

Even though the olive crop fail,
and fields produce no harvest,
Even though flocks vanish from the folds
and stalls stand empty of cattle
Yet I will rejoice in the Lord. [Habakkuk 3: 17-18]

Tell the false prophets of easy good news, as Jeremiah told them, the city is to be cast down. But tell the prophets of gloom, as Jeremiah told them, 'houses and fields and vineyards shall yet again be bought' (Jer 32:15). There are still a billion blades of grass to rejoice in, and even if there be not, if we are driven back to the last wall of all, if we have only our own execution and that of the world before us, if even the last blade of grass turn black and wither, 'yet I will rejoice in the Lord'. Such is, I believe, 'the hope that is in us'.

1 In *The Observer*, 17 January 1982.

Turner on 'Operative Rituals': A Sociological Response

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In a rather bleak essay, Charles Davis observed in 1970 that 'the general verdict upon liturgical reform is that it has failed to solve the problem of worship in a secular age' and 'that the chief effect of the reforms has been to uncover an insoluble problem'.¹ Any sociological response to liturgical renewal came after the late sixties as a critical reaction to changes implemented as a result of Vatican II. There was certainly no sociological participation in the demands for liturgical change prior to 1963. As a result the Conciliar reforms did not so much answer a sociological scepticism as generate one that has developed increasingly since. The attempt to relate the shape of rite, to what were perceived as the cultural and social needs of a secular modern society, merged with a wish to maximise the active participation of the laity in the liturgy, whose simplicity and clarity of form, would enable a worshipping community to develop as a witness to an increasingly sceptical society.

Pre-Conciliar forms of rite were rigid in shape, objectively secured in complex rubrics, but were considered as implausible and irrelevant to contemporary needs. The tenor of the new rites was a

mixture of looser simplified rubrics, in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, 1969, matched to a sensitivity to pastoral and cultural needs. But this wish for some degree of adaptability (that satisfied neither radicals nor conservatives) pre-supposed some criteria of assessing changes in form as affecting local situations. If indigenization was to occur some form of systematic evaluation seemed desirable. Initially, the changes were met with indifference by sociologists of religion, who have displayed little interest in the social nature of liturgy since. This partly accounts for the paucity of systematic research studies on the effects of the liturgical changes and the degree to which they have fulfilled their goals. Opening rite out, giving pluralism a theological status and assuming that complex symbols and rituals were impediments to the faithful, pointed to a sociological response.

Liturgy as a mode of realizing the gift of faith requires some means of making it realisable and knowable in terms that can be considered socially plausible and authentic. Rite, at whatever theological level it is cast, has to have a social and cultural mode of delivery. The crucial question is how this is to be sociologically assessed in a way that does not effect a mistranslation of the basis of the liturgy?

A cultural dimension has been written into contemporary theological specifications for ritual efficacy. Success or failure is now tied to subjective performative criteria for evaluating practice. This raises the issue of how competing forms of rite are to be assessed? Seasoltz has suggested that pluralism, the unfinished business of liturgical reform, is seen as inherently heterodox by some Bishops. This suggests a conservative nostalgia clouding their theological judgment.² But sociologists such as Berger regard pluralism as a theological issue that undermines the plausibility structures of contemporary rite, and renders the pursuit of the transcendent all the more hazardous. Indeed, pluralism simply begs a question of the arbitration of the social basis of competing rites that also admits a sociological expectation of its resolution. This discipline cannot completely supply this, however, without dangers of mistranslation, as debates on relativism, rationality and context-free pre-suppositions, all indicate.

Yet if liturgy is to be related to social and cultural needs there has to be some expectation of sociological involvement in liturgical theology.³ Clearly there is a problem of marrying the differing methodological assumptions to the same issue of rite in the modern world. But at the moment relationships between theology and sociology over liturgy are divided if not in a state of cold warfare. Those sociologists and anthropologists who have written on rites

of the Anglican and Catholic Churches, such as Peter Berger, Mary Douglas, Victor Turner and David Martin, have been uniformly critical of the social pre-suppositions of liturgical renewal since the Council. Most writing on liturgy by sociologists has displayed varying degrees of sympathy for orthodox, conservative positions: This has surprised and annoyed some theologians who had expected progressive and socially relevant stances to win sociological approval.

It could be argued that a sociological defence of formal, invariant complex rituals, set in the ceremonial enactment of rich symbols and ornate rituals, simply reflects the spiritual and aesthetic preferences of particular sociologists, who all pick out different issues to criticise. It also could be said that the battle over the *Alternative Service Book*, that resulted in the *Prayer Book Protection Bill*, moved by Viscount Cranbourne in 1981 was a right-wing political means of controlling leftward tendencies of progressive Anglican clergy. Yet somehow these qualifications do not affect the main thrust of sociological critiques of current forms and practices of liturgy. Whilst they do parallel conservative objections, and implicitly endorse many of their stances, their frames of reference come from wider debates in anthropology on ritual, symbol, and their operative qualities in areas ranging from healing rites to the implications of ordinary language philosophy on social reasoning. This has reflected a fundamental shift in sociological attitudes to liturgical elements hitherto considered indefensible, and irrelevant.

Urban Holmes, a radical Anglican liturgist was one of the first to realise in 1973 that liturgical renewal came to fruition in the churches ten years too soon, and that there had been a lamentable "near miss" between a liturgical breakthrough and a turning point in the anthropology of religion'.⁴ Operative qualities of symbols, the experience they opened out, the imagination they excited, and the transcendent they sometimes touched became central matters of interest in philosophy of social science. Increasingly, sociology is concerned with what ritual effects in its own terms, and not with how it is to be understood according to some vaguely defined pre-suppositions of secular reasoning. Oddly, sociologists have endorsed the autonomous, distinctive, and non-reducible basis of rite precisely at a time when some theologians seemed to wish to dissolve such elements in the interests of some supposed philosophically based criterion of relevance to modern man. But above all, the sacred has emerged as a central consideration of sociological concerns, shorn of the pejorative overtones the concept previously has elicited in the discipline.

Some indication of the shift was Victor Turner's unexpected

anthropological endorsement of the Tridentine rite. In his essay 'Ritual, Tribal and Catholic' Turner compared the basis of Tridentine rites with the rituals of the Ndembu tribe by making use of Adrian Fortescue's *The Ceremonies of the Roman Rite Described* to show how they managed their differing criteria of complex enactment. Certainly understanding the two forms of rite showed no anthropological difficulty to Turner who found much to admire in both. Indeed, Turner stated in the essay that the 'notion that "the ordinary faithful" can only appreciate the "sacred" when it is packaged in "secular" wrappings . . . goes clean counter to all anthropological experience'.⁵

Some evidence is emerging to suggest that despite their stress on democratic participation and communality, the newer liturgical rites are estranging the working classes, and that many of the newer experiential groups are often self-indulgent lower middle class assemblies.⁶ The argument that simple rites and the pursuit of a rational intelligibility have disabled the pursuit of imaginative religious experience is well put by Luis Maldonado. He argues that the reforms were carried out on the basis of a cultural criterion that is now outdated. Indeed the criteria of the early sixties is now doubly outdated by the counter-cultural movement of the early seventies and the new era of conservatism of the early eighties. His criticisms of the new rites, come from within anthropology, a discipline he feels, 'least suspect of being conservative, (which shows) how ridiculous are the postures of a certain clerical "progressivism" bent either on axing symbols or on creating new ones'.⁷ The crucial factor to Maldonado is the failure of the reforms to give ritual its central place in liturgical practice. Finally, it should be noted that whatever the theological lack of interest in sociological reflections on liturgy, the subject is of increasing domestic importance to the discipline for the many issues it raises of form and content, symbol and action, and the meaning and interpretation of ritual without mistranslation. The issue of liturgy also has profound implications for the growing debate on the place of hermeneutics within sociological theory. Unfortunately, it cannot be said that theologians have taken much notice of this shift in interest within sociological approaches to liturgy. Those who have, have either been highly defensive, or have missed the point of the sociological implications for understanding of rite. For this reason Denys Turner's response to sociological interest in liturgy is much to be welcomed, even if objections can be raised to many of his conclusions.⁸

Turner sets the operative factors of rite within a Thomist understanding of the Eucharist, that allows him to mark out the efficacy

of the social with clear objective qualifications about what is signified in the liturgy. He is correct to emphasise the divine autonomy of sacramental grace that allows him to criticise misguided assumptions that somehow rite 'manufactures' a Holy gift. This has been the central fallacy of the liturgical renewal movement. Sacramental efficacy is fused to its instrumental form of delivery but this raises a peculiar problematic for sociology. Yet because he sees elements of contradiction in the operative effects of rituals, and what they signify, he feels there is a role for the sociologist to comment. His separation of the conditions governing the social efficacy of rite from those governing its canonical validity are acceptable to a limited degree, as we shall argue later.

But our concern is purely with the social parameters of the sacramental instrument and its implications for the credible basis of ritual performance. Many of his theological qualifications to sociological interventions are valuable, and indeed uncontentious. Sociologists do admit profound limitations to their discipline in discussing theological issues of suffering, grace, redemption and forgiveness. Most would accept that in handling liturgical issues, they are looking at social forms of rite that domesticate and realise these sacerdotal functions in a manner that is repetitious, yet is incompletely understandable in sociological terms. Indeed, the presuppositions of a theological nature specified by Turner could be fitted to the sociological task of understanding any cosmic belief system and its social mode of delivery. Finally, he is to be commended for his criticism of bidding prayers that set up foolish expectations and genuflections to the issue of unemployment.

Less acceptable is his discussion of 'bastard rituals', and the sociological task of somehow legitimating their mode of delivery. Fundamentally, we do not link the ritual to the resolution of ideological deceptions; to the material conditions of its delivery; nor to the ruptures that routinely parodies the sacramental character of what the rite is supposed to exhibit. For us, rite proclaims the numinous and the transcendent. The application of a criterion of ideology (in Turner's terms) to ritual efficacy is misleading and misplaced. We differ also with Turner over the sociological understanding of performative contradictions (which are similar to Goffman's notion of ceremonial profanations) and the problems of ambiguity these pose for rituals. Turner sees these as routinely effecting ruptures with a social reality, where moral demands become disguised in misguided self-deceiving genuflections of concern in liturgy – a form of ritual opiate. This ambiguous misplaced attempt at relevance to social issues causes him to see such rites as bastard rituals, whose contradictory nature precludes them from being modes of

sacramental delivery. Even God cannot overcome their illegitimate nature. Turner can defend a theological position on the autonomy of Divine Grace, and at the same time castigate certain forms of rite as illegitimate. Because he denies an occasionalism in the delivery of sacramental grace, he is therefore committed to the problem of illegitimate instrumental modes of delivery as suggested by Aquinas. The fusion of grace to the social causes problems.

The outcome of Turner's argument is to suggest that ideological contradictions misguidedly imported in ritual effect a routine disguise of the moral implications of what is condemned in the liturgy. But Turner's approach generates endless ideological problems of arbitration between claims that forms are ruptures. By admitting such a criterion to ritual efficacy, theoretically no form of rite could over-ride hostile critical claims of routinely disguising social reality. Turner's criterion of ritual would make them all ultimately bastardised in terms of the religious and sacerdotal values they try to wrest from the secular and the literal. By relating ritual to the ideological, Turner begs questions about the sociological nature of both. Depending on his definition, each has a different criterion of rupture. Since these are seen as breakages with a social reality, that is ideologically constituted, the issue arises of what criteria will be privileged, and which pre-supposition of wholeness is to be adhered to, either in terms of what has been cast asunder or which has been redeemed by the resolution of a performative contradiction through social criticism. How can Turner set up a sociological language to arbitrate between different ideological claims, when the outcome of liturgy is by definition ambiguous (in social terms) and the forms are so potentially unstable in terms of taste, aesthetic inclinations, and doctrinal beliefs? Feminism can claim affront by the exclusion of women from serving, or of the realities sexist language routinely disguises; specism can claim continued references to the slaughter of lambs and redemption pose ambiguities the liturgy routinely smooths over; the ecology movement can likewise focus on an over-emphasis on wine as against the more ideologically satisfying use of water. All can write claims to affront into liturgical forms and assert demands for change according to some privileged view of reality they claim has been disguised in bastard rites. All can claim the sacramental instruments are false and illegitimate.

Turner is posing sociology a question it cannot answer, because it does not see the issue of ritual efficacy and performative contradictions in those terms. If a bastard rite is an instrumental failure that constrains God, why then is the sociologist so lucky as to be able to redeem and make whole in ritual that which He cannot?

Furthermore Turner never looks at the issue of varying levels of ambiguity and offence against differing elements of the ritual. Even if a sociologist accepted his point about ruptures, the level of the violation would have to be examined in some way.

Another difficulty arises over what Turner means by ideological. This relates to an issue of what is intentionally disguised, what is mystified, such as in the issue of false consciousness, or such that, by definition, cannot be understood. We would suggest that the latter applies, and assert that the unutterable is what liturgy routinely handles and effects intermittent contact with. If by ideology, Turner is referring to some liberating function, this would become an eschatological issue that would preclude sociological participation. Ideology is seldom tied to the issue of ritual by sociologists, except in a crude sense as effecting an opium of the masses. We would admit the term 'ideological' to liturgy in Ricoeur's usage when he speaks of it as a mode of reflecting distance that separates social memory from an inaugural event to be (imperfectly) repeated.⁹ Any ideological claim can be written into ritual form as a moral expectation that liturgy should endorse. One is safe in the knowledge that because the efficacy of rite is ultimately internal, the petition can never be found wanting. The trouble with Denys Turner's use of the occasionalism of grace and the interchangeable nature of the sacramental instrument is that it makes social forms random and their efficacy subject to ideological choice (informed by sociological reasoning). If we do not accept his definition of ideological, we could freely add in our own to argue that contemporary society suffers a rupture from medieval values that might offer redemptive possibilities, and suggest that as a minimal concession the Sarum rite be at least restored.

All social forms of liturgy cannot be equally efficacious, even at a sociological level. They vary in degrees of efficiency in realising and making credible a belief system, hence the variety of opinion, conservative and radical on the social nature of liturgy. To a sociologist, the fundamental issue is not the management of some pre-emptive criterion of performative contradiction tied to some ill-defined notion of ideology. Rather his concern is with the means by which ambiguities are to be routinely coped with in a form that renders the operative qualities of liturgical action present. It is these qualities of content that give to rite its non-reducible defining characteristics that also render the form capable of being believed to be credible by the actors. It is because the basis of liturgy is incredible in social terms, that some form of rupture is necessary with the cultural reality within which it is enacted. Whereas Turner criticises an occasionalism of grace, we would

want to widen it in terms of some characterising experience, unutterable, and numinous that marks rite apart and also renders it a risky venture that might not 'work'. Liturgy does not have to import ideological genuflections into rite to encounter ambiguities and to face charges of ruptures with reality. Ambiguities and ruptures arise from within the ritual process by the nature of what it confronts. Rite in itself does not guarantee the social effects of what it signifies, a point of Turner's we accept. There is a theological defence of this position (Turner's reference to instrumentalism) that also is enforced from a sociological understanding of rite.

In our argument the social is incomplete and is filled in liturgy by some unspecifiable sense of contact with signals of transcendence. The spiritual, it can be asserted, inhabits what is inchoate in the social. There is no guarantee that liturgical form will elicit a responding message, usually a nuministic quality in silence or in the darkness. Liturgies are ambiguous by the content they effect, and this sense of mystery fulfills the basis of the form. The sense of the mysterious can be manipulated, but in so doing there is always the risk of an empty silence or ceremonial, which makes the form a literal proclamation of human agency. Because of the nature of this content, whose relationship with form is ambiguous, a particular type of tact characterises liturgical management whereby mistakes (violations of working assumptions of the process of the rite) cause dangers of parody to intrude, and the literal basis of the transaction to be resurrected. Performative contradictions occur in liturgical enactment when social and ideological elements are not filtered out.¹⁰ Certainly, mystification can generate ideological blindness and deceptions, as Turner indicates. But in ritual form mystifications are Janus faced. They effect a marking out of the non-reducible properties of liturgy, and that which can be socially objectified as a basis of response. Mystifications are elements that give liturgy the basis of repetition. They generate curiosity. But they also are a means of marking off the profane, and constituting the sacred. This is done by way of ritual petition, but not in some manner that constrains the basis of Divine intervention. Mystifications make ritual credible. Their ambiguous nature sits with the symbols and the actions that wait to be acted on, by a surplus of meaning, elements added that are unutterable, autonomous and incredible.

Because mystifications in ritual are ambiguous (they can falsify the social basis of the form, or can enable its sacred qualities to be marked), it is difficult to see how Turner can tie these to issues of sacramental efficacy. The sociological basis to assessing

the instrumental form of the sacrament is missing, hence why the discipline is so unwilling to become involved in resolving instrumental issues of grace in ritual. There is no sociological language for the issue or otherwise of grace. Because it cannot describe in minimum or maximum form the theological relationship of institution to shape of rite, and its validity or efficacy, it avoids sacramental issues, but looks at the mode of handling experiences of the divine, as expressed in the connection between management of the ritual and the sense of the numinous it habitually attempts to realise. Unfortunately, the operative in liturgy cannot be confined to its relationship to ideological factors, for if this were the case sociological means of resolution would be straightforward. These ambiguities with content form the basis of the hazarding movement of the actors through the form of rite, and it is this presupposition any sociology of liturgy must start with if it is to avoid mistranslation or pre-emptive definitions of what the process ought to be about.

Some distinctive non-reductionist basis has to be marked out for liturgy to be understood in its own terms. Some social form has to be available to sociological modes of understanding. Many transactions in contemporary society can be deemed as ritualistic and can also be linked to the ideological. The social in liturgy, however, is not a complete explanation of its transactions, for a truth is affirmed that transcends the form of rite to give it a felt content, a distinctive "grip". Sociologists emphasise the transcendent in rite, the nuministic in Otto's terms, as its incomplete dimension, for otherwise Durkheim's view of ritual as reducible to collective effervescence would prevail. To a sociologist, liturgy is a means of handling the intangible.

Symbols, actions, and the social forms used are polyvalent in meaning and problematic in social effect, intended and unintended. They are supposed to represent efficiently a non-empirical reality. Symbols, as Ricoeur suggests are all expressions of double meanings, wherein a primary meaning refers to a second level never given directly. Furthermore, symbols carry for Ricoeur a meaning surplus whose adjudication is problematic in social terms.¹¹ Because symbols can be detached from their referents their potential for enhancing performative contradictions are great. As Rappaport graphically put it: 'Lies are the bastard off-spring of symbols'.¹² Equally actions can embody the "wrong elements": concern with detail can point to an obsessional neurosis, or it might display a necessary care over details for the efficient regulation of great complex ceremonial services. Performative contradictions, and impurities might be discoveries for theologians. For sociologists, they

are expected outcomes of liturgy, and the issue for them is how these contradictions are handled routinely in a manner compatible with the aims of the rite.

Every liturgy carries a risk of parody by the proximity of the forms used to competing secular models deemed to be profane. A high mass tries to avoid charges of being an aesthetic treat for the cognoscenti. Radical liturgies generate worries about charges of self-indulgent conviviality and the pliability of the shape of the assembly for the enlightened. Routinising contradictions can reflect ideological dangers where the mode invalidates the message. But equally forms can be self-defeating as ritual if they do *not* confront and routinise their contradictions of delivery within the enactment of the rite. A sociological approach to rite reflects therefore the management of an endemic ambiguity in liturgy, and the polyvalent nature of the actions and symbols that proclaim another reality to the social. For that reason, elements such as invariance, objectification and hierarchy fulfill specific defensive functions in rite that might contradict wider ideological values.

Social responses to the operative centre on its role in making present the visible means by which the institution of the Eucharist is believed to have been effected. It is not about imposing necessary and sufficient social criteria over God's redemptive gift. Rather it is about the conditions of social actualisation that forms a basis of response amongst the actors in a liturgy. Worship is a two way process. But the problem of coming to terms with its mysterious nature is our problem not God's. Rituals have to repeat, to fulfil the edict of Eucharistic remembrance. As public formal instruments they attempt to purify themselves of unacceptable aspects of the social, profane, or inconsistent. Any intended regulation of social response is to what is assumed to be objectified in the sense of its being given, a fixed pre-supposition, such as Aquinas stipulates. But if rite is matching what is visibly known to what is believed but invisible, the experience it produces of a mysterious content must be matched to forms equally characterisable. Fusing form to content in an operative manner has wide acceptance in sociology. Thus, reflecting Casel, Ladrière suggests the most fundamental aspect of liturgical language is 'presentification' of an efficacious reality, that has its own operativity.¹³ There is a necessary dimension of mystery in liturgical form, not so much mysterious and exclusive, as felt and inclusive.

Liturgy contradicts everyday life, not accidentally, but by its nature in postulating and effecting the accomplishment of a grace fused to a social form in an operative manner of interconnection. We generate our response and realise the basis of our belief by the

credibility of that which partly, socially, has been presented to us. Action and intention merge in an operative fashion over what is believed to have been accomplished. Sociology starts with that assumption, the belief that those participating in liturgy believe they have been acted on. Somehow, it has to take account of the dialectical nature of liturgical action and its indeterminate basis of response. Sociology's task is to demonstrate how this mode of response is to be characterised as an accomplished social construction.

Turner correctly feels that perlocutionary aspects of liturgy fall into a sociological domain. This approach has been already taken up by Rappaport and Skorupski who partly endorse theological forms of argument in a secular context. What they are concerned with however is the prevention of incredible ruptures or disbeliefs through the effects of formalised routinisation. Ruptures can be about liturgical fictions but they are also about endemic factors of rite that form has to distance the participants from. An ideal of self emerges intentionally despite the ambiguous social forces of rite because of what it changes when operative approaches to ritual are accounted for. Skorupski has indicated that operative efficacy is not causal efficacy, but is a function of the authority of agent producing that which is said to have been produced.¹⁴ The question of the operative in ritual points to a mechanism of self-realisation, the changing from something in the social to something else, in this context, the sacred. This then supposes that there is a routinised rupture with the social to effect and proclaim a new felt condition, where the intervening but indeterminate variable is the action of grace. The numinous can be a felt sense of realisation of that grace. Something more than the routinised abolition of ruptures by ideological fiat is required. The liturgical renewal movement has made a fatal assumption (which Denys Turner implicitly criticises): that socially ineffective liturgies are assumed to be spiritually counter-productive. The quest for liturgical renewal has been bedevilled by misplaced sociological expectations.

Actions in rite are objectified in terms that are a function of the need to indicate assent and to generate a social response. Rite is rendered dependent on theological efficacy, and the social is a condition of it being known. By deferring to grace and belief, and by emphasising the non-reductive experiential dimensions of rite, a sociologist can avoid charges of an anthropomorphic explanation. Thus, Stanner has noted ritual acts are really 'incomplete transactions with the supernatural'¹⁶ It is when they are rendered complete in form they become meaningless, both to sociology,

and ultimately to their worshippers. To close forms of rite to the empirical is a fundamental and necessary contradiction that keeps it open to the sacred. Adherence to an operative approach to liturgy not only allows an agnosticism over grace to co-exist with a social explanation, but also underlines the degree to which form and content are fused in ritual acts of expression. There might well be excessive references in sociology to formal invariant public qualities of ritual. These could be the basis of a discipline that seeks to find consistency in an ambiguous act that renders the real unreal. Invariance is a dimension that makes ambiguity credible. Ambiguity reflects a divided human nature journeying in curiosity. Some liturgical ruptures are inherently ambiguous and are not capable of complete sociological resolution nor should they be.

Ritual functions to manifest a cosmic order the proclamation of which leads to solidarity and community as an effect of what is done. As the repetitious realisation of an archaic charter event, liturgy has by its nature a traditional texture that exercises a constraint on the degree to which forms of rite are pliable. An operative approach looks at the domestication of the sacred in the here and now. Content and form are fused in a sacerdotal manner and credibility is sustained by the givenness of the rite. Both Rappaport and Tambiah see ritual factors sustaining contradictions in a meaningful manner. Thus, surplus or redundant actions function dialectically in ritual elaboration. But as Tambiah indicates this excess functions with a condensation and fusion characterising ritual action.¹⁷ His study of Buddhist rituals shows ritual repetitions yielding a cumulative effect through opposition and contrast in one superimposition of successive sequences.¹⁸ Useless effects contradict a sense of utility of the particular, which if disregarded allows the emergence of a holistic property of rite. The emergent pattern of the tribal and the 'thick' produces a grip, a sinking into the totality of effect. Ritual is the masking of reality in a theological expectation. Repetition demands a routinised mode, not to effect an ideological reproduction such as Bourdieu envisaged, that curtails freedom of choice, but rather in a ritual form to realise its expression. Routinisation gets ritual off a secular ground, by enabling private intentions to be confirmed in public discourse. Sociologists have access to modes of prayer, posture, intonation, but can say nothing about their purity or quality over and above what people reflect on as having been collectively accomplished. The absence of an empirical effect on rite is not a sociological problem. Indeed, studies of ritual often emphasise their indeterminacy as a necessary dimension of communication.¹⁹

If at a methodological level, ritual has an indeterminate incom-

plete dimension in sociological terms, it is possible to suggest that the meaning of the rite can only be completed by accepting an apophatic element in its form. An apophatic aura to rite at least places it in an operative frame acceptable both to a sociologist (admitting the uncertainty of outcome of rites in general) and to a theologian, who would wish to write in the sacred and mysterious basis of the Eucharist. Casel's approach to the Eucharist complements such a sociological approach by fusing mystery into the operative dimension of the form of rite. Turner tends to confuse objective factors of rite as theologically given with those that have to be objectified as a basis of ritual movement.

Unfortunately, Casel's interest in fusing form and content to mystery pre-dates Austin, and ordinary language philosophies in general. His attempt to give an autonomy to mystery and Eucharistic presence, against rational expectations, would elicit a warm contemporary sociological response. For him, acts are operative, not only as tangible manifestations of a grace, but also as a means of realisation of the pledge of the gift. Sacerdotal actions make present that which is completed in theological intention by a congregational response of acceptance and growth. Thus as Casel observes 'when we pray holy words, the saving reality of which they tell becomes a presence amongst us'.²⁰ What is problematic about ruptures and ambiguities in rite is to argue at a sociological level why they breach theologically necessary conditions of enactment.

It is important to remember that performative utterances in rituals, as Finnegan indicates, describe a process through which certain obligations are accepted and responded to in terms that realise the beliefs they proclaim.²¹ It is what the actor is enabled to effect that allows the sociologist to describe what is believed to have been effected. To suggest that ideologies incorporated into liturgical routines, as Turner argues, generate ruptures with social reality to the degree that effective means of response to social crises are disguised, overlooks the issue of theological hazards routinely incorporated into forms of belief. Hamnett has recently argued that Christian rites run acute risks in the management of doctrinal contradictions imposed by the twin dangers of Pelagianism (for Catholicism) and Docetism (for Calvinists) which can reflect either presumption according to action or inaction in ritual.²² These pose risks of expressing undesirable qualities in ritual enactment, and a presumptuous form of instrumentalism that renders the liturgical act theologically illegitimate.

Actors coping with liturgy often have to deal with ambiguities posed by the mode of expression or conveyance of grace. Whilst accepting the gift of the latter, they might find the means of the

former unacceptable or offensive. Ruptures can occur in ritual when the referent is substituted to effect a symbol that started off from another visible base. Thus a number of men and women find female extraordinary ministers of communion disturbing, for they re-present the operationalisation of a means of delivering a gift whose institution proceeds from a sacerdotal male, whose nexus of symbolism is entirely different. It is true that the ambiguity can be instantly resolved by rendering both open to both sexes, but this would simply transfer the ambiguity to wider hermeneutic, doctrinal and historical issues. If Turner argues that the occasionalism of God's grace makes forms of rite random, and that even He cannot over-ride bastard rites, men can hardly overcome imperfect rituals that pose ambiguous impediments fused intractably to the delivery of Eucharistic gifts. Some elements of ritual are polyvalent and indeterminate by definition, in that the actor's intentions indicate the means by which the ambiguity is to be resolved. A white surplice denotes purity of intention, the regulation of personal choice, but equally it can be seen as a badge of vanity, and the proclamation of impious deceptions. Because the issue of liturgical ambiguity is ambiguous, sociological interventions have to proceed carefully.

Sociology can proceed on the basis that the beliefs, over whose pre-suppositions it cannot exercise a privileged form of arbitration, are socially describable in their consequences. But since these forms are random, incomplete and polyvalent it has to force them into some describable form. Rappaport provides a solution when he suggests that 'the unfalsifiable supported by the undeniable yields the unquestionable, which transforms the dubious, the arbitrary, and the conventional into the correct, the necessary and the natural'.²³ It is what can be rendered objective that enables effects to be described. Sociological responses to liturgical action have to return the issue to the transcendent it proclaims. The discipline always negates criteria or attempts that do otherwise than discount the social. As Berger suggests 'the genius of sociology is negative, and, paradoxically, it is as negation that sociology can make its best contribution to any positive cause'.²⁴

This point applies especially to the efforts of the liturgical renewal movement in the last few decades which have elicited much sociological hostility. 'Progressive' versions of liturgical forms, despite their supposed relevance and shaping to contemporary necessities and values are paradoxically indescribable in sociological terms. Their modes of regulation of rite are so socially fluid, their presuppositions become so tied to immediate communal inclinations, and their pliability of form are so prone to reductionist

characterisations that they become dangerously close to Durkheim's notion of ritual as a form of collective self-reflection. Because these rites are so fluid, and prone to discretion (in that subjective inclinations cancel objective elements in the detail of the ritual) their procedures are extremely difficult to characterise in ethnographic terms. For instance, if one compares the detail available in ritual accounts of the Azande or the Ndembu (to name a few classical studies) with what is available at an informal folk mass in an average parish, one can begin to understand sociological problems of coping with sacramental instruments. The procedures of the former can be described and rendered intelligible despite the incredible nature of the belief system they attempt to realise. Mistakes, tacit assumptions and violations of ritual purity can be marked out, so that content is fused to form in an operative manner where the instrumental nature of the belief is objectively secured in an unambiguous manner.

It is ironic that the whole debate on ritual efficacy in the philosophy of social science has centred on the practices of some isolated 'primitive societies' to the virtual neglect of the products of the liturgical renewal movement supposedly concerned to make forms of rite credible to contemporary secular thought. Because sociology has a general interest in religion, some concern with liturgy had to arise, if nothing else, by default. There are many questions liturgy raises that have a domestic interest within sociology. But if sociological studies of liturgy are to proceed, some attention will have to be paid to the issue of the minimum and maximum forms of action that render the Eucharist valid or invalid as a rite. Queries to theologians, usually result in references to intention, the wider powers of the Church, but no stipulation of what has to be done within the rite that makes it an instrumental success or failure for what the Sacrament realises. Until that issue is resolved, sociologists are likely to remain muted about the instrumental nature of Sacramental efficacy, and, to concentrate on the sense of religious experience, imagination, and feelings rites occasion. Certainly, they will continue to criticise misleading expectations being awarded to the social in rite; the mishandling of the ritual basis of liturgy; and misguided attempts to render forms relevant, representative and clear of ideological impurities, feminist, ecological or otherwise. Until theologians cease imputing an unthinking conservative (political and theological) bias to sociologists, the dialogue about liturgical efficacy in social terms will never really get going. In the meantime, as some sociologists lean towards the formal, the describable and the ceremonially rich, a sneaking nostalgia for Sarum rites might develop as part of the agenda of the

indicate the means by which the ambiguity is to be resolved. A debate.

- 1 Charles Davis, 'Ghetto or Desert: Liturgy in a Cultural Dilemma' *Studia Liturgica*, Vol 7, 1970, p 10.
- 2 Kevin Seasoltz, 'From Liturgical Reform to Christian Renewal. Unfinished Business: I' *The Clergy Review*, Vol LXVII, No 3, March 1982, 92.
- 3 Kevin Seasoltz, 'Anthropology and Liturgical Theology: Searching for a Compatible Methodology' in David Power and Luis Maldonado, eds, *Liturgy and Human Passage*, Edinburgh. T & T Clark Ltd, 1979, pp 3-13.
- 4 Urban Holmes, 'Liminality and Liturgy' *Worship*, Vol 47, No 7, 1973, p 386.
- 5 Victor Turner, 'Ritual, Tribal and Catholic' *Worship*, Vol 50, No 6, 1976, 524.
- 6 See Michael Hornsby-Smith, 'The Statistics of the Church' and Antony Archer 'The Church and Social Class' in John Cummings and Paul Burns, eds *The Church Now*, Dublin, Gill & Macmillan, 1980, pp 55-65 and pp 157-160. See also evidence in Michael Hornsby-Smith and Raymond Lee, *Roman Catholic Opinion: A Study of Roman Catholics in England and Wales in the 1970s*, Guildford: University of Surrey, 1979, pp 71-74 and 127-128. It must be admitted that evidence to support this point is only suggestive, but this is an issue that requires urgent sociological study.
- 7 Luis Maldonado, 'The Church's Liturgy: Present and Future' in David Tracy, Hans Kung, and Johann Metz, eds *Towards Vatican III. The work that needs to be done*, Dublin, Gill & Macmillan, 1978, p 232.
- 8 Denys Turner, 'Sacrament and Ideology' *New Blackfriars*, Vol 64, No 754, April 1983, pp 171-180.
- 9 Paul Ricoeur, 'Science and Ideology' in John B Thompson, ed and trans. *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, Cambridge University Press, 1981, p 225.
- 10 See my essay 'Competitive Assemblies of God: Lies and Mistakes in Liturgy', *Research Bulletin*, University of Birmingham: Institute for the Study of Worship and Religious Architecture, 1981, pp 20-69. Some elements of the above response are further explored in 'Liturgy, Silence and Ambiguity: The ritual management of a real absence'.
- 11 T M Van Leeuwen, *The Surplus of Meaning. Ontology and Eschatology in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 1981, pp 110-116.
- 12 Roy Rappaport, 'Sanctity and Lies in Evolution' in *Ecology, Meaning and Religion*, Richmond, California, North Atlantic Books, 1979, p 226. This essay taken with 'The Obvious Aspects of Ritual' represents the most sophisticated sociological approach to the operative aspects of liturgy.
- 13 Jean Ladriere, 'The performativity of Liturgical Language' in *Liturgical Experience of Faith*, Concilium, New York, Herder & Herder, 1973. pp 59-60.
- 14 John Skorupski, *Symbol and Theory*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976, pp 102-103.
- 15 *Ibid.* p 114.
- 16 Quoted in S J Tambiah, *A Performative Approach to Ritual*, London, British Academy, 1979, p 150.
- 17 *Ibid.* p 131.
- 18 *Ibid.* p 149.
- 19 Gilbert Lewis, *Day of Shining Red: An essay in understanding Ritual*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1960, Chapter 2, pp 6-38.
- 20 Odo Casel, *The Mystery of Christian Worship*, London, Darton, Longman & Todd, 1962, p 163.

- 21 Ruth Finnegan, 'How to do things with words: performative utterances among the Limba of Sierra Leone' *Man*, N. S. Vol 4, No 4, December 1969, pp 537-552.
- 22 Ian Hamnett, 'Pelagianism and Idolatry' Paper read to the Sociology of Religion Conference of the British Sociological Association, Bristol, 1982.
- 23 Roy Rappaport, 'The Obvious Aspects of Ritual' *op. cit.* p 217.
- 24 Peter Berger and Hansfried Kellner, *Sociology Reinterpreted*, London, Penguin Books, 1982, p 13.

REVIEWS

JAMES FITZJAMES STEPHEN AND THE CRISIS OF VICTORIAN THOUGHT, by James A Colaiaco. Macmillan Press, pp 266. £20.00.

'Nothing of mine is ever popular', Stephen wrote in 1890, 'Indeed, I do not know how it should be, for my object has always been to show the weak side of all opinions which embody popular sentimentality of any sort'. His showings were generally made in newspaper and periodical articles. The habit of writing such pieces for the *Cornhill*, the *Saturday Review*, the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and *Fraser's Magazine*, had for him, his brother observed, the charm of a vice; 'it gave him the same pleasure that other men derive from dram-drinking'. In the hundreds of these trenchant articles Stephen declared his convictions that 'freedom depends on the political supremacy of the upper and middle classes', that Dickens enjoyed 'a very wide and pernicious political and social influence', and that the doctrine of eternal damnation was 'so wicked and so cruel that I would as soon teach my children to lie and steal as to believe in it'.

To identify Stephen's individual temper in time when our culture was under 'the threat of democracy', Dr Colaiaco institutes a set of contrasts and comparisons with acknowledged great men, with J S Mill, Carlyle, and Arnold, and with lesser persons, with J H Newman, Buckle, and Tom Paine. He is especially successful in showing how like were the liberalism of Mill and Stephen. Neither believed that 'a numerical aristocracy' would rise above mediocrity, except, as Mill said, in so far as they 'let themselves be guided (which in

their best times they always have done) by the counsels and influence of a more highly gifted and instructed Few'. Those who think Stephen's *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity* an attack against Mill's *On Liberty* are properly rebuked for their simplicity. 'Mill was the only writer on the subject with whom he agreed sufficiently to disagree profitably'. But Stephen did not care for that 'want of humour' which led Mill into a very mean view of contemporary British society. To Stephen it seemed that 'the commonplaces about the advantages of parliamentary government, a free press, and all the rest of it, are in the main true', and further that 'no nation is so logical as the English nation'. He pointed to the sequence of the nation's being converted to belief in political economy and its being the only nation in the world which established free trade. Such a social structure, inhabited by such persons was doing 'one of the greatest works that was ever done in the world'.

Stephen's enthusiasm is rebuked in the comparison with Matt Arnold. Dr Colaiaco starts from the odd assumption that Stephen was devoid of the finesse of the man who so roughly divided his contemporaries into 'Barbarians', 'Philistines' and 'Populace'. Stephen was certainly as concerned as Arnold for the enlargement of the nation's education. He was Secretary of that Newcastle Commission for which Arnold worked as a Schools' Inspector. And for the preservation of traditional