

Eddy Putranto

# RITUAL: AN INVENTIVE HUMAN SYMBOLIC ACTION

## ABSTRAK

Ritual, dari pandangan ilmu-ilmu sosial dewasa ini, telah memperoleh penghargannya sebagai peristiwa penciptaan. Ritual itu mempunyai daya cipta yang menyediakan ruang bagi pengkonstruksian diri dan penulisan kembali nilai-nilai. Ruang rekonstruksi ini baru menjadi efektif bila terjadi perjumpaan antara ajaran dan kepercayaan yang secara tradisional tersimpan di dalam ritual dan pengalaman sosio-historis ritualis, yakni pelaku ritual. Perjumpaan itu membuat ritual tidak lagi statis seperti tampaknya. Intervensi ritualis dengan pengalaman sosio-historisnya seolah membuat ritual senantiasa memperbaharui dirinya. Perjumpaan itu juga membuka kesempatan bagi ritualis untuk mengkonfrotasikan pengalaman sosio-historisnya dengan misteri kepercayaan yang dirayakan. Konfrotasi ini bisa menjadi benih baik bagi mekarnya transformasi individual maupun sosial. Demikianlah, daya cipta dan peranannya sebagai ruang rekonstruksi membuat ritual terkadang berbahaya, *subversive*.

## Key Words:

*Ritual • ritualist • inventiveness • action • symbol • subversive • transformation • living subjects • believing subjects • historical experiences • autobiography • ritual knowledge • reflexivity • transformational room • structure • social structure, anti-structure • komunitas • liminality • social drama • subjunctive mood • redressive action*

A dramatic shift of social science discourse on ritual today, beginning in the mid-60s, shows the emergence of ritual's inventiveness. Ritual is no longer understood as a mere functional, dull routine. Rather, it serves as a moment of reflexivity<sup>1</sup> in which the participants, with the involvement of their embodied consciousness during the ritual process, undergo transformation. To show this dramatic shift, Ronald Grimes has pointed out that: "Before [Victor] Turner ritual was static, structural, conservative. After Turner it is imagined as flowing, processual, subversive. In effect he reinvented ritual."<sup>2</sup>

The category of ritual applied to our discussion here will not be the one that Catherine Bell calls ritual-like activities,<sup>3</sup> such as ritual-like sports, greetings, social etiquette, cocktail parties, to name just few, which usually are composed on the basis of social conventions. These are ritualized activities that are not quite ritual by cultural definition. Rather, we will specify ritual as being made up by a complex of symbols, framed by traditional rules or rubrics representing belief systems of groups, and performed in either tribal or modern societies. This category of ritual refers to rituals such as rites of passage, rites of affliction, festivals, marriage rites, worship, pilgrimage, and sacrifice.<sup>4</sup>

Such rituals are considered as being powerful human actions that can mediate social changes. This fact brings us into question of how a ritual actually works, how ritualists, the participants should approach it, and what kind of human consideration is needed in doing ritual. One way to answer these questions is by taking account of ritual as inseparable from daily life. Our understanding of ritual refers to a special action inherently linked to the sacrality of tradition and held for a particular occasion. It occurs in a society as part of human experience.

## 1. Ritual Actions

Any ritual can be understood as an action or event. As a human action, first of all it belongs to the realm of gesture and visible bodily manifestation. It is distinguished from the invisible subjective aspects such as hopes, moods, desires, and motivation of actual subjects who enact this ritual. Eating together may be a ritual from the external point of view, but the desire to eat due to hunger, for instance, is hardly to be considered a ritual, even though we may say it is a mental action. Here we find the differentiation between bodily activity and internal motivation. However,

there is usually a certain continuity between the subjective aspect and action.<sup>5</sup> In this sense, the internal subjective aspects direct and inspire the action, but are not the action itself, like the desire of eating directs one to the action of cooking. Hence, human actions usually involve the subjective orientation that comes from living experiences.

Differentiated from other human actions, a ritual has "a very peculiar goal orientation" which differs from "a causal aim"<sup>6</sup> that assumes an immediate result. People who are gathered and eat in *Selamatan*, a Javanese ritual meal, for instance, do so not primarily to immediately satisfy their hunger for food or to satisfy themselves with drink. Rather they want to gain, using Panikkar's words, a "transcendent aim," which is to achieve the state of *selamet* (safety) by means of maintaining both social and spiritual harmony involving humans, spirits, and Allah (God). It is transcendent because the *Selamatan* does not ever completely succeed in achieving the goal. "[I]t points out, it suggests, hints, foreshadows . . . it discovers by covering again. In so many words, the target always remains transcendent."<sup>7</sup> Here we are attending to one step of looking at ritual by regarding its mood-action dynamics. As a result, in this first step, ritual action can be defined as an action of the *living* subjects who experience their *living existences*.

The second subsequent step is related to the thought-action dynamics. Catherine Bell, in her *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, shows how, in theoretical discourse, ritual is highly structured by differentiation and reintegration of two particular categories of human experience, "thought and action."<sup>8</sup> She argues that in the first pattern, the action-thought differentiation, ritual is simply assumed to be action and thereby distinguished from thought. Thought can be considered as "conceptual blueprints," such as beliefs, creeds, *worldview*, or myths, which are different from, yet inspire and promote, an action." In this sense, action is a physical expression of thought as ritual is that of beliefs. In this context, it primarily involves not living subjects, but believing subjects, who believe and commit to the thought. Relating to the ritual subject, this differentiation of thought and action brings us to realize the existence of the believing subjects that promote the description of ritual as an action of believing subjects.

However, ritual action, as we have discussed, involves the subjective orientation of the living subjects. For this reason, ritual action is an expression of people's thought based on the conceptions of order, worldviews, beliefs, and other traditional conceptions, as well as people's moods based on their historical existences. Ritual is an expression of what people believe on one hand and of what people experience on the other

hand.<sup>10</sup> Nathan D. Mitchell notes that "ritual deals with both metaphysics and social mechanics; beliefs and behaviors, transcendent meanings and cultural structures; religious traditions and human transitions."<sup>11</sup> These two aspects are different, but inseparable. This is the second pattern of ritual discourse as Catherine Bell suggests when she talks about the functional mechanism of ritual to reintegrate the thought-action dichotomy.<sup>12</sup> As a result, ritual functions as a reintegration of thought-action, belief-behavior, worldview-mood, or tradition-experience. It is an accumulation of believing and living subjects.

From Anthropology, Clifford Geertz has promoted the integration between collective conception and individual experience. To build up the meaning of cultural phenomena, he takes into account the conception-experience dynamics. In doing so, in the first place, he distinguishes between worldview and ethos.<sup>13</sup> Worldview designates the conception of the general order of existence, the existential aspect of culture.<sup>14</sup> It is a shared collective ideal or belief. Ethos, on the other hand, refers to people's behavior that is an "underlying attitude toward themselves and their world."<sup>15</sup> It can be described in terms of "dispositions," characterized as a sort of activity taking place under particular conditions, such as moods and motivations.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, in the second place, these two aspects of cultural phenomena, worldview and ethos, are fused and stored in a system of symbols, which makes up cultural phenomena such as art, ritual, or religion.<sup>17</sup> Regarding ritual, Geertz states that "any religious ritual no matter how . . . involves this symbolic fusion of ethos and worldview."<sup>18</sup> Hence, in Geertz's eyes, the understanding of the nature of ethos and worldview is significant to gain the meaning of ritual as cultural phenomena. Through ritual, the worldview is generated and affirmed by the community; in the same time the individual ethos is socially conditioned.

If one assumes that these two cultural aspects of ritual are also fundamental categories of human existence, ritual can be regarded as an "autobiography" of those who perform it. Clifford Geertz proposes this elsewhere in his comment that the ritual character of the Balinese cockfight is an autobiography of the Balinese people. The Balinese cockfight was "a Balinese reading of Balinese experience, a story they tell themselves about themselves."<sup>19</sup> Geertz looks at the Balinese Cockfight as a text that:

says something of something. . . . [It] is the Balinese reflection on [form of violence]: on its look, its uses, its forces, its fascination. Drawing on almost every level of Balinese experience, it brings

together themes . . . binding them into a set of rules which at once contains them and allows them to play, builds a symbolic structure in which, over and over again, the reality of their inner affiliation can be intelligibly felt.<sup>20</sup>

Through the set of rules and symbols of the cockfight, therefore, the Balinese want to say something of themselves, of their sentiment or longing for masculinity, of their ideas of art and sacrifice, of their feeling of triumph and loss.

## 2. Ritual's Inventiveness

To see ritual as an "autobiography," is to take account of the inventiveness of ritual by ritualists who perform and participate in the ritual. Ritual is not something that is merely handed down traditionally by the old generation to the new generation. In a ritual process, the ritualists redefine the ritual by applying their own historical experiences. Through the ritual process the lessons and values stored in the ritual meet with ritualists' historical experiences. The meeting between the two is a necessary condition for the ritualists to build up their own meanings, to rewrite their own life, to let the self be transformed. In other words, the meaning in a ritual process is not something that is up for grabs in symbolic codes. Rather, it needs to be reconstructed with respects to both the traditional values of ritual and the human historical experiences.

To move on to the discussion of the ritual's inventiveness, which signifies the creativity of ritual, we need to look at ritual beyond the framework of functionalism that tends to understand ritual as psychological and social functions. In the language of Sigmund Freud, for instance, ritual is an obsessive action, functioning as psychological mechanism of repression and displacement of neurosis. It forms a sort of clinical entity.<sup>21</sup> As social function, on the other hand, ritual serves as a mechanism for maintaining social equilibrium. Considering religion as a social phenomenon, Emile Durkheim, for instance, saw ritual as the means by which individuals are brought together as a collective group. Here ritual functions to strengthen the bonds attaching the individual to the society of which s/he is a member.<sup>22</sup> The inventiveness of ritual, however, does not stop on the ritual's function that facilitates the social and psychological life. It is open more to the questions of meaning than to the questions of function, to cultural phenomena than to social phenomena.<sup>23</sup> In other words, ritual is imagined as "flowing, *processual*, and subversive" instead of

"static, structural, and conservative."<sup>24</sup> As a result, we need to renew our way of looking at the nature of ritual.

In "Reinventing Ritual," Ronald Grimes tries to offer an alternative understanding of the nature of ritual. It is different from the commonly held assumption that ritual is necessarily traditional, collective, and meaningful; and the ritualist, the participant, is necessarily pre-critical.<sup>25</sup> He argues that ritual may be traditional, but it is also invented and can be creative:

Just as language is always being invented in the process of using it, so ritual is always in the process of being created as ritualists enact it. . . . [T]he history of any rite known to us always reveals it as changing, and these changes are typically congruent with others, which suggests that ritual is a fully historical, fully cultural process. As soon as one admits that ritual is fully historical and cultural, the door is open to admitting that it is constructed and on occasion, constructive.<sup>26</sup>

The inventiveness of ritual then requires a revised understanding of tradition, "not merely as cultural inertia but as a mode of active construction."<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore, another necessity for inventing ritual is to appreciate the individual human self involved in ritual. Grimes regrets a tendency to see individual and collective as mere static opposites. In reality, however, they are dialectical pairs that presuppose and require one another: "bodies are enculturated and cultures are embodied . . . . Societies have their most persistent root in the human body itself, and the body is always, no matter how closeted and private socially inscribed."<sup>28</sup> Hence, ritual is by definition not only collective. It is also private to individuals who partake in the ritual.

This proposal on the individual aspect of ritual by no means rejects the social aspect of ritual. Rather, the creativity of ritual will emerge if there is a potency of self to negotiate with society, with its values written in a ritual. It assumes a self-consciousness and critical state of mind in doing ritual. Related to this discussion, Grimes criticizes the thought of theorists, such as Eric Roy Wagner and Paul Connerton, who tend to focus on the non-cognitive ritualists and pre-critical ritual activity. Talking about a dance, for Wagner, to see ritual's inventiveness is only possible for theorists, but not for the dancers themselves. "When ritual is relativized by being conceptualized as invention rather than convention, the result appears 'forced,' 'commercialized,' 'too serious,' or 'sacrilegious.' . . . [T]he consequences of doing so would be destructive to ritual."<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, Connerton

assumes the body is a kind of sedimentation of memory gotten from society, which in turn enables ritualists to reproduce a certain kind of ritual. Such embodied memory, however, is a habitual one, distinguished from personal and cognitive memory, which leads the body on the basis of automatism. As a result, ritual, just like typing or riding a bicycle, does not need a critical memory and is habitually done by ritualists.<sup>30</sup> Wagner, on the one hand, reminded us of the dangers of self-consciousness and improvisation which may deconstruct and detach ritual from its root and allow ritualists to make up their own ritual with their own imagination. In this sense, ritual is product of imagination. Regarding such a caution, Barbara Myerhoff writes:

All rituals are paradoxical and dangerous enterprises, the traditional and improvised, the sacred and secular. Paradoxical because rituals are conspicuously artificial and theatrical, yet designed to suggest the inevitability and absolute truth of their messages. Dangerous because when we are not convinced by a ritual we may become aware of ourselves as having made them up. . . . Our ceremonies, our most precious conceptions and convictions, all are mere invention, not inevitable understanding about the world at all but the results of mortals' imaginings.<sup>31</sup>

However, Grimes argues, ritual is also a cultural process by means of human constructions. It is not merely a gift that came from the "sources out of reach and its authority beyond question. . . . Improvisation and revision are essential parts of many, if not most, ritual traditions, not just the ritual experiments. . . . All such processes imply that ritualists are not uncritical of what they perform."<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, Connerton is right to think that there is a kind of habitual repetition in ritual and bodily foundation of social memory. Yet, Grimes thinks, he "fails to comprehend the creative, cognitive, critical functions of the ritualizing body. The human body is not object, but subject. It has its own way of questioning, arguing, asserting, thinking its own form of wisdom. The body is cognitive, not stupid; and conversely, the mind is embodied."<sup>33</sup> Hence, the body should be able to gain what Theodore Jennings calls "ritual knowledge." Ritual not only transmits ancient knowledge but also enables believers to discover a new knowledge through embodied ritual. In addition, "[r]itual knowledge is gained by and through the body . . . not by detached observation or contemplation but through action. . . . not through detachment but through engagement, an engagement which does not leave things as they are but which alters and

transforms them. . . . ritual knowledge is not 'descriptive' but is prescriptive and/or ascriptive in character."<sup>34</sup>

Another alternative way of seeing ritual in order to grasp ritual's inventiveness is dealing with the nature of ritual symbol and how it works. A common assumption about symbol is that symbols work referentially toward something outside of ritual to offer meanings. They work as if they are signs, vehicles, or mediators of inevitable meanings coming from sources the symbols represent. The questions of meaning, then, invite explanation of symbol. In this approach symbols have predictable and static meanings. In an alternative approach to symbols, Dan Sperber, in *Rethinking Symbolism*, claims that "*smells are symbols par excellence*."<sup>35</sup> Symbols work like smells that evoke rather than refer. The power of smells is in the area of recognition and evocation. Jews who have had experience the cruelty of the Nazis, for instance, may recognize a smell coming from a burning human body almost automatically. At a same time, suddenly, a whole set of memories arises from the past: blood, suffering, hunger, hope, and frustration. In a similar way, seeing a swastika might bring them into the remembered realm of the Nazis and then, like magic, could evoke whole memories of their past or even some immediate reflection residing in their memory. "Ritual symbols, understood according to this Sperberian, olfactory logic, focalize attention and evoke memory; they do not leave us with religious ideas or political statements that constitute their meaning."<sup>36</sup> Ritual symbols then invite response rather than explanation, participation rather than instruction. They have multivocal meanings at different levels for different people, requiring human experience and understanding of symbol to open doorways to yet deeper meaning.<sup>37</sup> The power of symbols to hold together the different levels of meaning allows Jews to have their own meaning different from that of Germans when they experience the same swastika. Hence, from an essentialist view of ritual, "ritual symbols should be transculturally portable, capable of moving from one society to another 'without marked changed in form'."<sup>38</sup>

The alternative ways of looking at ritual imply that all rituals are in process of becoming, in many ways similar to the dynamic quality of social relations that Victor Turner claims: "The social world is world in becoming, not a world in being."<sup>39</sup> For this reason, he suggests studies of social process are more relevant than those of social structure in approaching ritual. Assumed as a unit of social process, then, rituals are meaningful in their process, in their performance in which a process of negotiation involving dynamic experiences of ritualists on the one hand and static packet of rules

or rubrics on the other hand occurs:

'The rules 'frame' the ritual process but the ritual process transcends its frame. . . . To perform is thus to bring something about, to consummate something, or to "carry out" a play, order, or project. But in the 'carrying out,' I hold, something new may be generated. The performance transforms itself. . . . [T]he rules may "frame" the performance, but the "flow" of action and interaction within that frame may conduce to hitherto unprecedented insights and even generate new symbols and meanings, which may be incorporated into subsequent performances. Traditional framings have to be reframed, new bottles made for new wine.'<sup>40</sup>

### 3. Liminality as Mother of Invention<sup>41</sup>

Victor Turner explores ritual's inventiveness in the context of social process, a process of becoming, within which a ritual is performed and identified as a social phase. Being a social phase does not mean that ritual is only a part of society, rather at the same time, through the dialectical process with the powers and structures of society ritual participates in the process of social change.<sup>42</sup> In addition, the inventiveness of ritual also takes into account the model of the process of social change. It constitutes a dialectic of structure and anti-structure in which a liminal phenomenon shows its significant role in the process of change.

#### 3.1. The Dialectic of Structure and Anti-Structure

It is a common assumption that living in and being part of society entail a social status by which society defines who an individual is and what kind of role the individual has in social relations. In society, the individual is structured in a relatively stable state and has rights and obligation in relation to others.<sup>43</sup> Victor Turner calls such a relatively stable state "structure," by which he agrees with British social anthropologists who identify it as "social structure," which is "more or less distinctive arrangement of specialized mutually dependent institutions and the institutional organization of position and/or of actors which they imply."<sup>44</sup> His social structure differs from "cognitive structure" of the French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss that concerns the relations operative within a set of logical categories.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, incorporating the work of Robert Merton, Turner defines structure as:

the patterned arrangement of role-sets, status-sets, and status-sequences consequently recognized and regularly operative in a given society. . . . "[R]ole-sets" are the actions and relationships that flow from a social status. "Status-sets" refers to the probable congruence of various positions occupied by an individual; and "status-sequences" means the probable succession of positions occupied by an individual through time.<sup>46</sup>

Here we find that the units of social structure are not the unique individuals. Rather, they are statuses and roles that set individuals in their relatively static structural positions.

In the social process, moreover, there is a dimension of life that creatively is outside of the social structures, but lies in between them. Victor Turner calls this a phenomenon "anti-structure." It is creative because in this situation, in contrast to the social structure, individuals are not defined according to their social positions. They come into an "in between" situation with their own mind and body through which their uniqueness appears. As a result, there would be inventiveness in the "anti-structure" when individuals creatively reinterpret or replace the values of the preceding social structure, prior to entering new social structures. Thus, anti-structure is transition as well as potentiality. It is transition to new structures; and it is potentiality to new values. Turner shows the inventiveness of anti-structure by saying that anti-structure is "the liberation of human capacities of cognition, affection, volition, creativity, etc. from the normative constraints incumbent upon occupying a sequence of social statuses, enacting a multiplicity of social roles, and being acutely conscious of membership in some corporate group."<sup>47</sup> The dialectic of structure and anti-structure, however, becomes a constitutive process of exploring human potentiality.

In order to understand anti-structure, we have to attend to its components which Turner considers as "liminality" and "communitas." Both can appear in situations of anti-structure, but they are different in nature. Liminality is a state of being in between, "a sphere or domain of action and thought," through which it "implies solitude rather than society" as a result of "voluntary or involuntary withdrawal from social structure matrix."<sup>48</sup> Communitas, on the other hand, signifies direct, unmediated human interrelatedness among those within anti-structure and directly opposite to the mediated relationships found in structure.<sup>49</sup>

### 3.1.1. Liminality

As one of the anti-structural categories, liminality is a stage that holds potentiality to reinvent and to transform those who are in the liminal phase. This concept takes its foundation from Arnold Van Gennep's rites of passage which he defined as "rites which accompany every change of place, state, social position and age."<sup>50</sup> Van Gennep identifies that all such rites are marked by three phases: separation, margin (limen/threshold), and aggregation.<sup>51</sup> A phase of separation detaches the subjects of rite from their old statuses and roles in society. A phase of aggregation reintegrates the subjects who are able to reenter society with new basis. In between these phases, there emerges a phase of threshold in which the subjects are neither in the previous stage from which they have been separated nor yet in the subsequent stage into which they will be reincorporated. Rather, they are in between two conditions, neither here nor there. Hence, through "nothingness," a temporary loss of identity, rites of passage introduce persons into their new identity.

For Turner, the threshold phase or liminality is significant to grasp an understanding of all kinds of social and individual change. He defines liminality as a "state and process of mid-transition,"<sup>52</sup> experienced by liminaries, those who "evade ordinary cognitive classification for they are neither-this-nor-that, here-nor-there, one-thing-nor-the-other."<sup>53</sup> Such persons leave their day-to-day world with its social structure to enter an ambiguous situation. It is ambiguous, but creative. Its creative feature lies in its character of being a deconstruction of social structures. By this feature, liminality becomes a source of human cultural evolution. "*Liminality* is the mother of invention."<sup>54</sup>

This feature, liminality, is essentially imaginative and playful. To strengthen this idea, Turner uses and distinguishes the term "subjunctive mood" which express possibility, desire, and hypothesis, and the term "indicative mood" which indicates the matters of fact.

Just as the subjunctive mood of a verb is used to express supposition, desire, hypothesis, or possibility, rather than stating actual facts, so do liminality and the phenomena of liminality dissolve all factual and common sense systems into their components and "play" with them in ways never found in nature or in custom, at least at the level of direct perception.<sup>55</sup>

All kinds of liminality work in the area of subjunctive, the "might be,"

not the "what is." With this sense of playfulness, room appears for reflexivity and creativity.

As an illustration, Turner presents the phenomenon of pilgrimage as liminality. According to him, pilgrims "are, literally, persons who go through fields or countries (per, through; ager, field); they are wanderers, peregrinators, transients, strangers to their lands of passage."<sup>56</sup> A pilgrimage leads to a liminal journey through a land of "betwixt-and-between" where one is no longer in the place one was (home), but not yet where one hopes to be (the pilgrimage center). However, their journeys are "not only transition but also potentiality, not only 'going to be' but also 'what may be'."<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, in *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, Turner, with his wife, examined the characteristic type of liminality of pilgrimage primarily in societies ideologically dominated by historical and salvation religion.<sup>58</sup> They illustrated an actual pilgrimage in which pilgrims go to secret sites or holy shrines located at some distance from the pilgrim's home. For many pilgrims the journey itself is something of a penance or of a desire to meet individual needs by means of intercession or sacrifices. In some respects, pilgrimage becomes a salvific journey. By comparison, while monastic contemplatives and mystics could daily make an interior salvific journey, those in the world have to exteriorize theirs in the infrequent adventure of pilgrimage. Thus, mysticism is an interior pilgrimage; pilgrimage is exteriorized mysticism.<sup>59</sup> By such an understanding of the phenomenon of pilgrimage, we can point out the characteristic actions during the journey: reflexivity and creativity. Pilgrims represent an intersection or accumulation of their past, present, and future. They present themselves in solitude, with their powerful "nothingness," before the Sacred and are opened to many kinds of possibilities. It is liminal journey that brings forward the pilgrims' new lives.

### 3.1.2. *Communitas*

Turner's preference of using term "*communitas*" rather than "community," as he said, is to show an operation of human relationship outside of ordinary life.<sup>60</sup> In contrast, community signifies human relationship within the area of ordinary life. *Communitas* embraces individuals in solitude with "spontaneous, immediate, concrete nature of *communitas*, as opposed to the norm-governed, institutionalized, abstract nature of social structure."<sup>61</sup> The concept of *communitas* may be adequately articulated in Martin Buber's definition of community, as quoted

by Turner: "the being no longer side by side (and, one might add, above and below) but with one another of a multitude of persons. And this multitude, though it moves towards one goal, yet experiences everywhere a turning to, a dynamic facing of, the others, a flowing from I to Thou."<sup>62</sup> In addition, Turner is also aware that "*communitas* is not solely the product of biologically inherited drives released from cultural constraints. Rather it is the product of peculiarly human faculties, which include rationality, volition, and memory, and which develop with experience of life in society."<sup>63</sup> In other words, *communitas* constitutes the human relationships of *liminars*, those who are in *liminal* phase in which they relate to one another on the level of what is shared by all rather than through the social structural roles and status which can inhibit relationships on that level.<sup>64</sup>

To return to the illustration of pilgrimage: pilgrims, in the course of their journey, relate and share with one another to build *communitas*. Turner distinguishes three types of *communitas* in order to consider the nature of the social bond in the pilgrimage situations: existential or spontaneous *communitas*, normative *communitas*, and ideological *communitas*.<sup>65</sup> The first seems to be an unstructured, homogeneous, and free *communitas* because of the direct, immediate, and total confrontation of human identities. The second identifies an organized and structured *communitas*. Under the influence of time, they need to organize their existential *communitas* and to mobilize their resources to support one another and together to gain the journey's end. Even though the normative *communitas* is structured, it is never quite the same as a structured group within social structure. Normative *communitas* begins with the non-utilitarian experience of brother/sisterhood and communion rather than the utilitarian one as the structured group does. The third type of *communitas* becomes utopian models of societies believed by their authors to exemplify or supply the optimal conditions for existential *communitas*.<sup>66</sup> Based on his data on pilgrimage, Turner affirms that while the spontaneous situation gives rise to an existential *communitas*, it is normative *communitas* that constitutes the characteristic social bond of pilgrimage situation. Such normative *communitas* appears among pilgrims and between pilgrims and those who support them in any kind of help during their journey.<sup>67</sup>

The point here is that even though the emergence of *communitas* is within anti-structure, it by no means entails the absence of any kind of structure. In most cases, *communitas* is normative and structural. The structure is not social structure, but a structure of symbols and ideas that can be called "instructional" structure.<sup>68</sup> We can point out norms and codes

which operate in *communitas* of pilgrims, rules and rubrics taught to neophytes during rites of passage, or guidelines and requirements in a classroom. By this structural understanding of *communitas*, then, ritual can be categorized as *liminal communitas* with its own orders and rules and differed from social structure.

### 3.2. Social Drama

The processual view of the social world described by Victor Turner seems "dramatic" with senses of playing its tensions, conflicts, and negotiation, and flowing toward a kind of conclusion which becomes a creative energy, being able to lead into order or disorder of the social world. The dramatic feature of social process signifies the social world as "a human esthetic form, a product of culture not of nature."<sup>69</sup> In contrary to natural systems that are "objectively given and exist independently of the experience and activity of human," cultural systems depend "not only for their meanings but also for their existence upon the participation of conscious, volitional human agents and upon human's continuing and potentially changing relations with one another."<sup>70</sup> In other words, cultural systems are dramatic because of "humanistic coefficient,"<sup>71</sup> a term that emphasizes the role of conscious actors in social process.

It is important, however, to keep in mind the role of conscious actors in order to preserve the dramatic degree of the social process. Turner argues that not all processual units are necessarily dramatic. Instead, some belong to the rubric of "social organization" defined as "the working arrangements of society . . . the process of ordering of action and of relations in reference to given social ends, in terms of adjustments resulting from the exercise of choices by members of the society."<sup>72</sup> The social organization, Turner calls it "social enterprise," implies a "harmonic" process that appears when, for instance, a particular social group together decides to build public services such a bridge, school, or road. Here individual choice and considerations of utility are discriminating features.<sup>73</sup> The dramatic social process, on the other hand, constitutes "social dramas" which are "aharmonic" phases of the ongoing social process.<sup>74</sup> The conflict situations in society between persons or groups, such as the conflicts in a court, village, school, or between political parties, mark the emergence of social dramas. Social dramas, thus, "are units of aharmonic or disharmonic process, arising in conflict situations."<sup>75</sup>

Furthermore, Turner's concept of social drama is that it unfolds in four

main phases: breach, crisis, redressive action, and reintegration. In breach, the pattern of social relations breaks down, as persons or subgroups break its rule. The following phase is a crisis that shows the conflict between individuals, sections, and factions, as a result of an unsolved previous breach. This phase has a *liminal* character:

Each public crisis has what I call *liminal* characteristic, since it is a threshold between more or less stable phases of the social process, but it is not a sacred limen, hedged around by taboos and thrust away from the centers of public life. On the contrary, it takes up its meaning stance in the forum itself and, as it were, dares the representatives of order to grapple with it. It cannot be ignored or wished away.<sup>76</sup>

The redressive action, the third phase, is a kind of "mechanism" to seal off or to limit the crisis. For Turner, this phase contributes significantly to the social change, so he advises those who are studying social change to "study carefully what happens in phase three. . . . For the society, group, community, association, or whatever may be the social unit, is here at its most 'self-conscious' and may attain the clarity of someone fighting in a corner for his life."<sup>77</sup> In this sense, the redressive action mediates the self-consciousness of social units. By its features, then, the redressive action signifies its liminal character through which a reflection and critique of events leading up to and composing the crisis are provided.<sup>78</sup> This reflection may be undertaken in various ways of cooling down. These can range from simple personal advice and informal mediation to more complex and formal reflections held in "the relational idiom of a judicial process, or in the metaphorical and symbolic idiom of ritual process, depending on the nature and severity of the crisis."<sup>79</sup> In the judicial processes, cognitive process assumes priority, while in the ritual process orrectic processes prevail.<sup>80</sup> The judicial processes considers "justice" in court; while ritual processes include divination, curative rituals, prayer, and sacrifice in dealing with the hidden causes of personal and social misfortune which, of course, cannot be brought to court for justice.<sup>81</sup> Assuming that the social drama runs its full course, the final phase will bring about "either the restoration of peace and 'normality' among the participants or social recognition of irremediable or irreversible breach or schism."<sup>82</sup>

As we have seen, ritual process is undertaken in the context of social drama, particularly during a *redressive* process which mediates the process of sealing off the crisis. It becomes a moment of public reflexivity and creativity. "Some social dramas may be more 'definitional' than others, it is



true, but most social dramas contain, if only implicitly, some means of public reflexivity in their *redressive* processes."<sup>83</sup> Ritual process, therefore, indicates *liminality* and *communitas* within society during social drama. It is performed in the realm of anti-structure, the fertile source for human imagination and creativity. With its anti-structural character, it is true that ritual process is held outside of social structure, but it is by no means outside of society. It becomes alternative social structure or structured social anti-structure within society. Rituals of affliction in tribal societies may become an example of such alternative social structure:

In rituals of affliction, there is a strong element of reflexivity, for through confession, invocation, symbolic *reenactment* and other means, the group bends back upon itself, so to speak, not merely cognitively, which become dismembered by internal conflict. . . . [I]t would be more correct to think of a ritual of affliction as a passionate attempt to heal the breaches caused by social structural conflict and competition and by egotistical or factional striving for power, influence, wealth, and so forth by reviving feelings of an underlying bedrock *communitas*, a generic human relationship undivided by status-roles or structural oppositions, which is also vouched for by myths and histories stressing the unity and continuity of the widest group to which all belong by birth and tradition.<sup>84</sup>

A powerful reflexivity demands the human's capability to participate in the realm of subjunctive mood by means of playing with ideas, symbols, and meanings. These symbols include symbolic objects, instruction (myths, riddles, catechisms), and ritual actions (enactment of myths, dance, dramas, etc.).<sup>85</sup> Ritual becomes invented human symbolic actions through which participants enter their "sacred" *liminal* phase and they can creatively reflect and play their possibilities. Playing in the area of possibility within symbolic structure in a ritual, we enter a *transformational* room that allows us to breathe, to reflect, to rethink, and to transform ourselves.

#### 4. Conclusion

Ritual's inventiveness depends on the creative dialectic of the belief and the historical existence of the participants. By providing a symbolic structure consisting of rules, gestures, words, and materials in a particular setting, ritual mediates that dialectic. In this dialectic process the participants express and experience their beliefs. In the same process, they rewrite and redefine their historical existence in light of the traditional

values and beliefs experienced in the ritual process. It is very essential, then, to involve the human consciousness in doing ritual. Otherwise, ritual becomes a mere static routine.

Applying the inventiveness of ritual to liturgy as a ritual process which can become a next agenda of discussion, we may come to realize that the liturgical participants are both the social-political subjects who live with their historical experiences, and the believing subjects who live with their believable mystery. In the liturgical process, liturgy should serve as a transformational room that allows the participants to organize and to integrate their historical experiences in light of the traditional beliefs whose central is in the paschal mystery, in order to be transformed into a certain state of wisdom and truth. Liturgy has to be considered as a part of the whole social process and being held within *communitas*. It invites the participants to come into *communitas* where the self is being reconstructed and in which they are identified as pilgrims.

Encountering the mystery, the Sacra, along with the historical experiences made up from the wider social world, is what liturgical process all about. In the words of Victor Turner, this is a "communication of sacra" immersed in the context of a social drama, a socially dramatic conflict, to serve the purpose of a redressive process. Liturgical process, then, is a redressive process that permits the participants, again and again in light of the paschal mystery, to reflect on and to criticize the conflict, the riot, social-political system, ideologies, and other elements involved in the conflict in order to achieve a healing community. Ritual such as liturgy has to become a place of reflexivity, a subversive moment that gives the participants a space to autograph their life.

Eddy Putranto

*A doctoral candidate in Practical Theology at Catholic Theological Union, Chicago*

#### End Notes:

1. Victor Turner, *On the Edge of the Bush: Anthropology as Experience*, ed. Edith Turner (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1985), 291-301.
2. Ronald Grimes, "Reinventing Ritual," in *Reading, Writing, and Ritualizing: Ritual in Fictive, Liturgical, and Public Places* (Washington, DC: The Pastoral Press, 1993), 6.
3. Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford

- University Press, 1997), 138-169.
4. Ritual is a complex realm of human existence. There is no single definition of ritual. The preference of naming categories and examples of ritual instead of defining it is a way out from the difficulty to find a fitting definition. In addition, we also realize that in society the activities categorized as ritual-like sometimes are also called rituals. However, we can feel the differences between ritual-like basketball or football and Sunday Eucharist. These are not only secular-religious differences. One difference, I believe, lies in the quality of liminality of each. We will attend to the issue of liminality later on.
  5. Raimundo Panikkar, "Man as a Ritual Being," *Chicago Studies* 16 (1977): 9.
  6. *Ibid.*
  7. *Ibid.*, 10.
  8. Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1992), 19-66.
  9. *Ibid.*, 19.
  10. Catherine Bell clearly mentions that action in terms of ritual discourse is physical expression or dramatization of logically conceptual orientations such as beliefs and myths. However, it seems to me that she does not state whether or not there is involvement of the people's moods in human ritual action. Understanding the opinions of both Raimundo Pannikar, Catherine Bell, and later on Clifford Geertz brings me to this conclusion.
  11. Nathan D. Mitchell, *Liturgy and The Social Sciences* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 23.
  12. Bell, 20.
  13. *Ibid.*, 26-29 also see Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 89.
  14. Geertz, 89.
  15. *Ibid.*
  16. *Ibid.*, 95-97.
  17. *Ibid.*, 44-45, 89.
  18. *Ibid.*, 89.
  19. Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight," in *Readings in Ritual Studies*, ed. Ronald L. Grimes (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1996), 225-6.
  20. *Ibid.*, 225-6.
  21. Sigmund Freud, "Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices," in *Readings in Ritual Studies*, ed. Ronald L. Grimes (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1996) 212-217. In this article, Freud also mentions that neurosis can be described as an individual religiosity and religion as a universal obsessional neurosis.
  22. Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, 25.
  23. *Ibid.*, 62.
  24. Grimes, "Reinventing Ritual," 6.
  25. *Ibid.*, 5-32.

26. *Ibid.*, 8.
27. *Ibid.*, 9.
28. *Ibid.*, 11.
29. *Ibid.*, 13-14, citing Roy Wagner, *The Invention of Culture*, revised and expanded edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 56-57.
30. *Ibid.*, 14-16.
31. Barbara Myerhoff, *Number Our Days* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), 86. Also cited by Mitchell, *Liturgy and the Social Sciences*, 42.
32. *Ibid.*, 17.
33. *Ibid.*, 16
34. Theodore W. Jennings, "On Ritual Knowledge," *The Journal of Religion* 62 (1982): 114-5.
35. Dan Sperber, *Rethinking Symbolism*, trans. Alice L. Morton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 118.
36. *Ibid.*, 20-1.
37. Ian Pratts, "Understanding Symbolic Process Metaphor, Vibration, Form," *Journal of Ritual Studies* 15 Vol. 1 (2001): 38.
38. Mitchell, 52.
39. Victor Turner, *Drama, Fields and Metaphors* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974), 24.
40. Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982), 79 as cited by Nathan D. Mitchell in *Liturgy and the Social Sciences*, 53-4.
41. Victor Turner, "Symbols and Social Experience in Religious ritual," *Studia Missionalia* 23 (1974): 10.
42. Tom F. Driver, *Liberating Rites: Understanding the Transformative Power of Ritual* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 189.
43. Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969), 95.
44. *Ibid.*, 166-7.
45. *Ibid.*, 167.
46. Victor Turner, "Passages, Margins, and Poverty: Religious Symbols of Communitas," *Worship* 46 (1972): 397.
47. Victor Turner, "Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbolology," in *The Anthropological Study of Human Play*, ed. Edward Norbeck, Rice University Studies, vol. 60, no. 3 (summer, 1974), 75.
48. Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, 52.
49. *Ibid.*, 202.
50. Turner, *Ritual Process*, 94.
51. *Ibid.*, also Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. M.B. Vizedom and G.L. Caffee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 11.
52. Victor Turner, "Variations on a Theme of Liminality," in *Secular Ritual*, eds.

- Moore, Sally F and Barbara G. Myerhoff, ( Amsterdam: Von Grocum, 1977), 37.
53. *Ibid.*
  54. Victor Turner, "Symbols and Social Experience in Religious ritual," *Studia Missionalia* 23 (1974): 10.
  55. Victor Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1986), 25. Also cited by Driver, *Liberating Rites*, 159.
  56. Victor Turner, "Pilgrimage and Communitas," *Studia Missionalia* 23 (1974): 305.
  57. Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell. 1978), 3.
  58. *Ibid.*
  59. *Ibid.*, 7.
  60. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 96.
  61. *Ibid.* 127.
  62. *Ibid.*
  63. *Ibid.*, 115.
  64. Turner, "Liminal and Liminoid," 77.
  65. Turner, *Drama, Fields and Metaphors*. 169.
  66. *Ibid.*
  67. *Ibid.*, 169-70.
  68. Turner, "Passages, Margins, and Poverty," 400.
  69. Turner, *Drama, Fields and Metaphors*, 32.
  70. *Ibid.*
  71. *Ibid.*
  72. *Ibid.*, 34. Here Turner cited Raymond Firth's definition in Raymond Firth, *Essays on Social Organization and Values* (London: Athlone, 1974), 45.
  73. Turner, 34.
  74. *Ibid.*, 33.
  75. *Ibid.*, 37.
  76. *Ibid.*, 39.
  77. Turner, *Dramas, Fields, Metaphors*, 40-1.
  78. *Ibid.*, 41.
  79. *Ibid.* Also Victor Turner, *On the Edge of the Bush: Anthropology as Experience*, ed. Edith Turner (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1985), 291-293.
  80. *Ibid.*, 199.
  81. *Ibid.*, 219.
  82. Turner, *On the Edge of the Bush*, 292.
  83. *Ibid.*, 293.
  84. *Ibid.*, 233.
  85. *Ibid.*, 293. Here, Turner presents a diagram of the relationship between social dramas and ritual process.