

Theological Resources from the Social Sciences

RITUALS: SACRED AND PROFANE

by *Anthony F. C. Wallace*

How does one recognize a religion? How does one know that the cultural aspect which one is observing is a religion and not a piece of economics, a political organization, a philosophy, or a game? The answer lies in the fundamental pattern, or structure, which the layman and the ethnographer alike recognize when they look at a society and which, whenever it is found, is called "religious," despite the manifold diversity of its forms.

It is the fundamental premise of every religion—and this premise is religion's defining characteristic—that souls, supernatural beings, and supernatural forces exist. Furthermore, there is a fundamental pattern of religion which would seem to be describable in terms of three levels of analysis: first, the thirteen universal categories of religious behavior, which are intuitively recognized by anthropologists, theologians, and laymen alike as *the elementary particles of ritual*: prayer, song, physiological exercise, exhortation, recitation of texts, simulation, touching things, taboo, feasts, sacrifice, congregation, inspiration, and symbolism; second, the threading of events of these ritual categories into sequences called *ceremonies*; third, the organization of ceremonies into complexes which we have labeled *cult institutions*; and finally, the religion of a society, which is describable

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only as a conglomeration of ritual (both calendrical and occasional) and *belief system* (including pantheon), *mythology*, and *morality*, whose components are logically integrated only at the level of cult institutions.

The primary phenomenon of religion is ritual. Ritual is religion in action, it is the cutting edge of the tool; myth, although its recitation may be a part of the ritual, or a ritual in its own right, serves in its meaningful content to explain, to rationalize, to interpret and direct the energy of the ritual performance. It is not a question of priority in time, for, as we shall argue later, even though in some extremely ancient period there may have been rituals without myths, in observed human behavior the two phenomena go together; few if any rituals any longer are instituted before a mythic base is invented to account for them, and some new rituals may be built around re-arranged and reinterpreted elements of older rituals and myths. The primacy of ritual is an instrumental one: just as the blade of the knife has instrumental priority over the handle. and, even though a sightless gun is very difficult to aim, the barrel of a gun over the sight, so ritual has an instrumental priority over myth, even though ritual is almost always accompanied by myth. It is ritual which does what religion tries to do.

Myth, in the most general sense, is the theory of ritual, which explains the nature of the powers, prescribes the ritual, accounts for its successes and failures. Together they are religion.

We are now in a position to make a new, more analytical definition of religion. From this vantagepoint, we can say that *religion is a set of rituals, rationalized by myth, which mobilizes supernatural powers for the purpose of achieving, or preventing, transformations of state in man and nature.* We find no advantage, in this formulation, in distinguishing between those rituals which invoke supernatural beings—and to which some writers prefer to restrict the reference of the term “religion”—and; those which invoke an impersonal supernatural force, such as *mana*, and which some writers like to denote separately by the term “magic.” As Hsu (1952) and others have said, the aims, the social context, and even the rituals themselves are indistinguishable. Furthermore, while we recognize the usefulness of Van Gennep’s (1908) category of rites of passage, and Chapple and Coon’s (1942) rites of intensification, we shall work with a less abstract classification of the transformations intended by religious rituals, closer to the consciously stated purposes of the actors. Five categories of transformations of state would seem to suffice to partition the aims of ritual:

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ritual as technology, ritual as therapy and antitherapy, ritual as social control, ritual as salvation, and ritual as revitalization.

THE RITUAL PROCESS

Perhaps ritual may be classified most succinctly as communication without information: that is to say, each ritual is a particular sequence of signals which, once announced, allows no uncertainty, no choice, and hence, in the statistical sense of information theory, conveys no information from sender to receiver; it is, ideally, a system of perfect order, and any deviation from this order is a mistake. But to say that ritual is communication without information is merely to state that ritual behavior is stereotyped; this criterion differentiates it from such action sequences as conversation and from games and play, in both of which the course and outcome of the behavior is uncertain, but does not distinguish it from equally stereotyped technical procedures like setting a trap, or grinding corn, or working on an assembly line. The difference between ritual and stereotyped physical labor lies in the distinction between the functions of the two kinds of action: the primary function of ritual is the use of energy to manipulate matter. (In a thermodynamic sense, of course, both communication and physical labor involve work—the transformation of energy—but the communication process requires far less energy than the manipulations of matter which ultimately both can affect.)

The particular function of ritual communication is quickly to prepare an individual, or individuals, to execute an action with maximum efficiency. Where only one organism is involved, the ritual may accomplish its preparatory function by resolving motivational conflict, reducing fear and anxiety, increasing confidence, focusing attention on the task at hand, and mobilizing appropriate psychophysiological systems for the execution of the act. Such solitary rituals as the sick patient's praying for strength to endure pain, or the foxhole-bound soldier's praying for divine protection during a prolonged bombardment, or the warrior's handling of his talisman before going into battle are examples of solitary, but institutionalized, religious rituals. Such solitary, but institutionalized, rituals are also prone to develop in persons suffering from anxiety arising from unconscious motivational conflicts; the famous hand-washing ritual of neurotics, obsessive-compulsive for instance, has the function of reducing the guilt-anxiety resulting from a conflict between hostility and conscience.

Theoretically, at least, such solitary rituals, whether conventional or bizarrely regressive, are effective in preserving the animal from

disablement resulting from prolonged and excessive anxiety; the cost of the ritual is the waste of time and energy in mechanically inefficacious activity, but this cost is less than the cost of not removing the anxiety itself, which—as Cannon points out in his analysis of voodoo death (Cannon, 1942)—may be complete disablement or even death itself. One may point out, of course, that the best way of eliminating the anxiety is to remove its causes in neurotic conflict, in ignorance, or in the threatening aspects of the real environment; but frequently such real dangers cannot be removed immediately, ignorance is only slowly replaced with knowledge, and unconscious conflict is difficult to treat. Ritual that maintains the organism in some sort of shape to cope with reality by keeping anxiety low and confidence high certainly has survival value.

The communication involved in solitary ritual is autocommunication whether it be talking to one's self, or hearing one's prayers to a god, or whistling in the dark, or reminding one's self of one's power by fingering beads. The person's anxiety is reduced by his perception of concepts, relationships, or things which mean that he is adequate, secure, worthy, loved, or whatever. To be sure, other observers—and even, to some extent, the solitary ritualist himself—construe these rituals as evidence of weakness or fear, inferring from their practice a vulnerability to anxiety for which the ritual is requisite as protection. Thus Pontius Pilate's guilt, although presumably reduced in his own awareness by the hand-washing ritual, is made manifest by the ritual; and Captain Queeg's guilty fear of a cross-examination which may reveal his rigid panic in the face of a storm (the event which prompted the *Caine Mutiny*) is displayed for all the court to see in his personally reassuring ritual of grinding together the steel ball-bearings in his pocket.

The communicational aspects of ritual are more manifest, however, in social rituals. Here, as the parties respond periodically to each others' performances, one can readily recognize that what is being observed is an exchange of signals. In social rituals, in addition to any anxiety-reduction function which may be present, one sees more clearly also a mobilizing and co-ordinating function which presumably brings the parties to a social action more rapidly to the state of readiness for its co-operative execution than is likely if the mobilization and co-ordination were to depend upon less stereotyped communication. In the courting rituals of birds, for example, the exchange of signals is accompanied by a rapid, co-ordinated series of complementary psychophysiological changes in the male and the female which readies

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both for the mating itself much more rapidly, reliably, and frequently than would dependence upon a random coincidence of time and place in birds independently varying in cycles of mating readiness.

Let us now, in summary, define ritual and then go on to consider how ritual works. Ritual may be defined as stereotyped communication, solitary or interpersonal, which reduces anxiety, prepares the organism to act, and (in social rituals) co-ordinates the preparation for action among several organisms, and does so more quickly and reliably than can be accomplished (given the characteristics of the organisms and the circumstance) by non-stereotyped, informational communication. How does ritual work?

First, we must recognize a difference between the sets of signals, both communicational, which are meaningful and informational. All information must have meaning; otherwise, it is simply noise. But not all meaningful signals are informational. In other words, a sequence of signals whose order is fixed, so that the receiver always knows what signal will follow the last, will have no information value because there is no uncertainty to be reduced by the outcome of each successive event. But each of the signals, and, therefore, whole patterns of them, are meaningful in either case. Obviously, no communication is occurring if the signals—whether or not they are informational—are meaningless to the receiver. But meaningfulness has nothing to do with whether or not the signal order is stereotyped—that is, with whether or not the message is informational. Meaningfulness has to do with the receiver's ability to respond to signals, that is, to respond to a small stimulus with a large response.

The simplest level of meaning would therefore be represented by the simple unconditioned reflex. The next level of meaning is the relation between a conditioned stimulus and its response; the buzzer to a Pavlovian dog is meaningful in this sense because it elicits the salivation reflex. The third level of meaning would be that described as instrumental learning, in which the organism learns to perform a complex instrumental action "in order" to secure reinforcement. The most complex, presumably, is the semantic response wherein the receiver translates the signal into a set of equivalent other signals (which can be substituted for the original signal) and is able to infer (from the set of these defining, substitutable, alternative signals) the properties of the class of events referred to by the original signal, and to infer relationships to still other classes of events by chains of logical relationship.

When we say that ritual is meaningful (and therefore is communi-

cation) we do not imply thereby that the meaning is necessarily learned, or conscious, or verbalizable, or even that language is necessarily involved at all (although, of course, it often is in human rituals, both sacred and profane). As we have seen in the case of lower animals, ritual functions can be accomplished without either learning or the use of language; but learning, and language, as we shall see, serve as powerful tools for extending the range of ritual's usefulness to a species.

In human rituals the content of the communication is twofold: first, it is a statement of an intention; and second, it is a statement of the nature of the world in which the intention is to be realized. The conscious intentions of human rituals, as we have seen, can be broadly categorized as transformations of state in the technological, therapeutic (and antitherapeutic), ideological (for social control), salvational, and revitalizational senses. But it must be recognized that several intentions can be expressed in the same act of communication, often on different levels of awareness. It has been the principal contribution of the psychoanalytical approach to ritual to emphasize that multiple intentions, sometimes congruent and sometimes contradictory, can be expressed by the same ritual act, and in the same ritual sequence. Furthermore, the "language" of ritual is, in a sense, extremely abstract, in that the rather arbitrary signals of which it is composed refer to extensive and complex ideas of value, structure, and transformation, whose verbal statement requires considerable time. The symbolism of ritual, therefore, is extremely elaborate and oft-times obscure, since it refers to intentions and beliefs that are complex and, in part, unconscious.

Thus the simple ritual act of crossing oneself, in Catholic custom, by touching the fingers to the forehead and chest in four, must be understood as a statement of intent to secure divine power as a protection against danger, spiritual or physical. The "sign of the cross," the extremities of which are indicated by the points touched, invokes the whole story of Christ and its complex meanings; the accompanying litany—"In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Amen"—asserts a particular theological conception and constitutes both a prayer and a primitive magical conception of power inherent in naming; the points of the body chosen are believed to be seats of particular spiritual function in man; and the nature of the danger to be warded off is obviously liable to be a complex combination of conscious threats. Thus, this simple act may be a statement of extremely complex intentions and is certainly an assertion of a world

view which is embodied in an extraordinarily elaborate set of beliefs based both on ancient Christian mythology and even more ancient conceptions of magic. In some rituals, the connection between the signal and that to which it refers is more easily recognizable; one thinks particularly of rituals involving sexual and aggressive symbolism interpretable by the kind of logic implied in Freudian dream interpretation. Thus, for instance, the analyst interprets the Australian subincision ceremony, in which the penis is slit lengthwise to the urethra, as a statement of intent by men to secure female sexual parts and to achieve certain generative powers associated with femininity; and this interpretation has some support from native informants. But it is also a test and a sign of manhood, of admission to a social status that involves the acceptance of both rights and obligations; and these rights and obligations are defined, in part, in an extensive mythology. In general, then, we must recognize that "the" meaning of any ritual act is apt to be multiple rather than singular and that explanations of ritual which claim a simple singularity are almost invariably oversimplifications.

But even though the meaning of a rite is both highly particular and highly complex, it has always one other message, which is implicit rather than explicit. This is the message of organization. The stereotype of ritual is orderliness raised to an extraordinary degree; rituals are predictable; the contingent probabilities of chains of events are near unity; the myth upon which the ritual is based describes a world in which chaos is being, or is to be, replaced by order. Furthermore, the content of ritual reduces the complex heterogeneity of reality to which the ritual refers, explains the mystic unity which lies behind phenomenological diversity in its realm of relevance. Thus ritual, and its supporting belief system, constitutes a world of symbols that is simple and orderly. This is hardly unexpected, as we have seen, for one of the principal functions of religion is to reduce anxiety and enlarge confidence, and to do this, the human (or non-human) organism participant must view his life and circumstances as a system so efficiently well-organized as to permit quick decision and confident action. An organism overwhelmed by information overload is incapable of discriminating response; ritual, by reducing the information content of experience below the often bewildering level of complexity and disorder with which reality confronts him, permits adaptive response. In this sense, the goal of science and the goal of religion and myth are the same: to create the image of a simple and orderly world.

The accomplishment of the ritual reorganization of experience thus

is a kind of learning. It is a reprogramming, as it were, of a machine, sometimes done once for a given individual and not again, as in many rites of passage, and sometimes done repeatedly, as in those calendrically scheduled communal ceremonies which readjust values and perceptions and refocus attention. But the psychological mechanisms upon which ritual learning depends are not confined to the practice-and-reinforcement schedule which has been so carefully investigated by experimental psychologists. The ritual learning process, whether its effects be measured in years, as in the case of puberty rituals, or in hours or minutes, as in the case of certain technological rituals, seems to involve a special five-stage process, which invokes not so much the law of effect (as in conditioning and instrumental learning) or the law of repetition (as in imprinting) as what might be called the law of dissociation: the principle that cognitive and affective content can be restructured more rapidly and more extensively the more the perceptual cues from the environment associated with previous learning are excluded from conscious awareness and the more those immediately relevant to the elements to be reorganized are presented. How permanent such a new cognitive synthesis will prove to be depends, presumably, in part on the maintenance of the dissociation (by such devices as actual isolation from prior contacts and as the continued presentation of the selected matrix of cues, including suggestion) and in part on the reinforcement in the conventional learning sense. The stages of the ritual process of cognitive-and-affective restructuring are as follows:

1. *Prelearning.* At least some of the several elements to be reorganized in the new cognitive synthesis must be already present as a result of previous learning. Some knowledge of the standardized rights and obligations of the new role, for instance, is usually held by novitiates before a rite of passage; persons about to become possessed by a deity are aware of that being's interests and characteristics; persons hopeful of salvation know something of what the new identity would be like; the incipient prophet is already well stocked with a miscellany of criticism of the status quo and of recommendations for reform. But the cognitive content of relevant prelearning is internally contradictory and not sorted out from other cognitive material.

2. *Separation.* The ritualist separates himself, and/or is separated by others, from conscious awareness of irrelevant environmental information. This can be accomplished in several ways:

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- a) By deprivation of sensory contact with previously significant features of the environment through such devices as physical isolation, darkness, distracting noise;
- b) By the use of drugs, such as mescaline, which interfere with the ability to assign meaning to previously familiar sensory data;
- c) By the imposition of extreme physical stress—through pain, fatigue, sleeplessness, hunger and thirst, or even actual trauma or illness—which restricts attention;
- d) By the presentation of monotonous and repetitive stimuli, such as drumming, flashing lights, dancing, which (as in hypnosis) induce a trance.

While the degree of separation of attention achieved by these methods can vary greatly—from the probably minor effect of simple withdrawal to a quiet, “sacred” place to the profoundly dissociative effect of drugs, complete sensory deprivation, extreme stress, or prolonged drumming—all these procedures seem to have the effect of facilitating cognitive restructuring.

3. *Suggestion.* Once the state of separation or dissociation (sometimes called trance) has been achieved, the cognitive material relevant to resynthesis can be readily recombined under the influence of direct suggestion from others or from one’s self (the general instructions for resynthesis having been prelearned, as, for instance, in the case of the Plains Indian vision quest). Apparently, in the absence of any specific suggestion, a spontaneous sorting out of dissociated elements is possible, if one can judge from the reported experience of prophets like Handsome Lake and the reports of experimental subjects in drug and sensory-deprivation experiments. Such a resynthesis may take the form of transient changes in mood, as in most technological rituals, or of an alternate, but only temporarily manifest, personality (as in those cases of temporary multiple personality which are interpreted by a theory of possession, as in Haitian voodoo); but it may also take the form of a hopefully permanent restructuring of beliefs and values, as in the radical mazeway resynthesis of the religious prophet or the identity transformations of rites of passage and of salvation.

4. *Execution.* After the achievement of resynthesis, the ritual subject will be expected, sooner or later, to act in accordance with the new cognitive structure. If “sooner,” it may mean immediately, as in ritual possession and during the dissociated state; but if the new role is to be a permanent one played out in a secular context, its execution may be delayed until after the

dissociated state is over, and the expectation may be for a permanent, lifelong change.

5. *Maintenance.* In cases of ritual possession, the resynthesis is implemented during the dissociated state, and is terminated with the end of those procedures which maintain the dissociation. The individual apparently retains a lower threshold for dissociation and personality alternation, however. In some instances, the maintenance of the new structure depends on posthypnotic suggestion; but this, by itself, usually does not remain effective for more than several weeks or months at most. Therefore, for "permanent" change, it is necessary either to renew, periodically, the ritual itself or to provide the subject with tangible cues from the ritual experience which will serve to maintain the new structure, or both. This provision of repetition of the ritual, even if in attenuated form, is recognized by evangelists, like John Wesley, who insist on their converts joining cells, congregations, or study groups who hold periodic meetings; and the provision of tangible reminders is, of course, effected by such devices as amulets, talismans, and medicine bundles, by special ornaments and uniforms, and by public symbols (like the cross). By such means as these, the survival of a resynthesis achieved under dissociation can be extended for a long period of time, perhaps indefinitely, even with minimal reinforcement (by a schedule of rewards or punishments).

The anthropologist should, in his consideration of this process, recognize that, although it invokes a specialized, and in Western eyes exotic, psychological mechanism for the achievement of cognitive change which seems to be independent of prior learning, and therefore of culture, it is in fact closely dependent upon culture. The pre-learning, of course, will in large measure be by the learning of traditional culture and of various personal attitudes toward it; and the techniques and content alike of the suggestions are similarly closely related to culture. Thus, despite the connotations of individualistic spontaneity, of pathology, or of radical innovation which these mechanisms of resynthesis have for team-minded Western readers, they should not be viewed as either extraordinary or as non-cultural. The ritual process, as described above, is a universal human phenomenon and indeed is not restricted to man; what man has done has been to institutionalize this process, to develop it into particular forms which are, in fact, different in detail in each society. One—but only one—

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way of institutionalizing the ritual process is to interpret and apply it within the context of a belief in supernatural beings.

THE EVOLUTION OF RELIGION

An evolutionary statement of religion would presuppose that religion (1) begins with societies that possess both individualistic and shamanic cults; (2) proceeds to societies with individualistic and shamanic cults, plus communal cults; (3) then proceeds to societies with individualistic, shamanic, and communal cults, plus ecclesiastical cults devoted to a pantheon of olympian deities; and (4) finally (at least so far) produces societies with individualistic, shamanic, and communal cults, plus ecclesiastical cults devoted to a singular monotheistic conception of deity—that is, a high god who, while not usually the sole supernatural entity or manifestation, nevertheless has unquestioned sovereignty and ultimate power over both man and all other supernatural entities.

Along with this sequence of stages, each defined by the presence of cults characterized by a particular combination of theological belief and social organization, there have occurred certain broad changes in the attention paid to certain aspects of the goals of religion. These changes would seem to be at least four: (1) the importance of technological ritual and therapeutic (or non-therapeutic) rituals, in which the goal is the direct manipulation of physical nature, both human and non-human, progressively declines as technology and socioeconomic institutions become increasingly effective; (2) there is an increasingly conscious concern with formulating religious belief as a system of metaphysical thought, internally consistent and capable of explaining all phenomena observable in the world; (3) as religion accumulates an ever larger establishment of material and personnel, and as it develops its relationships to increasingly hierarchical political and economic institutions, it becomes increasingly concerned with human morality—that is, with good and bad behavior in relations between peers and between persons in positions of relative super- and sub-ordination; (4) as cultural change accelerates, as population expands, and as social density rises, the problems of individual and social welfare become more challenging to religion.

These postulated evolutionary changes in religion are, theoretically, related to certain evolutionary changes in technology and social organization. In regard to the first process, one may observe that as capability of technological control advances over a phenomenon which religious ritual has traditionally attempted to govern, religious cult institutions

first attempt to deny the adequacy and/or propriety of the new technology; then, as demonstration of its value becomes unimpeachable, they attempt to take over control of the technology itself; and finally they abandon it to secular interests and concentrate on the metaphysical and moral implications of the change in technology and social organization.

If one considers the fact that technology, developed by an increasingly wide and profound body of scientific knowledge, has for tens of thousands of years been finding workable solutions for the problems to which technological and therapeutic rituals have traditionally been the only human recourse, then one can find it not surprising that there has been a continuing segregation of religion from technological issues and a continuing diversion of religious attention to the social and psychological transformations necessary to exploit new technology. This process has resulted in a transformation of religion itself. The accumulation of technological successes in human culture has been forcing religion to give up its technological pretensions and to concern itself with metaphysics, with morality, with the welfare of the human personality and of human society.

Thus the increasing bigness of technology has been, over the millennia, continuously redirecting the attention of ritual and myth from technology to man himself, as a thinking and feeling social being. The balance of attention has been swinging from technological and therapeutic goals to ideological, salvational, and revitalizational goals. In situations where cult institutions compete for human allegiance, whether of the masses or of the managerial class, those cults are chosen to survive that permit rational secular control of technology and which offer aid in psychological and social problems. But, in this regard, one must divide the category of psychological and social problems into two classes.

Some are perennial and universal human problems or processes, either immune to technological change or at least not yet effectively touched by technology, for which religious ritual as a means of inducing transformations of state is for most people more effective than any other procedure. Such individually experienced problems as these are death itself (which can be postponed but not prevented by technology), birth (which also can be postponed and made less frequent but, for most potential parents, not completely prevented without social suicide), life-cycle crisis, such as becoming an adult and retiring: all these remain subject to effective ritual influence.

And some psychological and social problems are at least in part the

result of the very technological changes which have diverted religious attention: population increase, urbanization, industrialization, unemployment, war, conquest, social inequalities, and the like. In this arena one typically observes a considerable lag in the development and dissemination of the world views, the ethical or moral codes, and the rites of passage which are optimally fitted to the effective use of the new technology. The complex arrangements of human behavior necessary to living in large cities, for instance, are not discovered along with brickmaking, the wheel, and surplus-producing agriculture. A whole assemblage of social roles is implied; further technological innovations—for bringing in water, getting rid of wastes, controlling fire, and so on—are going to have to be invented as the city grows, and these in turn will involve more new roles; and the process of escalation between technical and social innovation may continue for generations, for centuries, or indefinitely. In this process new codes of behavior which make moral issues out of actions which once were matters of individual options—such as waste disposal, or the quarantining of sick persons, or the contributions of labor, produce, or money to public enterprises—must be introduced. And these, in turn, need to become matters of interest to ritual practitioners in order to insure the survival of the system, during *rites de passage*, at communal ceremonies, in spiritual salvation.

Furthermore, if serious social disorganization occurs, whole new patterns of society must be rapidly conceived and rapidly introduced, not merely by authoritative fiat, but with maximum public support. In enterprises of this kind, religious institutions, as we have seen, often act as a kind of center for evaluating the feedback information from cultural change and for proposing minor or major corrections in the aims and performance of the system. Religion, in other words, by reason of its interest in over-all levels of organization in the individual and in society, is frequently in a position to diagnose and treat not only old but also new disorders.

But along with religion two other institutions have been developing capabilities along these same lines: science and government. Thus, even while religion has, over the millennia, been responding to the successes of technology by increasingly concentrating its attention on problems of human behavior, these two other institutions have been becoming ever more serious competitors. They compete with religion in different spheres, to be sure, and are themselves not fully allied. But the competition is mounting. Science competes with religious mythol-

ogy and metaphysics, with the belief system of religion, while government competes with religious ritual by introducing ritual of its own.

The simple, primitive relationship of science and religion described by Malinowski (1925) as being complementary systems of thought dealing respectively with the knowable and controllable, on the one hand, and the unknowable and uncontrollable, on the other, has not been valid for thousands of years in areas of urban civilization. Here, in a process that can be historically documented, at least from the age of Pericles, religious belief has been repeatedly challenged by scientific knowledge and the rational habits of scientific thought. In these contests, whenever the battle is fully joined and both parties commit themselves to the struggle, science *always* wins. This, indeed, can be stated as a cultural law: Because of science's reliance upon demonstrable proof, perceptible by any normal human being, and religion's reliance upon the set between belief and ritual, any serious intellectual conflict between science and religion must always end either in a victory for science or in a draw (for if a religious assertion happens to be true, science will sooner or later assert it too).

The conflict between religion and government probably began, as a serious issue, only when large and permanent secular bureaucracies became necessary for the administration of human behavior in urban living and in large technological enterprises like the creation and operation of irrigation systems. In prebureaucratic societies, there is no occasion for competition to arise. Political decisions are made by the same persons who perform religious rituals; religious ritual and belief are applied to so wide a range of human concerns and activities that the boundary between secular and sacred is drawn to separate different actions rather than different people. Although it is something of an overstatement to characterize all activities of a primitive community as sacred, the diffusion of ritual and myth into many areas of behavior precludes the development of competition between religious and secular ritualists. Even in the early urban states, the ecclesiastical bureaucracy tended to overlap extensively with the secular bureaucracy: royal roles tended to be rationalized as divine, or at least priestly, roles, and priests performed political and bureaucratic functions of the state.

But, as time went on, an increasingly marked separation of church and state developed, *de facto* if not *de jure*, and has now reached a point where only minimal religious ritual and rationale is employed to facilitate the business of government and the processes of mobilizing political power. This does not mean, however, that secular politicians and bureaucrats are not concerned with ritual or myth. To the con-

trary, they eagerly turn to ritual and to mythmaking to achieve the same kinds of goals—ideological, salvational, and revitalizational—at which religion has aimed.

In states administered by Communist politicians and bureaucrats, there is a conscious and deliberate competition for control of ritual and mythic access to the population. There are secular (i.e., non-supernatural rationalized) rites of passage marking events in the life cycle (such as marriage and the achievement of adult status); there are massive communal ceremonies (such as May Day); there is a kind of *ecclesia* (the Communist-party apparatus itself); there are “sacred” figures (such as Marx and Lenin), “sacred” places (e.g., the tombs for party leaders), “sacred” symbols (the hammer and sickle), “sacred” texts; there is elaborate myth construction and metaphysical speculation (dialectic materialism); conversion (by the rituals of “brain-washing”) uses the familiar essentials of the ritual process. In Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy there was the same kind of exploitation of secular ritual: the charismatic leader, sacred symbolism, mass revival meetings, texts, mythmaking, the sacred party, and so on, again in direct competition with religious-ecclesiastical cult institutions and their congregations (partly the Jews, but to some degree also Christian denominations). And even in the United States, where church and state are theoretically non-competitive, there is an extensive and powerful group of secular cult institutions which administer ritual and maintain myth, with little or no supernatural rationale.

A convenient example of a type of secular cult institution commonly found in the United States is the “Greek” college fraternity or sorority. These organizations, elaborately organized on a national basis, with “chapters” on individual campuses, serve the obvious function of providing board and lodging to college students. But their principal function is to accomplish an identity change in their members, transforming them from boys and girls into college men and women who can claim membership in an elite group. They conduct, in other words, the puberty initiation rituals for many members of our society. Furthermore, they do so by using the same essential ritual process as has been described for tribal societies, such as those of Australian aborigines and West African Negroes. The pledge is isolated from parents and other adults, and from less favored peers, and is subjected to a gradually intensifying series of stresses (by means of fear and anxiety, fatigue, sleeplessness, physical torture, and cognitive disorientation). Then, with dissociation accomplished, the suggestion of the new status, with its rights and duties, is made by the group. And, finally, the novice is

admitted to membership in the adult group or society. What is particularly interesting about these rites of passage is the jealousy which they arouse, not so much in non-fraternity members (although this may exist) but in the administrators of other rites of passage for freshmen on college campuses—guidance counselors, deans, personnel officers, and religious officials. They correctly perceive that he who controls the rites of passage controls the society.

Another kind of secular ritual in American society are the rituals for maintaining caste boundaries—and ritual gaps—in Negro-white relationships. Many conventional rituals, particularly in the South, are intended to serve as constant reminders to both whites and Negroes of their relative superiority-inferiority relationship: customs of mutual address (Negroes being addressed by first name by whites, and whites by title and last name by Negroes), seating in public conveyances, white priority in competitive encounters (such as meetings on narrow sidewalks), and so forth, all serve this purpose; they are ideological rituals par excellence. Furthermore, traditionally Negroes have been excluded from many of those rites of passage—religious and secular—by which the immature white is initiated into adult white society: coming-out parties, Greek-letter societies, dances, and graduation ceremonies in segregated schools and churches. From this viewpoint, then, the recent Negro “civil rights” demonstrations have been, in addition to their realistic function in securing access to various services, also rites of passage for their Negro participants. By participating in a demonstration, being beaten, fined, and jailed, the demonstrator is in effect initiated into a Negro adult group whose identity is very different from that of the traditional so-called Uncle Tom, who was socialized into an identity which overtly accepted (and only covertly condemned) his subordinate social status.

It should be evident, then, that secular organizations in contemporary industrial societies can and do make use of the same ritual process for inducing the same kinds of transformations of state which traditionally were the object of religious cult institutions. The challenge is a ubiquitous one and is mounted even by persons who, in their own lives, are devout Sunday churchgoers but who feel that certain kinds of transformations of state, such as the development and maintenance of equalitarianism, good citizenship, patriotism, personal hygiene, studiousness, and such, in the interest of efficient performance of secular tasks, are too important to be left to the vagaries of denominational differences and therefore demand co-ordinated secular attention.

THE FUTURE OF RELIGION

We have seen that religion, under the combined assault of science and politics, has in evolutionary time been more and more restricted in its field of application. We may very well ask, therefore, what the future course of this evolutionary process is likely to be.

In answering this question, it must be kept in mind that the definition of religion which is employed in this work includes supernaturalism as an indispensable element. As we have pointed out, secular faiths exploit the same ritual process as religions: they differ in that the system of belief (the mythology, ethics, and metaphysics) which gives meaning to ritual is explicitly non-theological. There does not appear to be much likelihood that secular cult institutions will disappear, abandoning their field of application to religion once again; indeed, they can be expected to enlarge their scope of influence and co-ordinate their belief systems ever more effectively and to become, perhaps, more and more "religious" in all respects save supernatural belief. Thus, in starkest form, the question about the evolutionary fate of religion is a question about the fate of supernaturalism.

Put in this way, the evolutionary future of religion is extinction. The belief in supernatural beings and in supernatural forces which affect nature without obeying nature's laws will erode and become only an interesting historical memory. This is not to say that this event is likely to occur in the next decade; the process very likely will take several hundred years, and there probably will always remain individuals, or even occasional small cult groups, who respond to hallucinations, trance, and obsession with a supernaturalist interpretation. But as a cultural property, belief in supernatural powers is doomed to die out, all over the world, as a result of the increasing adequacy and diffusion of scientific knowledge and of the realization by secular faiths that supernatural belief is not necessary to the effective use of ritual. The question of whether such a denouement will be good or bad for humanity is irrelevant to the prediction; the process is inevitable.

But the functional consequences, desirable and undesirable, of such an event as the elimination of supernaturalism from the human cultural repertoire are very much worth considering. Under some circumstances, the disappearance of supernaturalism would have very unfortunate consequences. If the secular faiths which move into the field left by religion permit the same attitudes to develop toward the state, and toward political figures, as commonly have been directed toward supernaturals, very undesirable things may happen. The intense ambiva-

lences of love and hate, the devouring dependencies, the masochistic longings, and other emotional debris which in religious systems are displaced in part from human objects onto supernatural ones, could, when confined to the society itself, intensify rather than reduce social problems. As critics of religion have pointed out, many crimes have been committed in the name of God; but even more crimes might be committed if the same people had no god. The religious person who now reveres the divine being is left intellectually free to criticize the state and the political leader, to see them as "only human," liable to error and deserving of sympathy or in need of restraint. But if this same person were to place upon the state and its officials the same reverence, he would be unable either to sympathize or to criticize; the political process, in other words, would be contaminated with precisely those attitudes that its critics have found so unsavory in religion itself. Thus, given the same spectrum of human nature with which we work today, the decline of supernaturalism would, in purging human culture of a cognitive error, only pollute his social relationships with the same infectious matter.

There are several possible ways of forestalling this undesirable turn of events. One, of course, is to establish an ideal society of the sort which Freud (1928) envisaged in *The Future of an Illusion*; a society in which—by virtue of an optimal environment for children to grow up in, free of neuroses—belief in supernaturals would not be necessary. But Freud's was indeed a counsel of perfection: mankind must become mature before it can abandon the support of the gods, he felt. One can take it as axiomatic that any proposal for social or cultural change that requires for its workability a perfect humanity is in fact unworkable. Thus, to plan to prepare man for the demise of the gods by establishing in advance the perfect system of child-rearing is futile. To be sure, all possible improvement in the way of maturation must be sought; but the gods will die before mankind grows up.

Another alternative is for existing theistic religions gradually to de-supernaturalize the meaning of the terms for the supernatural and, without abandoning ritual, text, or institutional apparatus, to become in effect secular. This process is already visible in many "liberal" religious groups.

And still another alternative is to invent what may be called, with due recognition of its apparent absurdity, a non-theistic theology. The properties of such a theology must be, first, that it postulate no supernatural being or force; second, that it not contradict scientific knowledge in any particular (although, of course, it may along with any body

of thought raise questions for scientific investigation); third, that the entities which are the elements of its belief system be such that, in psychoanalytic terminology, they can be cathected (i.e., be given emotional significance as the objects of intense wishes); fourth, that these entities not be any recognizable human person, group, or institution; fifth, that this belief system, including its theology, mythology, and ethics, be an effective rationale for particular rituals, including the rituals of secular faith, which are designed to induce socially and culturally desirable transformations of state; and sixth, that this belief system also rationalize an appropriate ecclesiastical organization (which must be independent of secular cult institutions).

Now this is, indeed, a formidable assignment, and my own theological imagination is hardly equal to the task of presenting such a pantheon, let alone the associated mythology and ethics, in the next few pages. Various efforts in this direction, of course, have been made, by distinguished thinkers, including members of the Unitarian movement. One recalls, for instance, the anthropologist Margaret Lantis' suggestion that "friendship" be established as the symbol of a new religion, the religious role of psychoanalysis, the existential philosophies, Julian Huxley's *Religion without Revelation* (1927) which invokes evolution as a theological concept, the humanistic idea of emergent godliness, the notion of increasing organization, and so on. It would seem, however, that whatever theological entity be chosen, it must include a teleological aspect, a notion of purpose in the sense of directional process, for purpose in this sense must be invoked in the rationalization of ritual. Perhaps, indeed, it matters far less what the metaphysical definition of this entity should be than what purposes are inherent in it. A certain flexibility of meaning, a friendly ambiguity in the positive characteristics of the entity, will permit its cathexis more readily than a sharp and precise definition.

But, with respect to the purpose of the entity, there can be far less ambiguity. The purposes must include the accomplishment of these ideological, salvational, and revitalizational transformations which are deemed to be essential for the creation and maintenance of healthy personalities in a healthy society. Thus there is required a fairly specific theory of what constitutes a healthy personality in our society, what are the desired roles of an adult, what sort of society it is or should be. Indeed, this study of man and society, and of the values which ritual is intended to serve, must in a sense precede, or at least be conducted *pari passu* with, any theological formulation, lest the "deity" be otiose.

And, finally, the non-theistic theology must at all times be aware that ritual is the cutting edge of faith, that without ritual, supernatural religion, secular faith, and our new non-theistic cult alike are sterile. This means, furthermore, that the new theology must not merely admit intellectually but actively embrace the essential ritual process or abandon the field entirely to the secular faiths. It must provide rites of passage, particularly for the adolescent-to-adult transformation; it must provide rituals of salvation for those adults who experience the depressed, cynical alienation from the processes of their society, and it may need to mount a vigorous revitalization movement.

Although it would seem that there is little space for such a non-theistic religion at the present time, and that a nascent cult institution of the kind which I have described would be quickly ground to pieces, or elbowed into obscurity, by competing supernaturally religious and politically secular cult institutions, it is conceivable that both these types of system may fail to cope with certain major social problems of our time and of the future. These problems are obvious enough: population control, technological unemployment, intergroup conflict (both intra- and international), the dialectic between bureaucratic administration and individual initiative, and personality development. The production and distribution of goods and services, and the provision of medical care, which once were major social issues, are now, in principle at least, amenable to adequate technological control, and there have been developed, over centuries, more or less satisfactory principles of social behavior relevant to the operation of these technologies. These principles, indeed, do not vary much even between Communist and free-world societies; the issues which are being fought over have more to do with the aforementioned regions of uncertainty than with the social structure of technology. It would seem, then, that the new faith which we are imagining should concentrate its attention on the nature of the optimal solution of these social problems, and on the associated ethical principles, rather than on those matters relating to technology and technological education, which are already well in hand and for which secular rituals of various kinds are readily available. Furthermore, such a faith should be truly international in reference, a catholic faith in the generic sense, raising a standard to which the righteous of all nations can repair, attending to the major issues which are of universal concern while eschewing partisan involvement with the particular solutions that divide mankind.

To a degree, therefore, we are talking about a revitalization movement. I have discussed the process of revitalization movements else-

where and need not repeat that discussion here. But one tactical point might be added. Although revitalization movements proselytize, they are not indiscriminate in their recruitment of disciples and followers, at least in their early phases. To the contrary, the successful movement is an elite group that requires new members to undergo a strenuous and transforming rite of passage; that excludes as much as possible the pure opportunist, the compulsive joiner, the lazy and cowardly; and that seeks only the true believer who will commit his life to the cause. Thus our new faith at first must be, while open to all, exclusive of the uncommitted; membership must be a prize; the aspirant must reach out for the way of salvation. Otherwise the faith will be diluted by desultory believers who continuously consume the energies of the devout without change in themselves or contribution to others. The organization must not become dependent for its self-respect, as some religious organizations now are, upon feeling righteous for performing unsolicited favors for those who do not believe in it and upon securing half-minded attention to evangelically pleasant and halfhearted expressions of agreement from those who out of courtesy have been persuaded to listen to its message.

In conclusion, then, of this discussion of how to start the non-theistic religion which evolutionary processes are generating, we must reiterate several points, which are in effect a recapitulation of the argument of this paper:

1. Ritual is instrumentally primary, and belief system is secondary.
2. Ritual aims at accomplishing five types of transformation of state: technological, therapeutic, ideological (for social control), salvational, and revitalizational.
3. The function of ritual is to prepare a human being for the efficient performance of a task by communicating an image of a highly organized world system, already described in the mythology, and by suggesting a role in a ritual process which follows the law of dissociation.
4. In a viable religion, appropriately fitted rituals and belief systems accomplish those transformations of state which are functionally necessary to the development and maintenance of the kind of society which exists or which the ritual-practitioners want.
5. Scientific belief and secular ritual, in a long-continuing evolutionary process, are restricting the application of religious belief and ritual, both theistic and non-theistic, to the ideological, salvational, and revitalizational spheres.
6. Viable "religions" of the future will be non-theistic but will not "deify" either person or state.

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COMMENTARY ON THEOLOGICAL RESOURCES
FROM THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

by *Henry Nelson Wieman*

Wallace has shown that religion is in a rather desperate predicament, and I think that is correct. Religion is groping to find its distinctive vocation in the present world situation. I also agree that religion is based upon ritual, but, as he says, that does not distinguish religion. Every sort of undertaking in life is based upon ritual. No baby can be reared without the ritual of caressing and hugging and cooing. One cannot maintain married life without a lot of rituals.

Ritual is absolutely indispensable in every serious undertaking. Science, too, has its rituals. It has its conferences where things are discussed, but those conferences are partly ritual to maintain esprit de corps and the co-operation and fellowship of scientists. Certainly government could not be maintained without rituals. So to say that religion is based upon rituals does not distinguish religion in any way. In fact, I would say that perhaps married life has more ritual in it than religion.

Ritual serves different goals when used in the diverse areas of human concern. The goal is different when saluting the flag or shaking hands or saying good morning to a passing acquaintance; and all these differ from what is served by ritual in religion. While the ends sought are

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