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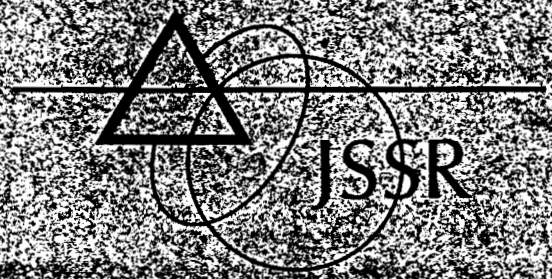


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# Status and Sacredness: Worship and Salvation as Forms of Status Transformation

MURRAY MILNER, JR.*

Sacredness and status have been two key concepts of classical sociological theory, but their interrelationship has seldom been discussed. The paper argues that sacredness is a special form of status. This conceptualization allows the use of common theoretical concepts and propositions to explain both status and sacral relationships. First, key processes relevant to the explanation of interpersonal status relations are outlined. Then the utility of this approach is illustrated by an analysis of worship and salvation as forms of status transformation. The analysis focuses on Christianity, but brief indications are given of how the perspective is also relevant to the analysis of Hindu worship and soteriology. The approach offers a prospect for a general integrated theory of status and sacral relationships.

Some of our most influential social theory is built upon Durkheim's analysis of the sacred in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Erving Goffman (1967, 1971) drew on Durkheim's notions to analyze brilliantly face-to-face interaction in contemporary society. Randall Collins has formalized and extended Goffman's work to help us explain variations in class subcultures and ritual styles of different types of societies (1975, 1982, 1988). Similarly, Weber's analysis of status and its relationship to other kinds of power have had an enormous influence on a wide variety of social sciences as well as on the analysis of religion (1968:921-938). Clearly, the concepts of status and sacredness both imply notions of difference and hierarchy. Yet there has been virtually no attempt to identify systematically the relationship between these two central concepts.

This paper argues that sacredness is a special form of status. Sacredness is status in the "other world." More precisely, my claim is not that sacredness can be fully subsumed under the notion of status, but that for certain analytical purposes it is useful to conceive of sacredness as a type of status.[1]

As Lockwood (1992:84) says, "in Durkheim's account of the social hierarchy there is a surprising omission: this is the connection of status with the sacred." The failure of others to explore systematically the nexus between the two notions is probably due to the conceptual dominance of Durkheim's original discussion. In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1965), Durkheim stressed the total otherness of the sacred and the profane and specifically denied that there is a continuum between the sacred and worldly evaluations (1965:54-56). Durkheim's claim that the two realms were always of a totally different order is at best questionable (see, for example, Lukes 1979:26-27; Pickering 1984:143-148). Durkheim him-

* *Murray J. Milner, Jr., is a professor of sociology at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA 22903.*

1. This is not necessarily to reject functional definitions of religion in favor of substantive ones. Rather, this allows us to see more of a continuum between religious and nonreligious behavior without opting for overly vague functional definitions (see Roberts 1984).

self recognized that the distinction between the sacred and the profane was ambiguous on the empirical level. He noted that societies constantly transform profane things into sacred things, including deifying heroes and kings (1965:243-244). Even at the conceptual level, Durkheim qualified his rigorous contrast between the sacred and the profane. For example, in a footnote he observed that there are degrees and ranks of sacredness, and that sacredness is a relative term: "So the more sacred repels the less sacred; but this is because the second is profane in relation to the first"(1965:340-341, n 7). He also noted that "precautions are necessary to keep them [the sacred and profane] apart because, though opposing one another, they tend to confuse themselves into one another" (1965:360). Durkheim clearly acknowledged and described the contradiction and ambiguity that is involved in keeping the sacred and the profane separated in cultic activity:

> [T]here is no positive cult which does not face this contradiction. Every sacred being is removed from profane touch by this very character with which it is endowed; but, on the other hand, they would serve for nothing and have no reason whatsoever for their existence if they could not come in contact with these same worshipers who, on another ground, must remain respectfully distant from them. At bottom, there is no positive rite which does not constitute a veritable sacrilege, for a man cannot hold commerce with the sacred beings without crossing the barrier which should ordinarily keep them separate. (1965:379-80)

But this ambiguity and contradiction characteristic of cultic activity is also characteristic of profane status relationships. This is illustrated by the old joke about joining an exclusive club: "If they would let me in, they must not be worth joining!" More generally, the high-status person who is too accessible tends to have his or her status eroded. In both the profane and the sacred realms the low and the high must be brought into relationship with one another, yet the very creation of such a relationship undermines the distinction that makes the relationship desirable in the first place. In short, for Durkheim to proceed with his analysis of the empirical world, he must significantly qualify his rigid conceptual distinction between the sacred and the profane and acknowledge that these categories form a continuum.

To include an adequate conceptual analysis of the concepts of status and sacredness — not to speak of their implications for the definition of religion — would require a much longer paper. It would begin not only with Durkheim, but with Weber's various discussions of status, charisma, and the sociology of religion, as well as covering a wide array of contemporary literature. But even if such an endeavor demonstrated the logical parallel between the concepts of status and sacredness, it would leave unanswered whether this insight is analytically useful. The primary criterion for the utility of conceptual innovations is whether or not they improve our understanding of important empirical phenomena. Hence, the claim that sacredness is a special form of status should hinge on whether our knowledge of status processes can help us to better understand and explain religious phenomena, and vice versa. Therefore, I draw on concepts and propositions relevant to status relationships in order to propose a theoretical account of two of the most central of religious phenomena: worship and doctrines of salvation. These are, respectively, special cases of the Durkheimian distinction between rites and beliefs. If the analysis of these central sacral phenomena — based upon concepts and propositions relevant to status relationships — is convincing, it will be strong evidence for considering sacredness as a special kind of status. By analyzing worship, the analysis will also help clarify the nature of such key religious activities as preaching, prayer, and sacrifice.

## THE SOURCES OF STATUS

There are two sources of status. The first is conformity to (or deviance from) the norms of the group; those who conform tend to be held in high esteem and those who do not are negatively characterized. Obviously, the content of the conformity can vary enormously.

The warrior band may praise those effective at killing; the pacifist group may most admire those who eschew violence and make no attempt to escape or resist it.[2] The second source of status is association with others. This notion requires some elaboration. Since people's own status is affected by the status of their associates, most try to increase their interaction with those of higher status and to decrease interaction with those of lower status. This is especially the case for such intimate expressive relationships as marriage and friendship. There is an important corollary: When lower-status actors want to approach and interact with those of higher status, they will try to display high-status attributes and hide low-status ones. This involves trying to conform more closely to the higher-status person's desires and expectations. Sometimes it involves trying to become like the higher-status person; other times it requires both increasing similarities and displaying differences. The greater the status differences, the more likely attempts to become just like a superior will be seen as presumptuous.

In either case, to the degree possible, people manipulate their actual characteristics and transform themselves into higher status actors — trying to become more acceptable to their potential higher-status associates. (There is, of course, no clear line between manipulation of the actual attributes and manipulation of the visibility of these attributes.) For example, when one goes for a job interview or is invited to the home of a high-status person, one is likely to clean and groom oneself, "dress up" (the term itself is instructive), use more formal language, and talk about one's accomplishments rather than one's failures. Moreover, high-status friends and acquaintances are likely to be mentioned, rather than low-status ones. So attempts to approach higher status actors usually involve, on the one hand, reducing contact with lower-status actors and emphasizing the contact one has had with higher-status actors, and, on the other hand, giving up patterns of behavior considered inferior and increasing conformity to the norms of those one hopes to approach. In short, one tries to maximize one's status in order to be acceptable to those of higher status.[3]

Attempts to raise oneself must be linked with appropriate deference: It is crucial to acknowledge the superiority of those who are clearly of higher status. Hence, in addition to "putting one's best foot forward," one must show superiors proper deference and respect. This may involve highly elaborated public displays of deference and honor toward superiors. An important component is listening attentively to the opinions and deferring to the requests of the higher-status actor. One effect of such attentiveness and deference, especially if they are sincere, is to further raise the status of the superior. Any petitions or requests to high-status actors usually comes after the processes already described, and they too must be stated deferentially.

The crucial question, however, is whether one is accepted by those of higher status. For to be accepted as a regular intimate by those of significantly higher status raises and even transforms one's own status. One's specific petitions are also more likely to be granted. Moreover, being accepted by superiors raises the value of the praise and deference one gives to superiors. This may produce a feedback effect on one's own status: If one remains intimate with the now even higher-status superior, one's own status is raised accordingly. (This

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2. This is not to suggest complete normative agreement. The consensus is often a tacit or practical consciousness with high levels of indexicality, rather than an explicit articulated agreement. Complex societies may have multiple status orders. Moreover, general societal norms tend to be associated with the interests of dominant groups. Norms specific to other strata are often counternorms. The highest levels of status are sometimes associated with innovation, which is, of course, a form of deviance. Such complexities do not negate the fact that conformity to norms is a key source of status and that, even in differentiated societies, there are some generalized norms. See Warner (1993) for a contrast between pluralistic and "sacred canopy" models of religion, which is a special case of this broader issue.

3. For brevity, the focus is on the attitudes and strategies of the lower-status person. The attitudes and strategies of the superior are roughly the reverse: to be suspicious of the inferior's status claims and to thwart attempts at presumptuous intimacy.

is probably a key element in the near worship that devoted followers give to charismatic leaders.)

In summary, three basic processes are present: first, the separation of self from that which is lower and the maximization of one's conformity and association with superior behaviors, things, and actors; second the acknowledgement — and even the raising up — of superiors through praise and deference; and third, the intimate association with superiors that increases one's own status and increases the likelihood that one's petitions will be granted.

## WORSHIP AS STATUS TRANSFORMATION

The central social activity for most modern religions are periodic worship services — Sunday services for Christians, the *puja* for Hindus, Friday *salat* for Muslims, synagogue services for Jews, and the like.[4] Participation in such services usually is the key distinguishing characteristic of the religious person. A high proportion of the resources of religious institutions goes into carrying out these periodic services. Yet sociologists of religion have paid very little attention to what happens in these services and why they are central to religious life — other than repeating Durkheim's assertion that they contribute to reestablishing social solidarity and consensus. Greeley (1972) has contrasted styles of worship in terms of Simple Church versus High Church, and Dionysian (emotional) versus Appollonian (intellectual). A few sociology of religion texts (e.g., Roberts 1984:100-106) briefly describe typical religious services, but provide little or no sociological analysis. Most texts indicate that "practices" or "rituals" are central to religion, but provide neither description nor analysis of these key activities (e.g., Johnstone 1992). Even key contemporary works in the sociology of religion pay relatively little attention to the details of ritual and worship activity (e.g., Berger 1967; Robertson 1970; Wilson 1982; Stark and Bainbridge 1985).

I contend that worship can be usefully considered a process of status transformation. Conformity plays some role in this — for example, fasting or purification in preparation for worship or carefully following the appropriate forms of ritual. The core of worship, however, involves status transformation by means of association. More specifically, the status of the deity is maintained and the status of the devotee is renewed by periodically increasing the level of intimacy between the two. The features of status association outlined above provide a paradigm for the analysis of worship. Worship consists primarily of three processes: making oneself and one's immediate context worthy (or at least less unworthy) of the deity's presence, praising and deferring to the deity, and coming into intimate contact with the deity so that one's own self is transformed by this contact and one's petitions are granted.[5]

These three processes are clearly central to Christian worship. First, prayers of preparation and confession focus on making the devotee fit for worship: for example, "Almighty God, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee and worthily magnify thy holy name"(*The [Methodist] Book of Hymns,* 1964:715 and *The [Episcopal] Book of Common Prayer,* 1979:323). Second, in most

4. Of course, not all ritual, not even all religious ritual, is worship per se. A systematic distinction between worship and other forms of religious ritual would require a long tangent. Suffice it to say that there is a continuum that runs roughly from coercive manipulation of the sacred, e.g., magic, quid pro quo exchange, and worship, which involves praise and deference. The continuum roughly parallels the distinction between magic and religion. (For a more elaborate discussion of these distinctions see Milner 1994: chap. 13.)

5. My stages have some parallel with van Gennep's (1909), but he focuses on life-cycle transitions. Victor Turner (1969) focuses on liminal situations where the usual differentiations are suspended producing a sense of unity or "communitas." Turner emphasizes how religious rituals create exceptional experiences; my emphasis is on how such experiences draw on the same processes that make up everyday interaction.

Protestant services hymns of praise and adoration are a central element. The first verse of the first hymn in a Presbyterian hymnal reads, "Praise ye the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation! O my soul, praise him for He is thy health and salvation! All ye who hear, Now to his temple draw near; Join me in glad adoration!" (*The [Presbyterian] Hymnbook,* 1955:1). Similarly, the first hymn in the *Pilgrim [Congregational Church] Hymnal* (1935:1) and the *Baptist Hymnal* (1975:1) begins, "Holy, holy, holy! Lord God, Almighty!" These words are, of course, a variation on the Sanctus of the Roman Catholic mass, which in turn are taken from the Hebrew Bible. Third, it is well known that the Eucharist as "Holy Communion" is the climax of worship in the Roman Catholic and Anglican traditions. While low church traditions celebrate the Eucharist less frequently, they create other forms of communion. For example, their prayers are notably less formal and imply easy intimacy with the deity: "Jesus, we just want to ask you to. . . ." In other words, communion is not limited to the Eucharist. But even in the low church tradition, the Eucharist is used to express this idea. Although the term "Lord's Supper" is usually substituted for the term "Holy Communion," it is clear that even here the key idea is transforming intimacy with the deity. For example, in the *Baptist Hymnal* the first hymn in the section on the "Lord's Supper" begins, "Where can we find thee, Lord, so near, So real, so gracious, so divine, As at the table set with love By those who know themselves as thine?" (1975:245). And this communion is seen as transforming: "Come thee, O holy Christ, Feed us, we pray; Touch with thy pierced hand Each common day, Making this earthly life Full of thy grace, Till in the home of heav'n We find our place" (1975:246). An analysis of the Roman Catholic mass would show that most of its elements also are oriented toward the three processes described above.

The Hindu *puja* also contains these same three basic elements. The *puja* can be either a public ceremony, as in a temple — very roughly analogous to the Roman Catholic mass — or a private ritual performed in the home. In his influential discussion of the *puja,* Lawrence Babb (1975: chap. 2) examines a variety of forms, but identifies an elemental set of activities that are characteristic of all *pujas.* He labels these as "Purity: Approaching the Deity," "Pranam: The Feet of the Gods," and "Prasad: The Food of the Gods." My claim is that these three categories are concrete examples of the basic processes of worship outlined above.

The first set of activities involves preparing oneself (and the physical surroundings) for contact with the deity, primarily by purification rituals. But these rituals imply separating oneself from behaviors and characteristics that are unworthy of the sacred. As central as purification is to Hinduism, in the context of *puja* it is not an end in itself. As Fuller notes (1992:76), "worshippers must purify themselves before beginning *puja* in order to make themselves fit to honour the deities and benefit from the ritual, and not simply to avoid polluting the deities." In sum, purification is primarily preparation for what is to come.[6]

Babb identifies *pranam* as the second basic element of the *puja*. This is essentially a bowing motion that is elaborated in various degrees to show respect both to deities and to higher-status people. This bowing motion should not, however, be seen primarily as servility. Rather, the overall import of Babb's data and discussion indicates that praising and honoring the deity are core concerns. Fuller stresses this point even more:

> It should now be clear that *puja* is, in the first place, an act of respectful honouring and that this meaning is inherent in its structure. . . . That worship is an act of homage to powerful, superior deities is explicitly understood by priests in the Minaskshi temple and by many, if not most, Hindus throughout India." (1992:57)

The third element, according to Babb, is the *prasad*. This usually involves making some type of food offering to the deity that is then taken back and distributed to the wor-

6. This is not to deny that for some Hindus purity and impurity is the core concern of most religious ritual.

shippers. As Babb notes, "[This is] in some ways the central and indispensable act, the core around which all else is elaboration and overlay" (1975:54). This seems to be clearly a form of sacramental communion with the deity which transforms the devotee.

In short, the Hindu *puja*, which has few, if any, historical ties to Christian worship, follows the basic structure that I outlined above — for like all worship it is, sociologically speaking, a form of status transformation.

## SACRIFICE, PRAYER, AND PREACHING

Some common elements of worship do not obviously fit into these three categories — for example, the preaching of sermons, sacrifice and prayer. The nature of these activities can be clarified by relating them to the three aspects of status transformation that have been used to analyze worship.

As a preliminary matter it must be noted that sacrifice and prayer can be aspects of magical coercion or quid pro quo exchange as well as worship per se. Weber claims that "sacrifice, at first appearance, is a magical instrumentality that in part stands at the immediate service of the coercion of the gods"(1968:423). Similarly, prayers can be magical — for example, mantras that have the power to coerce the gods. According to Weber, prayer frequently takes the form of exchange: "in most cases such prayer has a purely business-like rationalized form that sets forth the achievements of the supplicant in behalf of the god and then claims adequate recompense therefor"(1968:423).

But to the degree that religious ritual shifts toward worship per se, sacrifice and prayer can express any one or all three of the elements previously identified. First, the sins and impurity of the devotee can be "placed upon" the sacrificial victim. The victim's destruction then symbolizes the casting away of these undesirable characteristics. The result is an improvement in the devotee's spiritual status. Second, sacrifice can take the form of an offering that symbolizes both the deference of the worshipper and praise of the deity. Finally, sacrifice can be the means of communication and communion with the sacred. As the classic study of sacrifice by Hubert and Mauss (1964:39-40) notes:

> We noticed then how the sacrifier, by the laying on of hands, imparted to the victim something of his own personality. Now it is the victim or its remains which will pass on to the sacrifier the new qualities it has acquired by the action of sacrifice. This communication can be effected by a mere blessing. But in general recourse was had to more material rites: for example, the sprinkling of blood[,] the application of the skin of the victim, anointing with the fat, contact with the residue of the cremation. Sometimes the animal was cut into two parts and the sacrifier walked between them. But the most perfect way of effecting communication was to hand over to the sacrifier a portion of the victim, which he consumed. By eating a portion of it he assimilated to himself the characteristics of the whole.

In short, sacrifice is so common in religious ritual because of its capacity to symbolize powerfully all three of the elements of worship, as well as the elements of magic and exchange.[7] The same can be said for prayer. Stated another way, sacrifice and prayer are two important means of symbolic communication. They, along with other such media, can be used to symbolize or communicate all three of the elements of worship.

Preaching can also express all three elements. Hence, in certain religious traditions, such as Calvinism and Sikhism, "the word," and therefore the reading and exposition of sacred texts, becomes the core of worship. Typically, however, listening to sermons is primarily

7. Hubert and Mauss (1964: chap. 2) discuss a number of rituals that should be kept analytically distinct from sacrifice per se, e.g., purification of the victim. The essence of sacrifice is the destruction of one thing to create something of higher value. Sacrifice may or may not be the central element of the religious ritual. Where it is, it will often be related to other elaborate forms of ritual. These related rituals ( often used in other contexts, too) should not be confused with sacrifice per se.

a matter of deference, an aspect of the second element. The deferential listening to God's word is the equivalent of listening to the ideas and instructions of a high-status person. To refuse to do so is to deny the validity of a person's status. Whether one actually follows such instructions later is a matter of obedience to authority and is not, in the narrow sense, a matter of honor via deference. Humans frequently obey people they do not honor, and honor people they do not obey. But it is rare that they refuse to listen deferentially to people they honor. The same can be true for sacral relationships. Thus, the refusal to deferentially listen to God's word is to dishonor the deity; it is the opposite of praise and adoration. Again, an exception proves the rule: Traditions that de-emphasize preaching and listening attentively to "the word" are precisely those traditions that have other elaborate forms to express praise and deference of the deity; conversely, the more "the word" and preaching are emphasized, the more simplified and informal forms of worship are likely to be.

Therefore, the specific activities of worship do not necessarily have a one-to-one relationship with the three elements we have identified — although sometimes they do. Rather, these three elements are analytical categories; they help us see how worship can be usefully conceived of as status transformation and maintenance. Without worshippers, a god is without sacredness — at least in the empirical historical world. Conversely, by worship of deities people transform their spiritual status — and sometimes their worldly status as well — by contact with the sacred.[8]

Some elaborations and caveats are appropriate. It is noteworthy that actors themselves are in varying degrees conscious of the relationships between worship and status processes. In some languages there is a direct semantic relationship between status deference and worship. In English the earliest known uses of the word "worship" refer to "the condition (in a person) of deserving, or being held in, esteem or repute; honour, distinction, renown; good name credit." This meaning was common into the sixteenth century (*Oxford English Dictionary* 1971). Even contemporary dictionaries still list one meaning as "a person of importance — used as a title for various officials" (*Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* 1980). This seems to confirm further the legitimacy of conceptualizing worship as a status process.

Second, to conceptualize worship as a form of status transformation of the individual is not to deny that the collective outcome of such behavior can be to reinforce the solidarity and consensus of the group. What the status transformation perspective adds is a hypothesis about why the individual is motivated to participate in a form of religious activity that supposedly has crucial collective consequences — without assuming that these important consequences are in some sense the cause of the activity.

Finally, religious rituals — even the purest forms of worship — are not, from the actors' point of view, a permanent solution. The separation of the sacred and the profane reasserts itself, and the human experience of contingency and powerlessness continues. The transformation of the person or the world that results from worship is only temporary. This is one of the reasons worship and other rituals must be repeated again and again. Therefore, some religions have sought a more permanent solution. Usually this involves a notion of salvation.

8. Another caveat is about devils. First, two types must be distinguished. Some have characteristics roughly the reverse of some dominant deity, but are nonetheless respected and worshipped, e.g., where Satan is the supreme deity and devil worship is performed. In this case, the model I have outlined would apply, although many of the concrete behaviors will reverse conventional forms of worship. An example of this is radical Tantric worship. In the second type, the devil is a subsidiary deity that can cause harm if not propitiated. The interaction approximates magic rather than worship; in an often cynical manner the devotees take whatever ritual actions they deem necessary to avoid trouble.

## SALVATION AND SOTERIOLOGY

Most complex religions have some notion of salvation: deliverance from sin, suffering, and illusion — usually by being admitted more or less permanently into the presence of the ultimate deity or source of being. To demonstrate that the usefulness of conceptualizing sacredness as a form of status is not restricted to the analysis of worship, salvation will also be conceptualized as a form of status transformation and upward mobility.

If salvation is a form of status transformation, it follows that the sources of status should also be the means to salvation. As indicated above, the two key sources of status are conformity to the norms of the group and associations. This distinction provides a conceptual tool for analyzing alternative soteriologies, i.e., doctrines of how salvation occurs. I argue that many of the major theological debates in salvation religions are arguments about whether conformity or associations — or some specific mix of these two — are the most effective means to the form of status transformation known as salvation.

Classically this distinction is expressed as a contrast between works and law, on the one hand, and faith and grace, on the other. In the latter case, the availability of grace is nearly always related to one's devotion to and close association with some mediating savior. That is, one does not earn salvation by conforming to norms; a person is treated as if he or she is worthy because of association with a saving figure who is supremely worthy. Other traditions, of course, place more emphasis on humans' conformity to or deviance from some set of norms or laws.

Let us briefly review the history of the Christian churches' concern with these matters. First, in his dispute with the Pharisees Jesus clearly questions the efficacy of conforming to the Judaic law as a means to salvation. The concept of justification by faith rather than works is at the core of Paul's theology. One of the earliest recorded disputes within the Christian church was between Peter and Paul and their respective followers over whether Christians must conform to the Jewish rules of purification. A central consideration in Augustine's debates with Pelagius over free will was whether people's own efforts toward religious and moral conformity play a role in their salvation. The theological concern that started Martin Luther toward his break with the Roman Church was his emphasis on salvation through association with and trust in Jesus — justification by faith; this was in contrast to the claim of the medieval Catholic Church that salvation was available only to those who conformed to the ritual requirements of the Church. The post-Reformation debate within Roman Catholicism known as Jansenism was another version of the Augustinian-Pelagian controversy. A main point of contention within the later Puritan tradition was over the relative emphasis on association and conformity. Orthodox Calvinists — at least in explicitly formulated dogma — rejected all hints of earning one's salvation, or even that good behavior was due to one's own efforts. In its extreme form, Calvinism claimed that "the elect" had been unconditionally predestined to salvation and could not reject God's grace — eliminating the last vestige of free will and conformity. Their opponents, the Arminians, while not Pelagians, did insist that people were capable of accepting or rejecting the salvation that they had been offered. This latter stand was adopted by John Wesley, the founder of the Methodists. As their very name indicates, they granted some legitimacy to systematic human will and effort, at least in the process of sanctification. In short, throughout Christian history a central theological question has been "What is required for salvation?"

The alternative answers to that question have largely revolved around different emphases on conformity and association. In formal theology, the Christian's association with the deity — usually through a close relationship with the Christ figure — has always received the dominant emphasis. Yet the role of conformity to religious norms in establishing and maintaining the association — and whether conformity to moral norms was a reliable sign of such a saving relationship — have often been important, especially in the day-to-day

life of the Church. While not all of the subtleties of the historic debates over Christian soteriology are captured by conceptualizing these as differential emphases on conformity and association, it is parsimonious to see this as a basic issue around which the debates have centered.[9]

Very similar sectarian disputes have occurred within other religious traditions. The different traditions within Hinduism (see, e.g., Appadurai 1981; Hopkins 1971) usually are related to this issue. Orthodox Smarta Brahmanism, for example, clearly places a strong emphasis on conformity to the laws of the Dharmasastras and careful adherence to the rules of caste and ritual purity. In contrast, the *bhakti* or devotional tradition of Hinduism strongly emphasizes an intimate personal relationship with a savior figure — Ram, Krishna, Shiva, Mother — as the key to salvation. Even disputes within specific sects hinge on this issue. For example, the major theological division within the small but influential Sri Vaisnava sect concerns the significance of human effort. This internal sectarian difference is symbolized by the contrast theologians make between "monkey grace" and "cat grace." Though carried by its mother, the baby monkey must hold on if it is to be safely transported. In contrast, the baby cat, carried by the scruff of its neck, makes no contribution to its mobility and depends totally upon its mother for safety. In short, the major theological debate within this sect is another version of whether works or grace are the means of salvation.

These differential emphases on works and grace are special cases of the more general issue of whether status is to be acquired by conformity or association. In the first case one must to some degree accomplish one's own salvation by conforming to the religious norms. The content of such norms is highly variable: It may range from an emphasis on systematic interpersonal morality, to the maintenance of physical purity, to conformity to the magical procedures for sacrifice, to a willingness to accept the salvation that is offered. In the second case, more emphasis is placed not on one's conformity, but on the nature and the quality of one's relationship to the divine. Frequently, the role of a mediator, e.g., Jesus, Shiva, or some personal guru, is important; one's own spiritual status is transformed — despite the inadequacy of one's behavior — because one is a devotee and associate of a redeeming mediator. Sometimes this is even against one's own will. The details of any given historical tradition or conflict are, of course, highly complex and would require an elaborate analysis to deal with the variation and subtleties involved (for a more detailed discussion, see Milner 1994: chap. 14). But this discussion has shown how salvation and soteriologies can be usefully analyzed as special cases of status transformation processes.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has provided a sociological analysis of worship and salvation as forms of status transformation. But these analyses are intended to illustrate a more general point: the utility of conceptualizing sacredness as a special kind of status. Doing this offers the prospect of creating a systematic theory of status and sacral relations. Sciences often progress by being able to see important relationships among phenomena that had been unnoticed until they were subsumed within a common theoretical frame of reference. There is, however, the possibility that such analyses simply redescribe what we already know in some new more esoteric language. My claim is that conceptualizing sacredness as a form of status accomplishes more than this.

With respect to worship, there is no sociological literature that distinguishes worship from other forms of ritual and describes and explains the forms of behavior that constitute

9. There is, of course, a sizeable literature on the history of Christian doctrine. A standard overview is Pelikan (1971).

worship — much less a literature that does this for both Christianity and Hinduism. It is conceptualizing worship as status transformation that suggests asking what the sociological content of worship is, and how it relates to other forms of status transformation.

With respect to salvation, there is a significant sociological literature (e.g., Weber 1968) — and, of course, a much larger theological literature — that is well aware that variations in soteriology fluctuate between the notions of law-works and faith-grace. There is, however, no standard explanation of why this is the case. By seeing salvation as a special case of status transformation, and identifying conformity and association as the key sources of status, we understand why these two poles are characteristic of soteriologies.

Conceptualizing sacredness as status also allows us to see both the commonalities and the differences between worship and salvation. Both are concerned with the transformation of the individual (and/or the community); both use parallel process of conformity and association. However, they vary drastically in the time frame in which they are relevant and effective; hence, worship must be continually repeated, while salvation, if not for "eternity," is for an extended transhistorical period.

These arguments, of course, by no means explain all of the things that are of interest concerning worship and salvation (much less religion in general). If the proposed perspective does not answer all questions, it does suggest additional directions for future research. Two examples will have to suffice. First, if salvation is a form of status transformation and social mobility, then this must take place in the context of a stratification system. Therefore, it may be useful to conceive more systematically of eschatologies and otherworlds as stratification structures, and compare them more carefully to their profane counterparts. Analyses reported elsewhere (Milner 1993, 1994) suggest that the key notions of (and variations within) Hindu and Christian eschatology are reversals of the key structural characteristics of the worldly stratification systems with which they are associated. For example, the notion of repeated incarnations (*samsara*), characteristic of Hinduism, is analogous to endless social mobility, and is the precise obverse of the prohibition of social mobility characteristic of the Indian caste system. Second, it is well known that those who are religiously possessed are disproportionately drawn from low-status social categories (see, e.g., Obeyesekere 1981; Lewis 1989). It may be useful, therefore, to analyze possession as a special case of status transformation and to investigate if the same mechanisms relevant to worship and salvation can clarify the sociological nature of this phenomenon.

Conceptualizing sacredness as a form of status offers the prospect of creating a systematic theory of status and sacral relations, and hence further extending the insights of Durkheim, Weber, Goffman (1967, 1971), and Collins (1982) concerning the interplay between the sacred and the profane.

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