PERFORMING ETHICS

Ritual practice and performance in the ethical lives of two Australian religious communities

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Submitted: 24 November 2013

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Thesis Summary

Performing Ethics investigates the ritual practices and performances of two religious communities. It examines ritual action as it shapes their ethical values and frameworks, individually and collectively.

The thesis analyses ethnographic fieldwork at the Hillsong Conference in 2009, and with a monastic group, the Urban Neighbours of Hope, in 2010. Despite contrasts in the scale and aesthetic of their rituals, these communities both express the same Protestant Evangelical tradition and worldview, and operate nearby one another in the western suburbs of Sydney. Each upholds a cohesive ethical vision of the world through their ritual practices and performances, and their members embody these throughout their everyday lives.

Performing Ethics is grounded in the discipline of performance studies. The thesis analyses discrete ritual events rather than the 'scripts' upon which they are based (whether a liturgy, or a traditional 'way' of doing things). It also employs dramatic concepts – particularly the notions of *rehearsal* and *improvisation* – to organise the theoretical approaches to ritual from the social sciences, the humanities and from the religious traditions themselves, upon which it draws.

This thesis discusses the roles that rituals play in *rehearsing* patterns of action and intention, which are subsequently deployed in the real world. Ritual practices provide opportunities for participants to familiarise their bodies with sequences of action; ritual events create a world in which the presentation of an identity can be rehearsed. Through their strategic deployment, ritual codes meter time and indicate moral boundaries. They mediate the passage of transgressors out of the community (through exclusion from participation and by dictating identity), and back into the community (through schemes of repentance and reintegration).

Rituals invite mimetic reproduction of axiomatic knowledges about the cosmos. The Hillsong conference performs for its mammoth crowd a representation of a grand cosmic, historical and theological narrative. The conference's core rituals enable the crowd to embody this order, which rearticulates traditional Christian tropes and ethical imperatives within a Hillsong-centric vision. In the Urban Neighbours of Hope (UNOH), members privately rehearse a moral identity based on

a concept of ‘downward mobility.’ This enables them to enact their missiological vision in the public spaces of the depressed neighbourhoods they seek to empower.

Hillsong and the Urban Neighbours of Hope showcase a singular tradition, contextualising its core practices to address local concerns. These two communities create space for *improvisation* as times change and as new situations emerge. Both groups adapt their ritual performances and practices with the intention of producing wished-for social outcomes. The possibilities for ritual’s deployment in an instrumental capacity, and the ramifications of democratised ritual experiences, are considered.

Performing Ethics applies recent thinking on ritual adaptation to scenarios local and contemporary. It synthesises recent theological writings on ethics and ritual change with the predominant approaches of the secular sciences. It finds in performance theory a locus for engagement with religious and secular explorations of the relationship between rituals and ethics.

I certify that this work does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

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Tim Kurylowicz, 24 November 2013

Acknowledgements

I express my deepest gratitude to Urban Neighbours of Hope's Bidwill team: Adam, Katie, Matt, and Jarrod, Jon, Lisa, Lisa, and the two members who preferred not to be named in this research. I thank them for their warm hospitality and generous participation during my research visits. Their feedback on early drafts of this thesis added much to it. Hundreds of Hillsong conference-goers and staff made thoughtful contributions to my research.

Professor Stephen Downs offered encouragement and some excellent suggestions at a critical point in the process. Two of my best friends, Caryn Rogers and Jock Dunbar, read and critiqued my work too many times to count. Jill Harris' expert copyediting greatly improved this thesis in the final weeks.

It will never be possible to fully express my gratitude to my principal supervisor, Jonathan Bollen. His rigorous feedback, incisive suggestions and engaging conversation over the past six years always went above and beyond the call of duty. My best words and thoughts owe much to him. I am also immensely grateful for my co-supervisor, Professor Julie Holledge's timely feedback and support.

I am lucky to have such encouraging, curious and forgiving family.

To my beloved Sophie: thankyou again and again, forever and a day.

Rites … extend the forms of love and reverence, and step by step bring to fulfillment the beauties of proper conduct. And weeping, happiness and sorrow are opposites, yet rites make use of them all, bringing forth and employing each in its turn.

– Xunzi (Kline, 2004, p. 203)

We can opt for a series of fixed texts that wear out and have to be constantly changed, or we can choose the metaphor of the jazz session that constantly makes new music by listening to what's happening around it and applying the best of what is left of the tradition to the current context. The genius of improvisation seems to be a better metaphor for actual human moral experience than struggling to apply a single text to every situation. God invites us to join in the music, to listen and adapt to one another, to keep the melody flowing.

– Richard Holloway (1999, p. 33)

Ritual appears to be a bit of psychosocial alchemy as nimble and as inexhaustible as our imaginations and our memories.

– Catherine Bell (2006, p. 409)

Christians are made, not born

– Tertullian (Ferguson, 2009, p. 340)

1. Ritual Possibilities

Cops and nuns

Journalist Jonny Steinberg highlights the social power of ritual in his recent book *Thin Blue: The Unwritten Rules of Policing South Africa* (2008). In his time spent accompanying police officers on patrols through the suburbs and townships of Johannesburg, the journalist noticed that relationships between police and the citizenry were under constant negotiation through theatrical and symbolic performances. In situations, for example, where a two-person police patrol was significantly outnumbered by onlookers, the police would put up chase to an offender, and then deliberately allow the felon to escape. Steinberg concluded that this sort of situation demonstrated something more than the risk-averse tendencies of the police. It revealed a psychic need of the onlooking crowd to allow police to maintain law and order, whilst upholding their own collective agency as a resistive force. In the context of post-apartheid South Africa, the largely black populace seemingly allows the notion of the rule of law to preside so that at least a token level of civil order is safeguarded, while resisting the predominantly white force appointed to enforce the law. “In this sense,” Steinberg speculates, “the cops are always bluffing, and the role of the civilians is always to refrain from calling the bluff. It is the citizenry who always determine to what extent they are policed.” (pp. 35 -36) This ongoing mutuality of bluff and permission means that:

> Inspector L and Sergeant Z have learned to walk the narrowest of ropes. If they see a knife in the crowd and apprehend the culprit, they believe they will be overpowered. Yet if they are seen to see a knife and do nothing, their presence will not be tolerated either. And so they are the actors in a theatre whose script they have very little to say in shaping. But they must know their lines very well. (Steinberg, 2008, p. 36)

Steinberg’s use of theatrical language is apt; further examples reveal the performative nature of the negotiations between populace and their police. When men are arrested in view of their peers, they deftly perform as much moral outrage as possible, struggling in the arms of police while being careful not to lash out or strike an officer; yelling abuse, but ensuring they do not cuss, and then complying fully with police directives once they sense they have pushed the boundaries far enough (p. 44). The way police perform power, too, reveals a clearly-defined set of social boundaries which they actively reinforce whenever possible, and take equal care not to transgress. When outdoors, they limit their aggression to mitigate the risk of having their bluff called by the ever-present onlooking crowd. Conversely, when inside the homes of suspects, the police perform moral superiority with almost clownish grotesqueness, domineering and bullying their (usually) female, infirm or under-aged targets into submission as they assert power in one of the only spheres available to them (pp. 18, 24 -26). According to Steinberg, police and citizenry each experience enough victories to feel empowered by their ongoing battles; the drama is tense, but balanced.

The conventions might be strong, but they are never set in stone, and this is why the performers – police and populace alike – are constantly improvising their way around them. The two-way performances of dominance and bravado, rebellion and grudging obedience, continue day after day. Over long periods of time, concessions can be made by either side. It is a very real negotiation, and despite appearances, both sides want the same thing: a police force that is effective and a populace that is safe. But the process of negotiation is fraught with setbacks by both sides too. Hard-won symbolic victories by the police can be erased overnight by a single wrong move: a death in custody, a racial slur, a failure to protect an innocent. One police officer gruffly acknowledged that his unit has won over the right to successfully patrol a particular street only since 1999. “Before that, if you tried to do what we did tonight, you’d get shot” (p. 48).

While there is room for such deviance from the script, these performances involving the police and the Johannesburg populace exhibit many of the hallmarks that scholars have associated with ritual. The very notion of a ‘script’ suggests that these exchanges are ‘form-governed;’ that is, they are interactions whose form is bound by conventions which were authored prior to the present performance (Rappaport, 1999, p. 32; Kreinath et al., 2006, p. 156). They involve participation and observation – often simultaneously (Chwe, 2001, p. 20; Hoare, 2006, p. 48; Turner, 1980, p. 157; Postlewait, 1991, p. 168). They invoke the presence of higher powers, in this case of intrinsic justice and natural law; they indicate a separation between good and evil, sacred and profane (Marshall, 2002, p. 366; Turner, 1990, p. 11). They "enact relationships," between individual human actors, and between humans and the symbolic meanings encased in mythology and ideology (Handelman & Lindquist, 2005, p. 76; Turner, 1980). The social mechanisms they engage are not immediately apparent, rather the ritualistic act provides cover for the negotiations of power, status, permission and affront which take place (Goody, 1977, p. 32; Bourdieu, 1990, p. 112). They create situations wherein both police and citizenry have agency and responsibility, and this endows these ritualistic performances with critical significance to all the players' hopes for both social stability, and for social change.

Half a world away, in a convent in the German town of Paderborn is another instance of ritualistic negotiation, no less dramatic, but with an entirely different set of players and social consequences. Church historian Bernhard Lang outlines the daily office of the twenty or so Augustinian nuns of St Michael's convent (1997, p. 31). The tight unison of repeated chants and gestures that comprise their gatherings for Lauds, Terce, Vespers and Compline, would appear to be a complex, painstakingly-rehearsed recitation of an ancient liturgical structure. This group of nuns has "not invented the daily commemoration of events from the sacred story and their association with the canonical hours; they simply subscribe to a tradition that reflects the monastic imagination of both antiquity and the middle ages" (p. 35). Lang does not imply that the nuns are not paying close attention to the liturgies they enact, but that there is a difference between subscribing to a tradition in the here-and-now and actively scrutinising its historicity. According to Lang, they "take the task of celebrating the office very seriously," and study and read about its significance and meaning, even writing personal reflective notes to help each nun come to make sense of it for themselves (p. 35). Despite the age of the liturgies used by the nuns, the performance of these ancient texts has a role to play in the negotiation of the present-day issues facing the convent. Within their routines of work and worship, the Paderborn nuns broker a relationship between their own self-identity and a wider world which is rapidly forgetting that they exist. One such way that the dwindling cohort of nuns leverage their ritual practice to negotiate their place in the world is by regularly inviting members of local churches and seminaries to join them for daily prayers. Lang reports that despite their invitations, they rarely receive a guest. But in the face of this depressing situation, the nuns have found new consolation in their daily rhythm of work and worship. Recently, older members of the order recalled a book which aligns the prayers of present day Christians with the simultaneous choirs of prayer emanating from the saints in heaven. This new contextualising narrative has rejuvenated the meaningfulness of daily prayers:

> Seen with worldly eyes, the twenty-seven nuns and their one novice may seem to represent a lost cause. It is the universal, cosmic dimension of their praise that gives them courage and infuses their song with purpose and significance. As they recite the divine office, they feel caught up into a bigger whole – the truly universal church. (Lang, 1997, pp. 37-38)

An existential drama plays itself out in the ways these nuns perform and think about their daily ritual activities. Embattled against time, they imagine themselves no longer as a singular choir, but as a single voice among the 'bigger whole' – and this reimagining invigorates the nuns to carry on their tasks despite the likely demise of their own outpost. The nuns' invitations to neighbours address an equally significant identity issue within the lives of these participants – under mediation is the nature of each relationship between the nuns and their neighbours, students and patients in the outside world, as well as those between the convent and the other civic and private institutions of Paderborn.

Another scholar of Christian practice, Tom Driver has written about ritual's 'confessional' mode, and this describes what the nuns are now doing. "To confess," he pronounces, "is to acknowledge that one is engaged in the act of believing. Hence it is to reveal oneself, to expose the heart" (Driver, 2006, p.111). He suggests that this exposure is an unavoidable part of confessional ritual, for it necessarily happens in communal settings: "Persons or groups who confess their believing become open to the gaze and the unpredictable reaction of others" (p. 111). Lang's observations align with Driver's assessment: whatever else the nuns' praise might accomplish, its performance is declarative, and therefore contains an element of communal risk. The creeds and liturgies of the monastery do more than state belief; they narrate a story of salvation, and through each performance locate their confessors once again in relation to that story. Paderborn's liturgies refigure the realities that surround their performance; the act of confessing them defines the confessor as much as it defines the belief she possesses (Lang, 1997, p. 29).

As this reinvigorated way of thinking about prayers illustrates, a ritual's 'text' might appear fixed and inflexible even while the meanings it hosts, and the social impacts it brokers, are under constant negotiation. Importantly, the transformations wrought by these confessional performances are not effected through consideration of the liturgy, but during the application, the performance, of the ritual itself. Driver poetically evokes this 'mystery': "When we perform ourselves, we do not simply express what we already are: We perform our becoming, and become our performing. There is fate in this, and freedom, too, and something of mystery" (p. 114).

The nuns of Paderborn reveal ritual in its role as mediator between public and private constructions of identity, as a means of impression management, and of delineating between in-group and outsider status. As with the Johannesburg police, they show ritual's capacity to enact and modify a conceptual order, whether mythic, ideological or cosmological. Importantly, they demonstrate that ritual performances do more than imitate or represent: rituals embody, bring about, make real. Finally, the nuns model ritual in its usage as a repeated practice, demonstrating that ritual habits form and reform individuals and, through collectivised practice, transform whole communities. The following two chapters expand upon these broad threads of theory which underpin my subsequent analysis of ritual and ethics in two present-day Australian sites: at the Hillsong Conference, and in the Urban Neighbours of Hope (UNOH). Broadly speaking, Chapter 2 is concerned with ritual, and Chapter 3 with ethics. Chapters 4 through 6 discuss Hillsong, while 7 through 9 discuss UNOH.

Chapter 2 commences by presenting a foundational proposition underpinning many of the arguments of this thesis: that behaviour, action and practice constitute the foundations upon which cultures and traditions (and the textual resources which uphold them) are built. If 'practice' can precede 'principle,' it can be argued that changes to ritual practices can produce changes to the way a group thinks, remembers and self-identifies. The chapter then teases out what could be called the 'work' of ritual within social groups, focusing especially on its extra-rational, 'behind the scenes' capacities (that is, the work ritual accomplishes that is often unrecognised by its participants). Rituals often, for example, uphold the axiomatic principles and classification systems which legitimise cultural practices and taboos. The following section probes the relationship between practices which make groups cohesive, and the social values of a group's membership. Douglas and Wildavsky's Cultural Theory of Risk, and Sunstein's work on virtual enclaves, explain why it is that groups such as Hillsong and UNOH can reinforce certain values simply through the ways in which they gather. These observations are followed by an exploration of ritual as an instrument of subversion and cultural adaptation. Three different theories which describe processes through which cultures change, are then examined. Though they stem from different fields, each provides valuable insights which underpin the analysis in later fieldwork chapters.

Chapter 3 seeks out theoretical connections between ritual and ethics. It draws from a much wider range of fields – including western literature, Greek philosophy and contemporary theological ethics. Discussions about the connectivity between ritual and ethics are in their formative stages across many fields in the humanities and social sciences. This chapter draws together some of these threads, utilising the performance concepts of improvisation and rehearsal as anchor points. The first field of this chapter's enquiry is an examination of the use of communion and excommunication in Pinochet's Chile. It examines the nexus between ritual and identity, and shows how exclusion from participation was wielded to political effect. This is followed by an examination of parallels in the concepts of habit, practice and rehearsal. Catherine Bell's development of Bourdieu's 'practice' theory is employed to show how rituals comprise opportunities for bodies to negotiate and perfect their embodiment of a ritual order (and hence a cosmological, narrative, or philosophical order). A vignette from Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* demonstrates ritualistic actions used as rehearsals for real-world acts undertaken at a later time. Recent theological writings develop this concept, positing worship as an activity through which ethical engagements with real-world issues are rehearsed. Two of these writers, Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells, take the performance analogy further, likening the process of communal ethics to dramatic improvisation. The final part of this chapter shows how communities enact improvisational changes to the rituals they perform. Improvised substitutions of value and symbol enable seemingly fixed practices to answer emerging ethical challenges.

The police and nuns who open this chapter highlight the breadth of the subject matter that a thesis on ritual could encompass. Crucially to this project, they demonstrate that the workings of ritual can be similar, regardless of whether the act occurs in a religious context. Rene Girard notes that ritualised attempts to meter vengeance, whether through sacrifices to gods and spirits, compensatory tribal rituals like trials by combat and duels, or state-endorsed judicial institutions, all function in much the same way as “restraining forces” against violence, in order to “restore harmony to the community, to reinforce the social fabric” (Girard, 1977, pp. 21,20,8). Although my sites of fieldwork are religious in nature, I focus equally on official liturgies and ceremonies, and also on the interactive and impromptu expressions of the ritual order in the ordinary world. I examine ritual’s form in script and improvisation alike.

This thesis uses the Hillsong conference and the Urban Neighbours of Hope to explore connections between ritual processes and ethical processes. It develops a conception of ritual as a *rehearsal* of ethical values and behaviours. In both of these communities, ritual allows bodies to try on a new ontology prior to the ‘real’ performance of that self which will be made in the ‘real’ world beyond ritual time. Ritual also facilitates *improvisation*, enabling performers to playfully navigate their way through present uncertainties while remaining faithful to a set of givens to which they wish to hold true. These include identity and practice, tradition and taboo. I examine ritual’s role in gradual syncretic and adaptive changes within these social groups. If ritual has the capacity to transform the behaviour and beliefs of people (e.g. Marshall, 2002), then it has relevance to the field of ethics, so I explore a variety of views pertaining to the function rituals play within ethical processes of groups. These include the creation of moral codes and identity-boundaries, and various conceptions of ritual as a means of forming virtues and as an ethic-shaping practice. Finally, I draw attention to instrumental uses of ritual, examining its use in forging pathways toward imagined futures. This raises the dizzying possibility that communities might utilise ritual in an instrumental capacity (that is, in order to effect material consequences) to realise intentionally ethical ends. The theories of ritual that are employed by this study were developed within and between the disciplines of sociology, anthropology, performance studies and theology, and offer many interpretive possibilities.[1] This thesis has a special focus on the nexus between ritual, community, and ethics for our fast-moving world. I address a range of perspectives on ritual which implicate ritual performances in processes of adaptation and change. Put simply, the question I address is this: what roles can rituals play in helping communities navigate ethically as the world they live in, and the traditions they participate in, undergo rapid change?

Mega-rallies and urban monks

In the formative stages of this project I observed and visited a range of communities and events which seemed to be ritualising in innovative ways. I was living in Sydney in 2008, so the impending Papal visit for that year's Catholic World Youth Day celebrations presented a rare opportunity to examine church rituals at their most lavish. Several of the events of the World Youth Day celebrations adapted traditional Catholic rites to suit a young demographic, an uncharacteristically large crowd, and the environmental and cultural milieu of contemporary Australia. Such modifications revealed something of the organisers' vision for a contemporary rendering of Church ritual and performance, both in terms of aesthetics, and of ethics. The Australian rendering of the Stations of the Cross cycle spanned iconic locations across the harbour foreshore and incorporated a scene in which an Aboriginal man in traditional dress carried the cross for Jesus (SBS World News Australia, 2008). The performance attempted to celebrate the time-honoured tradition of the Passion Play, demonstrating its relevance to global, but also to local, concerns. Other adjustments to traditional ceremonial templates attempted to 'solve' problems created by the scale and architecture of the event. In the minutes preceding the Papal Mass, held in a sprawling equestrian racing facility in Randwick, a low-flying helicopter carried the Pontiff over the crowd. The helicopter enabled the participants of the mass to experience fleeting proximity with its officiating priest. This modification compensated for the difficult layout of the racecourse, which prevented processional movements of clergy through aisles among the gathered worshipers. Sydney's cathedral spilled its usual functions onto the neighbouring Hyde Park, with confessional booths set up in tents and staffed on rotating shifts to accommodate the crowd's confessions. These and other ritual modifications could probably be summed up with Anthropologist Roy Rappaport's observation that most ritual changes "indicate nothing more than the adaptation of a fundamentally constant body of doctrine to regional or ethnic concerns" (Rappaport, 1999, p. 341). But there were also entirely innovative additions to Catholic ritual, such as World Youth Day's "official" song, *Receive the Power*, written and sung by Australian pop singer Guy Sebastian. The song appeared to have been created with a dual purpose in mind. It was, on the one hand, a statement about the relevance of the event to broader society, and youth culture in particular. As such it functioned as a commercialised product: it was marketed as event merchandise, and achieved recognition in Australia's commercial pop music charts. At the same time, the song had a bona fide devotional function, and was sung among other hymns during the event's masses and rallies. This sits entirely apart from the kinds of adaptation described by Rappaport. It marks an attempt to create an entirely new ritual element which unifies the aspects of devotional pilgrimage and mass marketing that characterise the broader event. The mega-rally seemed to be fertile ground for the exploration of ritual and culture, and this informed my decision to select the Hillsong conference as a site of research.

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[1] Catherine Bell notes in the preface to her textbook on ritual: "To a great extent, multiple and even mutually exclusive perspectives on ritual continue to coexist due to fundamental indeterminacies that attend the identification of ritual, on the one hand, and historical changes in the projects of scholarly analysis, on the other" (Bell, 1997, p. x). She contends that the scope of ritual studies has not only been too broad to allow consistencies of approach across disciplines, but that this breadth has obstructed the "progressive development and refinement" of the various theories about ritual. To further complicate things, despite phenomenal, functionalist and structuralist perspectives each having periods of vogue in twentieth century ritual studies, "all three approaches can still be found in studies... today" (Bell, 1997, p. 88). Newer theories tend to take their place alongside, rather than in place of older ones; the interpretive frameworks of Durkheim are as likely to be employed in a contemporary study of ritual as those of more recent scholars like Pierre Bourdieu, Roy Rappaport, or Bell herself. With these interpretive possibilities (and their attendant agendas) in mind, Bell grimly warns that "talk about ritual may reveal more about the speakers than about the bespoken" (p. xi). Durkheim and Mauss warn of precisely this in the introduction to *Primitive Classification* (Durkheim & Mauss, 1963, p. 11).

As with World Youth day, the Hillsong conference presents Christian rituals that claim relevance – aesthetically and ethically – to the world of those who watch and participate. The conference is a site of ritual performances that are undergoing rapid change as the tastes and demands of participants evolve and as emerging technologies (from moving lights and multiple projections to multisite 'satellite' links) make new experiences possible (Thumma & Bird, 2011, p. 3). While some features of the Hillsong Conference are repeated in the church's weekly services, the scale of a mega-rally creates an experience which overshadows 'ordinary' church services, even for people who regularly worship in the megachurch setting (p. 5).[2] Hillsong conferences absorb their participants into an encompassing substitutive 'world,' which lives on in the memories of its participants long after the event's completion (Stevenson, 2010, p. 49). This thesis explores the mechanisms through which a ritual event such as the Hillsong conference influence the way a person interprets the world around them. It explores whether the bodily practices and experiences of the conference's participants constitute, as Saba Mahmood has put it, "the terrain upon which the topography of a subject comes to be mapped" (2005, p. 121)?

The notion that the Hillsong conference presents and enacts an encompassing 'world' is a significant focus of this thesis. The conference organisers leverage the event's scale and programming to set up a narrative positing itself as an ultimate expression of church, and a fallen outside world which desperately awaits redemption. Hillsong's position as an ascendant, capital 'C' 'Church' penetrates the church's retelling of its history. Hillsong commences the 'history' page of their official website with the same phrase that opens the Bible: "In the beginning" (Figure 1). This is typical of much of Hillsong's lore, which figures the church as a figure of unprecedented significance to Church and global history. The organisation's expansion is certainly impressive. *Hills Christian Life Centre* grew rapidly from its inception in 1983, being one of the first evangelical churches (and social institutions of any kind) to enter the greenfield estates of Sydney's North West (Connell, 2005, p.

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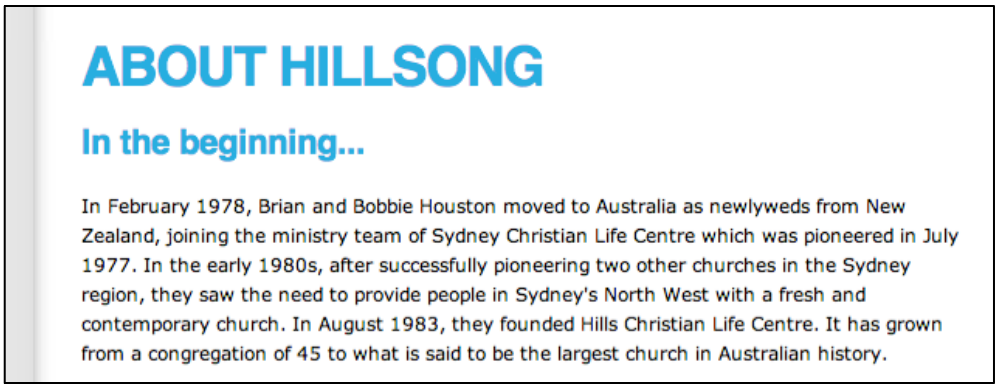
[2] There are orders of scale larger than Hillsong Conference, however, and Sydney hosted one of these with 2008's Catholic World Youth Day. Where a Hillsong Conference rally caters to a crowd numbering close to ten thousand people, the Sunday Mass for World Youth Day accommodated a crowd more than twenty times this size.

327). *Hills*, named after its location in the suburb of Baulkham Hills, would eventually take on the name and branding of its annual worship conference which rocketed to fame in the mid 1990s. The conferences, and the best-selling worship CDs that accompany them, have become a globally-recognised brand (Hicke, 2012). A 2006 press release claims Hillsong's conference to be "Australia's largest conference," boasting thirty thousand attendees hailing from eighty countries (Hillsong, 2006).



ABOUT HILLSONG

In the beginning...

In February 1978, Brian and Bobbie Houston moved to Australia as newlyweds from New Zealand, joining the ministry team of Sydney Christian Life Centre which was pioneered in July 1977. In the early 1980s, after successfully pioneering two other churches in the Sydney region, they saw the need to provide people in Sydney's North West with a fresh and contemporary church. In August 1983, they founded Hills Christian Life Centre. It has grown from a congregation of 45 to what is said to be the largest church in Australian history.

Figure 1: Hillsong invokes the Biblical narrative as it recounts the church's history.

The 2009 conference, upon which chapters 4 through 6 are based, was held at Sydney's Olympic Park from 7 to 10 July. Each day reiterated the same schedule: a morning rally followed by a combined teaching session, two afternoon slots for elective/workshop sessions, and a "main" rally each evening. Rallies and combined sessions took place in the 21,000 seat Acer Arena, while electives and workshops occupied other spaces around the Olympic park precinct. "Kidsong World" programs catering for children aged one to thirteen occurred in nearby buildings during all sessions and rallies. Conference rallies are similar in form to Hillsong's Sunday services, paralleling "almost exactly the general structures described for contemporary Pentecostal services elsewhere in Australia, in North America, and in other western countries" (Connell, 2005, p. 321). Rallies featured concert-style brackets of sung worship, and sermons delivered by guest and local speakers. Hillsong's guest speakers for 2009 included American mega church pastors Joel and Victoria Osteen, Louie Giglio, Craig Groeschel and Jentzen Franklin. The main 'local' speakers were Hillsong's senior pastor Brian Houston, and his assistant Joel A'Bell. Members of Hillsong's music team, and American worship leader Chris Tomlin, officiated sung worship and taught music-related electives during the week.

In the months leading up to the conference I visited Hillsong church services five times, taking notes and photographs of the worship spaces. I attended the four night-time rallies of the conference itself. I visited Hillsong Church services on the two Sundays which immediately followed the conference. I took written notes, photographs, and audio and video recordings of the proceedings I witnessed. I collected printed conference programs and pamphlets, and photographed advertising displays. I also collected video footage from the conference's website and YouTube channel. After the event, I noticed that some members of the audience had uploaded their own video recordings, and collected as many of these as I could find. Together with my own videos recordings, I was able to collect a repertoire of footage of the conference's opening and closing performances, which proved an excellent resource for the analysis which features in Chapters 4 and 6. I was eager to observe the performances on stage, and the activity of the crowd, whether participatory or resistive, and these recorded perspectives offered a multiplicity of vantages on the event. As well as observing the crowd 'as a whole,' I actively observed the activities of those seated in the rows nearby where I was sitting. This enabled me to collect a slightly more quantitative sample when noting, for example, what percentage of the crowd near me took notes to sermons. I interacted with conference participants before and after evening rallies, and during my church visits before and after the conference.

Around the same time as my research with Hillsong, I visited and spoke to a range of Christian groups experimenting with monastic frameworks. This emerging trend in evangelical culture saw groups of predominantly white, middle-class Christians forming communes and collectives that practised some of the liturgies and activities of traditional monastic orders (Sine, 2009, p. 53).[3] New Monastic communities sometimes adapt existing liturgies to respond ethically to their locality. The Urban Seed community, which is located in a back-alley in downtown Melbourne, incorporates themes of corporate economics into prayers and readings. These are contrasted with the notion of "Home" and "household", which evoke the church's role as gathered community and family. Metaphors of land, wilderness and pilgrimage are reworked to evoke the climate and environment of Australia, and also recognize institutional Christianity's foreignness to Australia's geography and spirituality (Kurylowicz, 2008, p. 5). Thus the first four lines of the Lord's prayer are rendered:

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[3] I presented a survey of some of the Australian expressions of 'New Monasticism' at Adelaide University's *Globalising Religions and Culture in the Asia-Pacific* Conference (Kurylowicz, 2008).

> Abba (Creator and Sustainer of our Household)
> Wholly Unbrandable
> May your economy come,
> May your way be sung on the sacred earth we know.
> (Lyons-Lee & Simpson, 2008, p. 107)

New Monasticism emerged within evangelical culture, partly in response to the rise of the megachurch.[4] The New Monasticism, as I encountered it, commenced in 2004 at a gathering of representatives of new evangelical communities (members of early twentieth century monastic communities, including Bruderhof and the Catholic Worker , were also present) (Moll, 2005). The conference produced a new monastic 'rule,' which was subsequently published under the title *School(s) for Conversion: 12 Marks of a New Monasticism* (Rutba House, 2005). Almost all of the twelve 'marks' outlined in the rule seemed to critique the core features of 'mega' rituals. Rule 1, for example, speaks of relocation to places 'abandoned' by churches and society, while rules 5 and 12 emphasise practised humility and contemplation. At least twenty books addressing the new monasticism have subsequently been published, and these range in tone from fervent testimonials (such as Shane Claiborne's bestseller *The Irresistible Revolution* (2006)) to scholarly assessments of individual orders (including Paul R. Dekar's analysis of an Australian order, *The Community of the Holy Transfiguration* (2008)). As the identity develops, there has been a palpable shift away from the manifestos and declarations of early writings (defining the movement against the mainstream) toward collections of liturgy, music and poetry (such as Claiborne's *Common Prayer: A liturgy for Ordinary Radicals* (2010)).[5] As the key members of the movement mature, it appears that they are seeking to resource a common lexicon of practice – of songs, stories, and saints – rather than define a particular set of membership prerequisites, or espouse a countercultural orientation. The emergence of the New Monasticism in Australia presented some unique possibilities for expanding this research project. My fieldwork with the Urban Neighbours of Hope offered another situation in which rituals were evolving to meet perceived needs in the community. Despite the marked differences in scale between Hillsong and UNOH, they each stem from the same evangelical tradition, and share cultural contexts, both operating in the western suburbs of Sydney. Combined, the two sites offered a broad lens to observe evangelical Christianity engaging with the emerging challenges of a shared setting.

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[4] A note on terminology: Bird and Thumma's recent survey of megachurches (2011) shows a growing use by congregants of the catch-all term 'evangelical' as a means of self-describing the tradition of which they are part.

Urban Neighbours of Hope is the first religious order to be associated with the Churches of Christ in Australia. It began in Melbourne in 1993, and was officially launched in 2001. As of mid 2013, it maintains chapters in public housing estates in Melbourne, Sydney, and Auckland, and slums in Bangkok. These locations reflect the organisation's focus on the urban poor in the cities of the Asia-Pacific region, a demographic they consider to be globally significant to the twenty-first century, yet neglected by developed-world churches.[6] My research has focused on this young religious order's first Sydney chapter, which at the time of my research was spread across three homes in the public housing neighbourhood of Bidwill in Mt Druitt.

Membership of the order follows a novitiate process that commences halfway through a year-long in-house training course, called Submerge.

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[5] Consider the sweeping claims encapsulated in the titles of these early publications from the new monastic movement: *The Great Emergence* (Tickle, 2008), *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope* (Pagitt & Jones, 2007), *The New Conspirators* (Sine, 2009).

[6] "In fact a United Nations report says that urban poverty is the single greatest challenge of our time: urban poverty and its attendant human cost is perhaps the single greatest challenge of our time. The future of our towns and cities, which is where most of humanity will live in the 21st century, hinges on our tackling it successfully." (Urban Neighbours of Hope, 2010)

Submerge trainees who commit to become UNOH members then continue their novitiate for a further two years, before becoming fully fledged members. Members do not take lifelong vows, but commit to the order for four, and thereafter seven-year intervals, and these are separated by discernment sabbaticals, in which members can take time outside the order to consider whether to recommit or not. Members come from both ordained and lay backgrounds, and are not required to have completed any formal theological training, although the Submerge course is an accredited theological and practical course.[7] Despite the order's affiliation with the Churches of Christ, individual members worship wherever they choose, and a spectrum of (mostly protestant evangelical) denominations are represented among UNOH's membership. In contrast to traditional monastic groups, UNOH accepts married couples as well as celibate singles, some of whom consider singleness a lifelong vocation.

Orderly life is structured around the 'Rhythm' – a collection of daily, weekly, monthly and yearly rites and meetings – but these occupy only a small fraction of the day-to-day routine. The Rhythm orders time for UNOH members: each member is to spend one third of each day and weekend in service to their neighbours, and another 'sacred third' in worship, contemplation or learning. Individual members have a degree of freedom to decide how they will apply the Rhythm to their lives, but there are also compulsory communal rites such as daily Communion, in which each chapter gathers for a weekday devotional, prayer time and to celebrate Holy Communion; Saturday night dinners, which are attended by all chapter members; and Sabbaths, which are a weekly day off, usually spent away from the community. Privately, all UNOH members study set Bible and devotional readings each day, which are discussed at weekly and monthly chapter meetings.

The types of service activities undertaken by community members vary greatly. Activities undertaken by the Bidwill chapter include gardening at the local community garden, visiting inmates at the Cobham Correctional Centre, mentoring recent migrants at a local refugee support centre, running a weekly kids club at a community hall, and attending a support group for Sudanese mothers. More often, informal expressions of neighbourly service take place, and these include things such as: driving neighbours to the shops and appointments, taking the neighbours' kids to a local skate park, planning the installation of a raised vegetable patch in the back yard of a neighbour with mobility difficulties, and inviting friends and neighbours over for meals – usually the Saturday Dinner.

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[7] In 2013 the Submerge course was accredited through Great Lakes Christian College, Tabor Victoria and Stirling Theological College.

In a 2012 article about Bidwill's chapter leaders Jon and Lisa O, Jon explains the intention behind his team's intentional community presence, saying:

> First and foremost, we are neighbours. When all else seems to be leaving, we move in. There is no professional agenda. We are about re-neighbouring a community – which means joining with the life of the neighbourhood to work together for its well-being. (Elliot, 2012)

This emphasis on investing the social capital of UNOH's membership into depressed areas is encapsulated in the phrase 'downward mobility' (2012). Jon and Lisa are both university educated, and from middle class backgrounds, and this pattern is typical of UNOH's membership. In 2011, Jon published a book entitled *Muddy Spirituality*, which further articulates the impulse behind the order's downwardly mobile community activities:

> Why don't we abandon the ways of the world that seek out opportunities to spend time with important people over the forgotten people? What if the best way to serve the rich was to live out Jesus' priority for the underclass, and let our lives speak a language of care, concern and compassion that our lives did not so much attract them as compel them towards a Christ-centred movement? (Owen, 2011, p.103)

My principal fieldwork with the Urban Neighbours of Hope's chapter in Sydney took place during a week-long visit in 2010. During a six-day period commencing Tuesday morning 27 April, I lived and worked with the members of the team – especially with Matt, Katie, Adam and Jarrod, who graciously allowed me to stay in their home (referred to as 'Tongariro,' after the street on which it resides). Throughout my visit, I observed and participated in communal worship activities such as daily Communions and daily discussions of allocated daily devotional readings. I participated in or observed nine different service activities in and around the community. During spare time, I conducted interviews with chapter members, both individually and in group settings. I used an audio recorder to capture more than eight hours of interviews and documented further conversations that happened along the way with written notes. Many times throughout the week, I was invited by Adam to accompany him on errands and visits – joining him as he drove a small bus which transports friends and neighbours about the suburb. I have remained in contact with the members of the Bidwill chapter since completing my field visit, and have conducted group follow up interviews in Bidwill in 2010 and 2011.

As with my fieldwork at the Hillsong conference, and in line with the methodology of performance ethnographers such as Turner and Schechner, I focus on rituals as arenas of human action. They are more than texts comprised of decodable symbols, or expressions of discourse or social structure. Questions of social function are always relevant, but these rituals are not interpreted solely as functionaries within a fixed social structure. Emphasis has been placed on the dynamism of tradition, and the processes of change evident within both UNOH and Hillsong conferences. I have focused on the interactive and negotiated elements of these ritual performances. Descriptive writing attempts to convey the experience of what it was like to participate in the key ritual performances I witnessed, on the days that they were witnessed. This culminates in a markedly different account than would be provided by an exhaustive listing of observed details, such as full texts of liturgies, or timings and movements of performances.[8] Rather than exhaustively chronicling the ritual happenings of these communities, my analysis centres on specific representative ritual events such as Hillsong's Opening spectacle, and UNOH's daily Communion ceremony. I also analyse certain qualities of the ritual space, such as dialectics set up between sacred and ordinary time, or the 'world' and the 'Church', and the interface between the presentation of collective and individual identities.

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[8] Resources such as these do, to some extent, already exist. Full texts and descriptions of key UNOH liturgies, prayers, core values and so on, can be found in some of UNOH's own publications, particularly *Surrender All* (Barker, 2005) and *Credible Witness* (Cronshaw, 2006), and on their website (www.unoh.org). Troves of video and audio recordings of Hillsong events appear on Hillsong's website (www.hillsong.com), and their songwriting and liturgical elements have been the subject of sporadic scholarly discussion (Riches, 2010; Hawn, 2006).

The two sites this thesis examines, the annual Hillsong conference and the Urban Neighbours of Hope's Sydney chapter, were chosen because their commonalities are as striking as their contrasts. One is a grand spectacle which fills stadia, the other occupies lounge rooms and kitchens in depressed suburbs. Yet both groups gather in unconsecrated locations, performing religious rituals that emphasise informality while simultaneously upholding normative evangelical liturgical and rhetorical frameworks. One utilises the newest technology and emphasises its place on the cutting-edge of popular culture, the other seeks inspiration from liturgies and practices buried in history. Both are relatively young communities (Hillsong was founded in 1983, UNOH in 1993), actively distinguishing themselves from the traditions from which they have emerged. Each confers an identity upon its participants that enables them to embody a moral vision directed towards the secular world. They promote themselves as communities that are responsive to the concerns of the contemporary world. Each subsequently innovates and adapts traditional rituals so that their participants might be shaped into ethical beings.

What this thesis does

The two major fieldwork sites of this research project are discussed in chapters 4 through 9. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 of this thesis analyse my field visits to the Hillsong Conference of 2009, while chapters 7, 8 and 9 examine my research on Urban Neighbours of Hope's Sydney team.

Chapter 4 deconstructs the Hillsong Conference's opening spectacle, a grandiose performance blending cosmological narratives with human history in order to imbue the conference event with significance. This spectacle set up a foundational categorical opposition – that between 'the world' and 'the Church' – upon which Hillsong's ethical principles are based. The first chapter on the Hillsong Conference also shows how the opening performance blends spectacle with pedagogical ritual, first presenting ideal representations of the crowd, then inducting them into embodiment of that ideal.

Chapter 5 examines the ‘Call to Repentance,’ (commonly referred to as an Altar Call) as a ritual unit that was performed each night of the Hillsong Conference. The ritual segregates, and then reintegrates, the gathered crowd along the ‘Church’/‘world’ fissure. It utilises a variety of somatic strategies to generate the momentum of respondents required to divide the crowd, who are subsequently guided through a set of actions that indicate penitence. The completion of the ritual involves the crowd’s reconfiguration into a unified whole, and their celebratory apprehension of this arrangement. The ritual performs the narrative of the ‘worldly’ becoming subsumed through repentance into an enlarged ‘Church,’ and by doing so it reinforces a set of ethical features that distinguish insider from outsider status. Ultimately, the ethical principles associated with insider status of the ‘Church’ are maintained. However, on the conference’s final evening, the ubiquity of the Call to Repentance was directly challenged during the sermon, and this set in motion a sequence of unexpected deviations from the usual Hillsong ‘script.’ This situation offers insights into the relationship between ritual and power in an event of the conference’s scale. It offers a glimpse of the possibilities for subversion embedded in the ritual order.

Chapter 6 focuses on the Hillsong conference’s closing sequence, which developed the themes and symbolism of the opening spectacle. This carefully-planned performance presented a spectacular arrival of God, which accompanied a ‘spontaneous’ eruption of worship. The relationship between spontenaeity and pre-planning is discussed, and this incorporates an analysis of the crowd’s capacity to recapitulate or resist the ritual’s power. Ultimately, a tradition is forged through the crowd’s performance of the liturgical text, not through the text itself. I discuss the strategies which the event’s planners utilise to control experience, and the ways in which the crowd shapes Hillsong tradition through their embodiment of the ritual order.

The first UNOH chapter, Chapter 7, shows two principal divisions of time in the order. These correspond to modalities of action. Ceremonial participation occurs during what I label the ‘muddy sacred,’ and is characterized by deliberately informal action which operates as an ‘anti-aesthetic.’ Community service activities and down time at home fill the ‘hope-filled ordinary,’ a modality of time characterised by idealistic improvisations aimed at freeing neighbours from poverty. The relationships between both ‘Church’ and ‘world’ at Hillsong, and ‘muddy sacred’ and ‘hope-filled ordinary’ at UNOH, are not strictly polar. Hillsong structures an ethical code around a narrative in which an ascendant ‘Church’ eventually absorbs the ‘world’ into itself. This relationship fosters the substitution of traditional Christian imperatives with Hillsong-centric calls to action. At UNOH, the ‘muddy sacred’ ritual times frame the service activities of the ‘hope-filled ordinary,’ infusing them with an idealistic intentionality. This ritual ordering reiterates itself in the improvisational practice of ‘overaccepting,’ in which arising scenarios are recontextualised in light of the larger framing narrative. This comprises one of the cornerstones of the group’s ethical activities.

Chapter 8 examines three different facets of UNOH’s ritual practices: communal prayer, sabbaths and sabbaticals, and the membership’s navigation of autonomy and collectivity. Morning prayer times are structured to promote ‘intertextual cohesion’ among the sequence of spoken prayers. Devotional messages precede prayers, arbitrarily selecting ethical values which will be applied to the prayed-for topics. Prayer times foster creative communal deliberation upon ethical issues. Sabbaths and Sabbatticals designate ‘on duty’ and ‘off duty’ intentionalities, and embed a spatial dimension to reflective thought in the order. Schemes of presentation and avoidance dictate members’ usage of home and neighbourhood spaces. These reinforce codes of decorum which typify behavior relevant to the ‘on duty’ and ‘off duty’ situations.

Chapter 9 shows how UNOH’s members navigate complex interrelationships between identity and intention. They must present differing ‘fronts,’ at different times, presenting as both neighbourhood insiders and missionaries from somewhere else. Comparisons of the front yards and back yards of their homes exposes the strategy UNOH members employ to express solidarity with the poor, while simultaneously attempting to improve the lives of the poor. It also focuses on the role UNOH’s participants play in shaping the ritual tradition in which they participate. Individuals adapt various elements of their ritual code to suit their personalities and preferences. The collective’s members also adjust their ‘Rhythm’ (their full suite of ritual activities) periodically; I track the evolution of a new element of the Rhythm – a commitment wristband – which was introduced as a means of solving a social issue in the order. This gives rise to a discussion of the group’s conscious utilisation of ritual as a means of addressing social issues. Such patent, technological usage of ritual raises questions that are only hinted at by accepted theories of ritual. In the context of a century where new faith traditions are emerging at a faster pace than ever before (Taylor, 2007, p. 515), dynamic research such as this thesis offers insights not only into how ritual traditions are evolving, but how communities co-opt, apply and exploit them in order to achieve wished-for outcomes.

There are thematic parallels between the first, second and third chapters concerning each fieldwork site. The first fieldwork chapters (Chapters 4 and 7) each outline the relationship between their site's ritual and social, narrative, and cosmological orders. The second fieldwork chapters (Chapters 5 and 8) analyse some of the core rituals celebrated by each respective group. These chapters demonstrate interrelationships between rituals and ethical processes. The third fieldwork chapters (Chapters 6 and 9) each focus on the individuals that participate in the ritual worlds I have described, and examine how identity – individually and collectively – is mediated. These chapters also explore how and why change and adaptation occurs to the practices of the community, and the role that the participants themselves play in the evolution of their traditions. While the Hillsong and UNOH fieldwork chapters mirror each other in terms of methodology and focus, the scalar difference between these two communities leaves its mark. At Hillsong, my participation and observation as a performance ethnographer focused on actions on a stage that I could not myself access, and on the collective responses of a crowd too large to engage with on an individual level.[9] My field visits with the UNOH community similarly focus on the dynamics between their individual and collective actions. Due to the smaller scale of their gatherings, however, a description of one of UNOH's rituals events can include references to the names of participants, and place individual conversations and interactions more centrally within the analysis. All fieldwork chapters attend to ritual in the process of performance, and to communities in the process of gathering.

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[9] This is not to suggest that the Hillsong chapters are devoid of reference to individual interactions. Over the course of my fieldwork I interacted with hundreds of attendees. My research also focuses on the actions of individuals observed within the crowd, as well as the crowd itself.

Why focus on performance?

What *role* might ritual *play*? Dramatic language saturates discussions of ritual, and this has as much to do with the intertwined histories of theatre and ritual as with the sheer theatricality of most ritual. The written text is essential, but deep strata of meaning appear when the text becomes act, when a community performs and experiences their own embodiment of tradition in real time and space. “Thus,” announces theatre scholar Patrice Pavis:

> There are two linguistic texts, and two ways of analysing them and establishing a semiology: the dramatic text studied on paper and amenable to a semiology of the text which borrows some of its methods from other text types; and the text uttered on stage, to which all possible meaning-systems attach themselves, based on the visual or acoustic image. (Hilton, 1993, p. 63)

For something to be classed as a rite, there must be a sense that what is being performed or alluded to had its origin in, or at least in some way refers to, a previous event (Rappaport, 1999, p. 25). As Pavis alludes, it is reductionist to refer to this past event as a ‘text’, given the sheer volume of non-verbal information conveyed within ritual performance. Edward Said’s notion of the ‘worldliness’ of texts acknowledges this interplay between text and culture, performance and meaning (Ashcroft & Ahluwalia, 1999, p. 13). Cognisant of this indeterminate relationship, ritual scholar Catherine Bell describes these occurrences as ‘textual practices’ (1992, p. 82). It is essential to acknowledge that each time a ritual is performed, or a practice is practised, its ‘text’ is redrafted in the recital. Whenever ritual happens, its participants fill in the blanks with breath and inflection, interaction and improvisation. They find ways to connect one sequence to the next in such a way as to make the meanings cohesive in their present setting. And they discover and react to momentary resonances that arise during the interactions of liturgy, semiotics and disposition during the performance. These resonances have the capacity to accumulate and generate their own narrative and symbolic traditions as a community repeats the ritual event time after time. Consequently, there are calls for religious studies to extend their range of enquiry beyond religious texts and attend to their enactment in the real world, as articulated by Grimes in the abstract of his forthcoming book *The Craft of Ritual Studies*:

> Before the last quarter of the twentieth century, methods for studying ceremonial activity were mainly historical, philosophical, and literary. Although these methods may be adequate for analyzing ancient ritual texts, they are not well suited to studying current ritual events, which are invariably complex, straddling multiple cultural domains such as religion, the arts, and politics. Although rites mark the human life cycle, punctuate public life, and suffuse religious practice, existing theories pay scant attention to ritual's capacity for nurturing or inhibiting creativity and for mediating or provoking conflict. (Grimes, Forthcoming)

Ritual scholars have for too long discounted the personal testimonies of ritual participants in favour of their own observations, preferencing the biases of their discipline, over those of their subjects (Grimes, 2000, pp. 9-13; Whitehouse & Laidlaw, 2007, p. xi). Of equal concern to Grimes, is the problem that ritual scholars have often resisted the urge to place themselves within the ritual space, opting towards observation in place of participation. By not participating, they have missed critical experiential data, and therefore privilege theoretical explanations over the corporeal. To be able to study "living ritual processes," Grimes argues,

> Calls for bodily training as part of scholarly preparation and bodily risk as part of scholarly participation and observation. It rejects the 'Gnosticizing', or disembodying, of scholarship. Furthermore, all the senses, not just seeing, must be developed for studying ritual.
> (Grimes, 1995, pp. 19-20)

Grimes anticipates that scholarship of ritual will shift from observation-based methodologies into more performative and experimental territories. Victor Turner's collaborations with theatre scholar and maker Richard Schechner (sparked by Turner's fascination with the dramatic possibilities of ritual and the ritualistic qualities of public performance (Turner, 1982, pp. 8-9)), was probably the first time that performance was used as a locus of scholarly engagement with ritual. Since then, a proliferation of performative methodological and experimental frameworks have arisen. Felicitas Goodman's experimentation with trance postures (Goodman, 1990) in dance choreography demonstrated that certain postures could be relied upon to induce trance-like experiences and inform the resulting choreography. Michael Houseman uses an invented 'Red and Black' initiatory rite which utilises secret knowledge whose symbolism is obtuse to its participants, but nevertheless strongly influences male-female relationships among his test group (Handelman & Lindquist, 2005, pp. 76 - 97). New York's Museum of Biblical Art, with its emphasis on artefacts that are religiously operational as well as having artistic value, likewise blurs the boundary between religious operation and exploration. Games designer and religious journalist Jason Anthony integrates elements from well-known games like Solitaire and Blackjack into religious masses, engineering situations where participants must 'game' the rituals, that is, creatively work within a set of rules to maximise positive outcomes.[10] These negotiations can be as simple as a team agreeing to discuss and form consensus rather than vote on a decision, or as consequential as full-blown cheating. The incorporation of the rules and situations of well-known games provide simple schemes within which participants can creatively navigate. Artist Eduardo Navarro arranged for a real priest to sanctify and hold a mass in his art installation, *Art Centre Chapel*, which sought to bring about a sense of the sacred in an art gallery (Sokalink, 2011). A key point of Navarro's work which involves engaging professionals including psychoanalysts and priests to participate in his artworks is that they simultaneously operate as artworks and as legitimately functional therapy sessions and masses. To attend a mass at Art Centre Chapel is to do mass proper, but it is also to participate in a piece of installation art.[11]

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[10] Footage of Anthony's Game Mass at Union Theological Seminary can be viewed online (Grimes, 2011). Anthony's game "Shabbatput" is a lighthearted improvisation that explores the ways orthodox Jews have had to creatively live their lives without breaking Sabbath rules. In the game, participants must figure out how they will participate in a shotput contest on the Sabbath without formally breaking the prohibition against picking something up.

[11] Dramatherapy also legitimates the performed deconstruction of ritual, but in this case as a form of therapy. Where dramatherapy differs from the aforementioned experimentations is that in dramatherapy, it is the patient, not the psychologist, who directs the enquiry.

> In Dramatherapy the ritual is re-created within a framework which allows the individual to explore the ritual and its relationship to them. The enactment of the ritual means it can be used in improvisation, the individual can explore different ways of

Anthony and Navarro's experiments each display what is, I think, an exciting development in the evolution of ritual studies, in that in both cases actual religious institutions and religious communities are fully complicit in the creation of these new experiments in ritual. These participants are comfortable viewing not only themselves, but also their traditions, as sites of transformation. The emergence of experimental Christian ritual events and spaces, commonly referred to as 'Alt-worship' likewise demonstrates that scholars and ritual makers themselves are working together to create new ways for congregations to engage with the sacred.

Grimes' own methodological experimentations have varied across his career. He is presently leading the charge in advocating that ethnographers replace the notepad and dictaphone with the video camera. "If you start to lead with the camera, you net a lot of fish, a lot more than you think… it enables me to slow the action down, think and rethink, play and replay in a way that I could never do if I am busy taking notes" (Grimes, 2011). His latest research output has challenged the dominance of the written word in studies of rituals. *The Craft of Ritual Studies* comes with accompanying media disc, while his Yale-sponsored work *Rite to Play: Ritual Creativity, Improvisation and the Arts* is presented entirely as an audio-visual product, comprising 75 individual films (Grimes, 2012).

Despite these developments, the methodological and theoretical foundations upon which ritual studies are conducted continue to result in studies which elucidate ritual as an essentially communicative or symbolic (rather than performative) activity. One recent exponent of this thinking, political economist Michael Suk-Young Chwe, has taken the communicative aspect of illocutionary rituals one further step from its performative context (Chwe, 2001).[12] According

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> responding to the ritual, or can accommodate the ritual to themselves by adapting the form." (Jones, 1996, p. 252)

[12] According to speech act theorists such as Austin and Searle, illocutionary acts are communicative units that operate in an environment in which there is local confidence that they will be effective (Kreinath et al., 2006, p. 526). Common examples feature

to him, rituals are activities which transmit ‘common knowledge’ to participants, which subsequently enable coordinated action:

> because each person will participate only if others do, for the message to be successful, each person must not only know about it, each person must know that each other person knows about it. In fact, each person must know that each other person knows that each other person knows about it, and so on. (Chwe, 2001, p. 8)

This emphasis on rational, cognitive engagement with linguistic matrices (‘liturgical orders’) also dominates the theories of anthropologist Roy Rappaport. He characterises the ritual participant, and ritual performance in general, as a functionary in the expression of a liturgical order’s communicative agenda:

> To say that performers participate in or become parts of the orders they are realizing is to say that transmitter-receivers become fused with the messages they are transmitting and receiving. In conforming to the orders that their performances bring into being, and that come alive in their performance, performers become indistinguishable from those orders, parts of them, for the time being. Since this is the case, for performers to reject liturgical orders being realized by their own participation in them as they are participating in them is self-contradictory, and thus impossible. Therefore, by performing a liturgical order the participants accept, and indicate to themselves and to others that they accept whatever is encoded in the canon of that order. (Rappaport, 1999, p. 119)

This perspective ignores the variety of ways in which a linguistic construct can be mobilised, appropriated, and subverted through performance. Another problem which confronts these communicative expositions of ritual’s efficacy is the instrumental effectiveness of so many ritual practices. These perspectives conflate the interrelatedness of psychological and somatic impulses and states, as well as the multifarious performative implications of ritualisations. They

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language such as “I give and bequeath...”, “In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit”, and perhaps the most elementary of all “I promise...” or “I swear…”

neglect the extra-rational forces behind so much human action, and gloss over historicity and contingency, our consciousness of which, according to Bloch, "drifts in and out" (2006, p.498). How might a curse, overheard or witnessed by a third party, modify the relations of the curser, the cursed and the witness? What of the relevance of the participant's status within the community, the approval or disapproval of onlookers, and endless other variables including notions of decorum and sacrilege, perceptions of fairness and reciprocity, and memories of the ritual's past efficaciousness? What if the curser's performance of the curse is unconvincing, or she utilises an unconventional liturgy? Like so many rituals, a curse is more than a mode of communication: it is a bodily action whose effects within the social group are felt and moderated by the real-time bodily reactions of others. Battle cries are another example of verbal ritualistic acts that create instantaneous somatic effects, arousing the fight or flight reflexes respectively in the bodies of the performing war party and their enemies. Benedict Anderson notices a similarly extra-linguistic capacity of national anthems

> …sung on national holidays. No matter how banal the words and mediocre the tunes, there is in this singing an experience of simultaneity. At precisely such moments, people wholly unknown to each other utter the same verses to the same melody. The image: unisonance. Singing the Marseillaise, Waltzing Matilda, and Indonesia Raya provide occasions for unisonality. For the echoed physical realization of the imagined community. (Anderson, 1983, p. 149; Albrecht, 1999)

To define such a happening using only the schemas of communication and semiotics is to strip them of their spine-tingling immediacy and somatic effectiveness. Ritual events are poorly understood if examined as fixed aesthetic or symbolic fields; they must be caught 'in the act,' and examined both as cultural action – expressing and challenging social structure, mediating discourse, identity and power – and social phenomena – revealing immediacy and interaction, agency and contingency.[13] While my own research does not explicitly cross from research into experimentation, it acknowledges how permeable the line between these two entities actually is. By attending to ritual in its performative context, I was able to move beyond the view of ritual as a static and textual practice, to see communities using their practices to respond to arising issues in their environments. Later in this thesis I will recount how UNOH members are changing the ways they signify commitment in order that their vows might become 'stronger.' Crucially, it is not the wording of their vows that are under negotiation, but the acts that accompany the taking of those vows which are bringing about changes. There is more to a rite than the words that are spoken in it.

As a performance ethnographer, I observed but also participated in rituals when appropriate. This provided experiential data that clarifies the immediate and interactive aspects of the ritual performances under analysis. Where possible I have included pictures and links to video footage so that, as much as possible, the particularity of the ritual performances that I witnessed, can be appreciated. As Turner intuited, there is more to a ritual than symbology, just as there is more to religion than texts and tenets. In the context of a century where new faith traditions are emerging at a faster pace than ever before, dynamic and interactive research methodologies deliver insights into how ritual traditions are evolving day by day, and on how communities co-opt, apply and exploit them in order to accomplish wished-for outcomes (Taylor, 2007, p. 515; Bell, 2006, pp. 406-407).

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[13] Bell is critical of approaches to ritual that consider it a wholly distinct and autonomous set of activities, and of those which reduce ritual to an expressive or communicative element of activity in general. Each of these dialectical views marginalize the other, conflating the panacea of ritual activities within their own theoretical constraints, thereby "impoverishing" the scholar's ability to interpret the particularities of every ritual instance (1992, p. 72).

The importance of ritual to ethics

Anthropologist James Laidlaw has noted that his discipline bears a blind spot to ethics because of its overreliance on Durkheim's account of morals as deriving from the social structure as a whole (2002, p. 311). Laidlaw contrasts Durkheim's schema in which "the question of whether they obey the dictates of social collectivities was a matter of how well arranged and integrated those collectivities are, and of how well we are socialized into them," with Kant's accounting for man as "subject to cause and effect… a free and rational being, moved instead by reasons," concluding:

> The category of the moral has, accordingly, almost invariably collapsed in the hands of anthropologists into whatever other terms we have been enthusiastically using to explain collectively sanctioned rules, beliefs, and opinions: sometimes 'culture,' sometimes 'ideology,' sometimes 'discourse.' (Laidlaw, 2002, pp. 312, 314)

The fact that rituals, be they political or private, religious or secular, are so actively connected to rules, beliefs and opinions renders them an eminent field for enquiries into the ethical processes of individuals and communities alike. Another anthropologist, Michael Lambek, calls for researchers to acknowledge that which is patently ethical in this field of human action.

> Ethnographers commonly find that the people they encounter are trying to do what they consider right or good, are being evaluated according to criteria of what is right or good, or are in some debate about what constitutes the human good. Yet anthropological theory tends to overlook all this in favour of analyses that emphasise structure, power and interest. (Lambek, 2010, p. 1)

Saba Mahmood identifies the same problem, wherein contemporary discussions of ethics tend to overlook the ways in which religious practices "may elucidate a moral rule, or even symbolise the value a moral code exemplifies" (Mahmood, 2005, p. 119). The problem is not only on the side of the scholars who study human action, however. She notes that "even those scholars who write on the subject of Islamic ethics focus on … doctrinal and legal arguments" (p. 120). The same critique has been levelled at Christian ethicists, who too often study liturgies out of their performative context. Bernhard Lang argues that performance animates meanings which are otherwise latent within written liturgies:

> The theoretical becomes consequential when the theory is embedded in symbols and enacted through the rite. The rite is, I think, the lens through which the theory can be understood. (Lang, 1997, p. 320)

Eliade considered that sacred and profane are not so much religious categories but existential "modes of being in the world" (1959, p. 14). To live is to put one's values to work in every action and interaction, and, in view of this practical ubiquity, Lambek labels this the field of 'ordinary ethics.' Ordinary ethics is, he believes, an essential and basic element of human behaviour, and an ever-present consideration in the lives of social groups. He cites recent work in developmental psychology which points to the conclusion that, "As a species, given our consciousness, or socialization and sociality, and our use of language, we are fundamentally… predisposed toward moral sensibility" (p. 1). If ritual is, as Rappaport contends, "*the* basic social act," (1999, pp. 137 - 138) then it is important to attend to the outworkings of moral concepts within and around ritual events. Like so many rituals, matters of ordinary ethics tend to be "relatively tacit, grounded in agreement rather than rule, in practice rather than knowledge or belief, and happening without calling undue attention to itself" (Lambek, p. 2).

Lambek suggests that the idea of an 'ordinary ethic' mirrors Austin's notion of 'ordinary language:' the commonsense, shared, and often tacit criteria we use to establish and regulate, "what we should say when" (Austin, 1956-7). So this study examines both the sacred and scripted, as well as the 'ordinary' and improvised elements of the ritual practices of the communities under investigation. This thesis examines instances when these categories bleed into one another: form-governed repetitions of actions that the community doesn't recognise as being part of the tradition to which they are devoted, rituals which are performed to effect entirely practical ends, the entrance of profanity into sacred time, and sacrality into the ordinary world.

The 'ordinariness' of ethics also evokes its grounding in the navigation of everyday situations, which may not be directly addressed by a tradition's standard moral tenets. In her research into the evolving practice of almsgiving in Russia, Detelina Tocheva noticed that Russian churchgoers of today identify two distinct kinds of alms – the money that helps the beggar, and the money that fuels the beggar's vice (Tocheva, 2011). This signals a redefinition of the object of alms (the money itself) from something meaningful for its basic economic value, into an amoral entity whose value is measured by its effect on the life of its recipient. This provokes caution and consideration in the prospective giver – for the act that of giving money to the poor, once considered intrinsically good, now has both good and evil potentialities. The giver must weigh up whether their gift in a particular instance constitutes a gift of 'good' alms or 'bad' alms. This redefinition invokes an important distinction between the words 'morals' and 'ethics,' which operates within my own research project. If a moral is an agreed upon precept or value, for example, 'give to the poor', then 'ethics' speaks of the process through which morals are weighed against one another *in practise* - in this case the negotiation of the relationship between morals 'give to the poor' and 'do no harm.' Tocheva asserts, "Ethics in the sphere of religion are approached… as a dynamic area of practice and interaction, distinct from 'morality'" (2011, p. 1011). Lambek agrees with this distinction, and argues that studies like that of Tocheva are precisely the arena where 'ordinary' grapplings with ethics, that is, the intersection between moral values or narratives and "practice, interaction, and historicity," (p. 1011) will be observed in action.

> Ethnography supplies case material that speaks to the urgency and immediacy yet ordinariness of the ethical rather than reverting to hypothetical instances and ultimately to reified abstractions."
> (Lambek, 2010, p. 4)

Lambek calls for ethnographic investigations into the relationship between rituals that communities formally and informally perform and their day-to-day dealings with the ethical.

This thesis searches for interconnectivity between ritual practice and practised ethics. But the corpus of theory on ethics is dauntingly complicated. Theologian Albert R. Jonsen mused on this problem in his contribution to a recent reader in theological ethics, noting that, "while there are fads and fashions, there is no canon in either philosophical or theological ethics. No one theory holds sway; no method is considered standard" (1996, p. 221). He plots a pathway through ethical theory by drawing upon a simple analogy, likening contemporary ethicists to musical or dramatic improvisers. Such artists draw on training and rehearsal (ritual) to make choices and take actions befitting the intricacies of an immediate situation. Jonsen's approach, while novel, is not obscure. As well as its grounding in Aristotelian ethics, the likening of ethics to improvisation, and ritual to the rehearsal space, is developed by major religious ethicists including Stanley Hauerwas (2004) and Samuel Wells (2004).[14] Given this project's concern with ritual performances in the context of religious communities, Jonsen's analogy, and its development by other exponents of religious ethics is well suited to the task. I, too, will connect performance and ethics concepts repeatedly in my research. I will examine how individuals and communities use ritual settings and actions as spaces for the rehearsal of values, virtues, narratives and rhetorics that will help them to be ethical actors in their broader lives. I will examine the place of improvisation in ritual performance, as a mode of action that transforms both the performers and the performance. I examine ritual as "the medium chosen to invoke those ordered relationships that are thought to obtain between human beings in the here-and-now and non-immediate sources of power, authority and value" (Bell, 1997, p. xi). This means focusing on ritual as it creates and transfers conceptions of the cosmos into the lives of social groups, imposing moral narratives and categorical analogies which people use to interpret their daily experiences. I explore both the patent and latent forces that rituals can apply to human behaviour, and the rational and extra-rational applications of ritual to questions of ethics.

Before this project's two sites of fieldwork are examined, it is important to extrapolate on the theoretical bases upon which its analysis rests. The two chapters to follow make a case for ritual to be studied as a significant functionary in the ethical processes of contemporary communities. The argument conmmences in the next chapter with an examination of the foundational role that ritual plays in the lives of communities and societies. This then allows for the present discussion about the ethical ramifications of ritual performances to be continued in more detail in Chapter 3. I argue that recent theories implicate ritual performance as a contributor to the everyday ethical processes of individuals and the communities in which they take part. The theories are diverse, but there are strong points of convergence at the intersection of ritual practice and practical ethics: this is the terrain this project will cultivate.

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[14] A raft of recent writings by major theologians, Kevin Vanhoozer (2005), and Hans Urs Von Balthazar (1988) to name two, draw upon the language of theatre and performance to describe theological concepts. Often these writers use dramatic concepts to outline a methodology of 'doing,' that is, performing, theology as well as considering religious practice as it is performed, rather than as it is theorised.

2. Ritual and Change

The 'work' of ritual

Many cultures use words for the work that ritual achieves. The Maring in New Guinea call rituals *rara kongung*, which literally means "spirit work" (Rappaport, 1999, p. 47), while in Greek the word *leitourgia*, from which the word 'liturgy' derives, refers to "the work of the people." St Benedict's rule incorporates "detailed and precise" rules for the Liturgy of the Hours, labelling them *opus Dei* or *opus divinum*, literally "The work of God" (Lang, 1997, p. 39). Tom Driver has proposed that in contrast to art, which is "play done workfully," ritual is best thought of as "work done playfully" (Driver, 2006, pp. 98-99). Rituals are often seen by their performers to be effective means of getting things done. What are their real, material, somatic effects, and how do these relate to their perceived, symbolic and metaphysical outcomes? Can rituals change the real world, or only the minds that perceive it? These are questions about function, and also about efficacy.[15] However, it is difficult to establish clear causal relationships between ritual acts and social truths because the laws of physics do not govern human relations and interactions. The results of a particular performance act can never be forecast with absolute certainty. Some of the tasks that rituals achieve are not immediately obvious to those who perform them, and the relationship between ritual to the traditions they propagate is far from linear.

This chapter explores several key dimensions to the relationship between rituals and the work that they achieve. It first attends to a historical conundrum about the relationship between a community's 'founding' principles, and the practices that often precede them. This analysis of ritual as a foundational element of social life leads into a discussion of the living nexus between group values, group practices and group cohesion. Rituals are then approached from a different angle: this chapter shows how ritual performances can be used to undermine, subvert or even overthrow those powers which they seemingly uphold. Three differing models are presented which demonstrate how rituals can be part of the process of cultural adaptation, transition and evolution.

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[15] See, for example, the special editions of the *Journal of Ritual Studies* dedicated entirely to questions of efficacy (editions 24.1 and 24.2, both in 2010), or *The Problem of Ritual Efficacy* (Quack et al., 2010)

Practice precedes principle

The sacrament of Holy Communion is arguably one of the pivotal ritual experiences of the Christian faith. It is a keystone in UNOH's worship practices, being celebrated daily by all members, while at Hillsong the ritual rarely occurs, having been largely replaced by rituals that offer more direct engagement with Christ (Lang, 1997, p. 417). Theologian and ethicist John Howard Yoder explains that Holy Communion existed as a practice for a considerable time before the written accounts of its origins emerged.[16] The implication he draws is that the practice precedes the text as the foundation upon which the community was formed. But it can be hard to appreciate this historical point when observing contemporary iterations of the rite of communion. "The bread no longer looks or tastes like the bread one shares with children and guests or that is owed to cousins and to the beggar. It is not broken nor (classically) even put into the mouth the same way as ordinary real-world food" (1991, p. 38). He laments that this 'sacramentalisation' of the rite distances it from its original use as a necessary daily occurrence in the life of the communities in which it originated. Like most Christian rites, the Eucharistic meal is an enactment of specific things Jesus had done – a particular meal – but also the regular practice of gathering to break bread (Bell, 1997, p. 213). The Christian traditions have, according to Yoder, forgotten that their sacraments arise from the lived practices of "specific datable, nameable, local first century messianic synagogues" (1991, p. 41).

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[16] Written accounts of Holy Communion's origin: Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-20. In contrast to Yoder's account, Lang suggests that it can plausibly be argued that Jesus invented the rite just as the gospels record it (Lang, 1997, p. 219)

Consequently, the rite as it is practised today gathers the community around spiritual concepts, rather than the very real, nourishing meal which inspired it.[17]

Yoder's approach to ethics commenced with close reading of historical texts to reconstruct a 'phenomenology of moral life,' which elevated the ritual practices of an originating community over putative 'first principles' (Vanhoozer, 2003, p. 38). He argues that in contrast to the values upon which a group is thought to have been founded, the day-by-day practices of a community require practical 'felicity' in order to be sustained. "The fabric exists, and functions more or less well, before anyone asks for an accounting about why it works. The 'accounting' that we can do is therefore not 'validation' but *a posteriori* elucidation" (p. 38). In other words, a community's originating practices present a picture of how they put their values into action in the real world; they reveal how their self-stated 'first principles' initially operated in the real world. Yoder suggests that the notions of being 'part of the family' and 'sharing bread together,' textually developed by the Pauline writings long after the practice of Communion became ubiquitous, would not have become a Christian ethical value were it not embedded in the performative bedrock of Communion (Yoder, 1991, p. 36). Whatever symbolic resonances come and go, the Communion will always speak of the singular body and blood from which the Church is comprised. The possibilities and limits of ritual performances "constitute the believing community as a social body. To see them in operation we need to do sociology, not semantics or philosophy" (1991, p. 41).

More recently, theologian Jonathan Schwiebert argues that founding practices actually inform the values that come to be seen as foundational. Schwiebert's analysis of the *Didache*, an early "church manual" (2011, p. 2) reveals that the ethical instructions contained within it (relating to fasting, washing and the entertainment of prophets) each has an important relationship to the book's central preoccupation – the meal ritual. Commandments to confess sins and reconcile with one another stipulate that these acts must occur before the meal ritual is celebrated. The *Didache's* ethical code, it seems, exists to uphold the celebration of the ritual, despite this being the reverse of common interpretations of the book.

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[17] Yoder notices that the two principal rites which became sacraments, Eucharist and Baptism, each originated in 'lay' and 'public' activities – sharing food and washing. For these to be transformed into the sacred and often intensely private rites they have become took a lot of work (Yoder, 1991, p. 42). Driver proposes that for differing reasons, both Protestant and Catholic traditions obscure the social aspects of their sacraments (Driver, 2006, p. 203)

> The ethical instructions that form the first six chapters of the Didache function as preparation for life within the ritually proscribed community… Commonsense would suggest that the ethics exist for their own sake, that they are somehow primary, a requirement for the good life, for pleasing God. Not necessarily so, in this instance… Why confess your infractions of the ethical code? So the communal sacrifice (its meal, its prayers) may be pure. Why turn back quarrelling members? So the gathering won't be profaned. In other words, ethics serves ritual ends. (Schweibert, 2011, p. 3)

When it is assumed that a holy text precedes practice, it naturally follows that rituals are the activities that perform, solidify, embody and express the values of a tradition. Yoder and Schwiebert invert this premise, suggesting that a community's ethical code exists principally to uphold the internal logic of their ritual practices. This is echoed by Driver, who notes that: "It is not as true to say that we humans invented rituals as that rituals have invented us" (2006, p. 31). Bourdieu's insight, that "every established order tends to produce… the naturalization of its own arbitrariness" (1977, p. 164), evokes the same mechanism. A similar conundrum surfaces in my analysis of Hillsong's 'Call to Repentance' rite (Chapter 5). It is not clear whether the ritual upholds the Hillsong-centric ethical code of the community, or whether this code maintains the felicity of the ritual world that is so central to the experience of being a Hillsonger.

The notion that 'practice precedes principle' elucidates the role rituals have played in the formation of not only religious, but also political communities. In what must have been a curious, perhaps even comical, exhibition of British ceremony for the "no doubt observant" Cadigal and Wangal clans of the area, Captain Arthur Phillip's formal declaration of colonial rule of New South Wales on 7 February 1788 nevertheless effected both a globally-recognised annexure of land and instigated the new and unique social construct of Australia, which continues to evolve today (Keneally, 2009, p. 90). None of the colony-building activities that occurred during the previous thirteen days of the First Fleet's presence on Australian soil had entitled Britain to any sort of sovereignty that would be recognised in Europe, but a ceremony involving two red leather boxes on a hastily-assembled camp table, some declarative speeches read from wax-sealed parchments, and three shots fired into the air by shabbily-uniformed marines, did. Australians reading about the ceremony today notice that, embedded in Phillip's ceremonial decree, and the subsequent "haranguing" he gave the assembled convicts, are some of the keystones of Australian society: the egalitarian spirit which underpins Australian law, the reverse-classism and underdog spirit embodied in a ceremony that featured convicts in the place of important dignitaries, and the myth of the 'fair go' which Phillip would repeatedly try to foster and enforce amongst his charges (Bowes Smyth, n.d.).[18] From what is known of Phillip, it is clear he understood the power of symbol and ritual to shape the society he governed. This is especially evident in his interactions with local Aboriginal people. On one occasion, he arranged the symbolic repatriation of fishing nets and spears stolen by the Europeans (Keneally, 2009, p. 159). So committed to ceremonial justice was Phillip that on a different occasion, he left Reverend Johnston, the captured aboriginal Abaroo and a young convict in the custody of Barangaroo as collateral, to ensure she and her kinspeople trusted in Bennelong's safe return (pp. 159-160).

Those rituals which instigate, embody and enact the power of political institutions, be they royalty, states, parties, or community leaders, demonstrate that rite and symbol influence social order. These foundational rituals not only symbolise power but embody and enact it. Placing a crown on the head of a new monarch does more than connote regency, it literally coronates (Rappaport, 1999, p. 35). Hoisting a white flag achieves the subordination of one fighting force to the other, while executing a traitor violently extends the power of the state upon the body of the one who resisted that power. Oaths, salutes, initiations and inaugurations all articulate and enact power within the operational lives of political systems (Bell, 1997, p. 129). According to Bell, occurrences such as these:

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[18] Description of the "haranguing" taken from Bowes Smyth's Historical Records of New South Wales, Volume 2 (History Services NSW, 2011)

> indicate the way in which ritual as a medium of communication and interaction does not simply express or transmit values and messages, but actually creates situations... They create power in the very tangible exercise of it. (Bell, 1997, p. 136)

Rappaport has illustrated the moral weight of ritually-instigated situations. He poses the example of a declaration of peace by surrender or treaty, noting that if a declared peace is broken, people will consider the subsequent state of affairs to be the situation that is illegitimate rather than the declaration of peace itself. In a case such as this, the fact that peace has been declared makes it such that peace is what must be. Ritual declarations not only alter the way things are, but the way people believe things *should be*.

> We judge the state of affairs by the degree to which it conforms to the stipulations of the performative act. Liturgical orders provide criteria in terms of which events – behavior and history – may be judged. As such, liturgical orders are intrinsically correct or moral. Morality is inherent in the structure of liturgical performance prior to whatever in particular may be taken to be moral. Morality derives ultimately not from statements about what may be right or wrong but from what liturgy establishes as right and wrong. To put it a little differently, to establish a convention independent of usage is to establish an "ought" against which the "is" of behaviour may be judged. (Rappaport, 1999, p. 133)

In many civilisations past and present, state and religious ritual traditions intertwine to powerfully dictate the order of a civil society, and the cosmos in which it resides. This is as evident in the inscription of "In God we Trust" on American banknotes as it is in Clifford Geertz's description of the extravagant funeral rites of Balinese monarchs.

> The state ceremonials of classical Bali were metaphysical theatre: theatre designed to express a view of the ultimate nature of reality and, at the same time, to shape the existing conditions of life to be consonant with that reality; that is, theatre to present an ontology and, by presenting it, to make it happen – make it actual. (Geertz, 1980, p. 104)

To view ritual as an elemental force within culture is to be concerned not only with origins, but with the continuing intelligibility of tradition in a dynamic world. The perspectives countenanced in this chapter thus far present rituals as means not only by which worlds (cosmic, political or social) are created, but as activities through which certain values make sense, seem intrinsic, or even unquestionable. Ritual lays the foundations, the linguistic conventions, political and social arrangements, philosophical and cosmological axioms, and symbolic associations that make a social world. As Geertz remarked of the Balinese, ritual practice helps people to navigate their operational environment by enabling them to transpose this cultural and cosmological reality onto their operational environment, and thus navigate purposefully within the world they know (1980, p. 104). Ritual, it seems, not only 'makes' worlds, but can actualise these in real time in the lived experiences of those who participate in them.

Rituals lay foundations upon which a social world can exist. Rappaport has described the often-unchallenged assumptions about the nature of humanity and about the world, upon which each social order is structured, as 'cosmological axioms' (1999, p. 263). He views ritual performances as the location wherein these paradigmatic relationships between the fundamental elements of the universe enter the bodily logic of the social group. Cosmological axioms are usually 'metaperformative,' which is to say that while they are not concerned with morality in and of themselves, they provide the logical bases from which more specific rules of conduct can be derived (p. 265). Rappaport's fieldwork among the Maring tribespeople explains how metaperformative notions in Maring ritual undergird their everyday navigation of the world.

> I include in this category Maring notions of the world as constituted by a set of oppositions between certain qualities which are, on the one hand, associated with the two general classes of spirits and, on the other hand, manifested in the social and physical world. Thus the hot, dry, hard, strong, cultural, spiritual and immortal are associated with the Red Spirits and substantiated in men, patrilineages, territoritality, warfare, high land and the upper portion of the body. In opposition, the low, soft, cold, moist, fecund, natural and mortal are associated with the Spirits of the Low Ground and

> substantiated in women, gardening, pig husbandry and the lower portion of the body. (Rappaport, 1999, pp. 263-264)

These axiomatic relationships are the interpretive keystones through which Maring people experience their world. They are also the bedrock of Maring society and every activity they undertake, whether it be the way they order social hierarchies, negotiate war and peace or retell their history, will reference these ritually-upheld paradigms. Similar connections between ritual practice and axioms knowledge appear in Levi-Strauss's interpretation of the way South African Bushmen divided and distributed the carcasses of the animals they hunted. Each part of the animal corresponds to a subgroup of the clan, so the ritually-proscribed distribution of meat after a hunt creates and reinforces the categories of difference and unity that allow the clan to operate successfully. Mary Douglas explains how the ritual analogies in a totemic society serve to shape that social order, through practice.

> It does not matter how it started, the point is that the classification of anatomical parts provides a notation scheme for the system of social categories. By the performance the pattern of ideas is reinforced and each part, whatever other meanings may accrue, has its main explanation by its relation to the rest. It is … the idea that every thought style is implanted in a way of life. (Douglas, 1999, p. 24)

Axiomatic knowledges of the kind Rappaport and Levi-Strauss describe tend to have an extra-rational function within culture, appearing to their believers as self-evident facts rather than ideological or cultural constructs. This tendency suggests an ethical dimension to the axiomatic foundations which are substantiated and propagated ritually. If rituals uphold the interpretive keystones by which a group interprets the world, then they play a part in how that group navigates their world on a day-to-day basis. In order to approach ritual as a functionary in ethical processes (that is, to a group's rational engagement with complex or uncertain moral situations), this thesis must examine the interplay between ritual's latent and patent efficacies. The following section examines some of the latent work that rituals undertake in social worlds, probing the capacities and limits of the unconscious work that rituals undertake in community life.

Misrecognised efficacies: ritual at work ‘behind the scenes’

Much ritual theory attends to the latent efficacies of ritual, especially its work in psychological, socio-political and communicative arenas. This might seem to echo a false characterisation of ritual, which emerges in the anthropological literature, as something which can only alter the hearts and minds, but not the bodies, of its participants. Edmund Leach, for example, contrasts ‘technique’ with ‘ritual’: “Technique has economic material consequences which are measurable and predictable; ritual on the other hand is a symbolic statement which ‘says’ something about the individuals involved in the action” (Leach, 1954, p. 13; Rappaport, 1999, p. 47). In Leach’s view, what is functional is technical, so only the “frills and decorations” that accompany these are what ought be considered ritual. Taking the same tack, Goody defines ritual as “a category of standardised behavior (custom) in which the relationship between means and ends is not intrinsic” (Goody, 1961; Rappaport, p. 48).

Bourdieu’s concept of ‘social magic’ concerns the ‘true’ effects of ritual, often unrecognised by the performing group. He offers male circumcision as an example of a ritual act which achieves far more than what the parents usually consider its primary purpose. He claims that an unrecognised effect of this coming of age rite is that it shaped a social world in which male and female were differentiated. So the ‘social magic’ of the rite is that it actually ‘makes’ women at the same time as it ‘makes’ men. Levi-Strauss, Bourdieu and Douglas all refer to the fundamental connection between practice and belief, by demonstrating that what people do actually ‘implants’ the lens through which their world will have meaning. These outcomes do not negate local understandings of an event like a circumcision or the reasons behind the distribution of hunted meat around a tribe, but they highlight that the range of efficacies that rituals may have will extend beyond those that the group patently recognises. Bourdieu, like Turner, proposes that ritual practices can be sites of contestation at the same time that they are sites of unconscious collaboration and reinforcement, and once more, misrecognition features as essential to the process (1990, p. 112). Bell succinctly explicates Bourdieu’s observations that in rites of exchange, a perception of fairness and reciprocity masks complicated, sometimes outrageous, plays for status and superiority. According to Bell:

> He demonstrates that the actual giving and receiving of gifts involve complex strategies of challenge, domination and honour: "To reduce to the function of communication… phenomena such as the dialectic of challenge and riposte, and, more generally, the exchange of gifts, words, or women, is to ignore the structural ambivalence which predisposes them to fulfil a political function of domination in and through performance of the communication function." In other words, the ritual exchange of gifts or insults or women in marriage is not primarily the communication of messages about the social order. Such ritualized exchanges are ways of establishing political dominance by means of what appear to be overtly fair exchange. Ritual is a tool for social and cultural jockeying; it is a performative medium for the negotiation of power in relationships. (Bell, 1997, pp. 78-79)

The process of misrecognition facilitates the latent levels of meaning in such exchanges, enabling "the gift or counter-gift to be seen and experienced as an inaugural act of generosity", when the exchange may in fact have embodied the opposite message (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 112).

It has been proposed that this gap of misrecognition – which reveals what Podemann Sorensen calls the 'positive latent function' – is functional in and of itself (Sorensen, 2006, p. 524). The internal logic of the ritual, "sees the problem it is intent upon; it does not see what it itself produces in the very operation of practice" (Bell, 1992, p. 87). This unconsciousness to the 'real' effects of a rite is precisely what allows ritual happenings to have such powerful influence on a social world. Just as with the Maring and the South African Bushmen, many of the assumptions that undergird a social order are taken to be expressions of the natural order of things. Montaigne notes this in his essay on custom that the "common notions" we are born into tend to be received as "universal and natural ones. Whence it comes to pass that what is off the hinges of custom, people believe to be off the hinges of reason" (1958, p. 83). Ritual practices that can keep certain presuppositions out of the realm of questionability provide base-level stability to a cultural or social order. Maurice Bloch proposes that ritual's "central character" is deference to an extant higher authority, suggesting this to be the reason why rituals have such a powerful capacity to reinforce extra-rational axioms within a culture (2006, p. 506). For religious communities, the positive latent function of ritual practices is particularly strong due to the intrusion of the divine into the group's understanding of their cultural origins. Bloch sees in these rituals a never-ending pattern of quoting others who are quoting others, and this separation between the present-day practisers of a ritual and the divine (or at least historically-constructed) actors from which the ritual is said to have originated means that "we are continually deferring to others but we do not catch sight of the minds to which we are deferring" (2006, p. 500). As Yoder attests, elements of a ritual's originating practices have a tendency to impact a social world long after a ritual's originators have disappeared from sight. Rituals may evolve with their performers, but they may unconsciously set boundaries which govern how the group meets the challenges that arise over time. Whether or not it is cognisant of the fact, a group shapes its language, its knowledge of the cosmos, and thus its ethical imagination through the rituals it performs.

The relationship between shared values and group cohesion

The communal nature of much ritual is important to this study, for it mediates the transmission of values, identity and action between the personal and the collective, and back again. Edmund Leach writes that people participate in rituals "in order to transmit collective messages to ourselves" (1976, p. 45). Often in ritual, since, "there is no separate audience of listeners… the performers are the listeners," (p. 45) there is a dimension not so much of 'preaching to the choir,' but of the choir 'preaching' to itself. Theorists have long drawn connections between the personal values of the constituents of religious groups (and other social institutions including clubs, societies and political parties) and the values that the institution promotes. This connection is sometimes conceived as a 'feedback loop,' or in the words of Durkheim, a "strengthening and vivifying action" (1915, p. 209) whereby the institution attracts members with complementary views, and then reinforces these values by generating the impression that such views are more widely held than they may be across a broader population. Durkheim considers this "perpetual sustenance for our moral order" (p. 211) to emanate from the collective influence of the social group onto the individual. In his conception of the social group as a body that represents itself in its construction and engagement with the sacred, the individual misrecognises social pressure to conform as the authority of their God.

> For the collective force is not entirely outside of us; it does not act upon us wholly from without; but rather, since society cannot exist except in and through individual consciousnesses, this force must also penetrate us and organize itself within us; it thus becomes an integral part of our being and by that very fact this is elevated and magnified. (Durkheim, 1915, p. 209)

In his appraisal of the rise of the mega church in Australia, historian Gary Bouma echoes Montaigne's view that a social group who share customs tend to reify these as part of the universal natural order (1958, p.83):

> Part of the appeal of mega-churches is the perpetuation of this myth [of the nuclear family], filling it with meaning and gathering people of like mind… For those who have families, this imagery may help them feel good about their decisions. But for a large proportion of the population, the imagery and emphasis is off-putting, either by praising what they do not have or by condemning whom they are. (Bouma, 2006, p. 125)

The National Church Life Survey corroborates these correlations between spiritual and social preferences, noting for example, that: "Congregations with high levels of attenders who favour a focus on social concern are far more involved in the wider community" (Kaldor, 1997, p. 209). This phenomenon of people being attracted to institutions and communities that vindicate and reinforce their values and beliefs (and conversely, as Bouma highlights, people being put off by communities that present alternative models) is well accounted for by the 'grid and group' matrix of Douglas and Wildavsky's cultural theory of risk (Douglas & Wildavsky, 1983). Proponents of this cultural theory consider this pattern to be not only commonplace, but predictive, asserting that it is usually possible to make assumptions about a person's beliefs and values based on the social orders they claim to prefer.[19] A community that has a strong hierarchical structure and emphasises cohesiveness over individuality ("high grid, high group") will both attract and produce people who value strong leadership and unity. A community which fits the diagonally-opposite sector of the matrix ("low grid, low group"), will have a flat organisational structure and an emphasis on individuality over homogeneity, and will attract and nurture the kinds of people who value diversity and autonomy and perhaps even those who are sceptical of traditional power structures. Ongoing membership of such communities reinforces values and beliefs about the world. A more recent expression of this relationship between individual and group values exists in the work of behavioural economist Cass Sunstein (2007). He asserts that the internet provides unprecedented opportunities for people to create virtual enclaves by filtering out perspectives and associations that challenge their values and beliefs. This would suggest that, rather than dissolving under plurality, virtual enclaves can shape increasingly extreme versions of their participants' core beliefs, with even greater efficiency and effectiveness than the temporal institutions and associations of times past.

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[19] Verwiej provides a detailed explanation of the connections between belief, desire and values in the Cultural Theory of Risk (Verweij, 2000, p. 22).

The two communities featured in my fieldwork ritually separate themselves from the broader world, in differing ways. The built environments of Hillsong churches and conference spaces are enclosed worlds unto themselves that recast the outside world as an order of reality subordinate to their own. The Urban Neighbours of Hope teams order their routines around a roster of ritual practices and community activities that separate participants from their middle-class former-selves. Implicit in both Bouma's critique of the mega-church, and Sunstein's of social enclaves, is the acknowledgement that when groups of people gather and begin to create a narrative about their group's identity in the broader world, this in turn manifests in behavioural changes across the group. We should expect to see modifications and intensifications to the ways individuals understand their identity, interact with outsiders, and live out their beliefs and values over time in groups that collectively ritualise. Actions that a group shares while together (many of which fall within the category of ritual), therefore, can serve to create, uphold, and even amplify the principles and patterns upon which their group is ritually founded. Communities can exist within self-made narratives that encourage a continual evolution towards more strident promotion of certain core values and conceptions of the world. What may to the ears of the membership sound like devotion to long-held traditions and principles may actually be a rhetoric that moves incrementally toward, then beyond, those cherished principles. In other words, whether cognisant of the fact or entirely unaware, communities can change themselves even as they undertake to preserve time-honoured practices and beliefs.

Shifting sands and shaking foundations: ritual in adaptation and subversion

To whatever degree rituals feature in the founding of orders, they have also been employed to confound, subvert and even destroy them. Rituals have been implicated in acts of revolution against prevailing social structures, and as arenas of subversion that ultimately restore equilibrium, or even shore up existing power structures. Just as cultures themselves are fluid entities, the role of seemingly static rituals within them can morph. Bruce Lincoln compared ethnographic descriptions of Newala ritual from three distinct eras in Swaziland's history: prior to colonial rule, during it, and on the eve of independence (Lincoln, 1989, p. 65). He observes that the ways the political power of the king was represented in these rites varied between these epochs. In a similar vein, Theologian Theodore Jennings proposes that even the most strictly codified liturgies vary when presented by different cultural groups. He remarks that "if we sought to compare the enactment of the Latin rite Mass in Western Africa, Central Mexico, a suburb of Chicago, and Saint Peter's in Rome. Even if all are "performed" in Latin (the situation prior to Vatican II) the trained observer would notice significant variation which it would be at least premature to dismiss as incidental" (1982, p. 113). Insights such as these challenge the structuralist assumption that there can be such a thing as an 'authentic' or 'untainted' version of a rite, demonstrating that even when a rite is performed in a 'textbook perfect' manner its meanings will resonate with localised issues.

Schechner proposes that just as history itself is "always in flux," ritual performances often occupy the "negotiation between a wished-for future and a rehearsable, therefore changeable, past" (Schechner, 1993, p. 259). This bidirectional interaction between social life and social structure prompted Turner to observe that "Human social life is the producer and product of time" (1980, p. 23). To Turner, the dynamic nature of cultures and traditions was one of the key facets of their usefulness to the societies that participated in them, their capacity to 'flow' being a prime indicator of their life and relevance. "The formal, supposedly static, structures only become visible through this flow which energises them to the point of visibility" (p. 37). Corroborating the findings of others, including Lincoln, Turner's work on 'comparative symbology' commenced with the observation that ritual symbols were "cultural dynamic systems, shedding and gathering meaning over time and altering in form" (1982, p. 22). So even, for example, if the Newala enthronement rites had been performed with exactitude, the 'operational meanings' – the meanings the participants associated with the various ritual symbols – were bound to change across the three political epochs that Lincoln observed (p. 20). The concept of kingship connotes vastly different resonances for a citizenry under colonial rule than it does when it exists within an independent state.

Even without evolving environmental or historical situations (such as the imposition of colonial rule), a group's ritual practices can be sites of contestation. Turner's theorising about 'social dramas', 'communitas', and 'liminality' (1977; 1982; 1974) demonstrates that ritual spaces can sometimes be "the seedbeds of cultural creativity," sites where 'latent alternatives' – new readings of existing symbols – can "feed back into the 'central' economic and politico-legal domains and arenas, supplying them with goals, aspirations, incentives, structural models and *raisons d'etre*" (1982, p. 28). Such dramatic turnarounds become possible in the liminal time-space of ritual events, which sometimes expose powers-that-be to risk. One of the more memorable recent cases of powers-that-be having their dominance subverted ritually occurred when Chinese activists chose Tiananmen square as the site of their protest. According to Schechner (1993, p. 52), the Chinese Communist party had reengineered Tiananmen square into its 100-acre dimension in the mid-twentieth century for the purpose of staging colossal pro-state spectacles. Unwittingly, the square's architects created one of the world's most vast, and memorable, stages upon which a power struggle would be performed.

The co-option of symbolic meaning can reframe power in a new light. During the 2011 uprising in Libya, anti-government rebels appropriated the 'three fists' symbol that Gaddafi used during his own revolutionary rise to power (Snapp, 2011). The dictator had used it to symbolise defiance against an entrenched regime during his own revolution, but in 2011 it invoked a similar sentiment against his own, recasting Gaddafi in the role of incumbent colonial force, and the new rebels as the country's liberators. What gave this symbol such incendiary power was the fact that it was 'stolen' from the ruling regime even while they retained military control. As an act of symbolic insurrection, its appropriation signalled that while Gaddafi's regime retained physical control, it could no longer control national discourse, having lost the power to wield even its most treasured emblems. Long before the regime's military control crumbled, they lost one of their most prized possessions – their revolutionary identity.

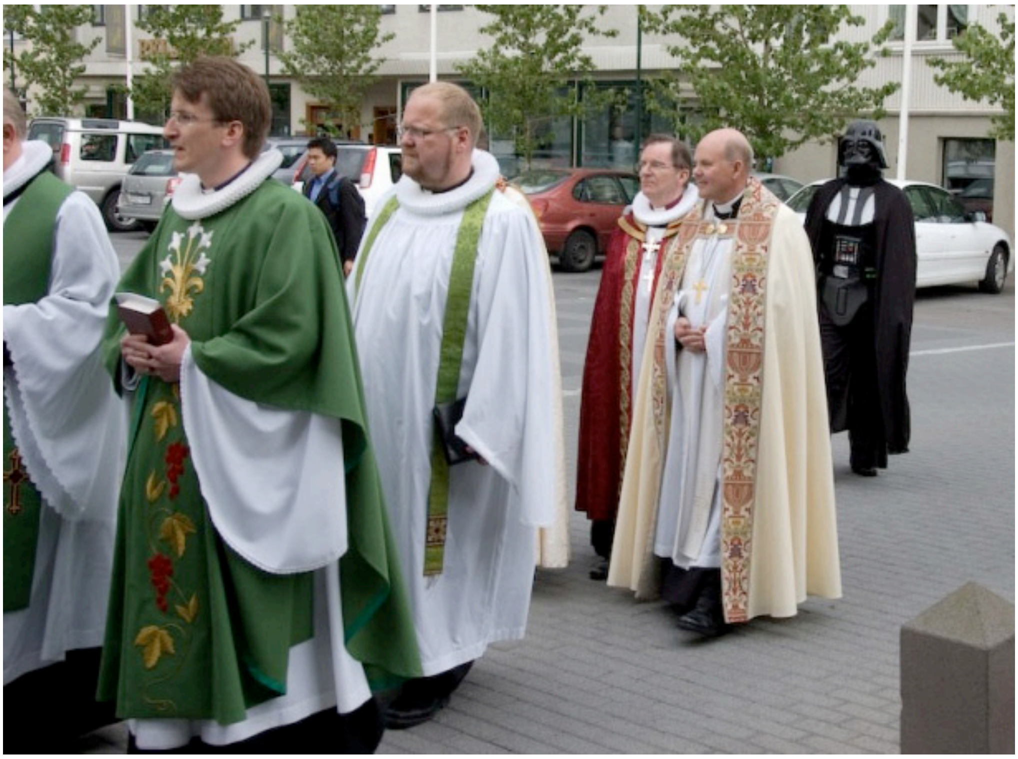

Figure 2: Lord Vader interrupts a gathering of Irish Catholic clergy (Willis, 2008)

Figure 2 shows a less revolutionary deployment of recontextualised symbols. The juxtaposition of Catholic pageantry with the iconography of the Star Wars universe provokes a profusion of colliding meanings. These examples show how ritual spaces and symbols can play host to what Turner called 'anti-structure'. But anti-structure doesn't only exist in the actions of subversives and renegades. The way in which an official rite is performed, too, can instantly change the meanings and resonances for its participants and watchers. An unintended faux pas can transform a moment of reverence into hilarity, just as much as an intentional change in inflection can recast humble gratitude into sarcasm (Hilton, 1993, p. 90). Even ritual events intended to reinforce the status quo can be hijacked by accident or sentiment, whether popular or subversive.

Street art and political theatre deliberately interrupt the rituals and symbolic meanings we take for granted. The most fascinating observations from this study's fieldwork concern instances of deliberate interference with the ritual status-quo by members of both Hillsong and the urban Neighbours of Hope. At the Hillsong conference an invited speaker deliberately snubbed his duty to officiate a 'call to repentance', and by doing so, called into question the foundational values the rite expresses. At UNOH, members deliberately and consciously adjust their rituals in the hope of generating wished-for social outcomes. Contrary to Lord Vader's appearance at a Catholic event, these examples reveal the subversive impulse emerging from group participants. In both cases, their performers subvert with the intention of improving aspects of their tradition in order to meet the ethical demands of contemporary life upon their community.

Three relationships between ritual and cultural evolution

Both Hillsong and the Urban Neighbours of Hope represent distinct 'stems' emerging from the same 'branch' of contemporary Christianity. They have each emerged from protestant evangelical culture, in Australia, in the 1980s and 1990s. Many of the attendees of the Hillsong Conference 2009 and the members of UNOH's Bidwill chapter grew up in the same evangelical churches of Sydney's western suburbs. Consequently, sections of this project – particularly the discussions in Chapters 6 and 9 – involve analysis of what drives the evolution of these communities' ritual practices. The ongoing adaptations of these communities show how arising concerns, narratives and values feed into a ritual order in time, revealing something of the relationship between their ritual practices and ethical processes. This section presents three approaches to ritual evolution which appear in the work of anthropologist Roy Rappaport, semiotician Roland Barthes and ritual scholar Catherine Bell respectively.

Rappaport uses cybernetic systems in biology to explicate the part rituals play in the adaptation of cultures and traditions over time. He describes adaptive processes as "universals, to be observed among pismires and empires, as much processes of life as respiration and reproduction" (1999, p. 408). He develops Bateson's view that cultural adaptation occurs whenever a community makes changes to its lesser-order truths in order to protect the truth-value of its highest-order truth-claims (such as "The Lord our God the Lord is One," or "God is Love") (pp. 6-7). Catholic historian George Weigel proffers an example of the process where lesser-order truths are adapted to preserve higher-order truths in his summary of the Catholic church's grappling with two enlightenment values during the fifteenth century. The concept of the freedom of the individual required the church to cease prosecuting those who converted to other faiths, while the construction of church and state as distinct entities necessitated each institution to forge a constructive, mutually non-coercive relationship to the other. These changes involved the overturning of long-standing practices and views over a large period of time.

> The Church itself had taken almost two centuries to find a Catholic understanding of religious freedom and political modernity that did not represent a rupture with, but a development of, classic Catholic understandings of the act of faith and the nature of political society. This process did not involve a wholesale, uncritical embrace of Enlightenment thought. Rather, it involved the recovery of classic Catholic notions of the distinction between sacerdotal and imperial authority, and the development of those ideas in light of the emergence of the political institutions created by the Enlightenment. (Weigel, 2013)

The Catholic Church's adoption of enlightenment values took hundreds of years. Weigel highlights that it was not enough that a ritual is performed in a new way for an adapted practice to become a new norm. A story about why these innovations have taken place needs to become embedded in the community's lore, and the adapted or recovered practice needs to invigorate those parts of the community's self-identity which are seen as ancient or inerrant. Thus, post-Enlightenment Catholicism learned to recognise papal authority as a sacred institution wholly independent from the apparatus of the state. In this regard, the cybernetics of culture are different from the cybernetics of biology. Unlike biological constructions, whose data is inscribed upon chromosomes, the 'DNA' of cultures is embedded in language and practise, which can be altered rapidly. Social and political orders can endure for millennia, but they can also be toppled in weeks.

Roland Barthes uses a slightly-different two-tiered taxonomy of meaning to illustrate cultural shift, and his is equally illuminating, for it reveals how meanings can morph within changing operational environments. He describes the process through which a community creates a myth about itself, and his theory accounts for how it is that cultures can make fundamental changes to lower – but also higher – order meanings in a short space of time. In Barthes' view, myths are created when signs that have denotative relationships with their meanings shift into second-order connotative relationships with their referents (1972, p. 109). Emory Griffin offers an example of this process through which the tradition of displaying yellow ribbons to welcome home loved ones returning from prison morphed into a widespread display of American nationalism over the course of two decades (2006, pp. 361-364). The initially-private ritual, entered the culture's imagination through the 1972 pop song *Tie a Yellow Ribbon round the ole' Oak Tree*. According to the logic of the ritual as it was originally conceived, a singular ribbon with a specific meaning (that he was welcome home) was designed to be interpreted by the returning loved one as he approached his house. It held a private meaning for that individual, denoting their loved ones' willingness to accept them home. By the time of its usage during the Gulf War, however, the tying of the ribbon had taken on a connotative meaning, a universalised shorthand for 'freedom' and 'support for the troops,' which was now intended to be read by all and any Americans catching sight of a yellow ribbon. Griffin's example demonstrates both how rapidly a ritual act can shift in meaning, and how marked such a shift can be - in this case shifting from 'forgiveness of stigma' to 'pride in victory' – even though the essential acts of the ritual itself remain intact (p. 362).

In contrast to Rappaport's cultural cybernetics, the process Barthes describes does not subordinate lower-order meanings in order to preserve higher-order ones. It rather allows meanings to shift fluidly – even unexpectedly. The only remnant of the original *Yellow Ribbon* ritual that remained was its articulation of welcome and reintegration to the returning person after a period of separation from home; the rest of the original ritual's meanings were lost in favour of its newer iteration (p. 363). Regardless of the clarity with which the original ritual articulated its meanings, the simple emotional resonances of welcome and reintegration proved to be the kernel that endured the adaptation process, despite several higher order elements of the rite being discarded along the way.

Catherine Bell sees ritual as the arena where the reciprocity between culture as it is experienced and practised in the here-and-now, and culture as a product of history and tradition, takes place.

> Ritual enables enduring patterns of social organisation and cultural symbolic systems to be brought to bear on real events; in the course of the process, real situations are assessed and negotiated in ways that can transform these traditional patterns or structures in turn. (Bell, 1997, p. 77)

Each reiteration of a ritual incorporates the sum of its performers' "negotiated appropriation" of the ritual order (Bell, 1992, p. 207). Conceptually, Bell breaks with Durkheim, who figures that rituals tend to override the beliefs of individuals through their collective force (1915, p. 209). Whilst acknowledging the psychosocial powers of ritual environments, Bell argues that every participant rearticulates a ritual's core meanings through the prism of their own bodies. The process of ritual change, in this conception, is as complicated as the combined stories of those who gather to perform a rite. Bell extends Foucault's theories about how discursive constructs are reiterated bodily by a social group (Foucault, 2008, pp. 106-114). While knowledge claims are inscribed upon the very mechanisms of society, a product of ideology and the rhetorical posturing of powerful institutions, ultimately it is the social body which, through resistance or capitulation, embodies that which is known.

Ritual change, in this third conception, comprises the minute or monumental adjustments in a ritual's articulation through the bodies of its performers. Bell places the body at the centre of ritual transformation: "The body first *defines* the ritual space and then more dramatically *reacts* to it. The shaped and qualified environment gives those in it an experience of the objective reality of the schemes that have defined it" (Bell, 2006, p. 405). The machinations of the powerful, and the whims of the moment, can sway a ritual's equilibrium; but neither will prevail should the ritual's participants resist. Thus, the movement of traditions over time represents the culmination of the relationships of power and narrative, discourse and subjectivity, as expressed by those who perform and participate in them.

The common thread in all these perspectives is that they figure ritual as the melting pot wherein culture and tradition, cosmology and narrative, identity and immediacy are simultaneously recast and remembered. Each reiteration of a rite is like a fresh staging of a play, and as such necessarily invokes the same revisionistic processes. As Patrice Pavis says, each new performance always means,

> "making a reading public, taking up a position with regard to the interpretative tradition, displaying a commentary on the text and the tradition and thus suggesting, with concretisation in mind, a meta-textual commentary." (Hilton, 1993, p. 58)

There are both strategic and extra-rational dimensions to this. Not all adaptations are undertaken consciously; not all symbols that endure retain their original meanings. Nonetheless, the performers of ritual produce a commentary on each rite they perform in, revealing not only what the rite says, but how the ritual order looks and sounds through their unique appropriation. Thus, through performance the values and categories of a ritual order constantly come into contact with new times, places and social settings. Consequently, rituals play a part in the way their performers navigate their own experience of the world. Rituals are a part of the ethical arsenal of their performers.

3. Ritual and Ethics

The very term ‘ethics’ derives from a Greek root with meanings that include ‘character,’ ‘disposition,’ ‘habit’ and ‘custom’ (Bell, 2006, p. 239). This chapter demonstrates that ritual can be the nexus in which custom, habit, disposition and character are shaped. Different traditions explain ritual’s power to shape people and their values in their own ways. A Zen Buddhist might explain that participants become one with the lifestream of the Buddhas and the ancestors. A Christian may proffer Augustine’s description of a sacrament, ‘a visual form of invisible grace,’ and explain that participating in sacramental ritual connects one with the transforming power of God. These examples are discussed by Donald Mitchell, in an essay that searches for “the source of moral empowerment in ritual performance” across the two religions (2000). He dwells upon an intriguing complementarity in the explanations proffered by the two traditions: that in each case, ritual’s efficacy extends beyond the discursive, inviting participants to “take on” the divine nature through embodied, rehearsal-like performance (2000, p. 86). A communicant Christian becomes empowered not only to celebrate God’s grace in the Eucharist, but to embody Christ and “become” the Eucharist for others, by being a source of healing and reconciliation that ushers God’s grace into their lives (p. 86). In a similar vein, Tibetan ritual visualisation instigates a “familiarisation with the luminous qualities and enlightened virtues of Buddhahood … in a way that enables these qualities and virtues to be ‘actualised’ in the practitioner” (p. 88). Ritual participation, in these instances, does more than impress the social structure or discursive features of a culture upon its participants; it invites its participants to become at one with – participating in the very nature of – the divinity around whom their community revolves. Whether through the indwelling of the mind of God, or the embedding of decorous values by repetitive practice, Mitchell presents ritual participation as a means for people to empower themselves to make better decisions in the here and now. He frames ritual as a practice which enables ethical action.

This chapter commences with an examination of the relationship between ritual and identity on a national scale. It examines the political application of Catholic Eucharist in Chile during Pinochet's regime, which was used strategically as a means to alter how Chileans thought about the legitimacy of torture. It shows how by highlighting the connection between participation in holy communion and the Catholic identity, Chilean Bishops wielded excommunication as a transformative influence on Chilean society. The second section of this chapter builds on the idea that rituals are practices – repeated bodily acts – closely related to habits. Ritual performances present formality, process, and convention, and by doing so they demonstrate how to live and move and interact with others. This connection is the basis upon which the virtue ethics of Aristotle rest. In his reasoning, ritual practices generate the virtues that form good character, by repetition:

> Moral goodness … is the child of habit, from which it has got its very name, ethics … It is as a result of playing the harp that harpers become good or bad at their art … Now this holds also of the virtues … we may sum it all up in the generalization: "Like activities produce like dispositions." (Anon., 1953, pp. 55-56)

Aristotle's reference to artistic rehearsal is telling: being performances themselves, ritual practices warrant dramaturgical exposition. After expositing the benefits of a practice approach to an enquiry about ritual and ethics, the focus shifts to this notion of rehearsal. I draw upon performative and theological perspectives to apply the concept of dramatic rehearsal to situations of individual and collective ethical processes, then round out this exploration by looking at 'ethical rehearsal' as a literary trope in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. My analysis of ritual performances operating in a rehearsive capacity intersects with a performance concept: improvisation. The final section of this chapter continues my dramaturgical examination of ethics, showing how musical and dramatic improvisors balance fidelity to a set of 'givens' (set conditions and intentions) with creative departures from normative or traditional responses. Improvisation offers an analogy for ethical engagement with a complex world, in which traditional moral tenets are difficult to apply. It provides an analogy by which radical departures from the 'script' can be interpreted not as deviations, but as faithful performances. I present examples of religious groups that use their ritual events as times to improvise ethical responses to arising situations in their communities, and then briefly introduce situations where rituals themselves are creatively improvised to meet perceived ethical needs. These improvised rituals creatively contextualise time-honoured practices, values and symbols to contemporary situations.

Ritual and ethical distinction

Within Catholic tradition, the Eucharist is a constitutive practice, it is central to the ontology of the faithful. Taking communion is the pivotal practice that defines active Catholicism. The linkage between the practice of communion and the formation of the Catholic 'communion' (as in community), is reinforced by the rare practice of excommunication, in which individuals are barred from participating in the Eucharist and thereby punitively expelled from the community.

Catholic theologian William Cavanaugh describes how the Eucharist has been used strategically to refigure the official pronouncements of the state (1998, p. 253). Cavanaugh examines the occasions when excommunication has been levelled against political powers in Chile over the centuries. In 1626, for example, Bishop Francisco Salcedo provoked anger from the King's representative when he excommunicated all slave traders (p. 254). In 1940, Archbishop Jose Maria Caro threatened the same fate upon any patron who paid unjust wages to their workers, and nine years later a similar threat – this time emanating from the Vatican itself – was leveled at the communists.

In Chile, excommunication has been used to influence the social fabric, both within and beyond the church. The main focus of Cavanaugh's study is the role of excommunication during the particularly dark recent era of the Pinochet regime. After years of seeming collusion with the regime, seven Chilean bishops declared participation in torture an excommunicable offence in 1980, citing torture's ability to "affect the common good, the dignity of persons and the sense of unity which signifies communion", and thus warranted the strategic use of one of the Church's own social mechanisms (p. 254). They wanted to modify the behaviours of their society at large, and used excommunication as a way of doing so. Torture, they reasoned, was "not just any sin," but one "which produces a significant social effect," which the church therefore had a duty to oppose (p. 256). One of the bishops, Carlos Camus, justified their intervention into matters usually considered beyond the church's reach as one aimed at countering torture's 'contagious' contribution to the social body. They stated the twofold purpose of the "extreme measure" of excommunication was, "to safeguard her identity and efficaciously move the conscience of her children" (p. 256). That these social aims were achieved through the adaptation of Church ritual makes Chile a noteworthy case study on the subject of ritual and ethics.

Four main accounts emerge in Cavanaugh's analysis for why this 'counter-politics' of excommunication actually worked to "move" the collective conscience. These four accounts demonstrate a range of relationships between a collective's ritual practices and their ethical processes. All four are revisited in my study of the Hillsong Conference, being echoed in a 'counter-politics' which involved the snubbing of one of the pivotal rites of the conference event. The first of these is a straightforward one: as recognised authorities, the bishops could make a declarative speech-act which altered the nation's moral plane simply through its declaration. This public declaration spoke strongly to a society in which "the brute fact" was that "most of both tortured and torturers were Christians" (p. 256). Bishop Jorge Hourton explained excommunication's power as a speech act: "When an entire society… has things so confused, so hidden, so distorted… we are enveloped in a social sin. Excommunication reveals it to us" (p. 257). But excommunication as an idea communicates something beyond the harsh disapproval of the church; it speaks to the very ontology of the torturer. Declaring a category of persons who are unfit to partake in the sacramental ritual suggests that they have committed an offence that is not only improper, but fundamentally irreconcilable with participation in the Catholic community.

The second account is that excommunication is a speech act, but also a social practice; it sets up those ethical categories that distinguish insiders from those outside of the communal identity, outlining the procedures for both exile and reincorporation. The distinction is a visible and inflexible one: in this case, excommunication was declared very publicly to be *latae sententae* – automatic – to anyone who had participated in or promoted torture. Anyone who had breached the rule had to consider themselves automatically excluded from partaking of communion, effective immediately, regardless of whether they were publicly known to have committed the sin. And any priest who knew of such acts by their community was bound to immediately exclude the perpetrators. Arguably the presence of such a hard and inflexible boundary around the community would quickly reshape the moral landscape within. But the declaring bishops insisted that the line of exclusion was not only arbitrary and rigid, but at its heart also a restorative process. For it was not a one-way boundary line; there was room for reincorporation of the expelled. The bishop's declaration made it clear that one who had been excommunicated under its terms could be absolved by a priest, if that priest deemed them to have repented and changed their ways. In this way, excommunication was deemed to have a "medicinal" effect (p. 254), not only by expelling those in breach of the rule, but by strongly incentivising adoption of the new moral code with the promise of restored insider-status. And it appears to have been at least a somewhat-effective medicine: several of the bishops later recounted stories about torturers confessing their sins and seeking absolution after the decree (p. 257). But there were also reports of known torturers continuing to attend church and take communion despite the decree. This meshes with Rappaport's observation that rituals can "establish obligation," but cannot in themselves "ensure compliance" (1999, p. 124). A significant reason the 'medicine's' effectiveness can be questioned was that the state's apparatus' for torture were largely unseen. The bishops could not name a publicly-known torturer to expel, and nor could they publicly absolve one. So while excommunication's effectiveness in changing the values of individual torturers was demonstrable, its capacity to alter public discourse was in this case diminished. Bishop Hourton framed excommunication as an illocutionary act which created an ethical distinctiveness for the Catholic communion. But what is this distinction? In what ways was it tangible to the populace and how might such a discursive construct operate?

The third and fourth accounts of the role excommunication played in shaping the ethical landscape of Chile both extrapolate on the the symbolism of the communion ritual itself. This third account of the ritual's potency concerns the central role that torture plays in the narrative of the death of Christ as remembered in the Eucharistic meal. That the Bishops chose the ritual of the Eucharist to address the subject of torture was no accident. Shortly afterward local theologians such as Jose Aldunate began to argue that "Torture is the most vehement attack against the body of Christ" (Cavanaugh, 1998, p. 257), proposing that to torture a member of the 'body of Christ,' that is, of the church, was in effect to torture Christ's own body. Understandably, this rendered the Eucharist dangerous psychic territory for an unrepentant torturer. While the Eucharist represented, on the one hand, the atonement for human sin wrought by Christ's sacrifice, on the other, the rite's narrative focus on Christ's substitutionary victimhood casts a torturer's sin onto the very body of Christ. If a torturer chose to covertly partake in the Eucharist, they now found themselves cast in the role of a torturer of Christ – an untenable proposition for one seeking solace from the ritual. The strategic genius of the Bishops resulted in a ritual whose elemental meanings required its participants to oppose the Pinochet regime. To participate in the Eucharist required a participant to physically embody solidarity with the tortured, and opposition to the torturers. This social power, aptly described as "symbolic power" by Bourdieu, causes the ritual's performers "to confirm or transform the vision of the world and thereby action in the world, and thereby the world itself" (Bourdieu, 1992).

The fourth account, also proposed by Cavanaugh, is that the rite became "much more than a ritual repetition of the past. It is rather a literal re-membering of Christ's body, a knitting together of the body of Christ by the participation of many in his sacrifice… If torture is the imagination of the state, the Eucharist is the imagination of the Church" (p. 229). The Eucharist resisted torture not only by shaping individual consciences, but by 're-membering' the church as a social body. For "while certainly individual bodies suffer grievously, the state's primary targets in using torture are social bodies" (p. 3). Disappearances and torture had atomised Chilean society, isolating every individual through fear and paranoia. Through participation in the Eucharist, the church not only remembered its antipathy to torture, but it also re-membered itself into a formidable social body which could oppose the methods of the state by behaving differently, *en bloc*. As Eucharist became increasingly political, and forced ever-increasing public discussion on the subject of torture, the implicit threat of exclusion (and the ramifications of being publicly tainted by association with the new sin *du jour*) gained power and notoriety. Within a population of proud communicant Catholics, the threat of exclusion from the rite (and by extension, from the Catholic identity), had a powerful ethic-shaping effect. The threat of being publicly excluded from a practice that shapes a society's ontology, had an ethic-shaping effect on the social order within, but also beyond the walls of Chile's churches. The constitutive act of communion proved to be the strongest enactment of not only Catholic, but also Chilean, identity. As with the previous account, the social ramifications of this ritual's evolution were connected to the meanings that generate within the performance of the ritual. It is in standing within a group of people and repeating a liturgy which affirms that all are part of the one body, breaking the same bread, that the participant experiences their position within the ritual's logic. Through performance, the participant recapitulates the ritual order: the only real option for the torturer being self-exclusion from participation in Catholic ritual and identity, or willing membership of a social group actively opposing torture.

Another take on the idea of a ritually-metered ethical distinction exists in Jonathan Schwiebert's analysis of the Didache (2011, p.3). The ethical instructions outlined in the opening chapters of the Didache all relate in some way to being ready and able to participate in the meal ritual which sits at the centre of the community's life.

> What's the larger purpose of this community's ethical instructions? Commonsense would suggest that the ethics exist for their own sake, that they're somehow primary, a requirement for the good life, for pleasing God. Not necessarily so, in this instance. (Schweibert, 2011, p. 3)

The ethical requirements of the Didache feed into an apocalyptic vision in which the world is destroyed, but the meal remains. These pronouncements prevent at all costs any profanation of the meal ritual, which sits at the heart of its community's vision for its future (p. 9). To weaken the primacy of the ritual would be to weaken the community's teleological purpose; thus, in Schwiebert's assessment, "ethics serve ritual ends" (p. 3). As with the Eucharist in Chile, this meal ritual and the ethical code that surrounds it are intractably linked. Schwiebert proposes that it is the ritual that:

> is doing the community's 'heavy lifting': the ritual has an end beyond itself and as such it reaches further than the ethics. Put another way, the ethics concern boundary maintenance for the sake of the community's ritual life, while the ritual concerns something much greater, something that goes beyond the community. (p. 1)

The ritual becomes not only the conduit through which a community's ethical distinctiveness is articulated, but brings about the required transformation. The participants performatively take on an identity; they become what ritual requires them to be, and by doing so, extend a community's teleological vision into the future. To ritualise is not merely to perform allegiance, but to become a living embodiment of a communal identity.

Ritual and ethical processes: habit, practice, rehearsal

Aristotle represents western philosophy's major touchstone on the connectivity between practice and virtue. But it is also worth noting the contribution of Confucian philosopher Xunzi. According to T. C. Kline, Xunzi expresses:

> That ritual practice shapes, transforms, and orders our cognitive and affective responses to our environment. Ritual practice has this effect because, through ritual participation, we come to embody the rites. Not only do we internalize the conceptual categories and ideals expressed symbolically in the ritual order, but our gestures and movements become ritualized as well. Part of this process of transformation, or ritual cultivation, takes place because of the somatic experience of ritual participation, an experience that enables us concretely to embody the ideals and virtues we find expressed in the ritual order. (Kline, 2004)

Kline proposes that Xunzi's work is significant to contemporary discussions of ethics because, "Xunzi focuses on describing *how* human beings become good, and Confucian ritual practice plays a central role in his account" (p. 188). He argues that Xunzi engages in "metapractical reflection," being cognizant of the underlying social functionalities of the practices he advocates (p. 195). Xunzi states that humans are motivated by immediate desire, but also in accordance with their judgments of approval and disapproval. It follows that if ritual can shape the values by which a person comes to judge their surroundings either approvingly or disapprovingly, it can shape their motivations, and ultimately, their actions (p. 200). Xunzi's proposal is that rituals do more than teach or represent: through repetition, they transform the moral character of the performer (p. 204).

Bourdieu and Bell pick up the investigation of ritualised behaviour as a social activity, rather than as a separate cultural or phenomenological entity. They argue that through repetitive engagement with a ritual a group generates a form, a scheme, a "way of acting that distinguishes itself from other ways of acting in the very way it does what it does," and this form becomes a part of the group's cultural repertoire and can be deployed at other times (Bell, 1997, p. 81). In Bourdieu's words, these forms of knowledge and action, determined both by culture and bodily logic, are called *habitus*, which combines:

> Systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. Objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor. (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 53)

The essential characteristic of *habitus* is that it combines bodily logic and cultural normativity in a relationship that is both the product of, and produces, thought and bodily action. So these extra-rational forms of speech and movement, belief and time come to be a part of the cultural bedrock of the group, that is, the ways in which the group naturally moves their bodies about space, "simultaneously defining (imposing) and experiencing (receiving) the values ordering the environment" (Bell, 1997, p. 82). While Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* provides an account for systematic human behaviours that are not consciously rational or externally organized, it nevertheless makes room for human actors to take charge of the situation. It is "never ruled out" that human actors might "perform in a conscious mode," the operations of a *habitus*, presupposing a "transformation of the past effect into an expected outcome" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 53). *Habitus* not only explains the way people interact with the world; it alsodemonstrates the way humans are not only shaped by, but shape their physical environments. "The practical world that is constituted in the relationship with the *habitus*, acting as a system of cognitive and motivating structures, is a world of already realized ends – procedures to follow, paths to take – and of objects endowed with a 'permanent teleological character'" (p. 53). In practice, then, *habitus* endows a cognised environment with teleological meaning, setting actors to work achieving these "already realized ends," while at the same time implanting causative meanings within their bodily experience (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 53).

Bell assimilates the varying perspectives on 'practice' in the work of Bourdieu, Marshall Sahlins, and Karl Marx, in an attempt to articulate: "a dynamic at the heart of social and cultural life which cannot be reduced to either pole of the dialectic of which it is composed – *langue* and *parole*, or structure and history" (1992, p. 76). Her resulting 'practice' view of ritual emphasises the individual's interpretation of the world and of the meaningful cosmologies they participate in, and of the ways these are synthesized experientially during the performance of the rite. Delivering a eulogy and praying for a parking space are each instances where actors bring the sacred to bear on their social worlds using ritual, and in each case a treatment as practice allows for an interpretation not only of the ritual's intrinsic symbolism, but of the way the rite was actualised in the real world: what it responds to, and how it interacts with the individual's perceptions of their situation and their beliefs. Practice explains the reflexive nexus between text and community, tradition and culture, because each new ritualisation produces a new state of *habitus*, which in turn informs subsequent practices, and so on (Bell, 1992, p. 88; Bourdieu, p. 53).

Bell outlines four key features of practice, and the first of these is that practice is situational: context, spontaneity and personal interpretation all play their part within ritual practices. The previous chapter elucidates many of the situational variances and contingencies of ritual practices. The second feature is that it is strategic, meaning that it is "a ceaseless play of situationally effective schemes, tactics and strategies" (1992, p. 82). This frames ritual not as blind repetition, but as the endlessly varying reapplication of theme and scheme. The next feature is the fundamental misrecognition of what practice is doing, and this comes into play in any discussion about the strategic nature of practice. While ritual practices fulfil strategic requirements for those who perform them, they also produce misrecognised effects which often (among other things) legitimise the ritual order being utilised. The notion of strategic deployment is important to this thesis, which examines rituals that are performed out of perceived strategic necessity, not merely out of repetition of or obligation to tradition (though it can be argued that fulfilling obligation is at times a strategic gesture). The fourth feature of practice is that it reproduces or reconfigures "a vision of the order of power in the world," which Bell calls a 'redemptive hegemony.'

> Although awkward, the term ‘redemptive hegemony’ denotes the way in which reality is experienced as a natural weave of constraint and possibility, the fabric of day-to-day dispositions and decisions experienced as a field for strategic action. Rather than an embracing ideological vision of the whole, it conveys a biased, nuanced rendering of the ordering of power so as to facilitate the envisioning of personal empowerment through activity in the perceived system. (Bell, 1992, p. 84)

This brings to mind Geertz’ observation that religious theatre not only performs, but ‘makes actual’ an ontology in line with the cosmology from which it originates (1980, p. 104). But under Bell’s conception, the hegemony of power relations that is enacted through ritual does not align strictly with orthodoxy, but with the way the cosmology is interpreted by the ritual’s actor.

> In sum, a redemptive hegemony is not an explicit ideology or a single and bounded *doxa* that defines a culture’s sense of reality. It is a strategic and practical orientation for acting, a framework possible insofar as it is embedded in the act itself. As such, of course, the redemptive hegemony of practice does not reflect reality more or less effectively; it creates it more or less effectively. To analyze practice in terms of its vision of redemptive hegemony is, therefore, to formulate the unexpressed assumptions that constitute the actor’s strategic understanding of the place, purpose and trajectory of the act. (1992, p. 85)

Every ritual participant sets the conditions through which they will experience their embodiment of the ritual order. Each individual constructs a unique personal narrative about the ritual itself, and their reasons for and expectations of participation. This narrative is usually one which, “promises a path of personal redemption, that gives one some sense of relative dominance in the order of things, and thereby some ability to engage and affect that order” (Bell, 1992, p. 208). The framing of ritual as practice reveals the ways in which people use it to mediate and inscribe their subjective experience of that order, their ‘redemptive hegemony,’ within and upon their daily lives.

Rehearsing values and virtues

There is a vignette in Dostoyevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*, in which the old monk Zossima recounts a life-changing experience that involves a duel, a beating, and an example of what literary critic Sven Linner calls 'the mimesis of virtue' (1975).[20] Arriving home after jealously challenging a man to a duel, Zossima flies into a rage and punches his new servant, Afanasy, square in the face (Dostoevsky, 1879, p. 211). As he lies in bed the following morning, Zossima is overwhelmed by the contrast between the beauty of nature and the guilt of his deeds the previous evening. What plays on his conscience, however, is not the pride and petty jealousy which instigated his challenge to a duel, nor the anticipation that he may kill when the duel happens in a few short hours.

> All at once I knew what it was: it was because I had beaten Afanasy the evening before! It all rose before my mind, it all was, as it were, repeated over again; he stood before me and I was beating him straight on the face and he was holding his arms stiffly down, his head erect, his eyes fixed upon me as though on parade. He staggered at every blow and did not even dare to raise his hands to protect himself. That is what a man has been brought to, and that was a man beating a fellow creature! What a crime! It was as though a sharp dagger had pierced me right through. I stood as if I were struck dumb, while the sun was shining, the leaves were rejoicing and the birds were trilling the praise of God.... I hid my face in my hands, fell on my bed and broke into a storm of tears. And then I remembered by brother Markel and what he said on his death-bed to his servants: "My dear ones, why do you wait on me, why do you love me, am I worth your waiting on me?" (Dostoevsky, 1879, p. 211)

During the duel later that day, Zossima undertakes a life-altering public act, allowing his opponent to fire at him without firing back. He survives the shot, then flings away his pistol and begs his opponent's forgiveness. This brave and "original" (p. 213) show of contrition wins the respect of his foe, becomes the talk of the town, and ultimately precipitates Zossima's transition from military officer to mystic. But there is another, highly significant action within this dramatic personal turnaround, and it happens in secret, before the duel. Just before leaving his house that morning, Zossima makes an excuse to his carriage driver and runs back to Afanasy's room.

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[20] This vignette was wonderfully adapted and explored by director Matthew Lutton in Tom Wright's "The Duel," as part of the Sydney Theatre Company's 2009 season.

> "Afanasy," I said, "I gave you two blows on the face yesterday, forgive me," I said.
>
> He started as though he were frightened, and looked at me; and I saw that it was not enough, and on the spot, in my full officer's uniform, I dropped at his feet and bowed my head to the ground.
>
> "Forgive me," I said. (Dostoevsky, 1879, p. 212)

Before the cowering subject of his servant, Zossima appeals for forgiveness. He rehearses alone, in private and before a benign subject, the contrition which he will shortly perform in public before an aggressive enemy. The first act of contrition, it seems, gives him the strength and conviction to follow through with the more dangerous and profound second.

Girard's writings on desire in *The Brothers Karamazov* (1966) highlight the internalisation of imitative desire as a process which intensifies and hides the consequences of desire. Under this regime, ordinary people – Afanasy in this instance – replace saints and kings as objects of imitation driven by the metaphysical desires of literary protagonists. In this case, however, desire precipitates the happiness of a religious conversion rather than the destructiveness of nonreligious desire which ultimately results in competitive violence. Zossima's desire for reconciliation and oneness with Christ is expressed in his encounter with his lowly manservant, whom he recognises as someone who has not only been the scapegoat victim of Zossima's violence, but is also an exemplar of Christlike cheek-turning humility. Zossima's transformation into a holy man has its beginnings not on the duelling field, but in the tiny bedroom of his manservant.

The story of Zossima's conversion portrays symbolic and ritualistic actions as instigators of personal transformation. A ritual event can celebrate or invoke mimetic desire by idealising or even sanctifying actions and values, while a ritual classification (asceticism, beatification) can confer desirable status upon an individual or tradition. The concept of mimetic imitation figures in the Christian tradition. In his first letter to the Corinthians, for example, Paul urges his readers to "follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ." The sentiment is repeated elsewhere in the New Testament (e.g. Ephesians 5:1, 3

John 1:11), often incorporating a sort of imitation by proxy, a call to imitate those leaders who in turn imitate God or Christ. UNOH members aspire to take on a "view from below" (Chapter 9) – to experience history from the perspective of the poor – and perform this ideal to one another within the private spaces of their homes. Girard discusses this idea of the presentation ofan 'ideal' type in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, noting that Virgil and Homer depict their heroes "not as they are but as they should be, to provide an example of virtue for centuries to come" (1966, p. 1). The call to imitate an ideal engages the imagination in a unique way. The Christian ascetic Thomas A Kempis' famous attempt to systematise the task, *The Imitation of Christ*, outlines Christlike virtues and habits, and counsels its reader to approach Christ not only as the supreme example of virtue, but as "a friend and ever-present protective spirit," the idea being that through repeated imitation one becomes closer to the one they imitate (Lang, 1997, p. 426; A Kempis, c1939, p. 116). A more contemporary expression of attempts to imitate Christ can be seen in the popular "W.W.J.D?" (What Would Jesus Do?) wristbands, which prompt their wearers to consider how Christ would react in any given instant and emulate that. The W.W.J.D. wristbands serve a secondary purpose which connects with the 'imitation by proxy' idea: the bands are brightly coloured, worn in a highly visible place (the wrist), and ubiquitous with evangelical Christianity. They therefore offer a level of accountability to the wearer, for others who witness their behaviour are likely to know that they are a believer and critique their actions accordingly.

Zossima's conversion along with these other examples, show how mimetic desire can outwork itself in human behaviour: a process where, through repetition, meaningful actions enable humans to 'rehearse' values and conceptions of the world. Hillsong presents a cosmology which divides the profane 'world' from an idealised 'Church', and its participants embody this divide ritually. They repeat the actions that constitute meta-Church worship that are presented to them (Chapter 4), and in doing so embody the 'Church' identity. Through the Call to Repentance (Chapter 5), participants pivot between insider and outsider status by repeating actions indicating repentance and contrition, and then reunification and revelry. This, too, is a form of rehearsal which enables participants to re-present these schemes in their ordinary lives. UNOH members engage with a theology based on notions of 'downward mobility,' patterning their descent into poverty along the lines of Christ's incarnational engagement with a fallen world (Chapter 9). This incarnational template is valorised by private performances of solidarity with the poor, which load the identity with moral importance.

John Howard Yoder's account of Christian tradition is that present 'sacramentalised' rituals began as deeply pragmatic practices within the social lives of early churches: meals and prayers for regular gatherings and simple liturgies to guide the everyday happenings of communal life, including births, deaths and marriages. This implies that these rituals ought to be viewed not only as traditions to be upheld, but as technologies of social formation that help present-day communities to rehearse – and ultimately realise – the structures and values of the earliest proponents of their religion (1991, p. 37). But Yoder proposes a further functionality of church ritual under this 'sacramental realist' view, which places the social organisation of the present-day believing community in relation both to its originating historical community and to the broader cultural world within which it resides: ritual not only shapes the social core of a community, but it also directs ethics (p. 39). Rather than seeking to build an ethical code of precepts built upon the 'first principles' of early Christian teachers, Yoder believed that contemporary Christian ethics had to commence with a description of the moral life of actual communities, that is, with their daily habits and practices (Vanhoozer, 2003, p. 38). He sees the Eucharist as a means to form communities who were able to, in essence, practise what they preached. To his view, the practices of a church can respond directly to arising ethical challenges.

> 'Sharing bread' is not only for soup kitchens and hospitality houses, but also for social security and negative income tax. 'Every member of the body has a gift,' is an immediate alternative to vertical 'business' models of management. (Yoder, 1991, p. 41)

Theologian Samuel Wells extends Yoder's thinking around ritual and ethics, offering insight into the process through which community ritual enables community ethics (2004; 2006). Wells agrees with Yoder that Christian liturgies and rites emerged in the day-to-day practices of the early Church, but adds that their formalisation happened in conversation with Aristotelian ethics. He suggests that early Christian communities grappled with the challenges presented by communal life and shared identity by creating rites designed to foster what Aristotle called ‘virtues’ among their community members. Aristotle’s notion of virtues and their relationship to politics translated easily from the *Polis* into the *Ekklesia*s (churches) of the early Christians (Wells, 2004, p. 23). In both the political or theological sense, virtue is:

> …a kind of power, the power of being good at something: a power that cannot be acquired overnight. Virtues are derived from repeated practises that a community continually performs because it regards them as central to its identity. Repeated practise nurtures skill, an excellence that derives from repeated performance. Skill develops habit, a disposition to use skills on occasions and in locations different from the times and places where the skill was developed. Habit develops instinct, a pattern of unconscious behaviour that reveals a deep element of character. This is the language of virtue. (Wells, 2004, p. 24)

Wells proposes that the early church formulated practices and habits specifically designed to encourage and develop Christian virtues, and these became the foundational rituals and liturgies of the religion. Arguably Aristotle’s notion of competition and violence continues to shape all communities – churches included – regardless of individual churches’ intention to subvert such things. Nevertheless, as Yoder attests, even after the co-opting of the Christian sect by the Roman Empire in the fourth century, its foundational rituals and stories continued to retain many of their countercultural, anti-violent resonances. Christian rituals still emphasise peaceability, humility and self-sacrifice rather than force, and promote unity in diversity, rather than unity through uniformity (Yoder, 1991, p. 37). Wells proffers these as examples of extant threads of the subversive religion which continue to be embedded in the faith’s present day rituals and stories.

An important element of Wells’ theory is that it locates virtue ethics within the sphere of community life. Wells proposes that by engaging with the rituals and liturgies of the Christian tradition, communities of believers ‘rehearse’ their foundational ‘habits’ together, becoming lithe and agile ethical beings in much the same way that the limbering sessions of a ballet troupe allow their dancers to perform better dances when the curtain rises. This process is contingent upon a community (in this case, an individual church) apprehending its own collective identity within a broader context: within their present social environments and as a part of an unfolding metanarrative involving God's action in the world through the church. This interplay between a believing community and the tradition and narrative that contextualise it, Wells notes, is by nature dramatic, being laden with tense departures and returns, struggles and victories.

Improvising ethics

As any performer knows, the relationship between rehearsal and performance is rarely straightforward. Performance theorist Eugenio Barba has described the evolution of training exercises in his theatre company, the Odin Teatret. He notes that "training does not guarantee artistic results. Rather, it is a way of making one's intentions coherent" (Barba & Savarese, 1991, p. 244). Wells figures that a church is a body with the call and capacity to interact ethically amid the circumstances it encounters; it has an endpoint (or eschaton) in mind, but no pre-determined course to take to get it closer to that point. It must play its part in the unfolding drama of life in God's world, faithfully reliant that its best 'habits' will carry it in the right direction, and help it to play its part well. Another theologian, Stanley Hauerwas, alludes to this process:

> In this regard, the regular, continual pattern of gathering for Worship may be viewed as the church's rehearsal. Worship thus becomes a kind of performance before the performance, a preparation beforehand for whatever witness the church might be called upon to give. (Hauerwas, 2004, p. 98)[21]

Hauerwas revisits narrative theology in light of performance theory. He, too, finds useful parallels between theatrical and theological concepts:

> Performance suggests itself as a potentially illuminating and instructive category for Christian reflection and self-understanding, both ethically and politically but also aesthetically and rhetorically, because it is a category richly suggestive of analogical relations between various facets of religious life. (Hauerwas, 2004, p. 78)

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[21] An earlier expression of this idea surfaces in William H. Willimon's *The Service of God: How Worship and Ethics are Related* (Willimon, 1983, pp. 32-33)

Hauerwas takes a specific interest in musical and dramatic improvisations, and their relevance to ethics. Citing Jonsen's analysis of "the ways in which rhetorical and casuistic invention are features of the ethicist's craft in much the same way that improvisation and invention are part of the artistry and virtuosity of an accomplished musician", Hauerwas suggests that all Christian lives constitute "Holy performances", in which the Christian's task involves allowing an "actualization of the divine act in our own temporal and finite context" (2004, pp. 79, 86). He likens the ethical navigation of the Christian life to the virtuosic improvised cadenzas of 18th and 19th century concertos. These improvised solos allowed the performer to depart from the score to improvise, yet required their performer to maintain a unity between their performance and the established themes of the composed piece, culminating in something that was at once a work of creativity and of devotion to the composer's vision. Hauerwas articulates some elements that comprise a "faithful" improvisation – active remembrance of prior "memorable performances", surrendering to an encompassing view of time, the necessity to balance risky departures and predictable returns to the score – offering them as essential skills for the ethicist.[22]

To Wells' mind, the way a community embodies the tradition that shapes it should resemble improvisation rather than a script-based recital. Unlike script-based drama, where parts are given out and pre-written lines delivered on cue, a Church's task in negotiating its present circumstances will be improvised, not recited. Attempting to 'recite' predetermined 'answers' to new situations is an accurate analogy for the approach of fundamentalists from all religions. The 'stage' on which the improvisations take place, and the 'parts' of the players are not predetermined.

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[22] Despite his interest in performance, Hauerwas remains committed to the word, written or spoken, and ultimately explores notions of performance that concern the carriage of the written word and the formation of ideology. Theology, and the Christian life (which he tellingly considers one and the same), are essentially "the performance of a rhetoric" (Hauerwas, 2004, p. 84).

> There is a dimension of Christian life that requires more than repetition, more even than interpretation – but not so much as origination, or creation *de novo*. That dimension, the key to abiding faithfulness, is improvisation. (Wells, 2004, p. 65)

In this analogy, God can be understood both as the key player in history, but also as the ultimate audience, watching on as people and communities exercise their free will in time.[23] In some cases, a church improvises in front of a watching public, while in others, individuals perform utterly alone and unseen, visible only to God. The possibilities open to the improviser are not limitless, however, for the Christian draws upon tradition and habit to inform their improvisation. Like all good performances, the improvisations being discussed here are performed better by actors primed for the task through regular practice, and this practice comprises the regular ritual activities of a believing community. The situations that might arise in and around the community which require deliberations upon ethics are diverse, and could include:

> debating the use of language in theological discourse or considering whether to resign a job because of misgivings about one's boss's integrity; whether seeking a harmonious breakthrough in church order or considering appropriate models for development work in the face of famine: each of these is a stimulus to faithful improvisation, fresh embodiment of the grace and truth of the scriptural witness. (Wells, 2004, p. 69)

These examples present some situations in which a community might hope to improvise an ethical outcome. In these examples, the community's response draws from their ritual practices and Biblical narrative (their 'habits'), in much the same way that in Yoder's example, the soup kitchen can be seen as an improvisory expression of the core truths of the Eucharist. In my own fieldwork

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[23] The contingency of the present is the critical element here. Christians find themselves somewhere between creation and eschaton, and must navigate a course they feel guides from one to the other. In Bonhoeffer's words, humankind, "finds itself in the middle, knowing neither the end nor the beginning, and yet knowing that it is in the middle. It knows therefore that it comes from the beginning and must move on toward the end. It sees its life as determined by these two factors, concerning which it knows only that it does not know them" (Bonhoeffer, 2004, p. 9)

I encountered instances in which communities improvise responses to arising issues, drawing from the knowledges and values embedded in their ritual practices. The worship practices of the Urban Neighbours of Hope, for example, infuse ordinary time with special meaning, and provide members with a redemptive narrative – and accompanying patterns of behaviour – so that they can improvise 'truthfully' in and about their neighbourhood (Chapter 8).

There are instances in which a more direct relationship between rituals and improvisation takes place: situations where rituals themselves are creatively reinterpreted in order to achieve ethical outcomes. Tocheva's research (2011) into the evolving practice of almsgiving in contemporary Russia, shows a long-running ritual practice playing host to improvisory – or 'crafted,' to use her term – interactions. She investigates changes to the way almsgiving is practised in several St Petersburg churches, examining the ways in which the social and cultural changes wrought by communism and its demise changed the philosophies that underpinned the practice itself, as well as the nature of those who begged. It is an example of a ritual diachronically adapting to emerging values, while retaining its constancy as a bedrock upon which the collusion of immediacy, historicity and contingency can be resolved through improvisory ethical actions. Tocheva first identifies the difficulty faced by contemporary priests and their congregations when confronted with beggars, because of the need to balance the giver's moral 'realization' in the act of giving with the measurable social consequences of giving alms to beggars (p. 1106). The traditional practice of unconditional almsgiving confronts the contemporary dilemma of "how to express Christian compassion and to refuse, at the same time, to support an unfit way of life" (p. 1101). She catalogues several present-day priests who create various schemes to assist their congregants to differentiate between more and less worthy beggars. One forbids alms to be given anywhere but on the church porch, which created a scheme in which the "bad" beggars (those who were poorly behaved, or who were drunk) were prevented from disrupting church events, while allowing the "good" beggars to continue worshipping within the church space (p. 1107). By controlling the space in this way, the priest physically separates the two classes of beggar, the 'little old ladies,' who continue to attend and beg without disrupting church services and the 'young panhandlers,' who are confined to the porch. This separation enables the churchgoers to maintain their sense of moral congruity by giving alms discreetly within the church space to ‘deserving’ beggars who benefit from the gift. Other priests modify the practice of almsgiving to eliminate the risk of giving ‘corrupting’ charity, by substituting money with goods of incorruptible value like food or work. These priests reason that while a beggar might misuse money given charitably on vodka, gifts of food or of pay in exchange for work are intrinsically beneficial to him or her, and thus remove the potential for harm from the process. This modification to a traditional practice requires the priests to “index their thoughts and actions to different frames of historical and moral reference,” but by doing so the orchestrators of change enable the practice to continue in its new form (p. 1112). Tocheva notes that the object-substitution of food or work for money not only circumnavigates the ethical uncertainties of monetary almsgiving, it reaffirms the act of almsgiving as an intrinsically moral one (an expression of compassion and hope). This revised action-set enables the churchgoer to give alms while upholding an ethical judgement against the bad choices that some beggars make with money.

I commence my analysis of the Hillsong conference with an example of an improvised ritual element. The conference opened with a reimagined processional (which brings the clergy, choir and cross into a church space at the commencement of a mass) which, while similar in form to traditional processionals completely redefined clergy, choir and cross to animate the event’s mythic self-identity (Chapter 4). The conference event creates a church ‘world’ which transforms traditional Christian imperatives into Hillsong-centric ethics. In my writing on the Urban Neighbours of Hope, I examine the community’s ongoing experimentations with the wearing of commitment wristbands, adjusting elements of this new tradition in order to maximise its efficacies as a means of ‘strengthening’ membership vows (Chapter 9). Each of these situations (and many more in the following chapters) exemplifies a ‘crafted’ or improvised ritual. This very notion of communities tacitly modifying ritual performances in response to arising ethical quandaries suggests an instrumentality to ritual innovation. These are not gradual, syncretic changes accompanying the glacial transitions of cultures and traditions. They are not lesser order truths being shed in the pursuit of maintaining the veracity of ultimate propositions and postulates.

In contrast to the popular theories of ritual change, the analysis of ritual at Hillsong and UNOH evidences conscious adjustment and readjustment by those performing the rituals. They offer a glimpse of ritual adaptation in an instrumental context. The following chapters will present improvised responses to arising issues, and improvisation used as a means to anticipate issues that may not have yet arisen. Tom Driver wrote that the practices of a community comprise a “ritual pathway” (2006, p. 33) that helps them navigate through uncertain times. The following chapters adopt Bourdieu’s refusal to rule out the possibility of consciously adaptive ritual, but also find that ritual is a means through which communities can blaze entirely new trails through uncertain situations (1990, p. 53). The possibilities of ritual adaptation frame ritual performance as an instrumental object in and of itself, which can be utilised by a community to navigate emerging ethical challenges.

4. The Expected Extra-ordinary

This first of three chapters analysing my fieldwork at the 2009 Hillsong Conference provides an in-depth analysis of the event's 'opening,' comprising the first fifteen minutes of its first evening rally. This spectacle of word, image, sound and song located the event within a grand cosmic, historical and theological narrative. The meticulously-executed presentation introduced the major themes of the conference, built upon a categorical separation of the conference's meta-'Church' experience, and a broken 'world' outside. These conceptions of Church and world are not situated on opposing polarities on a cosmological plane, however, but viewed as concentric realities undergoing a historical transition. The Hillsong conference is itself a large-scale performance of a narrative in which Hillsong – the meta-Church – increases in size and influence to eventually encompass and eclipse the broken world it presently finds itself surrounded by. This narrative underpins the ritual logic of much of the conference's activities, and defines the key ethical precepts promoted throughout the event.

This chapter engages with Roland Barthes' theory on myth-making to examine how traditional Christian motifs and ritual practices were re-worked to transform symbolic meanings into denotative reference in real time. During the conference traditional symbols and actions designed to commemorate Christ as a historical and spiritual figure were transformed into seemingly direct engagements with a physically-present God. The work of Mary Douglas is used to show how the conference utilises its architecture to 'project' a ritual logic which shapes the experience and values of its participants. The concept of rehearsal appears in a discussion of how a spectating crowd is transformed, during this 15-minute sequence, into the ritual's performers. The event's participants were trained in the bodily conventions of Hillsong worship, and then facilitated through the transition into actually embodying their new identity as meta-Church churchgoers. Mircea Eliade's concept of a 'hierophany' is employed to analyse participants' embodiment of the categorical separation between meta-Church and world, and rehearse the requirements of maintaining their identity as meta-Church participants. These include a transformed set of traditional Christian imperatives that are refocused upon the Hillsong institution.

Expecting the extra-ordinary

I visited Hillsong's Waterloo campus on Sunday mornings in the months preceding the conference. Every corner of the church premises seemed to be gearing towards the Conference event. The foyer buzzed with activity, with staff at one counter processing early-bird registrations, recruiting volunteers at another. Another stand accepted pre-sales on the album and DVD which was to be released to coincide with the conference, while posters at the kids' church desk advertised the conference's 'Kidsong' program. Trailers and teaser interviews cycled on the big screens as people mingled before and after the church services. Every surface and space within the church complex seemed to be decorated in banners, covered in glossy leaflets, or streaming media relating to the event, to the extent that laminated posters for the conference were on display above urinals and inside toilet cubicles. Even the black-box spaces in which Hillsong worship services take place were filled with banners and signs, with leaflets on every seat. Usually in these spaces, all visual material is mediated solely through audiovisual technologies. Once the lights and projectors are turned off, there is nothing to look at. This is not the case, however, in the months leading up to the Conference. Anyone attending one of Hillsong's church services, receiving their email or text message updates, or watching Hillsong's shows on television, was aware of the upcoming event – an event described with similar hype to an Olympic Games or the World Cup. Each year the Conference is the most anticipated event on the church's calendar, and is celebrated as both a milestone for congregants and a site of pilgrimage for guests the world over.

Sociologist Peter McLaren has described how strategically placed iconography and imagery throughout the Catholic Schooling system "wrap the students in an ideological miasma heavily laden with significance and meaning" (McLaren, 1999, p. 180). Participants "apprehend reality in a special way" as they move their bodies about a school's corridors and classrooms (p. 181). In contrast to McLaren's example, where the images on display tend to be perennial and generic in their subject matter – popes, crucifixes and saints – the intent of the advertising at Hillsong is to immerse participants in a world that points towards a more immediate event. The conference event is as pivotal a time-space to its tradition, as the elements of Catholic lore invoked by the iconography on display in schools. An image of a pope or of Mother Mary resonates with its beholder's relationship to past, present and future, and the same is true for an advertisement for an upcoming Hillsong conference. The important challenge for Hillsong is that the images with which they 'wrap' their congregants will continue to communicate as long as they are viewed. To see an advertisement for a 2007 event in the lead up to the 2009 one could trigger unsettling thoughts: why are we awaiting God's arrival in 2009 if he arrived back in 2007? Therefore every remnant of promotional materials for the 2009 conference were gone from church the Sunday morning that followed the conference's Saturday night conclusion. Hillsong's website keeps no archive of past promotional materials, and promotional videos of past events are routinely purged from their YouTube channel. All this activity before and after the conference carefully enables the conference to open with a privileged sense of time, a 'now' of immense importance and possibility.

The evening session of Tuesday 7 July marked the official opening event of Hillsong's 2009 conference. Before the regular activities of song and teaching had commenced – before even a prayer had been uttered – a massive spectacle reminiscent of an Olympic Games opening ceremony took place. Comparisons with the Olympics are particularly apt in discussions of the Hillsong Conference, due to its location in the largest indoor arena at Sydney's Olympic Park. To enter this space, delegates pass through the boulevards of the Olympic precinct, flanked by the monumental architecture and signage touting the 2000 Games.

The arena's ring of balconies was filled right to the back, and the space buzzed as delegates from all over the world took their seats. Tonight was the much-anticipated opening of the event. Looking closely, I noticed that the massive crowd was made up of smaller crowds. Delegations from churches ranged in size from pairs to groups of several hundred, and many of these bore some distinguishing identity-marker: matching t-shirts, bright wrist-bands, tassles on their backpacks. Over the course of the week-long conference, these markers delineating separate groups would become decreasingly visible as groups intermingled and individuals oriented themselves to the space. Many in the groups talked excitedly among themselves, while individuals introduced themselves to those in neighbouring seats. The lights dimmed, and the hubbub hushed in expectancy. After several seconds, a single pin spot picked out a young man standing behind a small podium. He was dressed in a neat, but not entirely fashionable outfit. He tapped the microphone and asked “Hello … is this thing on?” He continued “Tonight’s reading comes from Romans 10:36. ‘For from him, and through him, and to him, are all things. To God be the Glory, forever, and ever. Amen.’” His performance referenced, perhaps satirically, the pastors of small churches: earnest, but clumsy with modern technology. Despite the splendid words in his reading, his hesitancy at the microphone left them to echo about the darkened arena. This would be the last time that conference-goers would encounter anything unconfident, unpolished, or ordinary for the duration of the week. The pin spot faded and this was the last we saw of this character – though his performance and the Romans passage would be referenced in the final seconds of the conference during the benediction.

Shortly thereafter, a film appeared on the screens above the stage, while an instrumental piece reminiscent of the opening of Pink Floyd’s *Dark Side of the Moon* played.[24] It conveyed computation, space travel and the cycling of recorded information. The film plunged its viewers through the deep hues of outer space as brightly glowing stars and nebulae whizzed past. At the centre of the frame was the point towards which we seemed to be hurtling, an enormous point of white light. As all the other objects in space passed by, it remained poised in the distance, infinitely larger and more captivating than all other celestial objects. It seemed unambiguous that this point of light was the gleaming presence of the divine – a presence that we in the audience were on a collision course with (**Figure 3**).

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[24] Footage of this montage is available on YouTube (eg. http://youtu.be/pVvUMynD82A)

Figure 3: Hurtling towards the point of light in the opening video sequence

The bleeps and clips of the soundtrack began to take on a beat and a tune, and as the journey toward the bright light-presence continued, a montage of images flashed up on the screens: close-ups of printed pages, from which we could make out phrases such as "Book of Genesis", and "let there be light"; and pictures of the 'God and Adam' detail of the Sistine Chapel ceiling, a ticking clock, Egyptian hieroglyphics, stop-motion footage of a flower opening, medieval drawings of planets and stars and eventually, silhouetted modern cityscapes. Audio grabs from newsreels were spliced into the score's accelerating beat-track. The actual content of these recordings was difficult to make out, but they evoked the matter-of-fact voiceovers and earnest interviewees of vintage newsreels and lent a sense of reportage and historicity to the pageant of time cycling before our eyes. Images flashed across the screen evoking iconic moments of photographed history: Hitler, Gandhi, John F. Kennedy and his children in the Oval office, Mother Theresa, the burned 'running girl' in Vietnam, Mark David Chapman's mug shot, Woodstock, the Challenger astronauts, Mandela's release, Michael Jordan slam dunking … and on and on. The pictures flashed faster and faster, as the chronology they described accelerated towards the present moment. Some of the final images, in rapid fire as the music reached its crescendo, included images from the 2003 Iraq invasion and Barack Obama on the cover of *Time* magazine. The film crescendoed in a final explosive flash of white light, then all went to black as the crowd burst into hearty applause.

History had arrived at this moment – a moment on a collision-course with God's spectacularly bright presence. As the applause died down in the darkened stadium, solitary words appeared on the central projection screen, "But for now, there is ...", a pause, "Faith", "Hope", "Love." This 'now', from Paul the apostle's famous passage in 1 Corinthians, resonated as the present time and space of the conference opening.[25]

By relocating the present ('now') of the Corinthians passage into the beginning of the conference, the performance also relocated its future. The electric "But for now" which precedes the 'faith, hope and love' passage, follows Paul's prediction that one day God will be seen clearly, as in an image in a mirror. The juxtaposition of this clause with the space and time montage, which had seemed to imply that we were on a collision course with the divine light, implied that 'clear' contact with God was imminent. Would we come face to face with God during this conference event? Was his appointment with history due to begin 'now?' On top of the grand cosmic and historical narrative being constructed was an evocation of the Eschaton itself: this was more than a significant moment in time, rather it was time's ultimate moment. The conference's opening was telling its participants to anticipate (with faith, hope and love) an impending arrival of God.

The organisers who blended cosmological (space and creation imagery), historical (pictures of world events), and immediate time (the flash of white and the 'now' passage) utilised a strategy which is not new. Friezes in the home of Caesar Augustus on the Palatine hill in Rome depict noble historical figures interacting in a then-local and contemporary landscape populated also by the gods. Historian Christopher Smith explains, "What's going on here is the Romans contextualising themselves in a world that is very close to the Gods, and that closeness to the gods is linked with their closeness to history" (2010). The opening audiovisuals of the conference delivered the promised – and much-anticipated – sense of historical and cosmic magnitude to the event. The passage through space toward the great white light, its divinity cemented by the intercut creation-themed biblical and pictorial grabs, appeared to arrive just as the historical images cycled through to the present moment. These elements conveyed a powerful narrative: history, space and time are converging on a godly encounter, and this encounter begins at the conference right 'now.' This reworked time plane also denotes the ritual space as being "beyond or outside the time which measures secular processes and routines," setting the scene for the transformation of those present (Turner, 1982, p. 24).

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[25] The passage from which these words are taken reads: "When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known. But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love." 1 Corinthians 13:11-13 (New American Standard Version)

The processional

The next part of the opening spectacle can be likened to the processional sequences of Anglican and Catholic masses, in which the clergy, the choir, and the cross enter the space accompanied by music. Like traditional processionals, the human and symbolic elements that it brought into the space were transformed in the process. The sequence transformed the static symbol of the cross into a living presence, it transformed the choir and band from representatives of the crowd, into co-participants with the crowd, and it transformed the nature event itself from spectacle into worship. In doing so, this movement performed a pivotal narrative trope of the conference: that of a growing meta-Church movement incorporating those around it into itself.

Twin spotlight beams criss-crossed the darkened arena, illuminating a giant metal cross (probably five metres high and three wide) as it descended into the heart of the space. It was made of lighting truss, and glinted as it hovered in the spotlight's beams, a monumental symbol of the Christian faith hovering in a cavernous space (Figure 4). Much like a processional cross, it entered the space immediately ahead of the choir and musicians. A moody instrumental piece began to play, and as it did, spotlights picked up isolated performing musicians on small stages located around the stadium: an Aboriginal man dancing and playing didgeridoo, a man playing a drum kit, six cellists seated in a neat row of stools, small choirs of six or so singers each, and sixteen drummers beating floor toms which flashed as they were struck. At first the music played as a recorded piece through the arena's speakers. Gradually, over several minutes the processional's various players made their way down the stadium's aisles towards the main stage, and were assimilated into a band which accompanied, and then eventually 'took over' the playing of the piece. All the while, the cross glistened in two spotlight beams as it hung in the central airspace of the arena.

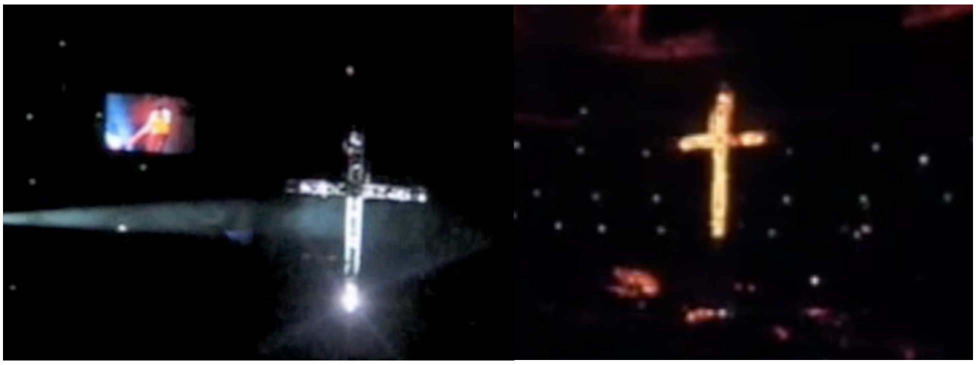

Figure 4: The cross alone in space; then erupting as if on fire

A biblical passage appeared on the screens as the music increased slightly in tempo and intensity. It described the "perfect sacrifice by a perfect person," and the giant cross pulsed blood-red, animating the passage. The spotlights that had focussed on the cross began to roam about the space, and our focus was drawn back to the procession of performers below, each moving down aisles towards the stage. More and more moving spotlights scoured the space, as the music grew in expanse as musicians continued their assemblage on the stage. The effect was reminiscent of the way an organist builds successive layers of pipes into the processional hymn with a crescendo being reached as the choir reaches their stalls to belt out the final refrain. The music grew faster, louder, more layered and intense until it approached its end: a machinegun crescendo which was accompanied by flashes of blinding halogen lights. As the final, emphatic beat ricocheted from the sixteen drums, all lights snapped off, plunging the crowd into darkness. Instantly, the cross flared an intense orange colour, as if on fire. This time, the light emanated from within the cross, it was hot, commanding, and it reconfigured the space around itself. One moment prior, the space had been a theatrical arena spectacle; now it was a circle of awestruck pilgrims gazing upon a fiery cross which burned brightly before them. Barely a second passed before the crowd exploded into cheers and applause. Till now, the cross had been a religious symbol, an icon to be held onto in 'faith, hope and love,' but now it glowed with presence and power. At this moment, the cross was more than a stand-in for Christ the historical figure or Christ the Christian object, but was Christ himself, temporally and tangibly present. To use Schechner's word (whose etymology he traces through Eliade and Levi-Strauss), the cross becomes an "actual:" a past time or myth "made present" (Schechner, 2003, p. 37).

Schechner (and the anthropologists he cites) refers to actualisation as being facilitated by shamanism and ecstasy (p. 34). While it is likely that psychological effects generated by the crowd and staging at Hillsong conferences bolster the efficacy of these transformations, they follow a simple pattern and are easily scripted into the program (Marshall, 2002). The template by which the Hillsong rituals "make the myth present," occurs in a process which is a precise reversal of Roland Barthes's theory about how new myths are created (Eliade, 1965, p. 6). Barthes theorised that myths are created when their first-order, denotative meanings are replaced by second-order, connotative meanings (Barthes, 1972). In the Hillsong processional, it appears as though this myth-making process is happening in reverse, so that symbols which connote that which is mythic and ideological are transformed into objects with temporal and specific denotations. The cross enters the space as pure symbol, evoking Christianity the concept, and Christ the historical entity. But as it begins to glow red, first by 'bleeding' along with scripture, and then by 'erupting' as a source of radiating light, the symbol animates, becoming a key character in the spectacle's drama. Where Barthes' transition involves the increasing separation of a sign's meaning from its original context, the process on display at Hillsong moves in the opposite direction. It commences with the mythic and the ideal, and replaces these connotations with meanings that are local, immediate, and responsive to their surroundings. The conference event has already communicated the portentousness of its location in historical and cosmological time; now it takes it up yet another notch, by demonstrating itself as the moment where Christian mythos becomes reality. The "faith, hope and love" prescribed to be lived in anticipation of Christ's return had suddenly been rendered obsolete – for Christ *had* returned, *was* present, and was eager to perform a pivotal role in the proceedings of the 2009 Hillsong Conference.

The processional brought more than just the cross into the arena space. The assemblage of the musicians from their positions among the crowd lent them a representative quality. Their assemblage on stage transformed them from representations of scattered and diverse ordinary people into a fully operational band. The choir's appearance, in the minutes that followed, charted a similar course, as they transitioned from representing the gathered crowd, to becoming subsumed within the singing mass they had instigated (Figure 5). Again, an ideal – the choir as a representation of the Church – is transformed by its actual – the monumental crowd actualising the tableau of a gathered, global Church worshipping before the glowing cross. This was no ordinary church processional. Rather than rehearsing the time-honoured symbolic journey of a church event, the Hillsong processional brought each symbol to life. The young man staidly reading from an enormous prop Bible caricatured the 'ordinary' church experience that Hillsong appropriates: repetitive, dry, dying churches which lack the ability to conjure the divine encounters about which they speak. The spectacle that supplanted his dry reading of scripture did so not by mocking the words he quoted, but by making them come alive. This impulse, arising throughout Hillsong events, culture and rhetoric, reveals their propensity to actualise Christian tropes, ideas, narratives and symbols. The figurative and propositional elements of church culture are made literal through the ways in which they are presented and performed. Some of this is the predictable consequence of Hillsong's propensity to use hyperbolic marketing language when they describe themselves, but a great deal of Hillsong's appeal is that it subtly presents itself as a meta-church, an ultimate church which stands above ordinary churches.

According to research by the Hartford Institute, the most common theme in megachurch preaching is that: "they want to portray what they do as more vital than other congregations, somehow better than "ordinary" Christianity" (Thumma, 1996). This claim extends beyond the aesthetic – beyond Hillsong's excellent production values, inspirational personalities and music – into the realm of the ontological. The exquisitely planned spectacle I have described claims much more about itself than that it is an ordinary church service with good production values. It is more, even, than a piece of spectacular theatre, because of the way it transforms the traditional elements of religion into powerfully immediate realities. What makes the Hillsong conference so forceful an experience is that it animates Christian mythos, scheduling the awesome, the seemingly-unprecedented, the miraculous into its tightly-scripted program.

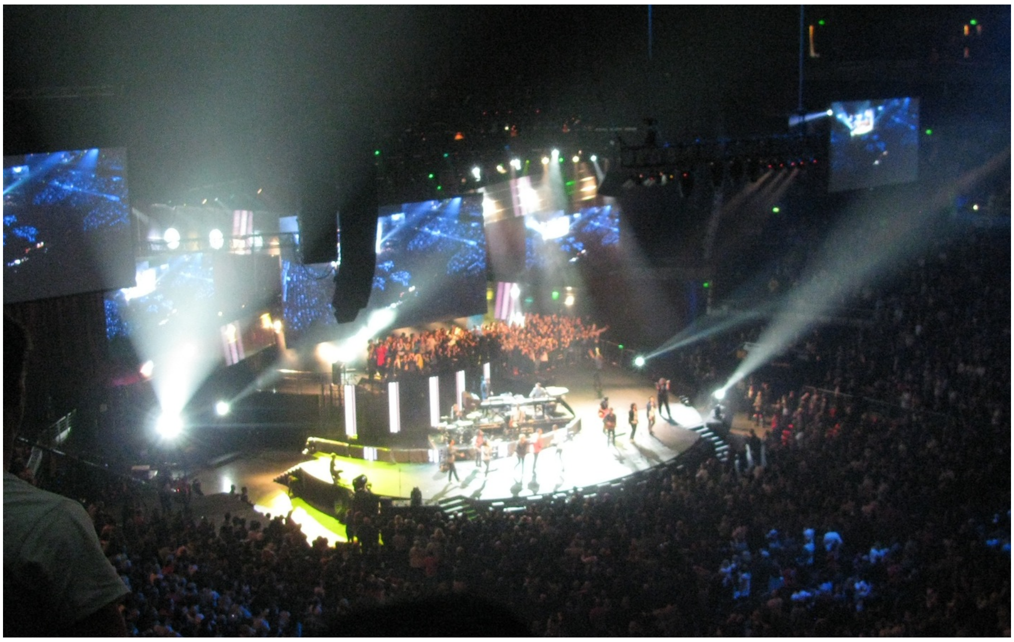

Figure 5: The choir (and projected images of them) project an idealised representation of the broader congregation

Rehearsing and becoming

The final sequence of the opening spectacle took place during a rendition of a song entitled "With Everything," which began as a subdued instrumental piece played by a row of seated cellists accompanied by piano. The song opens with an earnestly melodic sequence of chords, which build through a convoluted cycle of verses, bridges and choruses until it eventually (six to ten minutes later) burgeons into a massive sixteen-bar elongated cry of "woah!" as the guitars wail and the cymbals crash. The song is majestic, dramatic, anthemic; it *belongs* in a stadium. This inaugural rendition of "With Everything" accompanied a film which presented the outside world from the vantage of the conference event. Once the film had finished, the crowd was induced to assume a new identity – no longer individual spectators but a unified congregation – by singing along with the musicians and choir. This opening performance facilitated the rehearsal of the conventions of worship required of the crowd for the remainder of the conference. It utilised the contrast between the conference experience and the 'broken' outside world to invoke the ritual bargain that would characterise the remainder of the conference: God's presence is assured, but only if the crowd performs their part 'with everything.'

Underscored by the song's opening played by cellos and piano, black and white film footage began to play on the screens above the stage, and as it did, the cross faded from view.[26] Through a sequence of moody, overexposed shots, images of a city and its people danced across the screens. These images conveyed the bigness of a city, as well as a sense that this city was inherently fragmented, lonely and cold (Figure 6). But this foreboding city was being pierced with bright afternoon light, which repeatedly flashed into the camera's lens, momentarily erasing the stark silhouettes of the cityscape, and hinting that the white light of the previous film sequence was immanently present. A young lady sat alone on a bus, gazing out the window as piercing afternoon sunlight illuminated the graffiti scratches in the glass she peered through. A lone, tired looking young man watched himself shave in his bathroom mirror as fluorescent light saturated the tiles around him. A young woman at a bar flicked her fringe aside and looked over her shoulder to see if friends have arrived. An elderly woman drank a cup of tea by herself in an immaculately tidy – and painfully lonely – kitchen. A shot of city buildings was silhouetted by afternoon sun, from the vantage of the roof of a tall building. A high school student walked a busy locker-lined corridor, avoiding the gaze of others. A worker putting out rubbish in a dirty back alley eyed-off the camera suspiciously. Then a moment of connection as a young lady sat down beside an older woman in a headscarf, and they happily conversed. As the piano and cello instrumental struck rich chords, the final shots of the montage returned to the vantage of the roof of the tall building. A man wearing a business suit moved towards the safety rail, put down his briefcase and gazed off into the light. Was he thinking about jumping, or merely gazing into the sunlight? I haven't made up my mind after repeated viewings.[27] Whatever the narrative thrust of this final vignette, it ended by becoming saturated by flaring light.

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[27] A variety of handycam and TV recordings of the 2009 opening sequence can be found on YouTube (eg https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cuZ-8EZXK4Y)

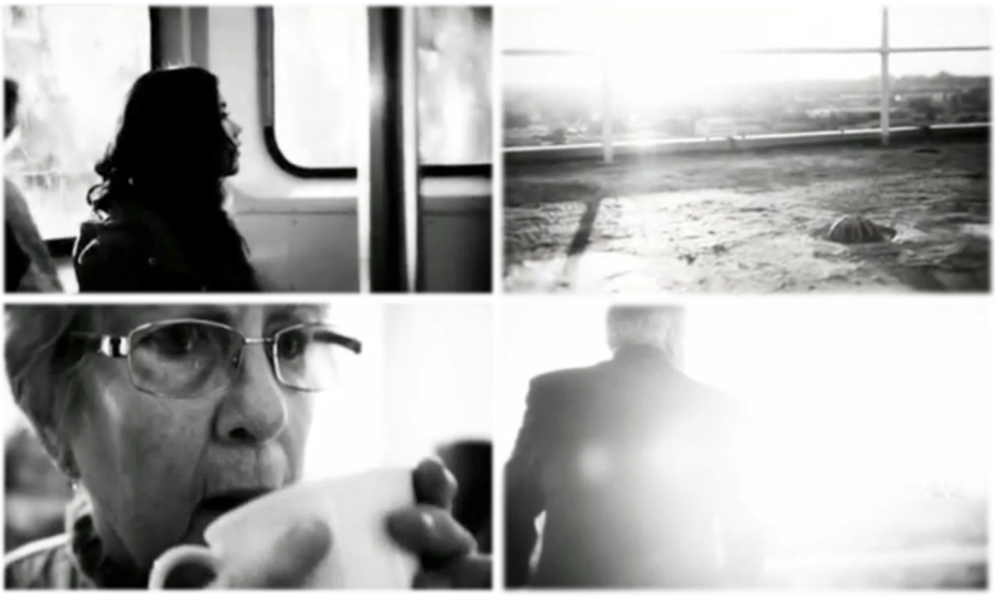

Figure 6: Screenshots from the city video montage

The world of the film, so generically representative of everyday urban life, also seemed incredibly distant from the vantage of the conference arena. Over the course of the conference week, participants would experience only fleeting moments of contact with the world outside of Hillsong. If they had been 'wrapped' in imagery of the conference in its lead-up, now they were fully immersed in the real thing. A participant walking into a Hillsong rally is greeted by a line of uniformed volunteers cheering and clapping them as they walk through the door, and from this limen to the final train journey at the end of an exhausting week, the conference delegate lives in an alternate world. It is a world with its own celebrities and media cycle (each day "Hillsong news" is broadcast across the campus, and highlight reels are played at the end of each day), a world in which the delegate's time is organised and filled by the conference organisers. Sydney's sprawling Olympic complex which hosts the conference provides a complete, enclosed micro-world which all but guarantees the delegates' separation from the profane outside world.

The city presented by the film represents the world each conference delegate has come from. It is an external world now viewed from the vantage point of the conference space. Like the man standing up high overlooking his city, like a film camera gliding through streets and homes, the viewer has god-like clarity on the totality of that now-external world. It is a world which, because of the conference's separation from it, is only accessible through the represented memory of the film. Michel de Certeau's description of what it was like looking out from high up in the World Trade Centre is apt: "It puts him at a distance. It transforms the bewitching world by which one was "possessed" into a text that lies before ones eyes" (de Certeau, 1988, p. 92). The city, and existence itself, is now relocated by the high vantage point of the conference into an otherly space – one which can be 'read' and understood in a way that only distance can facilitate. It is like Moses' ascent of Mt Sinai to meet God. The lofty site of the 'mountaintop,' the dramatic high of the conference world is a crossing into liminal time and space, and offers the prospect of returning home glowing.[28] If the conference world might thus far have been experienced as spectacular, even overwhelming, it now becomes an experiential cornerstone, a place of clarity, of true reality, from which participants' everyday worlds can be 'read' and diagnosed. During this sequence it is the crowd members themselves who experience a transformation: they are no longer individual spectators to a theatrical experience, but a congregation called out from the secular world in order to meet and worship God. What were they to do, individually and collectively as participants in this momentous event (carrying this newfound perspective, basking in the glowing presence of Christ)? The final part of the opening spectacle offered an unequivocal answer to this question, inducting the crowd into enthusiastic bodily participation.

As footage of the businessman overlooking the city dissolved to white, a male singer began to sing "With Everything*'s*" bridge, with the words, "So let hope rise, darkness tremble in your holy light, and every eye will see, Jesus, Our God. Great and mighty to be praised." Image and song transitioned seamlessly, with their shared references to the 'holy light' and to its carriage of hope into a darkening world. The cross illuminated once more, in an otherwise darkened arena, while the lone singer remained barely visible in a solitary spotlight beam. He repeated the bridge, a soulful pleading for God to intervene accompanied by piano and cello. The chorus neared.

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[28] Exodus 35:29-35 recounts the story of Moses returning from his time with God on Mt Sinai with a glowing face.

Soft lights revealed the large choir, assembled behind the singer; he fell silent and they began to sing the chorus. They faced and sang upwards towards the centre of the space, that is, towards the giant glowing cross, while the audience remained in deep darkness. Watching the stage, one apprehended the choir as a stand-in for the broader gathered crowd. It was a tableau of the event in miniature, a crowd in semi-darkness, gazing upon and singing to God, while God, who was present and powerful, glowed. It presented an ideal, an archetype for the broader conference experience. It also provoked a mimetic response, for the tableau implicated its audience through the choir's idealised version of them. The words to the song's simple chorus, "With everything, with everything, we will shout for your glory. With everything, with everything, we will shout forth your praise," appeared on the screens and the crowd took their cue to sing along, while the cross radiated a rich red warmth.

"With Everything" was a pedagogical performance. The crowd watched as the choir demonstrated what sung worship at the Hillsong conference involved: closed eyes, raised hands and earnest singing that is responsive to the directions of worship leaders and cues embedded in lighting and sound. From within the darkness, the crowd's singing began to be audible as they rehearsed their role. The song 's lyrics were well suited to their pedagogical task. They were easy to learn and sing, and phrased around collective pronouns: it frames 'we,' 'us,' and 'our' meeting with and singing to God. Its words further defined the mode of participation expected, which was intense ("With everything"), embodied ("we will shout for your glory"), all-inclusive ("and every eye will see"), reverent ("darkness tremble in your holy light"), contrite ("break down our pride, and all the walls we've built up inside"), demonstrative ("to be the church that you would desire"), and declarative ("for you our king, with everything, we will shout forth your praise") (Hillsong, 2008). In singing these lyrics, and mimicking the choir's idealised actions, the crowd rehearsed Hillsong-style worship.

As the crowd continued to join in and the singing grew louder, the cross glowed brighter and brighter. Eventually its glow illuminated the whole stadium, providing the crowd its first glimpse of itself in this new configuration. In the glow of the cross, the choir melded into the massive, arena-filling crowd. The archetype provided by the tableau of the choir and cross was instantaneously actualised into a larger version of itself. Basking in the hot light of the cross the crowd, no longer a mass of individual spectators, unknown to one another and cloaked in darkness; now a mammoth congregation singing as one before a mighty cross.

The crowd's rehearsal now escalated in the light of the glowing cross. After much repetition of verses and chorus, "With Everything" arrived at its explosive final line, the elongated cry of the word "woah!" As the choir and the band erupted into this line, dazzling moving lights and blinders behind the stage flashed on, criss-crossing the stadium with intense beams that sliced and animated the space. I felt sun-like light and warmth radiating on my face and body: the white presence-light evoked by the film montages seemed to have burst into the arena. The climactic musical outburst that accompanied it was overwhelming. I had heard this song at Hillsong church services previously, but its present rendition with all of those cellos and drums, that hundred voice choir accompanied by the enraptured singing of thousands, gave me goosebumps! In the exhilaration of this moment, roughly eighty percent of the crowd stood to their feet and began to raise their hands in worship.

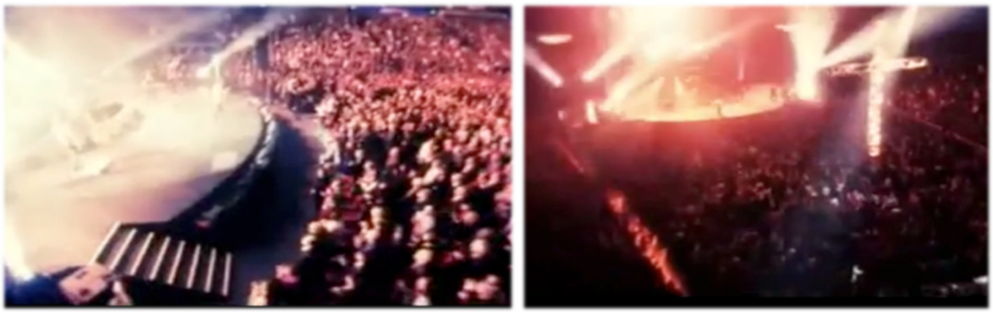


Figure 7 Light pierces the space and the crowd stand to their feet

Pedagogical performance moved into ritual embodiment. Each member of the crowd now needed to stand and demonstrate their new collective identity as the conference's congregation. Bell writes that this process of becoming, comprises the collected 'negotiated appropriation' of the individuals that make up the social body (Bell, 1992, p. 207). In this moment, each individual acts in a way which affirms their own 'redemptive hegemony,' which is to say their own preferential way of complying with the ritual's organisers. Each individual balances their interpretation of the symbolic order, with the social and hierarchical consequences of their compliance: whatever the crowd achieves collectively constitutes a patchwork of individual responses (p. 208). Based on Bell's theory, the majority of the crowd's unhesitating embodiment of Hillsong's worship style would suggest that at this moment, a strong majority of the conference's attendees wholeheartedly endorsed the spectacle's message. Arguably, many attendees would have come along willing to participate, however the rehearsive nature of the first song's performance seems to have played a role in securing such enthusiastic and coordinated embodiment of the conference's vision of itself, so early on in the proceedings.

The moment of embodiment is the moment the members of the crowd stand and take on their role as meta-Church worshippers. The rhythmic escalation of the music, combined with the scalar expansion of the performance (from crowd to full stadium), and the increasing intensity of light in the space, contribute to an intensification of experience for crowd members. The "woah" moment, in which lights, sound and music all climactically erupt, powers the surge of bodily responses. It simultaneously provides an impetus for participation, and enhances the appearance of that wave of participation. Each participant is caught up in the overwhelming experience of the performance they watch, launching themselves into worship at the same time as they are overwhelmed by the image being created by the crowd around them. Bell sides with Bourdieu and Bloch, noting that:

> one might retain one's limited and negotiated involvement in the activities of ritual, but bowing or singing in unison imperceptibly schools the social body in the pleasures and schemes for acting in accordance with assumptions that remain far from conscious or articulate. (Bell, 1992, p. 215)

As if in response to the crowd's embodiment of their role as passionate worshippers, God's presence seemed to burst through into the space. The divine light's entrance into the space implied a rule of reciprocity which would underpin the conference experience. God's arrival into the space came at the same time as the crowd embodied that idealised version of itself as presented by the choir. The crowd's rehearsal was more than a mimetic reproduction of idealised worship actions; it was an articulation of axiomatic knowledge about the reciprocity between the crowd's performances and those of God. They had been presented an experience that supersedes ordinary church experience. The meta-church experience of the conference offers direct divine intercourse – but the crowd must collectively embody its part if it wishes to receive what God has in store for it. Implicit in the performative contrast between the bland-church of the suburban pastor and the meta-Church of the Conference experience is the essence of the bargain: if participants want to meet the meta-Church's God, they must shed the shackles of bland-church behaviour and play the role of the meta-Church congregation. They must embody the triumphal postures, the hyperbolic language, and the frenetic worship style that have been demonstrated to them during the conference's opening. Consequently, throughout the conference participants would push through fatigue to worship 'with everything,' driven by a logic that connects the interventions of God with the worshipful performances of his children.

Mary Douglas's anthropological exegesis of the book of Leviticus offers an insight into the way a ritual setting might 'project' its own axiomatic knowledge onto those who worship within its architecture (Douglas, 1999, p. 56). She noticed that the structure which organised the book of Leviticus correlated with the design of the tabernacle in which it was intended to be read. Each subsequent passage corresponded to the next architectural feature one encountered as one moved around the temple space. Douglas' provocation is that the book of Leviticus should be considered essentially as a liturgy rather than as literature, for it is a book that is only properly appreciated when read aloud as its audience moves around a specific space in accordance with a set order. The text on its own is only a small part of the ritual experience of Leviticus. What is the point of this relationship between text and architecture to the authors of Leviticus? While memory-enhancing mnemonics were not uncommon at the time, Douglas argues that in the case of Leviticus, the newly-built tabernacle was built to impress a new social structure on the Israelite people. The text uses the tabernacle's architecture to project cosmological analogies onto the bodies of its 'readers,' creating a "privileged medium of instruction" of far more value than a text designed to be read or sung alone (1999, p. 57). Could a similar 'projection' be taking place in the Hillsong conference arena?

Into the opening spectacle, the stadium lent its own monumental architecture to the presentation of the conference as a time space of historical significance. The encasing micro-world of the Olympic complex assisted the categorical subdivision of the cosmos into two principal spheres: the earth-shattering conference 'now,' and the broken external world from which its participants had come. As the crowd become implicated in this cosmic narrative, entrusted as they are with the task of invoking God's presence through participation, the cavernous space and overwhelming light 'project' these realities onto their bodies and minds. Maurice Bloch described a similar transmission in Royal rituals in Madagascar "the actions of the court were not just a spectacle which others watched but an event of which they were part" (Bloch, 2004, p. 209). These spectacular rites utilised ordinary images of bathing and eating, imparting cosmic meaning through the performance of acts that onlookers have themselves experienced. Similarly, Hillsong's onlookers recognise in the film their represented selves which they can contemplate as if from a distance. They physically experience the analogical separation between the conference here-and-now and their comparatively underwhelming 'worldly' existence. They appreciate their own relationship with God through the choir/cross tableau and adopt their part, and subsequently interpret their encounter with the divine light within the logic of that tableau. The sheer scale of the event-space converts the logic of the performance into a logic of the real-world.

At the conclusion of this song, while the dazzling lights continued to shine, the giant cross was winched away from sight, and was not seen again for the duration of the conference. It had served to usher the external God into the space, and to impute participatory significance onto the crowd. Its task was now complete. If the 'dead' cross had come alive earlier in the opening spectacle, it was now superceded as a reference for God-presence by the blinding light which permeated the conference space. The last vestiges of the symbol were replaced by this direct denotation of God; the reverse of Barthes' mythmaking process was complete. Perhaps this substitution also mirrored Christ's ascension: the Christ-figure ascended into the sky and was replaced by the promise of God's presence in the form of the Holy Spirit. The cross was not seen again for the four-day duration of the Hillsong conference. Nor were other Christian symbols like bread and wine, altars, doves, candles or triptychal representations of the godhead. There was a tendency throughout the conference to utilise more bombastic, perhaps cinematic, imagery to evoke God, as opposed to the comparatively underwhelming personal descriptions of the godhead. So it seems fitting that despite the powerful transformation of the cross from symbol to presence, this image was then supplanted by the divine light. In the same way that the tableau of the band and choir gave way to the sight of a larger version of itself, the cross itself was subsumed within the blinding presence-light of God. In the opening spectacle's 'rehearsal' movement, the band and choir first demonstrated the worship practices required of their audience, and then performatively subsumed the crowd into their drama. The image of the choir singing to the cross was supplanted by the experience of the monumental crowd bathing in the divine presence-light. This movement helped to establish an experience in which Christian hopes (and even scriptural forecasts, in the case of the Corinthians passage) were transmuted into their actualised referents.

The 'Church' and the 'world'

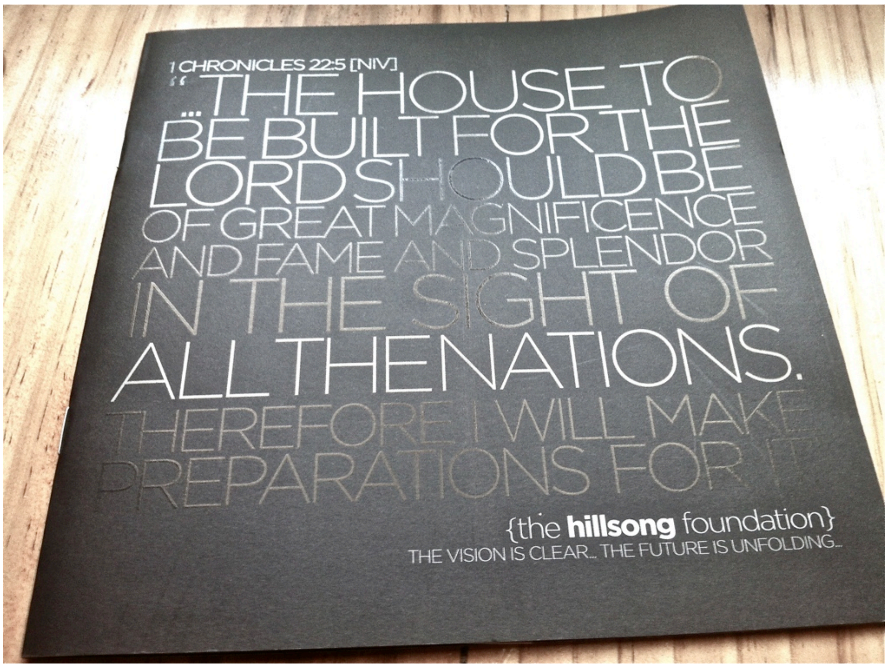
When the event actualises the symbolic, it does more than promulgate linguistic information: it allows its participants to actually live in a world it has created, to experience God's presence, to gaze down upon their distant former lives from the vantage of an immersive substitutive 'world.' The external 'world,' as represented in the 'broken city' montage, is cast in contrast to the capital 'C' 'Church' that is the Hillsong movement. These constitute the "basic divisions" of Hillsong's ritual order, and as the social body embodies these, these divisions are reproduced and objectified by its performers (Bell, 1992, p. 215).

Rather than situating the 'world' and the 'Church' on a dialectical plane, Hillsong envisages enfolding the ordinary world within itself as ever-increasing numbers of worldly people are converted into Churchgoers. Hillsong's senior pastor, Brian Houston, declared this very thing at the commencement of the 2007 Hillsong conference:

> … rather than be a generation that serves history let's be a generation that makes history ... The church you see is not peripheral to the world; the world is peripheral to the church. (Levin, 2007)

Playing its role as the ascendant 'Church,' Hillsong manufactures its own ubiquity by reshaping traditional Christian narratives to feed into the upkeep of Hillsong itself.

A prospectus for The Hillsong Foundation, the church's building fund, (Figure 8) invokes the scriptural call for the Israelites to build Solomon's grand temple as it urges churchgoers to contribute to the "ever-increasing vision of our Church" (Hillsong, 2009, p. 5).[29] Conference delegates from all over the world are invited to invest financially in "The house of the Lord," which, the prospectus makes clear, refers not to the global church but to Hillsong's own ambitious plans for expansion. Thus the Biblical notion of tithes and offerings, conventionally gathered through the collection plates of ordinary churches, becomes incorporated into Hillsong's narrative of itself as a meta-church.



1 CHRONICLES 22:5 [NIV]
"...THE HOUSE TO
BE BUILT FOR THE
LORD SHOULD BE
OF GREAT MAGNIFICENCE
AND FAME AND SPLENDOR
IN THE SIGHT OF
ALL THE NATIONS.
THEREFORE I WILL MAKE
PREPARATIONS FOR IT

{the **hillsong** foundation}
THE VISION IS CLEAR... THE FUTURE IS UNFOLDING...

Figure 8: Solomon's temple invoked on the front cover of the 2009 Hillsong Foundation Prospectus

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[29] Church Building funds: In Australia regular tithes and offerings are not claimable as tax deductible donations, but contributions to church building funds are. It is common for churches to set up building funds so that parishioners wishing to make tax-deductible contributions can do so. Hillsong hold special 'Heart for the House' services on the last Sunday of each financial year, in which congregants and supporters are urged to make a last-chance tax-deductible donation to the Hillsong Foundation. Hillsong are upfront about asking for substantial donations: the 2009 Foundation prospectus invites gifts of either "$5000 and above," "$2500 or more," or "less than $2500." (Hillsong, 2009)

The Christian imperative to share the Gospel is similarly redefined into a set of actions that benefit Hillsong. In the weeks that lead up to the 2009 conference, a series of testimonial videos was screened during Hillsong church services (Hillsong, 2009). In one of these videos, "Phil" describes his first time visiting Hillsong Church:

> I remember walking through the doors of church and feeling overwhelmed by the size of everything… I wondered why there were so many people around. As a professional I was impressed by the number of people like myself who were around, and I thought "there's got to be something real going on and keeping them here"[30]

Phil then praises the person who brought him along to church: "I'm just so thankful for the people that made my first Sunday at church possible." The video concludes with the appearance of some text which says, "There are people still waiting for their first Sunday." In the world of Hillsong, where a Christian's experience of God is delivered during ritual participation at sanctioned events, it naturally follows that the Christian imperative to spread the gospel and make disciples is reinterpreted as an imperative to bring people along to Hillsong events. This pattern seems to continue so that all Christian imperatives, such as hospitality, generosity and sacrifice, seem to have a culturally-sanctioned form of expression within the Hillsong movement. Within this world, "love your Neighbour" translates to "Participate in a project we've organised that involves the loving of a neighbour." "Make disciples of all nations" evokes the latest global tour of the Hillsong United band and "baptise them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" means "induct them using our branded discipleship course."[31]

The 'Church' world that Hillsong creates not only incorporates a dependably-present God into the lives of attendees, but enfolds their 'ordinary' lives into its fabric. The logic of the Hillsong world replaces the beholder's formerly-held beliefs about the world through the sheer size of the gathered group. They experience, in Eliade's words, a 'hierophany': their world is no longer the world it was, but a world that manifests the sacrality of that which they believe (1959, p. 12). In contrast to the hierophanies of which Eliade spoke, the Hillsong cosmology is evoked through performance. As 'Phil' discovered on his first Sunday at church, the 'Church' is a tangible, encompassing reality that can eclipse ordinary experience. Eliade's proposal that religious people experience existence as a "twofold plane," comprising human existence and at the same time, the "transhuman life, that of the cosmos or the gods," requires an important modification: For the Hillsonger, the 'world' and the 'Church' are equally concrete planes of existence (1959, p. 167). It could be argued that the 'Church' world created by Hillsong is in some ways more concrete and more somatically affective than the mundaneness of suburban life. Therefore the ethical task of the Hillsonger is not, per Eliade, to spend as much time as possible in pursuit of sacred experience in order to escape from the ordinary world, but to actively draw all aspects of the real world in which they exist, into the equally-real world of their Church. Through its rituals, Hillsong enables its participants to experience and enact the cosmic narrative it tells: Hillsongers can play an active part in the 'Church's' conquest of the 'world'. In this context, the ethical logic of the 'Church' presented by Hillsong Hierophany is remarkably consistent. On the one hand, the conference performs a narrative of the Church's expansion, and then through ritual repetition it equips its participants with the practical skills to assist this vision to become reality. Quite literally, the Hillsong conference enables its participants to 'practice what they preach'

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[31] Mark 12:31, Matthew 28:19-20 (ESV)

Conclusion

Consciously or not, every church inevitably transposes some of its own parish needs, aspirations and politics as it retells and performs the Christian story. The sheer scale of the Hillsong institution and its events make it able to not only represent, but rival (and sometimes replace) foundational symbols and stories. The awe-inspiring majesty of Hillsong events confirm, but also resemble, God's own. A conference crowd can stand in for the people of Israel as they cross the Jordan into the 'promised land' of a new building project or DVD recording. On their annual 'Vision Sunday' church service, Pastor Brian occupies a Moses-like role as he imparts a new God-ordained vision for his people.

In traditional Christian worship, people are called upon to have faith in events which occur in difficult-to-imagine timeframes. Lang notes that the Eucharistic ritual can seem antiquated and irrelevant to Evangelicals, who favour direct experiences over representation. To the Evangelical imagination, traditional rituals such as "a sacred meal that 'commemorates' the death of Christ ("do this in memory of me") somehow implies that the original event belongs to the past" (Lang, 1997, p. 409). At Hillsong, people place their belief directly in the prophet-speaker before them, and place their hope in divine encounters scheduled at upcoming events. Those who flock to experience God at events like the Hillsong conference, "have little interest in commemorating activities. They believe in original, new events effected by the presence of Christ's Spirit, not in weak echoes captured in commemorative meals" (p. 409). The sense of belonging to a 'communion of the saints,' which the Apostles' Creed and other traditional Christian liturgies have affirmed, is transformed through Hillsong ritual into something far more immediate. Where traditional lectionary cycles and choral dress imaginatively incorporate individual worshippers into the host of saints around the world and throughout time (Lang, 1997, p. 53), the Hillsong event is able to point to the more direct and tangible narrative of its own immediate colonial expansion across the globe. Worshippers literally embody a tremendous host of worshipping saints, simultaneously witnessing the fact on the video screens before them. These substitutions rework the relationship between a participant and the objects of their ritual: traditional rituals facilitate believers to engage imaginatively with the symbolic, the eternal, the mysterious, while Hillsong ritual places the participant in direct interaction with the referents of their symbols: the saintly choir sings live, and God actually descends.

At the same time as it delivers divine presence and momentous time, the opening spectacle transforms its participants. In the space of a few minutes a crowd of spectators are moved to stand and sing, inducted into a group, and rehearsed in the practice of Hillsong worship. By the conclusion of this ritual performance, the crowd itself now embodies Hillsong's analogic separation between 'Church' and 'world,' having felt the logic of this cosmology in their own bodies. Their somatic experience confirms the hierophany of an ascendant church which eclipses ordinary churches and the secular world. This hierophany underscores a Hillsong-centric ethical code which posits acts of service to

Hillsong churches as the ultimate expressions of traditional Christian values. The conference experience thus provides a tangible experience of the cosmic narrative it tells, while placing ethical importance upon practical activities that are consistent with the vision and values of the 'Church.'

5. Crisis, Catharsis and Confrontation

Arguably the pivotal ritual moment in a Hillsong rally – and almost any Pentecostal gathering – is the moment when a preacher calls believers and unbelievers alike to respond to the message of the sermon and come to the 'altar' to accept the transformation God has in store for them (Albrecht, 1999, p. 154). I will refer to this ritual cycle henceforth as a 'Call to Repentance.' During the Hillsong Conference of 2009, preachers concluded their sermons with a call aimed at attendees wishing to become Christians, and at those wishing to renew or enhance their faith. On some occasions listeners were asked to respond by raising a hand, at others, by standing up or moving forward to the front of the stadium. At the conclusion of each Call to Repentance, the new or newly reinvigorated Christians were welcomed back into the crowd with cheers, and the reassembled whole would sing a final bracket of worship songs to conclude the evening's rally.

In this chapter I describe the Call to Repentance cycle as it played out on three different occasions during the 2009 conference. The first half of the chapter studies the Call to Repentance in its conventional pattern, examining how this ritual carried the dramatic apex of an evening's rally and provided a set of concrete actions that conference delegates could undertake to embody the closing themes of the sermon, while the second is a case study in the contestation of convention and power at the Hillsong conference. It has been established that at Hillsong, insider-status is defined in terms of immersion in the 'Church,' which requires a transformation of that which is of the 'world.' This chapter looks at how the Call to Repentance cycle defines and imputes insider and outsider status, delineating a set of performative actions that indicate repentance and restoration for those wishing to return to the ideal. Cavanaugh's study of the Eucharist's role in Chile (Chapter 3) provides a set of approaches that can be applied to explore the ritual's efficacy at imparting ethical values. The ritual's repetition at each evening's rally reaffirms the unified identity and cohesion of its crowd and re-performs the narrative of the Church's conquest of the world. Chapter 4 showed how the conference creates a metaphorical separation between 'Church' and 'world,' and how this produces an ethical code which redefines Christian imperatives in terms of the Hillsong organisation. This chapter shows how one of Hillsong's major rituals assists congregants to identify as active participants in that ethical code, and to rehearse forms of behaviour to embody that ethical identity.

Calls to Repentance at Hillsong involve every member of the audience, and ritually exacerbate, then resolve, the tension between the mountaintop high of the 'Church' world, and the external 'worldly' world, broken and resistant to God's interventions. As a ritual cycle the Call to Repentance incorporates the four stages Victor Turner outlined in his work on 'social dramas' (1980; 1977; 1982). The compatibility of Turner's framework to this particular ritual process suggests that the Call to Repentance undertakes similar functions as other social dramas, that is, it stabilises cohesion and upholds social norms within the group. This chapter explores how this oft-repeated ritual sequence mediates between the axiomatic knowledges – historical, social and cosmological – that define the Conference's participants. Turner's insights also illuminate the final iteration of the Call to Repentance in which the cycle was used to contest the hegemonic order of the Hillsong Conference world.

Despite the power of this key ritual process, there was one very notable time when the Call to Repentance was dramatically subverted. Louie Giglio, a visiting speaker, announced his intention not to instigate this rite during his sermon, critiquing its use at events such as the Hillsong conference. The second half of this chapter explores how this particular happening utilised the Call to Repentance ritual to challenge social norms and structures. The ensuing attempts at reinstatement of the rite by Hillsong's leadership expose ritual as a site of power plays, of cultural innovation, and of the preservation of existing social orders. This particular power play threatened not only the ritual's ubiquity within the Pentecostal tradition, but the categorical separation of 'Church' and 'world' that it upholds. This challenge shows a leader attempting to revise the rituals at the heart of a community in order to alter the ethical principles upon which the community stands

Dividing the crowd

Fervour charged preacher Craig Groeschel's booming voice as he said "I'm putting out a call to three kinds of people tonight," with sweat glistening on his brow. Soft, emotive chords began to ooze from a keyboard somewhere on the stage behind him, gilding his impassioned words. His sermon, about the defining characteristics of successful churches, had segued into a lengthy monologue about the brokenness that many churches experience. He raised what must have been a painful subject for many in the crowd: that the bulk of the churches that conference delegates would return to suffer because of poor leadership, and cultures of fear and blame. “The first group of people I’m calling tonight, you had *it* and lost *it* and you want *it* back”, he continued, utilizing the key rhetorical device of his sermon (*It* was also the title of his recently-released book (Groeschel, 2008)). Churches in this group, he explained, were people who had lost their initial passion and faith, but tonight, he urgently informed them, was the night to re-establish that vigour. So commenced the Call to Repentance at the conference’s Tuesday night rally. Groeschel continued urgently:

> Those of you who had *it*, and lost *it* and want *it* back, stand up right now. I don’t care who’s around you, your spouse, your church board, those that follow you, I want you to stand up right now. If you had *it*, you lost *it* and you want *it* back, stand up right now. Get up! Stand up right now! (Groeschel, 2009)

As people around the stadium began to stand up, he lectured, almost scolded those who remained in their seats. To be far away from God was to be ontologically different to the gathered saints who had *it*. It was to be of ‘the world,’ on the outside, in antithesis to God’s movement through the conference event. According to his harangue, the fear that was holding some people back from standing up was miniscule compared to the emotions they would feel later when they realised they had missed out on one of the most important moments of their life. “Don’t you dare walk out of here and not be true and honest before God… Stand up!” he thundered (2009). By this point roughly ten percent of the crowd was standing, and the preacher bowed his head and thanked God for their honesty.

Groeschel shifted focus to a second category of respondent: “The second group of people, you don’t have *it*, you know there’s something about these people who have *it* and you want *it*...” He explained the essential characteristic of the person who emanates *it*: a relationship with Christ, and the peace, confidence and empowerment that accompanies it (Groeschel, 2009). As he continued his description of this second category of person and established a desperately immediate need for these people to respond to his next call, respondents to his first call continued to stand. He commanded his second group of respondents to stand up, and hundreds of people rose in successive waves. A great many of these people were probably late respondents to his first call, given the low probability the conference's crowd would contain so many hundreds of paying delegates who were not already Christians.

Nonetheless, this dramatic kinesis prompted a swelling buzz from the crowd. "Praise God for you," Groeschel said to the standing crowd, then turning his address to the wider audience, he called "Come, on, let's give them a hand" (Groeschel, 2009). The stadium now presented a tableau based on the 'Church' and 'world' narrative, with the fallen standing vulnerably amidst a broader sea of representatives of the 'Church,' fervently encouraging them for responding to God's call. More stood as the crowd's applause filled the stadium, and Groeschel continued to urge people to rise. Seizing on the growing momentum of rising bodies and the thunderous applause ripping through the stadium, Groeschel quickly moved on to a third call, this time launching straight into it without the narrative embellishments of the previous two: "Those of you who would say, 'I have *It*, but I want more', stand up right now," he commanded, and the entire audience rose to their feet, as if giving a standing ovation. He hushed the clapping and fervently prayed that God would bless "all of your people" who were standing before him.

On a different evening, a similar sermon conclusion diagnosed a serious problem among the gathered community and led into a discussion of the theme of salvation and renewed passion. Pastor Joel Osteen called for individual and communal responses to his call. "Let's bow our heads one more time," he said as he commenced the Call to Repentance cycle:

> I'm going to ask you if you're not at peace with the Lord, or like I said you've just grown cold, and you need to rededicate and recommit your life to Christ, if you need a fresh start, a new beginning. If that's you, would you be bold, and take a step of faith, and stand right where you are. Would you do it?

His tone changed and he exhorted the crowd, "C'mon, would you give them a hand as they do it?" (Osteen, 2009). The crowd erupted in applause, as people began to stand to their feet. As with Groeschel's Call to Repentance, those standing constituted respondents who fell into two separate categories: those who wished to become Christians for the first time, and those who wished to renew their fervour. As the applause subsided, Osteen encouraged the respondents, speaking on behalf of those who were still seated: “let me tell you we love you, we’re proud of you …” His address highlighted the ontological separation between those seated and those standing. There was a definitive categorical separation between the seated ‘we’ and the standing ‘you.’ The moments before Groeschel’s third call presented precisely the same tableau: those of the ‘world’ stood vulnerably while those of the ‘Church’ fervently prayed for them.

Generating momentum

The two Calls to Repentance I have described demonstrate how crowd responses are used to build the momentum of the ritual. In his study of Pentecostal culture, Albrecht describes the Call to Repentance not only as a rite of passage, but also as a rite of “intensification” (Albrecht, 1999, p. 259). Durkheim attributed this effect to a sort of ‘feedback loop’ generated by a charismatic orator and a responsive crowd:

> It is by this trait that we are able to recognize what has often been called the demon of oratorical inspiration. Now this exceptional increase of force is something very real; it comes to him from the very group which he addresses. The sentiments provoked by his words come back to him, but enlarged and amplified, and to this degree they strengthen his own sentiment. The passionate energies he arouses re-echo within him and quicken his vital tone. It is no longer a simple individual who speaks; it is a group incarnate and personified. (Durkheim, 1915, p. 210)

On both evenings, the smallest, most vulnerable group of respondents – those wishing to become Christians for the first time – were asked to stand up at the same time as another, much larger group. In the case of Joel Osteen’s call, new salvation respondents and rededication respondents were asked to stand up at the same time, while in Craig Groeschel’s, the new salvation respondents were called to stand after the larger group of rededication respondents had been asked to stand, but while people were still rapidly joining its ranks. These separated, yet concurrent, calls have important social functions. Firstly, concurrent calls offer *protection* to people participating in the rite for the first time. These respondents still feel the exposure of standing up or raising their hands, but at least they do so within a much larger group of simultaneous responders. There is further safety for the first-time respondent in the blending of response categories, which reduces their feeling of exposure to the broader crowd. Secondly, the blending of response categories *conceals* the true number of first-time respondents. The crowd witnesses a mass of rising bodies, and knows that among this mass are new Christians who are being incorporated into the church. Such a sight generates the favourable impression that great numbers of souls are being saved, even while it is possible that not one of the rising bodies fits this category. The first-time respondent can interpret their response as one amidst a sea of new converts and from the very outset of their Christian life testify to the mythology of revivalistic church growth. A third, and all-important function of the blending of responses is the role it plays in, to use Albrecht's word, 'intensification' of the rite. As individuals rapidly stand, they generate a physical momentum which escalates by feeding back into itself. As with the 'becoming' moment of the opening spectacle, in which the crowd stood and worshipped for the first time, this point in the ritual utilised theatrical elements (increasing tempo, volume and emotional intensity of the speaker's voice, and the visual impact of rapidly rising bodies themselves) to intensify the ritual experience and increase the consent of participants. Albrecht observed this mimetic feedback loop in his own research on Pentecostal ritual: "it is clear that they experience their God in a very social context. The Pentecostal ritual experience is not a solo affair, and each worshiper is greatly impacted and facilitated by fellow worshipers" (Albrecht, 1999). Each participant was not implicated in the performance, and had a stake in reunifying the collective.

Re-membering the Church

The next part of the Call to Repentance continued the mimetic rehearsal by reintegrating the crowd's sub-groups into an enlarged and once-more cohesive whole. This movement of the Call to Repentance ritual cycle projects the image of a global, unified 'Church' onto the bodies of all those who participate in the rite.

Osteen addressed the whole crowd, "Now let's pray a prayer. Why don't we pray it together? C'mon, even if you're seated, let's pray this together in faith" (Osteen, 2009). His inclusive language and invocations to action broadcasted the unity the ritual would bring. Those who were standing exposed amidst the sea of seated bodies were about to undertake the work required to make them one of 'us' once more, and 'we' expressed our pride and support by cheering them on, and then praying with them. Thus far the rite had dealt in unease and separation: its conclusion reunified the community into a singular entity.

The prayer of repentance was a fervent and serious happening, but upon its conclusion, the salvation it brokered was immediately and joyfully celebrated with an eruption of applause and whoops of jubilation amidst the crowd. The entire crowd was asked to stand, and in this moment the crowd's division was instantly erased. Now the crowd clapped and cheered as a reunified whole. There were numerous roles the prayer could have fulfilled in people's lives, so there were multiple dimensions to the celebrations: new Christians celebrated the bold new decision they'd made, newly recommitted Christians celebrated the renewed grace that had been extended to them, and content Christians celebrated that the Church had been enlarged by so many new and recommitted Christians.

Whatever shape the celebration takes, its impetus comes from the collective's apprehension of its own re-membering into a singular, posturally-consistent, group. Participants who had responded to one of the calls had done so in a situation where everyone around them had their eyes closed and heads bowed, or otherwise within the relative anonymity of a large and rising bloc of respondents. No longer divided into categories of separation from God and each other, the crowd found itself standing as a singular bloc, enlarged and energised by what had just happened. The escalating tension that had been felt in the participants as they contemplated their ontological status had been resolved (and absolved). The lost were found and the faltering restored in God's sight.

Usually, before the crowd had finished cheering, a bright and celebratory song would commence. The mood which followed is captured by the term 'carnivalesque,' which Richard Schechner used to describe a range of celebrations including the 1989 student uprising in Tiananmen Square, the Spring Break celebrations in Daytona Beach, and the New Orleans Mardi Gras (Schechner, 1993, pp. 74 - 83). Each of these scenarios featured large crowds of people in contained spaces, who shared a heightened sense of unity within a strongly governed time and space. According to Schechner, participants of the carnivalesque enjoy the illusion that the euphoria of freedom and fraternity will last forever, despite their knowledge that the event will be over in days or even minutes, and that social norms that govern interactions with others will fall back into place thereafter. The conference's post-repentance 'carnivals' are less overtly sexual than Schechner's examples, but sexuality is not entirely absent. Members of a youth group near my seat huddled in an intense, prayerful group hug, while a mosh-pit gathered in front of the stage, seething with sweaty recklessness as the band played. Across the auditorium, people jumped and clapped with a frenetic, slightly unbridled energy, throwing their hands in the air during the song's chorus and deliberately bumping in to those beside them. Singers on stage threw their bodies into dance to the point of sounding breathless (a stark contrast to the controlled exuberance that characterized the song-and-dance performances earlier in the evening). All this kinesis heralded the collective's return from crisis. But the crowd was not only celebrating unity – it was also performing it. The enthusiasm and euphoria on display at this time constituted an enactment of the triumphant 'Church,' unanimous in worship. Ironically, these highs, which by nature are short-lived, present an unsustainable ideal, and this is why a Call to Repentance just hours later can yield hundreds of respondents who feel they must repent of their lapsed passion for God.

Moderating ethical distinction

By separating a crowd along the lines of insider ('Church') and outsider ('world') identity status, the Call to Repentance places its participants in a physical enactment of this categorical divide. This enables the different groups of respondents to participate in assigned activities intended to change their identity status. The distinctive ethical attributes associated with insider status are patterned to and embodied by the participating crowd. Ultimately, the crowd's reincorporation into a singular identity does more than promulgate the narrative of the Church's conquest of the world. It also reinforces the value-set associated with insider-status. Chapter 3 examined Cavanaugh's work on the use of excommunication in Pinochet's Chile. It articulated four accounts of how excommunication 'moved the conscience' of Chile's people in a similar way. Each account expresses a process that can be seen in the Call to Repentance ritual, and offer insight into the variety of ways in which the Call to Repentance links a set of ethical priorities to insider status.

The first process in Cavanaugh's example was the authoritative declaration by an office-holder of a new state of play. In the Chilean example, the bishops' declaration was an illocutionary act that created a moral situation in which torture became fundamentally un-Catholic. The Call to Repentance incorporates the authoritative declarations of sermon-givers (Lang, 1997, p. 416).[32] They declare – and by declaring, establish – the ontological dimension of the categorical separation between 'Church' and 'world.' Their rhetoric establishes the conditional nature of membership of the Church: one must have a strong sense that they possess *It*. If one lacks confidence in *It*, their insider status, then they are in danger of falling into the outsider category. In contrast to the Chilean example, where a clear set of actions (participation in torture) facilitates the passage out of Catholic identity and practice, the Hillsonger exists perpetually on a 'slippery slope', susceptible susceptible to drifting away from relationship with Christ and becoming tainted by the world. This impetus to separate "persons deemed sinful or tempting from 'pure' spaces or persons," has long been a part of evangelical lore, argues sociologist Michael Lewis. He describes the belief in a 'geography of temptation' which contributed to aspects of Southern Evangelical culture ranging from the construction of churches long distances from existing bars, to parental advice to be careful of the company their children keep (Lewis, 2009, p. 41). This cosmological separation of the external sinful world from delineated holy spaces leads to the distinction that "While many Americans might view an inebriated churchgoer as an ill person… southern evangelicals then and now would characterise the person as a victim of Satan's machinations" (p. 41). The Call to Repentance frames the narrative of a cosmic rift between insider and outsider status, but operates as the bridge through which the fallen can be restored. The Call to Repentance is the mechanism whereby a person reinvigorates their passion, and re-enters the collective identity that sits right at the centre of the 'Church' world.

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[32] I chatted with attendees seated nearby prior to Tuesday night's rally. Given that this was Groeshel's first visit to a Hillsong conference, none of the people I spoke with had heard him speak. Nevertheless, from the commencement of his sermon, each of these people produced a notepad and took notes. I took this act to suggest that his authority as a teacher was assumed, because of the office he occupied.

Consequently, the Call to Repentance figures ubiquitously in evangelical worship services, and continual reiteration of the rite is the principal method of maintaining insider status (Albrecht, 1999, p. 154). This is not unlike to the link between participation in the rite of Communion and identity as member of the Catholic communion. To hold onto one's identity as a member of the 'Church,' one needs to be actively demonstrating one's passion for Jesus in the Church settings provided by evangelical churches.

The second approach discussed in relation to Chile assesses the ritual's role as a repeated practice. Rappaport describes how as repeated practices, rituals not only delineate moral categories, but establish obligation to them (Rappaport, 1999, p. 124). He states :"It is patently immoral to act incompatibly with the terms of a conventional state of affairs that one has ritually participated in bringing into being" (p. 133). At Hillsong, the multiply-focused Call to Repentance creates a situation whereby all must consider which category of identity status they fit within. As each person listens to the sermon giver (with their heads bowed and eyes closed), they must privately decide to which call they will respond. The crisis invoked in the Call to Repentance transfers structural categories of the collective onto the "personal-psychological" plane (Turner, 1982, p. 54). Every person knows they will need to act at some point - remaining seated once the whole crowd stands is a public declaration in and of itself. The participant knows that whichever action they take will be noticed by those sitting nearby. It is practically impossible to be present during a Call to Repentance without capitulating to the order it promotes. One must consider – and then physically embody – one's place in the cosmic order proposed by the rite.

The third account for the efficacy of excommunication in Chile examined the relationship of the theme of torture to the Eucharistic ritual. Participants in the Eucharist directly connected the torture of Christ to torture as a feature of Pinochet's Chile. In this way, the ritual itself promoted internal conflict for unconfessed torturers who secretly continued to be communicant. The Call to Repentance leverages a similar deterrent to participation in the rite by those who secretly breach its moral prerequisites. A person who does not respond to the call at the correct time will be required to actively participate in a different role (rising instead alongside those "who have *it* and want more," or praying as a part of the "we" group who give thanks for "you" repentant ones). This prompts psychological unease, fuelled by the knowledge that one is wilfully presenting an identity to which they do not adhere, and taking actions that are incompatible with their present ontological condition. It is as distasteful for one who feels distant from God to pray and worship with gusto as it is for one who feels close to God to feign repentance. This ritual pairs identity status with codes of action: acts of repentance for those lacking confidence in their insider status, and acts of affirmation and worship for those comfortable with their degree of insider-status.

The fourth account of the effectiveness of excommunication in Chile focuses on the Eucharist's capacity to "re-member" the church into a social body (Cavanaugh, p. 229). The Catholic community reoriented itself around the celebration of the Eucharist, and this prompted the formation of a collective identity that could resist the state's attempts to atomise society. The Call to Repentance does more than invoke the categorical divide between those allied to 'world' and 'Church.' It facilitates the collective's physical embodiment of division, and then ultimately reincorporation into an emboldened 'Church' identity. The ritual sequence enables participants to rehearse a set of activities that are associated with the retrieval of insider-status. Participants undertaking the transformation into insider-status are prayed-for and cheered along by the rest of the crowd, and the moment of reincorporation is figured as a reunified crowd singing and clapping as an embodiment of the 'Church' ideal.

Just as the opening spectacle presented a codified set of actions through which observers were transformed into participants, the Call to Repentance invites mimetic repetition that rehearses participants in a way of acting. In the Call to Repentance, penitence can be enacted through a codified set of actions (bowing heads, raising a hand, standing up or coming to stand down the front) in a relatively 'safe' and not-entirely public space. Much like Zosima's 'rehearsal' of penitence before his cowering manservant (Chapter 3), each participant in the Call to Repentance has the opportunity to rehearse the gestural and emotional journey of a penitent Christian, in private. This rehearsal might then be re-performed at a later stage in the participant's life. When an individual becomes cognisant of sinfulness, or distance from 'Church,' they can invoke the same action-set: confessing to another Christian, bowing and praying penitently, and then excitedly worshipping with other Christians as a reaffirmation of their Christian identity. This is not merely a pedagogy of repetition, because with each rehearsal participants literally experience the chasm that separates 'Church' and 'world.' It is, rather, a pedagogy of rehearsal, where the analogy enters the experiential logic of each participant through repetitive performance.

Contested rites and the drama of ritual

My analysis of the Hillsong conference has hinged on some of the event's most well-orchestrated moments. But what about the times when things did not go as planned, or when participants deviated from the 'script'? This section examines a point during the conference when its organisers temporarily lost control of the ritual order. The conference proceedings were interrupted not by an outsider, but by guest speaker Louie Giglio's Friday evening sermon. This exposed the vulnerability of the event's hierarchy, who otherwise exert control over what happens on their stage. In this instance the organisers were powerless to silence this invited speaker as he preached an unorthodox sermon. Pertinently, the point of divergence from the Hillsong 'script' which Giglio attempted to introduce concerned Hillsong's use of the Call to Repentance ritual. The organisers did, however, respond to it in the minutes that followed. Rappaport proposes that the best way to appreciate the function of modifications to a ritual is to ask, "what does this change maintain unchanged?" (1999, p. 7). Such a question informs my analysis of the Hillsong hierarchy's response to Giglio's sermon. The response of Hillsong's leadership reveals much about the values and themes which Hillsong's officiators were most keen to restore.

Evangelist Louie Giglio's Friday night sermon deviated from the conference's 'script' by suggesting that the present event was not actually the most important place for Christians to be. As he began his sermon he challenged that key tenet in Hillsong lore which situates the conference event at the very centre of God's will and focus. More shockingly, he flouted the convention of the Call to Repentance entirely. He proposed that Calls to Repentance (and the conferences that hosted them) were like a 'buffet' to which many Christians returned habitually without going out to the 'world' to exercise their faith in between. These challenges comprised the key points of his sermon, and are summarised in its opening words. I have described in square brackets some of Giglio's physical gestures and the more noticeable responses of the crowd.

> Tonight, I'm praying for a miracle … I don't see anybody coming forward at the end of the talk tonight, I see people going that way [points out of the building] at the end of the talk tonight. [crowd begins to applaud] And you don't need to clap like that 'cause that's not what I'm talking about [crowd hushes, murmurs and some nervous laughter] … And I'm telling you we have to do it, because *humanity is waiting*. And so my goal tonight … is not to see anybody come down here [gesturing to the area in front of the stage]. I tell you there's nothing down here. My hope tonight, is that people will be set ablaze by God with a compelling sense that "I have to *go*" …
>
> I couldn't stand behind Pastors Brian and Bobbie more … I believe everything that Brian believes about Hillsong two thousand and ten, and I believe this place is going to be packed out, why wouldn't it be? But can I just say that I think Brian and Bobbie would be happy, if some of you *didn't come back* next year. [strong murmuring among crowd]. Not because anything's wrong with you but because something gets *right* with you. [murmuring continues] And it just dawns on you that life's not about me coming to the buffet over and over and over and over and over and over and over and over and over and over and over and over and over and over and over again! I have been fed, I am full, I get it, I am inspired, I am equipped, I have a vision, humanity is waiting and *I'm on my way*! [Crowd begins to applaud] (Giglio, 2009)

The sermon continued for a further 55 minutes, during which Giglio called for the church to shift its focus away from self-serving experiences, and instead to serve the world, sacrificing itself for "the last and the least of these" (2009). His sermon painted a very different relationship between Church and world than that which had been described and performed thus far. Rather than an exultant Church absorbing the world through its own perpetual enlargement, Giglio envisaged empowered Christian individuals embedded at every point throughout the world. Giglio repeated the metaphor of "going back to the buffet" criticising the way conferences such as Hillsong position themselves as the dominant events on Church calendars, calling for their congregants to attend year after year. Instead, Giglio reasoned that Christians can get so distracted by attending endless conferences that they fail to put their faith into action in the world. He argued that the very measure of success that Hillsong applies to itself was in fact a hindrance to the true work of the church. It is no wonder that throughout his talk many in the crowd murmured and shifted in their seats. His critique of Hillsong continued throughout his sermon. The following statement, for example, seemed to be aimed squarely at Hillsong's highly successful music business:

> My wife and I lead a record label. We push songs around the world, we believe in music with every corpuscle of our bodies. So don't misread me ... but I pray tonight, the echo of his love for us will not be the volume of our songs. But the echo of his love for us will be the speed by which we run to the broken. (Giglio, 2009)

The timing of this counter-message could not have been more of an affront to the event's narrative about itself. All week a rhetoric of intensification had focused on the notion that the conference's final night would be its most significant. Whatever outpourings of blessing had happened thus far were due to be eclipsed by the promised descent of God on Friday night. Giglio's subversive sermon interrupted a moment that should have brimmed with triumphalism. Unlike the other sermons of the conference, the crowd murmured throughout, and was hesitant to cheer at times when it was called for. One person I spoke with afterwards explained that the talk had made him uncomfortable on behalf of the conference organisers. It was not that he personally disagreed with what Giglio had said, but he hadn't wanted to agree too loudly for fear that it would make the organisers' – particularly emcee Brian Houston's – task of closing the conference more awkward than it had already become (Personal Communication, 15 July 2009). How could Brian cheerfully celebrate the ending of a successful event whose usefulness had just been called into question? The crowd's muted behaviour indicated that most listeners recognised the sermon's direct challenge to the Hillsong status quo.

As he had telecast in the opening speech, Giglio snubbed the Call to Repentance at the end of his sermon. His sermon's conclusion proposed that a change of heart comes about by the realisation that we are loved by God, not the recognition of past personal failures or other forms of separation from God, which the Call to Repentance rite cycle often focuses on. Instead, Giglio shifted the focus away from the moral successes and failures of individual participants, and into a dual consideration of Christ's love for all and the challenge of poverty in the present world. He proposed that the remainder of the evening's singing be utilised as an opportunity to meditate on the poor and needy in the outside world. He concluded:

> So when we sing tonight, I want us to think clearly about the 20 million orphans in the world. I want us to think soberly about the 1.4 billion people who are living in extreme poverty. And I want you to think clearly about the 25 million people who are slaves today, not in John Newton's day but in ours. 8 million of whom are right now against their will being degraded and abused in every imaginable way... On their behalf, with our hearts open to him, say "send me out, send our church out, wake us up... mobilise us, send us out." (Giglio, 2009)

This intention for 'world'-focused sung worship struck a sharp contrast to the Church-glorifying 'mountaintop' experience it usually comprised. As Giglio finalised his sermon a worship leader began to underscore his speaking with soft piano chords. The emotive music clashed with his stark oratory as he urged his listeners once more to shun the 'buffet' and go out into the world to do good works.

He left the stage, and the worship leader softly sang a verse with the lines "Chains be broken, lives be healed, eyes be opened, Christ is revealed", repeating it like a mantra. The line was repeated more than ten times as the band improvised in accompaniment. Unusually, the rest of the song – including its chorus – was not sung. An analysis of the rest of its lyrics explains why. The song, titled "You'll Come," is about Christ doing all the salvific work in the 'world' while 'we,' the Church, "wait upon" him (Frazer, 2007). Its sentiment starkly contradicts Giglio's message about being compelled to leave the 'buffet' and go out into the world. As a singular refrain, however, the "chains be broken…" lyric complemented the sermon's call for Christians to end world poverty. The worship leader's use of this line reflects an admirable effort on her part to maintain the standard ceremonial order of concluding sermons with music, without explicitly contradicting his unconventional theme. Nonetheless, the appropriate 'bridge' to the next part of the service was missing. Usually, the swelling music accompanying a sermon's final words gave way to the Call to Repentance, which then provided its own cue for a transition to bright, celebratory singing. In this situation, however, no such cue presented itself. Perhaps the worship leader repeated the "chains be broken" mantra so many times simply because she could not decide how to bring about a transition into the song planned as its follow-up.

The Worship leader's improvised singing was not the last of the deviations from convention that evening. The sequence that followed deviated from the usual running order, and from the hierarchical conventions of conference night rallies. The "chains be broken" mantra subsided, and a young female member of Hillsong's pastoral team made her way to the microphone. She appeared nervous and unprepared as she launched into a Call to Repentance, choosing her words carefully so as not to exacerbate her obvious defiance of Giglio's wish. Instead of referring to the content of Giglio's message, she called more generically for people who weren't Christians to commit their lives to Jesus by raising their hands. The call was abnormally fast-paced and devoid of the gradually-built narrative of separation and anxiety that typically preceded salvation calls. The second element of her call contrasted even more starkly with the sermon it followed, as she commanded people who felt they were "just going through the motions" of Christianity, who wanted to "get more passionate about God," to raise their hands (Caine, 2009). This was, of course, an invitation back to the "buffet," the opposite of what Giglio had been agitating for. Only a small number of people responded to each of these calls, and after she had lead her respondents in a salvation prayer, the crowd's applause was measured. If anything was going through the motions, it was the Call to Repentance itself. The structure of this young pastor's calls demonstrate how strong the conventions of the Call to Repentance ritual are. It would have been far more expedient for this young pastor simply to hold a singular call for new converts. Such a course of action could have navigated Giglio's requests far more tactfully: an invitation into first-time belief alone would not strictly have contravened Giglio's opposition to the 'buffet.' But instead the pastor pursued the usual strategy of categorically dividing the crowd into insiders, outsiders and insiders who needed to strengthen their connection to the Church. Perhaps she did this because she felt obliged to perform the ritual in its conventional way, or perhaps habit and convention took the place of a reasoned response. Whatever her reasoning, she did precisely the thing that Giglio had expressly requested not to happen.

Typically, after the sermon and Call to Repentance had concluded, and a celebratory song had been sung, Hillsong's senior pastor, Brian Houston took to the stage. He usually reiterated a prescient point from the sermon, gave thanks to the speaker, and prayed for the speaker's wellbeing and ministry. He would then promote the following year's conference, urging all to purchase discounted registrations for the following year's event. What was he to say on this unconventional night? Giglio had categorically upended some of the pillars of Hillsong's lore and practice. Houston could not endorse the words of Giglio, for they critiqued such central elements of the empire Houston had built. But nor could he criticise Giglio too pointedly, for Houston himself had endorsed him to the crowd just an hour earlier. The office of guest speaker at Hillsong commands immense respect: those invited to the podium are regarded as authoritative voices. But as Giglio's sermon demonstrates, offices upheld by tradition alone can prove to be liabilities if the holder veers too far from orthodoxy (Bell, Ritual Theory, Ritual Practise, 1992, p. 212). Conventionally, Houston's closing remarks followed an upbeat song, allowing him to ascend the stage in the midst of unified revelry. On this night, the crowd was subdued and the music sombre. What happened next was highly unorthodox. I discussed it with several attendees after the event, all of whom stated that they had found this surprising.

Houston clearly recognised the difficult situation into which he had been thrown. To allow the Call to Repentance to be skipped in his programme would be a capitulation to Giglio's worldview. But to personally reinstate the Call would be a snub and would reflect equally poorly on his own duties as the conference's host. Adding to the impossibility of Houston's situation was his secondary emcee duty: urging people to register for the following year's conference. This, too, had also been thrown into disarray. To spruik Hillsong's next conference would be to invite people back to the 'buffet' would appear embarrassingly hypocritical, but then to forego this core task would sacrifice the last opportunity for a sales pitch to the gathered audience. This younger leader, who was not part of the event's officiating hierarchy and lacked the authority associated with masculinity in Pentecostal culture (Riches, 2010, p. 162), bluntly reintroduced the norm, but by doing so protected Houston from the embarrassing predicament into which he had been flung. By breaching the conventions surrounding *who* normally officiated such rituals, the conference leaders navigated the much larger breach about *how* the gathering ought to play out. In stark contrast to previous evenings, very few people actually responded to the Call to Repentance cycle. Nevertheless, by the conclusion of this Call to

Repentance, the narrative of church growth had been once more re-enacted through the Call to Repentance ritual. This in itself tenuously reinstated the Hillsong Conference's position in God's high-priority list.

At the conclusion of the Call to Repentance, Houston took the stage. In an uncharacteristically subdued manner, he joked, "Well, no night's ever the same, is it?" He prayed aloud for Giglio's family and ministry, but conspicuously omitted thanking God for the message which had been shared. In the ensuing minutes he offered no gratitude or praise of Giglio, and refrained from summarising or highlighting a key theme of his message, as was his usual custom. His speech was sincere and earnest, but devoid of the pleasantries he had offered so liberally during closing remarks on previous nights. No critique, corrective or defence was offered to combat the countercultural assertions of the evening's sermon; it simply was not acknowledged. Houston did not offer his usual spiel urging attendees to register immediately for the following year's conference. This must have been a costly forfeit for him, for it was the conference's very last evening, and consequently the last address to the crowd from him or anyone else. No doubt he would have prepared a special pitch promoting the 2010 event for this evening, but it was abandoned. The impact of Giglio's critique could not have been more evident in all these awkward deviations from Houston's usual pattern, but despite this the senior pastor reasserted his role as a gracious host. By orchestrating the continuation of the Call to Repentance norm, Houston demonstrated his capability to handle – or at least outlast – the speaker he had introduced to his crowd.

As this was the final night of the conference, there was one other significant variation to the usual ceremonial structure: a final bracket of songs, which lasted twenty more minutes. This final session of worship immediately followed Houston's closing remarks, and progressed into a highly choreographed closing sequence (which I will explore in the following chapter). The closing sequence revisited the key elements of the conference's opening: the song "With Everything," the Romans verse, and the blinding divine light. It delivered a powerful experience of Godly visitation as the people worshipped during the final song. It is surprising to consider that a dramatic worship experience occurred not many minutes after a sermon so pointedly critical of the idea of the conference experience as an end in itself. Such a juxtaposition is difficult to envisage. One could wonder how the closing spectacular could have 'worked' at all, given what preceded it. In my experience – and I suspect the experiences of many attendees – something about the emotive, enveloping nature of music at Hillsong almost immediately brought me into a different place and overrode the unease I had been feeling. Lang enigmatically describes the "powerful manifestations of the divine in and through worship," which form the crux of the Pentecostal experience, whose "embers" quickly reignite even after "cold ashes" (of calm intellectualism, of disappointing leadership) are placed over them (1997, p. 418). Perhaps this is the ultimate trump card which Houston knew he held. People may have been cautioned to be sceptical of the arena worship 'buffet,' but the buffet itself has an irresistible allure which wins out every time. Houston's play of having a low-status pastor defy Giglio's design asserted Houston's ultimate authority over the event. Despite his momentary embarrassment, he subtly reminded the crowd that Giglio was powerless to alter the ritual order and that despite the guest speaker's critiques, the Call to Repentance – and the axiomatic knowledge bundled in the rite – are the done thing at Hillsong.

This evening's drama had been a clash between ethical visions of the church. A message urging participants to leave the church and undertake independent acts of service to God and man, despite its clarity, did not reshape the criteria by which that community defined insider status. The 'Church' and 'world' narrative was too entrenched in the community's culture and practice, and Giglio's challenge did not prevail. A sermon that called its listeners to enact their insider identity outside of designated Church spaces was difficult for them to translate into action. His proposed ritual alternative to the Call to Repentance – that the crowd reflect upon the needs of the outside world – was not followed through. It could not have helped that the lyrics of Hillsong's songs are not conducive to such thinking: "With Everything" does not lend itself to contemplation of those with nothing. The limits of Giglio's office as guest speaker prevented him from remaining on stage to guide the direction of the worship session he envisaged, or returning to the stage to challenge the direction the service had taken. He could not dictate a new performative framework to guide his audience to the conclusion of a rally ("transitional" and "ending" motifs, in Turner's terms (Turner, 1980, p. 153)). So the band played on, and the dance returned to its conventional choreography.

At face value, this episode would seem to have reinforced Hillsong's 'Church'-'world' ethical dichotomy. As Bell puts it, "temporary inversions or suspensions of the usual order of social relations dramatically acknowledge that order as normative" (p. 38). Despite a tense final night to the Hillsong conference, the status quo was reasserted before the evening's conclusion. Giglio's exhortations had been thwarted and the Call to Repentance cycle had been reinstated. It must not be concluded, however, that Giglio's message made no lasting impact. This would be to ignore just how far the reverberations of the antimessage had travelled, and how far they may continue to travel beyond the event. Giglio's message critiqued what was central to Hillsong's ethical universe by urging people to do the one thing that is truly forbidden – to leave it. Even conference attendees hailing from other churches are required to perpetually return to the 'buffet.' The event's self-proclaimed primacy demands that attendees bring friends along to future Hillsong events, to structure their own church calendars around Hillsong events. In the process of re-establishing the 'buffet's' primacy, Hillsong's officiating hierarchy broke with cultural norms around both gender and hierarchy: breaches that themselves constitute memorable challenges to the status quo. Houston's forfeit of an opportunity to promote the following year's conference exemplifies this. Despite his success in negating the heterodox assertions of his guest's sermon, he failed to reassert the primacy of the following year's conference, ceding this ground silently. Furthermore, the memory of this happening will remain with the Hillsong community, and as long as it does it can inform the parameters of future social dramas.

Conclusion

The Hillsong cosmology is upheld by oppositional ritual movements. On one hand, performances of insider and outsider status are continually pitted against one another to reinforce a uniform ethical code. On the other, the affirming conclusion of the Call to Repentance resolves the status-tension by drawing all participants into the performance of a unified, expansive, Capital-C 'Church.' The Call to Repentance is a ritual enactment that expresses and resolves the tension between these opposing narrative thrusts through an encompassing performance involving everyone who is present. A sermon can emphasise the didactic relationship of 'Church' and 'world' precisely because the Call to

Repentance reapplies the integrative narrative upon its conclusion. The Call to Repentance links the ethical framework of Hillsong's cosmology to the identity status of its participants, thereby mediating an ethical prerequisite for cohesion and compliance. At the end of any Call to Repentance, the crowd stands and reappraises itself as an ever-growing Church, constantly incorporating worldly people into their midst. But this "carnivalesque" high, which posits itself as an enactment of what Hillsong envisages the 'Church' to be, is difficult to maintain for extended periods of time (Schechner, 1993, pp. 74 - 83). Thus the ritual's repetition ensures that the congregation continually re-performs (rehearses) the Hillsong hierophany (turning myth into embodied reality) as they present a totality that repeatedly, and unashamedly absorbs all others into itself. Through this ritual, participants rehearse an association of the escalating tension and recognition of contamination, and a desperation for reintegration with the 'Church.' Such associations might well manifest during their daily lives, as participants become aware of their physical or spiritual distance from the Church experience. The appropriate response to such realisations is rehearsed through participation in the ritual: one must perform penitence and seek restoration by re-connecting with the Church body. In this way the ritual presents a real-world set of activities through which the Christian can return to the hierophany from which their connection has weakened.

Giglio's challenge was ultimately unsuccessful, though it may yet prove to inspire a future evolution in Hillsong rhetoric and practice. His questioning of the need for an ethic based on a polarity between Church and world cut to the core of what it means to believe in Hillsong's God. The next chapter examines the 2009 Hillsong conference as a momentary expression of a broader ritual tradition, which is constantly evolving with every reiteration of itself. The conference is analysed as something which is intractably connected to the experiences of its participants. Their rearticulation of the tradition's ritual and cosmological order evolves the tradition with each successive performance. The previous chapter was a portrait of the crowd's 'becoming' of the conference's prescribed order. The following chapter shows how the conference 'becomes' only that which its participants allow it to be. It explores the extent to which the conference's ethical order capitulates to the values of those who momentarily enact it. Perhaps history will attest that Giglio's challenge was the impetus for an incremental adjustment to Hillsong discourse and practice. The following chapter explores how such a transformation might occur.

6. A People and their Tradition

This chapter examines the conference organisers' attempts to, "control, arrange or manipulate the whole world of the performance, not just present the drama at its centre" (Schechner, 2003, p. 154). As with Chapters 4 and 5, the inquiry focuses on a singular ritual unit – this time the spectacle that closed the week-long conference. The conference closing was as minutely choreographed as the opening spectacle, yet was designed to appear as if it contained spontaneous and unrehearsed elements. It performed an 'arrival' of God, and revisited the key elements of the opening spectacle: the same song, the same Bible reading and the same use of piercing white light to denote God's presence. This chapter focuses particularly upon the tensions between scriptedness and spontaneity, conformity and free expression, throughout the event. It draws upon Bell's application of Foucault's theories on power and the social body to explore how the conference world perpetuates axiomatic knowledges, but also the role participants play in shaping the culture as they resist and rehearse it. The conference's scale, architecture, and control over the attentions of its participants suggest that individual attendees will have limited agency to affect proceedings, and yet it is individuals, *en masse*, that constitute the movement, and carry its traditions. I examine the interplay between spontaneity and rehearsed performance, and how these notions in themselves constitute strategies of power. The chapter closes with a focus on the train ride home from the Hillsong Conference, examining the 're-entry' of participants into the ordinary world at the conclusion of the event.

The story of Hillsong, like that of any church, is one that involves the evolution of tradition. When Hillsong was founded in 1983, it drew upon archetypes of big-church evangelicalism that are at least a century old. The role and duties of senior pastor Brian Houston has antecedents in Billy Graham and earlier revivalists. The Hillsong music team's propensity to write church music which mirrors trends in popular music takes cues from Youth For Christ rallies, the musical stylings of George Beverly Shea (who accompanied Billy Graham on his crusades), and the Salvation Army meetings of the late nineteenth century. But while the Hillsong conference bears much in common with the revivalist crusades of the past, it is by no means a continuation of a static tradition. Church historian D. G. Hart describes the changing role that music has played within evangelical crusades across the twentieth century. Where evangelical rallies early in the century mimicked 'zippy' popular songs and radio jingles as a device for attracting crowds, this evolved into a "solidified devotional style which was from all appearances uniquely evangelical," by the 1950s (Hart, 2004, p. 161). During the second half of the twentieth century, music's role in church events evolved into something which "functioned as a means by which worshipers entered the very presence of God," generating "feelings and emotions that worshipers and their pastors often associated with the movement or work of the Holy Spirit" (Hart, 2004, p. 163). Hillsong's theology and practices continue to evolve. Shane Clifton points out that the theme of personal financial prosperity, which dominated Hillsong preaching in the 1990s, has since broadened into a notion of "flourishing," which incorporates "blessing in spirituality, health, family, church and community" (Clifton, 2005, p.226). He notes that this definitional shift (itself an evolution of influential Korean megachurch pastor Yongi Cho's "fivefold Gospel," which first introduced the notion of prosperity into the Pentecostal movement) has underpinned a growing emphasis on social justice as a desirable church outcome in Hillsong's teaching and songs (pp. 213, 226).

Agency, authority and adaptation.

The final session of the conference, which took place on the Friday evening, ended with a spectacle as bold as the one which had opened the conference. The order of service of this evening followed the regular pattern of a Hillsong service or rally: Songs – Prayers – Offering – Song – Sermon – Call to Repentance – Songs – Benediction, but on this evening the final bracket of sung worship was extended by around half an hour.[33] The songs were taken from the same repertoire that had been used throughout the week, but previously unseen lighting states and animations added to the sequence a supercharged atmosphere. The final thirteen minutes of the conference featured a special rendition of the song "With Everything," which not only revisited, but superceded, many of the key themes of the conference's opening sequence. In stark contrast to the opening, however, much of what happened during this sequence was geared around the concealment of its own choreography. We were to take the sequence as a series of spontaneous responses to God's arrival rather than a pre-rehearsed performance. The relationship between the crowd and the performance also stood in contrast to the conference's opening. In this closing sequence, the crowd figured as loud-voiced participants in, and even directors of, the ritual action – a significant development in their journey from spectatorship to inductee in the opening spectacle. At its heart, this sequence was an orotundly literal *Deus Ex Machina*, an intimation that God had taken the reins from Hillsong's production team and was directing the drama, descending upon and interacting directly with the gathered mass of worshippers. This rendition of "With Everything" lasted approximately seven minutes, and was followed by a six minute instrumental version of the song's bridge and final chorus, in which the audience participated by clapping, jumping, raising hands and praying intensely. As the music reached its conclusion, the same text from Romans which had opened the conference was given as a parting benediction to draw the four-day event to its close.

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[33] Albrecht discusses service structure in Pentecostal churches in his study *Rites in the Spirit* (1999, pp. 153-157).

The song began much like the songs that had preceded it. A muted lighting state accompanied its opening chords, as a spotlight picked up the lead singer as he began to sing the first line of "With Everything." It was discernably slower, sung with extra gravity; it was the beginning of an anthem. The double kick and floor toms began to rumble as the verse repeated. As the tempo increased, most of the band remained silhouetted against the soft purple backlights, and the reason for this soon became apparent – a new animation played on the projection screens depicting sparks of light rising across a black background.[34] The white light motif of the opening sequence had returned, and the worship of the people was rising to God in the form of tiny sparks, which floated skywards. The chords of the song's chorus began to shimmer, and deep golden light throbbed through the stadium as the crowd launched into its anthemic refrain:

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[34] See http://youtu.be/WJsH6DTP1hE (timecode 0:30)

> God of all days,
> Glorious in all of Your ways.
> Your majesty, the wonder and grace,
> In the light of Your name.

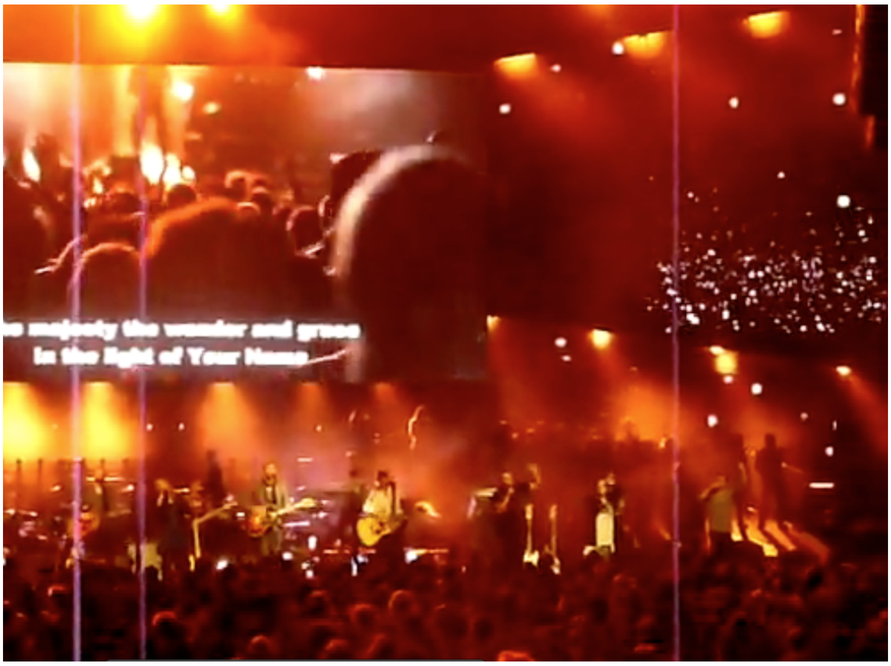
majesty the wonder and grace
In the light of Your Name

Figure 9 The crowd bathed in golden light, as white sparks rise to the heavens

As the crowd launched into the chorus, there was no mistaking the additional *gravitas* of this rendition of the song. The way the music was being played, the animation and the intensity of the lighting, and the full-throated singing that emanated from the crowd all bespoke a sense that this was a grand finale. If the opening showed the crowd how to worship 'with everything,' then this was the crowd pushing themselves to the very limit to give it their all. Sweeping shots of the crowd appeared on the central screen while the 'sparks' continued to fly around it, enhancing the tableau of the silhouetted mass singing as their prayers and praise rose above them to the heavens (Figure 11). The choir and band remained dimly lit themselves. Like the rest of the crowd, they were by turns bathed in the golden light or silhouetted against it. They were no longer idealised 'stand ins' for the greater mass, but stood within it, a small part of the collective roar that rose from the stadium. But bigger things were to come. The verses and chorus had risen in intensity for five full minutes, but now it was time for the consummate moment of the song: the monumental elongated "woah!"[35]

As the band struck its first note, the stadium combusted into a dazzling beacon of white light. Vast banks of hitherto unseen blinder lights flashed on, while pin spots around the stadium flashed points of white in every direction. Theatrical haze entered the space and gave these beams of light physicality and presence in the space. But the most stunning element of this dazzling display was the animation which filled every available screen on and above the stage.[36] It depicted something akin to thick bright liquid light, falling in great globs as if it were being poured from some monumental container onto the crowd (Figure 10).

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[35] See http://youtu.be/WJsH6DTP1hE (timecode 04:15)

[36] Many songs featured colourful animations on the diagonal LED screens. Usually the animations featured moving shapes in bright colours, and enhanced the appearance of the stage space. Only in this instance did an animation fill not only the LED screens, but also extend across the 5 rectangular AV screens (which usually displayed song lyrics or live footage)

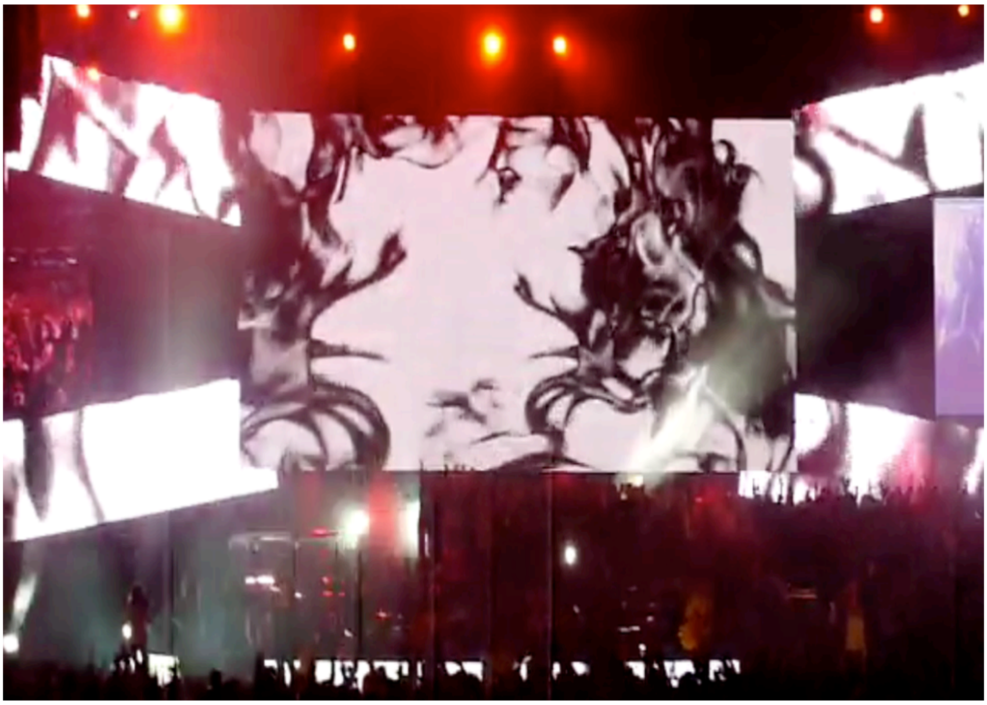

Figure 10: God's 'holy light' descends. This animation filled the diagonal LED screens, but also the five rectangular AV screens usually reserved for video footage or song lyrics.

God had received the upward-flying sparks, and now responded by pouring down vast quantities of presence-light. "C'mon lift up a shout of praise!" cried the worship leader as the guitarist soloed wildly atop the 'woah' crescendo, and the crowd clapped and cheered. For the full sixteen-bar duration of the line, people threw their voices and bodies into frenzied worship, thrusting their arms into the air, jumping up and down, and calling out their praises to God. Every group in the ritual space seemed to have given this toweringly climactic moment something more; it was as if God had joined in to sing the final line.

'Free' worship

The song reached its end, and the closing chords subsided. Singers stood poised in holy reverence, while the crowd hung in the moment, eyes closed, hands raised. The extended instrumental rendition of the song was about to commence. The pin-spots had ceased flashing, but shone brightly on, signalling that the song – and God – was not quite finished yet. Slowly and gently, the drummer began drumming a syncopated rhythm, which echoed throughout the otherwise hushed arena. As the drumming gradually built in intensity, people in the crowd began to clap in time with it, and this intensified to the point, after two minutes, where the majority of the crowd was participating. At this very point, the drummer eased back in volume, allowing the now-resounding clapping to take over and hold the rhythm. It seemed to signal a spontaneous shift in dynamic as the crowd, carried away by the intensity of the moment, wrested control of the ritual away from the worship leaders. What followed, in this space between the song's conclusion and the closing benediction of the conference, was a liminal worship time, which was both structured and playful, known in Hillsong as 'free worship.' Rather than comprising a worship action in its totality, the collective clapping created an intense rhythmic frame within which participants could improvise worshipful acts. People raised and waved their hands, jumped, swayed, prayed and called out to God (Figure 11).[37] The sheer volume of the clapping and reverberant music promoted a higher degree of unselfconsciousness than had been present throughout earlier worship brackets that week. I observed many crowd members using their voices and bodies in ways I hadn't previously seen at the conference. Within the surging rhythm, people shouted at the top of their lungs, threw their limbs violently into the air, or desperately beseeched God to come upon them.

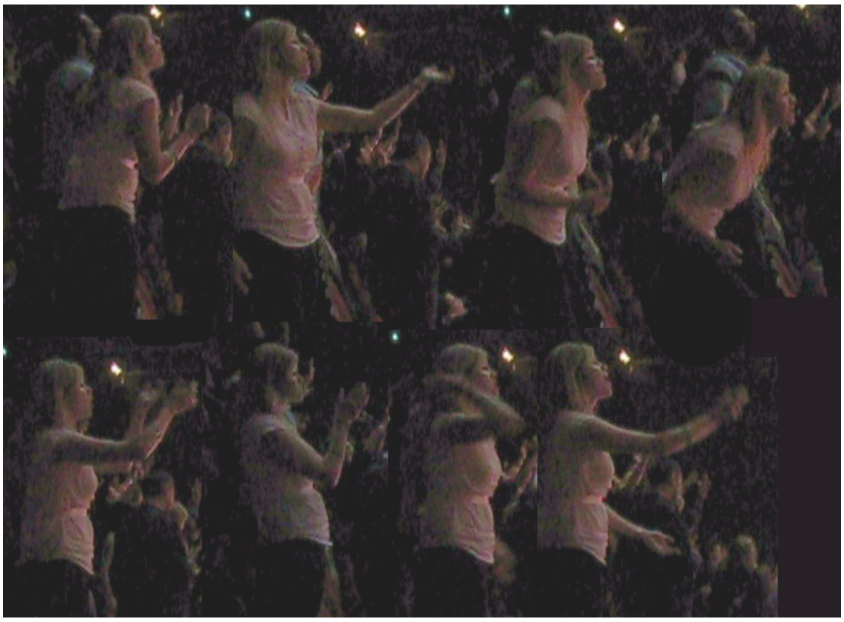

Figure 11: An attendee worships 'with everything' as the crowd claps

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[37] Daniel Albrecht's *Rites in the Spirit* (1999) provides a comprehensive list of "kinaesthetic" worshipful acts in the Pentecostal churches he observed, including: Raising of hands, Swaying, Dancing, Leaping, Jumping, Hopping, Signing, Waving, Standing, Bowing, Kneeling, Reaching out Toward.

After several minutes, the band launched into a shimmering instrumental rendition of the song's chorus one last time, throughout which the singers and the crowd continued to improvise their own worshipful acts. The atmosphere was one of heavenly electricity, sweat-soaked exhaustion, and ecstatic playfulness. The band reached the end of the song and played out a 'big finish,' and during this the worship leaders and many in the crowd resumed a more conventional standing state – head bowed, eyes closed, palms out to receive. As the din subsided, the lead singer approached a microphone at the front of the stage and echoed the words from Romans 10:36 that had opened the conference: "For from him, through him and to him are all things. To God be the glory, forever and ever, Amen." He paused briefly letting the benediction sink in, then continued, "Be blessed, go and change the world. Humanity is waiting."

The man who delivered this closing benediction could not have struck a stronger contrast to the young man who opened the conference with the same words. While the opening benediction was made by an actor caricaturing a young preacher, this closing one came from the lips of Hillsong's heir apparent – Joel Houston (the son of Hillsong's founding pastors Brian and Bobbie). The man who performed the opening was slight, clean shaven, and stiffly dressed in awkwardly neat clothing; Houston is handsomely muscular, bearded and effortlessly sartorial.[38] The first 'pastor' looked uncertain and lacking confidence behind a podium, while the young Houston spoke with ease, his gravelly voice loaded with conviction, his tone confident. Most significantly of all, the first speaker attempted to convey a narrative that he could not conjure, while the deliverer of the closing benediction easily communicated the grandeur of a god who was spectacularly present in the arena.

With a final "We love ya," Joel Houston turned and walked off the stage as the house lights switched on over the seating banks. The intense lighting state remained on as the crowd began to dissipate. Over the next ten minutes, the band would vacate the stage, while road crew started dismantling the set, but throughout this time the piercing lights continued to shine. If light was the symbolic element that sacralised the space, there was no moment of collectively 'switching them off' to desacralise the space again.[39] Participants wandered away from the light, bewildered and exhausted, glistening with sweat and the awe of the divine, back toward their ordinary lives.

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[38] Tanya Riches' thesis *SHOUT TO THE LORD! Music and change at Hillsong: 1996-2007* discusses 'ruggedness' as an element of Hillsong's branding which has evolved over recent years (Riches, 2010, p. 162).

Spontaneity and control

The apparent spontaneity of this extended period of worship, and the interplay between the crowd and the drummer's control of the proceedings, warrant close attention. Consider this excerpt from the marketing materials of Hillsong's album *This is our God*, recorded at a stadium-filling event one year prior to the 2009 conference:

> The evening culminated with a loud and victorious declaration of, 'With Everything' and a holy moment that all who experienced will remember. As the band left the stage and the name of Jesus on display, the people were not ready to leave and with little accompaniment, they broke into spontaneous song and continued to worship God. (Hillsong, 2009)

By the sound of it, the conclusions of the 2008 and 2009 events share much in common. Both events concluded with stirring renditions of the song "With Everything" that gave way to extended periods of 'free worship.' Both events also communicated a narrative of the crowd (and God) wresting control of the event away from Hillsong's leaders. The free worship and clapping that followed the closing song, and the final reprise of its chorus seemed to arise spontaneously out of the collective will of the crowd, in response to God's presence at the event. But upon closer examination, the hypothesis that the crowd 'takes control' can be challenged on a number of fronts. What, on first appearance (and certainly to the eyes of this observer on the evening) seems a spontaneous gesture of the crowd beginning to rhythmically clap along with the drums, actually originates in the assembled choir, who all start to clap at the commencement of a new bar. The crowd quickly and enthusiastically joins in, but the choir is the originator of this new action. Minor lighting changes are well synchronised with changes in the music, and these follow a sequential trajectory through the drumming and clapping sequence. There is no sign of the piece being interrupted, nor of the band repeating a musical refrain to extend its duration.[40]

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[39] This can be contrasted against the lighting and extinguishment of the cauldron in Olympic opening and closing ceremonies, where both halves of the act have equal significance.

Were the event planners of the 2009 conference attempting to recreate the 'holy moment' which had concluded a previous event? Perhaps, but how spontaneous could the moment at the previous event have been, if it occurred during a concert intended for recording into an album? Hillsong promulgates a rhetoric about God's miraculous appearances throughout time and history, so it logically follows that God's participation during events such as the conference will carry an element of surprise. But Hillsong also make promises on behalf of God, forecasting his involvement at their upcoming events. This places considerable pressure on the conference organisers to deliver what they promise. Just as the conference's organisers structured the opening and closing moments of the conference within a chiastic combination of the Romans Benediction and the song "With Everything", they crafted a singular narrative with the 'white light' which plays itself out across these two performance events. Regardless of whether God descended literally during the conference closing, God's bright presence-light certainly arrived on cue, and so did the crowd's apparently spontaneous eruption of free worship.

However, there are limits to how much control the band and worship leaders can have over a ritual space that figures the crowd as its central player. The dynamic between event performers and participants in this case is not unlike that between a leader and a crowd when s/he calls for a Mexican wave to be started. The musician can call for the action and exhort its progress, but the pivotal player in deciding how many times the wave will travel around a stadium is the crowd itself. The choir could commence the rhythmic clapping, but the sustenance and veracity of that rhythm were entirely dependent on the collective willingness of the crowd. In order to generate the narrative of the crowd's agency in the song's final refrain, the band and choir had performed in relative darkness. A consequence of this directorial choice, however, is that the worship leaders and choir forfeited some of their ability to demonstrate appropriate worship practices during this period of freedom. Shrouded in darkness, ensconced in the clapped rhythm, the crowd was free to encounter God on its own terms. Nonetheless the aural cue encased in the rhythmic clapping strongly influences the kinds of actions that the crowd will undertake. The knowledge that the choir initiates the 'free worship' frame is concealed by darkness, yet its aural cue successfully directed the crowd into an intended set of actions.

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[40] See http://youtu.be/WJsH6DTP1hE. From timecode 02:00 the choir can be seen clapping (bottom right of frame), and this gradually spreads through the crowd.

At the end of the conference, as the house lights rose and the crowd dissipated, many lingered within the arena. I overheard one person say "I'm just not ready to leave yet," as her friends nodded their agreement (Personal Communication, 10 July 2009). God had "showed up" powerfully for her and for many others that evening. Regardless of the scriptedness of certain elements of the evening, something miraculous had occurred in the minds of this group of friends. There was no doubt in the minds of those with whom I spoke that they had experienced a tangible act of God. Despite their knowledge that the 'falling light' had emanated from projectors, that the music's volume was controlled through a sound desk, they saw these elements not as performed representations of God's arrival, but as constituent parts of his tangible intervention. Even though the conference speakers had forecast all week that Friday's session would be a site of hitherto unseen Godly presence, they were surprised by the power of the final song. The event had meticulously crafted a narrative that depended upon an arrival of God, and God had done so via the leitmotif the conference had ascribed to him – piercing light. Certainly whatever God did that night confirmed rather than confounded expectations of him. And yet, despite God's predictable reprisal of his performance in 2008, people seem to have registered God's descent as a miraculous gift – dazzling, unexpected and original.

It is tempting to interpret the conference's delivery of God as a spectacularly choreographed performance, a pre-planned representation of a divine act, in which the crowd figured purely as spectators. The sheer consistency between the ending of this event and those of previous and subsequent years could invoke this kind of dismissive appraisal. The coordination of new projections and lighting states in the final song indicates the meticulous degree to which this performance was scripted, while the choir's clapping indicates the organisers' intent that it be experienced as an original and surprising happening. There is no shortage of commentators who suggest the Hillsong machine comprises a cynical, even blasphemous, scam, selling manufactured experiences of God to punters desperate enough to shell out hundreds of dollars to participate.[41] The unceasing triumphalism of Hillsong rhetoric only bolsters this perspective – so confident are they in God's impending visitations that one could well ask, "what *would* they do if God chose not to arrive, as advertised, at one of their events?"

Despite its bombast and hyperbole, the 2009 conference was only one iteration of Hillsong's annual conference tradition, and conferences have been held in subsequent years. One unambiguous discursive strategy employed by the Hillsong movement is the constant re-writing of the past as insignificant compared to the immediate future. Despite the 2009 conference's self-narrative about its own primacy within Christian experience, its conference programme offered an 'invitation' to the following year's event, which stated:

> 2010 ushers in a new decade. A decade that has the potential to be the finest in Church history. A decade where the collective faith, hope and love of a rising, empowered, authoritative and triumphant church will penetrate darkness, engage humanity and bring God's grace and

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[41] Tanya Levin's article in The Australian "Hillsong success no miracle", August 1, 2007, describes this popular view on Hillsong: "Most people want to know about the money, how the people who run organisations such as the Hillsong mega-church in Sydney's northwest get the crowds in and convince them to hand over their cash. And how is the money spent?" A parody song by popular Australian comedians The Chaser, broadcast May 2006, encapsulates a more cynical expression of this sentiment: "Praise the Lord this song's out on CD, just $14.95 plus GST. Hallelujah, plenty of moolah, solid gold baubles on my Christmas tree."

> goodness to searching multitudes. A decade where the church… will emerge as the unshakeable kingdom God knows it to be, giving light to all who come near. (Hillsong, 2009, p. 18)

Shortly after the 2010 rally had taken place, a promotional email for an upcoming album recording declared: "This year the worship and the passion in our meetings has been stronger than I can ever remember." A second email promoting the event continued the theme: "This is one of the most significant times in our church." The advertising for the 2013 conference took this anticipation of the future to seemingly new heights. Three days after the conclusion of the 2012 conference, a promotional email circulated under the subject heading "This Is Revival." It contained a link to a teaser video, and a quote from revivalist Smith Wigglesworth which seems to prophesy the emergence of Hillsong as a source of unprecedented revival.[42]

> You have been chosen by God for a great move of the Holy Spirit. This move of God will be the greatest move of God ever known in mankind's history and will start towards the end of the 20th century and move into the 21st century. This move of God will start a great revival in Australia, and spread throughout the whole world…
>
> – Smith Wigglesworth, at the beginning of the 20th century (Hillsong, 2012)

Less than a week after the 2012 conference experience, the focus was being directed towards a new, seemingly more important event. This transition of focus was powerfully mediated through the Hillsong Conference website, which had transitioned from featuring daily highlight videos and news from the 2012 conference into the promotional content of the next (Hillsong, 2012). There is no archive or 'history' section of this site, and all blog entries and conference updates from the 2012 event were no longer visible after the update. Just three days on from the conference's conclusion, all the aforementioned highlight videos on Hillsong's Vimeo and YouTube channels had been removed. Subsequent promotional material continues to emphasise the cosmic and global significance of the 2013 conference event. The rhetoric treats it not as a repeating annual event, but as a singular focal point in time in which God's presence is likely to descend. References to the conferences that have preceded, and will follow it, are rare. This kind of language precedes every upcoming Hillsong event, perpetually rehearsing a narrative of impending glory which defies its own logic – how can such a unique happening be repeated with such predictable frequency? Why would a community who witnesses an historical Godly intervention fail to remember or commemorate it? And yet this 'forgetting' is precisely what is required for the Escher staircase of the Hillsong narrative to lead ever higher, yet past the same turns each year round.

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[42] According to Bernhard Lang, Pentecostal writings tend to privilege "the biographies of their spiritual leaders or on compiling testimonies written by members of their denominations," over systematic accounts of theology and doctrine (1997, 409). Thus the words of foundational figures such as Wigglesworth take on a significant influence within the movement.

The pattern of hyperbole and excision from the record is only possible in a community that willingly plays along. The crowd are complicit in allowing this pattern to play out unchallenged, just as they are in allowing the blended boundaries between spontenaeity and control to exist. Within a charged environment like that of the conference closing, I witnessed actions that are the culmination of months of meticulous rehearsal, yet simultaneously subject to momentary improvisations arising in 'the heat of the moment.' Or to use Albrecht's words, the pentecostal ritual frame comprises both a "conscious" and "intuitive" effort to construct spheres of godly encounter (Albrecht, 1999, p. 148). The conference organisers are obliged to deliver something momentous by the expectations their own rhetoric generates. But in the case of the Hillsong tradition, where God continually delivers, where 'upping the ante' is a feature of everyday speech, and where yesterday is perennially purged from the collective memory, such lofty promises operate as articles of faith in themselves. They are functional norms at Hillsong, unquestionable elements within the culture that help it to "enact what it names" (Butler, 1993, p. 173). Albrecht notes in his own study of the Pentecostal ritual field that the community assesses their rites based on a pragmatic approach to experience. It comes down to what 'works':

> Thus, elements within the Pentecostal ritual field often are judged, to some extent, according to their assisting facility. Do they help move the ritualists toward the valued human-divine encounter? If the elements of the ritual field facilitate the congregation in their movement toward 'coming into the presence of God', they are

> accepted and positive. If the elements (e.g. music, preaching, charismatic words, rites of healing, etc.) and dynamics of the ritual field do not lead towards this goal, they will be questioned. (Albrecht, 1999, p. 142)[43]

Shaping a tradition

The attending crowd generally fails to apprehend that even the most scripted parts of the conference, such as the opening and closing performances, contain elements that are revisionistic, and this is necessarily so because of the conference's need to play an innovative role within the competitive tradition of global evangelicalism. The conference is a site of communal work, and those present all participate in the generation of the event's outcomes, year after year. Through their participation they hone the Hillsong ritual tradition which will, according to practice theorists such as Bourdieu and Bell, incorporate the evolving histories and interactions of its performers (Bell, 1992, p. 202; Bourdieu, 1990, p. 53). These theorists develop Foucault's significant explorations into the populace's bodily engagement with the structures and systems that perpetuate a construct (Foucault, 2008, p. 96). Bell cites Foucault's claim that the body is "the place where the most minute and social practices are linked up with the large scale organisation of power," concluding that "the body is a political field" (Bell, p. 202). She notes the misrecognition that plays such a crucial role in the power-play, stating: “Ritualized agents do not see themselves as projecting schemes; they see themselves only acting in a socially instinctive response to how things are” (Bell, p. 206).

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[43] Those who planned the 'spontaneous' eruption of worship most likely hoped that their offer of a space for such an eruption might be honoured by God in the same way it had been the last time it happened. Their fidelity to the tradition, and to the axiomatic knowledges that underpin it likely allowed the moment's architects to miss how closely they trod over the fine line between quotation and contrivedness. Such analyses of the conceptual logic of their foundational beliefs are uncommon in any culture. The characterisation of Hillsong as an organisation greedily exploiting their flock pivots on the idea that the brains behind the church strategise to maximise profit and power. But the 'strategies' which drive the Hillsong movement are embedded discursively, and are perpetuated in practice. They therefore do not need to have been consciously enacted in order to manifest themselves throughout the tradition. As Albrecht concludes, in a community where "experiencing God is the fundamental goal" (1999, p. 148), Hillsong's performative delivery of God can be interpreted as an evidence of the organisers' faithfulness, a proof that things are as they should be.

Bell explains that focusing only on the ‘top-down’ workings of power paints a somewhat monochrome picture, for to fully appreciate power in its deployment over time is to “explore a necessary and simultaneous resistance to power that continues to provoke and legitimize its exercise” (1992, p. 201). What remains to be discussed is what I witnessed of the crowd’s agency and activity shaping and guiding the tradition of which they are a part. Once again, Bell proposes that Foucault’s thinking can enlighten this analysis – in this case his conception of the relationship between power and resistance comes to the fore. As a collective, the participants form what Foucault refers to as the ‘social body’ – the ever-shifting combination of all social power relations who are present (Bell, 1992, p. 203). This social body, while endlessly in flux at a micro level, represents at a macro level both the social structure and cosmic order being promulgated by the ritual, much like Geertz’s assertion that the symbolic activities of a religion constitute both a “model of” the way things are and a “model for” the way things ought to be (Bell, 1997, pp. 66, 67). In the context of an organised event like the Hillsong conference, the social body’s allocated task is to embody the ‘Church’ ideal which has been rehearsed in the opening spectacle, and embodied in the call to repentance. But the ‘Church’ as it is enacted during a specific event will be contingent on the social body’s compliance and resistance as the members act out a cosmic and social order with their bodies. Thus, the crowd is, citing Foucault’s words, the “‘concrete, changing soil’ out of which the sovereign’s power is constituted and out of which the individual and his or her power strategies are constituted.” (Bell, 1992, p. 203).

Bell defines ‘resistance’ as the capacity that every participant has to accept, reject, or negotiate their own bodily participation within the proposed structure of the event. This capacity for resistance is as fundamental a part of the relationship of power as is the ritual itself – for the participant “naturally brings to such activities a self-constituting history that is a patchwork of compliance, resistance, misunderstanding and a redemptive personal appropriation of the hegemonic order” (1992, p. 208). An apt example of this capacity to resist (or to endorse by accepting the ritual’s proscriptions with one’s body entirely) could be demonstrated by observing the range of forms of participation on display during the ‘free worship’ segment that took place during the last half of the conference closing. Some adopted recognisable and culturally appropriate postures of worship, including raised hands, and faces tilted towards heaven, while a smaller proportion of the crowd stood with eyes open, without singing along. The former, by allowing the structures of power inherent in the ritual to incorporate their bodies into itself, endorsed and enhanced the event’s power. The latter group resisted the event’s prescribed forms of participation, though not as much as they could have had they chosen to sit down, divert their attention away from the stage, or to walk out of the room.

The Hillsong crowd exert some force upon the tradition by virtue of their continuing patronage and participation. Lang notes that liturgical traditions are always to some degree reliant on the social arrangements of the people who practise them: “Both decline and reinvigoration largely depend on the way Christians organize their lives” (1997, p. 39). He traces the wax and wane of the Liturgy of the Hours in Christian practice, proposing that “Whenever they practice intense forms of communal existence, there is a chance that communal praise will have a resurgence in popularity” (p. 39). The songs Hillsongers sing most enthusiastically are more likely to be repeated, the guest speakers they flock to hear will be invited back to future events, and the orchestrations within the ritual space that fit best their conception of what a divine experience ought to be like will be repeated at future gatherings (Bell, 1992, p. 213). It is possible that the apparently spontaneous continuation of worship at the conclusion of the conference (and the aforementioned 2008 recording) will take on its own array of symbolic meanings if it continues to be utilised in the concluding moments of subsequent events. It might, through the repeated collective endorsement of the social body, become a regular – even expected – element of Hillsong rallies (and could forseeably find ubiquity among the wider community of large-scale evangelical events around the world, among which Hillsong is undoubtedly a trend-setter).

The crowd is by no means passive in the ritual process, but it would be inaccurate at this juncture to overstate the scope of the crowd’s agency. For while individuals meter their participation and resistance, the officiating hierarchy alone dictates what forms of participation are conventional. Even in a period of ‘free worship,’ there are conventions which govern the forms of participation which are deemed appropriate. To choose to worship with a bodily posture directed away from the stage, for example, or to do something that diverted the attentions of others – reading aloud from a Bible, forming into a prayer 'huddle,' or discussing the experience with a neighbour – risk being interpreted as resistance, regardless of the intentions that motivate them. As in all ritual situations wherein the officiators and the laity are differentiated, lay people "can affect only indirectly the constructions of 'reality' or 'the ideal' objectified through ritualized activities" (Bell, 1992, p. 214). The elemental structures which underpin the rituals are unable to be affected by the crowd, for example, the ritually-embedded gender inequalities within the Hillsong world testify to this situation.[44]

Despite the crowd playing the pivotal role in the ritual bargain of sung worship (we amass and sing, and God descends), for the remaining preaching and teaching sections of the conference the crowd is expected to be the recipients of a monologic flow of information and revelation. The crowd members are not empowered to share their perceptions of the divine, nor act as mouthpiece for him – this role is fulfilled by on-stage staff only. While participants have license in various parts of the conference to express themselves, the lexicon of approved activities only contains actions that affirm the structure. During sermons, for example, members of the crowd are free to clap, say 'Amen!' or 'yes!' or 'that's good!' They can murmur and laugh, and even stand to applause if they approve of what is being preached. There are not conventional ranges of activities, however, that appropriately convey concern, disagreement or uncertainty. At one point during the conference, one of the guest speakers expressed a highly controversial view: he implied that people in the developing world experience such harsh poverty because they do not have the faith to accept God's provision in their lives. Appalled, I scanned the arena looking for signs of disapproval, but there was no audible murmur of discontent; I detected no unusual movement across the auditorium. Scanning the faces around me, I did not see any signs of confusion, no one talking with the person beside them about the speaker's assertion, and certainly no disgust. Without pause, the speaker continued his sermon. The incident prompted me to consider whether I had witnessed any incidents which might suggest a language of resistance, any forum for the expression of critique, evaluation, or disapproval. Bourdieu has expressed that "the most successful ideological efforts are those which have no need of words, and ask no more than complicitous silence" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 188). The Hillsong Conference presents few opportunities for discussion and dissent; to this extent it manufactures its participants' complicity.

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[44] The most obvious structurally-embedded gender differentiation is visible in the way that while husband and wife Brian and Bobbie Houston share the "Senior Pastor" title, Brian usually officiates at all major church events, while Bobbie's leadership rarely extends beyond female-only offshoot events, such as the 'Colour' women's conference. Brian and four other other male partners from Hillsong's husband-and-wife pastoral teams have seats on Hillsong's board, but none of their wives do.

The Homebush Olympic precinct that hosts the conference is designed to provide organisers the capacities to channel bodies and focus attentions with control and precision. The foyers and corridors of the arena work in similar ways to the corridors of an airport, enabling organisers to funnel large crowds into prepared areas with minimal confusion. Entering the arena, one encounters no chairs, tables or bars to loiter around, so one continues moving, following signage, guided by markings on the floor and temporary barriers, until the point when one arrives at one's own seat. During conference sessions, the foyers and lounge spaces were 'closed down' (lights were dimmed and foyer staff actively asked patrons to vacate these areas). Thus, during a conference session, the only options for an attendee are to remain in their seat, or to remain mobile within a limited set of intermediary passage-spaces. Within the arena itself, the conference organisers exercise control over the attentions of their attendees. A vigorous suite of in-house media productions fill in the time before and after sessions as crowds gather, providing news bulletins, testimonials, and comic relief. Options for members of the audience to express their own view are extremely limited.

Each of these architectural, managerial and rhetorical features contribute to an event in which the attendee has limited means to resist the hierarchy's intention for each moment of the proceedings. Such interventions assume the consent of participants. They are instead presented as features of the space, requirements of the running order. In reality there is nothing stopping the organisers from creating large café/lounge spaces to facilitate interaction and discussion, or from enabling the comment features on web-hosted conference videos, or from allowing news media to interview conference attendees. But each of these hypothetical actions would entail the organisers ceding control. Ultimately, the only real act of resistance available to a participant is non-attendance, though this action only increases the homogeneity of the experience for those that remain. As Bell comments, such a situation:

> leads all to mistake the minimal consent of its participants for an underlying consensus or lack of conflict, even when some conflict is objectified and reembodied. Most of all, ritualization leads participants to mistake the group's reformulation of itself as a straightforward communication and performance of its most traditional values. (Bell, 1992, p. 210)

There are ethical ramifications to Bell's second point. If members of the crowd understand their collaborative role in the development of tradition, yet simultaneously lack agency over the most fundamental discursive elements of that tradition, then they are likely to be influenced by values to which they have not assented, and upon which they are not allowed to ritually deliberate. Despite the illusion of their agency, the crowd can be subject to and complicit in the normalisation of new values and practices. In the absence of proscribed patterns of resistance, they recapitulate the hegemonic order through successive performances. Nevertheless, the conference organisers are themselves powerless to dictate the 'redemptive hegemonies' which comprise the experiences of attendees. The organisers can transmit a message, but how this message is interpreted, weighted, and reiterated by those who hear it is a completely different thing. Hillsong's empire-building will necessitate some compromises of meaning as they share their message in emerging contexts. Ultimately those aspects of present tradition which continue into the future depend upon the redemptive hegemonies and the real-time practise of the tradition by new groups of people. Just as Catholicism and Anglicanism adjust to the shifting weight of their members from Europe to Africa, Hillsong's burgeoning membership may shift the Hillsong tradition's ballast over time.

Leaving Hillsong

The experience of the train journey home each night offered a view of the participants outside of the governed space of the event. It showed what happens when a crowd is repersonalised into a collection of individuals, each drawing on their subjective perspective and experience to interpret, analyse and recount the event in their own words. Under bright fluorescent lights, tightly packed on these trains, people talked and mingled with each other. Within the confines of each carriage, conversations naturally overlapped. It was a picture of stark contrast to the controlled configurations of bodies during the conference, in which people are seated in allocated places, gazing over the backs of the heads of those seated before them, or moving from one site to the next in efficient lines. In the carriage, however, bodies were packed together in standing and sitting groups, face to face. Without the continuous streams of video to distract them, the attendees could discuss the events that they had witnessed. On the train ride home on the Friday night, two separate groups of people near me in the carriage discussed Giglio's sermon. One observer assimilated Giglio's message into the broader whole, describing the challenge to go out and serve the world, while anticipating with excitement the 2010 conference. Others were unsure. One person criticised Giglio for his criticism of Hillsong's music, saying that such a statement was "way off." To this person's view, Hillsong's music was an important ministry around the world, and Giglio's criticism of it sparked from jealousy.

Each night as I took my place on the train, the same pattern emerged: at the commencement of the journey, the train carriages bustled with conference-related banter. Groups would interact and sometimes even sing together for the initial stages of their journey, but the train shortly merged into regular suburban lines, and so with each successive stop, dropped off more Hillsongers, and took on more regular passengers. Station by station, the euphoric atmosphere in the train carriage was dissipated as the 'Church' world gave way to the secular one. I wondered what this experience must have been like from the point of view of a conference delegate. Was there perhaps a sense of sadness, of loss, of isolation? With each successive stop, a delegate needed to internalise more of their newly-learned bodily practices – praying expressively, singing with one's hands in the air, speaking in tongues or voicing the triumphant rhetoric of God and his church. The bodily logic of the 'Church' seeming incrementally more foreign, more distant, as Hillsongers departed the train and regular people boarded. Did reintegration into the ordinary world burst the bubble of the conference experience? Did the delegates simply long to be re-immersed in the social world of the conference? Ex-congregant Tanya Levin recalls that during her time at Hillsong, the outside world was "described only to us in terms of fear or pity," and the strong "appeal of being part of the heavily promoted greatest cause on earth" (Levin, 2007).

The experience of re-entering the ordinary world probably affirmed the categorical separation of 'Church' and 'world' that undergirds the Hillsong cosmology. Perhaps this process of reintegration following the conference experience, with its attendant feelings of alienation and disappointment, is in itself a part of the ritual journey. The conference world is so sensual and affirming, so integrative and so large-scale, that one cannot help but interpret their ordinary life just as it is represented by the conference's opening montage: broken and awaiting redemption (Figure 12). This experience may enhance the Hillsonger's commitment to ethical action, for the meta-Church narrative calls upon the 'Church' to actively absorb the 'world' into its sphere. Thus the ethical imperatives of the Hillsong tradition – inviting friends to Hillsong events, consuming Hillsong-produced media and encouraging suburban churches to do the same – arise as intelligible responses to the broken 'world' that is experienced.

Figure 12: A woman contemplates her world in the 'broken city' montage from the conference's opening spectacle

Conclusion

The quintessential Christian rite of Holy Communion barely figures in Hillsong practice. The rite is observed during ordinary church services once a month, and was not celebrated in any of the rallies of the conference.[45] Compared with the entrance of a dazzling, radiating cross, the symbolic substitutes of bread and wine seem drily disconnected from Christ. The mega-rituals of the Hillsong conference bear the power not only to represent religious tropes, but to deliver religious experience, and this is tantalising for believers living in a sceptical world. The experience of the conference stands in as new proofs of God's existence and supremacy. For participants who encounter ridicule in their daily lives, the experience of God's presence and the assurance of his interest in the here-and-now brings more than comfort – it brings certainty.

The Hillsong tradition defines itself as a historical movement whose primacy exceeds the history of the ordinary world. It rarely engages with political and social issues in the broader world, and if it does, it does so on its own terms. Kylie Sheppard notes that the occasional visitations to Hillsong's podium by Federal Prime Ministers and State Premiers are not so much moments of engagement with party politics, but opportunities for the Hillsong movement to demonstrate its own relevance to society (Sheppard, 2006, p. 186). Hillsong's congregants and conference attendees, who carry and shape the tradition, participate in a tradition that subjugates worldly values to a more central set of ethical demands – those of the 'Church'.

The chapters that follow reveal a markedly different set of ethical conditions being embodied ritually, and in so doing highlight contrasting visions of church, community and ethics. UNOH's Mt Druitt chapter is situated less than twenty kilometres from Hillsong's main church in Baulkham Hills, and its members are evangelical Christians. Most of its members have been to a Hillsong conference before, coming from large evangelical and Pentecostal churches themselves.

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[45] This is not unusual in Protestant and Pentecostal churches (Lang, 1997, p. 409)

They sing Hillsong songs and share the transformationalist ideals of their Hillsong counterparts. But they differ in their ritual practices, and ethical processes. Both their proximity to the Hillsong world, and also their widely divergent worldviews, are illustrated by a passage in UNOH founder Ash Barker's 2003 book *Finding Life: Reflections from a Bangkok slum.* In this passage, he criticizes Brian Houston's book *You Need More Money* (Houston, 1999). Barker criticizes the prosperity gospel which underpins Houston's message, while insisting that he holds the greatest respect for the man himself: "I don't doubt Houston's sincerity (though I think he is sincerely wrong)" (2003, p. 72). Unlike the ethical agenda of the Hillsong world, which promotes further participation in church activities, Barker's solution is that of an activist. He critiques the power inherent in the Hillsong system:

> The problem isn't that Houston wrote a silly book, the problem is that the power of his voice means that there's no opposition to it, unless Christians organize… If you agree, let Hillsong know of your concerns with this book, (hillsong@hillsong.com), or stop singing their songs in your church or buy a Bible at a local bookstore leaving a note at the counter about why you are boycotting Hillsong products. (Barker, 2003, p. 72)

The following chapters examine an alternative iteration of evangelical imagination and practice, in which worship is deliberately unspectacular, and acts of practical service are performances of an incarnational theology.

7. Qualities of Time in the Urban Neighbours of Hope

A muddy sacred and a hope-filled ordinary.

If the most notable characteristic of Hillsong rituals is their sheer magnitude, the way of life of the Urban Neighbours of Hope exemplifies a programmed emphasis on that which is small. Hillsong's enormity allows it to tower over the traditional symbology of Christianity itself, animating denotative stand-ins for the religion's traditional connotative symbols: why worship before a cross when Christ himself is manifest in the arena? The Urban Neighbours of Hope (UNOH, pronounced "youknow" by its members) follow a pattern of life – their 'Rhythm' as they call it – which places spiritual value in the overgrown streets and homes of the Asia Pacific's least glamorous locales. The Rhythm, and UNOH's strategic focus, revolve around places unlikely ever to be considered sites of Godly visitation, far from the suburban locales which host Hillsong franchises. My analysis of the rituals which comprise their Rhythm, contained here and in the chapters that follow, shows how UNOH members ritually infuse their ordinary, even drab, environment with sacred import, and how they adapt traditional rites to suit neighbourhoods that have scant memories of Christian observation or worship.

When it comes to the question of the connection between rituals and ethics, the contrast between UNOH and Hillsong is as marked as the difference between their minute and massive performances. Whereas Hillsong's totalising ethical structure places value upon actions that comply with its own organisational needs and orders Christian imperatives in relationship to itself, UNOH's rituals are designed to exercise their performers to improvise as they interact within the complex ethical terrains within which they reside. The ritual life of the Bidwill UNOH chapter equips its members to improvise in the social world of the housing estate, and provides opportunities for contemplation and communal deliberation upon situations as they arise. Rituals also assist UNOH workers to navigate their own complex positionality within their environment. These rituals help them to swiftly transition between the variety of spheres of identification that make up their daily lives: simultaneously missionaries and friends to their neighbours, individuals within the order, yet unified in practice and intent, voluntarily poor people who nonetheless carry good education and adequate financial reserves.

The structure of these three chapters repeats that of the three Hillsong chapters which precede them. Like the first Hillsong chapter, Chapter 7 describes the relationship between the community's pivotal rituals and the cosmology that informs their relationship with the world. In particular, these chapters show how rituals order time itself. Chapter 8 focuses on the specific relationships between particular rituals and ethical frameworks within UNOH. Like the second Hillsong chapter, it also investigates how rituals can instigate changes to social conditions, and even to the conceptual frameworks that underpin them. Chapter 9 focuses on the individuals that participate in this matrix. It explores how UNOH members manage identity and contribute to the shaping of their own tradition. Like its Hillsong counterpart, it explores how and why adaptations occur to the practices of a community, and how these respond to the ethical challenges it faces.

A 'muddy' sacred

The quality of sacred time in the order, and the ways in which this group performatively switches between ritual action and ordinary life, creates the balance between ritual structure and life's messiness that Owen calls a 'muddy' spirituality. Its muddiness is notable in the performance features of rituals themselves. Participation is not characterised by immediately-noticeable trappings of church ritual – aesthetically consistent sacramental objects, priestly vestments and the like – nor by performance features that traditionally communicate sacrality, like a form-governed approach to tasks such as candle-lighting and bread-breaking. Instead, simple illocutions indicate when it is time to begin or end worship, and denote bread, wine and candles symbolic objects. Bursts of humour dichotomise sacred and ordinary stretches of time in otherwise unchanged spaces. While the rituals may be performed in a somewhat improvised fashion, they frequently aspire to an anti-aesthetic, which signals the order's emphases on contextualised worship and practical works. Nonetheless, each communion ceremony is performed with wholehearted reverence to God, and commitment to the Rhythm itself.

My introduction to UNOH's Bidwill team happened just before 8:30am on a Tuesday morning. I had been collected from the train station by Adam in his minibus. As he opened the door to his house I was greeted by Matt and Katie's enthusiastic dog, Lily, and Adam's three human housemates, all still wearing their pyjamas. With bleary-eyes, and bowls of cereal in hand they welcomed me into their home and made me a cup of tea. Adam explained that morning communion moved each day among Bidwill's three UNOH houses, and that members always enjoyed the opportunity to sleep in when it was their house's turn. On this day, the ceremony's officiant wore ugg boots and a fluffy bed cap, while another member munched his breakfast cereal during the devotional message. A flurry of introductions took place between myself and the members from the two other houses as they arrived. This resulted in communion commencing ten minutes later than its usual start time of 8:30am. This did not seem to bother any of the members, and nor did the presence of this researcher. Once everyone was present, that day's officiant gently called people to attention and we all quickly assembled in seats around the lounge room.

So began UNOH's most regular ritual gathering, the daily Communion, which is celebrated daily for half an hour, Tuesdays through Fridays. A roster determines who will officiate Communion on a given morning (everybody takes a turn), and the ceremony usually takes place at that person's house. Typically, daily Communion commenced with some sort of reflection or discussion about a passage in the Bible or a piece of spiritual writing which was guided by that day's assigned officiant. This person usually introduced a time of communal prayer in which all could pray silently or aloud, and also a period of silence for individual reflection or prayer. Then they would distribute bread and some sort of stand-in for Communion wine, and lead the group in the rite of Holy Communion. Usually, once all had taken their bread and 'wine', the rite of daily Communion would conclude and members would leave to commence their day's work. Aside from its obvious importance as a shared religious rite, daily Communion was often the only time in the day when residents of all three UNOH houses gathered together as a group. It therefore carried a range of additional uses: an opportunity to share news and information, and space to affirm group values and identity.

The officiant elaborated on a Bible passage she had recently read, giving a message that was confessional in tone, and intended to motivate. She described her own struggle to keep a correct attitude as she undertook her service activities throughout the week. It was easy to slip into a pattern of ‘going through the motions,’ and to forget the reasons why she had joined UNOH in the first place. She warned of the dangers of slipping into a pattern of community service that was motivated more by guilt or shame, and challenged her listeners to examine their own lives for times when they acted out of shame or even fear, rather than love. As she shared her reflections, members nodded quietly and thoughtfully, and this introspection continued as she called for a time of silent contemplation. Some members bowed their heads and closed their eyes, as if praying silently, others sipped their tea and gazed around the room, appearing to drift in and out of concentration. Another member leafed through the pages of a devotional guide, apparently looking for a remembered passage. All of these approaches seemed acceptable: the space was both holy and homely, and members used this contemplation time in whichever way they deemed most useful. The officiant broke this period of quiet after about five minutes by praying aloud. All others immediately bowed their heads, joining her in prayer. She thanked God for the love which motivated Christ to undertake his own mission, and prayed that the love of God would permeate the lives of each member of UNOH, enabling them to approach their service with renewed vigour and compassion.

At the conclusion of her prayer, everyone remained with their heads bowed and closed eyes, and one by one, others prayed aloud. Not every member prayed aloud, but most did; some whispered prayers beneath their breath, and one member quietly spoke in tongues. Time passed, and sensing that all who had wanted to pray aloud had done so, the officiant uttered a definitive “Amen,” and prayer time was over. She then passed around the Communion elements – on this occasion some rice crackers and a cup of green cordial – offering an off-the-cuff explanative liturgy which highlighted the theme of her devotional message: “This is Jesus’ body and blood, which he gave for us out of love. Eat it and remember as you give yourself in love today”. Some members intincted (dipped) their ‘bread’ into the ‘wine’ before consuming, while others took them separately. One partook in a reverently formal fashion, with head bowed and ceremoniously weighty movements, while another said “cheers” as the cup passed to him, dipped his cracker and smiled to the person beside him as he passed it on. An almost cacophonic array of postures, approaches and performances was occurring in the same ritual event. Jon's then yet to be written book, *Muddy Spirituality*, is aptly titled: this was a serious and sacred time being had in the midst of an earthy, easy-going setting. Each person was committed to participating in the ritual, but there was no arbitrary performance language for indicating this – each member approached prayers, discussion and Holy Communion in their own way, and this situation seemed to be agreeable to all.

The UNOH team approached their rituals with an almost utilitarian air. In times of worship like the daily Communion ceremony, the members valued what worked over and above what looked right. On a different morning, which was cold but sunny, the group decided at the last minute that they would hold Communion outside on the porch instead of inside the house's cold lounge room. Chairs were pulled into a semicircle around the front steps of the porch, and participants jostled jokingly until everyone had a seat in full sun. A set of metal cricket stumps was laid on its side in the centre of the gathering, and a crust of bread and a mug of cordial were fetched from the kitchen and placed atop this makeshift altar.

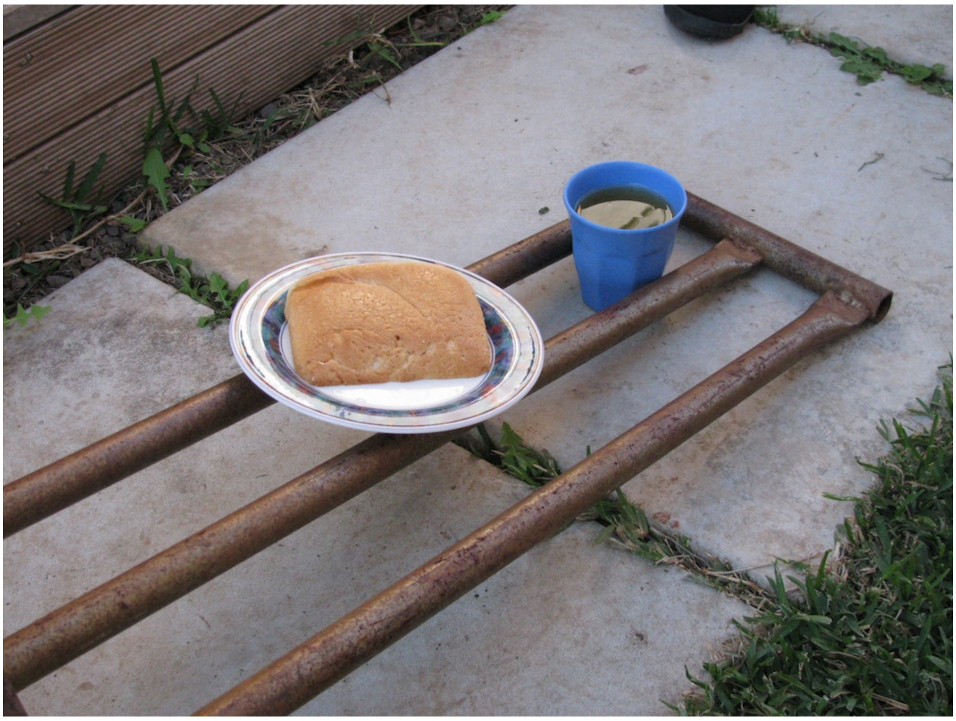

Figure 13: The cricket stump 'altar,' with Communion bread and 'wine.'

On this particular morning, the allocated officiant had been called away to assist someone elsewhere in the community, and asked Adam, via text-message, to lead on his behalf. Adam appeared relaxed and comfortable as he relayed this information to the gathered UNOH team. He commenced the daily Communion by attempting to light a candle – an act which had been used the previous morning as well. He explained that the flame reminded us of God's presence with us during this time, and struck the match, but it flickered out in the wind. He tried again, with little luck, and after a further failed attempt, other members endeavoured to construct a windbreak around the candle using their Bibles. After several more failed attempts to keep the flame alight, Adam shrugged and said "ah well, we'll just have to remember that God is with us without the candle," and continued on with proceedings. The unlit candle sat in the centre of the circle, beside the cricket stump altar, for the duration of daily Communion. I felt acutely aware of its presence as a sort of symbol of failure, an unintended suggestion of God's absence, but none of the gathered members paid it any attention. It was accidentally knocked over during the distribution of the bread and the wine, and no one stood it upright again.

Ritual times were characterised by semiotic pragmatism. A candle which had been fetched from the house so that it could be used as a meaningful symbolic object to sacralise the gathering, then sat discarded in the middle of that gathering devoid of all symbolic relevance. Its interpretation was contingent upon the words of the officiant, or perhaps more broadly, a cultural logic which rendered religious aesthetics into matters of utility: if it contributes to the experience, use it; if it distracts, ignore it. Despite the daily Communion's informality, which in this instance almost verged on the comical, this ritual of discussion and prayer, contemplation and Holy Communion was undertaken with serious hearts and dedicated minds. It was not the aesthetic qualities of the ritual that mattered, but that the ritual arose from the right motive and attitudes. This focus on sheer practicality is exactly what permitted members to decide upon their own participatory strategies. To draw on the message of the first day's devotional, the motivation of the heart was more important than the action that resulted.

Why so muddy?

Rituals that emphasise the freedom of individuals to participate in ways they choose are not uncommon. Quaker masses, for example, and the ‘free worship’ sequences at Hillsong, embody this principle.[46] The question is how UNOH’s informal, even disorderly, ritual performances align with their values, and how they function within the community. To put it bluntly, what is the point of such ‘muddiness’? I do not think that this community is unconcerned with aesthetics as a general rule. Rather, the earthy aesthetic that attends this community’s ritual performances exemplify the community’s post-colonial missiological focus. To make this case, I will focus on the most formal segment of the daily Communion ceremony – the taking of Holy Communion.

The sacrament of Holy Communion is Christianity’s most significant congregational rite. Historically, the rite has such an elevated place in church culture that many liturgical churches refer to the entire mass or liturgy of which it is the defining part, by the name “Eucharist” or “Holy Communion.”[47] In many mainline churches, this rite is exclusively conducted by clergy, or specially-appointed laypeople, and even in the more contemporary evangelical services of urban independent and Pentecostal churches, the ceremony tends to have a heightened and formal air, and would rarely be conducted outside the context of a Sunday service (Hart, 2004, pp. 179 - 180; Harris, 1990, p. 12). In contrast to this, Holy Communion at UNOH was markedly informal. It would be hard to conjure an image of a more profane substitute for an altar than a set of upturned cricket stumps, or of a wine substitute less suitable than green cordial. Then there are the obvious structural contrasts between Holy Communion at UNOH and its mainstream counterparts: in this religious order, Holy Communion is shared on weekdays, officiated by laity, and not held at all on the Sabbath (more on UNOH’s inverted Sabbath later). In each of these regards, it would seem that UNOH has everything backwards.

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[46] In both of these cases, as with all situations that emphasise individual expression, strong conventions still govern what is and is not appropriate.

[47] Driver offers 17 ritual elements that are usually part of a Holy Communion service in *Liberating Rites*, pp. 216 – 222.

I shared with two UNOH members my observation that the way they conducted Communion might seem unorthodox – even offensively flippant – to believing outsiders. They countered that the placement of Communion at the very start of most weekdays indicated just how important the rite was to the life of the order. They felt the rite had deep, and very unique, relevance to the experience of many UNOH members, because, as well as celebrating atonement through Christ's sacrifice, Communion was "A thing you do with your body that talks about who we are, what we do" (Personal Communication, 29 April, 2010). Matt reasoned that UNOH's mission to poor neighbourhoods in some ways paralleled the narrative of God taking on flesh in order to bring wholeness to humankind. He believed that the notions of selflessly going to become one of the group you are trying to save, of taking on their living conditions and local concerns, which are all embedded in the Communion narrative, all resonated strongly with the UNOH experience. Clearly, this rite's place in the UNOH rhythm is regarded with reverence and respect. What, then, of the shabby ways in which the rite is performed? After acknowledging that the casual setting in which the rite takes place might confront some mainstream Christians, Matt and Katie proposed that their way of performing Holy Communion was, in some ways, a more fitting and culturally-appropriate way of contextualising Holy Communion in a public housing estate.

> [Matt:] The Communion thing is a 'God's kingdom of love' meal, but what we're doing is we want to extend it to people around here, so it kinda has to be a bit ordinary and cordial-and-crust-on-cricket-stumps-ish.
>
> [Katie:] Yeah, cos when it comes to it, people in this neighbourhood are not going to traditional churches, and as far as we can know, in that sense they're not connecting with God and so what we have to do is be very open to making it something that anyone could be a part of. Because people don't go to formal jobs and that kind of stuff so it's sort of like something that's not been appropriate in some ways … What we're trying to do here as well is trying to create places where all of our neighbours would wanna come together to worship God and Jesus, so it almost has to look different. (Personal Communication, 29 April, 2010)

This conversation and many others gave me the impression that UNOH members almost aspire to produce their somewhat shabby aesthetic in order to emphasise their earthy ‘realness’ to poor neighbours. What I observed was not so much a disregard for their rituals’ aesthetic formality, as an active focus on aesthetically signifying that which is low-key, earthy, immediate and ‘true to the heart.’ This community navigates a complex range of identity markers, as does anyone undertaking outreach work that traverses class and culture, therefore it is probably incorrect to assume that they aren’t acutely aware of how their actions, dress and modes of speech are read by outsiders.[48] The fact that Bidwill is a community barely serviced by other churches provides them a context in which they can present practices and modes of expression more tailored to local needs and tastes. One of their chapters in Melbourne, for example, combines a weekday Communion session with a food distribution ministry, and by doing so offers locals a chance to participate in a short Christian service on a weekday morning. They believe their short outdoor ceremony meets locals ‘where they are at,’ at a time and location that is convenient to the mostly-unemployed recipients of their food ministry, in a style that is welcoming and informal.

As an emerging monastic tradition in the postmodern era, this community embodies what Hal Foster described as an ‘anti-aesthetic’ (Foster, 1983). Not only do UNOH’s ritual performances shun the pomp associated with colonial religion in order to communicate their compatibility with poor communities, but they similarly resist that which is “dominant but dead” by undermining the aesthetic sensibilities of mainline traditions (Foster, 1983, p. ix). Jon Owen alludes to his team’s resistive approach in his book:

> The lenses through which we see our world and use to understand Jesus are heavily biased by our surrounding culture. We too often think that the best indication that someone is really being transformed by Jesus is by how much their lives are coming to resemble our own. This wasn’t done because people are intentionally manipulative, it is just that they were usually blind to alternatives. We laugh now at the “civilising missions” of missionaries past, but we often fare little better in our own attempts. (Owen, 2011, p. 28)

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[48] Chapter 8 explores this community’s reflexive identification

Owen cites liberation theologian Robert McAfee Brown's truism that "Where you stand determines what you see," and urges Christians to live lives that epitomise "counter-narratives" to the dominant paradigms of culture (pp. 38, 108). UNOH founder Ash Barker cites Saint Patrick as a personal hero of his, lauding him for "confronting and redeeming Celtic cultural icons and expressions" (Barker, 2005, p. 162). Ash now bears a tattoo of a Celtic cross as a reminder of "the need for more Patricks" (p. 163). The performance of 'muddiness,' to use Jon's descriptor, indicates this community's sagacious co-option of other monastic ritual traditions. In the spirit of the anti-aesthetic, they take on practices from traditions past which they deem useful, while simultaneously resisting categorisations embedded in those traditional aesthetic forms. The order's radical place within their denomination and the broader church – one of a handful of monastic orders associated with protestant evangelical denominations worldwide – also contributes to their pursuit of a ritual anti-aesthetic.

Shifting modes

The daily Communion is a time when the UNOH members engage ritually with the divine, but I also studied the way this group behaves outside of delineated sacred times and spaces. By far the majority of their time is spent engaged in, to utilise the Durkheimian dichotomy, the 'profane' or ordinary world. And yet, just as their devotional activities have an 'earthiness' to them, their day to day routines of community service and work are charged with spiritual meaning and possibility. This section describes the actions and processes which the UNOH members engaged to shift between the 'sacred' and 'profane' worlds of daily worship and community service. The contrasts between these two qualities of time and modes of behaviour is most pronounced at the thresholds (limens) between them. I focus, therefore, on the immediate points in which the community transitioned between 'earthy sacred' times of ritual and the 'ordinary' time that frames it.

Making the transition from ordinary time into sacred time requires coordination, and this is often accompanied by ritual conventions that signal or even enact such changes. Anthropologists still invoke Hubert and Mauss's term 'sacralisation' to describe the processes that transfigure time or sacred objects from profane or ordinary status into sacred ones (Bell, 1997, p. 26). In many

Holy Communion liturgies, there is a moment in which the priest lifts up bread and the wine (re-enacting John 6:48-58), then lowers them again to the altar, now transformed into elemental or emblematic body and blood.[49] But the daily Communion at UNOH is not a conventional affair, and their ceremony which switches between location, leader and liturgy on a daily basis, lacks many of the formalities which would assist such a transition to occur. There is no bell to call such times to commence and conclude, no dedicated worship space which commands modified behaviour as people enter it, no ceremonial garb to put on and take off for the rite. In UNOH, daily communion takes place in spaces that have utility to the ordinary lives of its participants: their lounge rooms and porches. The group may be seated in the same space watching television, or eating breakfast immediately before the rite commences, so it is incumbent upon the group members to somehow rupture ordinary time and call each other into an attitude and posture befitting the ritual. The process of sacralisation, as it occurred during the ceremonies I witnessed, involved not the reconfiguration of symbolic objects into and out of the sacred field (as in a sacrifice or transubstantiated bread and wine), but a sequence of bodily actions that redefined time during the ceremony. Despite their informal presentation style and the lack of prewritten liturgies for the ceremony, daily Communions still utilised an easily interpreted 'text,' which each day's officiant, and those that followed their lead, performed to usher sacred time into being.

During the four Communion ceremonies I witnessed, the process of sacralising the space was initiated by that day's allocated officiant, and this leader/follower dynamic is the first feature of the sacralising process. All present knew who had the power to commence the ceremony, and it seemed all were comfortable to wait for the officiant to call the ceremony to order when they were ready to do so. It was always common knowledge who was rostered to officiate that day (this information was essential, for it was tied to the question of where the daily Communion was to be held that day as well), and this was most evident on the day that Adam filled in: he took the time to inform each arriving member that he was going to lead that day prior to the commencement of the ceremony. I noticed on my first morning that the leader paused slightly before saying, "well, let's begin, shall we?" It seemed that before she had finished the sentence, conversations had ceased and bodies had been realigned towards her. Bibles were fetched and balanced on knees, faces reflected concentration and reverent entry into sacred time. This pattern continued into the subsequent daily Communion ceremonies. Whether on time, or late, whether the preceding atmosphere was chirpy or subdued, all seemed to have an awareness in their peripheral vision of the movements of the appointed leader for that day. The moment the officiant gave a physical or verbal cue, all the members dived into worship. 'Dived into' aptly describes the orientation of bodies during worship at UNOH, each instance of communal prayer, biblical study or reflection involved the group forming an inward-facing circle (usually sitting, but on one occasion standing), and this was the singular postural consistency during these acts.[50] The leader's call and the group's responsive rearrangement of themselves constituted a simple pattern of action, but one powerful enough to shift the group's focus to the tasks of worship.

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[49] For an example of this part of Communion Liturgy, see *An Australian Prayer Book* (The Standing Committee of the General Synod of the Church of England in Australia, 1978, p. 126, 133)

A second aspect of the sacralising process was the sparing, yet consistent use of ceremonial objects. On three of the mornings that daily Communion was held, the officiant commenced the ceremony by lighting a candle and placing it in the centre of the gathered group. The act of lighting the candle was accompanied by an improvised liturgy (similar to the liturgies accompanying the distribution of bread and wine), using words such as, "I'm lighting this candle to acknowledge God's presence with us, amongst us and around us this morning" (Personal Communication, 28 April, 2010). The symbolic object of the lit candle itself, but also the act of lighting it and speaking its symbolism into significance, signalled the beginning of ritual time. At all four of the daily

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[50] One evening, for example, a few of the member gathered in a huddle in one corner of the lounge room, arms around each other's shoulders, to pray about an issue that had occurred that day, while others continued to mill about, chatting and washing up after dinner. Amidst the bustle around them, their physicality communicated a coming together and a turning of their attention towards each other, and God.

Communion ceremonies, bread and 'wine' were also placed in the centre of the space prior to the commencement of the ceremony. The items themselves were consistent with UNOH's earthy aesthetic, comprising found items – a slice of bread and some cordial, juice or water, placed in whichever cup and plate were close to hand. Once again, a simple illocutionary act of describing what these elements represented sacralised them for use as objects for Holy Communion. It mattered not what they looked like, or how they were arranged, but it was of utmost importance that they were placed in the centre of the group, and that the ceremony was being observed in the first place. In contrast to traditional Christian gatherings, however, these objects were merely props in the performatives which sacralised the space. They were not regarded as having an aesthetic contribution to the experience of worship, and this is amply illustrated by the earlier example of the candle that continually blew out and was subsequently ignored for the remainder of the ceremony. Another example of this is that leaders of Communion tended to describe the communion elements as juice or cordial, not as the 'wine' or 'blood' that they represented. It was not the objects themselves that became imbued with sacral status, but rather the time within which they were incorporated. The act of lighting a candle, whether it remained lit or not, instigated the ceremony, just as the acts of eating and drinking constituted Communion, regardless of what substances filled the glass and topped the plate.

The third performance action that facilitated the transfer between ordinary and sacred time involved deliberate ruptures to the sacred 'frame.' On the Wednesday morning, the officiant of the day needed to provide transport for a neighbour, and so was running slightly late to daily Communion. All the other members gathered in the front room of her house, drinking tea and chatting as they awaited her return. As the member pulled into the driveway and exited her car, one of the members in the front room said, "hey, hey, she's coming, quick everybody do this one," and bowed his head, turning up his hands in a posture indicative of deep prayer. Everyone quickly followed suit (including the dutiful researcher), and seconds later, the officiating member entered the front door, apprehended the group in prayer, and attempted to sneak over to a free seat very quietly. She was only half way there when snickers erupted into cackles of laughter from the group. The impending transference into sacred time was heralded by this comedic outburst, which disrupted the prevailing atmosphere and allowed a new timeframe to commence. Once the laughter and jostling had died down, she took a seat, and after a slight pause, said "let's begin." The members immediately took their seats and ceased talking, and the daily Communion ritual began in earnest. This episode encapsulates some of the core differences between sacred and profane times in the UNOH experience. The entering member, upon seeing the group engaged in prayer, instantly modified her behaviour so as not to interrupt the important, sacred time of the daily Communion. In contrast, those who fooled her were operating in profane or ordinary time – in which it was acceptable to joke and play around. Despite this silliness, the joking members knew that the space and time had not yet been sacralised, that the ritual event had not yet begun. It was fine to lampoon ritual from outside of the ritual event, though mock prayers would never be made during a Communion time.[51] As soon as the officiating member took her seat and called for communion to begin, the joking stopped. The ritual was observed with the customary level of reverence, and no jokes were made throughout its duration.

The endings of daily Communion ceremonies were also heralded by subtle, concrete cues. On two occasions this transition was facilitated by a joke. On one morning, upon the conclusion of Holy Communion with an "Amen" from the officiating member, everyone opened their eyes and silently looked around the room. It was a moment of awkwardness, as everybody waited for someone to be the first to speak. The first noise to pierce the silence was a loud burp from one of the members, which prompted laughter and 'broke' the atmosphere of reverence that still hung palpably in the air. Immediately, and with apparent relief, people broke out of the circle and commenced their own tasks and conversations. Another morning, members passed around the bread and 'wine' (in this instance, the energy drink Staminade), each dipping a chunk of bread into the liquid and partaking. The final member partook, then returned the glass and bread to a coffee table. As he did so, the members were experiencing a similarly awkward silence to the one I have just described. He pointed at the glass and, observing a floating breadcrumb, remarked, “someone left a floatie.” Again, it punctured the silence and desacralised the time space. The practical joke, the burp and the “floatie” remark parenthetically enveloped the sacred time of the communion ceremony; their frivolity contrasted against the deep seriousness that characterised ritual time in the order. There is something to this notion of ‘breaking’ a silence that hints at the functionality of humour. In UNOH there is no aesthetic differentiation between a lounge room during daily Communion, and the same lounge room during dinner or television-watching time or any other passage of ‘ordinary’ time (Figure 14). If the members wish to differentiate the two modalities of sacred and ordinary, they must do so with their own bodies. The humorous ruptures are functional in and of themselves. Both the burp and the “floatie” remark occurred in the time when people knew they had to return from a reverent state into an ordinary one. Significantly, these humorous interludes were the sole actions which were instigated during these transitional periods. They signalled the overlap of ordinary and sacred timeframes by making the contrast between the two modalities more pronounced.

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[51] Bell (1997, p. 84) discusses an amusing observation that pickpockets had "taken the day off" during Queen Elizabeth II's coronation ceremony, made in Shils and Young's review of the event, to illustrate the capacity of ritual time to temporarily override the diversity (and mischievousness) of a community with a singular focus.

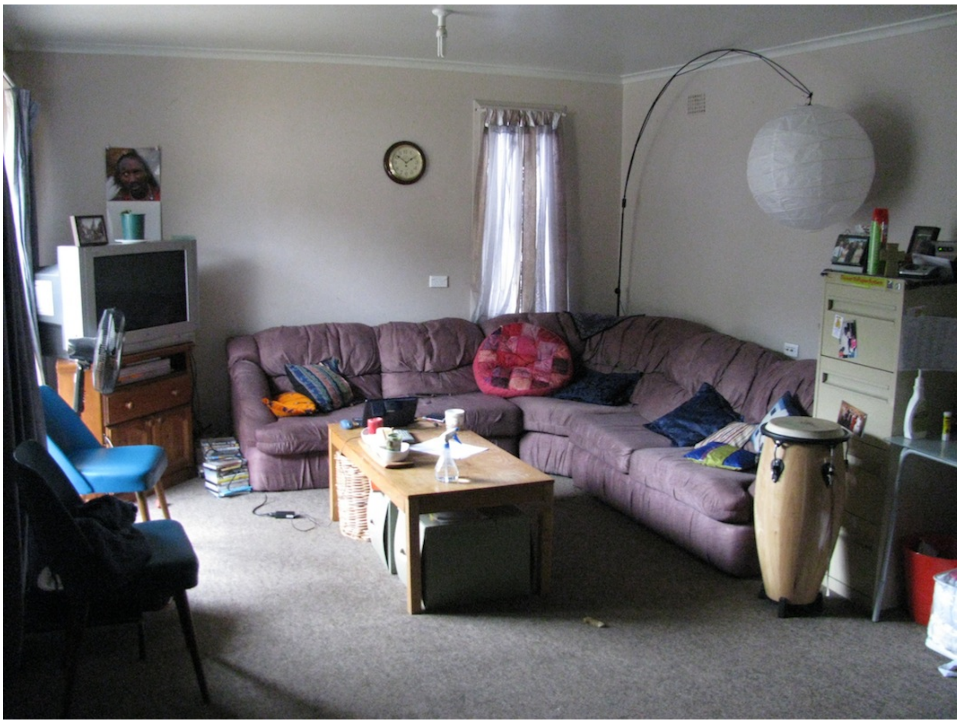

Figure 14: The Communion space (‘Tongariro’s’ loungeroom) immediately after Tuesday’s ceremony

Ritual practice underpinning practical service

If the points of transition between sacred and ordinary time reveal the contrasts between the two modes of action in the order, then the interruptions to rituals reveal the contours and limits of action in the ritual mode. Thursday morning's Communion was interrupted by a fierce knocking at the door. One member answered it while the officiant continued to share a biblical reflection. The person at the door was a neighbour who was upset because the lift she had arranged to take her to visit one of her children in hospital had fallen through. She asked if one of the UNOH householders could take her into the hospital (It is a forty minute drive from Mt Druitt – a very costly journey by taxi). The member who had answered the door invited the neighbour in and sat down with her in the kitchen to discuss the issue further. Despite the loud, emotional conversation happening in the adjoining room, those participating in daily Communion continued to listen intently as the officiant shared her reflection, then called for a time of silent prayer. While everybody's heads were bowed, the member in the kitchen stuck his head into the room and explained, "I'm just going to take [the neighbour] to the hospital. Be back in a few hours." The praying members nodded in acknowledgement, while the officiant continued to pray aloud as the neighbour and the member left the house.[52] This incident demonstrates the relationship between ritual and service in the daily life of UNOH: it was appropriate to break out of sacred time to undertake the holy activity of serving a neighbour in crisis; but it was also fully appropriate for the other members to carry on participating in the ritual, upholding its primacy in their routine despite the unfolding trauma among and around them. Ritual was subservient to neighbourly action, in the sense that the purpose of the UNOH community is to serve and save neighbours, and not to celebrate ritual for its own sake.

Opportunities for neighbourly action do not automatically override ritual obligations. UNOH members view rituals as practices that enhance the order's ministry endeavours. Ash Barker writes that the order's daily practices remind members of their mission: "the symbolism of bread and wine in ceremony can explode into meaning and purpose for those who participate. The symbolism of eating flesh and drinking blood should shock us into action" (Barker, 2005, p. 163). Ritual is figured as something that does more than just inspire. UNOH's Statement of Values states:

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[52] An alternative ride to the hospital eventuated shortly after this incident, and the member didn't end up driving his neighbor to the hospital that day.

> To dig deep the wells to sustain our walk with Christ among the poor requires us to make a conscious habit of prayer and biblical reflection. This prayer space changes us as we connect afresh with God and this can help transform those around us. The habits of spiritual disciplines, spiritual formation in a community and discerning prayer are cornerstones to keep us awake to Christ and his longings for UNOH and our neighbourhoods. (Urban Neighbours of Hope, c. 2006)

The role of the Rhythm in the life of this order is seen as something that prepares, strengthens and sustains the members in carrying out their mission. The group considers its 'habits' and 'disciplines' to have a functional necessity, for they shape the members into the kinds of people that can meet the challenges that arise in the course of their ministry. This is the key to understanding the ritual happenings of UNOH: each rite and practice punctuates time otherwise spent in dedicated community engagement, and is the site where one prepares, reflects and develops the virtues required to sustain one's ministry.

Improvising ethically in a hope-filled ordinary

I have described the profane acts which 'frame' ritual events within this community, but from a broader vantage it is the ritual times that parenthetically enclose ordinary time. Days are framed by the daily Communion ceremony, weeks by the Sabbath day, and months, years and even decades by respective ritual events. The rituals themselves are sets of practices that embellish ordinary time with special purpose and meaning. In this section I examine the ways that members of the order anticipated and reacted to challenging situations. Bell argues that through repetitive ritual practise, a group not only imposes their vision of redemption upon the world, but generates the forms and schemes that regulate their behaviour in their everyday lives (1992, p. 88; 1997,

p. 81). This is precisely the case with the Urban Neighbours of Hope. Much of a UNOH member's time is spent in their home and neighbourhood, undertaking service activities and the day-to-day happenings of life in a share house. Just as sacred time in UNOH has an inverted earthiness about it, ordinary time in the order also expresses itself in unconventional ways. UNOH members privilege ordinary time as the site of their 'real' ministry, a time when God's presence is most acutely sought and felt.

The rhetoric UNOH members use to describe their engagements with community members, the types of involvement they take, and their rhythm of prayer, contemplation and worship, all contribute to their propensity to perform what Hauerwas has called 'truthful performances' (Hauerwas, 2004, pp. 75 - 109). In Hauerwas' mind, truthful performances are truthful in that they actively and consistently incorporate the community's values, "both ethically and politically but also aesthetically and rhetorically" into social behaviour, and performative in that they encompass the full panacea of human embodiment, interaction and immediacy (p. 78). The truthful performance might express the underpinning truths of a value system, but its location within the situational diversity of the real world makes it difficult to predict how exactly one will need to act in any given situation. It is not an articulation of pro forma principles and axioms, but rather an embodied application of known values to issues as they arise. In Hauerwas' reckoning, the truthful performances of a Christian should be consistent with a world in which God's good purpose is eternally unfolding through efforts to discover, uncover, and coax out the good in nearly every human interaction, big or small. In much the same way that the vows and ritual practices of UNOH members designate their very lives as sites of grace, I find that members fill their daily service activities and interactions with acts that invite the possibilities of God. Such acts culminate in a way of life that interprets change, crisis, and interruption as potential 'gifts' – gifts that must be first noticed, named, then actively and improvisationally, provided a response.

This mode of human action is improvisational not only in the sense that it responds to circumstances that cannot be forseen, but also in that it values responses that are creative and contextually-appropriate. Theologian Samuel Wells co-opts the terminology of dramatic improvisationists, particularly the term 'overaccepting,' as used by Keith Johnstone in his book *Impro* (Johnstone, 1981). 'Overaccepting' is a method of meeting challenges, which is neither an aggressive block, nor a passive acceptance of the circumstance thrust upon the performer. To overaccept is to find a way to continue a present trajectory, but in light of a larger narrative.

> Overaccepting fits the remarks of the previous actor into a context enormously larger than his or her counterpart could have supposed. This is exactly what the Christian community does with offers that come to it from wider society. It overaccepts in the light of the church's tradition and story seen in eschatological perspective – a perspective much wider than urgent protagonists may have imagined. (Wells, 2004, p. 133)

Michael Lambek's down-to-earth term 'ordinary ethics' is another descriptor which sits easily with Hauerwas' 'truthful performances' and the 'overaccepting' strategy of Wells (Lambek, 2010). All three deal with ways of embodying beliefs and values through actions and interactions in the everyday world. However, Wells' incorporation of methodologies pertaining to theatrical action into a discussion about real-time ethical responsiveness seems particularly appropriate to a study that focuses on performative actions and religious rituals. UNOH members approach ordinary time intending to improvise responses to complicated situations that are not only consistent with their values and mission, but make room for Godly intervention. I will refer to these henceforth as 'ethical improvisations.'

UNOH members' improvisations and overacceptance constitute the group's principal strategy for dealing with matters of ordinary ethics. I observed several situations to which the UNOH members improvised hopeful, overaccepting responses over the course of my visit. The first occurred in the lead-up to a breakfast barbecue that members ran in partnership with a local Uniting Church community centre. I accompanied Adam as he shopped for supplies prior to the event. He was not sure of the quantities of sausages, bacon, eggs and bread to purchase that morning, and he explained his dilemma: attendance at the barbecue was, on average, very low (six or eight people), however there had been two recent occasions where an extra fifteen or so people turned up. He reasoned aloud that while to cater for the usual numbers was less costly and wasteful, to do so would leave the group unprepared if extra people showed up. He joked about the dangers of running out of food in front of a hungry, expectant crowd, inferring that such surprises were God's way of punishing the UNOH member who lacked enough faith to cater big. In the end, he settled on ordering enough for a large turnout. Being ready for the possibility of the big turnout was preferred over more cautious assessments of the likelihood of such an eventuation. Adam was choosing to overaccept the situation into a narrative that revolved around God's ample provision for the masses. Then an idea hit him as he explained his decision to me: "We could encourage the regulars to take leftovers back to their neighbours." The thought of leftovers ricocheting through the neighbourhood energised him greatly, and he enthused about it in the car as we made our way to the barbecue venue. He had chosen a course of action (catering for the potentially larger group) which brought the narrative truth of his faith to bear upon his present reality, but now this decision in turn inspired subsequent actions (encouraging neighbours to distribute leftovers), which were based in the same narrative.

Adam's catering decision revealed his ethical improvisation in anticipation of future potentialities. Two more examples of overaccepting concern members instantaneously improvising responses to situations as they arose. Each week culminates in an open-house dinner-party that gathers all the UNOH team members, neighbours and guests they have invited throughout the week. Like daily Communion, the three UNOH houses take their turn hosting the party. Throughout the week, members are free to invite new friends along to the Saturday night dinner, so it serves a dual purpose of being a time for the UNOH team to gather informally for fun and celebration, and also as a site where new contacts can be introduced to the team and receive their hospitality. When I arrived at the designated party house on the Saturday afternoon, preparations were already in full swing. As members prepared the food and set a large table, they relayed stories to me of the sorts of unexpected things that can occur at an event of this nature. Sometimes guests arrived accompanied by friends and family members whom the UNOH members had never met; sometimes people arrived incredibly early or late, and occasionally nobody would arrive at all. Memories of each of these kinds of occurrence triggered enthusiasm and positivity – a big turnout affirmed UNOH's standing in the community, while a small one presented opportunities for intimate conversation. I asked if there had ever been an occasion when the team had run out of food for a Saturday dinner, and a member shook her head. She told me stories about different occasions when the prepared food had miraculously stretched to fill every plate.[53] On the evening I was present, the team was only expecting a 'smallish' turnout of around fifteen people, because an invited neighbour had informed them earlier that day that he and his family could not make it. One hour into the proceedings, however, this neighbour arrived along with twelve of his family and friends! Before the arriving group had made it across the front yard, one UNOH member had excitedly announced their arrival, and was dialling a delivery pizza store on his phone. Other members interrupted what they were doing to greet the family as they entered, find extra chairs, and locate plates and cutlery for their extra guests. To accommodate the crowd which now filled the house, the party was relocated from the lounge room to a shed in the back yard. Within minutes the arrived guests had been poured drinks and integrated into conversations, activities had been found for kids to play, and pizza was on its way. All this was accomplished with an air of collective cheerfulness that evinced no sense of stress or frustration at the visitors' failure to notify of their intention to visit. Each host exuded enthusiasm at the possibilities that their dinner, now a full-blown house party, presented.

Later that same evening, one neighbour announced that he had brought along his Yahtzee set, and was very keen to play it with Matt. Matt had given him the set for his birthday a few weeks prior. Matt responded enthusiastically, and they cleared a space on a table to play. I watched them play several rounds, observing the neighbour flagrantly cheating and, unsurprisingly, winning game after game. I remember my own blood pressure rising as it became progressively more frustrating to watch the asymmetrical gameplay, and I struggled not to intervene for Matt's sake, as he continued to cheerfully play the game as if unaware of the injustices taking place. I asked him later how he had found enjoyment in the game with such an unsportsmanlike opponent. He alluded to his neighbour's troubled history, which was laden with violence and poor relationships, and explained that it was such a positive leap for the neighbour to be wanting to play a game with another person, he was delighted to keep modelling gracious sportsmanship – who knew what healing and growth the Yahtzee games might trigger? To Matt's mind, the Yahtzee game was not an end in itself but an opportunity for him to invest in his friend's emotional and spiritual growth and, because of these exciting possibilities, feigning ignorance of his neighbour's cheating had been as easy as it had been necessary.

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[53] One story, shared during preparations for the Saturday Dinner, concerned a community meal for fifty people to which one hundred and fifty turned up. Incredibly, everyone got their dinner and there were leftovers for the volunteers. Open-ended catering was such a recurrent theme that I would almost describe it as an unwritten law at UNOH. One morning, during discussions after Communion, Lisa O reminded everyone to budget for and include quick frozen meals in their shopping, so as to always be ready to feed hungry neighbours.

The earlier neighbour's unannounced arrival, and the later one's greedy gameplay were both interpreted as opportunities for positive missionary work, and triggered actions of hospitality and affirmation. In each case, by overaccepting the scenario, a potentially frustrating event was instead interpreted as a gift, and an opportunity for transformation to occur. Without any opportunity for premeditation, they improvised performances that were truthful to the narrative of salvation they celebrate in their daily and weekly rituals. 'Overaccepting' as a concept relies upon a clear sense of an overarching narrative, through which to contextualise ordinary occurrences. UNOH's 'muddy' rituals which frame ordinary times enact this relationship between the ordinary world and the sacred narrative which encapsulates it. The relationship between worship and ethical action, as encoded in the group's ordering of time, is rearticulated in their methodology of engagement (overaccepting) with the world.

If the UNOH team members spend ordinary time making 'truthful' ethical improvisations, then their ritual times are the space where these 'truths' are rehearsed. Their ritual practices create and uphold the rhetorical, narrative and ideological frameworks that render their missionary work intelligible. But these patterns of action themselves – the giving, listening, hosting, encouraging and comforting that UNOH members undertake daily – also have direct antecedents within the group's Rhythm. The structure of daily Communion, for example, facilitates a rehearsal of the practice of empathetic listening. Matt's posture of quiet appreciation of his Yahtzee counterpart was very much akin to the stance he would adopt while listening to the devotional musings of his fellow team members each morning. A commitment to voluntary poverty leaves its mark on gesture, stance, attitude and even on the very shape of the body. The very act of spending time as a group on a daily basis probably cultivates practices of inclusion, while the sharing of bread and wine during daily Communion ceremonies constitutes a model of hospitality that manifests itself in the Saturday dinner. Bell argues that through practice, through repetitive engagement with ritual, a group generates a form, a scheme, a "way of acting that distinguishes itself from other ways of acting in the very way it does what it does" (Bell, 1997, p. 81). This form becomes a part of the group's cultural repertoire which can be deployed at other times. The rituals of this group are far more than breeding grounds for ideas: they are activities in which forms of action ('truths,' in Hauerwas' model) are envisioned and rehearsed.

Conclusion: two meals, two modes

UNOH's practices in sacred and ordinary times are expressed most clearly not in a policy or theological stance, but through the celebration of two contrasting meals. The meal of Communion, with its anti-aesthetic of found objects and off-the-cuff liturgy, holds a central place in both the daily routines, and the spiritual lives, of the members of UNOH. The Saturday dinner is a melange of hospitality and celebration, and the pinnacle of 'ordinary' time in UNOH's week. The operational contrasts between these two approaches to time could hardly be more stark. While the daily Communion is essentially private, the Saturday dinner is open to friend and stranger alike. The former is loosely structured around a set sequence of ritual happenings (prayer, devotion, quiet contemplation, and Holy Communion), while the latter is an open-ended party whose only constant is that food will be shared. In daily Communion, the members arrange themselves into an inward-facing circle, while the party spreads them throughout the house and yard, sprawling and morphing as interactions unfurl. One takes plain, found food items like bread and cordial and declares these sacred nourishment, the other revolves around vast quantities of carefully-prepared, yet essentially unhealthy, party foods. The first has an officiant who keeps time, dictates the agenda, facilitates discussion and leads rites; the second's tone is set by the mood of the gathered group. One is a sacred ceremony that is open to God-appointed interruptions from the neighbourhood, the other is a worldly celebration that makes space for God-appointed moments of grace, care and ministry.

Though the distinctions between these meals are pronounced, they do not express opposing realities, as in Durkheim's sacred/profane dyad, but rather two expressive modalities of a singular order. Hence, UNOH's programmed times of worship, contemplation and reflection are not so much interruptions to ordinary time, but framing practices which imbue ordinary time with its missionary intentionality. The fact that communal worship times are open only to intrusions which present opportunities to serve, while being kept separate from frivolous forms of participation, is evidence of the community's emphasis on ritual as a pathway to, and supporter of, their mission to help their neighbours in Mt Druitt. The earthy sacred and the hope-filled ordinary are marked by distinctive patterns of behaviour, but contribute to the one social arrangement – one that positions itself continually in relation to the sacred, even in contexts that would seem profane to the casual onlooker. Ordinary time is framed by sacred ritual, and this pattern is reiterated in the improvisational 'overaccepting' which characterises UNOH members' service activities. In the next chapter I analyse this whole, focusing specifically on some of the ways in which UNOH's Rhythm actually contributes to the ethical improvisations which characterise their day-to-day interactions.

8. Ritual Action and Ethical Reflection

Ritual time frames the ordinary, day-to-day activities that make up life in the Urban Neighbours of Hope order. The order's 'Rhythm' provides a set of practices that embellish the ordinary world with special meaning and possibility, designating the group's daily mission activities as times for hope-filled ethical improvisations. In the community's own rhetoric, the Rhythm 'sustains and equips' the members for their missionary task of keeping every interaction open to possibilities of grace and redemption. This chapter examines how specific practices such as communal prayer, private reading, voluntary poverty, sabbaths and sabbaticals actually influence the members' behaviour during their day-to-day lives. Does ritual's relationship to action consist only as a frame within which ordinary time is defined, or are there more direct functional interconnections? How might each of these daily contribute to a UNOH member's ethical improvisations in and around their neighbourhood? Given the dynamic social and ethical landscape of the Bidwill housing estate, what is the relationship between the arising concerns of a neighbourhood and the practices of a local order living and responding to it?

This chapter opens with an examination of the prayers which took place during daily Communion rituals over the course of my field visit. I observed several thematic connections between the topics being discussed prior to daily Communion, and the prayers which were vocalised during prayer time. My analysis suggests that the arrangement of the daily Communion ceremony facilitates the advancement of ethical deliberations upon arising issues. The devotional messages which preceded prayer times arbitrarily introduced communal values which were prayerfully applied to ethical dilemmas. Day by day, ethical dilemmas were reframed in light of different communal values, and these creative syntheses allowed new responses to be improvised by the group. The second part of this chapter analyses how UNOH teams structure their time and apply meaning to the spaces they occupy. It looks at how UNOH members ritually embed a concept of distanced reflection (through Sabbaths, sabbaticals, and accountability structures) into their lives, simultaneously as a means to gain insight into the mission field, and as a structurally-embedded avoidance rite that helps members to cope in their demanding day-to-day living arrangements and commitments. Goffman's delineation between 'front of stage,' 'back stage,' and 'outside the stage as a means of describing modes of identity presentation, clarifies the different uses of home and neighbourhood spaces by UNOH members (Goffman, 1959).

Reflective ritual: prayer as ethical deliberation

Life for a UNOH member involves constant adjustment and accommodation to changes in the neighbourhood, and to changes within the team. Ethical dilemmas of great complexity arise on a daily basis, and the team's daily gatherings for Communion were opportune times for the group to discuss these issues collectively. Each morning of my visit, as the team conversed before and after the daily Communion ceremony, the members discussed and debated a particularly complex development within their community. The team had come into contact with a boy who was in need of accommodation and support. While offering hospitality is a common occurrence in this community, UNOH had not previously been confronted with the complexities presented by a minor.[54] There were questions of obligation and responsibility (the boy's mother had asked the team if they could provide this help) to be weighed up against the team's capacity to provide care, and an assortment of risks associated with his youth that the team had not previously needed to consider. Immediate practical issues around issues such as bedding, storage and supervision were resolved (two of the members decided to share a bedroom so that the boy could have his own space), and perspectives were canvassed about which 'house rules' should be imposed when the boy was visiting. To some extent this situation provoked consideration of some of the team's highest-order philosophical positions: was it possible, or even appropriate, to make helpful interventions in the lives of certain people? Were there situations where it was best for UNOH workers not to intervene, but to refer their neighbours instead to professional and specialist agencies?

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[54] During the course of the team's service activities I interacted with two people who had spent time living in a UNOH household during personal crises.

Reflective discussions of this nature peppered the group’s casual conversations, and it was plain that these ethically challenging scenarios took up a significant amount of the community’s thoughts and energies. Such discussions were never more animated, however, than immediately prior to, and after, the daily Communion ceremony. This was partly due to the fact that the ceremony gathered the whole collective together, but I noticed that the daily Communion ceremony itself contributed much more concretely to deliberations about ethics. The point at which this was most pronounced was during the ceremony’s open prayer time.

Usually, the time of prayer followed the officiant’s sharing of a devotional message, and immediately preceded the partaking of Holy Communion. Typically at the end of their devotional message, the officiant would initiate prayer time by bowing their head and praying aloud themselves. Once the officiant had concluded their own prayer, the group remained with their eyes closed and heads bowed, and anyone else could make a prayer. After a considerable silence indicated that nobody else wished to pray, the officiant would conclude prayer time by distributing the bread and wine of Holy Communion. The prayers themselves often picked up on the threads of the conversations about actions that had taken place prior to the daily Communion. As I analysed my recordings of these gatherings, I noticed significantly different ways in which these ethical dilemmas were characterised before, during, and then after, daily Communions. Prayer was a time in which the group actively deliberated upon the ethical challenges they faced. Discussions which had become gridlocked often moved forward during the group’s time of prayer. In this section I will describe the content of two prayer sessions, as well as the content of the discussions before and after the daily Communion ceremony of which they were part.

Wednesday morning’s prayer time immediately followed a Biblical reflection about a passage in 1 Kings 11 which describes God’s love for King David’s faithfulness, despite David’s many flaws and sins. Lisa P, who was leading the ceremony on this morning, advocated the view that what matters most is that God be “put first” in everything that the team do. The six prayers that followed this discussion are summarised below:

(1.1) Lisa P commenced prayer time thanking God for stories like the one in the Kings passage, "that shape our lives." She gave thanks for the role of David as a lesson, and as someone whose example could be followed.

(1.2) The next person to pray asked God to help the team to truly put God first, not getting too busy "doing stuff that [only] looks like it is." The person prayed that God would help each member to remember that "you're still writing great stories with our lives and our neighbours and help us to hold on to that and putting you first"

(1.3) This prayer thanked God for his endless love, and ask that God help the team embody this love to their neighbours.

(1.4) A request for God to remind them of his presence among them, so they wouldn't forget him amidst the busyness of their everyday lives.

(1.5) This person thanked God for the provision of bunk beds through generous friends and supporters, because they would enable the house to offer hospitality to their neighbours. The person gave thanks for the support UNOH receives from other churches, and the way such support enabled them to do God's work in the neighbourhood. "This is obviously a sign of you working through people, so we thank you for that."

(1.6) Lisa P prayed the final prayer, in which she asked that God would help a young female neighbour to feel welcome and loved as she spent time visiting the girls' house. She asked "That she will know that she is welcome and she aris loved, and that it is because of you that she is loved." She closed her prayer thanking God for the way that he views the world.

All six of these prayers incorporated a strong rhetorical connection with Lisa's devotional message, applying the values at its centre to the going concerns of the chapter. In her first prayer, Lisa characterised the story of King David as a "lesson" that should "shape" the lives of her team members. This signalled the way in which the themes of the message would be utilised in subsequent prayers, as analogues through which the subjects of prayers would be characterised. The notion of valuing a relationship with God above all else dominated all of the subsequent prayers, and in the final two this notion was reframed in terms of present situations within the chapter. In the fifth prayer, the intercessor framed the support his house had received the day prior as an evidence that God was honouring their commitment to him. He wasn't just giving thanks for material provision, he was giving thanks for an evidence of his team's close relationship with God. The sixth prayer mobilised the value of relationships with God above all else as a means through which a neighbour could come to trust the members of the 'girls' house. In conversations prior to the prayer time, Lisa had talked of her hopes that the neighbour would come to trust in her housemates, but in this prayer, this hope was made analogous to the talked-about theme of relationships with God first. The essential truth, according to words of her prayer, was that God's closeness to her would instigate the neighbour's hoped-for trust and happiness in the house. The day-to-day world of the UNOH workers was re-narrated with reference to the values which had been articulated in that day's devotional.

Thursday's prayers followed a reflection from Charles Ringma's devotional guide, *Seize the Day with Deitrich Bonhoeffer*, which challenges its reader to learn to love in ways that are liberating and which encourage growth, not dependence (Ringma, 2000). It focused on a quote from Bonhoeffer's *Life Together*, in which the German theologian says "I must release the other person from every attempt of mine to regulate, coerce and dominate him with my love." Adam, who was leading daily Communion that morning finished his reflection with "so as we reflect on that, let's pray for ourselves and our neighbours" (Bonhoeffer, 1954, pp. 35-36). Five prayers followed:

(2.1) In the first prayer, Adam asked God to supply the UNOH members with wisdom in the ways they related with their neighbours. He asked that the team would gain insights into when to "come close to people" and when to "take a step back" to give people "space to grow."

(2.2) The second prayer asked that God would "help us resist the temptation to use the poor to make ourselves feel better." Asking God "that we won't build dependent relationships, but that we would be friends and neighbours ... We know we will make mistakes, but give us the grace to keep learning."

(2.3) The third prayer was for the boys at the Cobham detention centre (whom some of the team members intended to visit that day). The pray-er asked that the boys would see a "representation of Christ" in the UNOH members, and asked God to "Help us to see the image of you in the boys as well."

(2.4) This prayer was for the boy who might soon be staying at one of the UNOH houses. The person praying asked for wisdom in relating to that family:

"keep us and them wise in relating to each other." He asked that the boy's whole family might attend a Saturday night dinner in the near future, so that a stronger relationship between them and the UNOH team could be forged. He prayed for God to enable the UNOH members to act in ways that empowered the boy, and his family.

(2.5) The final supplication was on behalf of the young woman who was deciding whether to stay in the 'girls' house (the same prayed about in prayer 1.6).The person prayed that the girl would have wisdom to make a good decision and cope will with the consequences of whichever decision she made.

As with the previous day's prayers, the central theme of the devotional was applied to the going concerns of the community, and this synthesis caused these situations to be narrated in a new way. The weekly chaplaincy at the detention centre was narrated as an opportunity for the team to find balance and reciprocity in their relationships with the boys they visited. The situation regarding the potential guest at the 'girls' house was once again contextualised according to the devotional message, and this marked a new way in which this issue had been characterised. Until this point the members had been discussing ways in which they might build trust with the female neighbour, but during this prayer a new angle was voiced – empathy with her own decision-making process.

The issue of the boy potentially coming to stay at a UNOH house was likewise framed in a new way. Immediately after Thursday's Communion time, another discussion took place regarding the boy and his situation. Now, the conversation incorporated the values articulated in the prayer, in this case by emphasising that the family of the boy needed to be wise players in the interaction. Unlike previous discussions, which had revolved around the legal, practical and philosophical ramifications of allowing the boy to stay, the conversation now explored ways in which the team could forge a relationship with the boy's family to ensure that his stay, regardless of whether it turned into a short or lengthy affair, could ultimately benefit his whole family. A discussion that had previously been overly complex and draining to its participants now bristled with energy and excitement. The team discussed for the first time the potential effects the stay could have on the boy's brother, who had appeared jealous of the attention he received. Matt chimed in, "I reckon we should ask the Grandma how we can support her, 'cause she's the one doing a lot of the looking after," and this became the bedrock of a new plan of action (one in which the UNOH team would attempt to support the grandmother to continue to raise her grandchildren) that developed throughout the day (Personal Communication, 29 April, 2010). Through the practice of communal prayer, each of these situations was reframed according to a discourse on values. The prayer time acted as an adjunct to reflective discussion, providing a mechanism for narratives to be reformulated, but more so, for responses to be imagined. It allowed for altogether new trajectories of action and intention to be plotted. Its practice on a daily basis locked it into step with the team's ethical improvisations in the wider world – each prayer time a fresh opportunity to re-narrate situations, and recalibrate planned responses.

Each individual prayer was received with murmured assents of "Amen", "yes, Lord" or the like, and this indicated the communality of the prayer time. While coming from a place of heartfelt reverence, and offering insights into the very personal feelings and thoughts of those who prayed, the structure of the prayer time – the fact that members prayed one at a time, aloud before the group – promoted thematic cohesion. This was a communal practice, and whatever was being achieved was being done so as a group. For this reason, the content of prayers that were uttered tended to veer toward generalised values rather than specific outcomes, and supplicants avoided provoking controversy in the prayers they voiced. The content of the daily devotional message was strategically invoked as an agreeable rhetoric for complicated issues. Even though he held a strong view on the matter, the person praying about the boy who might stay at the UNOH house (2.4) avoided articulating a view on whether or not the boy should be allowed to stay. This was a discussion on which no consensus had yet been reached, so the intercessor instead invoked an applicable part of the morning's devotional message to which everyone could agree, in this case asking that the UNOH team would act in ways that were empowering to the boy and his family. In a similar fashion, both prayers about the potential female house guest (1.6 and 2.5) avoided advocating a particular outcome; instead they recounted the situation in terms of the agreed-upon values of the respective day's devotional message. On Wednesday, the female neighbour's situation was framed in terms of faithfulness and love, and on Thursday as an issue of empowerment. Each day's devotional provided a thematic focus around which prayers could be constructed. If ethics is the process through which competing values are weighed to formulate an agreeable response to a situation, then the utilisation of the daily devotional message plays an important part in prayer's ethical function. The devotional names one or two core values that can be utilised during that day's prayer time, and by doing so, it prevents prayer time from becoming convoluted through the invocation of too many competing values. The selected values comprise a distinct vantage from which issues can be contextualised and creatively reappraised each day, and this is what happened in the situation regarding the local boy. The UNOH team members had prayed for him many times previously, but the Thursday morning's devotional values triggered a new way of looking at the problem, which invigorated the group and enabled them to formulate their response.

Rites that contextualise: Sabbath and sabbatical

At UNOH, the week-long sequence of work and worship, which incorporates daily Communion, study, service activities, team meetings and meals, is strongly punctuated by a singular ritual event: the Sabbath day. Members commence their Sabbath on a Sunday evening, concluding it before bedtime on Monday. Contrary to the contemporary Christian iterations of the Sunday or Sabbath day, no formal religious ceremonies are attended, nor are communal gatherings, formal or informal, prescribed. Sabbath is a time of personal rest, reflection, and perhaps its most striking feature, physical relocation. Rather than staying at home, members all leave their neighbourhood entirely, often staying over at a friend or relative's house for the Sunday evening. The activities they undertake on their Sabbath day are things that would be considered pure leisure: bushwalking, going to the movies, driving in the country, and so on. Daily personal readings and reflections are not prescribed, and its placement on a Monday rather than a Sunday ensures the day's time will not be filled with Church activities.

It could be noted with irony that in the UNOH world, the Sabbath appears to be the least holy day of the week. But by being a time of leisure and self-care, Sabbath offers an inversion to the predominant mode of attentiveness and servitude that characterises the working week. This mirrors the way that a traditional Sabbath of worship and communal celebration might invert a week spent pursuing self-oriented goals. Matt likened Sabbath to "a tolling bell" that "calls you back to rest and reconnect with God." The characteristic that distinguishes UNOH's Sabbath from a weekly routine peppered with opportunities for reflection and worship, is the distance, both physical and psychological, between the Sabbath day and the rest of the week. He suggested that this day of non-participation in sacrament or service was "probably the most important one," in that it set a "rhythm" which governed the rest of the week's activities (Personal Communication, 29 April, 2010). One of the problems of operating a hospitable house, he explained, was that neighbours tended to interrupt you on your day off. By removing themselves from the neighbourhood, the members absolved themselves of their perceived responsibility for any neighbourhood dramas that arose. UNOH's Common Practices document suggests that leaving the neighbourhood "reminds" members that "we are not slaves, addicted, worn down or driven by our work," to instead "trust God to work beyond and without us during this time" (Urban Neighbours of Hope, c2006)

Stepping back from the daily to a weekly view reveals that the daily ebb and flow of worship and work is reflected upon on a weekly basis by the Sabbath day. If daily Communion rehearses reflective contemplation upon arising day-to-day issues in the ordinary world, then weekly sabbath contextualises this action-reflection dyad into a whole, prompting reflection upon the collected experience of missionary life. The UNOH calendar focuses distance-based reflection upon much larger blocks of time, with programmed annual retreats in which the order's membership gather to meditate, strategise and worship. Sabbaticals factor in reflection upon even larger periods of time. Upon the conclusion of a commitment period, a member takes three months away from their neighbourhood, and this enables them to contemplate their commitment to the order once more with the clarity of an exterior vantage.[55]

Physical relocation imbues the entire missionary experience of the UNOH member with a singular intentionality, by mediating the difference between being 'on duty' and 'on site', and being 'off duty' and 'off site.' By placing the spatial distance between reflection and action, the sabbaths and sabbaticals denote that time 'on site' is for missionary activity, from which one leaves to rest and recuperate. It cultivates the notion that insights into the complexities of ministry are best gained from the objectivity of an external perspective. There are echoes, here, of the "mountaintop" experience of the Hillsong conference, which renders the world into a "text" which can be "read" (Chapter 4). This is reminiscent of correspondents, missionaries or anthropologists, who come home on furlough to retain links to home culture and family, and to contemplate their next sortie into the field. If the rest of the rhythm generates *habitus*, that is, practical and cultural normativity, then Sabbaths and sabbaticals place these at arm's length, so that they can be scrutinised.

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[55] Sabbaticals originate in Leviticus 25, which is itself an anamnesis of God's rest as described in Genesis 2:2-3.

Such a programmed absence can also be interpreted as an extreme form of what has been described as an "avoidance rite," in which actors pay deference to one another in order to preserve the purity of an "ideal sphere" (Trevino, 2003, p. 188). Sabbaticals formalise programmed periods of avoidance which balance the extended periods of cooperation and cohabitation (and their attending presentation rituals) which UNOH demands of its membership. Rites of avoidance actively contribute to the generation of an aspect of *habitus* itself, by modelling the behaviour required during time off. In the previous chapter I discussed the two ritual meals that paradigmatically embodied the modes of action correlating to sacred and ordinary time in the order. Through participation in these meals, members rehearse the full diversity of the actions required of them when they are 'on duty,' whether interacting publicly with neighbours or their UNOH teammates. The Sabbath and sabbaticals embed into weeks, years and decades a practice of rehearsing how one is meant to behave in the private spheres of their life. Much like the daily Communion and Saturday dinners, Sabbaths and Sabbaticals are obligatory elements of a member's timetable, and cause seemingly conflicting modes of action – self care and wilful distance from the community's needs contrasting against diligent and selfless community service – to be caught up into a broader whole.

Performing autonomy and collectivity

The lived dialectic between being 'on duty' and 'off duty' is expressed elsewhere in UNOH's daily life, in ways other than through spatial separation. During daily life the members perform 'interaction rituals' of presentation and avoidance, through which they seek by turns to acknowledge and include one another, but also to demonstrate respect for privacy and autonomy.

Within the house space, I noticed firm delineations between public and private spaces. Members stayed out of each others' bedrooms and carefully avoided breaching each others' privacy. I witnessed a member affixing a note onto the bedroom door of another member, opting not to interrupt that person's privacy by knocking. Adam alluded to this protected privacy when he noted that, since he rarely emerged from his bedroom before Communion time, his housemates could not know whether he had maintained his discipline of morning devotional reading, or slept in (Personal Communication, 28 April, 2010). According to him, daily readings and reflection, while mandatory, fit within the private sphere of his life, and this was a sphere protected from the scrutiny of the household and team. Compulsory supervision and mentorship relationships provided avenues through which members could be held to account for their private actions, but I observed that members refrained from asking one another about such things. Some of these private lifestyle commitments are also difficult to circumvent because of the ways that the daily schedule has been structured. Matt described the linkage between devotional readings and daily Communions as being "so built in to what we're doing that you kinda have to break your routine a bit to not do it"(Personal Communication, 28 April, 2010). He noted also that the commitment to live below the poverty line is difficult to break because members' incomes are managed by head office. One would need to seek out additional income if they wished to break this part of their covenant. "So it's not like we can just cheat," quipped Matt. Even in situations where it was within a member's power to avoid certain responsibilities, these two members agreed that such breaches were private matters, not to be interfered with by fellow members. They gave the example of chapter leaders Jon and Lisa, who had recently fostered a baby. During the initial months of this experience, it was widely known that they had found it difficult to keep up with their devotional readings, but, according to Matt and Adam, everyone in the team understood and accepted this, pretending not to notice. Adam added that there was usually a reason why people were not keeping up with their commitments, and this truism itself seems to justify the avoidance practices that safeguard a sense of the autonomy and privacy of individuals.

A subtle yet arbitrary ordering of accountabilities in the order dictates specific spheres of each members' lives, each hosting differing kinds of relationships and behaviours, and each mediated through different ritual events (Figure 15). Each member has a 'supervision' relationship with another member of the same chapter. The usual pattern for supervision relationships is that a supervisor will be a longer serving member of the same chapter of the same sex, and who will live in a different house. Members described the supervision meeting as an arena for discussion about personal growth and issues of a more private nature. The pairing of members across houses creates an arena for confidential discussion about household issues. As well as these monthly supervision meetings, each member met regularly with a 'mentor' – a spiritual and personal guide outside of UNOH, with whom they could explore their spiritual growth, as well as garner feedback on their life and relationships from outside the order. Matt and Adam agreed that the structures of supervision and mentorship had the useful effect of removing discussions about private issues from team meetings, and from general discussion around the house. Once again, they utilise the notion of contemplation from a distance in order to bring clarity, and to demarcate differing spheres of life, each with attendant behavioural norms.

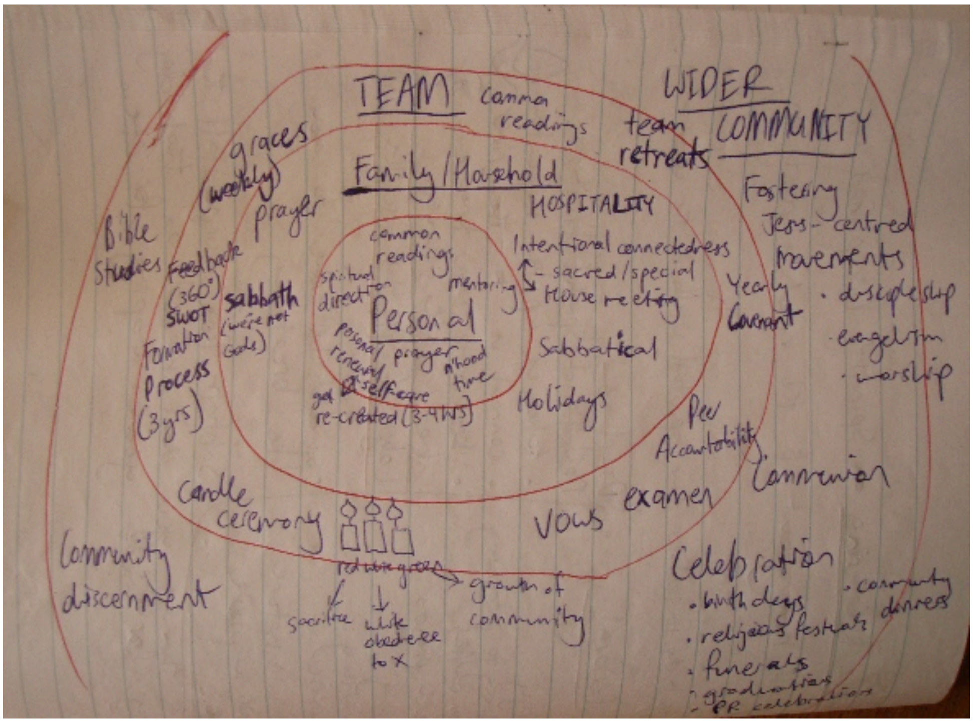
TEAM
common readings
team retreats
WIDER COMMUNITY
graces (weekly)
Family/Household
prayer
HOSPITALITY
Bible Studies
Feedback (360°) SWOT
Formation Process (3yrs)
sabbath (we're not Gods)
common readings
spiritual direction
mentoring
Personal
personal prayer
renewal
selfcare
get re-created (3-4WS)
p'hood time
Intentional connectedness
- sacred/special House meeting
Sabbatical
Holidays
Fostering Jesus-centred movements
· discipleship
· evangelism
· worship
Yearly Covenant
Peer Accountability
Communion
examen
Vows
Candle ceremony
growth of community
sacrifice
white obedience to X
Community discernment
Celebration
· birthdays
· religious festivals
· funerals
· graduations
· community dinners

Figure 15: As they see it - concentric spheres of identity and the ritual practices that accompany them. This diagram was drawn by Matt at a 2009 team retreat

Concurrent with their careful demarcation of a private sphere for each individual, members were cognisant of their obligations to maintain a positive collective experience. At team meetings the members regularly "take the temperature" of the team, discussing how the team, the households and the neighbourhood, is going in general (Personal Communication, 28 April, 2010). Katie recounted a recent discussion of this nature where it was decided that team gatherings had become too serious in recent times, and the team decided that they would hold their next team meeting at a local café so as to lighten the tone of gatherings (Personal Communication, 28 April, 2010). The unscripted nature of daily Communions and its roster of officiants ensures that each member regularly has an opportunity to share the message that they feel contributes constructively to the group's mission and culture. Through this mechanism, each individual can contribute to discussions pertaining to the collective's identity and practice.

In much the same way that the practice of spatial relocation gives individuals a more balanced perspective about their missionary work, the community's ritually-embedded practices of avoidance and presentation bring balance to interpersonal relationships in the order. The Sabbath/Sabbatical relocations and the performances of presentation and avoidance have functions that connect rituals and ethics with the construction and maintenance of identity. In the next chapter I will further examine the ways in which the UNOH members construct identity as they move through each sphere of their life – in the missionfield, in the household and fully outside the missionary context. I will revisit the home sphere ('back stage,' in Goffman's dramaturgical schema) to describe also the ways in which they rehearse and present what sociologist Sherryl Kleinmann calls a "moral identity," an identity imbued with moral significance, through their ritual gatherings and during daily life in the UNOH households (1996, p. 5).

9. Rehearsing an ethical identity

Sabbaths and sabbaticals, personal and public spaces help UNOH teams to define different frames of time to play host to specified patterns of action, such as active mission and distanced reflection. This chapter examines these frames of time and space as sites of performance. It extends the application of Goffman's dramaturgical schema to show how the UNOH workers synthesize and switch between contrasting performances of identity as they move about their homes ("back stage"), their neighbourhoods ("front of stage"), and the world beyond their missionfield ("outside the stage"), by utilising his concept of "front" (Goffman, 1959, p. 80). Rehearsed ways of acting and speaking address conflicts between the modes of action pertaining to different sites of performance, and activate a rhetoric of an empowered, activist poverty. The Bidwill members actively presented and systematically (often ritually) maintained their identification with poverty as it manifested itself in their neighbourhood. But identity transmission does not end with UNOH members actively managing the impressions of others. The team members actively rehearse their identification with poverty in the presence of one another, attempting to pattern their lives on aspects of Christ's incarnation. These performances invest UNOH members' activities with moral and theological significance, supplying the meaning necessary to maintain their missionary activities.

The final sections of this chapter concern the evolution of UNOH's ritual practices, focusing on adaptation, embellishment and contextualisation of the Rhythm. Matters of practicality dictate that aspects of the Rhythm be reworked to suit new locations: the divide between chapters in Australian public housing estates on the one hand, and slums in Thailand on the other, necessitate certain translations of practice. Even the Australian chapters make changes to accommodate local considerations. The Rhythm has its own history of change, and this seems to track with social trends in the membership: changes have been made at times when the Rhythm has come to be seen as being demandingly oppressive, and also too 'weak' to maintain the commitment of its performers. Being such a small community, UNOH's practices vary according to the personalities and preferences of the members, and marked contrasts between chapters are attributed to the values of the various chapter leaders. Individuals also modify rituals, improvising small amendments to prescribed rites in order to make them more effective. This chapter ends with a case study on the development of UNOH's commitment wristbands, which epitomise the community's attempts to engineer ritual solutions to social problems.

The contrasting selves of a UNOH worker

Lisa O alludes to a disparity between the social circumstances of UNOH workers and their neighbours: "Though we choose voluntary poverty, we ourselves will never be poor. Bear in mind the fact that we have a choice in the matter sets us apart" (Personal Communication, 27 April, 2010). Despite their austere commitment to live on the Henderson Poverty Line in public housing estates, UNOH members are set apart by education, class background, financial literacy, and perhaps most of all by the fact that their life of poverty is voluntary (Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, 2012).[56] The plainest indicator of this divide is the fact that despite the tireless commitment to community building by UNOH chapters around the world, no neighbour has ever taken on membership of the order (Personal Communication, 27 April, 2010). In truth, there is an enormous gap in education and worldview that separates UNOH's members from their neighbours, and the order remains populated predominantly by people from middle class backgrounds. Nonetheless, members actively identify with their neighbours and make considerable efforts to attain insider status in the communities to which they minister. The contrast between UNOH members' 'on duty' and 'off duty' modes of action illustrates the dialectical nature of identity in their daily life. Each member is required to fluidly transition between differing identities as they move about their homes, their neighbourhoods and beyond.

A poem entitled "Why Urban Neighbours of Hope," which is presented on the community's website under the heading "UNOH's Ethos," describes poverty as both a site of ascetic dedication ("we search for fresh ways to love God … from the front line of a world mired in poverty."), and a blight to be eradicated ("We surrender all to Jesus … to fuel the transformation the world and our neighbourhoods require."). This duality presents a challenge to UNOH members as they seek simultaneously to fit in with, but also to bring change to a neighbourhood's culture. UNOH founder Ashley Barker resolves this identity conflict by constructing a hybrid identity that is materially poor, but spiritually rich. In *Surrender All*, he describes how he and his team have dealt with their unusual position in their community (westerners who voluntarily live and work in Bangkok's Klong Toey slum), by carefully presenting an activist identity:

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[56] In UNOH rhetoric, the voluntary limiting of income demonstrates "solidarity and sustainability in our lifestyle amongst the poor" (Urban Neighbours of Hope, c. 2006).

> One of the things I do is help get groups together to respond to neighbourhood issues. "Hey, I know you have been around here a while. Are you interested in being a part of a group?" While it might not be totally understood, at least neighbours can place me and not get suspicious or worried about what I am doing choosing to live in a neighbourhood that most do not have a choice to live in. By being community activists we can be placed, given permission to seek *shalom* and not freak out the neighbours! (Barker, 2005, p. 81)

Barker repeats the idea that UNOH workers need to be 'placed' in the minds of their neighbours, indicating the value he places upon generating favourable impressions which will supercede the sometimes glaring otherness of UNOH workers in a community. As relationships between neighbours and UNOH members build, Barker adds, neighbours often come to identify the activities that take members away from their neighbourhood, including "team development, partnerships with others responding to poverty beyond our immediate neighbourhood, outside work, speaking, writing, song-writing, political activities, newsletters, work with supporters and churches and study and skills training" as their "work" with UNOH (p.81). He implies that this sits well with neighbours, as it maintains the favourable notion that UNOH members spend spare time with them; that neighbourhood relationships are organic friendships rather than effortful 'work' on the part of UNOH members. Barker's goal is to clearly and proactively communicate the role of the missionary as a community enabler, not a coloniser, or in his words, "washing people's feet rather than stepping on them" (p. 80).

These presentations of identity and intention constitute what Goffman called "impression management" and are achieved through carefully rehearsed performance (Goffman, 1959, p. 80). When UNOH members are 'outside' the stage, visiting their family and supporters, they present much like any missionary: one who has solidarity with their host culture, yet who retains an intrinsic connection to their home culture. The weekly emails from Jon O to his supporters communicate amusing and harrowing stories from Mt Druitt, constantly affirming his own position as an ordinary person in extra-ordinary situations. The narratives often emphasise the more hair-raising aspects of the missionfield which are contrasted against the more normative suburban contexts of his readers. When front of stage, moving about in their host neighbourhood, however, UNOH members broadcast an impression of themselves as local activists who are concerned about, but also part of, their neighbourhood. Associations with the worker's home culture, and with the missionary organisation itself, are actively jettisoned, for they quickly remind that the worker is not from here. Thus there can at times be an air of the covert which surrounds the community engagement activities of UNOH members. Adam explained that when answering questions about his "job" to neighbours, he preferred to describe his household as "a group of friends who have committed to make ourselves available to our neighbours," rather than introducing the UNOH organisation by name (Personal Communication 28 April, 2010). He believed the casual description minimised the risk of being associated with ministers or community workers, who might be motivated by professional, rather than neighbourly, impulses. I noticed that Adam, Jon, and Lisa P all used Facebook to connect with local friends and neighbours, but made scant references to the UNOH organisation on their profile pages. The lack of identifying materials such as uniforms, name badges and signage around their homes contributes to the 'front of stage' performances of UNOH workers. The group's members applied great effort in managing the impressions of others, actively seeking to moderate the ways their presence and work were interpreted by their neighbours. To continue Goffman's terminology, a "front" is presented, which consists of both "setting," incorporating the arrangement of furniture and décor, and "personal front," which concerns the appearance and manner of the UNOH workers (Goffman, 1959, p. 22). In the context of UNOH's Bidwill chapter, which uses its three houses as sites of hospitality ("open homes" in their parlance (Barker, 2005, pp. 255-6)), their homes are important extensions of the front they maintain. I will describe the ways they use their homes to present an impression first.

The home front

Six months after my research visit, I received an email from Matt and Katie, who were spearheading a new UNOH chapter in Mt Druitt central. The email outlined their search for a house, stating: "The other thing that we are avoiding is all the new houses within the area, as we prioritize having a place where our current neighbours will feel at home too when they come for visits." UNOH members' homes are set pieces on the stage upon which their identity performances are acted out. This emphasis on the front that the home itself presented was evident during my research visit also. All three of the chapter's houses broadcast the same message when viewed from the street, by being indistinguishable from the houses belonging to their neighbours. But while they each had poorly-maintained front yards, all three had surprisingly well-cultivated back yards. From the street, the Tongariro house's lawn was overgrown and there were discarded furniture items on its porch. The back yard, however, told a different story: an ordered permaculture garden and chicken run filled the space, contrasting against the untended kikuyu patches of neighbouring back yards. The girl's house had a similarly untended front yard, which doubled as a parking bay for guests, while its back yard was neatly mown with a large, verdant vegetable garden to one side. The third house's front yard was similarly indistinguishable from other frontages on street, but had a large shed to the rear which was used for parties and team meetings. On first apprehension, one would assume with each house that its inhabitants lived in similar conditions to their neighbours, but upon entering each home a story of hospitality and possibility presented itself. To some extent the front yard/back yard disparity simply reflects environmental factors: in an area with high property crime it may simply not be feasible to place furniture in the front yard. But Matt and Katie's email indicates that architectural elements figure within the order's impression management.

The spaces within the homes balance their dual utilities as living spaces for the UNOH members and as sites of hospitality. The members had arranged furniture in their living rooms into open circular configurations, so that they could easily accommodate large gatherings, whether daily Communions or Saturday dinners. In the Tongariro house, the loungeroom was hardly rearranged during the duration of my visit, appearing roughly the same during one usage as another. Objects such as the tri-coloured candles, which can be seen in Figure 14 on the coffee table, have specific ceremonial use, but were lit one evening simply to provide ambience as guests ate their dinner.[57] Decor and furnishings approximated the style and value of those of their neighbours, most having been collected from opportunity shops, or the side of the road. With the exception, perhaps, of a bookshelf crammed with theological texts, the second hand furniture and bric-a-brac that decorated the house sat comfortably amidst the neighbourhood's lower-class milieu. There were, however, some noteworthy omissions from the house's neighbourly guise. The team members of the Tongariro house had decided against purchasing gaming consoles and pay television, despite the prevalence of both in many houses on their street. Each of these, they felt, were overused in their neighbourhood and could at times substitute for more sociable forms of entertainment. The housemates of the Tongariro street house had made the proactive decision to promote alternatives to these activities, such as board games and outdoor activities, and encouraged these when children from the neighbourhood visited. In this way, an ethical improvisation had been codified through management of their setting. By eliminating gaming consoles and pay television entirely, the team subtly altered the space's operational capacity, without changing its overall appearance. To the visitor, the house presented the impression that it was just like other houses in the street. But its layout invited hopeful improvisations, offering opportunities to take on activities which aligned with UNOH's value set.

This gentle approach to advocacy of behavioural change permeated other parts of the UNOH houses. Matt shared with me, for example, his ambition to ensure the fridge was constantly stocked with fresh fruit and vegetables which could be offered to visitors in order to subtly promote healthier snacking options than the junk food most commonly consumed in the neighbourhood. The UNOH covenant mobilises a similar rationale when it bans its members from alcohol, drugs and gambling, stating that "because the nature of addiction means many in our neighbourhoods shouldn't consume any… we abstain completely in solidarity with them and in modelling a viable alternative" (Barker, 2005, p. 249).[58] These forms of advocacy are strategically underemphasised in the front presented by UNOH households. As with gaming consoles, alcohol, drugs and junk foods are subtly removed from the picture, with alternatives quietly offered in their place. Despite these significant contrasts between the order's households and those of its neighbours, the impression they strive to give is one of normality within the neighbourhood. Divergences from the neighbourly norm are presented as personal preferences, rather than collective moral decisions. Having excised these options from the frame, the UNOH members and their guests must improvise alternatives to normative ways of eating, socialising and playing.

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[57] UNOH members participate in a Candle Lighting ceremony at yearly team retreats, and to celebrate other milestones (inductions, commemorations etc). The white candle represents Christ's light and presence, the red suffering, hardship and Christ's sacrificial blood, and the green the imperative to 'go' and serve Christ (Personal Communication, 29 April 2010, and (Barker, 2005, p. 234-39)). There is a spoken liturgy which accompanies and directs the ceremony.

Strategies of exclusion and emphasis also characterise the manner and appearance of UNOH members themselves. This was highlighted to me when I asked Lisa P whether members' commitment to voluntary poverty was enforced or policed in any way by the collective. I had noted that a person living on the poverty line could probably still afford the occasional luxury item if they saved wisely. She explained that members were required to discuss significant intended purchases with their team. She cited a recent example of a couple who had wanted to purchase expensive and fashionable mobile phones for themselves, but were directed by their team members to purchase less 'showy' items. In this instance, the team had decided that the phones carried symbolic associations with wealth and middle-class consumption, and so the purchases were vetoed for reasons of their symbolic, rather than economic, values. The whole point of voluntary poverty, Lisa explained, was for UNOH members to experience similar living conditions to their neighbours, even if their individual priorities (the avoidance of alcohol and gambling, for example) enabled them to afford differences in lifestyle. This had resulted in certain decisions being made that were inconsistent with the logic of voluntary poverty, but consistent with the semiotics of neighbourly solidarity. For example, pet dogs, which two of the UNOH households owned, were acceptable, despite being significantly more expensive to keep than the aforementioned mobile phones (Personal Communication, 29 April, 2010). Such complex negotiations of appearance indicate the level of priority the group applied to their presentation of a front. Team members' participating in service activities consciously minimised the impression that they were members of a missionary order. Because of the sheer variety of community projects the team supports, the team splits up on weekdays. Many of these activities only have one or two UNOH members in attendance, and this enables the members to present simply as concerned locals, rather than as the collective they are. UNOH's lack of a uniform or ceremonial garb further aids its members in shedding the impression of organisational affiliation.[59] Architecture and dress are features of the front presented by UNOH, but ultimately it is the members themselves who do the real work of impression management.

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[58] A similar ban on "innapropriate romantic/sexual relationships," is outlined in the same document, though there is no further explanation of exactly which behaviours would draw opprobrium.

Taking on the 'view from below'

UNOH's practices translate an ethical framework into action. At the heart of this process combining ritual, ethics, identity and enactment, is rehearsal. Before something can be performed it must be formed, before embodiment comes a body. This section looks at the way UNOH members, through rehearsal, become selves that are capable of embodying their vision of incarnational ministry to the poor.

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[59] In the time since my main research visit, however, UNOH members have begun wearing special wristbands which symbolise their membership and commitment. These wristbands are ostensibly aimed at communicating identity, but the intended recipients of this particular front are other UNOH members. The wristbands are understated, and devoid of features which might communicate an organisational affiliation (Figure 18). Within the life of a UNOH chapter, however, these wristbands articulate the gravity of members' commitment and bond of common purpose. I examine the evolution of this emerging practice later in this chapter.

UNOH's training resources create an ideal of ministry that is 'incarnational,' upholding heroes of the faith who abandoned wealth to minister to poor communities. Barker writes:

> To be incarnational, like [Father] Damien, we must try to enter the worlds of neighbourhoods facing poverty and injustice. To only talk about the gospel of God's reign domesticates it into another ideology. The reign of God must be lived out as a neighbour if it is to catch on in the hearts and lives of the poor. (2005, p. 86)

The incarnation is posited not only as a missiological proposition, but as a performative template: just as Christ entered the sin-riven world intent on redeeming it, so must contemporary Christians enter and inhabit the dark places that they want to see transformed. Barker speaks of learning to see the "view from below" – the perspective obtained when one "sub-merges" to inhabit the world of the downtrodden (2005, pp. 85-91). Another regularly used phrase in the community is 'downward mobility,' an almost satirical inversion of the aspirations of the middle-class (pp. 93-103). As the reference to Father Damien suggests, their valorisation of saints ranging from St Francis of Assisi to Dietrich Bonhoeffer adds to the teleological certitude of their quest for downward mobility.[60] Within UNOH's rhetoric, the 'view from below' stands as an evidence of proper incarnational ministry; in the words of Barker, it "speaks of being the body of Christ incarnate" (2005, p. 91). Ostensibly, the 'view from below' helps UNOH teams to collectively interpret – and respond to – the situations that arise in their neighbourhoods. But its principal end is to embody Christ's own 'downward mobility,' as expressed through the incarnation. The 'view from below,' and its expression through 'downward mobility,' are aspects of the members' performed representations of Christ. I will show how performances of this template 'back stage' enable UNOH members to rehearse the ways of seeing, ways of speaking and ways of interacting in resonse to the 'view from below.' They improvise from the same starting points, toward the same ends. It is clear that UNOH members' service activities are characterised by improvised responses based on something more visceral than a shared value set or rhetoric alone. Rather, through repetition, the incarnational template is embodied, and injected into each member's sense of self.

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[60] Barker writes about the inspiration of Francis of Assisi in *Surrender All* (pp. 137 – 140). UNOH's 2009 devotional readings were taken from Charles Ringma's *Seize the Day with Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Ringma, 2009).

On the Thursday evening after dinner, the Tongariro housemates discussed the soon-approaching point in the year when Jarrod, their live-in 'Submerge' student, would have the opportunity to become an apprentice, or decide to see out his remaining months without making a commitment to UNOH and its covenant. Discussion turned to musings about what it must be like to experience the second semester of the year as a student who had not taken on the UNOH apprenticeship. Jarrod's housemates discussed whether the experience might cause 'Submerge' students to feel as if they had missed out on something, or to experience a drop in the amount of attention and training they received. One of the people in the conversation wondered aloud if it were possible that her team might inadvertently make someone in this situation feel as if they had let UNOH down. They reminisced about their own experiences of their formational year, speculating about what it must be like to be in the shoes of a Submerge student in Bidwill at the present time. They resolved to write a letter to the Submerge coordinator, and to Barker, requesting that the subject be discussed at the next national gathering. They also discussed drafting a document that they imagined could be given to new Submerge interns prior to signing up, which would outline what they might expect of their year. The housemates felt it needed to be articulated, for example, that: "you will be living in a close community, and if that community is having a difficult year, you will too" (Personal Communication, April 30, 2009). Another suggestion they discussed was that participants needed to be pre-warned that they would be expected to be flexible in regards to living arrangements as their host team juggled the needs of their neighbours and their interns. This was an especially salient point given the experience of their own intern, who had vacated his room several times to accommodate neighbours in crisis.

The following night, Jarrod and I were watching television together. During an ad break, a commercial for a tabloid-style current affairs program used the catchphrase, “Real families. Real events,” to promote a story about neighbourhood violence in a middle-class suburb. Jarrod was incensed. “What’s a ‘real’ family?” he asked, “Is there such a thing as a fake family?” He was appalled at the way the story portrayed the (probably publicly-housed) neighbours as ‘human scum’. “This stuff is what the middle class use to express their fear of the poor,” Jarrod fulminated, “What they mean is, ‘not in my neighbourhood.’” His response caught me off guard, as I had not even picked up the inferences about class distinction in the advertisement. I asked him to further explain his reaction and he did so. In his mind, the story was based on the assumption that “This sort of behaviour comes from somewhere else – not from where we, the pure, the decent, live” (Personal Communication, May 1, 2010). In the short time he had been a part of the UNOH household, Jarrod had taken on the enhanced sensitivity to the politics of class and power modelled by members of the Mt Druitt chapter. He now had an insider’s perspective into the ways that the poor are marginalised by media rhetoric, and a personal affiliation with those on the wrong side of the power dynamic. Perhaps Jarrod’s fury reproduced the righteous anger of Jesus when confronting the money changers in the Temple. It was more than an articulation of theory; it embodied the emotion and intentionality of the incarnational template. The members’ discussion about Jarrod’s student experience, and his own reaction to the television advertisement, caught me by surprise when they occurred. The UNOH members were adept at identifying inherent injustices and would quickly and confidently advocate for victims. They spoke not only as people who cared about issues affecting the poor, but in solidarity with them and ownership of those issues, for they themselves knew what it was like to be poor, and identified strongly with their neighbours.

These two episodes epitomise a pattern I observed throughout my time with the order, whereby members imaginatively identified and empathised with whoever was on the margins of a given story. Often it began with a person wondering something aloud, with other members joining in to flesh out the scenario, reimagining it from the point of view of the poor.[61] These experiences triggered strong emotions in the members: they enacted a fierce solidarity with the poor, deep concern for the wellbeing of sufferers and fury at injustice. Whenever I witnessed these conversations, they happened only in the company of other UNOH members: they were 'back stage' performances intended for exhibition within the team only. Why would a group with such an activist agenda corral these bursts of revolutionary fervour into the private sphere? My contention is that these performative outbursts imbue the community's chosen self-identity with ethical weight. They are rehearsals of UNOH's identification with the poor, which also vindicate the community's vision of a Christianity that privileges ministry to the poor.

The incarnational template is rearticulated in the community's membership process, as well as their favoured model of community engagement. Beyond the vow of poverty itself, the structure of the order's pathway to membership is a process which mirrors its members' transformation through their enactment of 'downward mobility'. The journey into membership, involves successive periods of time as a student, apprentice, then novice, and forms an experiential analogue to the process of 'sub-merging,' which involves phases of presence, partnership, discipleship, worship, and maintenance (Personal Communication, 28 April, 2010). A new chapter expends its early years establishing a presence in a community, gradually developing trust and rapport. As the chapter's members become more highly-regarded by neighbours and local organisations, partnerships are formed. As the chapter gradually gains authority and the capacity to exercise leadership in the neighbourhood, they can progress into the tasks of making disciples of Christ locally, founding worshipping communities, and ultimately maintaining these communities. The process dictates a pathway for the transformation of their identity among their neighbours from outsiders to trusted insiders, and eventually to respected community activists. In the process it mirrors the ways of seeing, speaking and interacting first articulated in the community's 'back stage' incarnational performances. Members' private performances of the incarnational template express their ever-adjusting public identity and their chapter's evolving status within the neighbourhood.

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[61] A further example of the same practice was the discussions about providing accommodation for the local boy (Chapter 8).

Making performances moral

The incarnational template idealises the order's emphasis on ministry in the margins. It imbues their everyday ethical improvisations with moral weight. Kleinmann describes 'moral identity' as:

> an identity that people invest with moral significance; our belief in ourselves as good people depends on whether we believe our actions and reactions are consistent with that identity. By this definition any identity that testifies to a person's good character can be a moral identity, such as mother, Christian, breadwinner or feminist. (Kleinmann, 1996, p. 5)

If rendered using Goffman's dramaturgical classification of the personal front, a moral identity might perhaps be described as what happens back stage, when the performer rehearses in front of a mirror. It is a front that is performed to oneself, and to those in the same 'cast' as they prepare for an upcoming performance: in short, a rehearsal. When a UNOH member instigates an empathetic discussion framed around a 'view from below,' they perform their affiliation with poverty, signalling this core value to their fellow members. Most important of all, however, is that by making such performances, and by watching the similar performances of others, the members practise the identity they wish to inhabit in the wider world.

Kleinmann's work on moral identities has been reinforced by Natalia Deeb-Sossa whose analysis also focuses on a group that uses a moral identity involving help for "the neediest of the needy" (Deeb-Sossa, 2007). She observed the strategies employed by the stretched staff of a maternal care clinic to cope with their low wages despite an ever-increasing demand for their services. She found that "gendered, racialized, and nationalist frames shaped the way the health care providers crafted a superior self" (p. 757). One such strategy involved employing racial shorthands that helped them to prioritise the most needy clients first. In their case, the health care providers focussed their attention on assisting the "sweet," often undocumented Latina migrants, over the “difficult” black American women. Another strategy involved defining their work as a feminist mission, as this enabled them to frame their work as sisterly, maternal and revolutionary (pp. 757 - 768). The UNOH teams utilise similar strategies – most notably around class frames – to imbue their own identity with ethical value. While they carry themselves with humility, they hold their model of incarnational Christianity to be superior to other expressions of the faith. They privilege their focus on the poor by likening it to the incarnation of Christ, and then actively frame their activities as revolutionary acts intended to liberate neighbours from poverty.[62]

Much like Deeb-Sossa’s health care providers, the UNOH workers allow their work among marginalised people groups to imbue their identity with a revolutionary quality, which validates their own lack of status and financial reward. These strategies of overlaying an ethical imperative onto an identity set in place a feedback loop between identity formation and expression, so that identity rehearsals ‘back-stage’ assist an activist-neighbour identity to be enacted when ‘on stage’ in the neighbourhood. Thus, seemingly clashing identity presentations, such as the ‘on duty’ and ‘off duty’ fronts presented by UNOH workers, ultimately are rationalised as expressions of a singular moral vision. The revolutionary meanings ascribed to incarnational ministry imbue every dimension of the UNOH experience with ethical significance, and this provides the hope which inspires ethical improvisations in and around the neighbourhood. The question that remains is whether such ‘feedback’ influences the ritual practices of UNOH members and teams.

Ritual dynamism

My analysis of the ritual practices and patterns of the Urban Neighbours of Hope has focused on how their ritual practices are rehearsals for ethical actions. Within this discussion, the rituals themselves have featured as relatively stable entities embedded within the order’s culture. This section focuses on the dynamics of the rituals, examining the ways in which UNOH's Rhythm has been modified, adapted and recontextualised, in response to change. In some instances, members of this community tinker with their ritual practices as they attempt to transform, in Bourdieu's words, "the past effect into an expected outcome" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 53). Bourdieu refused to rule out the possibility that humans might be capable of wielding rites as social technologies; this section explores the UNOH community's experimentation with the social efficacies of their rituals.

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[62] Barker’s recent treatise *Make Poverty Personal* is his most explicit exposition of a poverty-oriented Christianity (Barker, 2009).

In late 2011 Matt and Katie left the Bidwill chapter to establish a new chapter in central Mt Druitt. I visited and interviewed them shortly afterwards. As we discussed the ramifications of the new team's establishment, Matt outlined a series of innovations which he had been tasked to prepare, in order to equip his new team to grow healthily alongside the neighbouring Bidwill team, and more broadly within UNOH. "There's a recognition that we've adapted a new way of growing and also that we need a new bunch of practices to make sure that the DNA stuff doesn't get watered down," he explained (Personal Communication, 20 September, 2011). Ideas under consideration included setting up regular informal meetings between members of his own team and members of the Bidwill team, and programming special sabbatical visits where his team members would spend time living and participating with other teams.[63] In an earlier interview, Katie told me that the Rhythm is motivated by the question of, "What can we put into our life to help us to remember why we are here and keep the big picture in mind and to be healthy people?" and it seems this logic was underpinning their approach to the formation of a new chapter (Personal Communication, 29 April, 2010). "Change has to be part of it," Matt had said during this earlier interview, "I think a lot of things are up for negotiation. Some things aren't, I think Sabbath and stuff like that probably isn't so much." He then considered this statement, then added: "Although, I think that the Bangkok team ... Often it's not life-giving for them to have a Sabbath [away from the community], so they just have it on a Sunday and have a normal kind of day ... So they maybe have the Sabbath lifestyle, but not necessarily the 24 hours [away from home]" (Personal Communication, 29 April, 2010). Discussions like these clued me in to a fundamental characteristic of UNOH's Rhythm – perhaps the most important when it comes to the relationship between ritual and ethics – which is that the Rhythm itself is subject to continual revision and adaptation throughout the order. Life in UNOH involves rigorous adherence to a ritual structure, but it also involves individual and collective adaptations of the Rhythm with the intention of improving its efficacy.

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[63] This idea reiterates the concept of reflection from a distance (Chapter 8). In this situation, the idea was that by relocating into another team, the participant could gain clarity upon their own.

The members I asked could not articulate an official procedure by which changes to the Rhythm could be proposed and debated; however their policy documents state that during annual national gatherings, the "members council," which consists of all members who have completed their induction and novitiate phases, "sign off on major policy and direction decisions" (Personal Communication, 29 April, 2010). Anecdotally, it seems that such shifts tend to be instigated by conversations with and among the chapter leaders, and tend to be settled through consensus-based processes rather than votes wherever possible. "The good thing about UNOH," Katie suggested, "is that if things aren't working well, if people are responsible enough to bring things up, then usually the leadership is good enough to listen" (Personal Communication, 20 September, 2011).

The most common anecdote I encountered when I asked about changes to the Rhythm was a story about when the "Rhythm of Life" began to be called the "Prison of Life." At that time, the wording of the UNOH covenant had been adjusted to stipulate specific times of each day that were to be designated for community service and reflection at home. Members who were around during that era described the stifling consequences of the new rule, which included households foregoing dinner because they did not want to break the rules by driving to the shops. Reports of these unintended consequences evidently made their way around the order, and at a subsequent annual gathering, the covenant's wording was changed to its current prescription, which states simply that members must allocate one third of each weekday and weekend to community service, and another "sacred third" in worship, contemplation or self-development (Barker, 2005, p. 240). Stories of this period were regularly recounted to me during my research and followup visits, suggesting that the ‘prison of life’ experience might have taken on the status of a foundational myth which informs the culture of the order.

In my second followup visit in 2011, Lisa P explained the context around which the ‘prison’ covenant had been implemented, and her explanation offered insight into the nature of ritual change at UNOH. According to her, at the time, UNOH was based entirely in neighbourhoods around Melbourne, and in these early days many of its members were bi-vocational, working part time to support their ministry. As a consequence, it was common for members to be living in a house, but ‘not be there’ for large stretches of the week. Those who worked several afternoon shifts each week were barely known to their neighbours and this hindered their ministry. In an effort to improve the order’s ministry, the leaders arrived at the notion of prioritising presence in the neighbourhood in the afternoons, and hence the “prison” version of the covenant with designated times for each activity was brought into existence. What becomes clear when this context is considered, is that both the creation of the ‘prison of life,’ and its subsequent renouncement, were attempts to enhance the material effectiveness of UNOH’s Rhythm by changing it.

Commitment wristbands

Some time after my fieldwork, I interviewed Adam on one of his Sabbath Mondays. “Did I tell you about the wristbands?” he asked, showing me the beaded, tri-coloured band that encircled his wrist (Personal Communication, 6 August, 2010). He described the genesis of this new UNOH custom. In the year that preceded the introduction of the bracelets, a series of members left UNOH during their vowed commitment periods. While in some of these instances the leaving members were responding to illness or unforeseeable circumstances, others had seemingly walked away from their commitments without articulating a reason. Consequently, there had been a growing sense among the membership that their vows were getting “less strong,” were losing their binding power (Personal Communication, 6 August, 2010). In response, one of the members in the Bangkok chapter had suggested that members could wear symbolic bracelets, which were then made by Klong Toey Handcrafts, the jewellery-making social enterprise that the same chapter supported. Wearing the wristband was a way to represent one’s commitment to the UNOH covenant. They had been distributed among the Bidwill chapter members at a recent team meeting. Each had tied the band around the wrist of another member, and they had worn them constantly since. It was "a bit of a ceremony," although he hastily added, "but not too much."

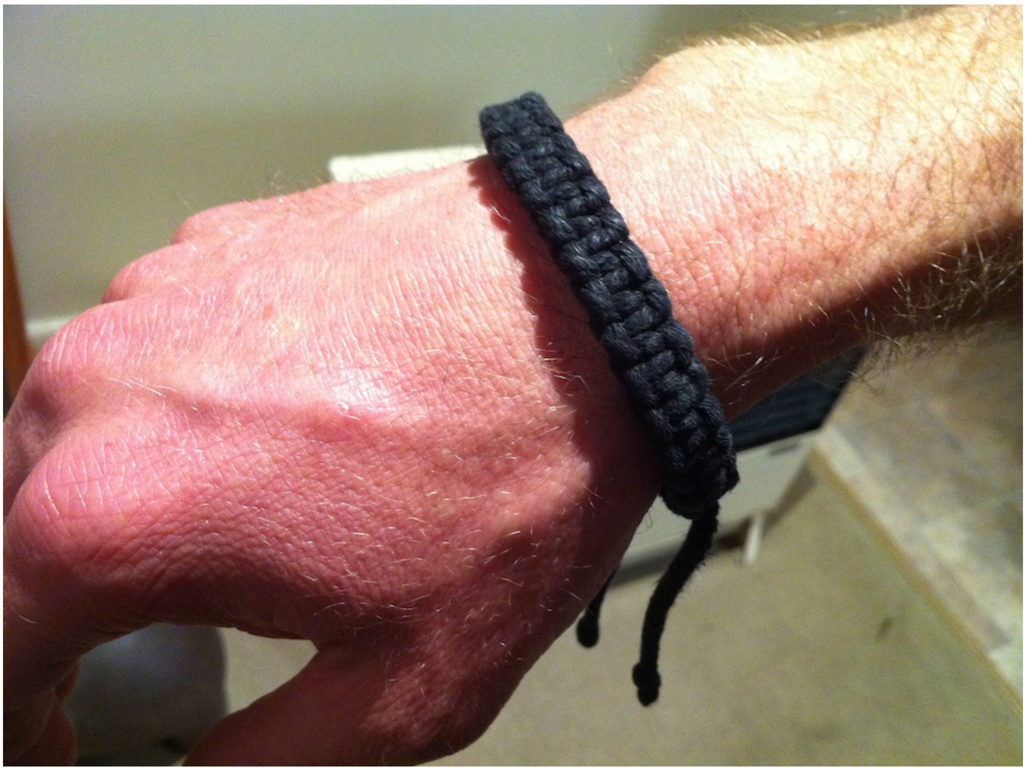

Figure 16: UNOH's third iteration of its identity wristband

As we discussed the function of the wristband, Adam implied a delicate balance in the culture of the order, between the individual's commitment to their community, and the community's commitment to respecting the individual's freedom to change. The wristband was a physical reminder to each member of the vow they had made, and was to be worn for the duration of their commitment to UNOH. During sabbaticals in between vow periods, members would remove the wristband, and would actively choose to put it back on when their vows were renewed for a further period. Later in our conversation, Adam recalled the good feeling he often felt when he saw another member's wristband: it was something that drew them together, reminding each other of the common experience they were living. He also reminisced about a "special moment" for the chapter recently, when two students had made the commitment to apprentice with the Bidwill chapter, and the members had gathered around them to tie on new wristbands.

During subsequent interactions with members I paid close attention to the development of this new tradition. The introduction of the ceremonial bracelets gave rise to new challenges as well as new benefits. Practically speaking, bracelets from the first batch were too thin, and regularly snapped. A second iteration, also manufactured by Klong Toey Handcrafts, was much thicker, but this presented new problems. It was affixed with a knot which made the bracelet difficult to remove; the thicker design tended to get wet in the shower and stay uncomfortably sodden for hours afterwards. The first two versions of the bracelet were adorned by red, green and white coloured beads, representing three symbolic 'lights' UNOH uses during initiation ceremonies (Barker, 2005, pp. 234-238). But these beads stained the wrists of their wearers, eventually losing their colour entirely. The Klong Toey Handcraft collective was unable to solve the issue of running dye, so the third iteration of the bracelet sacrificed this element of symbolism in favour of practicality. A third version is also easier to remove, but this creates a further problem: members forget to put it back on after showering, and so it loses its significance and ubiquity. At my last group interview with the Bidwill team in October 2011, only one of the seven people I interacted with was wearing their bracelet. It remains to be seen how UNOH will resolve the practical issues associated with their bracelets. Perhaps a future iteration of the bracelet's design will solve them, or perhaps they will be abandoned, and a different ritual solution to the problem of weakening vows will need to be sought. Perhaps the bracelets will be saved if a further ritual solution comes into play: for example, if putting on the bracelet were somehow worked into the proceedings of the daily Communion ceremony, their ubiquity and relevance would be restored.

UNOH's implementation of commitment wristbands indicates that the collective sought a ritual solution to their weakening membership vows, rather than a procedural one. There is already a section of the covenant which addresses leaving the order prior to completion of a commitment period, but this text was not modified in response to the spate of broken vows which Adam described. Rather, the community chose to adjust their ritual practices as a means of addressing the root causes of the phenomenon. This demonstrates a level of cognisance of ritual's efficacy at undertaking social functions. Their commitment to the three revisions (and counting) of the wristband tradition indicates that the community considers ritual to be worth investing in, and worth getting right. They know, whether tacitly or intuitively, that it is worth the effort required to keep trying to solve the practical problems currently attending their wristbands. Something as simple as tying on a piece of cord may solve their membership issues, but crucially, they know that for it to work it will need to be the right kind of cord, tied in the right kind of way in the right kind of context. If they can solve these practical issues, tap into functioning symbolic fields, and integrate the wristbands into existing practices, then a powerful new dimension to their social world might come into being.

Patently dynamic change

The need for adaptation as a means to the enduring survival of the order is an oft-recurring theme when discussions turn to UNOH's history and future. Members I have spoken to identify different 'generations' of participants within UNOH, with each successive generation of members bringing new changes to the shape of the order (Personal Communication, 24 October, 2011). I witnessed a conversation between the Bidwill members where they discussed the challenge posed by younger interns who find it difficult to committ to the present membership sequence of four and then seven year commitment periods. One member predicted that the number of interns choosing to take novitiate vows would rapidly decrease in coming years if UNOH did not revisit its commitment requirements. Another raised the possibility that a societal backlash against transience might emerge in coming years. They raised the possibility that UNOH's challenging periods of commitment could help. In my opinion, the most significant element of this conversation is that it was being had at all. The members discussing this had themselves taken vows within the present regime of commitment periods, and yet could still casually contemplate the notion that these might beneficially be changed or removed. I asked more specifically what would happen if a new team felt that a major element of the Rhythm was not beneficial to them. Would the organisation's leadership be able to accommodate such a change? A member replied, "They'd be open to having that conversation," while those around him nodded (Personal Communication, 24 October, 2011).

Social groups have been making rituals for about as long as social groups have existed (Rappaport, 1999, p. 31). In UNOH, rituals are instituted or modified consciously, with social outcomes in mind. Hobsbawm and Ranger's *The Invention of Tradition* provide historical accounts of political and religious figures instituting new traditions with the same strategic intent. Though they qualify this with the observation that “conscious invention succeeded mainly in proportion to its success in broadcasting on a wavelength to which the public was ready to tune in” (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983, p. 263). What is happening in the UNOH community steps beyond this, for the continual re-evaluations of their Rhythm provokes a method of engagement which is distinctive. The UNOH community is not only modifying traditions, but engineering a new kind of tradition that places elasticity at its core. The community adheres to a strict ritual order with reverence and devotion, while continually planning and implementing its optimisation. Adherents of this traditional order are required not only to repeat, but to improvise, its rituals. They treat the Rhythm simultaneously as a continuation of the organisation’s tradition, and as an improvisory performance which must continually be calibrated to improve their ability to achieve their missionary goals. While there is nothing new in the notion that rituals and traditions evolve it is exciting to consider that this community exhibits some awareness of the dynamic nature of their Rhythm.

UNOH’s treatment of ritual as a social technology may be in part a consequence of the youth of the tradition. Every religious tradition innovates and negotiates their ritual order before they ‘settle’ on what will one day become their ‘way’ (Lang, 1997, p. 414). Unlike the traditional monastic communities that it emulates, UNOH was founded in a rapidly-evolving societal context. It is impossible to predict which elements of UNOH’s Rhythm will need to continue to adapt in this coming century. The order’s inception within such a rapidly-evolving context will probably mean that it must continue to rank adaptation high on its list of priorities. Its ‘way’ may not be something that ever ‘settles,’ if it wishes to remain relevant, and ethically-responsive, to the challenges of the future.

10. Community Rehearsals

The drama of transformation

I opened this thesis with anecdotes of Johannesburg's police and of Paderborn's Augustinian nuns, because these stories demonstrate some of the commonalities and contrasts that attend the study of ritual. They illustrate the breadth of interpretive angles that a nuanced study of ritual practice and performance should consider. This is because rituals are performed entities: when they occur in a communal setting, the dynamics of power, interaction, discourse and subjectivity all come into play. To Johannesburg police, the performative actions taken upon seeing a knife change dramatically if it also happens that they are *seen* to see a knife (Steinberg, 2008, p. 36). The slightest modification to the scenario's unfolding imputes new obligations and opportunities. It is pointless, and often dangerous, to stick to the script; rather one must improvise as the drama unfolds. The nuns' reinvigorated approach to prayer and praise reveals the complexity ritual adaptation. A 'new' way of experiencing their prayers enters the community through the rediscovery of an old text, which is sanctioned by the more senior members (Lang, 1997, pp. 37 - 39). The resulting innovation marks both a departure from tradition and a return to it, an adaptation of their 'way' springing from the nuns' commitment to its founding principles.

These examples highlight the inherently dramatic nature of ritual, and the role ritual performances and practices play in mediating and making narrative, context and worldview. Central to this study has been an emphasis on drama, both in terms of the performance ethnography employed as its research methodology, and the dramaturgical framework that organises the theoretical taxonomies and analogies employed. Performance continues to be a vital rubric in the study of ritual, occupying the points of intersections between text and event, convention and improvisation, power and resistance. Focusing on the performative activities of a social body, their rituals and ritualisations, revealed culture and contingency in their immediacy and possibility. My analyses of the Hillsong Conference and Urban Neighbours of Hope reveals many of the ways in which rituals inform and make intelligible the ethical impulses, values and imperatives that religious groups might embody in the real world.

The Hillsong conference's opening spectacle wove several grand narratives together, imbuing the event with immense historical and cosmic significance. The movement of a bright divine light – first through outer space, then penetrating a broken city, and finally exploding into the arena itself – initiated a pattern of transforming the representative into the actual. A processional of musicians and choir members facilitated the crowd's own transition from spectators to participants, in a sequence that morphed from demonstration into worship proper. Shifts in lighting caused the musicians and choir to be subsumed into the broader crowd, incorporating their demonstrations of worship actions into collective embodiment. The final sequence introduced the song "With Everything," through which the newly-constituted worshipping crowd rehearsed their collective role. The 'broken city' film defined the principal discursive feature of the conference's ethical framework: a categorical separation between 'Church' and 'world.'

The architecture of the ritual space solidifies the analogic separation of 'Church' and 'world,' projecting the monumentality of the arena – sensual and enveloping – in contrast to the black and white film imagery – colourless and contained by a screen – of the secular world beyond. This is yet another situation whereby the Conference experience actualises something which is representative, be it a symbol, a concept, or a traditional worship form, into a patently sensual experience. The relationship between 'world' and 'Church' is not dialectical, but concentric; Hillsong envisages a future in which God draws the world completely into the ever-growing Church universe. An extension of this logic renders Hillsong the ultimate expression of church, beneath which sit all other Christian churches and denominations. It manufactures its own ubiquity by reworking traditional Christian tropes and narratives into Hillsong-centric versions of themselves. These reworked concepts rehearse an ethical code in which imperatives such as witness, hospitality, discipleship and global outreach conjure specific activities that always feed back into the Hillsong organisation. These ethical activities express a hierophanic agenda for the church's people, providing actions through which they can draw aspects of their worldly existence into the overarching universe of the Church.

The Call to Repentance ritual enacts a dramatic crisis stemming from Hillsong's categorical separation between 'Church' and 'world.' The crowd is divided according to subcategories that indicate varying levels of contamination from the world: people who have lost their faith, who never had any to begin with, and who yearn for more of it. Intensifying rhetoric escalates the experience of anxiety and separation for participants, who must categorise themselves within the rite's schema, and this fuels a momentum of responding bodies (whether standing up, raising hands or coming to the front). Communal prayers and a unified arrangement of bodies reconstitute the crowd into a whole again, and this is accompanied by the crowd's own apprehension of its cohesion and singular identity. While the rite generally reaffirms the social order, the events of the final night showed how the Call to Repentance can also host challenges to the event's structural norms.

The Call to Repentance inculcates every participant in a set of bodily actions that indicate penitence, submission and celebrative reaffirmation of a shared identity. Its repetition constitutes a rehearsal of *habitus*. By participating in the Call to Repentance, conference attendees rearticulate the founding values that underpin their ethical world. It is more than learning by rote, because with each successive rehearsal participants literally experience the chasm that separates 'Church' and 'world.' They take on a perspective of the 'world' as being riven with conflict, guilt, and isolation, contrasting against the celebratory, affirming and collective experience of life as part of the gathered 'Church.' Consequently, when a Hillsong participant encounters a sense of their sinfulness in their everyday life, associations with the first stage of the Call to Repentance (escalation, recognition of contamination, isolation) are mimetically invoked. In response, they can invoke the action-set embodied in the second part of the Call to Repentance: confessing to another Christian, or bowing and praying penitently in private. Following the rehearsed pattern of the Call to Repentance leads the participant to an excited return to the 'Church' to worship with other Christians as a means to resolve the crisis.

The Conference's final sermon and Call to Repentance challenged Hillsong's ritual structure, and the analogic separation of 'Church' and 'world' embedded within it. Nevertheless, the rebellious features of Giglio's sermon – particularly his shunning of the Call to Repentence – ultimately failed because the crowd lacked experience of alternatives to the 'Church'-'world' dichotomy. Given the lack of an alternate ‘frame’ to direct the rebellion, Giglio ultimately could not lead the crowd through an alternate set of actions to conclude the ceremony without first performing the Call to Repentance rite. This power-play was influential in two ways. Firstly, it prevented the senior pastor from promoting the following year’s event, preventing an invitation ‘back to the buffet’ in line with Giglio’s wish. Secondly, Giglio’s affront to the status quo entered the collective memories of the conference crowd, and this memory might inform future attempts at altering the ritual order.

The Conference’s intricately-scripted closing spectacle revisited the song, scripture and scenography of the opening sequence. It presented a descent of the divine-presence light, and incorporated the crowd into what appeared to be a spontaneous eruption of improvised worship actions. The impression of spontaneity was facilitated by the darkness of the worship space, which concealed the choir’s role in its instigation. Consequently, Hillsong’s worship leaders could only influence the actions of the crowd aurally, but nonetheless the pre-rehearsed constraints on worship contained the ensuing melee. The 2009 closing re-enacted a narrative, favoured by Hillsong’s hierarchy, describing the crowd spontaneously wresting control from the event’s organisers. This narrative asserts that its participants are experiencing unprecedented glory, assuring compliance. Hillsong’s recent attempt to re-perform (rehearse) this story might indicate that spontaneous free worship could become permanently embedded in the conference’s ritual structure in time.

Hillsong actively manages history, pairing excision with hyperbole to create a culture endlessly looking forward to the next big event, and continually forgetting the last one. The ‘social body’ of the crowd does more than experience an event: it rearticulates a tradition (Bell, 1992, p. 203). The crowd exerts considerable force on the tradition through their continuing patronage. Each participant negotiates their compliance with the ritual order, and the combination of these negotiations constitutes the crowd’s collective embodiment of that order. While the organisers can instigate actions, only the social body can execute its role as the congregation that performs them. These performance outcomes culminate in the emergent tradition.

Where Hillsong’s ethical code correlates with a cosmology divided along the fault line of ‘Church’ and ‘world,’ The Urban Neighbours of Hope structure theirs along patterning of missiological intent: a ‘muddy’ sacred and a hope-filled ordinary, 'on duty' and 'off-duty,' 'front of stage,' 'back stage' and 'outside' of the stage. The first pairing, representing the predominant modalities of time, comes with a corresponding set of attitudes and actions. The muddy sacred encompasses the group's communal ritual practices, and is characterised by participation that radiates an anti-aesthetic (Foster, 1983). Outside of these ritual happenings is the hope-filled ordinary, which makes up the dominant portion of a UNOH member's routine. Ordinary times are filled with activities (ranging from volunteer activities to Saturday dinners) characterised by improvised actions intentioned to free neighbours from poverty. The ritual activities of the muddy sacred 'frame' ordinary time, imputing it with special significance and intentionality. Because this team's rituals take place in the ordinary spaces of their homes, they use their bodies to transition from one mode to the other. Rostered officiants, inward-facing bodily arrangements and simple illocutions designate sacred time. The contrast between these modes, and their attendant behavioural norms, is sometimes highlighted by behavioural cues, such as humour and vulgarity.

Different elements of UNOH's Rhythm translate ethical values into ordered human actions. The combination of daily reflections and collective prayer in the daily Communion ceremony helps the team to find solutions to complicated ethical challenges. Arbitrary devotional passages allocate value sets that are applied to ethical issues through spoken prayers. The intertextual cohesion of the prayers themselves promotes constructive synthesis of viewpoints on an issue. Conversations after prayer times revealed that new strategies for dealing with issues had emerged. Sabbaths and sabbaticals each contextualise periods of service, designating 'on duty' and 'off duty' time periods with singular intentionality. By stepping away from the *habitus* of life in the neighbourhood, they facilitate reflection from a distance. Schemes of presentation and avoidance govern members' use of home spaces, and dictate appropriate channels for different topics of discussion. These generate codes of behaviour specific to the different 'stages' upon which members perform, and help members to differentiate their personal identity from that of the collective.

UNOH members navigate a complex range of interrelated identities and intentionalities, which are contingent upon their location and the activity being undertaken. They present a differing 'front' depending on whether they are moving about their neighbourhood ('on stage'), their homes ('back stage'), or locations away from their neighbourhood ('outside' the stage). Their homes are also used as means to communicate identity information. Front yards communicate that UNOH houses are no different from those of their neighbours. Inside the homes, healthy options such as good food are promoted, while disapproved activities such as video games and alcohol are subtly excised. Private performances of a rhetoric about the 'view from below,' create a 'moral identity' – a self that is capable of performing across the patchwork of 'stages' and 'duties' required by life in UNOH. By performing and re-performing this trope to themselves when 'back stage,' the members embody "downward mobility," which expresses a theology of incarnation that is central to UNOH's mission. This process of identity-transformation is encapsulated in models of staged community engagement ('sub-merging'), and the process of becoming a member of the order itself.

UNOH members adapt and adjust elements of their Rhythm in order to alter the social effects they produce. Individuals modify rituals, embellishing aspects of the Rhythm to suit their skills, habits and personalities. UNOH chapters contextualise rituals in order to make them 'work' more effectively in their own environment. Sometimes the UNOH organisation makes adjustments to the Rhythm, aiming to achieve collectively wished-for ends. The evolution of Commitment wristbands encapsulates the order's attempts to solve a social problem (the diminishing efficacy of commitment vows) with a ritual innovation. UNOH are creating a tradition that deems adaptation to be a core value.

Rehearsing virtue, improvising ritual

The idea of a tradition built upon the principle that its own foundations must continually move, seems oxymoronic. It flies in the face of contemporary understandings of the place of ritual in a social world. Girard, for example, states that conscious efforts to understand and adapt ritual processes would reduce their efficacy: "our penetration and demystification of the system necessarily coincides with the disintegration of that system" (1977, p. 24). Yet in the case of UNOH, where by all accounts, continual tinkering with the ritual order incrementally improves its efficacies, Girard's pronouncement seems off the mark. Hillsong's co-option of Christian tropes in their conference's opening and closing spectacles might evidence a similar reality. In these cases, the demystified symbolic field retains its power, provided those who participate in the changed ritual can retain their intentionality within it. As long as the modified ritual field produces the hierophany its participants expect, the system remains robust.

The communal settings of many religious rituals place each actor in dynamic interaction with others, and with the schemes embodied by the ritual itself. Bell proposes that ritual participants often shape an empowering personal narrative which imbues their participation with special significance. By doing so each participant's personal story is affected by the narratives encased within the rite (Bell, 1992, p. 206). The processes of embodiment and objectification are party not only to "consent, resistance and negotiated appropriation" on an individual level, but also to interpersonal interaction and conflict as participants adjust their involvement depending upon the nature of the "very specific people, groups, places and events" involved in the ritual gathering (pp. 207, 208). The very dynamics that enable ritual settings to project social structures upon their participants also "set the limits" of their efficacy, for in order to maintain an illusion of consensus, a ritual setting must orchestrate the sensibilities of consenting participation (pp. 210-11). Balance and imbalance, structure and antistructure, work themselves out in the multifarious experiences of the gathered ritual participants. This feature of ritual is particularly applicable to the fieldwork sites examined in this thesis, because they both to varying degrees shun time-honoured liturgical templates in favour of improvised expressions of devotion in ritual settings. How these traditions adapt to a changing world, therefore, will be significantly influenced by the ways their participants individually and collectively negotiate their compliance with the ritual order.

Bell's focus on consent and resistance situates these oppositional impulses in relation to the power structures embedded in a ritual order. My own analysis of both Hillsong and UNOH places these in a different context, examining the effects of power-plays on the evolution of the ritual itself. Schechner discusses Eugenio Barba's observations regarding power-plays as a pattern through which the medium – the ritual itself – evolves as its players negotiate their participation in a rite (Barba & Savarese, 1991, pp. 44, 176; Schechner, 1993, p.40). Like Bell and Barba, Schechner isolates the body as the site where stabilising and destabilising forces are brought to bear on each other. An introduced 'extra' component necessarily causes the whole system to require rebalancing. Perhaps, as Bell asserts, some players will modify their internal stance to the rite without perceptibly changing their participation within it (Bell, p. 208). But as resistance increases, it eventually spills into the social body's collected performance of the ritual. In this way the combination of all power relationships, internal, inter-personal, and structural, culminate in each unique performance of a ritual event. As every entertainer knows, no two shows are ever the same. Whether on the scale of Hillsong or of UNOH, each ritual event parses its sociopolitical agenda through the social body, which rearticulates its schemes, orderings of power, and identity narratives in terms of its own combination of resistance and appropriation (p. 209). A ritualizing community is one which continually reiterates (or 'substantiates,' to use Rappaport's word (1999, pp. 125, 141)) the values, statutes and stories that underpin the ethical processes it uses to interact with the wider world.

The previous chapter's concluding focus on conscious ritual adaptation in UNOH described the motivation behind changes to the community's rituals. If this community uses a creative rationale to fuel ritual development, there are likely be other iterations of this kind of approach in other Christian groups in present-day Australia. These could help 'flesh out' the features and limits of consciously adaptive ritual changes. I will outline a small handful of examples of ethically-instrumental religious rituals. Reflecting the subject matter of this research project, these examples are all situated in Australia, and within Christian, particularly Protestant, subcultures.

Miriam Pepper of Uniting Earth Web invokes the notion that new practices precede new beliefs (See p. 50) in a 2009 essay: "The truth of my experience is that a great deal of the work of re-imagination comes through practices themselves" (Pepper, 2009).[64] She describes the experiential tilt that has taken place since she began cycling to worship:

> Slowly but surely, cycling has changed me, in ways that I would never have thought when I first took it up. I am more attuned to the

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[64] Uniting Earth Web is a network organised by the Uniting Churches of NSW and ACT of worship and ecological concern.

> weather and to the changing seasons. My world has become smaller, distance-wise, but more filled in with detail and diversity. When I ride the ten kilometres home from church on a Sunday night, in the winter dark, I process the sermon, I repeat songs and prayers, and my body exhilarates as the cold air rushes past my warm body. I have some of my most mystical moments, a sense of being drawn out beyond myself and of connecting with God and with nature, when I am on a bike. (Pepper, 2009)

By injecting her method of transportation to and from church with meaning (she sees cycling to worship as an act of environmental stewardship), Pepper's experience of worship itself becomes something new. The transport journey becomes a meaning-laden extension of the church service's ritual time-frame into the active, solitary, meditative state induced by the cycling. Ostensibly there is also a transference of the ethical significance of each activity to the other – the esteemed practices of cycling (as an expression of commitment to sustainability) and worship (as an expression of commitment to Christianity) enhance each other. Through their combined practice, Christianity and sustainability become synonymous with each other, and for the practiser become part of the one moral identity.

Continuing the theme, a group called the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change (ARRCC) advocates for religious communities to adopt a 'meat free day' each week. Like many of the ritual innovations described in this thesis, this proposal articulates twenty-first-century values (environmental stewardship) through the recovery of foundational practices (traditional fast days, in particular Orthodox meat fasts). They invoke the earliest iterations of Eucharist ritual, which they point out "were red meat free… traditional interpretations of Jesus' death affirm that, because of him, animal sacrifice is no longer necessary" (2008 - 2013). Thus, a template is presented through which contemporary churches might undertake such consciously ethical modifications to their rituals as a means of honouring first principles. The organisation provides implementation guides that include theological justifications and endorsements from prominent religious figures, ostensibly to assist people to promote the ritual modifications to the members and leaders of their own communities.

Another recent fusion of environmental action and religious devotion is the celebration of 'earth hour' events at churches. The Earth Hour concept began in 2007 and requires participants to symbolically switch off their lights for a designated one-hour period. I am aware of three Australian churches that have celebrated earth hour in the form of a candlelit vigil featuring prayers, songs and homilies about earth care. As with the projects of the ARRCC, the emergent ritual event employs classical forms of worship (candlelit masses, prayer vigils) to express a contemporary (in this case wholly secular) event. One Canadian church has published an earth hour liturgy, ripe with language connecting the ritual's momentary performance with ongoing ethical action:

> May we leave this place empowered to live into this hour. May we continue to live simply and walk gently on this earth. And now let us go and live the message we dare to proclaim. Amen. (Anglican Diocese of Niagara, 2009)

The liturgy itself declares the intention of the event: "May this simple gesture of turning out our lights be a moment of inspiration for ourselves, for our community, and for our world" (2009). It is a pointedly ethical ritual intervention, designed to modify the behaviours and beliefs of its participants, and of the Anglican tradition whose liturgical forms and language it co-opts.

One final example of patently ethical adaptations of ritual orders expresses a moral vision that is social and political, rather than environmental. In 2013 the Australian Uniting Church's global relief agency launched a new program, entitled *Empowering Lives through Leadership*, aimed at combating the endemic problem of rape in Pacific Island countries. The program aims to fund and support Pacific Islander women through theological training, ordination and ministry. Its brochure argues that the way to tackle the cultural antipathy to women in these societies is by increasing the numbers of female clergy:

> Across the Pacific, faith plays a major role in every aspect of life. 95% of the population in the Solomon Islands are Christian; yet domestic violence across the Pacific remains the highest anywhere in the world. The Church will play a fundamental role in this transformation. (Uniting World, 2012)

The stated end goal of this program is not simply to bring about gender parity in clergy numbers, however, but to bring about a transformation of culture across the Pacific Islands, and reduce instances of rape, by supporting more women into one of the few positions of influence available to them (according to the brochure, less than 3% of leadership positions in the Pacific Islands are held by women). The *Transforming Lives through Leadership* program, therefore, represents a strategic intervention into the sphere of religious ritual with an end goal of addressing an ethical problem. It seeks to insert women into positions of moral authority in local communities, expecting that they will be able and likely to advocate better treatment of women. To do this, it exploits a socially-acceptable exception to the norm of masculine authority – female ministers – to directly counteract masculine hegemony. This vision of women in leadership over Pacific Island congregations exemplifies "the ability of ritualization to create social bodies in the image of relationships of power" (Bell, 1992, p. 207).

These examples of ritual adaptations reveal a variety of methods through which contemporary Christians are trying to alter their ritual practices. In the *Transforming Lives through Leadership* program, a relief and development agency directs scholarships and support structures to alter the gender distribution of a region's clergy, while in the case of Meat Free days an external organization provides resources to aid lay people in orchestrating cultural change through symbolic acts and events in their community. The example of Earth Hour illustrates some churches spontaneously transforming a secular activity into a religious vigil, and on the other side of the world, inspiring the production of liturgical resources by diocesan committees attempting to prioritise new theological foci. Such a broad array of options for cultural input is symptomatic of the decline of the formerly normative hierarchical organization of the major Christian denominations. Hobsbawm and Ranger propose this change has occurred in tandem with experimentation with democracy over the past two centuries, and that this change is exemplified by the replacement of the cathedral with the stadium:

> In line with the exhaustion of the old language of public symbolism, the new settings for such public ritual were to stress simplicity and monumentality rather than the allegorical decoration of the nineteenth-century Ringstrasse in Vienna or the Victor Emmanuel monument in Rome. (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983, p. 305)

These new ritual spaces accommodate new schemes for disseminating knowledge and organizing power relationships, and new forms of participation.

The collapse of hierarchically-sanctioned symbolic fields beneath the multitudinous interpretative possibilities (and power dynamics) present in a mass of equals, has opened up new ritual possibilities (Turner, 1990, p. 8). Is the next step a corporatised reversal, where the crowd, like any other mass market, comes to dictate the options presented to them, even against the directives of traditional hierarchies?

The democratisation of ritual experience

Another indication of what we might call the democratisation of religious experience in present-day Australia is the transference of church membership from the institutional denominations to independent congregations.[65] Australian Bishop and Church historian Tom Frame argues that the decline of the mainline institutions erodes the clout of religious identities:

> I do believe that institutional churches with a global membership, an expansive polity and an inclusive outlook, rather than established churches or "independent" congregations like Sydney's Hillsong Church, can contribute to a broader vision of human destiny and foster community cohesion. The capacity of institutional churches to make these kinds of contributions is a purely practical consideration but it is no less important for being so. (Frame, 2006, p. 93)

Frame's enquiry defines the relationship of the church to the state principally through traditional (legislative and judicial) points of contact. Perhaps if he considered the role that the independent congregations and Hillsong play in shaping a more broadly-defined subset of culture, he would arrive at a different conclusion. He is not the only one who fails to recognize the scale and importance of the transference from institutional to independent worship. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has itself failed to identify the shift. It measures religious affiliation, but not participation, and this distorts the participatory significance of these growing denominations. Taken on their own, the ABS figures situate 'Pentecostal' and 'Other' church affiliation on the lower end of the church table: a combined four percent of the populace in 2001 versus twenty one and twenty seven percent for the Anglican and Catholic affiliates (2006, p. 376). The National Church Life Survey (NCLS), of the same year surveyed 80% of Australia churchgoers, and captured attendance data which dramatically alters the picture painted by the ABS figures (Bellamy, 2004). It found that only five percent of those who identify as Anglicans, and 15 percent of those who identify as Catholics, attend church once per month or more, while for Pentecostal denominations the percentage sits at seventy three (p. 10). The NCLS calculated estimates of weekly church attendance by denomination, and these figures reveal the significant slice of the churchgoing pie that the Pentecostal and independent churches constitute: a wedge four fifths as large as that presently occupied by the Anglicans (p. 10).[66] These independent and Pentecostal churches not only maintain high attendance levels, but are expanding numerically at a rapid pace. According to the ABS data, the number of people identifying with the Pentecostal and Other categories rose by 11.4 and 18.4 percent respectively in the period 1996 – 2001 alone (2006, p. 376). As the institutional clout of the mainline denominations diminish, the evangelical churches constitute an ever-increasing subset of Australia's devotional landscape. Whether these emerging expressions of the Christian faith can reverse the broader trend of declining belief remains to be seen, but it is true that these churches seem to be the most successful at fostering, in Frame's words, "community cohesion" and a "vision of human destiny."

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[65] The National Church Life Survey website reports in its "fast facts" page on Church Growth and decline (for period 1996 – 2001): "Declines in mainstream Anglican and Protestant denominations (Lutheran, Presbyterian and Uniting) appear to have been offset by increases in attendance across the remaining Protestant and Pentecostal denominations. The Catholic Church declined by 13%." Kaldor et. al. *Build My Church* (1999, pp. 21 - 24) derives the same conclusion based on a broader dataset spanning the second half of the Twentieth Century.

Dean M. Kelley's study on the rise of conservative evangelicalism suggests that, contrary to Frame's assertion, evangelical churches use their detachment from tradition to encourage cohesion and transmit a strong sense of identity and destiny to their participants (1977). According to Kelley, conservative Protestant churches have grown because of their willingness to dictate clear behavioural codes. Hillsong's transmission of traditional Christian imperatives into the prioritising of church attendance exemplifies Kelley's notion of a strong behavioural code. Kelley argues that what Frame calls the 'expansive polity' of mainline denominations contributes to their "diminishing demands" upon local churchgoers, and that this is precisely the cause of collapsing social cohesion and shared vision for the world (p. 99). An evangelical preacher, on the other hand, does not need to parse their exhortations and admonishments through dense canons of doctrine and history, and for this reason can address a contemporary issue with unqualified directness. Movements such as Hillsong, which aren't tied so closely to doctrinal or customary stances, are able to enact changes to their ritual practices rapidly in response to arising situations.

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[66] Anglican weekly attendance: 177,700, Pentecostal weekly Attendance: 141,700

Hillsong's narrative of itself as a meta-Church in antithesis to a 'broken' outside world, strongly orients the church toward the issue of secularism. Hillsong projects a self-identity of a church on the rise, a brand synonymous with God's own kingdom-building on earth. It counters unbelief by creating tangibly divine experiences; institutional decline with narratives of spectacular growth; brokenness with promises of success and blessing to those who dwell in its capital 'C' Church world. Hillsong's fight against secularism pervades the church's rhetoric and fuels the passion with which its leaders and congregants participate. As Giglio's sermon attested, sometimes this singular focus diminishes the church's sensitivity to other issues in the world, such as poverty and injustice.

If there was one ethical issue that dominated all others at the time of my fieldwork, it was the issue of climate change. The immensely popular film *An Inconvenient Truth* had propelled the issue to prominence in 2006. In the year leading up to the Hillsong conference, Australia's Prime Minister described climate change as "the greatest moral threat of our generation," and attempted to legislate a carbon price through parliament.[67] Also at the time of Hillsong's 2009 conference, global preparations for the United Nations Climate Change summit in Copenhagen were well underway, and all these events gave the issue of environmental sustainability a prominent place in Australia's political and moral discourse. Despite this, the world's climate was not mentioned during Hillsong's conference. Perhaps this reveals the breadth of the cultural disconnect between the 'Church' world created by Hillsong and the broader world outside the conference. I am not aware of any action taken by Hillsong in relation to environmental stewardship before or since the conference. This is an especially noteworthy omission given the high electricity consumption of the staging technologies they employ, and the mammoth amounts of printed materials they distribute to their congregants and across their enormous mailing list. Presumably, the fight against secularism takes precedence over concerns (economic or ecological) about the Church's high energy demands.

Sheppard's 2006 study of 'Citipointe,' a Pentecostal mega church in Brisbane, arrived at this conclusion, noting that overall the church exhibited "limited" engagement with issues related to environmental sustainability (Sheppard, p. 302). "Neither the senior pastor's preaching nor the members' interview comments engaged explicitly with the sustainability agenda, and there was no evidence they were even aware of its existence" (p. 302). Citipointe's excessive use of powered technologies stems from the same prioritisation of evangelism over every other ethical sphere that is evident at Hillsong: "as a collective, Citipointe's commitment to creating a culturally attractive church has translated to high levels of unsustainable consumption" (p. 302). That these churches have failed to address environmental issues at this juncture in Australian history reveals something telling about the Pentecostal ethical process. While it is true that these churches have the capacity to respond to arising issues in the broader community, in practise they seldom do. Hillsong's cultural mechanisms are so tightly geared to the task of creating an alternative to the world, that they often fail to engage with its going concerns.

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[67] The claim features in Kevin Rudd's introductory address at the National Climate Change Summit (Saturday 31 March 2007)

Clearly, while we might describe the shift to independent and Pentecostal churches as a democratisation of religious experience, it does not necessarily follow that such congregations will increasingly prioritise contemporary ethical concerns. As this study shows, the categories, narratives and methods through which a ritualising community addresses matters pertaining to ethics will be moderated by the social body as a whole. I have explored some of the ways in which a ritual setting such as the Hillsong conference can amplify the consenting, while downplaying the resistive, impulses of its attendees. These contrast strikingly against those aspects of the UNOH setting which encourage the collaborative generation of ethical thought and action. It does not automatically follow, however, that Hillsong's ethical priorities are so set in their ways as to be unchangeable by their participants. As Bell notes, for a ritualising community to enjoy continuing patronage, its participants need not only to generally approve of the ethical priorities being advanced by the hierarchy, but to enjoy a sense that the moral framework of the hierarchy perpetuates stability and cohesion: "Such power is vindicated only by general and continued well-being; it is indicted by widespread and sustained social problems" (1992, p. 212). Hillsong's singular focus on generating a 'Church' as an alternative construct to the secular world will only remain as long as this project successfully creates a sense of wellbeing and cohesion. As society changes, the constructed 'Church' world will need to adjust in ways that assure participants that the 'Church' they are participating in is a more ethical world than that against which it competes. In the UNOH community, questions of wellbeing and social stability are directly addressed by frequent conversations (especially those programmed into organisation-wide annual retreats) about whether practices are "life-giving." In Hillsong, where such discussions are not shared with general participants, the answers to these questions will eventually manifest in the actions of the social body as a whole.

Further research may clarify the changing relationships between traditions and the ritual participants that substantiate them. The fact that consent, whether explicit or implied, has a role to play in the articulation of a rite presents a challenge for groups with dynamically-changing ritual codes such as UNOH and Hillsong. It will be essential that such groups maintain a strong sense of tradition, that they articulate each iteration of ritual as an expression of – not a diversion from – its own traditions, forms and structures.

> Just as contractual authority must be renewed (implying the periodic option of choice) and coercive force must be constantly vigilant in maintaining its threat, in the same way power constituted through ritualization must regularly sustain itself through the recreation of tradition, the reobjectification of office, and the reproduced displays of its magnificence. A breakdown in the cycle of rites that create ritualized power, or a breakdown in the semblance of conformity to traditional models, can quickly fragment the illusion of social cohesion. (Bell, 1992, pp. 212 - 213)

This task will be especially critical to the stability of groups that effect such conscious changes to their ritual codes. A community like the Urban Neighbours of Hope, which prioritises individual expression and appropriation of the ritual order, and entertains a largely democratic power structure, will need to maintain a clear sense of its own tradition if it wishes to maintain its trajectory. Because its members are spread in such small groupings across countries and continents, their rearticulation of a ritual tradition will need to be carried out strategically and energetically (Douglas, 1999, pp. 32-33). Though their rituals might change, or be replaced with more “life-giving” alternatives in time, the community will need to maintain a sense of practical fidelity to a tradition of which they are a part.

Hillsong and UNOH each ritually maintain an ethical agenda intent on transforming the world. Hillsong’s world-changing rhetoric was epitomised by the conference’s opening spectacle, but the very same impulse underpins the UNOH’s ethos, as reflected in statements like “Raising-up as many authentic followers of Jesus as we can then helps to catalyse liberating, social change movements in our neighbourhoods” (Urban Neighbours of Hope, c. 2006). Yet the two communities embody this transformationalist impulse in contrasting ways. The Hillsong community invests their time, efforts and finances in calling people ‘out’ of their ordinary lives in to a spectacular and satisfying substitutive world. They envisage this world, the ‘Church’ to be ever growing and destined to eventually supplant the secular world. In contrast to this, the UNOH teams seek global transformation by ‘diving in’ into poor neighbourhoods as incarnational ministry workers. They employ similar language to describe the ‘broken’ secular world (e.g. Barker, 2005, p. 85), but rather than escaping that world, they deliberately ‘submerge’ themselves within it, seeking to transform it as neighbour-activists. That this common agenda can underpin such diverse ethical classifications and patterns of action is instructive in and of itself. Though Hillsong and UNOH share a common heritage in Protestant Evangelicalism, their ritual practices – and the ethical expressions they promulgate – contrast dramatically. Viewed side by side, these communities showcase the swathe of possibilities that ritual practices and performances offer to the field of ethics.

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