

Rituals

Lecture 8

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1

What is Ritual?

“Rituals are symbolic, routine, and repetitive activities and actions through which we make connections with what we consider to be the valuable dimensions of life.”

Ring et al (1998), p.73.

A religious ritual can be defined as an agreed-on and formalized pattern of ceremonial movements and verbal expressions carried out in a sacred context.

James C. Livingston

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2

Types of Rituals

- Life-Cycle Rituals
 - These refer to rites of passage to mark the different stages of life (Initiation, Marriage, etc).
- Life-Crisis Rituals
 - These intend to re-establish order amidst the chaos caused by crises like sickness and death (Anointing of sick, Funeral rites, etc).
- Periodic Rituals
 - These mark the different times and seasons in the life of the community (harvest, liturgical year, sacrifice)

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3

Structure of Rites of Passage

Arnold van Gennep's (1873-1957) three phases in a rite of passage:

1. Separation

- Separation or detachment of the individual or group from the previous status – often marked by a minor ritual (bath) or physical isolation, accompanied by a guide.

2. Transition (Liminality)

- An ambiguous phase without the old status and the new phase not yet conferred. The person is “betwixt and between” (Victor Turner). A stage of temptation and discernment!

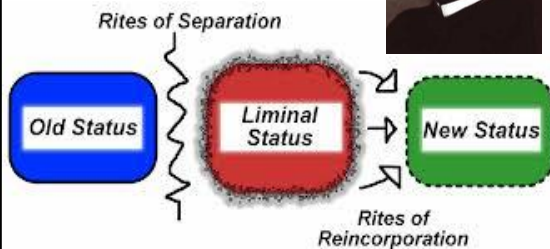
3. Incorporation

- New status is conferred and welcomed back to the community; often name is changed to mark the new identity.

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4

Arnold van Gennep's 3 phases in a rite of passage



5

Stages of Sacrificial Ritual

1. Separation – a breach of relationship

- Whether the source of the separation is an ailing deity or king (Frazer), sin (Robertson Smith), a state of impurity (Hubert and Mauss), a rift in the clan (Durkheim), or a general sense of lack or disorder (Valeri), dissociation is linked to an explainable problem.

2. Sacrificial Event

- Meaning of sacrifice is brought out by the ritual itself and by the symbolic character of the object of sacrifice. A consecration of the object takes place in order to lift it from the profane world yet still have the offering serve as a bridge to the sacred.

3. Reestablishment of the Relationship

- Consummation by fire, or consumed as food by the sacrificers.

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6

Functions of Sacrificial Ritual

Dual functions (according to Robert Daly):

1. Horizontal dimension: Among groups of people

- The horizontal function affects the strictly socio-political and economic realm of society, and is operative implicitly.

2. Vertical Dimension: Between the sacrificers and their deity(s)

- The vertical dimension is the deepening of the relationship with the divine. It is the hope of the sacrificer that the sacrifice will win the divine good will.

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7