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Ritual Risk and Emergent Efficacy: Ethnographic Studies in Christian Ritual

Hillary Kaell & Jessica Hardin

ABSTRACT

Ritual is a domain of analysis shared across Christian confessions and continents. Yet in anthropological work on Christianity, studies of ritual have thus far remained piecemeal and disjointed, unwittingly perpetuating distinctions between north and south, 'secular' and 'religious' publics, Pentecostals and 'the rest'. This introductory essay charts the analytic potential of developing a robust cross-cultural analysis of ritual from the perspective of anthropologists of Christianity. We employ ritual risk and efficacy to expand the ongoing study of the practice of Christian sociality, which we explore through three themes. Firstly, this collection is united by a shared interest in ritual inefficacy—the 'infelicitous' moments when ritual go awry—and the societal and metaphysical risks that may result. Secondly, the collection examines the social 'work' of ritual in defining and authorizing particular forms of Christianity. Finally, the essays explore the ways Christian futures are imagined and created through ritual.

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Introduction

In Swaziland, a ritual to produce embodiment of the Holy Spirit ends in the deaths of four young men. In Romania, a Catholic woman's testimony of miraculous healing is rejected and redacted by her priest. In Samoa, Pentecostals engage in intercessory prayers, but fail to keep the Devil at bay. Each example offers a glimpse of Christian engagement in a creative interplay between embodied action, doctrinal interpretation, and cultural exigency, but nevertheless fails to effect its intended result. Such 'infelicitous' rituals are ethnographically rich moments when uncertainty erupts and social negotiations are made manifest. Yet religious ritual, infelicitous or not, has over the last decades retreated from the frontlines of cutting-edge anthropological research.¹ Ritual itself has not disappeared as a theoretical standby, yet, increasingly, it has been 'uncoupled' from religion due to the combined result of genealogical critiques of ritual as a Western construct (Asad) and the tendency, especially following Catherine Bell, to conceive of ritual so broadly as to include any patterned semiotic activity (Bialecki, "Religion" 11; see also Basso and Senft; Handelman and Lindquist).

These trends have paralleled the growth of anthropological studies of Christianity, so it is perhaps not surprising that scholars in this field have produced comparatively little

theoretical engagement with ritual or Ritual Studies.² Further, as Joel Robbins has noted, until recently, the field's axial focus on belief and language has caused studies of the social organization of Christian institutions, gender, and space to lag behind (Robbins, "Anthropology").³ By uniting these concerns, the study of ritual can do much to advance the recent wave of interest in exploring Christianity as not just a set of beliefs, but also a "kind of social life" (Robbins, "Pentecostal" 63). This focus moves beyond a definitional preoccupation with *who a Christian is* (pertinent especially in earlier studies of conversion from pre-Christian religions) to an increasingly sophisticated analysis of *what a Christian does*.

Of course, ritual has never been wholly absent in anthropological work on Christianity. As ritual studies solidified into a cross-cultural, interdisciplinary field in the 1970s and 1980s, formative ethnographic work relied on Roman Catholic examples, notably Ronald Grimes's and Victor Turner's pioneering studies of Catholic festivals and pilgrimages (Grimes, *Symbol*; Turner and Turner). Bell also foregrounded Catholic rituals throughout her watershed study *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*. In more recent work, grouped loosely into anthropology of Christianity, analyses of ritual tend to fall into four major streams: a strand which focuses primarily on 'Western' Christianity to examine how rituals interact with the secular/modern (Coleman, "Mirrors"; Rubow; Fedele 20); a much larger group of studies about the 'global south' that asks how hybridized Christian rituals mediate and produce tensions for practitioners related to conversion and indigenous traditions (Robbins, *Becoming*; Tomlinson, "Ritual"; Okwaro; Toren; Schram); a set of studies—too often marginalized in the anthropology of Christianity as a whole—on the centrality of ritual in Eastern and Oriental Orthodoxy (e.g. Hann and Goltz); lastly, a growing number of studies on Pentecostalism that view ritual through a Bourdieu-inflected approach to embodiment (Klaver and van de Kamp). However, as Klaver points out in her rereading of Roy Rappaport's theory of ritual, Protestant rituals are performative but also highly perlocutionary; as a result, work in this vein often focuses on oral testimonies and sermons (Klaver 478–9; see also Engelke and Tomlinson; Chua; Tomlinson, *Ritual*).

The issue is thus not a total neglect of ritual. Rather, the problem lies in how anthropologies of Christianity so far lack any explicit theorizing of ritual, in large part because each of the streams of scholarship described above remains fundamentally disparate. This collection is the first to begin a more robust cross-cultural analysis of ritual from the perspective of anthropologists of Christianity.⁴ Therefore, without advocating a formal definition of ritual, it is useful to clarify "how we will use the word on this occasion in this place" (Grimes, *Craft* 188). Firstly, to provide a framework for our shared focus on Christianity, we reclaim rituals as *religious events*. By this we mean that the people who engage in them do so because intangible beings or powers are present and in relationship with them. We limn closely to emic definitions in this regard, although, admittedly, the word 'ritual' may be foreign to participants themselves (Grimes, *Craft* 185). Many Protestants protest that they do not engage in ritual at all. Other participants may refuse any congruence between events such as *siwasho* (purgative rites), weddings, worship, *la fiesta*, prayer groups that anthropologists group together as ritual. Nevertheless, to think of rituals as interactional—comprising divine–human relationships as well as (usually) human–human relationships—broadly corresponds to emic understandings. It also opens up space to think about the emergent properties of ritual, a point we take up below.⁵

Rituals are also 'events' in the way they are moments of specific patterned action that for practitioners have a quality that differs from the ordinary. Rituals include "words uttered,

gestures performed and objects handled”—generally all three (Lévi-Strauss, *Naked* 671; Fleurbaey). Rituals are always embodied and enacted. As a result, they materialize the ineffable, such as a hope, a relationship or a prayer. Rituals are also embedded in particular times and places. They are often proscribed, but can be *ad hoc*. They are subject to change in ways both unforeseen and deliberate (e.g. Fedele 19) in interaction with specific social, cultural, economic, and environmental contexts (Handelman and Lindquist). Finally, it is important to note that, as an event, rituals are temporally discrete; they ‘disappear’ after they have been performed (Grimes, *Craft* 181). Yet they also remain unbounded: they are compelled by previous rituals and talk about rituals (Grimes, *Beginnings* 10), just as they compel meaning-making and more rituals into the future. As Matt Tomlinson has recently suggested, rituals are channels for motion—the circulation of signs, actions, and ideologies—that are continually reproduced in new contexts (Tomlinson, *Ritual* 2–3).⁶ In short, “rituals beget rituals” (Hardin, “Challenging”).

In the following sections we briefly introduce the three primary themes that organize this collection: a shared focus on ritual risk and efficacy; the social ‘work’ of ritual in defining and authorizing particular forms of Christianity; the ways in which Christian futures are imagined and created through ritual.

Rituals Gone Wrong: Emergent Efficacy

The essays gathered in this special issue are united by a shared interest in ritual inefficacy—the ‘infelicitous’ moments when ritual go awry—and the societal and metaphysical risks that may result (Grimes, “Infelicitous”; Howe). In formative anthropological work, rituals were viewed as rule-bound and fixed, always re-creating cohesive societal structures and thus tempering risks in everyday social interactions (Durkheim; Malinowski, *Argonauts*; Goffman qtd in Harth 21). With this overarching assumption in place, anthropologists have evaluated ritual efficacy in two primary ways, evident in Sally Moore and Barbara Myerhoff’s distinction between the ‘doctrinal’ and the ‘operational’. The first term refers to postulated efficacy, the how-to of ritual and what participants believe it accomplishes; the second refers to its empirically detectable physical, psychological or societal effects (Moore and Myerhoff 10–12).⁷

A new generation of scholarship on ritual has revitalized notions of efficacy and risk through a reevaluation of the ritual process itself. Ritual studies scholar Ute Hüsken outlines an approach to efficacy that is especially useful here. She calls this mode ‘emergent’ because it recognizes that rituals are creative acts that may be performed incorrectly without rendering the ritual itself ineffective or wrong (Hüsken 351–2; Tambiah). Thus even ‘mistakes’ are constitutive of a ritual process that is “flexible [and] adaptable to immediate circumstances”, incorporating new outcomes that emerge as it is performed (McClymond 2; Howe 67). According to Hüsken, and evident in our essays, parallel modes of efficacy can also exist simultaneously: both failure and success may result (Hüsken 353; Grimes, “Infelicitous”). For the Swazi Christians in Casey Golomski’s contribution, for example, what adults deem ritual failure may generate new organizational and social networks for youth, who become prophets and displace the old.

These newer emphases in ritual studies are important to highlight, since anthropological work on Christianity has largely viewed rituals—after the initial rupture of conversion—as maintaining and reinforcing the religious commitment of new converts (Comaroff and

Comaroff; Robbins, *Becoming*), thus tempering risk and creating social cohesion. While ‘mistake’ and ‘risk’ hold different meanings in each localized context we study, we take as a starting point that risk may be provoked or mitigated by ritual and that it is intrinsic or extrinsic to its practice (Coleman, “Mirrors” 44). Thus whether a ritual ‘works’ depends on the connections people make between the ritual event, its societal context, and their understandings of what is efficacious (Tomlinson, *Ritual* 3).

Ritual risk also takes on particular valences in different Christianities. Writing of ritual in Greek Orthodoxy, Jill Dubisch quotes anthropologist Roger Just: “One is a Christian because one believes; one is a Christian because one is Greek; what one believes is that one is a Christian Greek.” (Dubisch 58) Religious rituals, she argues, are not matters of contemplation, but a set of acts that one performs “inevitably [and] almost naturally” in a context where Orthodoxy structures all levels of society (ibid; see also Boylston, “Food”, “Orienting”; Luehrmann, “Dual”; Kormina 282). Orthodox churches are also colored by the supreme importance of the liturgy, the ritual *par excellence* around which all human–divine relationships are structured (Hann and Goltz 5, 12). Studies of ritual risk in Orthodoxy must thus take into account how ritual creativity is braided with canonically sanctioned orthopraxy (Luehrmann, “Objects”) and situated within a theology where material forms—such as icons—bring every believer into contact with the divine (Naumescu 89; Hann and Goltz 10–12).⁸ Certain forms of Protestantism, on the other hand, have traditionally disavowed ritual, a concern that stems from the Reformist rejection of Roman Catholic ‘earthly works’. In this case, ritual risk is couched within contexts where people may engage in ritual while also discursively condemning it (Albrecht); Coleman speaks of ‘lateral engagement.’⁹ Or, as Bielo shows in his recent study of emergent evangelicals in the United States, the fraught nature of ritual may lead some Protestants consciously to adopt rituals in order to embody what they view as a more authentic relational faith (Bielo 259).

The essays in this issue highlight distinct but overlapping kinds of risk among Christians in Samoa, Guatemala, the United States, Romania, and Swaziland. Both Eric Hoenes and Hardin examine contestations over particular visions of what it is to be a Christian, specifically where newer forms of charismatic Christianity interact with traditionally dominant forms of Catholicism or Protestantism. For Hardin, risk operates in Samoa on a number of levels at once, including the very real risks that ritual mistakes introduce, such as Satan’s influence during ritual, a risk echoed in Hillary Kaell’s study of US evangelicals. In all of the articles, societal modes of authority within congregations or communities are also at stake. This dynamic is especially evident in Golomski’s essay where ritual crisis is heightened as AIDS ravages the bodies of the young, decimating traditional modes of religious transmission (on a similar point in post-Soviet states, see Naumescu 86). In this context, riskiness includes jockeying for authority within the church and, at a more conceptual level, the moral implications of death by sexually transmitted disease. In another register, Kaell and Marc Loustau explore a kind of existential risk-taking. In Loustau’s portrait of Hungarian Catholics in Romania, the risk lies in putting one’s own story into circulation, thereby leaving open the possibility that it will be disbelieved or rejected. In analogous ways, the US evangelicals in Kaell’s study travel to the Holy Land once they believe God has called them to it, leading them to frame the trip as a testament of faith. To have such an undertaking ‘fail’ may cast doubt upon this divine–human relationship, which is a very serious risk indeed.

In each essay, there is (explicitly or less so) an overarching concern with divine–human interaction in the light of ritual risk. As other studies note, the interplay between doubt and acceptance can be a productive and indeed essential dimension of religious transmission through ritual. In Christianity, the prototypical example is Jesus’ own cry on the cross: “My God, why have you forsaken me?” (Hojbjerg; Naumescu 90). Yet, for Christians, God’s actual presence is (or should) never be at risk, nor are God’s actions viewed as non-sensical or capricious (Robbins, “Afterword” 212). Thus the rituals we explore trace what might be likened to an active engagement with God’s presence and the concomitant fear of absence—a kind of ‘risk management’. When rituals fail to work as planned, Christian actors must nevertheless reaffirm an omniscient and all-encompassing deity and moreover secure God as an active participant in their evolving conceptions of ritual efficacy and attendant outcomes.

Defining Christianities: The Social Life of Rituals

In the essays in this issue, ritual actors carve out authority and engage with ritual risk in order to bring forward particular ways of being Christian. Earlier anthropological studies have sometimes assumed distinctions between ‘correct’ procedures in Christian ritual (taught and monitored by Europeans) and the ‘incorrect’ syncretic/hybrid practices of converts—‘idols behind altars’ as anthropologist Anita Brenner noted in her classic study of Mexican Catholicism. Other times, studies have focused on contestation models where ritual allows one religious group to lay claim to disputed sacred places, often in shared urban areas or pilgrimage sites (Orsi, *Gods*; Eade and Sallnow; Selka). Rather than focus on syncretism or inter-religious contestation *per se* (see Handman), we take from these studies the important reminder that ritual is powerful because of the way it *materializes* beliefs, feelings, and relationships. What may be unspoken and unseen becomes embodied and visible and, through materialization, social stakes and intentions are multiplied. As Edward Schieffelin suggests, risk is heightened in rituals that are public performances and thus social actions; when ritual results from the interaction between an audience and performers, the latter must be prepared to lose face or credibility (Schieffelin 197).

Studies of rituals, and in particular rituals where participants actively negotiate risk, thus illuminate how authority, gender, and space interact to sustain Christian socialities. We focus on the dynamics related to contested authority between co-religionists who differ in terms of generation, social strata or theological conviction. In each article, ritual participants (and others) use risk and threats to efficacy as a discursive springboard to elaborate their vision of how to be Christian, a conception that is (re)negotiated in the shifting exigencies of each time and place. Jerikho Zion elders leverage youth’s mistakes in performing *siguico* as a way to establish the ethical boundaries of being this sort of Christian; American evangelicals use pilgrimage to embody and enact a vision of their life course as a progressive spiritual journey; in Guatemala, two kinds of Catholics find ways to establish their own religious authority while denying others through overt ritualization.

Importantly, during ritual, Christian others are not only *imagined* as distinct but are also often *encountered*. Participants may, for example, engage distinctions between older and younger generations (Golomski), between clergy and laity (Loustau) or between new Christian groups and more established ones (Hoenes). Rituals exemplify the multiple ways in which Christians act interdependently, in this case as they negotiate norms and procedural

mistakes. This point is important because anthropologists have often associated (especially Protestant) Christianity with the production of individual personhood, as conversion from indigenous religions breaks reciprocal obligations to kin and ancestors. Increasingly, however, scholars note that “[the Christian] God and other spiritual powers need not be perceived only as setting up boundaries between selves and others, but rather as providing means for experiencing and evaluating others as aspects of selves, and vice versa” (Klaitz 146).

One way in which this collection broaches the issue of relationality is through a focus on gender. Ritual participants in Christianity are often women, while ritual leaders are often men (Eriksen). Studies of ritual have shown how women’s ritual actions create and maintain ties of interdependence (Orsi, *Madonna*), while also producing creative appropriations and revisions that may circumvent male authority (Sered; Dubisch 193–228). In Hardin’s essay, Samoan women pray in the office to avoid the patriarchal organization of church groups. For the Americans in Kaell’s essay, gender plays a key role in justifying pilgrimage, a problematic ritual in Reformed theology, because women view the trip as an extension of their responsibility to pray and act on behalf of others. In Loustau’s contribution, a Transylvanian woman insists on the authority of an improvised baptism, in part because of her own theological training. Loustau further complicates traditional scholarly understandings of gender in Catholicism by showing how male ritual specialists, namely the local priest, also struggle with experiential contradictions and express vulnerability.

This collection includes instances of rituals that take place both inside and outside ‘traditional’ religious spaces. In this sense, we build on what anthropologist Thomas Csordas, in his study of Catholic charismatics, calls the ‘ritualization of life,’ referring to how prophecy and healing spill out of church spaces and into homes. In turn, shared rituals produces new social groupings outside of church. (Csordas 107–20) Following Csordas, we are attentive to the slipperiness between ritual times/spaces/communities and the everyday. However, we underline that all of the places in our studies are, for participants, indexed as ‘Christian’ places: the office, the home, the street. Another key site in the essays (especially in Loustau’s and Kaell’s) is the ‘no place’ of the ethnographic interview, where ritual participants narrate and thus re-create ritual moments, including mistakes. In either case, the question of place is continually inflected by how the Christian God is viewed as omnipresent.

Temporality and Omniscient Divinity

The essays in this issue also argue for analytic attention to the temporality of rituals. In other words, we ask how Christian futures—eschatological, teleological, and emergent—are imagined and constituted through ritual action. When faced with ritual risk, how do Christian actors conceptualize evidence of an omniscient and all-encompassing divine being? If they do not view the presence of God as ‘at risk,’ how do they interpret ritual outcomes so as to secure God as an active participant? This focus speaks to debates in the anthropology of Christianity concerning the distinction illuminated by Robbins between continuity and discontinuity (Robbins, “Continuity”) as well as ideas about futurity, Christian temporal perception (Guyer; Piot; Bialecki, “Disjuncture”), and eschatology (Harding; Boyer). Ritual is powerful in part because it makes time seem ongoing and continuous (Michaels) and also because it always leaves something undone (Hardin, “Healing”). Performing an exorcism, for example, cements the reality of demons—which therefore necessitates the production of future exorcism rituals (Tomlinson, “Ritual”). We build on these discussions in a number of key ways.

Methodologically, the essays focus on diverse moments in time. Loustau examines the ‘before’ and ‘after’ experiences of ritual. Hoenes and Hardin explicitly focus on interactions during ritual, while Golomski and Kaell explore how ritual is reflected upon after the event itself. As Hüsken remarks, ritual ‘mistakes’ influence future performances and may even instigate the creation of new goals and actions (362). Most pointedly, Hardin and Kaell explore the various smaller rituals that result from the original event, which bring people into contact with God in new ways. For US evangelicals, for example, the pilgrimage compels rituals upon return, such as gift giving, baptism or the renewal of wedding vows. Hardin shows how the original purpose of the ritual intervention of a Samoan prayer group is transformed through ritual action, moving from healing cancer to interceding against ‘false’ Christianities.

Our comparative approach also illuminates the multiple ways that Christians view this future-oriented temporality. In Hardin’s essay, the Samoan group consciously recognizes the changing purpose of its mission, thus propelling it into an imagined future of renewed spiritual work. For others, however, the temporality of ritual agendas is less marked. Golomski finds that the mistakes of one ritual do not create specific future rituals, but objectify the perceived cause of the ritual mistake, moving that social concern into the future. Similarly, Hoenes shows how a deliberate ritual mistake—a lay leader who disrupts the liturgy of a competing group—does not explicitly instigate new actions, although it is a powerful enactment of an imagined future and idealized past where one type of Catholicism is dominant. Across the articles, temporality thus has a social effect. As ritual agendas move through time, some forms of Christianity, subjectivities, and ideologies are authorized while others are challenged.

Another shared form of temporality concerns how Christians understand the power of God as in *potentia*. Kaell’s essay offers a clear example when she describes how, for US evangelicals, the future-oriented temporality of ritual risk draws Christians closer to God by reiterating the necessity of having faith in God’s outcomes. In other words, temporality of ritual—as teleological, emergent, and future-oriented—is one way that Christians secure the sense of a God that is all-encompassing and omniscient. The very potential of ritual failure and mistakes may reaffirm for participants that God will act in His own time, in His own way. This may be one way to understand how the presence of God is never (or rarely) at risk, even in ‘risky rituals’, and, indeed, how God is actually secured as an active participant even when outcomes defy expected norms.

Conclusion

Ritual is a domain of analysis shared across Christian confessions and geographic continents. Yet studies of ritual have thus far remained piecemeal and disjointed in anthropological work on Christianity, often perpetuating distinctions between north and south, secular and religious publics, Pentecostals and the rest. Broadly, we draw attention to ritual as a way to find common ground between ‘northern’ and ‘southern’ Christianities with shared (yet distinctive) rituals, such as liturgy, baptism or communion, and to explore how ritual illuminates the subtle competing social and theological forms within given Christian groups. In order to do so, we focus our essays away from the everyday ritualization (Csordas) that forms people’s *habitus* to the fraught moments of becoming that unfold when ritual fails to effect its intended result. Characterized by heightened ambivalence and creativity, these moments offer an especially productive lens for exploring the social life of Christians as well as human–divine interactions.

Without imposing too reductive a model of ritual ‘risk’ across Christianities, we nevertheless point to certain distinguishing features that could productively form the basis of future cross-cultural research. Firstly, we focus on ritual action as the *materialization* of beliefs, feelings, and relationships. The unspoken and unseen becomes embodied and visible, putting relationships at risk. Christian ritual is always relational; even a person who performs a ritual by him/herself is communing with supra-human presences that in Christianity have their own intentionality and will. Most of the essays focus on rituals as publicly iterated social actions (Schieffelin), which therefore materialize particular social stakes because Christian others are not only imagined as distinct but are often encountered and thus potentially reshaped. On the one hand, authority is contested and asserted within Christian groups, especially as it fractures along gendered and generational lines. On the other hand, ritual reveals much about the intersections between disparate Christian groups, a *lacuna* in work done under the rubric of the anthropology of Christianity, which has focused mainly on specific churches (or similar self-constituted groups of people) rather than on the interactions between them. Sociality, as we note above, is also linked to temporality. As ritual agendas move through time, some forms of Christian subjectivities and ideologies are authorized while others are challenged. Rituals beget new rituals in a fluid and creative process.

Because ritual organizes social relations and spaces in tangible ways, it moves beyond conversion, discourse, language or text—topics that have dominated more recent anthropological work on Christianity. It furthers recent interest in what Christians *do*—how they socialize, build institutions or organize spatially. Methodologically, our essays follow rituals before they begin and after they end, precisely in order better to understand their incorporation into Christian social life. The articles are arranged such that Loustau’s paper (a ‘before’ portrait of Catholic canonization) comes first, followed by three articles about rituals as they occur, ending with Kaell’s discussion of the aftermath of a Protestant pilgrimage.

Ronald Grimes enlivens the collection with a critical response from outside the anthropology of Christianity. Reflecting on the development of ritual criticism, Grimes calls for robust definitions of ritual and religion that take indigenous perspectives more thoroughly into account. Is ritual risk-taking the same or different from non-ritual risks, he asks, and are there are some kinds of, or phases in, a ritual that are more risky than others? Grimes also poses provocative questions about the project of anthropology of religion itself, pushing readers to reconsider the ‘studied neutrality’ of most ethnographers—including the contributors in this collection. Should scholars also run a risk by explicitly criticizing their interlocutors and the rituals they engage? This approach brings into focus the ways Christians make meaning through multiple, and often interacting, rituals (Engelke and Tomlinson). We find that for adult Christians, intention and meaning are nearly always paramount (Robbins, “Afterword”; see also Capps and Ochs). However, within Christian epistemology, meaningfulness is itself emergent: the unexpected may be understood as the work of Evil or the Devil, as societal failure or as an indication of the impossibility of ever truly knowing divine will.

This last idea is perhaps the most intriguing. While rituals may be risky, for Christians, God’s presence is never at risk, nor are God’s actions viewed as capricious. Across the cases examined here, a shared form of temporality views divine power as in *potentia*, an orientation that trusts that God’s actions will come to have meaning at some point, no matter how grave the current failure may seem. In short, when rituals go awry, Christian actors nevertheless reaffirm an omniscient and all-encompassing deity and moreover secure God as an active *participant* in their evolving conception of the ritual’s purpose and outcome.

Taking these aspects together, we see a doubling: becoming individually close to God and adopting the social markings of appropriate Christianity, which together drives rituals from one event into a future of potentiality.

Notes

1. For example, Émile Durkheim, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Mary Douglas, and Victor Turner all built the field around studies of ritual.
2. Notable exceptions include the work of Thomas Csordas and Simon Coleman (as well as James Bielo and Miranda Klaver, both cited here). In part, this *lacuna* is the result of the way the field initially coalesced around Protestantism which anthropologists did not initially associate with ritual. At the same time, Christian case studies have been lacking or been absent in the growing literature on ritual efficacy produced by scholars in ritual studies (e.g. Hüsken; McClymond). Work in anthropology of Christianity has paid attention to materiality (Meyer and Houtmann), if not ritual *per se*, drawing on approaches to semiotics that view symbols as objectified (e.g. Keane).
3. Among anthropologists, there are some signs of a resurgence in interest. There are recent volumes on religious ritual (Hicks) and the 2015 Meeting of the Society for the Anthropology of Religion included ritual in its biennial theme. In 2012, *Cultural Anthropology* produced an online collection on the topic at http://www.culanth.org/curated_collections/4-ritual, access date: 2 July 2016.
4. We have consciously sought to bring together ethnographers who draw on anthropology (Hillary Kaell, Marc Loustau, and Ronald Grimes are in religious studies departments) and anthropologists (Casey Golomski, Eric Hoenes, and Jessica Hardin).
5. Hoenes and Loustau both refer to 'ritualization'. While this concept is defined in a number of ways in ritual studies, for Hoenes, it refers primarily to "the differentiation and privileging of particular activities" (Bell 204). Loustau's use of the term emphasizes how ritual is embedded in everyday life, recalling scholars such as Coleman and Csordas.
6. Clearly, we do not take a Durkheimian approach that views ritual as necessarily reflecting and re-inscribing a societal ideal. Nor do we attempt to distinguish between ritual and spectacle.
7. Moore and Myerhoff associated the 'doctrinal' with Malinowski's *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays* and the operational with Lévi-Strauss's "L'efficacité symbolique".
8. In Orthodoxy, humans are made in the image of God, just as the transcendent God was made incarnate in a human body. As a result, there is a fundamental affinity between God and humanity expressed through anthropomorphic forms (e.g. icons). The liturgy is a dialogical encounter between God and humanity that reaches its highest form in the orality of chant, song, and prayer.
9. For this reason, some studies of Christianity eschew the term 'ritual' in favor of 'ritualization' (Coleman, "Moving"). We use the term 'ritual' because the essays in this collection center on particular ritual events understood by their participants as distinct moments or actions. See, however, note 5 for exceptions.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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