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The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion

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Introduction

14 The Reader will very soon realize that sacred and profane are two modes of being in the world, two existential situations assumed by man in the course of his history. These modes of being in the world are not of concern /15/ only to the history of religions; they are not the object only of historical, sociological, or ethnological study. In the last analysis the sacred and profane modes of being depend upon the different positions that man has conquered in the cosmos; hence they are of concern both to the philosopher and to anyone seeking to discover the possible dimensions of human existence.

17 Our primary concern is to present the specific dimensions of religious experience, to bring out the differences between it and profane experience of the world.

Cf. opening reference to Rudolf Otto's Das Heilige (1917) as experientially based account of religion. Roger Poole, Towards Deep Subjectivity, Allen Lane

I Sacred Space and Making the World Sacred The Penguin Press, 1972
HOMOGENEITY OF SPACE AND HIEROPHANY "Ethical space"

20 For religious man, space is not homogeneous; he experiences interruptions, breaks in it; some parts of space are qualitatively different from others. [Exod 3 5: holy ground].

... There is then a sacred space, and hence a strong, significant space; there are other spaces that are not sacred and so are without structure or consistency, amorphous. Nor is this all. For religious man, this spatial nonhomogeneity finds expression in the experience of an opposition between space that is sacred -- the only real and real-ly existing space -- and all other space, the formless expanse surrounding it.

It must be said at once that the religious experience of the nonhomogeneity of space is a primordial experience, /21/ homologizable to a founding of the world. It is not a matter of theoretical speculation, but of a primary religious experience that precedes all reflection on the world. For it is a break effected in space that allows the world to be constructed, because it reveals the fixed-point, the central-axis for all future orientation. When the sacred manifests itself

I. e., experience as process, cf. John E. Smith, Experience and God [OUP 1968] pp. 12, 25 ff.

in any hierophany, there is not only a break in the homogeneity of space; there is also revelation of an ~~absolute reality~~, opposed to the ~~nonreality~~ of the vast surrounding expanse. The manifestation of the sacred ~~ontologically~~ founds the world. In the homogeneous and infinite expanse, in which no point of reference is possible and hence no orientation can be established, the hierophany reveals an absolute fixed point, a center.

22 ... religious man has always sought to fix his abode at the center of the world. If the world is to be lived in, it must be founded -- and no world can come to birth in the ~~chaos~~ of the ~~homogeneity~~ and ~~relativity~~ of profane space. The discovery or projection of a fixed point -- the center -- is equivalent to the ~~creation~~ of the world; and we shall soon show the cosmogonic value of the ~~ritual-orientation and construction of sacred space~~.

23 (BL non-religious man in pure state does not exist; always some degenerate form of religious space /24/ -- a man's birthplace, or the scenes of his first love, or certain places in the first foreign city he visited in his youth.)

THEOPHANIES AND SIGNS

25 For a believer, the church shares in a different space from the street in which it stands... The threshold that separates the two spaces also indicates the distance between ~~two modes of~~ being, the profane and the religious. The threshold is the limit, the boundary, the frontier that distinguishes and opposes ~~two~~ worlds -- and at the same time the paradoxical place where those worlds communicate, where passage from the profane to the sacred world becomes possible.

... Numerous rites accompany ^p passing the domestic threshold....

26 On the most archaic levels of culture this possibility of transcendence is expressed by various images of an opening; here, in the sacred enclosure, communication with the gods is made possible; hence there must be a door to the world above, by which the gods can descend to earth and man can ascend symbolically to heaven. We shall soon see that this was the case in many religions; properly speaking, the temple constitutes an opening in the upward direction and ensures communication with the world of the gods.

Jacob's dream. Genesis 28 12-19.

28 Religious man's desire to live in the sacred is in fact

equivalent to his desire to take up his abode in objective reality, not to let himself be paralysed by the never ceasing relativity of purely subjective experiences, to live in a real and effective world, and not in an illusion. This behavior is documented on every plane of religious man's existence, but it is particularly evident in his desire to move about only in a sanctified world, that is, /29/ in a sacred space. This is the reason for the elaboration of techniques of orientation which, properly speaking, are techniques for the construction of sacred space. But we must not suppose that human work is in question here, that it is through his own efforts that man can consecrate a space. In reality the ritual by which he constructs a sacred space is efficacious in the measure in which it reproduces the work of the gods. But the better to understand the need for ritual construction of a sacred space, we must dwell a little on the traditional concept of the "world"; it will then be apparent that for religious man every world is a sacred world.

CHAOS AND COSMOS

29 One of the outstanding characteristics of traditional societies is the opposition that they assume between their inhabited territory and the unknown and indeterminate space that surrounds it. The former is the world (more precisely, our world), the cosmos.; everything outside it is no longer a cosmos but a sort of "other world," a foreign, chaotic space, peopled by ghosts, demons, foreigners (who are assimilated to demons and the souls of the dead).

30 (Not because humanly organized but)... precisely because it was first consecrated, because in one way or another it is the work of the gods. The world (that is, our world) is a universe within which the sacred has already manifested itself, in which, consequently, the break-through from plane to plane has become possible and repeatable. It is not difficult to see why the religious moment implies the cosmogonic moment. The sacred reveals absolute reality and at the same time makes orientation possible; hence it founds the world in the sense that it fixes the limits and establishes the order of the world.

Illustration from Vedic ritual for taking possession of a territory.

31 An unknown, foreign, and unoccupied territory (which often means "unoccupied by our people") still shares in the fluid and larval modality of chaos. By occupying it and, above all, by settling in it, man symbolically transforms it into a cosmos through a ritual repetition of the cosmogony. What is to become "our world" must first be "created," and every creation has a paradigmatic model -- the creation of the universe by the gods.

Illustrated by Scandinavian occupation of Iceland, Spanish occupation of Americas.

Consecration of a Place = Repetition of the Cosmogony

32 - 36: Various illustrations of sacred pole, pillar, column

34 The sacred pole of the Achilpa supports their world

and ensures communication with the sky. Here we have the prototype of a cosmological image that has been very widely disseminated -- the cosmic pillars that support heaven and at the same time open the road to the world /35/ of the gods.

THE CENTER OF THE WORLD

36 Where the break-through from plane to plane has been effected by a hierophany, there too an opening has been made ., either upward (the divine world) or downward (the underworld, the world of the dead). The three cosmic levels -- earth, heaven, underworld -- have been put in communication. As we just saw, this communication is sometimes expressed through the image of a universal pillar, axis mundi, which at once connects and supports heaven and earth and whose base is fixed in the world below (the infernal /37/ regions). Such a cosmic pillar can be only at the very center of the universe, for the whole of the habitable world extends around it. Here, then, we have a sequence of religious conceptions and cosmological images that are inseparably connected and form a system that may be called the "system of the world" prevalent in traditional societies:

- (a) a sacred place constitutes a break in the homogeneity of space;
- (b) this break is symbolized by an opening by which passage from one cosmic region to another is made possible (from heaven to earth and vice versa; from earth to the underworld);
- (c) communication with heaven is expressed by one or another

of certain images, all of which refer to the axis mundi: pillar (cf. the universalis columna), ladder (cf. Jacob's ladder), mountain, tree, vine, etc.; hence the axis is located "in the middle," at the "navel of the earth"; it is the Center of the World.

Many different myths, rites, and beliefs are derived from this traditional "system of the world." Hence:

38 The cosmic mountain (India, Iran, Mesopotamia, Gerizim in Samaria, Jerusalem, Golgotha, the ka'aba....

39 This same symbolism of the center explains other series of cosmological images and religious beliefs. Among these the most important are:

(a) holy sites and sanctuaries are believed to be situated at the center of the world;

(b) temples are replicas of the cosmic mountain and hence constitute the pre-eminent link between earth and heaven;

(c) the foundations of temples descend deep into the lower regions.

"OUR" WORLD IS ALWAYS SITUATED AT THE CENTER \$x p 42

44 A universe comes to birth from its center; it spreads out from a central point that is, at it were, its navel.

Rig Veda, Hebrew tradition...

Rabbi ben Gorion said of the rock of Jerusalem: "it is called the Foundation Stone of the Earth, that is, the navel of the Earth, because it is from there that the whole Earth unfolded." Then too, because the creation of man is a replica of the cosmogony, it follows that the first man was fashioned from the "navel of the earth" or in /45/ Jerusalem (Judaic-Christian tradition). It could not be otherwise if we remember that the Center is precisely the place where a break in plane occurs, where space becomes sacred,, hence pre-eminently real. A creation implies a superabundance of reality, in other words an irruption of the sacred into the world.

It follows that every construction or fabrication has the cosmogony as paradigmatic model. Hence plan of villages, sanctuaries...

47 ... settling in a territory is equivalent to founding a world.

CITY-COSMOS 47

47 Since "our world" is a cosmos, any attack from without threatens to turn it into chaos. And as "our world" was founded by imitating the cosmogony, so the enemies who attack are demons...

UNDERTAKING THE CREATION OF THE WORLD 50

50 It does not lie within our province to write the history of the desacralization of the human dwelling....

51 We shall later have occasion to inquire whether this secularization of nature is really final... Survivals...

BL: It is final only within the scientific part of a differentiation of consciousness.

52 Whatever the structure of a traditional society -- be it a society of hunters, herdsmen, or cultivators, or already at the stage of urban civilization -- the habitation always undergoes a process of sanctification, because it constitutes an imago mundi and the world is a divine creation. But there are various ways of homologizing the dwelling place to the cosmos, because there are various types of cosmogonies. For our purpose it will be sufficient to distinguish two methods of ritually transforming the dwelling place (whether the territory or house) into cosmos, that is, of giving it the value of an imago mundi:

(a) assimilating it to the cosmos by the projection of the four horizons from a central point (in the case of a village) or by the symbolic installation of the axis mundi (in the case of a house);

(b) repeating through a ritual of construction the paradigmatic acts of the gods by virtue of which the world came to birth from the body of a marine dragon or of a primordial giant.

... the first method -- cosmicizing a space by projection of the horizons or by installation of the axis mundi -- is already documented/in the most archaic stages of culture.... while the second method seems to have developed in the culture of the earliest cultivators. What is important for our investigation is the fact that, in all traditional cultures, the habitation possesses a sacred aspect by the simple fact that it reflects the world.

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COSMOGONY AND BUILDING SACRIFICE 54

58 Thus religious architecture simply took over and developed the cosmological symbolism already present in the structure of primitive habitations. In its turn, the human habitation had been chronologically preceded by the provisional "holy place," by a space $\frac{1}{2}$ provisionally consecrated and cosmicized (cf the Australian Achilpa). This is as much as to say that all symbols and rituals having to do with cities temples and houses (derive from *exper sac sp*

57 The multiplicity, or even the infinity, of centers of the world raises no difficulty for religious thought. For it is not a matter of geometrical space, but of an existential and sacred space that has an entirely different structure, that admits an infinite number of breaks and admits an infinite number of communications with the transcendent.

Cf. Piaget, child's first space is topological

TEMPLE, BASILICA, CATHEDRAL 58

58 In the great oriental civilizations -- from Mesopotamia and Egypt to China and India -- the temple received a new and important valorization. It is not only an imago mundi; it is also interpreted as the earthly reproduction of a transcendent model. Judaism inherited this ancient oriental conception of the temple as the copy of a celestial work of architecture. In this idea we probably have one of the last interpretations that religious man has given to the primary experience of sacred space in contrast to profane space....

To summarize the essential data of the problem: If /59/ the temple constitutes an imago mundi, this is because the world, as the work of the gods, is sacred. But ~~mixing~~ the cosmological structure of the temple gives room for a new religious valorization; as house of the gods, hence holy place above all others, the temple continually resanctifies the world, because it at once represents and contains it. In the last analysis, it is by virtue of the temple that the world is resanctified in every part. However impure it may have become, the world is continually purified by the sanctity of sanctuaries.

Another idea derives from this increasingly accepted ontological difference between the cosmos and its sanctified image, the temple. This is the idea that the sanctity of the temple is proof against all earthly corruption, by virtue of the fact that the architectural plan of the temple is the work of the gods and hence exists in heaven, near to the gods. The transcendent models of temples enjoy a spiritual, in corruptible celestial existence. Through the grace of the gods, man attains to the dazzling vision of these models, which he then attempts to reproduce on earth. Illustrations.... pp 59-62

SOME CONCLUSIONS 62

62 From thousands of examples.. we have cited only a small number but enough to show the varieties of the religious experience of space.

63 But for our purpose it is not the infinite variety of the religious experiences of space that concerns us but, on the contrary, their elements of unity.

65 Religious man's profound nostalgia is to inhabit a "divine world"... the desire to live in a pure and holy cosmos, as it was in the beginning, when it came ~~as~~ fresh from the Creator's hands.

63 If we should attempt to summarize the result of the descriptions that have been presented in this (first) chapter, we could say that the experience of ~~the~~ sacred space makes possible the "founding of the world"; where the sacred manifests itself in space, the real unveils itself, the world comes into existence. But the irruption of the sacred does not only project a fixed point into the formless fluidity of profane space, a center into chaos; it also effects a break in plane, that is, it opens communication between the cosmic planes (between earth and heaven) and makes possible ontological passage from one mode of being to another. It is such a break in the heterogeneity of profane space that creates the center through which communication with the trans-mundane is established, that consequently founds the world, for the center makes orientation possible. Hence the manifestation of the sacred in space has a cosmological valence; every spatial hierophany or consecration of a space is equivalent to a cosmogony. The first conclusion we might draw /64/ would be: the world becomes apprehensible as world, as cosmos, in the measure in which it reveals itself as a sacred world.

II Sacred Time and Myths (68 - 113)

PROFANE DURATION AND SACRED TIME 68

68 For religious man time too, like space, is neither homogeneous nor continuous. ... there are intervals of sacred time (festivals)... .. the e is profane time, ordinary temporal duration, in which acts with religious meaning have their setting. Between these two kinds of time there is, ofcourse, solution of continuity; but by means of rites/man can pass withut danger from ordinary temporal duration to sacred time.

religious/

.. essential difference... by its very nature sacred time sacred time is reversible... it is a primordial mythical time made present. Every religious festival, any liturgical time, represents the /69/ reactualization of a sacred event that took place in a mythical past, "in the beginning." Religious participation in a festival implies emerging from ordinary temporal duration and reintegration of the mythical time reactualized by the festival itself.... It (sacred time) is an ontological, Parmenidean time; it always remains equal to itself, it neither changes nor is exhausted. With each periodical festival, the participants find the same sacred time -- the same that had been manifested in the festival of the previous year or in the festival of a century earlier; it is the time that was created and sanctified by the gods at the period of their gesta, of which the /70/ festival is precisely a reactualization. In other words the participants in the festival meet in it the first appearance of sacred time, as it appeared ab origine, in illo tempore.... By creating the various realities that today constitute the world, the gods also founded sacred time, for the time contemporary with creation was necessarily sanctified by the presence and activity of the gods.

(BL: non-distinction of original and festival times)

71 contrast of religious and non-religious experience of time

72 Just as a church constitutes a break in plane in the profane space of a modern city, the service celebrated inside it marks a break in profane temporal duration.

Difference of Xtian religion from archaic religion: Xtian liturgy unfolds a historical time sanctified by the incarnation of the Son of God.

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TEMPLUM - TEMPUS 73

73 .. in a number of North American Indian languages the term world (= cosmos) is also used in the sense of year. The Yokuts say "the world has passed," meaning "a year has gone by."... .. The vocabulary reveals the intimate religious connection between the world and cosmic time. The cosmos is conceived as a living unity that is born, develops, and dies on the last day of the year, to be ^breborn on New Year's Day. We shall see that this rebirth is a birth, that the cosmos is reborn each year because, at every New Year, time begins ab initio.

(BL: non-distinction of spatial and temporal frameworks)

(more precisely: non-distinction of frame as spatial and as temporal)

75 Later (than Usener) studies have refined the discovery: templum designates the spatial, tempus the temporal aspect of the motion of the horizon in space and time.

76 In the preceding chapter we noted the considerable importance of the cosmogonic myth as paradigmatic model for every kind of creation and construction. We will now add that the cosmogony equally implies the creation of time. Nor is this all. For just as the cosmogony is the archetype of all creation, cosmic time, which the cosmogony brings forth, is the paradigmatic model for all other times -- that is for the times specifically belonging to the various categories of existing things.... Before a particular vegetable species was created, the time that now causes it to grow, bear fruit, and die did not exist. It is for this reason that every creation is imagined as having taken place at the beginning of time, in principio. Time gushes forth with the first appearance of a new category of existents. This is why myth plays such an important role; as we shall see later, the way in which a reality came into existence is revealed by its myth.

(BL: temporal aspect of significance of myth)

ANNUAL REPETITION OF THE CREATION 77

77 .. the cosmogonic myth . tells how the cosmos came into existence. At Babylon during the course of the akitu ceremony, which was performed during the last days of the year that was ending and the first days of the New Year, the Poem of Creation, the Eunuma Elish, was solemnly recited. This ritual

recitation reactualized the combat between Marduk and the marine monster Tiamat, a combat that took place ab origine and put an end to chaos by the final victory of the god. Marduk created the cosmos from Tiamat's dismembered body and created man from the blood of the demon Kingu, Tiamat's chief ally. That the commemoration of the Creation was in fact a reactualization of the cosmogonic act is shown both by the rituals and in the formulas recited during the ceremony.

The combat between Tiamat and Marduk, that is, was mimed by a battle between two groups of actors, a ceremony that we find again among the Hittites (again in the frame of the dramatic scenario of the New Year), among the Egyptians, and at Ras Shamra. The battle between the two groups of actors repeated the passage from chaos to cosmos, actualized the cosmogony. The mythical event became present once again. "May he continue to shorten his days!" the priest cried. The combat, the victory, and the Creation took place at that instant, hic et nunc.

Since the New Year is a reactualization of the cosmogony, it implies starting time over again at its beginning, that is, restoration of the primordial time, the "pure" time that existed at the moment of Creation. This is why the New Year is the occasion for "purifications," for the expulsion of sins, of demons, or merely of a scapegoat. For it is not a matter merely of a certain temporal interval coming to an end...; it also is a matter of abolishing the past year and past time. Indeed, this is the meaning of ritual purifications; there is more than a mere "purification"; the sins and faults of the individual and of the community as a whole are annulled, consumed as by fire.

The Nawrōz -- the Persian New Year -- commemorates the day that witnessed the creation of the world and man... the renewal of creation was accomplished... Time had worn the human being, society, the cosmos -- and this destructive time was profane time, duration strictly speaking; it had to be abolished in order to reintegrate the mythical moment in which the world had come into existence, bathed in a "pure," "strong," and sacred time. The abolition of profane past time was accomplished by rituals that signified a sort of end of the world. The extinction of fires, the return of souls from the dead, social confusion of the

/79/ type exemplified by the Saturnalia, erotic licence, orgies, and so on, symbolized the retrogression of the cosmos into chaos. On the last day of the year the universe was dissolved in the primordial waters.... Since Tiamat was again present, the cosmos was annulled; and Marduk was obliged to create it once again, after having once again conquered Tiamat.

The meaning of this periodical retrogression of the world into a chaotic modality was this: all the "sins" of the year, everything that time had soiled and worn, was annihilated in the physical sense of the word. By symbolically participating in the annihilation and re-creation of the world, man too was created anew; he was reborn, for he began a new life. With each New Year, man felt freer and purer, for he was delivered from the burden of his sins and failings. He had reintegrated the fabulous time of creation, hence a sacred and strong time -- sacred because transfigured by the presence of the gods, strong because it was the time that belonged, and belonged only, to the most gigantic creation ever accomplished, that of the universe.

REGENERATION THROUGH RETURN TO THE TIME OF ORIGINS ^I 80

80 ... (1) through annual repetition of the cosmogony, time was regenerated; it began again as ~~xs~~sacred time, for it coincided with the illud tempus in which the world had first come into existence.

(2) by participating ritually in the end of the world and in its re-creation, any man became ^{con}temporary with the illud tempus; hence he was born anew, he began life over again with his reserve of vital forces intact, as it was at the moment of his birth.

81 .. the festival is not merely the commemoration of a mythical (and hence religious) event; it reactualizes the event.

The paramount time of origins is the time of the cosmogony, the instant that saw the appearance of the most immense of realities, the world. This, as we saw in the preceding chapter, is the reason the cosmogony serves as the paradigmatic model for every creation, for every kind of doing. For the same reason cosmogonic time serves as the model for all sacred times; for if sacred time is that in which the gods manifested themselves and created, obviously the most complete divine manifestation and the most gigantic creation is the creation of the world.

((Hence reactualization at founding a new territory, a city, a house, to ensure a fortunate reign, a safe voyage, in healing, etc.

83 ... in healing chants.. the myth of the origin of the medicines employed is always incorporated into the /84/ cosmogonic myth. It is well known that in all primitive and traditional therapies a remedy becomes efficacious only if its origin is ritually rehearsed in the sick person's presence.

FESTIVAL TIME AND THE STRUCTURE OF FESTIVALS 85

85 .. the first manifestation of a reality is equivalent to its creation by divine or semidivine beings; hence recovering the time of origin implies ritual repetition of the god's creative act. The periodic reactualization of the creative acts performed by the divine beings in illo tempore constitutes the sacred calendar, the series of festivals. It is precisely the reintegration of this original and sacred time that differentiates man's behavior during the festival from his behavior before or after it. For in many cases the same acts are performed during the festival as during nonfestival periods. But religious man believes that he then lives in another time, that he has succeeded in returning to the mythical illud tempus.

89 The origin of realities and of life itself is religious. The yam can be cultivated and eaten because it is periodically cultivated and eaten ritually. And these rituals can be performed because the gods revealed them in illo tempore, by creating man and the yam and by showing how to cultivate and eat that particular food plant.

In the festival .. the participants experience the sanctity of human existence as a divine creation.

90 (eternal return and progress: progress occurs but considered new revelation)

PERIODICALLY BECOMING CONTEMPORARY WITH THE GODS

93 .. it would be wrong to believe that the religious man of primitive and archaic societies refuses to assume the responsibility for a genuine existence. On the contrary... he courageously assumes immense responsibilities -- for example, that of collaborating in the creation of the cosmos, or of creating his own world, or of ensuring the life of plants and animals, and so on. But it is a different kind of responsibility from those that, to us moderns, appear to be the only genuine and valid responsibilities. It is a responsibility on the cosmic plane,

in contradistinction to the moral, social, or historical responsibilities that alone are regarded as valid in modern civilizations.

94 .. existentially the primitive always places himself in a cosmic context.

.. here again we can discern the ontological obsession .. which can be considered an essential characteristic of the man of primitive and archaic societies. For to wish to reintegrate the time of origin is also to wish to return to the presence of the gods, to recover the strong, fresh, pure world that existed in illo tempore. It is at once once thirst for the sacred and nostalgia for being.

MYTH = PARADIGMATIC MODEL

95 The myth relates a sacred history, .. a primordial event that took place at the beginning of time. .. equivalent to revealing a mystery. For the persons of the myth are not human beings; they are gods or culture heroes..... The myth... is the recital of what the gods or the semidivine beings did at the beginning of time. To tell a myth is to proclaim what happened ab origine. Once told, that is, revealed, the myth becomes apodictic truth; it establishes a truth that is absolute. "It is so because it is said that it is so," the Netsilik Eskimos declare to justify the validity of their sacred history and religious traditions. The myth proclaims the appearance of a new cosmic situation or of a primordial event. Hence it is always the recital of a creation; it tells how something was accomplished, began to be. It is for this reason that myth is bound up with ontology; it speaks only of realities, of what really happened, of what was fully manifested.

Obviously these realities are sacred realities, for it is the sacred that is pre-eminently the real. Whatever/belongs to the sphere of the profane does not participate in being, for the profane was not ontologically established by myth, has no perfect model.

Higher
from
George
Netsilik
Eskimos

in contradistinction to the moral, social, or historical responsibilities that alone are regarded as valid in modern civilizations.

96 Everything that the gods or ancestors did, hence everything that the myths have to tell about their creative activity, belongs to the sphere of the sacred and therefore participates in being. In contrast, what men do without a mythical model, belongs to the sphere of the profane; hence it is a vain and illusory activity and, in the last analysis, unreal. The more religious man is, the more paradigmatic models does he possess to guide his attitudes and actions. In other words, the more religious he is, the more does he enter into the real and the less is he in danger of becoming lost in actions that, being nonparadigmatic, "subjective," are, finally, aberrant.

97 It is the irruption of the sacred into the world, an irruption narrated in myths, that establishes the world as a reality. Every myth shows how a reality came into existence, whether it be total reality, the cosmos, or only a fragment -- an island, a species of plant, a human institution. To tell how things came into existence is to explain them and at the same time indirectly to answer another question: Why did they come into existence? The why is always implied in the how -- for the simple reason that to tell how a thing was born is to reveal an irruption of the sacred into the world, and the sacred is the ultimate cause of all real existence.

"why" and "how" indistinct; sacred equals cause.

The gods create out of an excess of power, an overflow of energy. Creation is accomplished by a surplus of ontological substance. This is why the myth, which narrates the sacred ontophany, this victorious manifestation of a plenitude of being, becomes the paradigmatic mode, for /98/ all human activities.

98 Hence the supreme function of the myth is to "fix" the paradigmatic models for all rites and all significant human activities -- eating, sexuality, work, education, and so on. Acting as a fully responsible human being, man imitates the paradigmatic gestures of the gods, repeats their actions, whether in the case of simple physiological functions such as eating or of a social, economic, cultural, military, or other activity.

/99/ /

He (a primitive) did not pray to the mythical/hero for aid and favor; he identified himself with him.

99 Writing on the Karuk Indians of California, J. P. Harrington says: "Everything that the Karuk did was enacted because the Ikkareyavs were believed to have set the example in story times. The Ikkarayevs were the people who were in America before the Indians came. Modern Karuks, in a quandary now to render the word (ie Ikkareyavs), volunteer such translations as "the princes," "the chiefs," "the angels." ... [The Ikkareyavs] remain[ed] with the Karuk only long enough to state and start all customs, telling them in every instance, 'Humans will do the same.' These doings and sayings are still related and quoted in the medicine formulas of the Karuk."

REACTUALIZING MYTHS

99 It is not without interest to note that religious man assumes a humanity that has a transhuman, transcendent model. He does not consider himself to be /100/ truly man except in so far as he imitates the gods, the culture heroes, or the mythical ancestors. This is as much as to say that religious man wishes to be other than he is on the plane of his profane experience. Religious man is not given; he makes himself, by approaching the divine models. These models, as we said, are preserved in myths, in the history of the divine gesta. Hence religious man too regards himself as made by history, just as profane man does; but the only history that concerns him is the sacred history revealed by the myths -- that is, the history of the gods; whereas profane man insists that he is constituted only by human history, hence by the sum of the very acts that, for religious man, are of no importance because they have no divine models. The point to be emphasize is that, from the beginning, religious man sets ^{the} model he is to attain on the transhuman plane, the plane revealed by his myths. One becomes truly a man only by conforming to the teaching of the myths, that is, by imitating the gods.

101 To give only one example: according to the myths of the earliest cultivators, man became what he is today -- mortal, sexualized, condemned to work -- in consequence of a primordial murder; in illo tempore a divine being, quite often a woman or a maiden, sometimes a child or a man, allowed himself to be

immolated in order that tubers or fruit trees should grow from his body. This first murder basically changed the mode of being of human life. The immolation of the divine being inaugurated not only the need to eat but also the doom of death and, in consequence, sexuality, the only way to ensure the continuity of life. The body of the immolated divinity was changed into food; its soul descended under ground, where it established the Land of the Dead. A. E. Jensen, who has devoted an important book to this type of divinities -- which he calls dema divinities -- has conclusively shown that in eating and dying man participates in the life of the demas.*

* A E Jensen, Das religiöse Weltbild einer frühen Kultur, Stuttgart 1948.

For all these palaeo-agricultural peoples, what is essential is periodically to evoke the primordial event that established the present condition of humanity. Their whole religious life is a commemoration, a remembering. The memory reactualized by the rites (hence by reiterating the primordial murder) plays a decisive role; what happened in illo tempore must never be forgotten. The true sin is forgetting. The girl who at /102/ her first emnstruation spends three days in a dark hut without speaking to anyone does so because the murdered maiden, having become the moon, remains three days in darkness; if the menstruating girl breaks the tabu of silence and speaks, she is guilty of forgetting primordial event. Personal memory is not involved; what matters is to remember themythical event, the only event worth remembering because the only creative event. It falls to the primordial myth to preserve true history, the history of the human condition; it is in the myth that the principles and paradigms for all conduct must be sought and recovered.

It is at this stage of culture that we encounter ritual cannibalism. The cannibal's chief concern would seem to be essentially metaphysical; he must not forget what happened in illo tempore.... /103/ For the begetable world to continue, man must kill and be killed; in addition, he must assume sexuality in its extreme limit -- the orgy. An Abyssinian song declares this: "She who has not yet engendered, let her engender; he who

has not yet killed, let him kill!" This is a way of saying that the two sexes are doomed to assume their destiny.

Cf Myths, Dreams and Mysteries: The Encounter between Contemporary Faiths and Archaic Realities, New York Harper 1960 pp 43 - 47: "The Cares of the Cannibal"

104 In judging a "savage" society we must not lose sight of the fact that even the most barbarous act and the most aberrant behavior have divine, transhuman models.

SACRED HISTORY, HISTORY, AND HISTORICISM 104

106 In the primitive and archaic religions the eternal repetition of the divine exploits is justified as an imitatio dei. The sacred calendar annually repeats the same festivals, that is, the commemoration of the same mythical events.... For religious man reactualization of the same mythical events constitutes his greatest hope; for with each reactualization he again has the opportunity to 107 transfigure his existence, to make it like its divine model.

107 .. when it is desacralized, cyclic time becomes terrifying....

108 This (Indian cycle of 311,000 milliarts of human years) is the true eternal return, the eternal repetition of the fundamental rhythm of the cosmos -- its periodical destruction and re-creation. In short, it is the primitive conception of the Year-Cosmos, but emptied of its religious content.

110 For Judaism, time has a beginning and will have an end. The idea of cyclic time is left behind.

110 The fall of Jerusalem expresses Yahweh's wrath 111 against his people, but it is no longer the same wrath the Yahweh expressed by the fall of Samaria. His gestures are personal interventions in history and reveal their deep meaning only for his people, the people that Yahweh has chosen. Hence the historical event acquires a new dimension; it becomes a theophany. 111 Christianity goes even further invalORIZING historical time. Since God was incarnated, that is, since he took on a historically conditioned human existence, history acquires the possibility of being sanctified. The illud tempus evoked by the Gospels is a clearly defined historical time (time of Pontius Pilate) but it was sanctified by the presence of Christ.

112 As for the conception of time on which certain historicistic and existentialist philosophies have insisted, the following observation is not without interest: Although no longer conceived as a circle, time in these modern philosophies once again wears the terrifying aspect it wore in the Indian and Greek philosophies of the eternal return. Definitively desacralized, time presents itself as a precarious and evanescent duration, leading irresistibly to death.

III The Sacredness of Nature and Cosmic Religion 116 - 159

116 For religious man, nature is never only "natural"; it is always fraught with a religious value. This is easy to understand for the cosmos is a divine creation; coming from the hands of the gods, the world is impregnated with sacredness. It is not simply a sacrality communicated by the gods, as is the case for example with a place or an object consecrated by the divine presence. The gods did more; they manifested the different modalities of the sacred in the very structure of the world and of cosmic phenomena.

The world stands displayed in such a manner that, in contemplating it, religious man discovers the many modalities of the sacred, and hence of being. Above all, the world exists, it is there, and it has a structure; it is not a chaos but a cosmos, hence it presents itself as /117/ creation, as work of the gods. The divine work always preserves the quality of transparency, that is it spontaneously reveals the many aspects of the sacred. The sky directly, "naturally," reveals the infinite distance, the transcendence of the deity. The earth too is transparent; it presents itself as universal mother and nurse. The cosmic rhythms manifest order, harmony, permanence, fecundity. The cosmos as a whole is an organism at once real, living, and sacred; it simultaneously reveals the modalities of being and of sacrality. On tophany and hierophany meet.

We must not forget that for /118/ religious man... nature always expresses something that transcends it... .. a sacred stone is venerated because it is sacred, not because it is a stone; it is the sacrality manifested through the mode of being of the stone that reveals its true essence. This is why we cannot speak of naturism or of natural religion in the sense that ^{the} nineteenth century gave to those terms; for it is "supernature" that the religious man apprehends through the natural aspects of the world.

THE CELESTIAL SACRED AND THE URANIAN GODS 118

118 Simple contemplation of the celestial vault already provokes a religious experience. The sky shows itself to be infinite, transcendent. It is pre-eminently the "wholly other" than the little represented by man and his environment. X Transcendence

is revealed by simple ~~xxx~~ awareness of infinite height. "Most high" spontaneously becomes an attribute of divinity. The higher regions in accessible to man, the sidereal zones, acquire the momentousness of the transcendent, of absolute reality, of eternity. There dwell the gods; there a few privileged mortals make their way by rites of ascent; there in the conception of certain religions, mount the souls of the dead. The "most high" is a dimension inaccessible to man as man; it belongs to super-human forces and beings. He who ascends by mounting the steps of a sanctuary or the ritual ladder that leads to the sky ceases to be a man; in one way or another, he shares in the divine condition.

All this is not arrived at by a logical, rational operation. The transcendental category of height, of the super-celestial, of the infinite, is revealed to the whole man, to his intelligence and to his soul. It is a total awareness on man's part; beholding the sky, he simultaneously discovers the divine incommensurability and his own situation in the cosmos. For the sky, by its own mode of being, reveals transcendence, force, eternity. It exists absolutely because it is high, infinite, eternal, powerful.

.. the cosmos -- paradigmatic work of the gods -- is so constructed that a religious sense of the divine transcendence is aroused by the very existence of the sky. And since the sky exists absolutely, many of the supreme gods of primitive peoples are called by names designating height, the celestial vault, meteorological phenomena, or simply Owner of the Sky or Sky Dweller.

Cf M Eliade, Patterns of Comparative Religion, chapter II, The Sky and Sky Gods, pp. 38-123.

G Durand, ascensional symbolism

I Kant, the starry skies above and the moral law within

"The heavens shew forth the glory of ~~God~~ God

Vergote, ^hInterprétation du langage religieux

Roger Poole, etical space

THE REMOTE GOD 121

125 It is useless to multiply examples. Everywhere in these primitive religions the celestial supreme being appears to have lost religious currency; he has no place in their cult, and in the myths he draws further and further away from man until he becomes a deus otiosus. Yet he is remembered and entreated as the last resort, when all ways of appealing to other gods and goddesses, the ancestors, and demons, have failed. As the Oraons express it: "Now we have tried everything, but we still have you to help us." And they sacrifice a white cock to him, crying, "God, thou art our creator, have mercy on us."

THE RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE OF LIFE 125

125 The divine remoteness actually expresses man's increasing interest in his own religious, cultural, and economic discoveries. Through his concern with hierophanies of life, through discovering the sacral fertility /126/ of the earth, and through finding himself exposed to religious experiences that are more concrete (more carnal, more orgiastic), primitive man draws away from the celestial and transcendent god. The discovery of agriculture basically transforms not only primitive man's economy but also and especially his economy of the sacred. Other religious forces come into play -- sexuality, fertility, the mythology of woman and of the earth, and so on. Religious experience becomes... more intimately connected with life. The great mother goddesses ~~XX~~ and the strong gods or the spirits of fertility are markedly more dynamic and more accessible to men than was the Creator God.

127 And yet their worshippers -- primitives and Hebrews alike -- had the feeling that all these great goddesses and all these vegetation gods were unable to save them, that is, to ensure their existence in really critical moments. These gods and goddesses could only reproduce and augment life; and they could perform that function ~~x~~ only during normal times; in short, they were divinities who governed the cosmic rhythms admirably, but who proved incapable of saving the cosmos or human society in moments of crisis (historical crisis among the Hebrews).

128 The various divinities who took the place of the supreme beings were the repository of the most concrete and striking powers, the powers of life. But by that very fact they had become "specialists" in procreation and lost the subtler, nobler, more

spiritual powers of the creator gods. In discovering the sacredness of life, man let himself be increasingly carried away by his own discovery; he gave himself up to vital hierophanies and from the sacrality that transcended his immediate and daily needs.

PERENNIALITY OF CELESTIAL SYMBOLS 128

128 Yet we must note that even when the celestial gods no longer dominate religious life, the sidereal regions, uranian symbolism, myths and rites of ascent, and the like retain a preponderant place in the economy of the sacred. What is "above," the "high," continues to reveal the transcendent in every religious complex. Driven from the cult and replaced in mythologies by other themes, in religious life the sky remains ever present by virtue of its symbolism. And this celestial symbolism in turn infuses and supports a number of rites (of ascent, climbing, initiation, royalty, and so on), of myths (the cosmic tree, the cosmic mountain, the chain of arrows connecting earth with heaven, and so on), of legends (magical flight). The symbolism of the center of the world -- whose immense dissemination we have seen -- likewise illustrates the importance of celestial symbolism; for it is at a center that communication with the sky is effected, and the sky constitutes the paradigmatic image of transcendence.

It could be said that the very structure of the cosmos keeps memory of the celestial supreme being alive. It is as if the gods had created the world in such a way that it could not but reflect their existence; for no world is possible without verticality, and that dimension alone is enough to evoke transcendence.

Driven from religious life in the strict sense, the celestial sacred remains active through symbolism. A religious symbol conveys its message even if it is no longer consciously understood in every part. For a symbol speaks to the whole human being and not only to intelligence.

STRUCTURE OF AQUATIC SYMBOLISM 129

130 The waters symbolise the universal sum of virtualities; they are the fons et origo, "spring and origin," the reservoir of all the possibilities of existence; they precede every form and support every creation. One of the paradigmatic images of creation is the island that suddenly manifests itself in the midst of the

waves. On the other hand, immersion in the water signifies regression to the preformal, reincorporation into the undifferentiated mode of pre-existence. Emergence repeats the cosmogonic act of formal manifestation; immersion is equivalent to a dissolution of forms. This is why the symbolism of the waters implies both death and rebirth.

PARADIGMATIC HISTORY OF BAPTISM 132 - 136

UNIVERSALITY OF SYMBOLS 136

137 For the Christian apologists, symbols were pregnant with messages... The revelation brought by faith did not destroy the pre-Christian meanings of symbols; it simply added a new value to them. True enough, for the believer this new meaning eclipsed all the others; it alone valorized the symbol, transfigured it into revelation. It was the resurrection of Christ that counted, not the signs that could be read in cosmic life. Yet it remains true that the new valorization was in some sort conditioned by the very structure of the symbolism; it could even be said that that the aquatic symbol awaited the fulfillment of its deepest meaning through the new values contributed by Christianity.....

History cannot basically modify the structure of an archaic symbolism. History constantly adds new meanings, but they do not destroy the structure of the symbol.

138 All this is comprehensible if we bear in mind that, for religious man, the world always presents a supernatural valence, that is, it reveals a modality of the sacred... The revelations of cosmic sacrality are in some sort promordial revelations; they take place in the most remote religious past of humanity, and the innovations later introduced by history have not had the power to abolish them.

TERRA MATER 138

138 An Indian prophet, Smohalla, chief of the Wanapum tribe, refused to till the ground... "You ask me to plow the ground! Shall I take a knife and tear my mother's bosom? Then when I die she will not take me to her bosom to rest. You ask me to dig for stone! Shall I dig under her skin for her bones? Then when I die I cannot enter her body to be born again. You ask me to cut grass and make hay and sell it, and be rich like white men! But how dare I cut off my mother's hair?"

139 These words were spoken scarcely fifty years ago, but they come to us from very far. The emotion that we feel on hearing them arises primarily from their revealing to us, with incomparable freshness and spontaneity, the primordial image of Mother Earth. The image is found throughout the world in countless forms and variants....

HUMI POSITIO: LAYING THE INFANT ON THE GROUND 141

141 The fundamental experience -- that the human mother is only the representative of the telluric Great Mother -- has given rise to countless customs. We will mention as an example giving birth on the ground (*humi positio*), a ritual that is found almost all over the world, from Australia to China, from Africa to South America...

144 Initiation includes a ritual death and resurrection. This is why, among numerous primitive peoples, the novice is symbolically "killed," laid in a trench, and covered with leaves. When he rises from the grave, he is looked upon as a new man, for he has been brought to birth once more, this time directly by the cosmic Mother.

WOMAN, EARTH, AND FECUNDITY 144

144 Woman, then, is ^{mystically} held to be one with the earth, childbearing is seen as a variant on the human scale of telluric fecundity.

In some religions Mother Earth is imagined as capable of conceiving alone, without the assistance of a coadjutor. Traces of such archaic ideas are still found in the myths of parthenogenesis of Mediterranean goddesses. According to Hesiod, Gaia gave birth to Ouranos "a being equal to herself able to cover her completely" (*Theogony* 126 f). Other Greek goddesses /145/ likewise gave birth without the help of gods. This is a mythical expression of the self-sufficiency and fecundity of Mother Earth.... The social and cultural phenomenon known as matriarchy is connected with the discovery of agriculture by woman. It was woman who first cultivated food plants. Hence it was she who became owner of the soil and crops.. The magico-religious prestige and consequent social predominance of woman have a cosmic model -- the figure of Mother Earth.

In other religions the cosmic creation, or at least its completion, is the result of a hierogamy between the Sky-God and Mother Earth. This cosmogonic myth is quite widely disseminated (Oceania Africa Asia the Americas).

.. the cosmogonic myth is pre-eminently the paradigmatic myth; it serves as model for human behavior. This is why human marriage is regarded as an imitation of the cosmic hierogamy. "I am Heaven," the husband proclaims in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (VI 4 20), "thou art Earth."... Dido celebrates her marriage to Aeneas in the midst of a violent storm (Aeneid IV 165 ff); their union coincides with that of the elements; the Sky embraces his wife, dispensing the fertilizing rain.... .. the divine myth is the paradigmatic model for the human union. But there is another aspect which requires emphasis -- the cosmic structure of the conjugal ritual....

SYMBOLISM OF THE COSMIC TREE AND OF VEGETATION CULTS

147

147 For religious man the appearance of life is the central mystery of the world. Life comes from somewhere that is not this world and finally departs from here and goes to the /148/ beyond, in some mysterious way continues in an unknown place inaccessible to the majority of mortals. Human life is not felt as a brief appearance in time between one nothingness and another; it is preceded by a pre-existence and continued by a postexistence. Little is known about these two extraterrestrial stages of human life yet they are known to exist. Hence for religious man death does not put a final end to life. Death is but another modality of human existence.

All this moreover is ciphered in the cosmic rhythms.... But one thing seems clear beyond doubt: the cosmos is a living organism, which renews itself periodically.... This is why the cosmos was imagined in the form of a gigantic tree; the mode of being of the cosmos, and first of all its capacity for endless regeneration, are symbolically expressed by the life of the tree.

149 Only the religious vision of life makes it possible to decipher other meanings [other than a series of births and deaths] in the rhythm of vegetation, first of all the ideas of regeneration, of eternal youth, of health, of immortality. The religious idea of absolute reality, which finds symbolic expression in so many other images, also is expressed by the figure of a miraculous fruit conferring immortality, omniscience, and limitless power, a fruit that can change men into gods. (various examples)

150 .. it is sacrality that unveils the deepest structures of the world....

What are called the vegetation cults do not depend on a profane, "naturistic," experience connected for example with spring and the reawakening of vegetation. On /151/ the contrary, the religious experience of renewal of the world precedes and justifies the valorization of spring as the resurrection of nature. It is the mystery of the periodical regeneration of the cosmos that is the basis for the religious significance of spring. Then, too, in vegetation cults the emphasis is not always on the natural phenomenon spring and the appearance of vegetation but on the prophetic sign of the cosmic mystery.

(priority of whole to part: religious view presupposed by religious interpretation of spring)

DESACRALIZATION OF NATURE 151

151 Experience of a radically desacralized nature is a recent discovery; moreover it is an experience accessible only to a minority in modern societies, especially to scientists. For others nature still exhibits a charm, a mystery, a majesty in which it is possible to decipher traces of ancient religious values. No modern man, no matter how irreligious, is entirely insensitive to the charms of nature.

OTHER COSMIC HIEROPHANIES 155 - 159

recurrent emphasis on "valorization"

IV Human Existence and Sanctified Life

EXISTENCE OPEN TO THE WORLD 162

162 The ultimate aim of the historian of religions is to understand, and to make understandable to others, religious man's behavior and mental universe.

165 To come to know the mental universe of homo religiosus, we must above all take into account the men of these primitive societies. Now to us in this day their culture seems eccentric, if not positively aberrant; in any case it is difficult to grasp. But there is no other way of understanding a foreign mental universe than to place oneself inside it, at its very center, in order to progress from these to all the values that it possesses.

What we find as soon as we place ourselves in the perspective of religious man of the archaic societies is that the world exists because it was created by the gods. and that the existence of the world itself "means" something, "wants" to say something, that the world is neither mute nor opaque, that it is not an inert thing without purpose or significance. For religious man, the (BL: correlative of pure desire to know; contrast eternal silence of the skies, etc., of modern thought; absence of God). cosmos "lives" and "speaks."

This is why beginning at a certain stage of culture, man conceives ^{of} himself as a microcosm. He forms part of the gods' creation; in other words, he finds in himself the same sanctity that he recognizes in the cosmos. It follows that his life is homologized to cosmic life; as a divine work, the cosmos becomes the paradigmatic image of human existence. To cite a few examples: (hierogamy of heaven and earth; intercourse assimilated to sowing seed in fertile soil).

compact
consciousness

166 Let us attempt to understand the existential situation of one for whom all these homologies are experiences and not simply ideas. Clearly his life has an additional dimension; it is not merely human; it is at the same time cosmic, since it has a transhuman structure. It could be termed an open existence, for it is ~~not~~ not strictly confined to man's mode of being. But we cannot say as Hegel did that primitive man is buried in nature, that he has not yet found himself as distinct from nature, as himself.

167 In other words, cosmic symbolism adds a new value to an object or action, without affecting their peculiar or immediate values.

An existence open to the world is not an unconscious existence "buried in nature." Openness to the world enables religious man to know himself in knowing the world --and this knowledge is precious to him because it is religious, because it pertains to being.

164 In many cases the customs and beliefs of European peasants represent a more archaic state of culture than that documented in the mythology of classic Greece (see reference). It is true that most of these rural European populations have been Christianized for over a thousand years. But they succeeded in incorporating into their Christianity a considerable part of their pre-Christian religious heritage, which was of immemorial antiquity. It would be wrong to suppose that for this reason European peasants are not Christians. But we must recognize that their religion is not confined to the historical forms of Christianity, that it still retains a cosmic structure that has been almost entirely lost in the experience of urban Christians. We may speak of a primordial, ahistorical Christianity; becoming Christians, the European cultivators incorporated into their new faith the cosmic religion that they had preserved from prehistoric times.

(BL: compact implies non-distinction; hence Xtian faith either just added or rejected)

SANCTIFICATION OF LIFE 167

167 .. for him (man of archaic societies) the whole of life is capable of being sanctified.... Probably in a very distant past, all of man's organs and physiological experiences, as well as all his acts, had a religious meaning. This is understandable, for all human behavior was established by the gods or culture heroes in illo tempore; they instituted not only the various kinds of work and /168/ the various ways of obtaining and eating food, of expressing thought and feeling, and so on, but even acts apparently of no importance (eg urinating).

168 But aside from this religious meaning that physiological acts receive as imitation of divine models, the organs and their functions were given religious valorization by being assimilated to the various cosmic regions and phenomena. (examples abound)

170 f Indian tantrism: "he who knows" has at his command an entirely different experience from that of profane man.

BODY - HOUSE - COSMOS 172

172 The homology house-body-cosmos presents itself very early. We shall dwell on this example a little, for /173/ it shows how the values of archaic religious feeling can be reinterpreted by later religions and even philosophies. (Much detailed homology)

176 This example shows the importance of the perennial life of the archaic symbolisms connected with the human habitation. These symbolisms express primordial religious situations, but they are capable of altering their values, can be enriched with new meanings and enter increasingly complex systems of thought.

177 There is an immense difference between the philosophical meaning^{the}/Buddha's broken egg or the rook shattered by the Arhats and the archaic symbolism of the passage from earth to heaven along the axis mundi of through the smoke hole. Yet the fact remains that, among symbols capable of expressing ontological break-through and transcendence, both Indian philosophy and Indian mysticism chose this primordial image of shattering the roof..... /178/ The image of shattering the roof signifies that one has abolished all situation, has rejected settling in the world and chosen absolute freedom, which, for Indian thought, implies annihilation of any conditioned world.

178 In a summary formula one might say that for the nonreligious man of the modern age the cosmos has become opaque, inert, mute; it transmits no message, it holds no cipher. The feeling of the sanctity of nature survives today in Europe chiefly among rural populations, for it is among them that a Christianity lived as a cosmic liturgy still lives.

179 The cosmic liturgy, the mystery of nature's participation in the Christological drama, have become inaccessible to Christians living in a modern city. Their religious experience is no longer open to the cosmos. In the last analysis, it is a strictly private experience; salvation is a problem that concerns man and his god; at most, man recognizes that he is responsible not only to God but also to history. But in these man-God-history relationships there is no place for the cosmos. From this it would appear that, even for a genuine Christian, the world is no longer felt as the work of God.

PASSING THROUGH THE NARROW GATE 179

180 All these /181/ rituals and symbolisms of passage, we must add, express a particular conception of human existence: when brought to birth, man is not yet completed; he must be born again, a second time, spiritually; he becomes complete man by passing from an imperfect embryonic state to a perfect, adult state. In a word, it may be said that human existence attains completion through a series of "passage rites," in short, by successive initiations.

181 But it is especially the images of the bridge and the narrow gate which suggest the idea of a dangerous passage and which, for this reason, frequently occur in initiatory and funerary rituals and mythologies. Initiation, death, mystical ecstasy, absolute knowledge, "faith" in Judaeo-Christianity -- all these are equivalent to passage from one mode of being to another and bring about a veritable ontological mutation.

183 These few examples of the initiatory, funerary, and metaphysical symbolism of the bridge and the gate have shown in what way ordinary life and the "little world" that it implies -- the house with its utensils, the daily routine with its acts and gestures, and so on -- can be valorized on the religious and metaphysical plane. It is his familiar everyday life that is transfigured in the experience of religious man; he finds a cipher everywhere. Even the most habitual gesture can ~~be~~ signify a spiritual act. The road and walking can be transfigured into religious values, for every road can symbolize the "road of life," and any walk a "pilgrimage," a peregrination to the Center of the World. If possessing a house implies having assumed a stable situation in the world, those that have renounced their houses, the pilgrims and ascetics, proclaim by their ~~act~~ walking, by their constant /184/ movement, their desire to leave the world, their refusal of any worldly situation.... Those who have chosen the Quest, the road that leads to the Center, must abandon any kind of family and social situation, any "nest," and devote themselves wholly to "walking" toward the supreme truth, which, in highly evolved religions, is synonymous with the Hidden God, the Deus absconditus.

RITES OF PASSAGE 184

Vergote
 constitutive
 meaning

184 When a child is born, he has only a physical existence; he is not yet recognized by his family nor accepted by the community. /185/ It is the rites performed immediately after birth that give the infant the status of a true "living person"; it is only in virtue of these rites that he is incorporated into the community of the living.

At marriage there is also a passage from one socio-religious group to another....

In regard to death, the rites are all the more complex because there is not only a "natural phenomenon"... but also a change in both ontological and social status. The dead person has to undergo certain ordeals ~~that~~ that concern his own destiny in the afterlife, but he must also be recognized by the community of the dead and accepted among them. For some peoples only ritual burial confirms death; he who is not buried according to custom is not dead. Elsewhere.... q. v.

186 We need not here describe initiation ceremonies in all their complexity. What concerns us is to show that, even in the archaic stages of culture, initiation plays a leading role in the religious formation of man, and more especially that in essence it consists in a complete change in the novice's ontological status. This fact seems of the greatest importance for and understanding of religious man; it shows that the man of the primitive societies does not consider himself "finished" as he finds himself "given" on the natural level of existence. To become a man in the proper sense he must die to this first (natural) life and be reborn to a higher life, which is at once religious and cultural.

constit
 meaning

187 More of the same

188 PHENOMENOLOGY OF INITIATION

MEN'S SOCIETIES AND WOMEN'S SOCIETIES 192

DEATH AND INITIATION 195

"SECOND BIRTH" AND SPIRITUAL GENERATION 197

201 From one religion to another, from one gnosis or one wisdom to another, the immemorial theme of the second birth is enriched with new values, which sometimes profoundly change the content of the experience. Nevertheless a common element, an invariable,

remains. It could be defined as follows: access to spiritual life always entails death to the profane condition, followed by a new birth.

SACRED AND PROFANE IN THE MODERN WORLD

201 It is a vast subject, because as we have said it concerns not only the historian of religions, the ethologist, the sociologist, but also the political and social historian, the psychologist, the philosopher.

202 ... long since left behind by history. But they have not vanished without a trace; they have contributed ~~x~~ toward making us what we are today, and so after all they form part of our history.

202 ... homo religiosus always believes that there is an absolute reality, the sacred, which transcends the world but manifests itself in the world, thereby sanctifying it and making it real. He further believes that life has a sacred origin and that human existence realizes all of its potentialities in proportion as it is religious -- that is, participates in reality. The gods created man and the world, the culture heroes completed the Creation, and the history of all these divine and semidivine works is preserved in the myths. By reactualizing sacred history, by initiating the divine behavior, man puts himself and keeps himself close to the gods -- that is, in the real and significant.

203 Modern nonreligious man assumes anew existential situation; he regards himself solely as the subject and agent of history, and he refuses all appeal to transcendence. In other words, he accepts no model for humanity outside the human condition as it can be seen in the various historical situation. Man makes himself, and he only makes himself completely in proportion as he desacralizes himself and the world. The sacred is the prime obstacle to his freedom. He will become himself only when he is totally demysticized. He will not be truly free until he has killed the last god.

203 Just as nature is the product of a progressive secularization of the cosmos as the work [204] of God, profane man is the result of a desacralization of ~~x~~ human existence. But this means that profane man has been formed by opposing his predecessor, by attempting to "empty" himself of all religious and transhuman meaning. He recognizes himself in proportion as he "frees" and "purifies" himself from the "superstitions" of his ancestors. In other words profane man cannot help preserving some vestiges of the behavior

of religious man, though they are emptied of religious meaning..... He cannot utterly abolish his past, since he himself is a product of his past. He forms himself by a series of denials and refusals, but he continues to be haunted by the realities that he has refused and denied. To acquire a world of his own, he has desacralized the world in which his ancestors lived; but to do so, he has been obliged to adopt the opposite of an earlier type of behavior, and that behavior is still emotionally present to him, in one form or another, ready to be reactualized in his deepest being.

204 (BL pure state of nonreligious man rare; large stock of camouflaged myths and degenerated rituals /205/ New Year, house warming, merrymaking at marriage, birth of child, promotion; mythologies camouflaged in plays enjoyed and books read; cinema a dream factory; novel escape from time into another history; /206/ little religions: pseudo-occult, neospiritualistic, hermetic sects and schools; various political movements and social utopianisms [notably marxism 206 f];/nostalgia for Eden in nudism, complete sexual freedom; scenarios of initiation in combats,/in descent into self in psychoanalysis; struggle for life; ordeals; 209 religious inspiration all the more true because great part of modern existence fed by "unconscious")

210 Yet the contents and structures of the unconscious are the result of immemorial existential situations, especially of critical situations, and this is why the unconscious has a religious aura. For every existential crisis once again puts in question both the reality of the world and man's existence in the world. This means that the existential crisis is, finally, "religious," since on the archaic levels of culture being and the sacred are one. As we saw, it is the experience of the sacred that founds the world, and even the most elementary religion is, above all, an ontology.

210 This is not the place to develop all the consequences
211 of this close relation between the content and structures of the unconscious on the one hand and the values of religion on the other. We were led to refer to it in order to show in what sense even the most unavowedly nonreligious man still, in his deep^{er} being, shares in a religiously oriented behavior. But modern man's private mythologies -- his dreams, reveries, fantasies, and so on -- never give rise to the ontological status of myths, precisely because they are not experienced by

the whole man and therefore do not transform a particular situation into a situation that is paradigmatic. In the same way, modern man's anxieties, his experiences in dream or imagination, although "religious" from the point of view of form, do not, as in homo religiosus, make part of a Weltanschauung and provide the basis for a system of behavior. An example will show the differences between these two categories of experiences. The unconscious activity of modern man ceaselessly presents him with innumerable symbols, and each of them has a particular mission to accomplish, in order to re-establish the equilibrium of the psyche. As we have seen, the symbol not only makes the world "open" but also helps religious man to attain to the universal. For it is through symbols that man finds his way out of his particular situation and "opens himself" to the general and the universal. Symbols awaken individual experience and transmute it into a spiritual act, into metaphysical comprehension of the world. In /212/ the presence of any tree, symbol of the world tree and image of cosmic life, a man of the premodern societies can attain to the highest spirituality, for, by understanding the symbol, he succeeds in living the universal. It is the religious vision of the world, and the concomitant ideology, that enable him to make this individual experience bear fruit and "open" it to the universal. The image of the tree still quite frequently appears in the imaginary universes of modern nonreligious man; it is a cipher of his deeper life, of the drama that is played out in his unconscious and that concerns the integrity of his psychomental life and hence his own existence. But as long as the symbol of the tree does not awaken his total consciousness and "open" it to the universe, it cannot be said to have fulfilled its function. It has only partly "saved" him from his individual situation -- for example, by enabling him to resolve a deep crisis and restoring his temporally threatened psychic equilibrium; but it has not yet raised him to spirituality -- that is, it has not succeeded in revealing one of the structures of the real to him.

This example.. suffices to show in what way the nonreligious man of the modern societies is still nourished and aided by the activity of his unconscious, yet without thereby attaining to a properly religious experience and vision of the world. X

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The unconscious offers him~~st~~ solutions for the difficulties of his own life, and in this way plays the role of religion, for, before/making an existence a creator of values, religion ensures its integrity. From one point of view it could almost be said that in the case of those moderns who proclaim that they are nonreligious, religion and mythology are eclipsed in the darkness of the unconscious -- which means too that in such men the possibility of reintegrating a religious vision of life lies at great depth. Or, from a Christian point of view, it could also be said that nonreligion is equivalent to a new "fall" of man -- in other words, that nonreligious man has lost the capacity to live religion consciously, and hence to understand and assume it; but that, in his deepest being, he still retains a memory of it, as, after the first "fall," his ancestor, the primordial man, retained intelligence enough to enable him to rediscover the traces of God that are visible in the world. After the first "fall," the religious sense descended to the level of the "divided consciousness"; after the second, it has fallen even farther, into the depths of the unconscious; it has been "forgotten."

Here the considerations of the historian of religions end. Here begins the realm of problems proper to the philosopher, the psychologist,^{and} even the theologian.