I trust I shall hear from you. You may be sure of our interest in you and our willingness to cooperate in every possible way.

With all good wishes, I am

Sincerely,
Charles E. Batten

CBE

TLc CRO-NRGR.

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project

“Ritual”

[25 September 1946–31 January 1948?]
[Atlanta, Ga.?]

Probably written for a sociology course with Walter R. Chivers during King’s junior or senior year, this paper is one of the few extant academic papers from his Morehouse years. As a “pre-th[e]ological” student and major in sociology, he grapples with the problem of writing “scientifically” about religious matters. In this paper King considers both sacred and secular rituals, including those of the Ku Klux Klan and college fraternities. Chivers gave the paper an A− and commented: “This is a good analysis. Your thought is good. Learn to do two things: (1) Proof read and correct your ms. before submitting it; (2) How to document and check your references.” In this and other academic essays, King’s citations are presented as notes in the inner margin.

I. Introduction
II. Definition
III. Classification of Ritual
   A. Sacred
      (a) Life Cycle Ritual
         1. Baptism
         2. Birth
         3. Ritual Dances
         4. Marriage (sacred)
         5. Others

(b) Ritual For Group Welfare
1. Mass
2. Communion
3. Feast Days
4. Others

B. Secular
(a) Secret Societies
1. Clubs
2. Age Groups
3. Fraternities
4. Lodges
5. Ku Klux Klan
6. Others
(b) Etiquette
1. Standing
2. Smiling
3. Removal of hat
4. Words of thanks

V. Changes of Rites
A. Causes
1. Cultural change
2. Individualism

VI. Conclusion

The present study represents an attempt to apply the scientific method to an analysis of ritual. Being a pre-theological student it would ordinarily be expected of me to defend certain aspects of sacred ritual, therefore becoming unscientific; but I will attempt to be as unbiased and scientific as possible. For the most part the study has been confined to the forms and functions of ritual in contemporary America, though occasional references are made to ritualism characteristic of other cultures, even as far back as Greek and Hebrew culture.

In order to keep the study within reasonable limits it has been necessary to confine the analysis to what appears to be the most important features. So very complex and all pervasive is the phenomenon of ritu-

2. Chivers wrote “good” in the margin.
3. Chivers corrected “titualism” to “ritualism” and added an “s” to the end of the sentence.
alism that a complete picture would involve innumerable details of all single aspects involved in ritual. In this respect the present study conforms to accepted methodological standards in institutional research. This study will deal with both sacred and secular ritual. For the purpose of this discussion the terms "ritual" and "ceremonial" will be used synonymously. Let us now look into the meaning of ritual.

"Ritual," in the words of Ruth Benedick, "is a form of prescribed and elaborated behavior and occurs both as the spontaneous inventions of the individual especially of the compulsion neurotic, and as a cultural trait."5 From this definition we can easily see that ritual is found in all forms of prescribed behavior. In other words ritual is any repetitive symbolic act which is socially established. As used in this sense the term may indicate either those simple, person-to-person acts such as handshaking or tipping one's hat, or else those formal collective procedures such as a Catholic Mass, the inauguration of a president, the graduation of college students, or the initiation of a neophyte into a secret order.

In most discussions of ritual it is often discussed as aspect of religion and has been considered the origin of religion, but it is by no means a phenomenon peculiar to religion, as we saw in the definition above. I will agree that most of the ritualistic occasions are sacred and are often, therefore religious; but many secular occasions are similarly elaborated.6 Durkheim, the French sociologist, contends that ritual is only to be associated with that which is sacred;6 but this contention must certainly be challenged, for the most extreme ritualistic formalism has no religion connec-

---

4. Chivers underlined "Ritual" and "Encyclopedia Of Sociology," and in each instance (text and footnote) circled the misspelled name, correcting it to "Benedict." He marked the Encyclopedia of Sociology and commented, "I don't know this reference." The citation is Ruth Benedict, "Ritual," in Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, ed. Edwin R. A. Seligman and Alvin Johnson (New York: Macmillan, 1934), 13:396–397. The word "inventions" in the middle of the quotation should be "invention"; likewise, the correct phrase at the end of the quotation should be "cultural trait."

5. Benedict, "Ritual," p. 396: "It is ordinarily discussed as an aspect of religion and has even been considered the origin of religion, but it is by no means a phenomenon peculiar to religion. The occasions which are ritualistically elaborated are usually solemn and are often therefore religious; but many secular occasions are similarly elaborated."

6. Chivers asked, "How does he define sacred?"
tions, as we shall see later in the study. I will agree that in many instances secular ritual grows out of sacred ritual, but certainly are they not to be used identical. Durkheim fails to see that ritual may surround any field of behavior. Let us look for the moment into the realm of sacred ritual.

We shall begin this discussion by giving a few of the ritualistic practices connected with individual or life cycle ritual. The first rite under discussion is that of baptism. As a sacrament of admission to the church, baptism always stood until the religious divisions of Post-Reformation days. It so stands for the vast majority of Christians at present. The origin of the rite is uncertain, but according to most of the theological data I have come across, it seems probable that it was a spiritualization of the old Levitical washing. Diverse interpretations of baptism have been given by theologians. To John the Baptist, it was a fitting symbol of the spiritual purification that followed the repentance of sin. With Paul, baptism was not merely the symbol of cleansing from sin, it involved a new relationship to Christ, and a participation in his death and resurrection. Baptism still stands as one of the basic symbolic acts connected with sacred ritual.

The ceremonies associated with the birth of a child is also a very important aspect of life cycle ritual. Leaving contemporary America for the moment, I have chosen for an example the Buka people in the Northwestern part of Bougainville in the Solomon Island.* Among these people the beginning of pregnancy is symbolically marked; the woman makes a belt of a special creeper and wears it in place of a loin cloth; furthermore, during pregnancy, she must abstain from eating certain foods. Toward the end of pregnancy a ritual is performed to make delivery easy. When the expectant mother feels the child birth beginning, the husband goes to fetch one of her female relatives and then goes to another but where he must spend his time in complete idleness for three days. During this period, he must carry no account, carry or lift no heavy objects. It is believed that if he did so, the child would be injured.

* Blackwood, Beatrice, Both sides of Buka Passage, 1935

---

7. Benedict, “Ritual,” p. 396: “The contention of Durkheim . . . that religion arises from ritualism as such must be challenged, for the most extreme ritualistic formalism . . .”

His reintroduction to his normal rate of interaction begins on the fourth day, after he has seen his wife and child he is allowed to wander around the village once more. Actually these prohibitions are nothing more than ritualistic ceremonies. Of course, in a more complex society like our own, the ceremonies connected with child birth are much different, yet they are present.

The ritual dance is also a striking phenomena to study in relation to ritualism. I will use for an example the vodun dance as found in the Haitian Culture.* According to Herskoirts the vodun dance is the most public aspect of Haitian peasant ritual and also the most important social occasion.

The vodun dance may be said to be nothing more than a symbolic way of becoming possessed of the gods. A release of psychic {tension) is undoubtedly afforded those who become possessed.10 When a possession occurs, the songs for the deity who has "arrived" are taken up as the drums play the rhythm of the god. As the possession comes on, the devotee falls to the ground, rolling before the drums, or staggers blindly about the dancing-space. After a while he begins to dance.11 Gradually his dancing becomes calmed until he is taken to a near-by house where he rests and if, as often happens, he has rolled in muddy ground during his possession, he washes and changes his clothes.12 This, in short, is the theory behind the ritual dance.

The ritual connected with marriage is the simplest of all ceremonies with which we have to deal. There is always a general increase of interaction between

---

11. Herskovits, Life in a Haitian Valley, p. 183: "When a possession occurs, the songs for the deity who has 'arrived' are taken up as the drums play the rhythm of the god. As his possession comes on, the devotee falls to the ground, rolling before the drums, or staggers blindly about the dancing-space, or otherwise follows the characteristic behavior attributed to his god. After a time he begins to dance."
12. Herskovits, Life in a Haitian Valley, p. 184: "Gradually his dancing becomes calmed, until he is taken either to the maison de servitude or to a near-by house, where he rests and if, as often happens, he has rolled on muddy ground during his possession, he washes and changes his clothes."
two groups, involving, as a rule, gift giving and feasting. It is interesting to know that most of the ceremonies connected with marriage were borrowed from Jewish and Pagan customs. The presentation of the man and woman by their parents and friends, the joining of their right hands, the giving and receiving of a ring, the veiling of the bride, and the crowning of the married couple with chaplets and flowers, were all in use in the fourth century A.D. This ceremony remains one of the most sacred of all ritual in our culture.

Other life cycle rituals which will not be discussed in detail are puberty ceremonies, funeral ceremonies, circumcision etc. Each of these is built around definite ritualistic practices.

Now we pass from the realm of life cycle ritual to the ritual for group welfare. It must be remembered that both are equally important in institutional research. The Catholic Mass, in my opinion is the most important phase of ritual for group welfare. I will elaborate on the mass a little more than I have on previous aspects of ritual, because of the extreme formal and ritualistic practices found therein. I will approach the Mass from a somewhat social-psychological point of view. That is to say I will go into such matters as the character of social interaction within the church, the influence of the ritualistic experiences on attitudes and values, and particularly the effect of the ritual on youthful members.

The ritual centering around the mass with all of its formalism is the principal feature which sets off Catholicism from Protestantism. In the ceremony of the mass there are three factors, the belief, the ritual, and the response of the worshiper. Of all of these, the symbolic trapping, the ritual, is the most important. Why is it that this mechanical factor tends to confirm people in their old faiths and hold them in the

---

13. Oscar Hardman, *A History of Christian Worship* (Nashville, Tenn.: Cokesbury Press, 1937), pp. 73–74: "The presentation of the man and woman by their parents and friends, the joining of their right hands, the giving and receiving of a ring, the veiling of the bride by the priest, and the crowning of the married couple with chaplets and flowers, were all in use at this time [from the fourth to the seventh centuries]."

14. Chivers underlined “most important phase” and asked, “Do you mean this?”

15. Luther Sheeleigh Cressman, "Ritual the Conserver," *American Journal of Sociology* 35 (January 1930): 569: "The ritual centering about the Mass and all its manifold implications is the principal feature which sets off Catholicism from Protestantism."
church?\textsuperscript{16} According to Cressman\textsuperscript{17} this is due to the general psychological principle that we respond to a repeated total situation or to a part of the original one as though it were the entire original situation. In other words a part may call forth a response given originally to the whole. The ritual which the child is taught for years to become accustomed to almost becomes second nature to him. This is why it is almost impossible to separate the Catholic trained person from the church; too many stimuli release the old reactions.\textsuperscript{18}

The story is told of a Bishop of the church of England who was once called upon to advise one of the country's leading scientific men, a former devout worshipper in the Anglo-Catholic church. The Scientist came to the Bishop because he had lost his faith. The Bishop being wise knew that this was no case for argument. He understood both human nature and the power of the majestic ritual of his church. So the Bishop advised his friend to try an experiment; to continue to attend church, especially at the mass, as he had always done in the days before he lost his faith and see if he did not regain the faith which he had lost. A few weeks later the scientist was back in the Bishop's office. He had come back to assure the Bishop that the experiment was successful, that once more he had found himself secure in the faith of his fathers. The ritual had done its work.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{16.} Cressman, "Ritual the Conserver," p. 569: "In the ceremony of the Mass there are three factors, the beliefs, the ritual, and the response of the worshipers. The ritual is but the trappings, the mere mechanics of worship. Why is this mechanical factor the decisive one that results in the development of modernism, yet tends to confirm people in their old faiths and bind them to the church?"

\textsuperscript{17.} Chivers underlined "Cressman" and remarked, "Document."

\textsuperscript{18.} Cressman, "Ritual the Conserver," pp. 569–570: "This is due to the general psychological principle that we respond to a repeated total situation or to a part of the original one as though it were the entire original situation. In other words, a part may call forth a response given originally to the whole. . . . The long years in which the child is taught to become accustomed to the ritual of his church until it becomes almost second nature with it makes well-nigh impossible the separation of the Catholic trained person from the church because too many stimuli release the old reactions."

\textsuperscript{19.} Cressman, "Ritual the Conserver," p. 564: "Bishop Gore, of the Church of England, once found himself called upon to advise one of his country's leading scientific men, a former devout worshipper in the Anglo-Catholic church. The caller had come to the bishop because he had lost his faith. The good bishop was a wise and gentle person and knew that this was no cause for argument. He understood both human nature and the power of the majestic ritual of his church. So he advised his troubled friend to try an experiment; to continue to attend his church for worship, especially at the Mass, as he had always done in the days before he had lost his faith,
knows the power of ritual. The ritual has a certain emotional effect upon the worshipper that produces a certain mystic ecstasy or "emotional thrill." Once this ecstasy has been experienced the worshipper is safe so far as the church is concerned. So the statement that we often hear, "Give me a child for the first seven years of its life and I do not care who has it for the rest," is often true.

Protestantism, on the other hand is much different. There is no ritual like the mass, which serves to imbibe the old faith. The nearest thing psychologically, which Protestantism has to offer is the evangelistic revival. This is, in my opinion, one reason why it is so easy to find Protestants withdrawing from his own denomination or from any church connections whatsoever. In other words there is no psychological mechanism established in Protestantism which will serve to hold its members once the intellectual grounds for beliefs are shaken. I do not argue the Protestantism has no basic ritual and no binding force, all religions do, but I do argue that the definite pattern of worship found in Catholicism has a greater psychological effect than that found in Protestantism. All of this goes on to justify Luther Cressman in saying, "ritual is the powerful conservation force binding the members of a religion which invokes its aid so firmly to their faith that the appeal to reason is of no avail."*24

and see if he did not regain the old sureness of conviction which he had lost. Some months later, the bishop found his old friend again in the study. He had come to thank the bishop and to assure him that the experiment had been successful, that once more he found himself secure in the faith of his fathers. The ritual had done its work.

20. Cressman, "Ritual the Conserver," p. 568: "Its emotional effect upon the worshiper is the production of a certain mystic ecstasy, the 'religious thrill,' as it has been called. And once this ecstasy has been experienced the worshiper is safe as far as his church goes. The folk saying, often invidious, that the Catholic church says, 'Give me a child for the first seven years of its life and I do not care who has it for the rest' is a recognition of this fact."

21. Cressman, "Ritual the Conserver," p. 570: "The nearest thing, psychologically, which Protestantism has to offer is the evangelistic revival."

22. Cressman, "Ritual the Conserver," p. 565: "In a conflict between the church and the individual in the Catholic communion, the individual makes every effort to remain in the bosom of his church, whereas in Protestantism he too often withdraws from his own denomination or from any church connection whatsoever."

23. Cressman, "Ritual the Conserver," p. 570: "No psychological mechanism is established which will serve to hold its members to the church once the intellectual grounds for belief are shattered by the use of the scientific method or for any other reason."

24. The quotation should read: "[Ritual] is a powerful conservative force binding the members of a religion which invokes its aid so firmly to their faith that the appeal to reason is of no avail" (Cressman, "Ritual the Conserver," p. 572).
Another important aspect of ritual for public welfare is that of holy communion or the Eucharist. This is the central and most characteristic act of Christian worship—It remains the unshaken faith of the church that Christ himself instituted the Eucharist and the night in which he was betrayed, and that he expressly ordered its observance as a memorial of His sacrificial death and intended it to be a means of sacramental association with Himself as Victor over all the powers of evil.25

To miss communion in many churches is considered a major sin. For instance Catholicism put major emphasis on its observance. Why? Because Christ himself instituted it, supposively. It is interesting to know that the Catholics believe this communion is beyond a mere symbol. They believe that the substance is transformed into the very body and blood of Christ. The basis of the whole thing is built around the concept of eating the God.

In this analysis feast days are certainly characteristic of ritual for public welfare. All feasts are divided into two classes, feasts of precept and feasts of devotion. The feasts of precept are holydays on which the Faithful in most Catholic countries refrain from unnecessary servile labor and attend Mass. These include all the Sundays in the year, Christmas Day, the Circumcision, the Epiphany, the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, St. Joseph, St. Peter and St. Paul, and all Saints. The feasts of devotion, which form the second division, are purely ecclesiastical feasts, and are of three grades, double, semi-double, and simple.26 Throughout Christendom, feast days have been considered very important.

25. Hardman, History of Christian Worship, pp. 28–29: "The central and most characteristic act of Christian worship is the Eucharist. Its dominical institution has been denied: but it remains the unshaken faith of the Church that our Lord Himself instituted the Eucharist on the night in which He was betrayed, and that He expressly ordered its observance as a memorial of His sacrificial death and intended it to be a means of sacramental association with Himself as Victor over all the powers of evil."

26. Hardman, History of Christian Worship, p. 233: "All feasts are divided into two classes, feasts of precept and feasts of devotion. The former are holy days on which the Faithful in most Catholic countries refrain from unnecessary servile labour and attend Mass. These include all the Sundays in the year, Christmas Day, the Circumcision, the Epiphany, the Ascension, Corpus Christi, the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, St. Joseph, St. Peter and St. Paul, and All Saints. The feasts of devotion, which form the second division, are purely ecclesiastical feasts and are of three grades, double, semi-double, and simple."
We now leave the realm of sacred ritual entering into the broad realm of secular ritual, which, in my opinion, is just as important as sacred ritual. As was stated above, secular ritual, in many instances, becomes more elaborate than sacred ritual. Let us open the discussion with a consideration of secret societies. This discussion will cover such organizations as clubs, age groups, Fraternities, Lodges, Ku Klux Klan, Honor Societies, Philanthropic Societies and Insurance Societies.

By way of introduction of the subject it may be well to mention what appears to be almost a universal characteristic of secret societies, namely, the secrecy of the ritual themselves. As Simmel says, "that which is most striking about the treatment of the ritual in secret societies is not merely the precision with which it is observed, but first of all the anxiety with which it is guarded as a secret as though the unveiling of it were precisely as fatal as betrayal of the purposes and victims of the society, or even the existence of the society altogether."* Even those secret societies which never hid their motives or aims will take special precautions against disclosure of the secret ritual. One of the most extreme forms of disloyalty in any secret society, is to expose to non-members the ritualistic traits. It is one of the obligations of every member to honor this ritualistic secrecy throughout life. Let us look into some of these secret societies. But before doing so I must admit some difficulties I encountered. As we know a classification or interpretation of secret societies according to their secret ritual is a difficult task, because of the emphasis placed against their disclosure. So in no way should the purpose of this study be interpreted as an exposure of fraternal secrets. All of the printed rituals that are copyrighted may be found in the library of Congress. Where there was any doubt about their authenticity of the printed ritual, I contacted students on Morehouse's campus who are fraternity members, and friends in the city who are lodge members.27

---

27. King added the word "most" at the beginning of the quotation and substituted the phrase "purposes and victims" for the original "purposes and actions." Chivers circled the date and volume and wrote "no," indicating that the year was incorrect. The citation should read George Simmel, "The Sociology of Secrecy and Secret Societies," *American Journal of Sociology** XI, no. 4 (January 1906): 441-498.

28. As a student at Morehouse, King was not a member of a fraternity. He later joined Alpha Phi Alpha, a black social fraternity, in 1952 as a graduate student at Boston University.
Of all the secret orders those in support of the status quo in this country appear to be far in the numerical majority. Perhaps the most distinctive among all these societies is the Ku Klux Klan, committed to a philosophy of "one hundred per cent Americanism", white supremacy and nationalistic isolation. This organization is avowedly antagonistic to Catholic, Jewish, or Negro influences. The most ritualistic trait found within the Ku Klux Klan is the "Fiery cross." This symbol is always featured conspicuously in Klan meetings. During the prosperous days of the Klan the burning cross was a familiar scene; often it would be placed on a hill or mountain top as signal to the countryside that "the Klan rides" or as a warning to unconventional persons in the vicinity. It is the symbol of Klan morality and Klan power. At mass initiation ceremonies, usually conducted in the open, the lighting is provided by an illuminated cross. The symbol of the Klan is a simple Latin cross with no embellishments or decoration.

Greek letter fraternities are also very important in relation to secular ritual. Such fraternities are: Phi Beta Sigma, Alpha Phi Alpha, etc. The whole make-up of fraternal life is built around ritualism. The symbol of the fraternity, the fraternity colors, the initiation period and the oath of secrecy are nothing more than ritualistic practices. Let me give briefly a few of the ritualistic practices found in fraternities. First, most fraternities have as one of their recognition signs the fraternal handclasp. Like titles and pass words they are symbolic in character. Second, we find that...
most fraternities have a symbolic coloring. While the colors and their symbols vary considerably, there is one fairly common color combination—red, white, and blue—signifying, no doubt, the patriotic sentiments of the members.32

The well-nigh universal propensity of human beings to assist their fellow in time of distress finds expression in Philanthropic societies so common to the western world. These organizations combine social activities with the task of providing protection to member whose economic status is jeopardized by the circumstances of life. Here are the Knights of Pythias, the independent order of Odd Fellows, the improved order of Red Men, and other well-known societies.33

Space will not permit me to go into details of the ritualistic practices of each of these, but it is to be understood that the basis of each of them is ritualistic.

Similar to the Philanthropic society is the fraternal insurance organization. While devoted to the principle of brotherhood, the mechanisms of mutual aid of such organizations are more formal and their devotion to ritual and ceremony usually less pronounced.34

Lodges also have a very important position in an analysis of secular ritual. Let us look into the Freemasonry centers its ritualistic drama on Biblical legends relating to King Solomon's Temple.35 All of the "degrees" found in Masonry are nothing more than symbolic practices.

There are two things all lodges have in common. One is the oath of the lodge. Conscious of the power of ritual as a modifier of human behavior and especially as a solidifying influence in group life, lodges

32. Gist, "Secret Societies," p. 127: "While the colors and their symbols vary considerably, there is one fairly common color combination—red, white, and blue—signifying, no doubt, the patriotic sentiments of the members."

33. Gist, "Secret Societies," p. 24: "The well-nigh universal propensity of human beings to assist their fellow in times of distress finds expression in the benevolent societies so common to the western world. . . . The organizations combine 'social' activities with the task of providing protection and succor to members whose economic status or even existence is jeopardized by the circumstances of life. Here are the Masonic order, the Knights of Pythias, the Independent Order of Odd Fellows, the Improved Order of Red Men, and other well-known societies."

34. Gist, "Secret Societies," p. 24: "Similar to the benevolent society is the fraternal insurance organization. While likewise devoted to the principle of brotherhood, the mechanisms of mutual aid of such organizations are more formal and their devotion to ritual and ceremony usually less pronounced."

35. In the original document page 11 ends with "Freemasonry centers" and page 12 begins with "its ritualistic drama." King (or King's typist) omitted several lines of the essay.
have employed these ritualistic devices to further the cohesiveness of the group.\(^{36}\) Second is the oath of secrecy. This is the most conspicuous aspect of ritualistic obligation. It is the formal promise to keep inviolate the secrets of the order. The candidate must not write, print, or impart verbally any of the secrets relating to passwords, ritual, or other secret features. These are the supreme taboos of secret fraternalism. To make them more compulsive for religious-minded persons the name of deity is usually associated with the obligation, the candidate promising "in the presence of Almighty God" to conceal none of the ritualistic secrets.\(^{37}\)

Another important phase of secular ritual is that of Etiquette. Etiquette has been defined by one as the body of forms of conventional decorum into which one's behavior is cast." In the Western world etiquette is inculcated at such an early age until it is often mistaken as an unborn drive. Thus, standing to show respect is thought by many to be instinctive until people show respect by sitting. Most of the manifestations of emotion such as smiling, are determined by convention, most of which can be traced to ritual. Although I have classified etiquette under secular ritual, I think I can be justified in saying that there are certain sacred traits found therein. Some sociologists argue that etiquette centers around divinity. For instance, etiquette often consists in practices arising from the belief that the superior equals a god.\(^{38}\) In short, all

---

36. Gist, "Secret Societies," p. 92: "Conscious of the potency of ritual as a modifier of human behavior and especially as a solidifying influence in group life, fraternalists have employed certain ceremonial devices the obvious purpose of which is to further the cohesiveness of the group."

37. Chivers changed "conceal" to "reveal." Gist, "Secret Societies," p. 93: "The most conspicuous aspect of the ritualistic obligation, as noted above, is the formal promise to keep inviolate the secrets of the order. . . . The candidate must not write, print, or impart verbally any of the secrets relating to passwords, ritual, or other secret features. These are the supreme taboos of secret fraternalism. To make them more compulsive for religious-minded persons the name of the deity is usually associated with the obligation, the candidate promising 'in the presence of Almighty God' to conceal the secrets."

38. A. M. Hocart, "Etiquette," in *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* 5:615: "Etiquette is the body of forms of conventional decorum into which one's behavior is cast. In the western world etiquette is inculcated at such an early age that it becomes automatic and is therefore often mistaken for a reflex expression of emotions. Thus, standing to show respect is thought to be instinctive until peoples are found who show respect by sitting. Reflex manifestations of emotion, such as smiling, are invariable. Variable expressions of the same feeling are determined by conventions, most of which can be traced to ritual. Since ritual centers around divinity, so does etiquette. . . . Etiquette often consists in practices arising from the belief that the superior equals a god."
etiquette is social ritual, and when we give words of thanks, or remove our hats we are indulging in ritualistic practices.

The other aspects of secular ritual which will not be discussed in detail are: saluting the flag, singing school songs, and observing national holidays. Because these are not discussed they must not be considered unimportant; in institutional research they are very important.

Throughout this whole discussion, ritual has appeared to be something stable. Although ritual displays an extraordinary stability, its nature is of course not absolutely rigid; it grows, alters, and decays. Ritual change can be attributed to two things. First, the element of migration; secondly, the element of strong individualism. The whole course of ritual evolution is affected by the constant borrowings of races and creeds from one another, and the ever present tendency to develop new forms from old. Moreover, the individualism of strong men has had a very decided influence upon the simplification, or total or partial destruction of ritual. A good example of this can be found in Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick who, in his church, puts little or no emphasis on the ritualistic aspects of religion. The more educated individuals become the less formal and ritualistic they become.

The conclusion I have thus reached deductively from a consideration of the fundamental ideas of sacred and secular ritual is very interesting. First, the most striking thing about ritual, both in the secular and sacred realm, is the precision with which it is observed. In many instances it becomes the be-all and end-all of all social occasions. Moreover, ritual is looked upon as an end within itself rather than a means to an end. Too often do individuals think the complete task is finish when they attend Mass, take all sacraments, or, in short observe all rituals. But real

---

31 Jan 1948

39. Harry Emerson Fosdick (1878–1969) was a liberal Baptist preacher who studied at Colgate University, Union Theological Seminary, and Columbia University. As pastor of First Presbyterian Church in New York City, he achieved national prominence in the 1920s by challenging fundamentalism. In 1925, Fosdick became pastor of Park Avenue Baptist Church, which became the nondenominational Riverside Church in 1930. As pastor of Riverside Church, professor of practical theology at Union Seminary, and a prolific author, Fosdick was one of Protestant liberalism's most influential voices for four decades. See his autobiography, *The Living of These Days* (New York: Harper, 1956), and Robert Moats Miller's biography, *Harry Emerson Fosdick: Preacher, Pastor, Prophet* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).
religion goes beyond a form of ritual; that is, it is not to end in recitation of prayers, offering of sacrifice and other outward ceremonies. Its aim is to please the deity, and if the deity is one who delights in charity and mercy and purity more than the singing of hymns, and the burning of candles, his worshippers will best please him, not by bowing before him, and by filling the church with costly gifts, but by being pure and charitable toward men.

On the other hand I noticed that ritual is a form of control. It must be remembered that all ritual is not propitiation. As one says, "ceremonies are the bond that holds the multitude together, and if the bond be removed, those multitude falls into confusion." The recognition of a new-born child, the emancipation of slaves, the inheritance of property, marriage, adoption, initiation, installation of officers, ordination and treaty—these have this in common, that they bind somebody to do for others, for the family, or for the group at large, what hitherto has not been laid upon him.

Thirdly, I noticed that ritual is solemn. It serves, not only to be remembered, but to leave a moral impress. A coronation or a ring as giver in marriage, as a miniature drama intended to produce an effect upon the feeling of the person who receives it.

What can we conclude to be the overall concept of ritual? It serves to stimulate the imagination by certain picturesque, dramatic actions, and words which calls up the conception of something larger in power, life or numbers than the here and now—God, society, the dead, or the unborn.

Selected Bibliography

Books

Blackwood, Beatrice Both Sides of Buka Passage, 1935
Frazer Golden Bough, 2nd ed. II
Hardman, C. A History of Christian Worship
Nashville, Tenn. Cokesbury press 1937
Feb 1948

Herskoirts, M. Life In A Haitian Valley New York, 1937

Lang, Andrew Magic and Religion, London New York: 1907

Articles

Cressman “Ritual the Conserver” American Journal of Sociology XXXV, 1929

Gist, N. P. “Secret Societies” The University of Missouri Studies XV 1940

Seligman & Johnson “Ritual” Encyclopedia Of Social Sciences XIII 41

Simmel, George “The Sociology of Secrecy” American Journal of Sociology, XI 1946

THDS. MLKP-MBU: Box 113, folder 19.

41. Chivers wrote question marks in the margin by the first three articles and “Incomplete” at the end of the bibliography.

---

Application for Admission to Crozer Theological Seminary

[February 1948]
[Atlanta, Ga.]

Shortly after his nineteen birthday, King applied for admission to Crozer Theological Seminary. His application indicates the date of his joining the church (1 May 1936), the date of his early decision to enter the ministry (summer of 1944), and his various student activities at Morehouse College. As character references King lists George D. Kebe, Morehouse professor of religion; Lucius M. Tobin, chaplain at Morehouse; Benjamin E. Mays, Morehouse president; John Burney and Phoebe Burney, members of Ebenezer Baptist Church; and his father.

To the Faculty of Crozer Theological Seminary, Chester, Pa.

Gentlemen:

Having filled out to the best of my ability the questionnaire that you forwarded me at my own request, I hereby make application for