CHAPTER THREE
TOWARDS A LITURGICAL THEORY OF THE INCARNATED MIND. A NON-REDUCTIVE NATURALIST VIEW

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1. INTRODUCTION

Since the Second Vatican Council, there has been an anthropological shift in liturgical science, as in Catholic theology generally (Lukken 1999, 311). The focus shifted to the embodied human actor. The intention is to close the gap between transcendence and immanence, between divine actions and human actions. At the same time we need to recognise God’s free and merciful initiative in coming to our world (Lukken 2001, 160). But how do we do this without opening up a new gap between the gift of God’s grace (opus operatus) and human actions (opus operantis) in Christian ritual? This is a crucial problem of sacramental theology. It can only be solved if the ritual itself is the mediation of God’s free gift (Schillebeeckx 2000, 178). The opus operantis (i.e. the ritual performed by human beings) must be part of the opus operatus and not merely an appendage to it.¹ The gap between God’s actions and human actions will never be bridged completely. Every bridge we build will be secondary to the gap, which is fundamental.

Cognitive science of religion offers a new theory of ritual activity, which might provide a sounder anthropological basis for this theological problem.² It anchors ritual actions in people’s mental functioning,

¹ According to Chauvet, an objectivist interpretation of the sacraments was developed in the Scholastic period (12th–13th century. ‘The sacraments are regarded less as revelatory signs than as operative means of salvation’ (Chauvet 2001, xiv). This has led to questionable representations of the ex opere operato of sacraments as instrumental, remedial or germinal. The term ‘ex opere operato’ is difficult to translate. Chauvet suggests rendering it as ‘by the very fact that the (sacramental) act is (understood: validly, legitimately) accomplished’ (Chauvet 2001, xv, note 1). Chauvet warns that this formula should not be misinterpreted as referring to some sort of magic. It indicates that God is sovereignly free to give his grace to humankind.

² Most Catholic liturgists who want to renew sacramental theology in the spirit of the post-Vatican II anthropological shift draw their anthropological insights from philosophy
that is “deeply into the bone” (Grimes 2000a). Cognitive science of religion takes a naturalistic view of an incarnated mind, which expresses itself in rituals and ritualising processes. We use the term ‘incarnated mind’ because it offers both a theological and an anthropological slant on ritual actions. Incarnation refers to the body (carnis) as the ground of all human actions, and to the theological notion of God becoming human in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Not all naturalistic views of religion are open to the idea of divine action within human action. One has to distinguish between reductive and non-reductive naturalist views of religion in general, and ritual actions in particular (Chesnik 2002; Goodson 2003). Reductive views in cognitive science of religion ‘reduce’ religion to the mind (see e.g. Newberg & D’Aquili 2001). We will discuss this approach at the end of the chapter. For the moment it suffices to say that we settle for a non-reductive naturalist view capable of accommodating the insider perspective of the religious ritual participant, who relates to some divine actor in embodied ritual actions.

The chapter is structured as follows. First we define religious rituals as the coalescence of divine and human action—or, more precisely, as divine actions working through human actions (section 2). Here we dwell on the aforementioned theological problem of anchoring God’s act of grace in human ritual activity. Next, we present a theory of the way the incarnated mind works in ritual actions. We draw on the cognitive theory of participants’ competence at ritual forms, developed by E. Thomas Lawson and Robert N. McCauley (Lawson & McCauley 1990; McCauley & Lawson 2002) (section 3). On the basis of Lawson and McCauley’s theoretical assumptions we formulate research questions regarding to the role of emotions in rituals. We gathered data from Dutch participants in the (Catholic) World Youth Days in Toronto in July 2002. We focussed on their experience of the open air mass celebrated by the pope at the end of World Youth Days. In January 2003 a retention test was administered to the same participants. The results of this research are reported in section 4. The chapter ends with an evaluation and discussion of the results (section 5). We evaluate some assumptions of Lawson and McCauley’s cognitive theory of ritual competence (5.1), and consider the possibility of a non-reductive naturalist view of ritual competence in liturgical science (5.2).

(e.g. semiotics, phenomenology). Cognitive science of religion has the advantage of providing a solid empirical foundation for theories of ritual actions.
What do we mean by ritual actions? There appears to be broad consensus among scholars in both ritual studies (Bell 1992; 1997) and liturgics (Lukken 1999; Post 2001) that ritual actions cannot be sharply defined. The term refers to a category of human actions which, on the basis of a family likeness (in Wittgenstein’s sense), belong together. The problem of definition relates partly to the fact that rituals always occur in a specific socio-cultural context (Schillebeeckx 2000). Because of the interplay between ritual and context there is a potentially infinite range of ritual activities.

Ritual is an activity, and as such it should be distinguished from reflective thought (Bell 1992, ix). It is not directed to reflection on religious ideas and values, but to human experience. It is a specific form of action, namely symbolic action. Ritual actions involve all the senses: vision, touch, smell, hearing, taste, as well as verbal expression (symbolic language) (Lukken 1999, 56). The source of the ritual process is the human body, in interaction with a symbolically constituted, spatio-temporal social environment. Any space can be assigned to this symbolic function, but it must be on the basis of a tradition embraced by the participants (Hermans 2003). Symbolic actions create a world of meaning, with which participants are integrated and from which they can reconstruct their personal life and the life of the community. In ritual the meaning lies in the actual activities, also known as the performance.

Tambiah mentions three attributes of ritual performance (quoted in Bell 1992, 41–42). Firstly, a ritual is ‘acted’, even when it entails speech. Speech in rituals should be seen as performative speech acts, in which utterances realise their own truth (Searle 1998, 115). The utterance, ‘I forgive you’, accomplishes the forgiveness. Secondly, the performance is located in a setting that addresses as many senses as possible so as to intensify the participants’ experience. Thirdly, particular symbolic elements of the ritual refer to the natural and the social world. Bell warns, however, that the term ‘performance’ can give rise to misunderstanding. A performance is not a drama in a theatre where the actors are distinct from the audience. All participants in a ritual take part in the performance. Finally we stress the attribute of repetition. Rituals create structure in life: in the rhythm of a day, the annual rhythm of seasons and the life cycle (Lukken 1999). The repetitive aspect also relates to the social dimension of ritual activities. Human beings
look for order and that is exactly what rituals create. Through rituals people fit into an order peculiar to their particular socio-historical context. Rituals not only derive from the social order, but help to create and maintain it (cf. Durkheim).

Religious rituals establish a relation between the (social and natural) world and transcendent reality. Conceptions of this transcendent reality (God) differ widely (Van der Ven 1998), but however one conceives of it, faith in a transcendent reality is essential for religion to exist. This transcendent reality is linked with the mundane world (immanence). Rituals can evoke religious experience (Lukken 1999, 101). In other words, they can make people experience God’s activity in their own lives and those of other people, in society and in nature. A characteristic of religious experience is that participants in rituals ascribe their experience to a non-natural, superhuman agent (God). They are not merely doing things themselves (active dimension), but something is being done to them (passive dimension). God can do things that human beings can never accomplish either by themselves, through other people, or through some other natural cause. A distinctive feature of Christian ritual is that it refers to God’s unique, salvific history with his people in Jesus of Nazareth (Lukken 2001). Christian rituals (including the sacraments) have the same anthropological basis as rituals generally. God’s activity (opus operatum) is accomplished in the ritual mediation (opus operantis) (Schillebeeckx 2000, 178). This does not mean that God’s grace is caused by human actions. Essential for an understanding of Christian rituals is that God’s activity is conceived of as a free gift of grace initiated by God. God’s grace works through ritual mediation, not by virtue of human action. Without mediation, God could not work in the life of people, history or nature. How could we experience God’s agency without mediation? At the same time we should avoid a mechanistic view of religious rituals which sees human actions as causing divine action.

This intervention of divine grace and human action in the community lies at the heart of the renewal of Catholic sacramental theology after Vatican II. This is not the place for an elaborate account of the development of sacramental theology. We merely highlight some

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3 More precisely, the opus operantis is already part of the opus operatum, because the combination of the two aspects is the performance that mediates the free gift of God’s grace (Schillebeeckx 2000, 178).
characteristics of this renewal. The council did not develop a formal sacramental model, but corrected the Scholastic model which had been the standard at the Council of Trent (Chauvet 2001, xxi). Chauvet (2001, xxvii) describes it as a model centred on the objective efficacy of the sacraments as a ‘source’ of salvation. God sanctifies and saves human beings through the sacraments, which are sources or operative expressions (means or cause) of sanctification. Thus sanctified, human daily life becomes a spiritual offering to God’s glory (Chauvet 2001, xxv). Characteristic of this objective model is the stress on a unilateral movement from God, via the sacraments, to humankind. As mentioned above, Vatican II does not relinquish this perspective but balances it with a reverse process: from humankind to God. From the human perspective the sacraments are the acme of a life sanctified by God’s grace and the revelatory expression of this sanctification. This presupposes that God already acts salvifically in people’s lives, and not only through sacraments.

For Chauvet this is a fundamental departure from the linearity of the objectivist model. It is in fact a triangular model: God acts towards humankind (and vice versa), the sacraments affect humankind (and vice versa), and God acts through the sacraments (and vice versa) (Chauvet 2001, xxiv). It is this fundamental interaction of God’s free gift of grace with communal ritual action which constitutes Chauvet’s new model of sacramental theology. If this is what sacramental theology wants to express, how can modern cognitive science of religion help us to fathom the working of the human mind when God’s free gift of grace makes itself felt within human ritual action?

3 HOW DOES THE INCARNATED MIND WORK IN RITUAL ACTIONS?

The approach to ritual known as cognitive science of religion does not focus on the question of which specific symbolic actions are rituals.

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* To avoid misunderstanding, the great Scholastics (e.g. Thomas Aquinas) acknowledge the twofold circuit from God to humankind, and from humankind to God. The second movement is poorly developed in their sacramental discourse, although not absent. Every period in history has to use the theoretical models available at the time. In this sense, modern cognitive science of religion offers new avenues for theology to express its views on sacraments. Maybe it can help us to express more accurately what sacraments are. At the same time future generations are sure to challenge our efforts, as we challenge those of past generations.
"Evolution does not create specific behaviours; it creates mental organisation that makes people behave in a particular way" (Boyer 2001, 268). How does the human mind function to permit rituals to operate in the manner they manifestly do? Rituals lend plausibility to counter-intuitive images (Boyer 2001, 271). The ritual action violates natural intuitive causal expectations.

The action must be cognitively tagged as more than it seems. If the tag is some connection or appeal to superhuman agency, then the action qualifies as a religious ritual (Barrat & Lawson 2001, 185).

For example, a religious ritual can link people together 'for eternity'. Intuitively we know that human beings cannot conceive of anything that endures eternally. Participants in a religious ritual can pick up a signal that there is more to it than just human work. At the same time the breach of our normal, intuitive expectations must not be such that participants in the ritual are unable to accept the non-natural cause. Rituals are activities (or performances) which make participants experience the active presence and agency of God or some non-natural cause, or that God is the active recipient of our ritual activity. How does that happen? Rituals are not 'talk shows' about counter-intuitive agents (Pyysiainen 2001a). They are directed to religious experience: to be plausible and leave a lasting imprint in memory the experience has to be emotionally charged. Rituals have a deep impact if they evoke strong feelings and are sensorily remarkable. These attributes powerfully affect episodic memory, in which experiences are stored.

Rituals are effective if they turn up the emotional volume and provide a pageant for the senses. How do they achieve this? In the literature one finds two rival theories hypotheses:

- the ritual frequency hypothesis (Whitehouse 1995)
- the ritual form hypothesis (Lawson & McCauley 1990), or the theory of religious ritual competence (McCauley & Lawson 2002).

What is the crux of these theories? First we consider the ritual frequency hypothesis. Whitehouse (1995, 197) lists various attributes of rituals, of which we mention just three. Firstly, memory storage of rituals differs from that of ritual concepts. Religious concepts are stored in semantic memory; religious experience, on the other hand, is stored in episodic memory. Secondly, the frequency of transmission is important. Religious ideas, values and attitudes are lodged in memory through repetition. That is why religions put such emphasis
on reciting sacred texts. Experience, however, derives from specific events, often from special events in human life (e.g. birth and death). Thirdly, information processing of religious experience differs from that of religious concepts. In the case of concepts one must ensure that they are solidly anchored in the structure of semantic memory. What are the main attributes of a concept? What similarities are there with other ideas? To which umbrella category does the idea belong? In the case of religious experience it has to be emotionally ‘carved’ in episodic memory rather than gradually ‘engraved’ in semantic memory. The force of an experience does not depend on constant repetition but on the power of feelings. The extent to which a person is moved emotionally determines whether an experience is meaningful. Feelings can be reinforced by excessive sensory stimulation. That gives a signal that something special is happening.

In the ritual form hypothesis strong emotional effect depends not so much on frequent repetition as on implicit knowledge of the form of the ritual (Lawson & McCauley 1990). In addition to ‘ritual form hypothesis’ the authors also call it a ‘theory of religious ritual competence’ (see McCauley & Lawson 2002, 8). This name underscores the point that their theory is about the human actor in religious rituals and not about ritual forms as such. It is a theory about how the incarnated mind works in religious ritual actions. We prefer the second name, but will also use the first (ritual form hypothesis) because it is better known.\footnote{This could be because ritual form hypothesis stresses the aspect which differs from the rival theory developed by Whitehouse, namely ritual frequency hypothesis.}

What does the theory entail? Participants in a ritual recognise a particular form and respond to it (e.g. more or less emotionally). Lawson and McCauley emphasise that the recognition occurs unconsciously. This relates to the idea that people have an intuitive ontology when it comes to agency. For example, agency involves intentionality; an agent cannot be in two places at the same time; an agent has some, but not all, knowledge about the situation. The main reason for focussing on agency in ritual actions is that rituals are a form of social interaction (Barret & Lawson 2001, 186). This involves interaction not only between human agents but also between human (or immanent) agents and a divine (or transcendent) agent.
According to Lawson and McCauley, two principles of a ritual determine its form.\(^6\) Both principles relate to the manner in which the ‘superhuman’ agent is involved in the ritual. What clues does the form of the ritual offer to the working of a transcendent actor? The authors use the term ‘CPS agent’, which stands for ‘culturally postulated superhuman agent’. This could be God, but also angels, ancestors, et cetera. We prefer the term ‘CPC agents’\(^7\) or ‘transcendent agents’. This agent is considered to be a non-natural cause which affects the life of an individual, a community or nature. What are the two principles which determine the form of rituals?

1. The first principle pertains to the primary manifestation of a transcendent agent in the structure of the ritual activity. This agent can operate either through the people performing the ritual, or through some other element (e.g. a sacred object like a rosary or a sacred place like the cave at Lourdes). This is known as the principle of superhuman agency (PSA): “which connection with the CPS-agents in the representation of a religious ritual constitutes the initial entry, i.e. the entry with the ‘most direct connection’ with the ritual at hand” (McCauley & Lawson 2002, 27). Rituals seek to make people experience God’s activity. That is why the role of the ritual element closest to the CPC agent determines the form of the ritual. That could be either the ritual actor (priest, shaman, pandit) who acts as an intermediary between the participants and God (CPC agent), or some other ritual element such as the holy water that a person brings home from church or some place of pilgrimage.

2. The second principle relates to that which serves as a primary manifestation of the CPC agent in the structure of a ritual. Ultimately there is always a CPC agent operative in a ritual, but

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\(^6\) The effect of the ritual can be seen as a logically necessary outcome of its form (Rappaport 1999, 138). From this perspective, one can agree with Lawson and McCauley’s focus on form.

\(^7\) The category of ‘superhuman’ is not without problems (e.g. super as ‘more than human’). The concept of ‘counter-intuitive agents’ or ‘counter-ontological agents’ is preferable, because it locates the difference in the way the mind processes different kinds of agency (Pyysiainen 2003). Counter-intuitive agents have some properties which violate default assumptions of agency. For example, the agent may pass through solid objects or be in more than one place at the same time (McCauley & Lawson 2002, 25). They cannot violate all default assumptions, because this would make them incredible. That is why we opt for the term ‘culturally postulated counter-intuitive agents’ (CPC agents).
some rituals build on other rituals that are considered necessary for the operation of the CPC agent. The CPC agent has his or her primary manifestation in these underlying rituals, where he or she is ‘immediately’ present. The longer the chain of rituals to get to the ‘immediate’ presence of a CPC agent, the less important a ritual is in a religious system. A ritual that puts the believer in direct contact with God is more important than a ritual that does not. This is known as the principle of superhuman immediacy (PSI).

A decisive factor in the ritual form hypothesis is the location of the CPC agent. Where does ‘God’ crop up in the ritual system? Of the two principles cited above the first is decisive for the difference between ritual forms (Lawson & McCauley 1990, 128–130). Firstly, there are rituals in which the CPC agent is present in the structure of the action. This aspect can be reinforced by the sacred person who performs the ritual (e.g. priest, pandit, shaman). These rituals are called ‘odd-numbered’ type rituals (ON-type)\(^8\) or ‘special agent rituals’ (McCauley & Lawson 2002). Secondly, there are rituals in which the presence of the CPC agent is associated with ritual tools (symbols, spaces, vestments, objects) or the recipients of the rituals. Often the role of the CPC agents is passive, hence their presence in the ritual less vital (Lawson & McCauley 1990, 135). Lawson and McCauley call them ‘even-numbered’ type rituals (EN-type), or ‘special patient’ and ‘special instrument’ rituals. ON-type and EN-type rituals may offer the same level of sensory stimulation. But in that case the ritual form hypothesis predicts that ON-type rituals will have a more powerful emotional impact on participants than EN-type rituals. After all, in the former the CPC agent is considered to be immediately present. The nearness of the transcendent agent (God or the divine) evokes strong emotions. Something is happening that is not the work of human hands.

The distinction in ritual types manifests itself in three characteristics of ritual, namely repeatability, reversibility and substitutability (McCauley & Lawson 2002, 30–33). Some rituals do not require repetition in the lifetime of the ritual participant. Rites of passage are an example of ON-type rituals (McCauley 2001, 131). Initiation into adulthood only happens once for each participant; it does not need

\(^8\) Lawson and McCauley distinguish several types of rituals in this category of ON-type of rituals. We omit this part of the theory because it is not crucial to our argument.
to be done over and over again. These rituals are typically connected with special ritual agents who mediate the power of CPC agents. This property of the ritual form must convince the participants that whatever is accomplished, is accomplished by God. The baptismal water has been blessed by the priest, and in the holy oil (charisma) that has been blessed by the bishop God himself is actively present. Such a rite does not have to be repeated. God’s activity is at a different level from human activity: God accomplishes something for all eternity (McCauley 2001, 132). This special meaning of the ritual evokes powerful emotions in the participants. Something of inestimable existential value has actually happened.

EN-type rituals are different. Their form is that of rituals that are repeatable. Thus a believer may use a rosary to pray at a fixed time of day or of the week, read the Bible after dinner, or light a candle for a statue of a saint or the Holy Mother Mary. In these rituals the agents’ actions carry no such finality as they do in special agent rituals (McCauley & Lawson 2002, 31). The CPC agent is also more remote from the ritual, as a result of which its emotional effect is less powerful. The expectations of the participants (active and passive) are less powerfully emotional. It does not have to happen at that very moment,9 there will be another ritual which will be a repeat of this one. The second characteristic, reversibility, refers to the question whether a ritual’s consequences can be reversed or not. “Because the consequences of special patient and special instrument rituals are temporary only, it is unnecessary to have procedures (ritual or otherwise) for their reversal” (McCauley & Lawson 2002, 31). We would tell somebody who says that his or her prayer has not been fulfilled to pray again (and light another candle). But there is no need to reconstruct the ritual that has been enacted. The consequences of special agent rituals need to be reversed. For example, marriage is considered to be a permanent bond between man and wife. If this bond breaks, some reconstruction is necessary with regard to the special agent ritual in which the permanent bond was established. Retrospectively, that ritual is not considered to have had a super-permanent effect because the ritual-as-intended did not take place. The third characteristic is substitutability. Ritual substitution often arises in EN-type rituals, because no religiously indispensable element hinges on any particular performance. One can light a candle for this specific

9 “Their effects are not super-permanent” (Lawson & McCauley 1990, 135).
saint, or for that one; one can go on a pilgrimage to Lourdes (France) or Santiago de Compostella (Spain). Because EN-type rituals have a temporary effect, they permit greater latitude in regard to instruments (e.g. a candle, a crucifix or a rosary) and patients (e.g. this saint or that one). Special agent rituals that are closely connected with the power of the CPC agent tend to resist substitution. The special ritual agent must be present to mediate between the participants and God, the correct procedures must be followed, the right words spoken and the correct gestures made. In the Catholic Church this applies to the consecration of bread and wine in the Eucharist. Because that bread and wine are transformed into the body and blood of Jesus Christ, this can only be done by a special agent, the priest. The holy bread establishes close contact with God, because it is the body of Christ. The ritual act cannot be substituted by something else. As God is really present in the bread, this can evoke strong emotions in participants.\textsuperscript{10}

If one compares the two theories, one finds that the ritual form hypothesis is more comprehensive than the ritual frequency hypothesis. The ritual form hypothesis can explain the same phenomenon as the ritual frequency hypothesis (McCausley 2001). The power of a religious ritual does not lie in repetition but in turning up the emotional volume, causing participants to have a profound experience that sticks in their memory. But the ritual form hypothesis goes further in that it links this explanation with the unique nature of religious rituals, namely the agency of a transcendent agent (‘God’). In this way the theory tries to do justice to the distinctive character of religious rituals. The form of the ritual is designed to persuade participants of that divine agency or, to use the term of sacramental theology, of God’s free grace.

\textsuperscript{10} At the same time the communion of bread and wine is repeatable (see first characteristic). Repeatability is a property of EN-type rituals. In the history of the Catholic Church there was a time (roughly before the synod of Trent) when ordinary believers only took communion once a year, preferably at Easter. There are also orthodox Protestant denominations which only have communion on very special occasions. For Catholics who take communion every Sunday this could mean that the ritual loses its significance as an ON-type ritual.
4 Research

4.1 Research questions

1. Compared to participants in an EN-type ritual, do participants in an ON-type ritual have:
   a. a stronger experience of God's presence, and
   b. stronger positive and weaker negative emotions?
2. a. Which elements of an ON-type ritual are reported to be connected with the experience of God?
   b. Do participants remember the same ritual elements as being connected with the experience of God?
3. Do participants in an ON-type ritual who experienced God retain:
   a. the same level of experience of God's presence, and
   b. the same level of positive and negative emotions?

According to the ritual form hypothesis we would expect participants to have a more powerful experience of God (CPC agent) in an ON-type ritual and, as a result, stronger emotions.

The second research question reflects the expectation that ritual elements which are connected with the CPC agent feature most prominently in the experience of participants. This applies especially when the CPC agent's immediate presence is experienced. Where does the CPC agent 'crop up' in the ritual? In which ritual element is that agent's presence and power experienced? In an ON-type ritual the experience of the CPC agent must be connected with the special agent. This experience of the CPC agent must still be remembered after some time, because it is the specific characteristic of the ritual. Participants will refer to the same ritual elements in which they experienced God and not to other elements.

The third research question pertains to the idea that powerful experiences and emotions are stored in episodic memory. They are easily retrieved and retain their power. The situation which made a strong (emotional) impression is easily recalled.

4.2 Research design and instruments

Lawson and McCauley's theory rests on two principles: the principle of superhuman agency (PSA) and the principle of superhuman immediacy (PSI). To test their theory we have to study the effect of an ON-type ritual, and compare it with the effects of an EN-type ritual. To answer
our research questions we used a non-equivalent post-test control group design (Campbell & Stanley 1963).11

The experimental treatment was the celebration of the Eucharist with the pope at the end of the World Youth Days (WYD) in Toronto in July 2003. This celebration has marked characteristics of an ON-type ritual. First there is the pope, who for Catholics is the successor of St Peter, hence close to God (PSA). Secondly, it is the pope who consecrates the bread and wine, which are believed to be the real presence of Jesus Christ. A Eucharist is an ON-type ritual in which God (or the CPC agent) is immediately present (PSI). There is no long chain of enabling acts between the ritual and the manifestation of God’s power. In the bread and wine God is really present. The presence of the pope as main actor enhances this ritual quality. For Catholics who go to communion every Sunday, there can be a tedium effect. But when the pope has consecrated the bread and wine, it gives the ritual special poignancy. The Eucharist was held at Downsfieldpark at the end of a ten-day period. During this period all kinds of meetings took place: meeting with other young people from all over the world and with local parishes, catechetical meetings, other rituals (mass). Before taking part in the Eucharist, the youths slept in the park. The service is a sensory feast with music, colours of liturgical vestments, smell of incense, et cetera.12

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11 The content and structure of the ritual were determined by members of the Catholic organising committee. We videotaped the experimental and control treatments in order to confirm our hypothesis that the experimental treatment is indeed an ON-type ritual and the control treatment an EN-type. The treatments themselves in this quasi-experimental design are not subjects of research. We presuppose that they have a causal effect on the experiences of the participants (i.e. experience of God, emotions), because the treatments precede (in time) the measurement of the experiences (post-test).
12 The Dutch participants were not very close to the altar (centre of liturgical actions). They depended to a large extent on television screens and sound installations to follow the ritual actions.
The control treatment is an EN-type ritual. This is also a collective ritual action but there is no special position for the priest as intermediary between people and God. Ritual elements are readings of biblical texts, prayer, singing and meditation. All kinds of ritual tools are connected with the CPC agent: symbols, the space (a church), objects (candles, holy book), texts. But the CPC agent plays a passive role: the participants pray to God, light candles in God’s honour, read texts in remembrance of God’s actions. The participants in the EN-type ritual (n = 26) were WYD participants in a particular diocese in the Netherlands. Thus their religious background was the same as that of the WYD participants. As will be seen below, this equivalence is especially important in view of the specificity of the research population. The prayer service was held one month before the service at Downsfieldpark (Toronto). It was held in advance to ensure that the experience of the service at Downsfieldpark would not influence the experience of the EN-type ritual participants.

After the experimental (ON-type ritual) and control (EN-type ritual) treatment, the participants completed a questionnaire consisting of both closed and open items. Before going to Canada they completed a questionnaire giving their background variables. Participants in the experimental treatment (ON-type ritual) underwent the retention test more than six months after the experience at Downsfieldpark (February 2004). The open questions were categorised by two persons. Interrater reliability is >95%.

The first research question can be answered by comparing the effects of the experimental treatment (ON-type ritual) with those of the control treatment (EN-type ritual). The second research question requires an analysis of the content of the experience of God (CPC agent) at Downsfieldpark (experimental treatment). A similar analysis is made of the retention test scores six months later; concerning the ritual elements connected with the experience of God. The third research question can be answered by comparing the effects of the experimental treatment and the retention test.

We used the mysticism scale developed by Hood (1975; 1977) to measure the experience of the nearness of God (CPC agent). Mystical experiences are defined as experiences in which the person has a sense of union with God or some higher power. These experiences are triggered by incongruity between the individual and her limits. The mystical experience resolves the incongruity: “limits are transcended and the person is relatively suddenly made aware of particular aspects
of self in a classic spiritual manner” (Hood 1978, 285). Some features of this experience are: a feeling of loss of self, a perception of everything as being ‘One’, an experience of timelessness and spacelessness, inexpressibility of the experience in conventional language. We combined this scale with ‘open’ questions so people could express what they experienced in their own words. For example: “Have you ever had an experience which you would call ‘holy’? If so, could you describe this feeling? Could you tell us when and how it happened?”

We developed a scale to measure emotions during the mass with the pope at the end of the WYD. This scale was based on two types of emotions by the personality psychologist H. Hermans. On the basis of his research, Hermans distinguishes four categories of emotions: positive, negative, other-directed and self-directed (Hermans & Janssen-Hermans 1995). In our research, we only used the categories of positive and negative emotions. Each category was measured by four indicators (affect terms). For example, the indicators of positive feelings are: joy, happiness, enjoyment and inner calm. The respondents were asked to rate their experience during moments in the ritual which they found very appealing according to these affect terms. We left it open if these were moments of experience of God’s nearness or not. In addition the questionnaire contained open questions regarding emotions during the ritual in general, and specific emotions regarding the experience of God’s nearness. For example: “Which moments in the service were most appealing to you? What kind of feelings did these moments arouse? Did you experience God as very near during this service? What did you feel?”

4.3 Sample

Our sample consisted of young Catholics who participated in the World Youth Days in Toronto from 18 to 28 July 2003. The total group comprised just over 450 people. We sent a questionnaire with a letter to all participants in June 2003. One third of the participants returned the questionnaire (n = 152). Of this group, only 49 returned the questionnaires after the Eucharist with the pope in Toronto. Of this number, nine respondents did not take part in the papal mass at Downsfieldpark due to the weather or logistical problems. This left us with a sample of 40 respondents. The reason for the loss of so many respondents lies in the complexity of the data collection. The circumstances made it impossible to complete the questionnaire at Downsfieldpark.
Respondents had to complete it later, put it in a sealed envelope and give it to one of the group leaders or send it to our university. Only one third of the respondents did so. There were no significant differences between the sample for the experimental condition and the whole group of WYD participants.

In this section we describe the WYD participants and compare them with the overall Catholic population in the Netherlands. The data for all Dutch Catholics are taken from the Socon study in 2000. Where there are significant differences between our research sample (n = 40) and the total group of WYD participants (n = 152), we specify it. The average age of the participants was 23; the youngest was 15, the oldest 31. There were 42.2% female and 57.2% male participants.

The WYD participants have a far higher percentage for church attendance than the average Dutch Catholic (see table 1).\textsuperscript{13} More than 70 percent of our sample go to church every Sunday, in comparison with only 8.2% of all Catholics in the Netherlands. We also compared WYD participants with the average Dutch Catholic regarding belief in a theistic God, which is a ‘classic’ or ‘traditional’ Christian image of God: a God who is above the world and controls it. Belief in a theistic God does not differ significantly between Catholics generally and WYD participants (see table 2). Finally, WYD participants differ from other Catholics as regards the experience of God’s nearness (see table 3). WYD participants report more experiences of God’s nearness.

\textbf{Table 1: Comparison of church attendance (in %) between all Catholics in the Netherlands and WYD participants}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Church attendance</th>
<th>Dutch Catholics (%)</th>
<th>WYD participants (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At least 1x per week</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>72.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least 1x per month</td>
<td>53.0</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A few times a year</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seldom or never</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[172.23 \text{ (p}<.001\]

\textsuperscript{13} Only 12 people in the Socon data fall in the 15–29 age group. This is a poor basis to test differences of church attendance with the Socon data. If we take these results as an indication of church attendance among this age group, the WYD participants go to church more frequently than other young Catholics.
Table 2: Comparison of belief in a theistic God (in %) between all Catholics in the Netherlands and WYD participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>m</th>
<th>sd</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dutch Catholics</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WYD participants</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scale ranges from 1 (strong disbelief) to 5 (strong belief)
t = .58 (n.s.)

Table 3: Comparison of mean scores on the mysticism scale between all Catholics in the Netherlands and WYD participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>m</th>
<th>sd</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dutch Catholics</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WYD participants</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>.52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scale ranges from 3 (yes), 2 (to some extent), to 1 (no)
t = 10.90 (p<.001)

To summarise: our sample consists of young Catholics (15–31 years) who go to church frequently (1x a week), who believe in a God who rules the world, and who have had more experiences of God in their lives than other Catholics. The WYD participants are both strong believers and strong belonging. This is a good group to answer our research questions, because they are familiar with the ON-type ritual of the experimental treatment. If the chosen ritual has the expected effect, it would be on such a group.

4.4 Results

4.4.1 First research question

Do participants in an ON-type ritual have a stronger experience of God’s presence and stronger emotions than participants in an EN-type ritual? Participants in the ON-type ritual (i.e. the Eucharist in Toronto) report a significantly stronger experience of God than participants in the EN-type ritual (see table 4). For the descriptive statistics, see table 9 (appendix). Only one type of emotion differed significantly, namely positive emotions. Participants in the Eucharist at Downsfieldpark (EN-type ritual) report stronger positive emotions roused by that ritual than by the prayer ritual in Rotterdam (ON-type ritual). They also reported weaker negative emotions, but this difference is not significant.
Table 4: Comparison of mean scores (t-test) on experience of God and emotions between post-tests of the Control Treatment (EN-type ritual) and the Experimental Treatment (ON-type ritual)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ON-type ritual</th>
<th>EN-type ritual</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experience of God</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mean</td>
<td>mean</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotions</td>
<td>s.d.</td>
<td>s.d.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.06(^1)</td>
<td>1.75(^1)</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>4.26(^2)</td>
<td>3.77(^2)</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>1.51(^2)</td>
<td>1.78(^2)</td>
<td>-1.47</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\) scale ranging from 1 (no), 2 (to some extent), to 3 (yes)
\(^2\) scale ranging from 1 (completely absent) to 5 (very strong)

4.4.2 Second research question

The second research question concerns the contents of the experiences stored in the memories of participants in the ON-type ritual at Downfieldpark. Which ritual elements are mentioned in relation to the presence and efficacy of the CPC actor? Where is the CPC agent located in the ritual? Firstly, according to the principle of superhuman agency (PSA) the primary manifestation of the CPC agent is decisive for experience of that agent’s presence. In an ON-type ritual a ritual agent (priest) is the intermediary for the presence of the CPC agent. Secondly, according to the principle of superhuman immediacy (PSI) some ritual forms make participants experience the CPC agent directly. All the information that the participant derives from the ritual form suggests that the CPC agent is working here and now. The Eucharist is such a ritual, because Christ (CPC agent) is present in the bread and the wine.

In order to answer the research question, we analysed the words connected with the experience of God’s nearness during the ritual. For our analysis we used the answers to the following questions:

- Could you mention the moments in the celebration which appealed most to you?
- What feeling did these moments evoke?
- Did you feel very near to God in these moments?
- Did you feel close to God in this Eucharist?
- How did it happen?
All the answers to these question were combined in our analysis. This means that a respondent could mention a ritual element in answer to one question, and God’s nearness in response to another question. In the analysis, all the statements are considered to be part of one overall view of the meaning of this Eucharist (ON-type ritual). We first listed all the ritual elements connected with an experience of God’s nearness. Next we reduced the answers of the respondents to four categories: the pope, consecration/holy bread, togetherness and the weather (see table 5). The pope is very strongly connected with words (his words, his sermon, when he addressed us), but participants also refer to his charisma. The pope only has to be there to radiate God’s nearness. The contrast with the pope’s physical frailty (can hardly walk, speaks softly) makes this experience even more powerful. The holy bread is sometimes mentioned in connection with the consecration. The verbs most often associated with the holy bread are ‘receiving’ and ‘eating’. God (CPC agent) is experienced as near when the person is brought into contact with the holy bread (see table 5). ‘Togetherness’ refers to the bond with other participants as a ritual characteristic: singing together, praying together, standing in the rain together, passing the peace together. This togetherness is a source of experience of God’s nearness. On the face of it the last category, ‘weather’, might seem strange as a ritual element. The organisers of the papal mass probably did not include it as a factor in their planning of the service, although anyone organising an open-air ritual should allow for it. In the words of the respondents, it was not just the weather but the unexpected change in the weather. Respondents experienced the sudden change of the weather as a limit experience. This unexpected change is very often connected with some ritual element: during the Bible reading; at the beginning of the service; on the arrival of the pope; during the singing of ‘Hallelujah’ (see table 5).

With the aid of these categories we can answer our second research question. Which ritual elements are reported to be connected with the experience of the CPC agent? The role of the ritual element that is closest to the CPC agent determines the form of the ritual (see the principle of superhuman agency (PSA)). Four elements are mentioned by our participants in the mass at Downfieldpark. Half of the respondents mention the pope, which was to be expected, as he is seen as the successor of St Peter (see table 6). A quarter mentions the holy bread, which is likewise to be expected from the form of the ritual. The pope as intermediary between humans and God and the holy
Table 5: Statements of respondents in four categories of ritual elements connected with the experience of God (experimental condition, n = 40)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pope</td>
<td>The pope’s entrance; his words; his sermon; as if the pope was addressing me personally; the pope’s strength despite his physical frailty; through the vocation of the pope; by listening to the pope; when the pope left; when the pope drove past right next to me; the pope’s strong spirit; the pope speaks the words of God; when the pope asked to wear the cross; the pope began to speak at a moment when we had lost courage; the Eucharist with the pope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holy bread</td>
<td>Receiving the holy bread; like eating a piece of heaven; communion rite; in the consecration and communion; the consecration (when it became very quiet in the field); consecration; the giving of the bread; when I received the bread</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Togetherness</td>
<td>Going to communion together; to sing together; singing hand in hand; to experience God in others, a feeling of unity with others; if you help others; in love for others; togetherness of all the people standing in the rain; passing the peace to those next to me; God was there in the person next to me/in others who helped me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weather</td>
<td>When the weather changed suddenly; when the sun suddenly broke through the clouds; when the sky cleared; when the sun started to shine during the Bible reading; when it stopped raining at the beginning of the service; when the rain stopped on the arrival of the pope; during the ‘Hallelujah’ the clouds cleared</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

bread are also ritual elements in which the CPC agent is immediately present (see the principle of superhuman immediacy (PSI)). The two other elements are rather unexpected in the context of Lawson and McCauley’s ritual form hypothesis. How can togetherness and the weather be ritual elements through which people experience the CPC agent as immediately present?

The second part of the second research question was: do participants consistently refer to the same ritual elements in the tests after the experimental treatment and the retention treatment? We expect this to be the case because of the emotional overtones of the experience. A person who has had a powerful emotional experience will know exactly how and where it happened.\(^{14}\) Retrieval of the situation is facilitated

\(^{14}\) For example, everyone will know where he or she heard the news of the 9/11 disaster in New York.
Table 6: Descriptive statistics of the number of ritual elements connected with experience of God (experimental condition, n = 40)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pope</th>
<th>Holy bread</th>
<th>Togetherness</th>
<th>Weather</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post-test</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experim. treatment</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retention test</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: Association (Kramers V) between different categories of ritual elements connected with experience of God (experimental condition)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Retention test</th>
<th>Pope</th>
<th>Holy bread</th>
<th>Weather</th>
<th>Togetherness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post-test</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>Pope</td>
<td>Holy bread</td>
<td>.35*</td>
<td>.42*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>treatment</td>
<td></td>
<td>Togetherness</td>
<td></td>
<td>.47*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Holy bread</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.45*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* significant at .05 level (p<.05).

by the emotions connected with the experience. Table 6 shows that there are differences in the ritual elements which respondents mention in the tests after the experimental treatment and the retention test, but the consistency of their responses is relatively high (see table 7). People who mention the pope, holy bread and togetherness after their experience at Downsfieldpark do so again six months later (retention test). There is only one exception. There is no significant association between weather in the test after the experimental treatment and the retention test. Instead, people who refer to the holy bread as signifying God’s nearness mention the weather significantly more in the retention test. This may be explained by the exceptional weather conditions at the time of the Eucharist (ON-type ritual). Respondents connect the weather with other ritual elements, such as the holy bread.

4.4.3 Third research question

The third research question concerns the experiential quality of the memory of the ON-type ritual at Downsfieldpark. Do participants in an ON-type ritual who experienced God retain the same level of experience of God’s presence, and the same level of emotions? If not, there would be significant differences between the test after the experimental treatment and the retention test. This is not the case (see table 8). The
Table 8: Comparison of mean scores (T-test) on experience of God and emotions between the post-test and the retention test of the experimental treatment (ON-type ritual)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Post-test</th>
<th>Retention Test</th>
<th>Post-test</th>
<th>Retention Test</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mean</td>
<td>s.d.</td>
<td>mean</td>
<td>s.d.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience of God</td>
<td>2.06(^1)</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>2.08(^1)</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>4.26(^2)</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>4.22(^2)</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>-.34</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>1.51(^2)</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>1.66(^2)</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\) scale ranging from 1 (no), 2 (to some extent), to 3 (yes)
\(^2\) scale ranging from 1 (completely absent) to 5 (very strong)

experience of the CPC agent remains as powerful six months later as it was in Toronto. The experience of God’s nearness did not fade in the episodic memory of the respondents, but remained as intense as it was immediately after the ON-type ritual in Toronto. And there is no change in the quality of the emotions after six months, nor in positive and negative emotions. The experience of God’s nearness is emotionally highly charged, as predicted by the ritual form hypothesis. These emotions remain as strong in the episodic memory as during the ‘original’ event when they were stored in memory.

5 Conclusion and Discussion

In the exploratory study described above we formulated three research questions. We first present our conclusions from the research results summarised in section 4. Then we discuss two issues. In section 5.1 we reflect on two unexpected research results against the background of the ritual form hypothesis. We consider whether this theory does not need to be supplemented with other theories, while acknowledging that it seems to be able to predict some major effects of ritual competence. In section 5.2 we reflect on the possibility of developing a non-reductive naturalist view of ritual actions in liturgical science.

Three research questions were formulated. The first concerned differences in the experience of participants in an ON-type and an EN-type ritual. The research results confirmed our expectations. Participants in an ON-type ritual report a stronger experience of God’s nearness, as well as stronger positive emotions. There is also a difference in negative emotions, but this is not significant. This could have been caused by
our small sample, but also by the fact that participants hardly mention negative feelings at all (ceiling effect).

The second research question relates to the characteristics of an ON-type ritual. The participants mention four ritual elements that are connected with the CPC agent: the pope, the holy bread/consecration, togetherness (with others) and the weather. The first two elements are to be expected on the basis of the ritual form hypothesis. In the discussion we return to the last two elements, which are not included in the ritual form hypothesis.

The third research question relates to the expectation that experience of God and strong emotions would not be extinguished over time. Six months after the papal mass at Toronto participants reported the same level of experience of God and the same level of emotions. This emotional information, which was stored in episodic memory, is easily retrievable. As predicted by the ritual form hypothesis, it did not lose its experiential and emotional intensity.

5.1 Reflection on the ritual form hypothesis

Not every research finding was corroborated by the ritual form hypothesis. Two elements (togetherness and weather), which were connected with the experience of God, are not part of this theory. Although the ritual form hypothesis offers good predictors of human experience, it does not fully explain the intensity of religious experience in rituals. We think it needs to be supplemented with other theories that take more elements into account than just the role of the CPC agent. The two principles of PSA (principle of superhuman agency) and PSI (principle of superhuman immediacy) are confined to the role of the CPC agent. This is the strength of the ritual form hypothesis, but also its weakness.

Firstly, various authors have pointed out that this theory needs to be augmented by the social dimension of ritual. Thus Pyysiäinen (2001b, 93) indicates that the emotional effect of rites of passage cannot be associated exclusively with the CPC agent. Such rituals derive a powerful emotional impact from the uniqueness of the social event (e.g. birth, marriage, death) (Boyer 2001). One can make the same assumption about the mass at Downsfieldpark. The participants went on an excursion to attend a unique event. They spent ten days together with other young people (both from the Netherlands and from other countries), to whom they came to relate closely. Then, with all their new and old friends, they go to Downsfieldpark. After spending a night in the open,
they celebrate mass. This social dimension is reflected in the category of togetherness as a ritual element. From the perspective of liturgical science, this social dimension is at the heart of every Eucharist. "The agent of celebration is the church as church understood as the primary meaning of assembly" (Chauvet 1999, 32–33). The ritual form hypothesis completely ignores this community dimension. From a theological perspective it is not only "erroneous to say that 'such and such a priest celebrates' (what the priest does is preside ‘in the name of Christ’), but it is insufficient to think that the community celebrates only by uniting itself to what the priest does" (Chauvet 1999, 33).

Secondly, the weather was very bad before the ritual. Then, when the ritual started, the clouds cleared and the sun began to shine. This situation has all the characteristics of a contrast experience, which Hood (1977, 1978) mentions as a trigger of mystical experiences. The bad weather must have caused stress among the respondents. We have some proof of this in the reports of nine respondents, which we had to remove from our sample because they did not participate in the service. Three respondents who did attend report frustration because of the weather and bad circumstances. The change in the weather is a contrast experience which evoked an experience of God for some respondents. It becomes a ritual element, not on its own but in conjunction with other ritual elements, for example: 'the clouds cleared when the pope arrived', 'the sun began to shine during the Bible reading'.

Thirdly, other authors point out that the body, too, strongly influences the emotional impact of a ritual. Thus Newberg and D'Aquili (2001, 87) maintain that some rituals entail rhythmic activities that are repeated automatically (e.g. song, monotonous sound, bodily movements). Such behaviours affect people’s neuro-physiological system in such a manner that they feel they are being enveloped in (ultimate) reality. Rituals also often entail physical actions that capture attention because they deviate from normal actions (e.g. deep genuflection; rapid, uncontrolled movements). Such deviant actions give a signal (through a part of the brain known as the amygdala) that something extraordinary is happening. That, too, can evoke strong feeling. Such deviant actions are common in religious rituals, but cults and sects in particular use them extensively (see Poloma & Hoelter 1999).15

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15 One of the participants reports fainting during the mass. The respondent knows that this was connected with the heat and lack of food. At the same time she sees God’s hand in this event.
5.2 Contribution of a non-reductive naturalist theory of ritual competence to liturgical science

We have gone to great lengths to show the fruitfulness of the ritual form hypothesis for understanding people's ritual competence. It may be fruitful, but is it relevant to liturgical science as a theological discipline? The fact that this is a naturalist theory of ritual actions makes it suspect in some theological circles. Should we not leave naturalist theories to the social sciences and religious studies, and construct theological theories about the Christian liturgy? We would argue that there is no contradiction if the naturalist theory of ritual competence is non-reductive. This type of theory is theologically legitimate from a transcendence-in-immanence perspective. A non-reductive naturalist theory equips liturgical science for interdisciplinary debate (especially with ritual studies) and comparative research. In this debate liturgists (theologians) are needed because of their inside knowledge of the semantics of Christian liturgy.

Firstly, naturalist theories understand religion as a natural human category, not a supernatural category. The latter is characterised as 'theological', that is belief in the supernatural. Theology is about something 'over there' in contrast with 'over here' (Chesnik 2002). Naturalism restricts the study of religion to what can be researched in natural categories, that is something experienced by people. The ground for naturalism is found in the canon of criteria for good academic research. One criterion is the need to restrict research to what is observable. It is impossible to test statements about a reality 'over there'. How does one decide whether a proposition about this reality is true or false? Scientific knowledge is fallible. All knowledge is constructed by human beings and can never escape the human condition, implying that it could be falsified. Naturalism, in this view, has always been characteristic of the social sciences and the discipline of religious studies, which researches religion.

But is naturalism compatible with theology? The answer is yes, but not every form of naturalism and not every type of theology. Theology can be understood as a science about God (theologia) but also as science about the human experience of God's manifestation in individual lives, society, history and nature (oikonomia) (Beinert 1985). Catholic theology after the anthropological "shift" adopts the second definition as the subject of theology. Theology reflects on the way people experience God in rituals, such as the Eucharist or a rite of absolution. This form
of theology can be compatible with naturalism without falling into the pitfalls of (neo-)pelagianism. There are two types of naturalism: a reductive and a non-reductive type. Reductive naturalism wants to restrict the study of religion in general, and rituals in particular, to observable reality. For example, if people pray and say that they feel freed from anxiety, then the meaning of the prayer is this freedom from anxiety. Whether or not a person has experienced this effect, can be tested empirically. This theory is reductive because it reduces religion to ‘natural causes’ and ignores the insider perspective of the religious person who refers to some non-natural cause (God). Non-reductive naturalism wants to do justice to the religious person’s experience of a situation as divinely caused. Religious experience (like prayer) is different from other experiences precisely because it assumes the involvement of some non-natural cause. This non-natural cause is not studied in isolation from human action but as God acting through human action. Religious practices and experience have a characteristic that distinguishes them from other practices and experience. They cannot be reduced to psychological, neurological, sociological or whatever origins. A psychologist recognised for his non-reductive naturalist view of religion is William James (Chesnik 2002; Goodson 2003).\textsuperscript{16} For James, religious experience is part of nature. In experience (as a natural category) religious people feel themselves connected with some non-natural cause which imparts order to existence. The objective truth of religion to which an empirical psychologist can assent is a continuation of our natural life, not an addition to it (Goodson 2002, 12).\textsuperscript{17}

The second point we want to discuss is the theological justification of a non-reductive naturalist view. Can Christianity be regarded as ‘a religion’ which can be studied alongside other religions? Can the Christian liturgy be studied from the perspective of religious rituals? Some theologians fear that experiential features common to all religion will become the norm for Christianity. Thus a human category becomes a straitjacket for the Christian tradition when it speaks about God. Christianity cannot be regarded as ‘a religion’, but is a category

\textsuperscript{16} James also has theological critics, most notably Stanley Hauerwas (see: \textit{With the grain of the universe: the church witness and natural theology}, Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2001). Hauerwas’s position is grounded in a \textit{sui generis} claim of Christianity. We will criticise this position below.

\textsuperscript{17} For James religious experience is grounded in a pre-conceptual level, which has logical and chronological priority. This idea presents many difficulties (see Hermans 2002, 164–168). We omit this critique, because it is not pertinent to our argument.
sui generis. God, who above all is known in the life and death of Jesus Christ, is Totally Other, not to be slotted into what is defined as religion in human terms (Schüssler-Fiorenza 2000, 10–12). The dilemma seems to be that either Christianity is a sui generis concept (incommensurable with all other phenomena), or it ceases to be distinct from the rest of personal and societal life. However, the dilemma is false, because it introduces a dichotomy between transcendence and immanence. Once this dichotomy has been introduced it can never be bridged. But the theological model of incarnation opposes such a gap. Human beings are ‘themselves’ by virtue of ‘being from God’ (Houtepen 1998). Incarnation refers to the fact that human beings participate in God, and this is seen as a gift of God’s grace. The antithesis of God’s actions versus human actions is false. In the act of faith the initiative is reversed: God takes over, leading human beings into infinite time and space, which is God. Finitude is not infinitude, but it is open to it. Hence we opt for a theological model of transcendence-in-immanence. There are traces and signs of a transcendent reality in our immanent reality. On the one hand we should avoid making Christian religion an isolated category, on the other we should avoid reducing it to a phenomenon in personal and societal life.

Thirdly, we want to stress that a non-reductive naturalist theory of religious rituals equips liturgical science for interdisciplinary debate (especially with ritual studies) and for comparative research. A non-reductive naturalist theory opens up common ground for liturgical science to enter the interdisciplinary debate on rituals and ritual actions with other sciences, in particular the social sciences and ritual studies (Grimes 2000b). It also is one of the best theories for engaging in comparative research into Christian rituals and rituals of other religions. Cognitive theories like ritual form hypothesis are especially promising, because they identify mental structures which act as trans-historical and cross-cultural constraints on ritual competence (Martin 2000, 54–44). For liturgical science it is important to be able to participate in this interdisciplinary debate, not only with a view to its own theorising but also its place in the university. To be recognised as an academic discipline, liturgical science must be able to take part in the public debate within the university. To participate in this public debate about religious rituals in general, and Christian rituals in particular, liturgical science must speak a conceptual language which permits academic partnership with other disciplines. A non-reductive naturalist theory of ritual competence can fulfil this condition.
Fourthly, in line with the foregoing arguments, let us explain the specific contribution that liturgical sciences can make to the development of a non-reductive naturalist theory of religious rituals. What kind of expertise can liturgical sciences bring to the theorising process? To answer this question, we make a distinction between the semantics and structure of religion as a cognitive system, and the use or practice of the system in various societies and cultures (Penner 2000, 70). Rituals need to be understood via the religious codes (semantics) that are used and the practice of rituals in various contexts (pragmatics). The theoretical task of developing a non-reductive naturalist theory of religious rituals can be divided into explanation of the semantics of rituals, and explanation of their pragmatics. Penner (2000, 70–71) points out that we cannot derive semantics—that is language—from a study of pragmatics, that is speech, performance or use. Both are needed for theory building about religious rituals. Liturgists are specialists in the semantics of Christian rituals. In the present research, this is particularly evident in regard to the ritual elements connected with experience of God in the Eucharist (section 4.4.2). Specific knowledge of the semantics of the Eucharist is needed to analyse and categorise the participants' comments. One needs hermeneutic insight to do justice to the insider perspective of participants in the Eucharist. This hermeneutic understanding (Verstehen) is the specific expertise of liturgists. This is exemplified in section 5.1, when we remarked that the ritual form hypothesis wrongly ignores the community dimension of rituals and disconnects the special ritual agent (priest) from the community. A hermeneutic understanding of the Eucharist can reveal this dimension and broaden our perspective on this Christian rite.

**Literature**


