

Human Existence and Sanctified Life (by Mircea Eliade)

EXISTENCE OPEN TO THE WORLD

The ultimate aim of the historian of religions is to understand, and to make understandable to others, religious man's behavior and mental universe. It is not always an easy undertaking. For the modern world religion as form of life and *Weltanschauung* is represented by Christianity. By making a considerable effort, a Western intellectual has at most some chance of familiarizing himself with the religious vision of classical antiquity and even with certain great oriental religions--for example, Hinduism or Confucianism. But such an effort to broaden his religious horizon, praiseworthy though it may be, does not take him far enough; Greece, India, China do not take the Western intellectual beyond the sphere of complex and highly developed religions with a large written sacred literature. To know some part of these sacred literatures, to become familiar with some oriental or classical mythologies and theologies does not yet suffice for a comprehension of the mental universe of *homo religiosus*. These mythologies and theologies are already only too clearly marked by the long labor of scholars; even if, strictly speaking, they are not "religions of the Book" (as are Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, and Islam), they possess sacred books (India, China) or at least have been influenced by revered writers of genius (e.g., in Greece, Homer).

To gain a broader religious perspective, it is more useful to become familiar with the folklore of European peoples; in their beliefs and customs, their attitude toward life and death, many archaic religious situations are still recognizable. Studying the rural societies of Europe provides some basis for understanding the religious world of the neolithic cultivators. 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. (1) 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.

But for the historian of religions who would understand and make understandable all of the existential situations of *homo religiosus*, the problem is more complex. A whole world stretches beyond the frontiers of the agricultural cultures--the truly "primitive" world of nomadic herdsmen, of totemistic hunters, of peoples still at the stage of gathering and small-game hunting. 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 there 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 cosmos "lives" and "speaks." The mere life of the cosmos is proof of its sanctity, since the cosmos was created by the gods and the gods show themselves to men through cosmic life.

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: We have seen that marriage is valorized as a hierogamy of heaven and earth. But among the cultivators, the homology earth-woman is still more complex. Woman is assimilated to the soil, seed to the semen virile, and agricultural work to conjugal union. "This woman has come like living soil: sow seed in her, ye men!" says the *Atharva Veda* (XIV, 2, 14). "Your women are as fields for you" (Koran, II, 225). A sterile queen laments, "I am like a field where nothing grows!" On the contrary, in a twelfth-century hymn the Virgin Mary is glorified as "ground not to be plowed, which brought forth fruit" (*terra non arabilis quae fructum parturiit*).

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 strictly confined to man's mode of being. (We know too that the primitive places his model for himself on the transhuman plane revealed by myths). The existence of *homo religious* especially of the primitive, is open to the world; in living, religious man is never alone, part of the world lives in him. 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. The Hindu who, embracing his wife, declares that she is Earth and he Heaven is at the same time fully conscious of his humanity and hers. The Austroasiatic cultivator who uses the same word, *lak*, to designate phallus and spade and, like so many other agriculturalists, assimilates seed to the *semen virile* knows perfectly well that his spade is an instrument that he made and that in tilling his field he performs agricultural work involving knowledge of a certain number of techniques. In other words, cosmic symbolism *adds* a new value to an object or action, without affecting their peculiar and 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.

SANCTIFICATION OF LIFE

The above example helps us to understand the perspective adopted by the man of the archaic societies; for him, the whole of life is capable of being sanctified. The means by which its sanctification is brought about are various, but the result is always the same: life is lived on a twofold plane; it takes its course as human existence and, at the same time, shares in a transhuman life, that of the cosmos or the gods. 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 the various ways of obtaining and eating food, of making love, of expressing thought and feeling, and so on, but even acts apparently of no importance. In the myth of the Australian Karadjeri the two culture heroes took a particular position to urinate, and the Karadjeri still imitate this paradigmatic gesture today. (2) Needless to say, there is nothing corresponding to this on the level of the profane

experience of life. For nonreligious man, all vital experiences--whether sex or eating, work or play--have been desacralized. This means that all these physiological acts are deprived of spiritual significance, hence deprived of their truly human dimension.

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. We have already seen a classic example--woman assimilated to the soil and to Mother Earth, the sexual act assimilated to the hierogamy Heaven-Earth and to the sowing of seed. But the number of such homologies established between man and the universe is very large. Some of them seem to force themselves on the mind spontaneously, as, for example, the homology between the eye and the sun, or of the two eyes to sun and moon, or of the cranium to the full moon; or again, of breath to the winds, of bones to stones, of hair to grass, and so on.

But the historian of religions encounters other homologies that presuppose a more developed symbolism, a whole system of micro-macrocosmic correspondences. Such, for example, is the assimilation of the belly or the womb to a cave, of the intestines to a labyrinth, of breathing to weaving, of the veins and arteries to the sun and moon, of the backbone to the *axis mundi*, and so on. Of course all these homologies between the human body and the macrocosm are not documented among primitives. Some systems of man-universe correspondences were fully elaborated only in the higher cultures (India, China, the ancient Near East, Central America). Yet their point of departure is already present in archaic cultures. Primitive peoples have revealed to the investigator systems of anthropo-cosmic homologies of extraordinary complexity, which bear witness to an inexhaustible capacity for speculation. Such is the case, for example, with the Dogon in French West Africa. (3)

These anthropo-cosmic homologies concern us particularly in so far as they are ciphers of various existential situations. We said that religious man lives in an open world and that, in addition, his existence is open to the world. This means that religious man is accessible to an infinite series of experiences that could be termed cosmic. Such experiences are always religious, for the world is sacred. If we would understand them, we must remember that the principal physiological functions can become sacraments. Eating is a ritual, and food is variously valorized by various religions and cultures. Food stuffs are regarded as sacred, or as gifts of divinity, or as an offering to the gods of the body (for example, in India). Sexual life, as we saw, is also ritualized and hence also homologized to divine acts (Heaven-Earth hierogamy). Sometimes marriage is valorized on a three fold plane--individual, social, and cosmic. For example, among the Omahas, the village is divided into two halves, respectively named Heaven and Earth. Marriages can be contracted only between the two exogamic halves, and each new marriage repeats the primordial *hieros gamos*, the union of Heaven and Earth. (4)

Such drawing of anthropo-cosmic homologies and, especially, the sacramentalization of physiological life that ensues have preserved all their vitality even in highly evolved religions. For but one example, we need only think of the prestige that sexual union as ritual acquired in Indian tantrism. India strikingly illustrates how a physiological act can be transformed into ritual and how, when the ritualistic period has ended, the same act can be valorized as mystical technique. The husband's exclamation in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, "I am Heaven, thou art Earth," follows the transfiguration of the wife into the Vedic sacrificial altar (VI, 4, 3). But in tantrism woman ends by incarnating Prakriti (= nature) and the cosmic goddess, Shakti, while the male is identified with Shiva, the pure, motionless, serene spirit.

Sexual union (*maithuna*) is above all an integration of these two principles, cosmic nature-energy and spirit. As a tantric text expresses it: "The true sexual union is the union of the supreme Shakti with the Spirit (*atman*); other unions represent only carnal relations with women" (*Kularnava Tantra*, V, 111-112). There is no longer any question of a physiological act, there is a mystical rite; the partners are no longer human beings, they are detached and free, like the gods. The tantric texts never tire of emphasizing that a transfiguration of carnal experience occurs. "By the same acts that cause some men to burn in hell for thousands of years, the yogin gains his eternal salvation." (5) The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* already declared: "He who knows this, though he seem to commit sin, is pure, clean, ageless, immortal" (V, 14, 8). In other words, "he who knows" has at command an entirely different experience from that of the profane man. This is as much as to say that every human experience is capable of being transfigured, lived on a different, a transhuman plane.

The Indian example shows to what a degree of mystical refinement sacramentalization of the organs and of physiological life can be brought--a sacramentalization that is already amply documented on all the archaic levels of culture. We should add that the valorization of sexuality as a means of participating in the sacred (or, in India, of gaining the superhuman state of absolute freedom) is not without its dangers. In India itself, tantrism has provided the occasion for aberrant and infamous ceremonies. In the primitive world too, ritual sexuality has been accompanied by many orgiastic forms. Nevertheless, the example still retains its suggestive value, for it reveals an experience that is no longer accessible in a desacralized society--the experience of a sanctified sexual life.

BODY-HOUSE- COSMOS

We have seen that religious man lives in an open cosmos and that he is open to the world. This means (a) that he is in communication with the gods; (b) that he shares in the sanctity of the world. That religious man can live only in an open world, we saw when we analyzed the structure of sacred space; man desires to dwell at a center, where there is the possibility of communicating with the gods. His dwelling is a microcosm; and so too is his body. The homology house-body-cosmos presents itself very early. We shall dwell on this example a little, for it shows how the values of archaic religious feeling and practice can be reinterpreted by later religions and even philosophies.

Indian religious thought made ample use of this traditional homology, house-cosmos-human body. And the reason is clear: in the last analysis, the body, like the cosmos, is a "situation," a system of conditioning influences that the individual assumes. The spinal column is assimilated to the cosmic pillar (*skambha*) or to Mount Meru; the breaths are identified with the Winds; the navel or heart with the Center of the World, and so on. But homologies are also established between the human body and the entire ritual; the place of sacrifice, the sacrificial utensils and gestures are assimilated to the various physiological functions and organs. The human body, ritually homologized to the cosmos or the Vedic altar (which is an *imago mundi*), is also assimilated to a house. A hatha-yogic text refers to the human body as "a house with a pillar and nine doors" (*Goraksha Shataka*, 14).

All this amounts to saying that by consciously establishing himself in the paradigmatic situation to which he is, as it were, predestined, man cosmicizes himself; in other words, he reproduces on the human scale the system of rhythmic and reciprocal conditioning influences that characterizes and constitutes a world, that, in short, defines any universe. The homology also applies in the reverse direction; in their turn the temple or the house are regarded as a

human body. The "eye" of the dome is a term that occurs in several architectural traditions. (6) A fact to be emphasized is that each of these equivalent images--cosmos, house, human body--displays, or is capable of receiving, an upper opening that makes passage to another world possible. The upper opening of an Indian tower bears, among other names, that of *brahmarandhra*. This term designates the opening at the top of the skull, which plays a primary role in yogico-tantric techniques and through which the soul takes flight at the moment of death. In this connection we may mention the custom of breaking the skulls of dead yogins, to facilitate the departure of the soul. (7)

This Indian custom has counterparts in beliefs that are widely disseminated in Europe and Asia--that the soul of the dead person departs through the chimney (= smoke hole) or the roof and especially through the part of the roof that lies above the "sacred area." (8) In cases of prolonged death agony, one or more boards are removed from the roof, or the roof is even broken. The meaning of this custom is patent: *the soul will more easily quit its body if the other image of body-cosmos, the house, is broken open above*. Obviously all these experiences are inaccessible to nonreligious man, not only because, for him, death has become desacralized, but also because he no longer lives in a cosmos in the proper sense of the word and is no longer aware that having a body and taking up residence in a house are equivalent to assuming an existential situation in the cosmos (see below).

It is noteworthy that the mystical vocabulary of India has preserved the homology man-house and especially the assimilation of the skull to the roof or dome. The fundamental mystical experience--that is, transcending the human condition--is expressed in a twofold image, breaking the roof and flight. Buddhist texts refer to Arhats who "fly through the air and break the roof of the palace," who, "flying by their own will, break and pass through the roof of the house and travel through the air," and so on. (9) These vivid formulas are capable of a twofold interpretation: on the plane of mystical experience there is an "ecstasy" and hence the flight of the soul through the *brahmarandhra*; on the metaphysical plane there is abolition of the conditioned world. But both the meanings of the Arhat's flight express a break in ontological level and passage from one mode of being to another, or, more precisely, passage from conditioned existence to an unconditioned mode of being, that is, to perfect freedom.

In the majority of archaic religions, flight signifies access to a superhuman mode of being (god, magician, spirit)--in the last analysis, freedom to go wherever one will, hence an appropriation of the condition of the spirit. For Indian thought, the Arhat who "breaks the roof of the house" and flies away through the air shows figuratively that he has transcended the cosmos and attained a paradoxical and even inconceivable mode of being, that of absolute freedom (by whatever name it may be called: *nirvana*, *asamskrita*, *samadhi*, *sahaja*, etc.). On the mythological plane the paradigmatic gesture of transcending the world is illustrated by Buddha proclaiming that he has "broken" the cosmic egg, the "shell of ignorance," and has obtained "the blessed, universal dignity of Buddha." (10)

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. Man inhabits the body in the same way that he inhabits a house or the cosmos that he has himself created (cf. Chapter 1). Every lawful and permanent situation implies location in a cosmos, in a universe perfectly organized and hence imitated from the paradigmatic model, the Creation. Inhabited territory, temple, house, body are all, as we have seen, cosmoses. But each of these cosmoses keeps an opening, however this idea

may be expressed in different cultures (the eye of the temple, chimney, smoke hole, *brahmarandhra*, etc.). In one way or another, the cosmos that one inhabits--body, house, tribal territory, the whole of this world--communicates above with a different plane that is transcendent to it.

It can come about that in a noncosmic religion, such as that of India after Buddhism, the opening to the higher plane no longer represents passage from the human to the superhuman condition, but instead expresses transcendence, abolition of the cosmos, absolute freedom. There is an immense difference between the philosophical meaning of the Buddha's broken egg or the roof shattered by the Arhats and the archaic symbolism of passage from earth to heaven along the *axis mundi* or through the smoke hole. Yet the fact remains that, among symbols capable of expressing ontological breakthrough and transcendence, both Indian philosophy and Indian mysticism chose this primordial image of shattering the roof. This means that passing beyond the human condition finds figural expression in the destruction of the "house," that is, of the personal cosmos that one has chosen to inhabit. Every fixed abode in which one has settled is, on the philosophical plane, equivalent to an existential situation that one has assumed. 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.

Without entering into any lengthy analysis of the values that one of our nonreligious contemporaries attributes to *his* body, *his* house, and *his* universe, we can already sense the vast distance that separates him from men belonging to the primitive and oriental cultures that we have been discussing. Just as a modern man's habitation has lost its cosmological values, so too his body is without religious or spiritual significance. In a summary formula we might say that for the nonreligious men 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 exists.

As for the Christianity of the industrial societies and especially the Christianity of intellectuals, it has long since lost the cosmic values that it still possessed in the Middle Ages. We must add that this does not necessarily imply that urban Christianity is deteriorated or inferior, but only that the religious sense of urban populations, is gravely impoverished. 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

All that we have just said concerning the body-house symbolism and the anthropo-cosmic homologies that are bound up with it is far from having exhausted the extraordinary richness of the subject; we have had to confine ourselves to only a few of its many aspects. The "house"--since it is at once an *imago mundi* and a replica of the human body--plays a considerable role in rituals and mythologies. In some cultures (e.g., proto-historic China, Etruria, etc.) funerary urns, are made in the shape of a house; they have an opening above to

permit the dead man's soul to enter and leave. (11) The urn house in some sort becomes the dead man's new "body." But it is also from a house (in this case cap-shaped) that the mythical Ancestor comes; and it is always in such a house-urn-cap, that the sun hides at night to come forth again in the morning. (12) Thus there is structural correspondence between the different modes of passage--from darkness to light (sun), from a human race's pre-existence to its manifestation (mythical Ancestor), from life to death and to the new existence after death (the soul).

We have more than once stressed the fact that all forms of cosmos--universe, temple, house, human body--have an "opening" above. The meaning of this symbolism now becomes still clearer; the opening makes possible passage from one mode of being to another, from one existential situation to another. Passage is predestined for every cosmic existence. Man passes from pre-life to life and finally to death, just as the mythical Ancestor passed from pre-existence to existence and the sun passes from darkness to light. We must note that this type of passage is part of a more complex system, the chief characteristics of which we examined in discussing the moon as archetype of cosmic becoming, vegetation as symbol of universal renewal, and especially the many ways of ritually repeating the cosmogony--that is, the paradigmatic passage from virtual to formal. All these 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 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.

We shall discuss the meaning and function of initiation further on. Here we will dwell for a moment on the symbolism of "passage" as religious man reads it in his familiar surroundings and his daily life--in his house, for example, in the paths that he takes to go to his work, in the bridges he crosses, and so on. This symbolism is present even in the structure of his habitation. As we saw, the upper opening signifies the ascending direction to heaven, the desire for transcendence. The *threshold* concentrates not only the boundary between outside and inside but also the possibility of passage from one zone to another (from the profane to the sacred; cf. Chapter 1). 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. To suggest this paradoxical passage (for it always implies a break and a transcendence), the various religious traditions have made plentiful use of the symbolism of the Perilous Bridge or the Narrow Gate. In Iranian mythology the Cinvat Bridge is traversed by the dead in their *post mortem* journey; it is nine lance-lengths wide for the just, but for the wicked it becomes as narrow as "the blade of a razor" (*Dinkart*, IX, 20, 3). Under the Cinvat Bridge lies the mouth of the deep pit of hell (*Videvdat*, 3, 7). The mystics always pass over this bridge on their ecstatic journeys to heaven; over it, for example, passed the spirit of Arda Viraf. (13)

The Vision of St. Paul presents a bridge "narrow as a hair" connecting our world with Paradise. The same image is found in Arabic writers and mystics; the bridge is narrower than a hair," and links the earth to the astral spheres and Paradise. Just as in Christian traditions, sinners cannot cross it and are cast down into hell. Medieval legends tell of a "bridge under water," and of the sword bridge which the hero (Lancelot) has to cross barefoot and with bare hands; it is "sharper than a scythe" and is crossed in "pain and agony." In Finnish tradition a

bridge covered with needles, nails, and razor blades crosses hell; the dead, as well as shamans in ecstasy, use it in their journeys to the other world. Similar descriptions are found practically all over the world. (14) But it is important to note that the same imagery was still used when it became a question of expressing the difficulty of metaphysical knowledge and, in Christianity, of faith. "A sharpened edge of a razor, hard to traverse, a difficult path is this--poets declare" (*Katha Upanishad*, III, 14; tr. Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, p. 353). "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matthew, 7, 14).

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 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. (15) If possessing a house implies having assumed a stable situation in the world, those who have renounced their houses, the pilgrims and ascetics, proclaim by their "walking," by their constant movement, their desire to leave the world, their refusal of any worldly situation. The house is a "nest," and, as the *Pancavimsha Brahmana* says (XI, 15, 1), the "nest" implies flocks, children, and a "home"; in a word, it symbolizes the world of the family, of society, of getting a living. 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*. (16)

rites of passage

It was long ago observed that "rites of passage" play a considerable part in the life of religious man. (17) Certainly, the outstanding passage rite is represented by the puberty initiation, passage from one age group to another (from childhood or adolescence to youth). But there is also a passage rite at birth, at marriage, at death, and it could be said that each of these cases always involves an initiation, for each of them implies a radical change in ontological and social status. When a child is born, he has only a physical existence; he is not yet recognized by his family nor accepted by the community. It is the rites performed immediately after birth that give the infant the status of a true "living person"; it is only by virtue of those 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. The young husband leaves the group of bachelors and is thenceforth part of the group of heads of families. Every marriage implies a tension and a danger and hence precipitates a crisis; this is why it is performed by a rite of passage. The Greeks called marriage *telos*, consecration, and the marriage ritual resembled that of the mysteries.

In regard to death, the rites are all the more complex because there is not only a "natural phenomenon" (life or the soul-leaving the body) but also a change in both ontological and social status; the dead person has to undergo certain ordeals 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 a death is not considered valid until after the

funerary ceremonies have been performed, or until the soul of the dead person has been ritually conducted to its new dwelling in the other world and there been accepted by the community of the dead. For nonreligious, man, birth, marriage, death are events that concern only the individual and his family; or occasionally--in the case of heads of governments or political leaders--events that have political repercussions. In a nonreligious view of life, all these "passages" have lost their ritual character; that is, they signify no more than is visible in the concrete act of a birth, a death, or an officially recognized sexual union. However, we must repeat that a drastically nonreligious experience of the whole of life is seldom found in the pure state, even in the most secularized societies. Possibly such a completely nonreligious experience will become commoner in a more or less distant future; for the present, it is still rare. What is found in the profane world is a radical secularization of death, marriage, and birth; but, as we shall soon see, there remain vague memories of abolished religious practices and even a nostalgia for them.

As for initiatory rituals proper, a distinction must be made between puberty initiations (age group) and ceremonies for entrance into a secret society. The most important difference lies in the fact that *all* adolescents are obliged to undergo an age initiation, whereas only a certain number of adults enter the secret societies. It seems certain that the institution of puberty initiation is older than that of the secret society; it is more widely disseminated and is documented on the most archaic levels of culture, as, for example, among the Australians and the Fuegians. 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 to us of the greatest importance for an 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.

In other words, the ideal of humanity that the primitive wishes to attain he sets on a superhuman plane. This means: (1) one does not become a complete man until one has passed beyond, and in some sense abolished, "natural" humanity, for initiation is reducible to a paradoxical, supernatural experience of death and resurrection or of second birth, (2) initiation rites, entailing ordeals and symbolic death and resurrection, were instituted by gods, culture heroes, or mythical ancestors; hence these rites have a superhuman origin, and by performing them the novice imitates a superhuman, divine action. It is important to note this, for it shows once again that religious man *wants to be other* than he finds himself on the "natural" level and undertakes to make himself in accordance with the ideal image revealed to him by myths. Primitive man undertakes to attain a *religious ideal of humanity*, and his effort already contains the germs of all the ethics later elaborated in evolved societies. Obviously, in modern nonreligious societies initiation no longer exists as a religious act. But, as we shall see later, the *patterns* of initiation still survive, although markedly desacralized, in the modern world.

PHENOMENOLOGY OF INITIATION

Initiation usually comprises a threefold revelation: revelation of the sacred, of death, and of sexuality. (18) The child knows nothing of these experiences; the initiate knows and assumes them, and incorporates them into his new personality. We must add that, if the novice dies to his infantile, profane, nonregenerate life to be reborn to a new, sanctified existence, he is also reborn to a mode of being that makes learning, *knowledge*, possible. The initiate is not only

one newborn or resuscitated; he is a man who *knows*, who has learned the mysteries, who has had revelations that are metaphysical in nature. During his training in the bush he learns the sacred secrets: the myths that tell of the gods and the origin of the world, the true names of the gods, the role and origin of the ritual instruments employed in the initiation ceremonies (the bull-roarers, the flint knives for circumcision, etc.). Initiation is equivalent to a spiritual maturing. And in the religious history of humanity we constantly find this theme: the initiate, he who has experienced the mysteries, is *he who knows*.

The ceremony everywhere begins with the separation of the candidate from his family and a period of retirement in the bush. Here already there is a symbol of death; the forest, the jungle, darkness symbolize the beyond, the "infernal regions." In some places it is believed that a tiger comes and carries the candidates into the jungle on his back; the feline incarnates the mythical Ancestor, the master of the initiation, who conducts the boys to the underworld. Elsewhere the novice is believed to be swallowed by a monster. In the monster's belly there is cosmic night; it is the embryonic mode of existence, both on the cosmic plane and the plane of human life. In many places there is an initiatory hut in the bush. Here the young candidates undergo part of their ordeals and are instructed in the secret traditions of the tribe. Now, the initiatory hut symbolizes the maternal womb (19); the novice's symbolic death signifies a regression to the embryonic state. But this is not to be understood only in terms of human physiology but also in cosmological terms; the fetal state is equivalent to a temporary regression to the virtual, precosmic mode.

Other rituals illuminate the symbolism of initiatory death. Among some peoples candidates are buried, or laid in newly dug graves. Or they are covered with branches and lie motionless like dead men. Or they are daubed with a white powder to make them look like ghosts. In addition, the novices imitate the behavior of ghosts; they do not use their fingers to eat but take food directly with their teeth, as the souls of the dead are believed to do. Finally, the tortures that they undergo which, of course, have many meanings--have this meaning too: the tormented and mutilated novice is believed to be tortured, cut to pieces, boiled or roasted by the demons who are masters of the initiation, that is, by the mythical ancestors. These physical sufferings correspond to the situation of one who is "eaten" by the feline demon, is cut to pieces in the maw of the initiatory monster, is digested in its belly. The mutilations (knocking out of teeth, amputation of fingers, etc.) also carry a symbolism of death. Most of them are connected with lunar divinities. The moon periodically disappears--that is, dies--to be reborn three nights later. The lunar symbolism emphasizes the conception that death is the preliminary condition for any mystical regeneration.

In addition to specific operations--such as circumcision and subincision--and to initiatory mutilations, other external signs, such as tattooing or scarring, indicate death and resurrection. As for the symbolism of mystical rebirth, it appears in many forms. Candidates are given new names, which will be their true names thenceforth. Among some tribes the young initiates are supposed to have forgotten their former lives completely; immediately after the initiation they are fed like infants, led about by the hand, and reinstructed in all forms of behavior, like babies. Usually they learn a new language in the bush, or at least a secret vocabulary, kept from all but the initiate. It is clear that with initiation everything begins anew. Sometimes the symbolism of the second birth is expressed by concrete gestures. Among some Bantu peoples, before being circumcised the boy is the object of a ceremony called "being born again." (20) His father sacrifices a ram and three days later wraps the boy in the animal's stomach membrane and skin. Just before this is done, the boy must get into bed and cry like an infant. He remains in the ramskin for three days. The same peoples bury their dead in ramskins and

in the fetal position. The symbolism of mystical rebirth by ritually donning the skin of an animal is also attested in highly evolved cultures (India, ancient Egypt).

In the scenarios of initiations the symbolism of birth is almost always found side by side with that of death. In initiatory contexts death signifies passing beyond the profane, unsanctified condition, the condition of the "natural man." who is without religious experience, who is blind to spirit. The mystery of initiation gradually reveals to the novice the true dimensions of existence; by introducing him to the sacred, it obliges him to assume the responsibility that goes with being a man. Here we have a fact of the first importance: for all archaic societies, access to spirituality finds expression in a symbolism of death and a new birth.

MEN'S SOCIETIES AND WOMEN'S SOCIETIES

Rites for entrance into men's societies employ the same ordeals and the same initiatory scenarios. But, as we said, membership in a men's society already implies a choice; not all those who have undergone the puberty initiation will enter the secret society, though they may all wish to. (21)

To cite one example: Among the Mandja and the Banda of Africa, there is a secret society named Ngakola. According to the myth told to the candidates during their initiation, Ngakola was a monster who had the power of swallowing men and then disgorging them renewed. The candidate is put in a hut that symbolizes the monster's body. There he hears Ngakola's eerie voice, there he is whipped and tortured, for he is told that he is now in Ngakola's belly and is being digested. More ordeals follow; then the master of the initiation proclaims that Ngakola, who had devoured the candidate, has disgorged him. (22)

This is another instance of the symbolism of death by being swallowed into the belly of a monster, a symbolism that plays so great a role in puberty initiations. We may note again that the rites for entrance into a secret society correspond in every respect to puberty initiations--seclusion, initiatory ordeals and torture, death and resurrection, bestowal of a new name, instruction in a secret language, and so on.

There are also initiations for girls and women. In these feminine rites and mysteries we must not expect to find the same symbolism, or, more precisely, the same symbolic expressions, as those found in men's initiations and confraternities. But it is easy to discern a common element: the foundation for all these rites and mysteries is always a deep religious experience. It is *access to sacrality*, as it is revealed to her who assumes the condition of womanhood, that constitutes the goal both of feminine initiation rites and of women's secret societies.

Initiation begins at the first menstruation. This physiological symptom imposes a break, the girl's forcible removal from her familiar world; she is immediately isolated, separated from the community. The segregation takes place in a special cabin, in the bush, or in a dark corner of the house. The catamenial girl is obliged to remain in a particular and quite uncomfortable position, and must avoid exposing herself to the sun or being touched by anyone. She wears a special dress, or a sign or color allotted to her, and must eat only raw foods.

Segregation and seclusion out of daylight--in a dark hut, in the bush--suggest the symbolism of the initiatory death of boys isolated in the forest or shut up in huts. Yet there is a difference: among girls, segregation occurs immediately after the first menstruation, hence it is individual; whereas boys are segregated in a group. But the difference is explained by the

fact that in girls the end of childhood has a physiological manifestation. However, in the course of time the girls make up a group, and they are then initiated collectively by old women who act as their instructors.

As for the women's societies, they are always connected with the mystery of birth and fertility. The mystery of childbearing, that is, woman's discovery that she is *a creator on the plane of life*, constitutes a religious experience that cannot be translated into masculine terms. This makes it clear why childbirth has given rise to secret feminine rituals, which sometimes attain the complex organization of real mysteries. Traces of such mysteries are still preserved even in Europe. (23)

As in the case of men's societies, women's associations are found in various forms, in which secrecy and mystery progressively increase. To begin, there is the general initiation that every girl and every young married woman undergoes; this eventually produces the institution of the women's societies. Next come the women's mystery associations, as in Africa or, in antiquity, the closed groups of the Maenads. Women's mystery associations of this type were long in disappearing. We need only think of the witches of the Middle Ages and their ritual meetings.

DEATH AND INITIATION

The initiatory symbolism and ritual of being swallowed by a monster has played a considerable role both in initiations and in heroic myths and the mythology of death. The symbolism of return to the ventral cavity always has a cosmological valence. It is the entire world that symbolically returns, with the candidate, into cosmic night, in order that it may be created anew, that is, regenerated. As we saw (Chapter 2), the cosmogonic myth is recited for therapeutic purposes. To be cured, the victim of an illness must be brought to *a second birth*, and the archetypal model of birth is the cosmogony. The work of time must be undone, the auroral moment immediately preceding the Creation must be reintegrated; on the human plane, this is as much as to restore the "blank page" of existence, the absolute beginning, when nothing was yet sullied, nothing spoiled.

Entering the belly of the monster--or being symbolically "buried," or shut up in the initiatory but--is equivalent to a regression to the primordial nondistinction to cosmic night. To emerge from the belly or the dark hut or the initiatory "grave" is equivalent to a cosmogony. Initiatory death reiterates the paradigmatic return to chaos, in order to make possible a repetition of the cosmogony--that is, to prepare the new birth. Regression to chaos is sometimes literal--as, for example, in the case of the initiatory sicknesses of future shamans, which have often been regarded as real attacks of insanity. There is, in fact, a total crisis, which sometimes leads to disintegration of the personality. (24) This psychic chaos is the sign that the profane man is undergoing dissolution and that a new personality is on the verge of birth.

We understand why the same initiatory schema--comprising suffering, death, and resurrection (= rebirth) is found in all mysteries, no less in puberty rites than in the rites for entrance into a secret society, and why the same scenario can be deciphered in the overwhelming inner experiences that precede a mystical vocation (among primitives, the "initiatory sicknesses" of future shamans). Above all, we understand this: the man of the primitive societies has sought to conquer death by transforming it into a *rite of passage*. In other words, for the primitives, men die to something *that was not essential*; men die to the profane life. In short, death comes to be regarded as the supreme initiation, that is, as the beginning of a new spiritual existence. Nor is this all. Generation, death, and regeneration (= rebirth) were understood as three

moments in a single mystery, and the entire spiritual effort of archaic man was exerted to show that there must be no intervals between these moments. One cannot *stay* in one of the three. Movement, regeneration continue perpetually. Man constantly re-performs the cosmogony--the paradigmatic making--in order to be sure that he is making something well--a child, for example, or a house, or a spiritual vocation. This is why rites of initiation always present a cosmogonic valence.

"SECOND BIRTH" AND SPIRITUAL GENERATION

The scenario of initiation--death to the profane condition, followed by rebirth to the sacred world, the world of the gods--also plays an important role in highly evolved religions. A celebrated example is the Indian sacrifice. Its purpose is to obtain heaven after death, residence among the gods or the quality of a god (*devatma*). In other words, through the sacrifice the celebrant creates a superhuman condition for himself, a result that may be homologized to that of archaic initiations. Now the sacrificer must first be consecrated by the priests, and this preliminary consecration (*diksha*) carries an initiatory symbolism obstetric in structure; strictly speaking, the *diksha* ritually transforms the sacrificer into an embryo and causes him to be born a second time.

The texts dwell at length on the system of homologies by virtue of which the sacrificer undergoes a "return to the womb," *regressus ad uterum*, followed by a new birth. (25) The relevant passage in the *Aitareya Brahmana*, for example, runs: "Him whom they consecrate (with the *diksha*) the priests make into an embryo again. With waters they sprinkle; the waters are seed. . . . They conduct him to the hut of the consecrated; the hut of the consecrated is the womb of the consecrated; verily thus they conduct him to his womb. . . . With a garment they cover him; the garment is the caul. . . . Above that is the black antelope skin; the placenta is above the caul. . . . He closes his hands; verily closing its hands the embryo lies within; with closed hands the child is born. (26) . . . Having loosened the black antelope skin, he descends to the final bath; therefore embryos are born freed from the placenta; with the garment he descends; therefore a child is born with a caul" (I, 3; trans. A. B. Keith, *Rig-veda Brahmanas*, pp. 108-109).

Sacred knowledge and, by extension, wisdom are conceived as the fruit of an initiation, and it is significant that obstetric symbolism is found connected with the awakening of consciousness both in ancient India and in Greece. Socrates had good reason to compare himself to a midwife, for in fact he helped men to be born to consciousness of self; he delivered the "new man." The same symbolism is found in the Buddhist tradition. The monk abandoned his family name and became a "son of the Buddha" (*sakya-putto*), for he was "born among the saints" (*ariya*). So Kassapa said of himself: "Natural Son of the Blessed One, born of his mouth, born of the Dhamma [the Doctrine], fashioned by the Dhamma," etc. (*Samyutta Nikaya*, II, 221, trans. in A. K. Coomaraswamy, "Some Pali Words," p. 147).

This initiatory birth implied death to profane existence. The schema was maintained in Hinduism as well as in Buddhism. The yogin "dies to this life" in order to be reborn to another mode of being, that represented by liberation. The Buddha taught the way and the means of dying to the profane human condition--that is, to slavery and ignorance--in order to be reborn to the freedom, bliss, and nonconditionality of *nirvana*. The Indian terminology of initiatory rebirth is sometimes reminiscent of the "new body" that the novice obtains through initiation. The Buddha himself proclaims it: "Moreover, I have shown my disciples the way whereby they call into being out of this body (composed of the four elements) another body of the

mind's creation (*rupim manomayam*), complete in all its limbs and members and with transcendental faculties (*abhinindriyam*). " (27)

The symbolism of the second birth or of generation as access to spirituality was adopted and valorized by Alexandrian Judaism and by Christianity. Philo freely uses the theme of generation to refer to birth to a higher life, the life of the spirit (cf., for example, *Abraham*, 20, 99). In his turn, Saint Paul speaks of "spiritual sons," of sons whom he has procreated by faith. "Titus, mine own son after the common faith" (Epistle to Titus, 1, 4). "I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds" (Epistle to Philemon, 10).

There is no need to insist on the differences between the "sons" that Saint Paul "begot" "after the faith" and the "sons of the Buddha" or those whom Socrates "delivered" or the "newborn" of primitive initiations. The differences are obvious. It was the power of the rite itself that "killed" and "resuscitated" the candidate in archaic societies, just as the power of the rite transformed the Hindu sacrificer into an "embryo." The Buddha, on the contrary, "engendered" by his "mouth" that is, by imparting his doctrine (*dhamma*); it was by virtue of the supreme knowledge revealed by the *dhamma* that the disciple was born to a new life that could lead him to the threshold of *nirvana*. Socrates, for his part, claimed to do no more than exercise the art of the midwife; he helped to "deliver" the true man that each man bore deep within him. For Saint Paul, the situation is different; he engendered "spiritual sons" by the faith, that is, by virtue of a mystery established by Christ.

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

Although we have dwelt on initiation and rites of passage, the subject is far from exhausted; we have done scarcely more than to suggest a few of its essential aspects. And yet, by deciding to discuss initiation at some little length, we have had to pass over a whole series of socio-religious situations that are of considerable interest for an understanding of *homo religiosus*. For example, we have not discussed the sovereign, the shaman, the priest, the warrior, and so on. The fact is that this little book is necessarily summary and incomplete; it represents only a rapid introduction to a vast subject.

It is a vast subject because, as we have said, it concerns not only the historian of religions, the ethnologist, the sociologist, but also the political and social historian, the psychologist, the philosopher. To know the situations assumed by religious man, to understand his spiritual universe, is, in sum, to advance our general knowledge of man. It is true that most of the situations assumed by religious man of the primitive societies and archaic civilizations have long since been left behind by history. But they have not vanished without a trace; they have contributed toward making us what we are today, and so, after all, they form part of our own history.

As we said before, religious man assumes a particular and characteristic mode of existence in the world and, despite the great number of historico-religious forms, this characteristic mode is always recognizable. Whatever the historical context in which he is placed, *homo religiosus*

always believes that there is an absolute reality, *the sacred*, which transcends this world but manifests itself in this 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 imitating the divine behavior, man puts and keeps himself close to the gods--that is, in the real and the significant.

It is easy to see all that separates this mode of being in the world from the existence of a nonreligious man. First of all, the nonreligious man refuses transcendence, accepts the relativity of "reality," and may even come to doubt the meaning of existence. The great cultures of the past too have not been entirely without nonreligious men, and it is not impossible that such men existed even on the archaic levels of culture, although as yet no testimony to their existence there has come to light. But it is only in the modern societies of the West that nonreligious man has developed fully. Modern nonreligious man assumes a new 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 situations. 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.

It does not fall to us to discuss this philosophical position. We will only observe that, in the last analysis, modern nonreligious man assumes a tragic existence and that his existential choice is not without its greatness. But this nonreligious man descends from *homo religiosus* and, whether he likes it or not, he is also the work of religious man; his formation begins with the situations assumed by his ancestors. In short, he is the result of a process of desacralization. Just as nature is the product of a progressive secularization of the cosmos as the work of God, profane man is the result of a desacralization of human existence. But this means that nonreligious man has been formed by opposing his predecessor, by attempting to "empty" himself of all religion and all 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. Do what he will, he is an inheritor. He cannot utterly abolish his past, since he is himself the 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.

For, as we said before, nonreligious man *in the pure state* is a comparatively rare phenomenon, even in the most desacralized of modern societies. The majority of the "irreligious" still behave religiously, even though they are not aware of the fact. We refer not only to the modern man's many "superstitions" and "tabus," all of them magico-religious in structure. But the modern man who feels and claims that he is nonreligious still retains a large stock of camouflaged myths and degenerated rituals. As we remarked earlier, the festivities that go with the New Year or with taking up residence in a new house, although laicized, still exhibit the structure of a ritual of renewal. The same phenomenon is observable in the

merrymaking that accompanies a marriage or the birth of a child or obtaining a new position or a social advancement, and so on.

A whole volume could well be written on the myths of modern man, on the mythologies camouflaged in the plays that he enjoys, in the books that he reads. The cinema, that "dream factory," takes over and employs countless mythical motifs--the fight between hero and monster, initiatory combats and ordeals, paradigmatic figures and images (the maiden, the hero, the paradisaical landscape, hell, and so on). Even reading includes a mythological function, not only because it replaces the recitation of myths in archaic societies and the oral literature that still lives in the rural communities of Europe, but particularly because, through reading, the modern man succeeds in obtaining an "escape from time" comparable to the "emergence from time" effected by myths. Whether modern man "kills" time with a detective story or enters such a foreign temporal universe as is represented by any novel, reading projects him out of his personal duration and incorporates him into other rhythms, makes him live in another "history."

Strictly speaking, the great majority of the irreligious are not liberated from religious behavior, from theologies and mythologies. They sometimes stagger under a whole magico-religious paraphernalia, which, however, has degenerated to the point of caricature and hence is hard to recognize for what it is. The process of desacralization of human existence has sometimes arrived at hybrid forms of black magic and sheer travesty of religion. We do not refer to the countless "little religions" that proliferate in all modern cities, to the pseudo-occult, neospiritualistic, or so-called hermetic churches, sects, or schools; for all these phenomena still belong to the sphere of religion, even if they almost always present the aberrant aspects of pseudomorphs. Nor do we allude to the various political movements and social utopianisms whose mythological structure and religious fanaticism are visible at a glance. For but one example we need only refer to the mythological structure of communism and its eschatological content. Marx takes over and continues one of the great eschatological myths of the Asiatic-Mediterranean world--the redeeming role of the Just (the "chosen," the "anointed," the "innocent," the "messenger"; in our day, the proletariat), whose sufferings are destined to change the ontological status of the world. In fact, Marx's classless society and the consequent disappearance of historical tensions find their closest precedent in the myth of the Golden Age that many traditions put at the beginning and the end of history. Marx enriched this venerable myth by a whole Judaeo-Christian messianic ideology: on the one hand, the prophetic role and soteriological function that he attributes to the proletariat; on the other, the final battle between Good and Evil, which is easily comparable to the apocalyptic battle between Christ and Antichrist, followed by the total victory of the former. It is even significant that Marx takes over for his own purposes the Judaeo-Christian eschatological hope of *an absolute end to history*; in this he differs from other historicistic philosophers (Croce and Ortega y Gasset, for example), for whom the tensions of history are consubstantial with the human condition and therefore can never be completely done away with.

But it is not only in the "little religions" or in the political mystiques that we find degenerated or camouflaged religious behavior. It is no less to be seen in movements that openly avow themselves to be secular or even antireligious. Examples are nudism or the movements for complete sexual freedom, ideologies in which we can discern traces of the "nostalgia for Eden," the desire to re-establish the paradisaical state before the Fall, when sin did not yet exist and there was no conflict between the pleasures of the flesh and conscience.

Then, too, it is interesting to observe to what an extent the scenarios of initiation still persist in many of the acts and gestures of contemporary nonreligious man. We shall, of course, disregard the situations in which a certain type of initiation survives in degenerate form. A good example is war, and especially individual combats (particularly between aviators)--exploits that involve "ordeals" that can be homologized to those of traditional military initiations, even if in our day the combatants are no longer aware of the deeper significance of their "ordeals" and hence scarcely benefit by their initiatory meaning. But even specifically modern techniques, such as psychoanalysis, still preserve the initiatory pattern. The patient is asked to descend deeply into himself, to make his past live, to confront his traumatic experiences again; and, from the point of view of form, this dangerous operation resembles initiatory descents into hell, the realm of ghosts, and combats with monsters. Just as the initiate was expected to emerge from his ordeals victorious--in short, was to "die" and be "resuscitated" in order to gain access to a fully responsible existence, open to spiritual values--so the patient undergoing analysis today must confront his own "unconscious," haunted by ghosts and monsters, in order to find psychic health and integrity and hence the world of cultural values.

But initiation is so closely linked to the mode of being of human existence that a considerable number of modern man's acts and gestures continue to repeat initiatory scenarios. Very often the "struggle for life," the "ordeals" and "difficulties" that stand in the way of a vocation or a career, in some sort reiterate the ordeals of initiation; it is after the "blows" that are dealt him, the moral and even physical "suffering" and "torture" he undergoes, that a young man "proves" himself, knows his possibilities, grows conscious of his powers, and finally becomes himself, spiritually adult and creative (the spirituality is, of course, what is understood as such in the modern world). For every human existence is formed by a series of ordeals, by repeated experience of "death" and "resurrection." And this is why, in a religious perspective, existence is established by initiation; it could almost be said that, in so far as human existence is fulfilled, it is itself an initiation.

In short, the majority of men "without religion" still hold to pseudo religions and degenerated mythologies. There is nothing surprising in this, for, as we saw, profane man is the descendant of *homo religiosus* and he cannot wipe out his own history--that is, the behavior of his religious ancestors which has made him what he is today. This is all the more true because a great part of his existence is fed by impulses that come to him from the depths of his being, from the zone that has been called the "unconscious." A purely rational man is an abstraction; he is never found in real life. Every human being is made up at once of his conscious activity and his irrational experiences. Now, the contents and structures of the unconscious exhibit astonishing similarities to mythological images and figures. We do not mean to say that mythologies are the "produce" of the unconscious, for the mode of being of the myth is precisely that *it reveals itself as myth*, that is, it announces that something *has been manifested in a paradigmatic manner*. A myth is "produced" by the unconscious in the same sense in which we could say that *Madame Bovary* is the "product" of an adultery.

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 presence 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. In other words, in so far as the unconscious is the result of countless existential

experiences, it cannot but resemble the various religious universes. For religion is the paradigmatic solution for every existential crisis. It is the paradigmatic solution not only because it can be indefinitely repeated, but also because it is believed to have a transcendental origin and hence is valorized as a revelation received from an *other*, transhuman world. The religious solution not only resolves the crisis but at the same time makes existence "open" to values that are no longer contingent or particular, thus enabling man to transcend personal situations and, finally, gain access to the world of spirit.

This is not the place to develop all the consequences 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 avowedly nonreligious man still, in his deeper being, shares in a religiously oriented behavior. But modern man's "private mythologies"--his dreams, reveries, fantasies, and so on--never 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 religious*, 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 message to transmit, a particular mission to accomplish, in order to ensure or 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 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, to "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 completely 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 temporarily 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, it seems to us, suffices to show in what way the nonreligious man of 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. The unconscious offers him 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 their unconscious--which means too that in such men the possibility of reintegrating a religious vision of life lies at a great depth. Or, from the 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; now, after the second, it has fallen even further, 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.