pray. We are specifically the praying animals. Of course, prayer may display an illusion; and on that supposition, we would need an explanation of the human function of the illusion. There is no reason why such explanations cannot be produced and be illuminating, whether or not they are actually needed.

As we have noted, it is just at the juncture of prayer that discourse is ineluctably embodied. Adam and Eve were the first community of our

ancestors to have a cult, and it is precisely the ritual of that cult that let it be an ontological beginning. That is, whatever place religious ritual may have in the evolution of the species *homo sapiens*, it has a decisive role in the coming-to-be of humanity; one can even say that it simply is that coming-to-be. We are course as reluctant and perverse sacrificers as we are reluctant and perverse reasoners; but on the proposed account that which we can and do fail is not a potential in ourselves but an event that involves us, God's word.

Once more I turn to the question of mutuality between scientific study of ritual and its theological consideration. This time I will suggest benefits that run the other way from those I have so far mentioned. I also will try to make up some of a deficit readers have surely noticed: that the kind of scientific study of religion I have adduced is not the one exemplified by some papers in this issue.

Let me refer to those interesting questions from Ralph Wendell Burhoe in the "Introduction."⁴ It is indeed almost a priori likely that religious ritual emerges as the "coadaptation" of "earlier-established neural levels" of animal behavior with "a phenotypically and behaviorally different set of characteristics" created by a "living sociocultural system." The informationally somewhat more loaded proposition also seems to me to be fairly well established, that these two sets of dispositional properties are wired in different, earlier- and later-evolved parts of the nervous system. Now suppose we are able to go on to learn much more about all this than we now know—what precise adaptive steps required these neural arrangements, details about the interaction in ritual performance of specific areas of the brain, and so on. What will we thereby discover?

It really would not have required much research to make me tentatively assent to the opinion that the evolutionary history of the brain is synchronically reflected in its structure and that the structure in turn maps boundary conditions of our ritual performance. Just for that reason, the So what? question inescapably poses itself.

Let me first answer that by such research we will discover a great deal of truth about evolutionary history, neural anatomy, and so on, and that for any worshipper of the Creator such discoveries require no exterior justification. But of course we never leave truth quite so brazenly at that; our technical and cognitive longings are not so clearly separable, even the itch for celestial mechanics was never quite distinct from the itch for improved bombardment. Likewise, Burhoe's questions end with these: "What do [new pictures of ritual in human adaptation] suggest for further developments in religious education, for renewed richness and authenticity of religious faith, hope, and charity?"

Victor Turner has said he was not quite sure what neurophysiological explanations could add up to for our understanding of our own behavior.⁵ Surely they can only add up to self-knowledge of the very sort that Socrates attributed to his predecessors and dismissed. Christian theology cannot simply join Socrates' dismissal, and the reason has been gratifyingly reflected in this issue. In much of the discussion there has been some consensus that ritual is located at the intersection of determination and freedom and that this intersection itself is built into our embodiment—which is just what Christian theology ordered! However, I have two caveats. First, if this consensus is to be affirmed, we must then say that the body itself cannot be understood one body at a time but only as a communal phenomenon. Second, we must note the abiding truth in Socrates' position. What indeed may neurophysiological or other quantitative explanations of ritual add up to for our practice of ritual? Those concerned to make ritual work obviously must welcome every piece of knowledge about ritual's workings. It is the case, however, that the knowledge now in question never presents itself in quite that state of cognitive purity that celestial mechanics can achieve if much pressed; it always indeed suggests things about what would be "further" and what would be "rich." The evolutionary track projects itself on choice. And it is the experience of those concerned for the church's ritual that the suggestions are regularly bad for it. That may say something sad about Christian ritual, or it may suggest something of the epistemological situation of those sciences that take humanity for their object.

Western science achieved itself by eschewing teleological explanations, including, partly inadvertently, eschatological explanations. It does not follow that science at all levels and at all times can go on that way. Insofar as science becomes history, as evolutionary narrative does or as the most advanced approaches to a unified field theory now do, the same questions must come to afflict it that afflict all historical study. Why should what an event or condition comes *from* explain it more appropriately than does what comes *of* that event or condition? Is historical knowledge possible at all apart from some posit of the whole of history, which in turn depends on some posit of the End of history? Is historical knowledge possible apart from methodical reckoning with freedom?

Science that can tell us about ritual always hovers on the verge of such questions. Antecedent decision to ignore them has decisive consequences for the suggestions such science, as an actual human and social enterprise, makes for the conduct of specifically human life, including ritual. It perhaps has consequences also for the immanent practice of the science. The decision to seek all argumentative warrants in the past

rather than in the future is a sheer metaphysical choice. And it must, unless there is great personal incoherence, decide policy generally; it must decide what is to count as "rich" or "further." The decision is against freedom.

Scientific study of humanity that is done sheerly apart from the posit of freedom in which humanity occurs will necessarily generate a replacement eschatology from the decision that governs its own practice. We cannot but do what we do *for* something, if not for the Kingdom of God then for something else. The act of renunciation by which Western science emerged must *by itself* generate ideals of stability, of satisfaction of perceived needs, even of mystic escape from time. The current coalescence of popularized psychology and bowdlerized Eastern religion is most instructive. To the extent that American religion has opened itself to suggestion from behavioral science, it is such reactionary norms that have in fact mostly been suggested. Moreover, the theological distant observer cannot but note science's extraordinary tendency to schism whenever it touches such questions as those set for this issue of *Zygon*, and the tendency of each scientific sect to establish itself by composing a creed precisely about "genesis." May one suggest that the sectarianism may partly be accounted for by these creeds' common lack of an article on the Spirit to go with the article on creation, that is, of an article on the reality and power of the future?

It is not to be expected or wished that science, even when it touches ritual or other central human matters, will begin referring in its argumentative warrants to the will of God or to the character of the absolute. However, one may suggest that it would be beneficial for scientists to take it as belonging to properly mandated method, for certain matters of investigation, to listen in to modes of discourse that do make such references, to put themselves regularly under reminder that there is such discourse and that it might touch reality. Scientific method is after all a set of moral commitments. One necessary commitment may be that scientists never limit their own reflection to the sphere marked out by the repudiation of teleology, precisely for the sake of what is to be known about that sphere, but rather that they let themselves with methodical purpose participate in speculation about what, for our present instance, ritual is *for*.

One such speculation is that proposed here by Christian theology. Ritual is our discourse athwart our self-development, marking the irreversible intrusion of God and making us vulnerable to reality. That is, we are the praying animals—or, as I would have said had I been able to forego the pun, we are the sacrificing animals.

NOTES

1. Augustine *In Joh.* 80,3.
2. Aquinas *Summa theol.* III,60,6.
3. See Charles E. Winquist, "Theology, Deconstruction, and Ritual Process," in this issue, pp. 295-309.
4. For a revised and edited version of these questions, see the section "New Knowledge and Questions" by Ralph Wendell Burhoe in the "Symposium on Ritual in Human Adaptation," in this issue, pp. 211-16.
5. Victor Turner, "Body, Brain, and Culture," in this issue, pp. 221-45.

Is the idea of the fatherhood of God still relevant?

THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD IN AN AGE OF EMANCIPATION

by W. A. Visser 't Hooft

In an era of changing sex roles and increasing liberation from the bonds of paternalism, W. A. Visser 't Hooft presents a significant new work on religion in the modern age. He asserts that, "To believe in the fatherhood of God according to the teaching of Jesus is not to turn to the past, but to the future." He provides an incisive analysis of the process of emancipation from the authoritarian and patriarchal modes that governed the past existence of the family, church, and state and shows that the revolt against God as Father is a revolt against a caricature.

Paper \$7.95



At your bookseller or from
THE WESTMINSTER PRESS
925 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, PA 19107