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Liturgy as Experience — the Psychology of Worship

A Theoretical and Empirical Lacuna

Introduction

This article has three aims: 1) to plead for an approach to the study of the liturgy based on the psychology of religion, 2) to draw up a preliminary theoretical model for how the liturgy can be interpreted, and 3) to narrow down the field for further interdisciplinary development and empirical analysis.

The liturgy is — from a historical viewpoint — the ritual centre, the socially supported and architectonically accompanied symbolic world within which Christian religious experience has emerged and through which people could/can (?) find an answer to their life questions. Religious language is not “silent” in the liturgical event, it does not consist merely of a textual mass that is read intellectually or privately; rather, it is a part of common and integrated “fictional contract” or stylised role play: praise of, prayer to, forgiveness for and acceptance of a message from “the Other”. An interdisciplinary study of religious rite and place could develop this further.

The service in the Swedish Lutheran church has changed in a decisive way during the second half of this century. This is also true to some extent of the non-conformist churches. The liturgy of church services has, after enormous effort, been reformed. The work of reform has, in turn, been studied from historical, organisational and theological perspectives (Klingert 1989).

It is remarkable, however, that no real study based upon a behavioural approach has been made of what people actually experience when they attend one or other form of service and what factors affect their experiences.

This lack of information has meant that different actors on the ecclesiastical scene can more easily project their own wishful thinking into the liturgy. It can be claimed that the service provides meaning, security, a sense of closeness or that symbols or gestures, communion or the position of the altar create the prerequisites for experiencing the holy or sacred. However, this is something that is assumed, hoped or presumed. From the academic point of view the field is theoretically diffuse and an empirical lacuna.

No study has addressed the question of the relationship or distance between what professional religious *believe* or hope that liturgies convey and what those attending a church service *actually* understand and experience. In all probability there is also a great difference between how a service is experienced by those with a considerable degree of theological education and training, ordinary “churchgoers” and those who just happen to find themselves in church for some reason or other. There are certainly differences between the young and the elderly, between men and women, etc. Different services serve different purposes for different individuals (see Helmbroek and Boudewijse 1990; Faber and Tilborg 1977).

In all probability — but we know very little about this — people undergo more or less strong experiences during and in conjunction with church services (Grimes 1984). Perhaps people are moved, experience holiness, reverence, fellowship or closeness to the risen Christ. The problem is what factors during the service strengthen such a religious experience. What is the role played by the music, symbols, the place or building where the service is held, the number of participants and the liturgical event? We can turn the question around and ask, “What is it about the service that *militates against* a spiritual, religious experience?” This latter question is just as important since it has been assumed in discussions within the church that the desacralisation, historicisation and wordy demystification of divine service can in fact be an instrument of secularisation. There has been a desire to bring back the sacred into church services. But instead of wonder, a feeling of sanctity and a transcendental experience has the most important experience perhaps been one of stiffness, boredom, strangeness or disappointment, especially among Christians?

In other words, in the psychological approach to the study of church services there are numerous questions that need to be examined terminologically, theoretically, methodologically and materially. It is for these reasons that the interdisciplinary project “Liturgy as Experience” has been initiated and a project group set up in the Department of Theology at Uppsala University.

These questions should not, however, be looked upon as of only internal ecclesiastical or religious interest. A development of the area "liturgy as experience" casts light on *interdisciplinary* problems, both in principle and of a more general nature, concerning the relationship between space-behaviour/experience, music-religious experience, experience-interpretation (Hesser and Weigert 1980). By linking it to current psychological theory (attributive, cognitive and dynamic psychology) the study can be related to the question of religious socialisation and change. By bringing different disciplines into contact with each other within the framework of a research group representing the history of art, liturgical studies, musicology, semiotics, ritual studies, the sociology of religion and the psychology of religion the greatest possible degree of penetration of the problem can be guaranteed.

The Scientific Study of the Liturgy

The rite, liturgy or service — whatever we term the phenomenon that is the focus of our study — has been studied primarily from three perspectives: that of theology, that of social sciences of religion and that of the history of religion.

The theological study of church services is often called *liturgical studies*. In Sweden this has generally meant a *historical* and systematic analytical branch of research. It has been customary to study the development of church services from the early church up to the present to see how cultural influences have set their stamp on the form and symbolism of divine service. The question has also been reversed and discussion has revolved around what significance church services have had for society and cultural expressions (Dix 1945).

Another trend in liturgical studies has been that of systematic theology — an attempt to arrive at an understanding of the religious arguments contained in one or another form of service, the place of the confession of sins, the conditional nature of absolution, whether mass should be celebrated facing the people, etc. Within liturgical studies there have also been more interdisciplinary projects that have looked at the interaction between place and liturgy, religious symbolism and its theological justification, dramaturgy, the place of music and change, etc. There are already lines within musicology, comparative literature, the history of art and architecture that examine these. In all three fields there is

a preliminary but so far undeveloped psychological reasoning about the liturgy as experience (Martling 1986; Ekenberg 1984).

Two social and psychological perspectives can be adopted in the study of church services. One concerns the social/cultural function of the service, i.e. its place and significance for church life and society in general, for the district, for customs and habits. The other concerns how different individuals experience church services.

The first field has been studied to some extent by *sociologists of religion*. However, attendance at church services has often been only one of many parameters of piety. By means of these measurements we can follow clearly at the national, diocesan and parish level developments and changes in baptismal customs, communion customs, in the frequency of high masses, the frequency of communion, etc. and reach a certain knowledge about who goes to church and for what reasons (Weelock 1984). In ecclesiastical sociology, in ethnology and in folkloristics there are interesting studies of baptismal, funeral and wedding customs, i.e. events that are linked with the human life-cycle.

However, when it comes to individual people's experiences of going to church, entering a church, hearing church bells, lighting a candle in a candelabra, listening to organ music, singing hymns, genuflecting during mass, etc. there are far fewer studies. This is remarkable since there is hardly any field which is more relevant in the *psychology of religion*. The mediation of religious traditions in today's secularised Sweden takes place almost exclusively in church. The main church services on Sundays are of the utmost interest both as religious mediation and as content. The psychology of religion can, for example, study reception, i.e. "the way the different elements that comprise a service are experienced".

At this point I should like to stress that I do not look upon the service as simply a pedagogical or communicative structure in which some form of knowledge or ideas are mediated from A to B. The idea of a sender (the minister or the gospel) and a receiver (the churchgoer) needs to be supplemented with a model which more clearly underlines that from the psychological standpoint the special character of divine service/mass — as opposed to many other forms of cultural activity — is that those who attend a church service themselves take part in creating what they experience. From the socio-psychological point of view the liturgy constitutes rather a kind of stylised play with fixed roles, a religiously legitimised form of behaviour within a given fictional contract. Gestalt psychology, the theory of theater and ritual studies can offer important theoretical perspectives for renewed understanding. A group of people who together

and repeatedly make use of a symbol world with the aim of re-creating and re-experiencing an imaginary religious world must be viewed from a socio-psychological perspective.

A third research approach is that of the history of religion or *the phenomenology of religion*. From a transcultural and interreligious perspective the liturgy is a type of rite or cult. It is — like other collective ritual events — a celebration that 1) sustains a memory or keeps events alive, 2) creates a social fellowship around this event, and 3) offers people an opportunity to “re-dedicate” themselves to this memory (Randall 1985).

A distinction is made in the phenomenology of religion between rites pertaining to different stages in life, “rites de passage”, time-related rites and crisis rites. As a result of secularisation the justification for these rites may be transferred from religious to political, psychological and other secular attitudes to life. An analysis of the successive emergence of secular rites, not least in relation to our life-cycles, working lives, and the year would be of interest here, as would the function of these rites.

In such an analysis it is important to relate ecclesiastical liturgies to central concepts from Mircea Eliade’s dichotomy sacred/secular, hierophany and ontophany and also to Tillich’s symbol theories (Wikström 1990a; Wikström 1990b; Wikström 1992; Wikström 1993). In this way we can more clearly explain the religious function of church services by incorporating them into an interdisciplinary framework of a wider nature, not just a Christian one. In addition, ritual studies supplement the psychological functional perspectives with a more contentual one where the focus lies on the dichotomy sacred/secular.

The Liturgy as a Psychological Field

The topic “liturgy and psychology” is, in other words, a key research field in the psychology of religion but one which has been neglected. The psychology of religion strives to understand the conditions of religious experience. Church services constitute some of the few occasions on which religious tradition is mediated in modern society. Such tradition is hardly handed on in the home or in Sunday school. In children’s religious instruction organised by the church and in pre-schools religious tradition has been subjected to ideological devaluation. In schools the principle of agnosticism predominates.

The sacred space and the holy service/rite probably play a doubly important role as mediators of religious tradition in the secularised society. Divine worship/the place where it takes place as a communicative space, as a semiotic space, as a communion of symbols, as a ritual presentation of mystical patterns are therefore of decisive interest in order to understand religious initiation and socialisation in a Europe characterised by many cultures.

Preliminary questions which might well be asked are “who attend church services, why do they go to church and what do they get out of it, both at the time and in the long term? What factors affect what churchgoers get out of attending church?”

Even from such general questions as these it can be seen that both the terms “church service” and “experience” must be precisely defined and operationalised in order to avoid vague generalisations. Multidimensionality must be avoided and a precise definition arrived at in order to proceed from vague speculation to exact clarification of a number of sub-areas that might be subjected to study.

The focus of interest for a psychologist of religion is *man* as an experiential and behavioural being; in this context man is seen in relation to the church service and where it takes place. The terms used are not those of theology, the liturgy, church history or the Bible but derive from the theoretical models of social psychology and its research. We speak of “social interaction between actors” and “ritualised intercommunication” or that a number of persons enter into a “fictional contract”.

The Psychology of Liturgy — a Preliminary Model

How is it possible to obtain a preliminary theoretical understanding of the psychological factors contained in the liturgy as a whole? I am thinking of a church service in an average parish, on an ordinary Sunday, in an ordinary church with church bell, porch, pews, altar, some Christian symbols, church warden, organist, choir, minister/s who act, church elders greeting churchgoers and reading the texts, etc. However, the model needs to be extended so that it encompasses the Orthodox, Lutheran and Catholic churches. We shall concentrate on the church service as a rite and therefore the sermon will be accorded only secondary status.

I will limit myself to

- pointing out a number of basic questions concerning the relationship between the liturgy and religious experience.

- proposing a number of theses about the psychological role of the liturgy with the aid of which I will try — through analogy with psychological and sociological theory — to understand how different stages of the service affect people.

The Role of the Liturgy in the Genesis and Maintenance of Religious Experience

Religious experience can be formalised by saying that it consists of different elements in the individual, for example

- an experience of participating in something Different or holy which breaks the constraints of this world (the *Holiness* dimension)
- an experience that this “something” is the unfathomable existence (“I am”), the *Mystical* dimension, and/or is a person with a will, the *Dialogue with God* dimension
- an experience of being the object of the Holy One’s/the Other Being’s actions, i.e. the experience is a consequence of being “hit” from without (the *Intervention* dimension), not something one has created oneself.

I shall make a distinction between *an experience* in the sense of something felt, undergone on a single occasion and *experience* in the sense of a chain or series of events linked together. In concrete terms, the second sense means that one does not experience the holy, the sacred just once. Religious experience in the second sense often indicates that a person has undergone several experiences that together form a total experience. But language use in this respect often varies.

These three dimensions are closely linked. They often occur simultaneously. Christian theological systems develop the theological definition of these dimensions systematically into dogmas. “The Other Being’s” activity, for example, is defined

- in the teaching that God exists in an eternal invisible world that is in, with or under this world
- in terms of God being a mystery but at the same time a person who is creator, redeemer and life-giver
- in terms of “before we seek God, He seeks us” Such teachings and dogmas have been expanded in different directions. They in turn have led to stylised architectonic, musical, poetic, literary and *liturgical* expressions.

From the *psychological* point of view historical or theological/dogmatic definitions of religious experience less important. The interesting question from the psychology of religion standpoint is to find similarities and differences on the experiential level between Lutheran, Orthodox and Catholic liturgies and to see how the theological definition of different liturgical elements, e.g. mass offering, the occurrence of Mary in symbolism, the singing of hymns or the use of incense, affects the churchgoer's total experience.

The focus lies on

- *describing* religious experiences undergone during a church service (fear, peace, joy, forgiveness, nearness to God, eternity, etc.)
- the psychological *conditions* under which these types of experiences are encouraged or discouraged during the liturgical event (music, symbolism, size of church or chapel, etc.)
- the *interaction* between the auditory, visual, verbal and spatial dimensions of the place where the service takes place and the actual service itself
- the *function* these experiences have for different individuals at the time and in the long term.

How can we identify the psychological factors in the service that should exist if these types of experiences are to occur? Put in another way, how can a psychological readiness for single religious experiences be created and sustained in an individual during a church service so that he may experience, momentarily or more constantly, existence in a religious way?

It is impossible to study religious experience as a *psychological phenomenon* if we *a priori* exclude our knowledge of the normal processes to which people are subject: i.e. perception, socialisation, symbol environment, linguistic treatment of internal experiences, interpretation of existential conflicts. In the following I shall address the liturgy primarily as a collection of symbols.

Liturgy as Acting within a Language Game

Without a common set of linguistic and social symbols it is difficult to *sustain an experience* of some holy thing or holy person. In their private spheres individuals may feel that they share in something Different, the sacred, be religious on the private plane, etc. However, if this experience is to be firmly established or rooted in the individual there needs to be

a fellowship through which the experiences can be legitimised verbally or symbolically in a social context; there needs to be a plausibility structure (Berger and Luckmann 1966).

Put in another way, the biblical terms “God”, “spirit”, “the granting of prayers”, “salvation” become alive for an individual only if they are confirmed by other important individuals. The words, the conception of religious reality and its symbolic language — together with the experiences for which the words are an expression — have can survive value only if they are shared. Religious words are bearers of a meaningful content primarily because the individual is part of a social field where others live in a language game where the words refer to similar experiences. Here the ritual language and its interaction with the holy space play an important role. From the psychological viewpoint the “dual” character of religious language is also of fundamental interest (Sundén 1966).

Religious tradition is a language or a symbolic universe which incorporates man into a cosmic context that stretches “for ever and ever”. This context is not only described verbally in the liturgy; it is also acted out bodily.

A key concept in the Christian — as indeed in the Judaic and Islamic — scheme of the world is that God lives and interacts with man. This dialogue experience is visualised and recreated in the liturgy as a *role play* where God is the one, invisible partner and man the other in a given interaction. The minister represents or symbolically “makes present” God by means of his liturgical role, for example, by raising his hands and blessing or forgiving the assembled congregation, or by distributing the bread and wine. The role play is emphasised by the liturgical apparel. The minister plays a stylised role which is legitimised by its allegedly transcendental origin and function, to relate or link God to man. Regardless of the theological view it is interesting from the psychological viewpoint to note that a service can be described as just such a drama between God and man.

The “Christian dialect” of this religious dialogue is found developed in the most important texts and semiotics of the liturgy, in hymns, in the sermon, of course, but also in the symbolic language of the liturgical garments, on the altar and in the architecture of the church. The cognitive content is accompanied by the music. This means that we detect a preliminary condition for religious experience; Christian tradition with its dual narratives.

Liturgy as a Cultural and Semiotic Act Embedded in a Christian Interpretive Scheme. This Scheme Colours both the Sacred Room and Rite.

A fundamental assumption in Christian belief is that there exists another — a truer — world where the Other lives and speaks to man through the Word and the Sacraments.

This contentual fundament marks the *symbolic environment* in which the liturgy takes place, the *texts* and hymns used to mediate the sacred tradition and the *way* in which the liturgy is performed by the different actors. The “relational experience” is already fixed and (in a double sense) cemented by the appearance of the church building. Through the symbolic language provided by the church, the position of the altar as a focus of attention or in the liturgical language where the priest symbolically acts out his/her part in front of the Other Being on behalf of the congregation but at the same time represents “the Other Being” to the congregation. The liturgical signs and symbols probably facilitate the mediation of the relation experience.

This “language” sits there so to speak and *waits for* the person entering the church. The altar is stripped during Holy Week, candles and flowers abound on Easter Sunday, etc. The outward symbolic language emphasises the cognitive content. The church or place where the service takes place, the obvious symbols interact both with the actors on the stage (in front of the altar) and with the congregation (the churchgoers) in a different way from in the theatre, at an opera or in a cinema. The churchgoer and the priest take part in a joint action. The *interaction* between the actors (the congregation — liturgies — musicians — choirs) and the outward symbols (church garments etc.) tend to heighten the degree of involvement.

A social alloy is created between the different actors (priest-congregation-organist etc.) on the “stage” where the service is “performed” partly through the common verbal, sung codes and partly through the common codes of behaviour. Hymns sung in unison constitute a psychologically important factor since by taking an active part the behaviour that many other people are sharing in “social facilitation” is increased. In addition, there other linguistic expressions — the joint confession of the faith, answering prayers, confession of sins, agreement, etc. There is a great difference between just sitting and listening on the one hand and, as in a church service, listening, watching, moving one’s body, tasting, smelling on the other. Then there is the common body language of the congregation

— genuflecting, making the sign of the cross, bowing, going up to the altar, rising to one's feet during the reading of the gospel or when the procession approaches. All this "behavioural language" is in turn embedded in the overarching religious interpretive framework "the relationship with the invisible but nonetheless real Other Being" (Schieffelin 1955).

Liturgy as Verbal and Non-verbal Role Play

From one angle the liturgy can, then, be seen as a drama which is repeated time after time. This drama is not shown on a screen or a stage but it is the actual church building that constitutes the stage on which the participants themselves are the "actors". The members of the congregation act out a play where the Other — invisible, to be sure — is represented by the *cross* that is carried in, by the *bread* and the *wine* that are distributed and by the *hand* raised in blessing. It occurs in an even more tangible form when the churchgoers fall upon their knees to receive communion and "is" the disciple who receives the bread from Christ's hand. The people taking part in the service are on stage. The visual and auditory constituents in the mass are subordinated both to the "dialogue elements" and to the creative elements of the service. The confessional content is expressed in the liturgy both *verbally* and *non-verbally*.

Verbally there are the hymns that are sung, the texts that are read, the sermon that is preached, the interaction between the liturgist and the members of the congregation. The cognitive content of the religious texts is accompanied *non-verbally*.

The *auditory element* in the music accompanies and emphasises the religious content. Hymns sung during Lent are predominantly in the minor key, songs of praise in the major, evening hymns are meditative, etc. Church bells ringing are linked with an experience of sanctity, they call the people to church services, and they interrupt burial services when tolling the knell. The significance of church bells ringing probably serves the function of a religious experience since they accompany the actual introduction to services in the sense that they "spread" an air of sanctity since they are heard both within and without. The sound inspires associations with earlier services or childhood experiences. It is also a sound which in the middle of the liturgy — when the bells are rung for the dead — offers a moment of introversion and private meditation. It affects primary processes.

Then there is the church organ, an instrument regarded by many as sacred since it accompanies the hymns sung by the congregation and also because it is an instrument that marks the transition to the religious phase in the form of preludes and the return to the secular by means of the postlude. The musical constituent is *collectively active*; the congregation is invited to join in the singing of the hymns or antiphons where social characteristics are emphasised.

In the case of *private and passive* listening to the choir, soloists, instruments or organ the text may be important but in all probability the aesthetic musical expression is even more so. The music with its tonal language is subordinated to the overall "dialogue"; it is *expressive*. Christmas carols and Lenten hymns make it possible for the congregation to express their joy and longing, sorrow, repentance and self-control.

The *visual* as represented by the church itself emphasises the sacred. Different symbols in stylised form — altar, windows, paintings, candlesticks — point to the divine. The church or chapel constitutes a space which is at the same time social and focused. There is an obvious focus for the eye — usually a cross or altar — and this centre of focus is the same for all the members of the congregation. The garments worn by the celebrant — alb and stole — emphasise his role as a holder of office, that he is not present as a private person but he is subordinated to the message of dialogue that he speaks of; this is expressed visually in his apparel. It is made quite clear that he plays a role that is typified, he represents the people to God and God to the people. The progression from one liturgical colour to another is in turn linked with the system contained in the liturgical year. This in turn has its legitimate basis in the revelation that has the character of a dialogue. The candles that burn on the altar or that can be lit in a candelabra in conjunction with prayers of intercession represent calm and spiritual peace. They create the outward space around which the mental space is created that gives the kind of religious experience defined above.

Gestures and movements constitute a kind of body language; raising the hands points to the basic content, genuflecting, rising to a standing position to listen to the gospel, etc. are all a bodily expression of the cognitive content (DeMarinis 1990).

The liturgy itself is consequently a form of dramatised yet nonetheless stylised expression of the religious content it tells about. It offers typified, established and theologically legitimised codes of behaviour.

Liturgy as Drama Makes Involvement Easier

The focus of the liturgy — if we except the sermon — is not communication of an unambiguous message which is encoded, dispatched, decoded and evaluated; rather it is an expression of a complex of ideas that influences different moods.

The linguistic, the musical, the behavioural fellowship is built up about a centre which in theoretical terms can be described as an interaction between God and man. In the course of this interaction it is not just a question of talking *about* God but also *with* God. To bow one's head before the altar is a way of expressing or acting out one's faith. When the churchgoer after hearing the liturgist proclaim "This is the word of the Lord" answers "Thanks to be God", it is a way of emphasising that there exists an invisible Other Being. Participation in an event, as opposed to just listening and accepting, probably strengthens the individual's involvement in what is taking place (Freundt 1969).

The Sacred Room, Beginning and End of the Ritual Underline the Fictional Contract

The beginning of the service is partly an auditory experience — listening to the church bells, partly the experience of entering the church through the door. The act of *leaving* the secular and *entering* the sacred, the process of actively trying to achieve silence, calm, reverence and peace, the rising to one's feet at the beginning of the service as the procession makes its way to the altar, the listening to the prelude to the first hymn — all these have as their aim the "starting up" of the religious experience.

There is a clearly defined outside and inside in a purely spatial and behavioural sense: one enters through a door. Passing through the very door itself means that the space unconsciously redefines the churchgoer; from being a person of the world and society he becomes the object of something unspoken and holy. Here the fictional contract is concluded. It is renewed continuously during the liturgy. After the blessing and the final hymn the process of readaptation to the secular world begins. The postlude is an introverted and private moment, and then the churchgoer leaves the church or chapel, possibly bowing to the altar as he or she departs. Outside there are greetings and handshakes, coffee is served in the parish hall and the social part of the meeting takes over. The service that has legitimised the fictional contract in a sacred way is over. Now

the members of the congregation have redefined themselves in terms of the secular world.

The Psychological Function of the Liturgy

Functional explanations and descriptions of religious experience, in religio-psychological research, maintain, for example, that "religious experience gives man a meaning, it offers security in the face of death, it gives a cosmic experience of sanctity, eternity, it creates a commonality of values, etc". It is important that the question of function be asked, defined and operationalised in connection with the question of what the liturgy *gives*.

We can preliminarily distinguish four ways of describing the function that a religious experience fulfils. It gives a comprehensive meaning to existential questions (an *cognitive* function). It provides an experience of the Other Being who invisibly accompanies man through his life-cycle and provides security (an *emotional* function). We can also see the religious experience as a way of receiving moral guidance and rehabilitation/forgiveness (an *ethical* function). Finally, the symbols and rites of the service give expression to a feeling of wonderment, awe, gratitude and joy when we are confronted with the holy (an *expressive* function).

Religious symbols objectify or "awaken" qualities that are latent within man. The liturgy narrows down, activates and reworks different types of human needs or motives. It is important to define all these functions and relate them to the liturgy and the different elements contained in it.

The liturgy *typifies experiential qualities* — healing, repentance, joy, fellowship, respect — which are expressed so to speak in condensed form and which are continually repeated and expressed in the form I/you in a kind of role play. There are a) experiences which present themselves in confrontation with existential questions concerning death, the meaning of life, suffering, the finiteness of time (cognitive function), b) experiences of wonderment, sanctity, gratitude, praise (the expressive function), c) experiences of responsibility and guilt (the ethical function), d) experiences of loneliness, insecurity, fear and its positive pole — trust (emotional function).

From a dynamic psychological viewpoint it may be said that questions concerning death always constitute a potential source of anxiety in man's subconscious. Man has constantly to repress such feelings in order to be able to function. The same is true of responsibility/guilt/suffering. The self-examination that forms part of the liturgy activates man's more or

less repressed *guilt* or consciousness of sin. The fear of *death* is activated during the Easter drama in the different variations in the mass during the liturgical year, *suffering* during Lent, futility during Holy Trinity which talks of *growing up* and social responsibility, etc.

The liturgy and its symbols — which change with the church year — consequently appeal to half repressed or unconscious levels in the listener. This is an interpretation from depth psychology. It also explains the psychological survival value of the communion liturgy. It corresponds to deeply felt needs to both give expression to and provide an outlet for uneasiness and at the same time thereby to gain relief, something that takes place simultaneously, in the same ritual act.

An expression of *gratitude* and wonder is offered by hymns of praise, the possibility of rising to one's feet, raising one's hands, bowing one's head when receiving the blessing. The altar is a manifestation and an objectivisation of a transcendent signal.

Naturally one might say that other cultural activities — an opera, a play or a film — arouse similar experiences and can therefore have similar functions. But the stylised language of the liturgy offers a formative framework within which semi-conscious feelings can be expressed and cultivated.

Liturgy as Interaction of Introversion/Extroversion, Individualism/Collectivism, Primary/Secondary Processes and Regression/Progression

The church service is legitimised along the axis God/the holy and man. This is the ideology that underlies the whole service. But the form in which this encounter between God and man takes expression might be described as a form of commuting.

1) Between extroversion and introversion. The participant in part concentrates on external factors, in other words what the priests or other actors say or do. Attention is directed outwards. During the process of self-examination before confession, on the other hand, attention is directed inwards. The same may be said of the prayers where the words of the prayers are spoken by the liturgist and the others present are expected to agree silently. Introversion is perhaps at its extreme in the case of bells ringing, prayers or at the moment when a person kneels down to receive the sacrament.

2) Between individualism and collectivism. The commuting is between those parts of the liturgy where the individual sees himself as an "I" with a personal responsibility and in an individual encounter with the Other Being and those parts where he sees himself as taking part in a "we" experience, such as "We believe in God the Father almighty". The collective is expressed, for example, when the members of the congregation together kneel down whereas the individual lies in the fact that each separate member of the congregation receives his own wafer of bread, his own sip of wine when the priest says "given up for you, shed for you".

3) Between primary and secondary processes. Between rationality and emotionality. The sermon has a more cognitive orientation whereas participation in hymn singing or when the member of the congregation returns to his pew after communion is not just this. The pew itself and its hard quality militates against all too deep a falling into an altered state of consciousness, something that a cinema seat or a concert hall more easily permits. To stand up, to sit, to kneel down are all acts that militate against monotony. The shape of the church pew from the experiential viewpoint is not unimportant.

4) Between regression and progression. The church service is a social channel through which we may gain access to primary processes but it is also a regression when it comes to the question of "I". It takes place partly in so-called "transitional space", partly in the ego area, partly on the preconscious or unconscious level. The liturgy with its symbols and forms can, in psychoanalytical terms, be seen as an activator of unconscious levels within the personality. Consequently on a projective level it is able to influence conflicts and desires.

Theoretical Foundations

The theoretical foundation that an empirical study of this kind can build on is — apart from general theory from the psychology of religion —

the sociology of knowledge and in particular its emphasis on the capacity of religious language as a function of fellowship,

Sundén's role theory, which stresses the religious texts and rites devoted to identification and role adoption and therefore can interpret the liturgy as a dual dialogue experience,

psychoanalytical symbol theory, which strives to clarify the relation between a given religious symbolism and its intrapsychic function or correspondence.

Not least can Winnicott's term the *transition area* (Winnicott 1971; Winnicott 1953) be linked to a more sociological theory of play and drama, the "fictional contract". To this we can add models from music, art and sociology.

Summary

The number of people who trust in and expect something from the religious world is declining. The Sunday church service is probably, however, one of the more important instruments of socialisation in the assimilation of religious traditions. The ritual action and the liturgical space can, from a functional perspective, be seen as a social and cultural semiotic system for the expression, interpretation and processing of existential questions. In earlier times the church service made it possible for a person to regularly interpret his life by means of a given symbolic framework. The academic study of the church service has hitherto been mainly either historical or theological. Analyses of the *liturgy as experience* have been lacking and constitute an undeveloped and empirically virgin field.

I have initially attempted to unite the liturgy with a number of psychological theories and models. This theoretical work, however, is only preliminary; my intention is to continue a more intimate cooperation with representatives of ritual studies, art historians and liturgy historians, musicologists, educationists and sociologists. This will take place within the framework of the research project "Liturgy and experience".

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