(5.25ff.), the bridegroom and bride can say of each other 'This is my body': 'Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word ... that she might be holy and immaculate. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself'. The whole liturgy of Holy Thursday is thus focussed on the mystery of unity, of our oneness with each other in the body of Christ. But, as I have said, Holy Thursday is also about sin, about alienation and disunity, and this element too is to be found in the story of the washing of the feet, where Jesus relates it to cleansing from sin: 'If I do not wash you', he says to Peter, 'you have no part in me'. This connects the ceremony with the other traditional feature of Holy Thursday, the reconciliation of penitants who, in the early form of the sacrament of penance, had been doing penance since the beginning of lent, when the ashes were imposed on them. But this takes us into the mystery of sin itself and that we must leave until the next section, *The Mystery of the Cross*.

A Mistake about Error

Ian Hamnett

In a recent stock-taking essay on the current state of the sociology of religion, Richard Fenn writes:

> The functionalist synthesis in the sociology of religion has disappeared ... Functionalism provided a privileged methodological stance from which the sociologist could interpret and transcend the accounts of groups and individuals. As a trained interpreter the sociologist could provide a coherent text of a community's beliefs, but as one skilled in delving below surface appearances the sociologist could also identify 'latent' functions and, in the process, call into question a community's account of its own life. These methodological approaches are still adopted, but the sociologist does not enjoy a privileged position from which to put them together. The result is parallel and competing

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perspectives without a single viewpoint (Fenn 1982:101).

Later, Fenn goes on to assert that

> To abandon functionalism is therefore to abandon a privileged methodological stance and a synthetic theoretical viewpoint. Some might therefore argue that sociologists of religion have exchanged their functionalist birthright for a mess of ethnomethodological and philosophical pottage. It is unlikely that sociologists of religion will abandon the search for a privileged standpoint from which to improve on the accounts that others, lay or professional, give of their religious activities. The claim that a sociologist's account of a given religious group or practice is an improved and not merely adequate translation of that group's own experience and understanding rests on the sociologist's more direct and complete access to common sources of knowledge (1982:123—4).

Most of what I want to say accords with Fenn's account of what has happened, but presents a case against the conclusions he draws.

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In 1973 I published a short article in which I argued that the sociology of religion usually turned out, in practice, to be a sociology of error—at any rate if the word 'error' is given a generously wide meaning (Hamnett 1973:1—12). The starting-point for this idea is Burrow's use of the phrase 'sociology of error' in his well-known study of nineteenth-century approaches to the study of religion (Burrow 1966:7ff.). My argument, in a nutshell, was that sociologists and social anthropologists (whom I will usually refer to collectively simply as sociologists in what follows) tend to embark on a sociological inquiry only when something does not seem to bear a simple and adequate explanation of itself on its face. They do not (I then maintained) as a rule invoke sociological explanations when they encounter a culture that asserts or assumes that two and two make four, or that twins are *not* birds. However, when a culture (and not simply a wayward or ignorant member of it) asserts or assumes that twins *are* birds, or that two and two make five, then, since straightforward explanations are not available, sociological ones are sought for and advanced. In this sort of sense (I argued) any 'special sociology' (i.e., the 'sociology of' such and such: religion, education, the theatre, the law, or whatever) is in a wide sense a sociology of error. To put it more accurately, even if there is no actual error, the object of study is thought not to bear its full explanation on its face; there is more to it than meets the eye, and something more is required by way of explanation than what the actors in the situation can furnish. At the very

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least, the participants do not see the whole truth; their accounts simply form part of what is *to be explained*. As such, they are invaluable as the native or actor's model, but they only yield their secrets when the analyst exercises his sophisticated skills upon them.

This approach implies the conviction that 'truth is manifest', and that only error has to be specially accounted for. That is how Popper (1963:5) formulated this position, in contrast to his own conviction that 'truth is hard to come by' (1963:373), and it reflects the whole tradition of positivist optimism which characterised most Victorian research and remained fairly well in command of the field until quite recently.

In the 1960s, the tone and assumptions of most anthropology departments (and sociology departments much more so) was blandly and complacently secularist and non- or anti-religious, at least so far as those religions were concerned that still commanded a degree of actual assent or support in modern western societies. I remember accompanying one very able and knowledgeable colleague to a solemn requiem mass at St Peter's, Morningside, in Edinburgh, after the death of a common friend. This was well before the liturgical changes that followed Vatican II. As a well-brought up anthropologist, my colleague approached the study of 'primitive' religion with fascination and respect and would have had contempt for anyone who derided it, but her response to the Tridentine requiem was itself derisive and contemptuous. After the service, she talked about 'superstitious mumbo-jumbo', 'antiquated ritual', 'unbelievable nonsense', etc.—just the language that an anthropological illiterate might have used about the Bongo-Bongo. This anecdote is characteristic of the mainstream social science of twenty and thirty years ago. Primitive religion could be patronised; 'real-life' Christian ceremony had to be attacked, though in both cases sociological explanations had to be sought for an answer to the question: how can a sane human being possibly believe *that*?

At this point a strong objection could be made. Whatever may have been the cause in sociology, surely social anthropology yielded many exceptions? At one time it used jokingly to be said that a necessary non-academic condition for appointment to a post in the Institute of Social Anthropology in Oxford was to be a Roman Catholic. Such were or are John Beattie, the Lienhardts, and of course Evans-Pritchard himself, not to mention former Oxford scholars like Mary Douglas and indeed non-Oxonians like Victor Turner. The Catholic presence in British anthropology was certainly very strong, and this appears to contradict what I have said about the prevailing secularism of social science in the 50s and 60s. Up to a point, of course, it does—and this is one aspect of the 'mistake about error' I am confessing to. But there are more sides to the question than this, at least so far as the response of other, non-believing, colleagues is concerned. At a not wholly flippant level, the

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eccentricity was seen as, after all, largely confined to Oxford, a city and university proverbial for so many lost causes and *lusus naturae* down the years. Secondly, Roman Catholicism itself could be regarded by friendly and unfriendly critics alike as a form of belief that put itself so far beyone the scope of rational discourse that it could be safely ignored for most purposes of ordinary life—the example here being set, as often as not, by Catholics themselves, who usually conducted their non-religious activities in a perfectly rational and acceptable manner. Ironically enough (since Catholicism is or at least used to be itself a highly rationalistic kind of religious system in which 'fideism' is a formal heresy) Catholics were often supposed to profess a faith that rested on no rational foundation and could not therefore be intellectually related to other departments of thought.

One special case concerns Evans-Pritchard himself. It was a commonly held view that while his earlier monographs (Evans-Pritchard 1937, 1940, 1951) were works of outstanding scholarship, his *Nuer Religion* (1956), which followed his conversion to Roman Catholicism, marked a sad degeneration, attributable to the intellectually debilitating effect of his new faith. The accolade which no less prestigious a figure than Lévi-Strauss (1962:ch.4) subsequently bestowed on this work came as rather a surprise to many.

There is a further point to be made about *Nuer Religion*. Readers of this book will recall how Evans-Pritchard was at great pains to defend the good sense of Nuer religious thought and ritual, which (against the early Lévy-Bruhl) he consistently interprets not as magic but as metaphor. Relationships between religious action and the social world constitute, for the Nuer, 'not ... a mystical bond but simply a symbolic nexus' (1956:141). Nuer ritual, in other words, is to be interpreted as expressive, rather than as instrumental or efficacious. It thus belongs to what can crudely be called the 'protestant' conception of sacrament rather than the 'catholic' one. Now, the question arises why Evans-Pritchard seems so anxious to argue for the purely metaphorical status of Nuer symbolic action, in the face of what appears, even from his own ethnography, to be evidence pointing the other way (cf. Gatbuogh the 'living corpse', 1956:152f.; rites of separation, 216f.). A 'sociology of error' approach might suggest that Evans-Pritchard was reluctant to suggest for the pagan Nuer a theology that bore too many resemblances to his new faith, so that the 'catholic' explanation, though arguably the more plausible, was rejected in favour of the safer 'protestant' alternative. (Mary Douglas, by contrast, had no such inhibitions and happily equates Bantu 'magic' with her own Catholic sacraments (Douglas 1973).)

This raises one question to which I gave insufficient attention in my article on error, namely that the sociology of error approach is not
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limited to unbelievers in their treatment of belief, but is regularly adopted by believers in their treatment of other and hence by definition 'false' beliefs. Indeed, the assumption that factors external to belief can act as determinants of belief is a commonplace among religious educators. The notion that going out with non-catholic boys or girls, or having too many non-Jewish friends, or whatever, can be a 'danger to the faith' has been taken for granted by pastors and teachers for centuries, though if other people formulate the principle in theoretical terms it is quickly denounced as sociological determinism. The very same bishops who reject the sociological study of (for example) conversion on the grounds that faith is a gift of the Holy Spirit are prompt to raise the alarm about the dangers of consorting with heretics, though the implications of the views are in flat contradiction.

A further argument in favour of a sociology-of-error approach comes from a quite different and in a way rather surprising source, namely, its endorsement, on occasion, by the very 'natives' who are about to be upstaged by the observer and analyst. Henry Moore maintained that psychoanalysis would imperil his creativity as a sculptor. Professional actors, for all their hunger for attention and praise, often prefer a quite general endorsement of the excellence of their performance, and find that they can be badly put off their stride if particular gestures or speeches or bits of 'business' are singled out for specific comment, even if of the most flattering kind. And it was a common idea among structural-functionalists that if society's members knew as much about what they were doing as the anthropologist did, they would probably not be able to go on doing it. A degree of innocence is held to be necessary if the 'real world' is to continue to work properly, but the sociologist must forfeit the simplicity of the innocent eye, and eat of the tree of knowledge, and lose his Eden... Or as Nietzsche put it less self-admiringly, 'we have made eunuchs of ourselves, so that we may come and go as we please in the great harem of world culture'.

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This is the position at which the 'privileged access' claim underlying the sociology-of-error approach is bound to lead, and I want to turn now to registering some objections to it. In the first place, it is open to objection on the grounds that it sets up a quite spurious opposition between the naive actor on the one hand and the relativised *hors-de-combat* sociologist on the other. Actors (whether in the technical sociological sense or in the everyday professional meaning of the word) are no more and no less naive than you and me. No doubt there are some activities, like driving a car, that we perform better when we do not think too much about them at the time, and it could well be that some aspects

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of a stage performance are of this kind, but (as with Henry Moore—who might have been wrong in his anxieties anyway) this is more a matter of individual psychology than of social action. Take for example the Durkheimian 'function' of religion as being the promotion of social solidarity. Where this supposed function has become manifest—that is, where believers have *themselves* seen this solidarity as an effect of their religious belief and practice—this has, notoriously, been more often used by them to commend their religious institutions than to undermine them. The structural-functionalist idea that actors are necessarily disabled when they know what it is that their actions lead to is baseless. The truth to be rescued from this muddle is really quite a different matter: namely, that if I cease to believe in the *independent* validity of what I am doing, then its 'function' alone may not in all cases furnish an adequate basis for me to persist in doing it. There are, in other words, certain classes of action such that they have to be believed in if they are to work: but a sophisticated understanding of their 'functions' (if they are thought to have any) is nevertheless quite compatible with belief.

Again, if the 'privileged access' approach patronises and diminishes the actor, it correspondingly inflates the role of the sociologist, and this in two ways. First, it arrogates to a reified 'sociology' the virtual monopoly of a process of critical and analytical thinking that can be found (sometimes in considerably sharper form) in other activities and disciplines. Fiction, literary criticism, psychoanalysis, drama, religious studies and political science are obvious examples, most of which have a longer ancestry than institutional sociology. This is not, of course, to deny the truth (classically, as it were, formulated by H. Stuart Hughes) in the thesis that this century has witnessed a particular prominence attaching to consciousness, self-consciousness, and the foxing dilemmas of relativism (Hughes 1958); again, Lionel Trilling, citing Ellenberger, talks about the 'unmasking trend', the 'systematic search for deception and self-deception and the uncovering of underlying truth' (Trilling 1972:141). But these characteristic preoccupations of modern liberal culture in the west are to be found in various forms in all parts of the system. To put it in another way, we are all sociologists now.

The second way in which the 'privileged access' claim inflates the role of the sociologist is that it seems to deny or understate his own situation *as an actor*. I do not just mean that sociologists go in for birth, copulation and death like everybody else, and engage in 'real-life' activities as much as their fellows, though this truth is worth reiterating in view of the idea sometimes found that they are so radically crippled by relativising self-consciousness that they are (as Nietzsche suggested) all impotent. The more serious point is that sociologists are all actors not only in their off-duty hours but specifically in their work as sociologists too. It has been the virtue of ethnomethodology to have insisted, if

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sometimes rather too stridently, on exactly this. The nearest I got to acknowledging it in my 'error' article was a rather grudging concession in a footnote. Even in 1973, I ought to have known better—Peter Winch had made the essential point fifteen years before (Winch 1958). Certainly no one writing in the 1980s could get away with ignoring the virtual revolution in sociological self-assessment that has overtaken the discipline, largely to its advantage, in the last fifteen or twenty years.

In my grudging footnote, I described the new cognitive sociologies as issuing 'an invitation to see supposed non-problems specifically *as problematic*'. The assertion that two and two make four is as interesting, because as problematic, as the assertion that they make five or three. The point has been better and more carefully made by Barnes and Bloor, when they write:

> Our equivalence postulate is that all beliefs are on a par with one another with respect to the causes of their credibility. It is not that all beliefs are equally true or equally false, but that regardless of truth and falsity the fact of their credibility is to be seen as equally problematic (Barnes and Bloor 1982:23).

Note here the strong assertion that 'it is not that all beliefs are equally true or equally false'—a crucial intervention which marks off this kind of radical relativism from the totally agnostic epistemology usually taken to accompany it as a logical corollary.

Now it is true that Barnes and Bloor are making a contribution to a debate in which other contestants take sharply contrasting positions (Hollis, Taylor, Horton in Hollis and Lukes 1982). Their 'equivalence postulate' is fighting talk, not part of a new theoretical consensus. The interest and significance of their position is that they propose a relativism within which belief (at least in the sense of distinguishing between true and false) can apparently remain comfortable. Mainstream believers have always been fairly happy with a statement such as Hollis adopts from Strawson: 'if understanding is to be possible, there must be...'"a massive central core of human thinking which has no history"'(Hollis 1983:75), or with Robin Horton's conclusion that 'Relativism is bound to fail whilst Universalism may, one day, succeed' (Horton 1982:260). What is slightly less predictable is the offer that Barnes and Bloor seem prepared to make, namely, of accommodating belief within a relativism that no longer implies a 'privileged access' and which liberates the sociological study of religion from the presuppositions of a sociology of error. This is a statement of the relativist position which, whether accepted or not, at least makes sense, renounces privilege, and escapes the partisan eccentricities of the more precious brands of ethnomethodology.

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Towards the beginning of this article, I mentioned the strongly secularist tone of social science departments in the 50s and 60s. Sociologists of religion were as secularist as the best of them. Although some professed religious belief, they were few and of those few several were nearer to a *sociologie religieuse* than to a sociology of religion in the usual sense (Joan Brothers, C.K. Ward). Bryan Wilson was a more typical figure, at the time, than David Martin. The prevailing emphasis on sectarian studies reinforced this tendency. Not only are sects more manageable than churches from a 'research methods' angle: their often bizarre histories and teachings offer better sport to non-believers. Things are very different today. The sociology of religion has not, luckily, become the prisoner of religious belief, but no one is surprised any more to find believers being sociologists or sociologists being believers. It was only a nine-days'-wonder that an ordained priest should hold the chair of sociology at the London School of Economics.

One particularly interesting feature of this relationship is the appearance of a small but not insignificant number of evangelicals, and indeed conservative evangelicals, among the ranks of sociologists. There is, of course, nothing new about finding conservative evangelicals in certain science-based disciplines, especially in subjects like engineering and inorganic chemistry, and in a way there is no more cause for surprise or remark about this than there is on learning that one and the same person both plays tennis and drinks claret. It is, however, remarkable that conservative evangelicals and even biblical fundamentalists are moving without noticeable discomfort or loss of faith into the relativising minefield of contemporary social science—or, to change the metaphor, putting their toe, indeed a whole foot, into what Peter Berger calls the 'fiery brook', the 'Feuerbach', of our time (1970:44). Moreover, the kind of sociology that they go in for is often of a critical and theoretical sort and is not, or not by any means always, just a *sociologie religieuse*. The so-called Ilkley Group is largely though not exclusively evangelical in membership, and although it is a loose association of practitioners in the social sciences generally rather than one only concerned with the study of religion, quite a lot of their meetings and publications fall in the sociology of religion field. The periodical *Third Way,* though in no sense a learned journal and with no pretensions to be such, is an example of the kind of intelligently popular material that evangelical social scientists produce.

I have encountered two young writers out of this stable that I would like to mention by name. One is J.A. Walter (Walter 1979 and 1982). The other is David Lyon, whose recent *Sociology and the Human Image* (1983) has, perhaps because of its more explicit title, become more generally known in the discipline than Walter's books. Neither of these authors would expect or want me to represent either their books or
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themselves as 'important' in any inflated or pretentious sense. On the other hand, if not swans, they are not geese either, and the interest that their work arouses comes not so much from a vulgar surprise at its religious provenance as from observing how some quite specifically Reformed and evangelical emphases are constructively used in the course of a sociological critique of contemporary ideologies and institutions. The characteristic Protestant stress on God's transcendence, on the rejection of idols and on the perils of an uncircumspect sacramentalism, leads to critical (because 'relativising') analysis of the work ethic, the family, and reified notions of 'society'. These are no doubt familiar targets, but here they are assailed with novel arguments and from an unfamiliar direction. That the work ethic in particular should come under explicitly Protestant attack is perhaps the most striking and unexpected of all these developments.

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If there is any kind of general conclusion to be drawn from all this, it must relate not to the wholly trivial question of where I went wrong in 1973, but to the actual changes within sociology and the sociology of religion during the last however many years, lustres or decades. The epistemological problems that once perplexed the sociology of religion particularly have now opened up into a concern that extends over the discipline generally. The optimistic humanism of the positivists has seeped away. Don Cupitt, in *The Sea of Faith,* stood revealed as an endearingly old-fashioned rather than as a daringly advanced thinker. Believers need no longer fear sociology as a threat; and this is partly because the dangers that it seemed to present only to religious belief are now expressed in questionings that disturb all belief-systems, including agnostic and secularist ones. By making nothing believable, sociology makes everything believable. We are all in it together, and we might as well join Pascal at the betting-shop window.

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*   This article was first given as a paper to the BSA Sociology of Religion Study Group, London School of Economics, in September 1984; a slightly different version was broadcast on BBC Radio 3 in September 1985. The present text is based on both of these.

Lonergan and Systematic Spiritual Theology

Daniel A. Helminiak

Popular enthusiasm for spirituality has mushroomed in the past two decades. The analyses of the human sciences and the impact of secular self-help programs have challenged the religious basis of spiritual pursuit. The influence of gurus from the East has transformed the problematic. The need for a systematic spirituality that can sort out the issues and relate them insightfully grows more urgent. In different ways, the thought of Bernard Lonergan, summarized in *Method in Theology,*[1] speaks to the present need. Here I shall suggest some of those ways.

Introduction: The Need for Theory

Spirituality is a broad field. It entails many practical issues. These include: prayer and how one does it, from vocal prayer and *lectio divina*

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