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Chapter 3: The natural, the extranatural and the supernatural level of reality

3.1. A 'here', an 'above', and a 'below'.

Religion, as a study of the sacred, presupposes an empathetic attitude but also a constant and critical examination of its presuppositions. Because, in a dynamically conceived religion, the mantic, unconscious and subconscious factors exert their influence, such critical investigation does not seem at all an easy task. Man, with his conscious and unconscious side, is indeed a citizen of two worlds. One can say that he simultaneously and to a high degree consciously lives in the here and now, but also unconsciously in a mostly hidden 'elsewhere', in 'the other world'. Both worlds, however, constantly influence each other. Man leads a profane life but also a rather hidden and sacred life. The profane life and the sacred life are also evolving.

Every religion worthy of the name has at least a vague awareness of what is real, and knows that reality is 'layered'. There is, from a religious point of view, a 'here', a level of higher reality and a level of a lower reality. The 'profane' refers to life here. The 'above' or 'below' refers to the sacred and more hidden side of existence.

The Bible, *Exodus 20:4*, expresses this stratification as follows: "You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth", and thus divides reality into three 'areas', which are not always strictly separated, but which are nevertheless distinct: The natural, The extranatural and the supernatural level of reality. *Philippians 2:10* also confirm this distinction: "So that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth".

The natural level of reality

We start with 'the natural level' or the 'here'. This is everything that, in this profane world, can be observed by everyone. This is what the nominalist and rationalist vision of reality shows us and what has a scientific basis. This interpretation was already mentioned initially in the distinction between the saint and the profane (1.4.1.).

The extranatural level of reality

This refers to the paranormal, that which is outside the 'normal'. The paranormal was common in all former cultures and is still for a large part in the present, not Western, traditional societies. With a few exceptions one could say that the practice of mantic, the art of divination is of all times and of all places. It is characteristic of the thousand-year history of mankind. A radical change in this attitude took place with the Western European 'Age of Enlightenment', which was active from the 18th century onwards and is constantly gaining in influence. Man and this world became much more central to this. Religions that focused on subtle forces and subtle creatures were more likely to be scorned. Nevertheless, the attention for mankind has continued to exist throughout history, even if this was sometimes in a more hidden way. In our time there is a renewed and open interest in all the paranormal. Let's look at the success of the movement that calls itself "New Age", and wants to update a lot of paranormal insights and magical customs of the traditional cultures.

New-Age

Let us consult *L'ère du verseau, Pourquoi tout va profondément changer, in L'autre monde*¹ (The Aquarian Age, Why everything will change profoundly in the other world). Instead of giving 'learned' explanations about 'New Age', we deliberately choose a special number from a fairly well-known magazine that is typical of New Age. The main theme is the transition from one period to another. This is based on the attraction that the sun and the moon exert on the earth, but also on the movement of the earth in cosmic space. The earth rotates around its axis, which gives rise to the alternation of day and night. Furthermore, in one year the earth describes an orbit around the sun. One can imagine this orbit as the circumference of an ellipse, with the sun in one of the focal points. The plane formed by the ellipse is called the ecliptic. Now the axis of the Earth is oblique relative to the ecliptic. In its annual orbit around the sun, this gives rise to the seasons.

One can compare the rotation of the earth with a spinning top. Not only does it rotate very fast around its axis, but the top also moves and 'swells' a bit. It seems to tilt slightly from left to right. Its axis is not always perpendicular to the ground, but in turn describes a circular movement. Anyone who has ever seen a child throw a top knows that the top not only rotates around its axis, but that the top also moves and the axis constantly changes direction. This is called a precession movement. Now the earth also makes such a precession movement. As a result, her axis does not always point at the pole star but describes a circular movement, so that after many centuries other stars in the vicinity of the pole star will also be in line with the earth's axis. In other words, other stars gradually serve as 'pole stars'. A complete circular motion,

going through the twelve signs of the zodiac, takes about 26000 years. Going through one sign of the zodiac takes about 2160 years. The Age of Pisces began in the year 1 of our era and would end in 2.160. The Age of Aquarius follows and gradually begins. This is then astronomically the new era, the New Age, or the "Nouvel Age".

The thesis of New Age is that together with this astronomical new era also a shift in human culture would arise. This change of culture would already have begun now. In other words, here scientific astronomy is being transformed into controversial astrology. The whole issue of *L'autre monde* tries to use elements from our culture such as technology, medicine, biological communication, genetic manipulation, sciences, religions, myths and others, to make this typical astrological thesis come true.

A postmodern world

Let's say that New-Age re-activates the ancient religion from a postmodern world. The postmodern world follows the modern world and sees many downsides of our modern development. These include the acute environmental problem. Postmodern thinking has long since ceased to share the optimism of modern thinking, as well as the rather blind belief in straightforward technical progress. New Age assumes that the renewed interest in the old religion is the start of a new era.

Let us also note that 'heaven' and 'the underworld', the 'above' and the 'below', as discussed in the non-Biblical religions, also belong to the extra-natural level for the Bible. The ancient Greeks knew a distinction between heavenly and subterranean gods. High on the Olympus live the heavenly or ouranic gods, and in the underworld reside the subterranean, telluric or chthonic gods. Although for the Greeks the heavenly gods are much brighter and higher than the subterranean gods, both these 'heavenly' and the 'subterranean' inhabitants, biblically seen, belong exclusively to the outer-nature, not to the super-natural. We will explain in more detail that Christianity, for this apparently peculiar point of view, believes that it has sound reasons for doing so. Let us conclude by emphasizing that the term 'heaven' in a non-biblical sense, does not at all refer to the same atmosphere, condition or place as the same term in Christianity. Biblical heaven is situated in the highest areas of reality, infinitely higher than the "heaven" of non-Biblical religions.

The supernatural level of reality

Already at the beginning of the first sentence in the Bible, *Genesis 1:1*, the supernatural side is expressed as: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth". This means that God created but still creates the whole ordered reality. He who addresses himself in prayer to the Creator of all that exists, can hardly have anyone else than this highest being in mind. Even if the one who addresses this being is not familiar with the Bible or with Christianity. Indeed, there can only be one God the supreme.

It is different with the gods who control a part of reality. They are not the creators of all that exists, but they themselves are a part of the creation. As a result, everything that presents itself as, or is worshipped as a 'god' reveals itself, in comparison with the God referred to in the Bible, as no more than yet another creature.

The word 'god' (without a capital letter) then means: 'to be gifted with a higher, powerful form of energy'. In *1 Cor. 8:4ff.* we read: "we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one".

Also Saint Paul, in enumerating the number of higher beings venerated by the peoples around the Mediterranean, emphasizes the immense distance between them and the God of the Bible. For although the many mythologies of the nations tell us that the heavens, the underworld and the earth are populated with many 'gods', for Christianity there is in any case only one creator, one supreme God. He was called 'Yahweh' in the Old Testament. In the New Testament one speaks about the so-called Holy Trinity. As said, this Holy Trinity refers to a rather mysterious bond between "three persons". First God the Father, the Creator of all that exists. Then, Jesus Christ, His 'son', incarnated as a man and born of a virgin, crucified, descended 'to hell', resurrected, and ascended to heaven. And finally, there is the Holy Spirit, who also descended on Pentecost. According to Christianity, these "three-in-one" forms an inexhaustible source of subtle energy. We described such a force as the dynamism of 'the holy' (2.1.).

The introductory chapters about the "homo religiosus" (1) and "the holy" (2) can therefore be placed under this "supernatural level". In what follows, we go deeper into each of the three subdivisions.

3.2. The natural level of reality

As said before, the term 'natural level' refers to the profane world, contrary to the sacred world (1.4.1.). The view that states that only the natural level is real, to the exclusion of the extra-natural and the supernatural level, is characterized, among other things, by nominalism and rationalism. We have already mentioned an ideological form of science, which considers that its domain encompasses the whole of reality, a reality which is then preferably interpreted in a purely nominalist way. As we mentioned in the chapter on the "homo religiosus", the so-called "God-is-death theology" is also nominalist in nature.

This nominalist interpretation presupposes that only that which can be experienced by everyone is real. Man gives things a name and arbitrarily determines their content. Paranormal giftedness, religion, deities, prayer, extended awareness ... become for the nominalist hard to digest data, because they escape the sensory perception.

Man as a measure of all things

In very religious Greece, such a profane attitude was rather the exception. In the works of the poet Homer, who lived in the 9th century BC and is the author of the Iliad and Odyssey, one can hardly find a page in which there is no mention of the gods.

The ancient Greek thinker Protagoras of Abdeira (-480/-410, Abdeira in Trace) had, contrary to the opinion of most of his faithful contemporaries, a nominalist view. His well-known statement is: "Man is the measure of all things". Until then, the gods were the measure of things. It was the gods who, consulted through various oracles, determined what could and could not be done, even if it was according to their own, not always conscientious jurisprudence. Thus, we see that the Greek supreme god Zeus dictates the laws to the Greeks, but that he deceives his wife Hera with female mortals and that he rapes Leda, the wife of the Spartan ruler. We will return to the double moral of such 'extra-natural' deities later, in chapter 11, in more detail. Here we limit ourselves to the 'natural' level.

If man becomes 'the norm' for judging reality, then there is no longer such a thing as an 'objective' truth, situated outside of man. Such a code of conduct, which is independent of man, can be seen, for example, in the Biblical Decalogue or the "Ten Commandments" (1.4.1.), as a summary of an ethic situated outside and above man.

Protagoras was the first to hold the view that there are two opposing views on all subjects. For example, he indicated that, in his view, there is simply no objective truth, but that there are

only subjective opinions. He seriously questioned the assurances of many a Greek's existence. This was not appreciated at all in his time. Our current humanists refer to Protagoras as 'the first humanist' in world history. He did indeed advocate independent thinking, free from 'divine' influences.

Dirk Verhofstadt, *Atheïsme als basis voor de moraal*², (Atheism as a basis for morality), writes: "Yet there are rules that we all accept together, regardless of our faith. We do not kill, steal and deceive like this - and not because God asks for it - but because it is socially condemned and punished.

And yet, history and current events teach us that there are places and times, and even many of them, where all this is neither disapproved nor punished. This worldly frame of reference does not seem to be so absolute.

Inner sensation

The view of the French philosopher R. Descartes (1596/1650) is also highly nominalist. For him, the entire philosophical tradition had hardly any value. He questioned the philosophical pedestal on which our culture was built. He did not trust what was not researched by "modern reason". In his thinking he did not start from a higher reality outside of man. After all, this is not uniform and evident to everyone. He wanted as a basis what seemed to him to be indisputable and absolutely certain: the inner sensation. In his mental search for absolute certainties he found... only doubt. And from the inner experience that he doubted, he introspectively deduced his existence. He expressed it with the well-known "cogito, ergo sum"; or "je pense, donc je suis", "I think, so I'm". When I think, he said, I must exist, because if I don't exist, I just can't think. Although his doubt was not an existential doubt in its entirety, but a kind of methodical doubt in his search for absolute certainties. Indeed, our senses sometimes dare to deceive us. We can take a delusion for reality and so any doubt about our perception does not always seem unfounded. For example, a cube is perceived in perspective, while it has no perspective on its own. For example, a stick partly stuck in the water seems to be broken, whereas in fact it is not. And the place where a rainbow seems to hit the earth, is in reality never reachable. If we want to go there anyway, the rainbow seems to move with us. We don't see the sun's rays parallel, but shine through the clouds from a very large angle, and yet they are practically parallel to each other. And if you look up between two columns, you'll see that they seem to tend towards each other. The information that our senses give us does not always correspond to the full reality. What is certain is our doubt about the information they give us.

It seems as if exploring the world from such an inner sensation, divides reality into two parts: on the one hand there is the consciousness that is so to speak trapped in the bubble of the inner perception, and on the other hand there is the sensory experienced outside world. And the world outside of us is suspected of not being what it seems. Descartes assumed that the outside world must somehow really exist because he believed that God cannot deceive us.

The question is how far such a separation between, on the one hand, the inner sensation and, on the other hand, the experience of the outside world is carried out. To doubt our ability to perceive is a very daring undertaking. Descartes knows very well what a sensory feeling of hunger and cold means and what you can do to satisfy your hunger almost immediately, or what you have to do to get it warm again. And you don't do that by musing in the bubble of your consciousness, but by actually going to the kitchen cupboard in that "supposed outside world" in search of food, and taking a warm pullover out of your wardrobe and putting it on. His doubt, as said, is rather methodical, not absolute.

Does the world exist?

The extreme nominalist apparently has a certain separation between the world of consciousness and what is outside of it. He doubts the direct contact between himself and the outside world. In this way he can torment himself by asking whether the reality around him is not fiction. He is, as it were, trapped in the bubble of his intimate consciousness and looks at the world around him as an outsider, almost as someone who is shielded in a diving bell and does not really belong to 'the world'. His consciousness does not directly affect the self-evidence of reality. It seems as if the extreme nominalist has something autistic.

In *Humo*³, Leo Apostel (1925/2009), an internationally renowned philosopher, expresses his nominalist vision in a rather poignant way: "Once God had disappeared, I had to have something in place. Actually, I'm still working on that. At the time I had a period that I thought: if God does not exist, does the world exist, do I exist? Isn't it all a dream? If you really realize that existentially, it is a horrible experience. Can I prove that this table really exists? If I had said that out loud, I would probably have been collocated. As Apostel puts it here, it looks a bit like Descartes' reasoning.

Strictly logically, the following can be added. The fact that the question arises as to whether or not the table exists, argues for its existence. If it didn't exist at all, how could you come to the question?

An unlimited reality

Do we compare this somewhat introverted attitude of the Apostle and Descartes with the cosmic ecstasy of an Eastern mystic? Gopi Krishna, *Kundalini, de evolutionaire energie in de mens*⁴ (Kundalini, the evolutionary energy in man), describes his experience: "I had an awareness from within me of an immediate contact with an intensely conscious universe, a great, indescribable immanence around me. My body, the chair in which I sat, the table in front of me, the walls of the room, the grass outside, the whole earth and the sky are all evil to me as mere phantoms in this truly all-pervading ocean of being, which - in an attempt to reproduce the most incredible of them - was at the same time unlimited and yet did not seem larger than an infinitely small point."

One sees the two extremes: the doubt about the actual existence of L.Apostel on the one hand, and the intense experience of reality of Krishna on the other. For the mystic, the chair, the table and the whole material world are also there, but only as an extremely minimal part of an overwhelming reality.

G. Gusdorf, *Science et foi au milieu du XXe siècle*⁵, (Science and faith in the middle of the 20th century), speaks of the weakening of the ancient medieval worldview, of "the wonderful system of security". Instead, what the French thinker Pascal (1623/1662) calls "the frightening eternal silence of the boundless spaces".

E. Van den Bergh van Eysingha, *Hegel*⁶, tells the story of a certain Herr Krug who one day challenged Hegel to deduce the existence of his penholder from general and abstract principles. Hegel answers that the existence of, for example, a penholder 'proving' is meaningless because it is simply there. One sees that for Hegel the outside world is a given, not a demanded one. This gives him a much healthier view of reality than, for example, Descartes. For Descartes, the data were actually requested, just like for the Apostle: "How do I prove that the table I see is real?"

Archaic peoples would be more than surprised at the far-fetched arguments with which Western nominalist thinking tries to demonstrate that the world exists. For those ancient cultures, this is simply obvious. They see the world around them, they feel the radiance and

vitality of people, animals, and nature. For them, the world is not only materially recognizable, but is also 'sacred'. The data are not only what the senses tell us about it. They do not only belong to nature, they are much more than that. They share a life force that is factual, but not experienced by everyone. Everything that exists has a natural aspect, but also an extranatural aspect, perhaps a supernatural aspect.

Sensory experience

The vision of the Scot David Hume (1711/1776) and his contemporaries, the so-called 'empiricists', for example, is also nominalist. They argue that there is nothing in reality that transcends sensory or empirical experience. Attention was paid to the analogy, the resemblance and the difference, with Descartes' thinking. For Descartes, man is an angel in a machine, a subtle being that controls a material body. He also believes in the existence of God. But this higher world is to him so powerless, so nominalists thought, that it is hardly of any significance for ordinary life.

Descartes keeps track of what he experiences directly, inwardly, namely doubt. From that doubt, from the bubble of consciousness, he tries to explore the outside world. Like Descartes, Hume also adheres to what he experiences directly. This, however, with an important difference. Hume does not depart from consciousness, but from data that can be experienced by the senses, and then tries to come to consciousness. He states that only the sensory experience is valid in order to get to know reality. He claims that there is nothing in the mind that is not first known through sensory experience. Our general concepts arise according to Hume after repeated sensory perceptions and this as a result of the abstractions our mind makes hereby. However, they are no more than a subjective construction of human thought. Therefore, they do not exist 'somewhere' objectively, in themselves, independently of man.

In a way, Hume and Descartes are each other's opposites, just as the exclusive sensory experience is opposed to the exclusive inner sensation. It is a knowing through the senses, against a knowing through the bubble of consciousness. With Immanuel Kant (1724/1804), the top figure of German enlightenment - the Aufklärung - one can also suppose that both visions are, as it were, the two sides of the same medal and complement each other.

Considerations and thoughts

For Kant the height of knowledge indeed lies where sensory perception and intellectual knowledge are combined. Concepts and thoughts on the one hand are fed by sensory experiences but on the other hand also our sensory experience is refined by our concepts and our thoughts. These accurately steer our sensory experience and tell us what we are going to pay attention to.

Descartes, Hume and Kant therefore believe that the 'idea' that we form according to a given data, is no more than an abstraction, without any contact with another extra-natural or supernatural reality. An idea is only a name, in Latin, 'nomen', for a man-made reality. Hence one speaks of 'nominalism'.

This combination of inner sensations and sensory experiences shows that, by reasoning with logical rigor, a lot of one-sidedness and shortcomings can be brought to light. Two apparent contradictions are accepted, purified from their one-sidedness and reconciled. It can be said that they are brought to a higher level. Such an "acceptance, purification, and exaltation" will be encountered later, where it will be applied as a very effective religious practice.

The unknowable

Kant introduced us to reality through sensory experience and reasoning. Yet he believed that not all reality is known in this way. In his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781) he states that our scientific mind clearly understands what is happening within time and space, but that the phenomena as they are situated above or outside of it, are actually inaccessible to man. Of concepts such as 'God' and 'soul', he says that they are not sensually experienced, nor are they known through inner sensations. However, he is convinced of the spiritual character and immateriality of the soul. Kant will therefore conclude that a part of reality is simply unknowable for man. Even the judgments and conclusions of our mind cannot provide certainty about the real existence of the immaterial world. He therefore divides everything that exists into what is known and what is not. The latter he called the 'noömenale', the intelligible or what exists at a higher level. What we do know, he thinks, is actually in our own imagination world.

People who see in reality more than just nominalism, state that our concepts - to the extent that they are nominalist - have been stripped of their dynamism. If 'ideas' are merely subjective abstractions, and do not connect to the objective world of ideas outside and above man, then they do not share in the subtle power of life either. Johan Wolfgang von Goethe (1749/1832), the famous German philosopher and poet, and with him the entire Romantic movement as a philosophical movement, will react vehemently against the notion that 'ideas' are only cerebral and theoretical. Romanticism wants to emphasize "life in all its vitality". Goethe put it in his winged way: "Grau, mein Freund, sind alle Theoriën, grün des lebens goldner Baum", "Without color, my friend, all the theories are, green is the golden tree of life". Or to put it another way: colorless is the content of every abstract concept. Colorful, however, every concrete sample from that to which the term refers".

The theory is set against life, which is typically romantic. All romantic philosophy stands or falls with the concept of 'life'. Romantics tend to view the universe holistically, as a coherent whole. They react against nominalism, which focuses on abstract concepts. However, they do not deny abstract concepts, but argue that life is much richer. That the world and life itself are much more than sensory experiences, inner sensations or abstract theories is also emphasized by New Age in our time. Here, we also know a holistic approach to the world, as an association of all, with everything and everyone.

However, an overly far-reaching romanticism can, in turn, fall into one-sidedness. In order to understand reality, we not only need concrete things, but also understanding. Kant emphasized this. With our senses we discover the visible world, but our thinking reaches into the invisible. This is actually illustrated in some syllogisms. The two phrases bring up data, the conclusion exceeds precisely what is given. We will come back to this later in the text (11.7.).

As said before, Kant stated that what is situated outside of time and space is inaccessible to man and that concepts such as 'God' and 'soul' are therefore in essence unknowable. With this he indirectly expresses his nominalist attitude. Then it is immediately clear that he has never had a paranormal or religious experience. Kant is reluctantly opposed to all paranormal inspirations, manticism and to a religion with a dynamic approach. This leaves him with only a very poor and powerless faith. He assumes that God and the soul exist. But they no longer represent that much. For example, he did not fail to express his reservations when listening to the paranormal visions of his contemporary, the Swedish seer E. Swedenborg (1688/1722)..

The Divine Marquis

For the nominalist, only sensory experiences and inner sensations are real. Higher values mean almost nothing to him. Therefore, he sees no need to pursue or realize them in his life.

With regard to the theme of 'sexuality', this is no different. For the radically nominalist marquis de Sade (1740/1814) or "le divin marquis", author of erotic literature, sex is therefore totally profane, empirical material, with which one can experiment freely.

De Sade is known as a prototype of the sadism that is named after him. After the First World War (1914/1918), from 1920 onwards, we see in the USA the sexual revolution and the term 'sex appeal' gradually appear as a desacralized and commercialized mass product around the 'stars' of the film and music industry. This continues to grow and has been more successful since 1955, with the rise of pornography, among other things.

This evolution is living proof of how brilliantly de Sade has anticipated the development of emotional life. Especially in the field of 'sex', a term that appears from the same 'enlightened' USA after 1955 to express the total freedom with regard to sexual life. Sex has penetrated - among other things in all its psychopathological forms (including sex with animals) - all levels and layers of our current 'rational' society. This alone justifies the fact that we discuss what the rationalism of "le divin marquis" actually entails and what repercussions it can have for our culture-in-crisis.

The well-known existentialist Simone de Beauvoir (1908/1986), *Faut-il brûler de Sade*⁷?, (Should we burn de Sade?) quotes de Sade himself: "Authoritative, temperamental, without measure or purpose. In terms of moral conduct, he gave up a confused fantasy that had no equal. Atheist to the fanatical. In short: this is how I am! Kill me or take me as I am, for I will not change myself anyway." It can be seen: De Sade had a cynical self-knowledge.

A few facts: According to the minutes of the Arcueil trials, April-June 1768, the Sade "subjected" a leper, Rose Keller, to erotic floggings. He recruited a group of prostitutes to "subject these women to a number of perversions" together with his chamberlain. This led to the trials in Marseille from June to September 1772. In its castle, La Coste, in Provence, de Sade founded a polygamous sex group with homosexual relations, including minors.

His books *Les 120 jours de Sodome* (1787), (The 120 days of Sodom), *Justine ou les malheurs de la vertu* (1791), (Justine or the misfortunes of virtue), and *La philosophie dans le boudoir* (1795), (Philosophy in the boudoir) are porn. Le Petit Larousse (1972) characterizes them as follows: "Romans in which the heroes and heroines are obsessed with the tendency to torture innocent souls ('sadism'). But they are important, because they explain "la révolte d'un homme libre contre Dieu et la société"; a freeman's rebellion against God and society.

De Sade's nominalism is expressed, among other things, by the novel character Juliette, the frigid heroine: "I allow myself to be guided by no other 'light' than the light of my own reason". Let us pay attention to the metaphor of 'light', as it was used in the century of French enlightenment. Let us also pay attention to radical individualism: "only the light of my own reason". We refer to Protagoras and his statement: "man is the measure of all things". Simone de Beauvoir, in her then controversial work on the Sade, *Le deuxième sexe*⁸, (The second sex), gives him the floor: "Don't hesitate, Eugénie. The words 'virtue' and 'vice' mean only purely individual thoughts. There is no act - no matter how extraordinary you imagine it - that is a real crime. Nor is there any act that can be called a real virtue.

'Virtue' and "vice" are for Sade only names without any objective and higher value. "God, and his ideas are dead", as Nietzsche (1.2.) put it, and so everything is allowed. In *Les 120 journées de Sodome*, le divin marquis writes, "Crime does not possess the high nobility found

in virtue. But is she not exalted? Doesn't crime continuously show the characteristic of the greatest ("grandeur") and of the most exalted ("sublimité")? Is she not, therefore, greater - and will she not always be the greatest - in the face of the monotonous and effeminate charm of virtue?" The behavior of the Sade shows its nominalism that dismisses all higher, holy, inviolable realities ('ideas') as mere 'names', as hollow words. He sexually tortures his fellow men and finds reasons to justify his behavior. In the spring of 1793 he is appointed judge. But since he does nothing but acquit the accused - even his former enemies - he is arrested. His way of life was still full of scandals and provoked many reactions. Under Napoleon (1789/1821) he was locked up in an insane asylum in Charenton. He spent thirteen years of his life there and died there, insane, in 1814.

The red booklet for students

The Red Booklet for Schools, Utrecht 1970-1, 1971-8, is also nominalist. At the time of its publication it was secretly sold in many schools and had some popularity. It also denies all higher values. A sample: "When it says in the newspaper that someone has committed a moral offence, it sounds worse than it is. This is someone who has an ejaculation in an 'unusual' way. If you read the story of a voyeur, it is a man or woman who "likes to see how others 'do it'. He spies on loving couples who think they're alone. From time to time, a voyeur may be 'panicked'. It's because of the way others react to this behavior. These voyeurs no longer know what they are doing and sometimes such a situation leads to violence".

So much for this quote. We pay attention to the mercy with which the voyeur is approached. It is the others who cause him to panic. Every higher idea, ideal or value is hereby denied. The higher sense of sexuality, as the various traditions have tried to interpret it, seems to have been completely lost. In this way one builds a permissive society, which in turn prompts 'puritanism'. One might wonder whether the propositions of the red book, in our 21st century and after a lot of vengeful sexual scandals in the world press, would still be so generally accepted today.

Communism

In chapter 1.2. "What religion is not", we refer to Karl Marx who said that religion is the opium of the people. It is clear that communism is also nominalist in its orientation. Communism emphasizes the economy in which in principle everyone produces according to capacity and receives according to needs. Its spiritual fathers were Marx and Lenin (1870/1924).

St. Courtois and others, *Le livre noir du communisme*⁹ (*Crimes, terreur, répression*), (The Black Book of Communism, (Crimes, terror, repression)) was surprising in France. It was written by eleven French historians, all somewhat left, but who do not want to conceal the facts. To begin: what the 'dissident', Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn about Russia, Jean Pasqualini about China, and Pin Yathay about Cambodia have been shouting about killing people in the name of the dictatorship of the proletariat for decades from the rooftops, is more than confirmed in the book in question. Because it is based on the archives of the former communist states in such a way that even the figures could be substantiated. Solzhenitsyn, Pasqualini and Yathay were not taken seriously at the time by Western intelligentsia.

Jean-François Revel, *Communisme*¹⁰ (*85 millions de morts!*), (Communism (85 million dead!)), sums up: "Twenty million people were killed in peacetime in the USSR and by order of the state. Sixty-five million were murdered in China on the orders of MaoTse-toung, now Mao Zedong (1893/1976). He was the founder of the People's Republic of China and wrote his Red Book that programmed the Chinese cultural revolution, which began in 1966. Two million people were murdered in Cambodia, out of a total of 7.8 million inhabitants. All the result of

programmed exterminations. In short, eighty-five million people were killed. With 65 million dead in China, Mao is the biggest killer of all time”.

Although communism states that everything is 'matter', there has been a lot of research into the paranormal in the Soviet states. See Lynn Schroeder, *Parapsychologische ontdekkingen achter het ijzeren gordijn*¹¹, (Parapsychological discoveries behind the Iron Curtain), among others.

Three anecdotes

G. Bush, president of the USA, used to be an ambassador to Communist China. Mao, shortly before his death, was talking to him and said: "Soon I will go to heaven. I have already received my invitation from God". Knowing that, at least in the beginning, the People's Republic of China considered religion to be the opium of the people, such a statement is in contradiction with the precepts of communism.

G. Bush was at the solemn funeral of Leonid Brezhnev (1906/1982), Head of State of the USSR. " There, in the middle of the center of a totalitarian and cold state, Mrs Brezhnev stood for the last time, watching her husband. With an unmistakable gesture she bends down ... to make a sign of the cross over her husband's chest¹²".

In Stalin's legacy, a book on magic was found, which he had annotated. Apparently, he took into account that in the whole of reality there is more than just 'matter' as the axiom of communism puts it.

The 'Übermensch'

A number of more recent philosophers and philosophies also start from an exclusively nominalist basis. For example, F. Nietzsche (1844/1900) with his already mentioned assertion that God is dead. For Nietzsche, the ideal man is the 'Übermensch', a statement with which he became the philosopher of Nazism. Hitler gave the complete works of Nietzsche to Mussolini, when they met in 1942 in the Brenner Pass.

Although Nietzsche can be interpreted as nominalist, this does not apply at all to Nazism, on the contrary. In 1936, Hitler told Hermann Rauschning that the actual name of the NSDAP, (the National Socialist German Workers' Party), should have been "Magical Socialism", but that this could hardly be explained to the common people.

L. Pauwels / G. Bergier, *Le matin des magiciens*¹³, (The morning of the magicians) has many pages in which the occultism of the Nazi movement is explained. And not just superficially. But the final blow for all those who claim that occultism and racism do not go hand in hand for the Nazis, is N. Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism*¹⁴. The author studied thoroughly and strictly scientifically the occult movements that prepared and guided Nazism and that were of decisive influence. Mystical, racist and pan-German philosophical tendencies are exposed in the work. They are still active today.

"The death of God"

J.P. Sartre (1905/1980), existentialist philosopher, elaborated on this theme. He had been a celebrated thinker for at least two generations, with international resonance. We will take a moment to consider one aspect of his very versatile personality, namely his interpretation of our profane culture. His interpretation is still topical, for it is one of the many forms of 'dismantling' or 'deconstruction' of the great philosophical and religious tradition of the West, and a way of dealing with what remains of human possibilities after that dismantling. Let us consider the book of Sartre *L'existentialisme est un humanisme*¹⁵, (Existentialism is a humanism). Sartre takes Descartes' 'cogito', the 'I think', as his point of departure, and considers

man purely as an individual and then in his inner life, in 'le sens intime', in 'the intimate meaning'.

Opponents argue that this immediately undermines all human solidarity. The "Ten Commandments" as a Christian summary of eternal values are thus directly denied, so that there is no longer any objective, out-of-human justification for any behavior.

Sartre's thought is based on the premise that "with the absence of God one loses the last reason or foundation". He summarizes this in a term borrowed from the German philosopher M. Heidegger (1889/1976): 'le délaissement', 'the neglect' or being left alone. "There is no such thing as God," he said, drawing the ultimate conclusion from this "to be alone in creation".

For the morale of the classical layman, this is no problem at all. To eliminate God as the foundation of every morality is virtually harmless. According to this view, God is an unusable and demanding hypothesis. It is therefore better to drop it. In the interests of morality, a society and a civilized world require some values to be taken seriously, by agreement, after all.

Sartre, as an existentialist, does not agree with this vision, but thinks that it is very annoying that God does not exist. For in denying his existence, any possibility of putting "a thought that exists before anything else actually exists" and finding values in it, is weakened. For Sartre, 'values' are essentially preexisting values. Sartre writes, "An a-priori is impossible since there is no infinite and perfect consciousness left to think that a-priori". After all, it is not written anywhere that, for example, "the good" exists, that one must be honest, that one cannot lie. "We are in a living space where only people exist" he says. Sartre quotes the Russian novelist F. Dostoevsky (1821/1881) where he says: "If God did not exist, everything would be allowed". However, Dostoevsky is well understood: he doesn't claim that by eliminating God, everything is actually allowed. The fellow human beings, the community, the police and the judiciary are there to restrict a godly freedom to a certain extent. Dostoevsky does say that "in principle" everything would be allowed if God, as legislator and judge, were "put in parentheses". "Well, that is precisely what existentialism is all about," notes Sartre. Indeed, if God is not there, everything is allowed. Consequently: man is 'délaisé', abandoned. He is on his own, since he does not find, either inside or outside himself, any presuppositions to which man has a hold. He is thus not confronted with values or commands that justify his behavior. 'That', says Sartre, "I express it as follows: Man is condemned to be free". Sartre's concept of freedom is the freedom of man abandoned by God.

Contemporary materialism.

Today's materialism originated around 1960 and is represented by the American skeptical philosopher Daniel Dennett (1942°), among others. Dennett examines questions concerning consciousness, the philosophy of the mind and artificial intelligence. In the West he is known for his *Consciousness Explained*¹⁶. Dennett and his contemporaries state that we separate our ideas "like a snail's mucus". Consciousness here is reduced to an 'epiphenomenon' or an accompanying phenomenon of our brain activity.

For the Western philosophical tradition there is of course much more difference than resemblance between a snail that produces mucus and a human that develops thoughts. In the classical view, consciousness and brain function are connected, but 'consciousness' is a completely different and broader concept that does not just arise as a by-product from the functioning of the brain. It is therefore evident to the age-old tradition that mankind has a consciousness at its disposal. But here Dennett has a reversed difficulty. For him, as for anyone who sees the human brain as a perfected computer, the very existence of something like a consciousness is a problem. If the brain is no more than a complicated computer - as Dennett

claims¹⁷ - how does this give rise to consciousness? How can a dead computer suddenly and of itself become a conscious living machine? Or, conversely: how can, seen from the great tradition, consciousness, the 'I' with its striking characteristics, be reduced to material processes? And if one does that, what remains of one's own consciousness as one experiences it in oneself? For Dennett and his contemporaries we are nothing more than our bodies. In fact, he thinks that if we were to download all our information on diskettes¹⁸, we could be revived millennia later.

According to him, there are no objective ethical or religious values in themselves. We construct autonomously the meaning of our existence. Nature and the universe itself are completely amoral. The existence of a higher power or a creative God is therefore superfluous.

One notices the immense gap between Dennett's materialism and the great philosophical tradition.

Gospel Stories

It may come as a surprise, but a number of believers also interpret Christianity in a nominalist way. For those who are familiar with the dynamic and subtle side of religion, it seems to be an outright contradiction. And yet, the god of Kant, for example, was powerless, but Kant hardly believed in manticism and subtle forces. For him, all this belongs to the 'noömenal', to a world that we cannot know. We also quoted R. Bultmann and K. Deurloo (1.4.4.). They worked for a religion in accordance with the needs of our rather nominalist and rationalistic zeitgeist. The miracles of Jesus, His descent to hell, resurrection and ascension, are reduced to beautiful stories without real value and can only be interpreted symbolically. After all, Bultmann, together with those who share the same ideas, asserts that these salvific facts carry too many non-modern elements that cannot be verified by the current sciences. This also applies to this vague, not scientifically verifiable concept of 'life force'. What the Gospel tells us are 'only' words, 'names', nothing more. We must - always according to this nominalist vision - translate them into modern terms, which hold out, at least in the eyes of the modern sciences.

Conceptualism

We have already seen that nominalism is based on experiences and sensations. From here we come to 'concepts', to 'ideas', with which we then continue to experiment. For the extreme nominalist, real is only the singular and experienceable. A concept is no more than a thought construction. From generalizations, that the conceptualist himself cannot deny, he says that man himself designs them. They are merely constructions of the human mind and cannot possibly exist independently, regardless of what our human mind thinks.

However, opponents of conceptualism point to the objective existence of, for example, physical laws. The pendulum had long been in compliance with a law when G. Galilei (1564/1642) discovered the connection between the pendulum motion, the length and the acceleration of the pendulum, and recorded this in the pendulum formula. He did not invent the formula, he discovered it. Similarly, the planets were already moving for an eternity according to the laws described by J. Kepler (1571/1630) in 1609. Similarly, since time immemorial, apples have fallen off the trees according to gravitational laws formulated by I. Newton (1642/1727) and supplemented by A. Einstein (1879/1955) in 1915 with his general theory of relativity. The remarkable thing about laws is indeed that they, once formulated uniformly, formulate connections of laws that exist objectively, completely outside the subjective mind of the people. In other words: even without a Galilei, a Kepler, a Newton or Einstein, yes without there being any humans, the attraction between objects will show itself in accordance with the

formulas they discovered and described. Laws apply, regardless of whether someone knows about them or not. For the extreme nominalist, the fact that there are laws, completely outside the subjective consciousness of man, is therefore a problem.

The Isidians

Sir G.J. Warnock (1923/1995), a Berkeley specialist, criticized the generality of concepts in accordance with the long Anglo-Saxon nominalist tradition. He claimed that there are only singular realities. The British philosopher B. Russell did not agree at all with this extremely nominalist point of view and illustrated the nonsensicality of it by means of the story of the Isidians, a fictional and primitive tribe. He says: "Long ago there was a tribe that lived on the banks of a river. Some claim that the river was called 'Isis' and the tribal members 'Isidians'. The language of the tribe knew the words 'roach', 'trout', 'perch', and 'pike', but not the word 'fish'. A group of Isidians who had sailed further than usual down the river from their place of residence caught what we call 'salmon'. Immediately, there was a fierce debate. Some claimed it was a kind of 'pike', others that it was 'something dark and terrible'. Immediately it was ordered that everyone who mentioned it had to be thrown out of the tribe. At that moment a stranger appeared who lived on the banks of another river. He said to the Isidians: "In our language we have the word 'fish' that applies to roach, trout, bass, and pike. And also to the animal that is now causing so much disagreement here". The Isidians were indignant: "What is the use," they said, of such new words? For everything we catch in the river, we have a word in our language. Because it is always either a roach or a trout or a perch or a pike. It may be that you use words that are forbidden to us. But with us there is a law that prohibits the mentioning of useless and superfluous words, and even prohibits the mentioning of those words that you use unnecessarily. That is why we consider the word you spoke and what we do not want to say to be completely worthless". So much for Russell's biting irony about conceptual Nominalism.

The tribe other than the Isidians, who do have the word 'fish', can make 'abstractions' of 'roach', 'trout', 'perch', 'pike'. To say that a new fish is "a fish". The Isidians, in the absence of the word 'fish', must speak of "a non-Roach, a non-trout, a non-perch or a non-Pike". As a consequence, instead of saving words, this results in a waste of words. After all, the term 'fish' summarizes many species and is much more sparing when it comes to the use of words. Warnock criticizes the fact that general concepts exist and prefers to stick to singular realities. Russell's story shows that it is much easier to have general concepts like 'fish'.

Western thinking is nominalist

R. Van Zandt, *The Metaphysical Foundations of American History*¹⁹, says that Willem van Ockham (1290/1350) had already undermined and dismantled medieval and Christian-inspired scholasticism (800/1450) and founded all modern nominalist thinking. Van Zandt continues: "There was a tidal wave of nominalism. Descartes was a nominalist. J. Locke (1632/1704), the top figure of the Anglo-Saxon Enlightenment, was a nominalist. The Irish philosopher G. Berkeley (1685/1753), the English philosopher D. Hartley (1705/1757), the Scottish philosopher D. Hume, all of whom were nominalists. G. Leibniz (1646/1716), a German philosopher and mathematician, was an extreme nominalist. Kant was a nominalist. Hegel was a nominalist but with realistic influence. Bertrand Russell (1872/1970), *History of Western Philosophy*²⁰, and Jostein Gaardner's bestseller, *De wereld van Sofie*²¹, are nominalistically written. Thus, to put it in one word, "all modern philosophy" was nominalistic. Van Zandt goes on to say that nominalism is an Anglo-Saxon philosophy par excellence. English and American thinking is completely nominalist. The light of nominalist reason is, by the way, symbolized by the American Statue of Liberty, which holds up the torch of enlightenment in New York. It has

the chains at its feet that bind it, broken and brings the light of reason all over the world. For nominalism, man is indeed the measure, the norm of all that exists.

In recent literature one speaks of a 'bright' versus a 'super'. A bright swears by a scientific worldview, free from any religious belief. Supers – from 'supernatural' - are those who, contrary to the brights, believe that science does not have the last word, but that there is a reality that largely transcends our material situation.

So much for this sample with regard to the 'natural' level, in so far as it is thought to be merely profane. It is the world as it can be perceived by everyone, a world characterized by sensory experience and inner perception. For anyone who limits reality to this world, names given things are merely sounds, which, according to subjective human agreement, refer to concrete or abstract data. Such names have no connection with an objective reality that transcends this nature. Many contemporaries will recognize their vision of life and their presuppositions as the most normal thing in the world in the nominalist conception of reality described above. Our culture is indeed so permeated that the idea that other and richer conceptions of reality are possible, rather as estranging, can possibly come across as threatening. That the whole of everything that exists can also be viewed from a broader point of view, that is what we try to explain with a number of samples, first with regard to the extranatural level, and then with regard to the supernatural level.

3.3. The extranatural level of reality

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, Christianity divides reality into three parts, which are not always strictly separated, but which are nevertheless distinct: the natural, the extranatural and the supernatural level.

The supernatural level was discussed in the first two chapters: "the first acquaintance" and "the sacred and what follows from it". We then took a number of samples relating to the natural level in so far as it was indicated nominalistically.

We are now immersing ourselves in the world of the extranatural level, in the world that is more than 'natural', in the world that literally "goes beyond" the natural level and appears to us as paranormal. Let us take a first number of samples of non-Biblical religions. It should be noted that they are characterized by manticism and by dynamic or magical forces.

Sacred, but not necessarily ethical

So let's go deeper into what Christianity calls the 'extra-natural' level. It is the world that seems more than normal to us, that falls outside the normal, but according to the Bible does not belong to the supernatural level, not to God's high light world. It is, among other things, the world to which, according to Christianity, the many lower deities, alienated from the Biblical God, belong. An introduction to the non-Biblical religions can make us more acutely aware of the essence and the presuppositions of Christianity. Also in the many pagan religions, the sacred is the object par excellence and the subject in which we want to deepen ourselves. Nevertheless, a clarification is needed in advance.

For Christianity, the sacred, the increased power, is regarded as a very high ethical concept. Yahweh is holy in the first place. He is also the giver of life force and the creator of all that exists. In this way He is the creator of many other beings, even those who afterwards turned against His authority and went their own way. What these gods and their energies cause is also called "holy" but only in the sense of increased strength. They are not or not necessarily of a high ethical level.

The term 'holy' can be interpreted in two different ways: on the one hand the possession of a lot of energy, without actual ethics, and on the other hand also this energy, but now on a Christian and ethical level, the 'Sanctus' in Latin.

In the following we briefly discuss some non-Biblical religions, together with their 'holiness'. The reader will indeed notice that these religions are also dynamic in nature, but that a high level of ethics is sometimes hard to find.

We will deal with some aspects of santeria and macumba, two related religions in America, successively and as a sample. Next we will discuss the religion of Fang, a people in West Africa and the occult initiation of a Native American. Finally, we give a testimony of a magician of the Mennomonis, an Indian tribe in Canada.

3.3.1. Santeria

The sacred

Read Migene Gonzales-Wippler, *The santeria Experience*²². The book is more or less a model for what is essentially a non-Biblical religion. Santeria comes from West Africa (Nigeria, Benin) and is the religion of the Yoruba peoples. Many Yoruba's were taken as slaves to Cuba, Puerto Rico, Haiti, Trinidad, and Brazil. Also in Florida and New York, santeria spread. In New York alone, this religion has 300.000 followers. More than one hundred million people worldwide are said to adhere to this religion in one way or another.

Migene Gonzales-Wippler was a white anthropologist and was raised as a child by a nanny, who was a follower of santeria. Santeria is a syncretic religion: a mixture of superficial Catholicism and West African paganism. Let us pay attention to the meaning of the word 'Santer', 'holy'. Santeria means 'as far as the sacred is concerned'. As in Christianity, the sacred is the object of religion.

A deus otiosus.

That's how the santeria religion knows a supreme being called Olorun. This supreme being is not the Biblical Yahweh. For the santeria-believers, Olorun is the source of all life and vitality. Santeria is apparently a dynamic religion. After Olorun had created this world, he considered his work to be finished and no longer cared about the cosmos and mankind. He is there, but on a distant background. This makes him a kind of fatherly god. In the history of religion one speaks of a 'deus otiosus', a god 'on holiday'. The Latin word 'otium' is opposed to 'negotium', which means activity. So he is an absent god. In the santeria religion the work is done by the orishas, a kind of divine helpers. As lower deities they control the universe and especially the fate of the people. One could compare them with the court of Yahweh, as mentioned in the Bible (*Job 1:6*). For the santeria believers, Olorun and the orishas are real, but subtle beings. The orishas are also effectively contacted during rituals. According to the believers, those who are sensitive, those who are mantically gifted, will feel their presence, possibly see them, possibly hear their words. This religion is therefore far from nominalistic or rationalistic.

Do, ut des

Gonzales-Wippler writes that people need 'ashé' to solve various life problems. They need 'ashé' to even just survive. Ashé' is the santeria word for subtle life force. Where does one get this 'ashé'? With those who own them. They are the orishas, the gods. And where do the orishas get this energy? Simply from the sacrifices they demand from the believers and which are offered to them. The gods first want to be in a favorable mood, which implies that they don't automatically live in a good relationship with the people. These sacrifices can be for example field fruits, a chicken that is sacrificed, a goat... Once sacrificed to the gods, this food is no longer eaten by anyone. In addition to their material matter, these sacrifices also possess a subtle

energy, the bearer of life force. In the case of fruits, this is the radiation or aura. In the case of animals (and humans), the blood is the carrier of this subtle life force. It is this life force that the gods then appropriate themselves through the sacrifice. On the basis of their magical abilities, the gods transform part of this subtle energy thus obtained, into that kind of life force that is needed to solve the problem that is presented to them. For example, they are asked to cure a sick child, help an unemployed person find a job, clear up a cloudy love affair, find an affordable home, let it rain while facing a prolonged drought... It is clear that these are all very practical life problems and that this religion is very close to the needs of ordinary people.

In Latin there is the expression "do, ut des", "I give, that you may give". Applied here: I, the santeria-believer, give you, orisha, through a sacrifice, the necessary subtle energy, so that you, orisha, transform part of that energy and use it for the solution of my problem.

Function Gods

Communication between the Orishas and the people is done through the mediums and using divination (mantic). Also singing, performing a rite, letting oneself be possessed by these gods, are means to get in touch with the orishas. Let us remember that the Bible is averse to such ecstatic or irrational behavior (1.3.). Santeria knows this well: some mediums reach ecstasy or trance, are possessed by a god and lose their individuality and free will.

The sacrifices to the gods vary from orisha to orisha. The attributes of each orisha are taken into account. Each deity is specialized in one domain of reality. Each deity therefore has one specific function. For one problem, healing for example, one goes to that particular orisha, for another problem, for example love affairs, one turns to another deity. Christianity, too, has a similar form of division of labor: one saint is invoked for one particular type of problem, the other saint for another type of problem. For example, Saint Christopher is considered the protector of traffic and communication, and we turn to Saint Anthony when an object is lost. The historian in religion H. Usener (1834/1904) introduced in this context the term "Functionsgottheit", a divinity with a function that is unique.

For example, in the Oshun santeria the name of a particular Orisha is mentioned. Its nature or cosmic energy is found in the waters of rivers. That's why, to these religions, polluted rivers pose a religious foremost. Her specialty is eroticism, marriage, children, the abdomen, gold, artistic things, pleasures. Her attributes are the number 5, honey, mirrors, pumpkins, cakes, wine, and yellow chickens. Each sacrifice to her must contain at least one of her just listed attributes. For example, she wants a hollowed-out pumpkin stuffed with honey and olive oil.

One lets a burning wick or stone float on the oil. The flame must burn for five days - see above her number '5' -. Often the name of the 'beloved' or 'coveted' person is placed inside the pumpkin, or underneath it. These things are loaded with life force and, as such, are sacrificed because of their life force. To which Oshun responds by giving part of the energy she has herself received through sacrifices and which she transforms into the energy necessary to solve the problem that has been presented to her.

Thus the orisha YemaYa has as cosmic force or domain, the water of the ocean ("seven seas"). Her domain is femininity and motherhood. Her sacrificial attributes are the colors blue and white, her number is '7', her product is sugar cane syrup, her plant is the watermelon, her animals are ducks and female guinea fowls.

A pagan religion

In the new world a lot of religiosity, the orishas in the first place, was hidden under a façade of Catholicism. The orishas, for example, were identified with Catholic saints. For the owners of the slaves it happened that the latter behaved very catholic. To the outside world, for example,

the slavegirl prayed to St. Barbara. But in fact she venerated the orisha Shango, the lord of lightning, fire and dance, who through these cosmic life forces provided life drive, masculinity, and character strength. That is precisely his 'function'. His 'attributes' are red and white, the numbers 4 and 6, apples, bananas, roosters and male sheep. Who wants to appease Shango, must take into account his desires. It is because of that, that the name 'santeria' (which means 'worship of saints') came into effect. But it is abundantly clear that the soul of the adherents is and remains fundamentally pagan.

Structure of santeria

Migene Gonzales-Wippler, defines santeria in her book as follows:

- It is a dynamic religion. The central belief of santeria is that every reality within the universe consists of a cosmic energy. This energy is called 'ashé'.

- Santeria has a belief in a supreme being. The first creator of the universe and the source of this energy or life force is a mysterious being whose yoruban name is 'Olorun'. Viewed this way, it is a monotheism, with some Catholic influence.

- However, it can also be called a polytheism. The orishas or deities are the messengers of Olorun and bearers of his ashé or energy. Each orisha represents both a force of nature and a human value.

- Magic is at the center of this religion, as it is in all dynamic religions. Through their magical powers, the orishas transform the life force, present in the sacrifices, in that kind of energy that is necessary to solve the problem that is presented.

One finds the above described ground structure; a fatherly high god next to many autonomous deities, in almost all pagan religions. Since the whole human culture is one continuous solution of problems (a given problem requires a solution), which is only possible on the basis of higher life force, religion is the foundation of the whole culture.

So far an all too short sketch of a non-Biblical religion that is gaining more and more influence today, especially under the hispanics on the new continent. Where in the Bible the Holy Trinity is central, here the orishas are central. From the point of view of Christianity, there is a gap, indeed an abyss, between the Holy Trinity and the orishas. The Holy Trinity is situated in the supernatural level and is the donor of all life force. The orishas belong to the extra-natural and it is they who demand this vital power from their believers.

3.3.2. Macumba

The dark forces

Macumba is an "archaic" religion, related to santeria, which arrived in America, including Brazil, via African slaves from the 16th century onwards. This religion was enriched with a number of Christian influences.

We delve into S. Bramley, *Macumba, Forces noires du Brésil*²³ (Macumba, Black Forces of Brazil). Note that in the title of his book Bramley speaks of "les forces noires", "black forces", which sounds far from positive. He had a lot of conversations with "La mère Marie-Josée", which is a "Mère-des-dieux". This term is difficult to translate and is usually not translated. The term 'Mother of God', for example, hardly covers the same content. We clarify the role of a mère-des-dieux. With a séance, a medium, such as a young girl, goes into a trance. The deity - literally - takes possession of her. The medium is then no longer herself, she is obsessed by her god. According to the followers of macumba the deity then 'rides' (the French term is 'chevauché') the girl. In this culture, it is considered a great honor to be 'chosen' by such a deity. After the trance, which can last several hours, the medium is completely exhausted and has no memory whatsoever of what happened during this trance.

Y. Verbeek, *La sexualité dans la magie*²⁴, (Sexuality in magic), confirms this "being ridden" that also occurs in voodoo religion. It comes from Dahomey, today's Benin (West Africa). In Haiti, the voodoo lives on. Verbeek notes: "In the course of a voodoo rite, it happens that a woman is 'ridden' by a 'loa' (pronounced 'lwa'), an invisible spirit. The woman is enraptured and experiences a deep orgasm. The spectators then say: "She was ridden". In the local language: "she was raped".

The mère-des-dieux

She ensures the proper functioning of this trance. She herself made her task clear: "I am here to watch over the trance of our mediums. I make sure that the possession is neither superfluous nor dangerous. Sometimes the gods do not take sufficient account of their powers. I calm them down. You see, they are not as different as we are. They can be influenced by trickery, flattery, reasoning, prayers or gifts. If I also went into a trance, who would watch over our mediums?"

This is the role of the 'mother of the gods'. Apparently she needs to have a good sensitivity, a good psychological insight, but above all a strong dose of occult power or subtle energy in order to bring the 'gods' who threaten to mistreat their mediums in a way that is too dangerous, back to 'reason'. In such cultures, mère-des-dieux are therefore highly appreciated.

The mère-des-dieux continues: "There are two forms of possession: the first is violent, brutal, and therefore undesirable. The medium is thrown to the ground by her god, so I have to calm him down. The second form, the most common, is gradual and gentle". And further: "Some gods are very cheeky when they possess you. Let's take Ogum, for example. He is the god of war. If one evening he decides to behave terribly, I'm powerless. Because it is his nature to be terrible. But if a medium does not comply with our laws, I will punish her. I leave her to the acts of violence of her god, who folds her in two, throws her on the ground, or hits her head against the wall.

These subtle creatures do not take ethics very seriously and let off steam to their heart's content through their medium. In doing so, they pay little attention to the limits and possibilities of their medium. They handle the girls, who they then 'own' in an overwhelming way, with little respect. It is precisely the task of the mère-des-dieux to watch over this. If these lower gods go too far, she is, in a number of cases, able to point them in the right direction and call them to order.

Spirits and gods

It should also be clear that this religion, like all other religions, gives 'spirits' and 'gods' a real and objective existence. These subtle beings are for the believers as real as an ordinary fellow man, only they have a subtle body that is not felt or perceived by everyone. Christianity, for example, also has 'angels' and 'saints'. In the macumba one contacts among others the deceased ancestors who from 'the other world' are concerned with their offspring. Such an ancestor worship occurs in many places. In addition to the 'deified' ancestors, there are also gods in macumba who have existed for much longer. We will go into this in more detail.

Women as mediums

Bramley tried to have an open interview with La Mère Marie-Josée about her religion, but in her answers she initially remained very superficial. This, however, until she mantically notices that he has something to do with water and the beach. Bramley replied that, although of French nationality, he was born in Tunisia, in Africa. Then Marie-Josée exclaimed, "Then you

are one of us. Our ancestors were brought here from Africa as slaves". With this, the ice suddenly broke and she openly answered Bramley's questions. What's more, Bramley is allowed to attend a 'séance', a ritual ceremony, in which the gods show themselves. He describes in detail what goes on at such a ceremony and also mentions each time the explanations and interventions of Marie-Josée, the Mère-des-dieux.

"Do ut ut des"

We have already mentioned the so-called "do ut des". We described it as: I, believer, provide you, deity, through a sacrifice, with the necessary subtle energy, so that you deity transform, a part of that energy, and use it for the solution of my problem. This sacrifice consists, for example, of field fruits or of the blood of a freshly slaughtered animal. Let's put it in the words of Marie-Josée: "We regularly feed these gods with herbal baths and animal sacrifices in blood. Because blood is the essential foundation of energy. All our ceremonies begin with bloody sacrifices. Blood is the bearer of all life". A number of nature-religions will continue to reason like this until they reach the extreme consequence: an even more powerful blood sacrifice is the sacrifice of a human being. "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood possesses my vitality," they say. For many of our contemporaries, this last sentence will sound somewhat familiar to them. Even during a mass, similar words are said during the consecration. Yet the difference is sky-high. For, according to Christians, Holy Mass is a bloodless sacrifice, and the energy, the subtle life force of Jesus, is of a very high ethical standard. In the non-Biblical religions this is very different. Religion in its deeper core is apparently much more complicated than what we might suspect at first sight.

Sexual energy

We return to the macumba and its mediums. Let us note that in the 'séance' mentioned here, the subtle energy required for the sacrifice, consists for a large part of the subtle energy of the medium itself. This energy is simply stolen while 'riding'. After the séance, the medium remains physically exhausted, even fatally tired, and then needs several days to recover somewhat from this subtle energy loss. This loss of energy has an effect on the biological body, which is particularly depleted as a result. The medium can console herself with the thought that her 'calling' gives a great deal of energy to the deity, energy of which the deity transforms a part - certainly not all - into the energy required to solve a life problem of a fellow human being. The magic of such gods consists precisely in transforming subtle energies. Through the energy of the medium, a child can be healed, a bad love affair can be improved, a man can find work again... This religion, with the help of lower deities, solves life problems no matter the cost.

The divinity itself will be inclined to want to solve human problems repeatedly, because it gives her or him the guarantee that the faithful will continue to worship her or him. So that the deity can be assured of regular sacrifices.

As said before, these sacrifices consist of field fruits, blood, or the sexual energy that the mediums provide when they are ridden. The greater the prestige and reputation of such a god, the more sacrifices he receives. And so the circle is complete. These lower gods help with practical problems, but at the same time they steal the subtle life force of the mediums, only to give what they want to share: a little energy that leads to healing, a little advice and some clairvoyance. This is the 'do ut des' of almost all natural religions.

An anthology

Let's give a small anthology of Bramley's work (o.c., 26). He writes: Suddenly a medium comes loose from the circle of dancers, a shrill cry, she staggers, seems to fall, she screams again and falls to the ground in ecstasy. She trembles over all her limbs.

(o.c., 34). "The mediums lend their bodies to the gods, (note: the Mère-des-dieux is speaking here) and in return they want to help us. They need a 'support point' in order to be able to exist. And the medium gives them that support. He rides her. The medium then has no more will, no memory, no personality. The god penetrates her, installs himself there, and it is the god you see and hear then. Receiving such a god in your body is a great honor. Yesterday, Tereshina (remark: a medium) drank four liters of alcohol. Normally she doesn't tolerate that, but she is the girl of Exu (a god), and Exu always wants to get drunk. He appreciates the cachaça (a sugar cane liqueur) and the large black cigars. He has used Tereshina's body to fulfill his desires. After the ceremony, Tereshina was no more drunk than you or me. After all, she herself had not drunk anything, it was her god who drank".

The Mère-des-dieux says that it was not the medium who drank four liters of alcohol, but her god did. It is remarkable that someone can drink so much alcohol, apparently without experiencing any harmful side-effects. For the mère-des-dieux this is no problem. After all, the medium was possessed by her god Exu. One sees that the normal biological laws are exceeded here. The mère-des-dieux continues (o.c., 61.): "To control the trance of the mediums, I pass by their naked arms with a burning candle. In a real trance, there is no burning wound anywhere. The flame hits the skin without causing the slightest pain or burn".

This statement is also surprising: a fire that does not burn seems physically impossible to us. We refer to the Bible, *Exodus 3*, where Moses watched how a thorn bush was on fire and yet did not burn (1.1.).

The Mère-des-dieux continues (o.c., 99): "Olorun is at the beginning of all things, but he is a very old god. We don't address him, he wouldn't even hear us, he's above all the human race". We had already met such an attitude at the santeria. Olorun is a "deus otiosus", a god on holiday. He created everything "in the beginning" and then withdrew.

No ethics?

All of their being, all of their behavior, shows that these gods are not so strict about ethics and that, to put it mildly, they are quite egocentric. They must be favored with sacrifices. They want to smoke cigars, drink alcohol and rape their medium. And once satisfied, they also want to solve a problem. They cause a lot of harm, but they also do something good. It's like a duality that makes you think. The Mère-des-dieux expresses this ambiguity in her own way (o.c., 194): "The god Exu may be devils, yesterday you saw him with the characteristics of a demon, but he can also be the best of all gods.

- Bramley: "How do you explain that the god Exu is both on the side of good and on the side of evil?"

- Mère-des-dieux: "But my son, good and evil are human agreements. They are values that man has created and that the gods ignore. We ask the gods to work for good or evil. But the gods are above that. Our morality is not really their concern."

In all of this, one feels the great difference with the Biblical God. First of all, Yahweh doesn't need any sacrifices at all, because He is the creator of everything that exists. He is also the giver of all energy and therefore does not need the believers to make sacrifices to Him. In return for the gift of his life force, he asks of man an ethical way of life, something that he has concisely formulated in his Decalogue or Ten Commandments.

Fire doesn't hurt the loa.

Wade Davis, *De slang en de regenboog*²⁵, (The snake and the rainbow), says that voodoo is an animism. 'Animism' refers to the belief in an omnipresent life force, specific to gods and spirits. We will explain this in more detail in chapter 8. The spirits or 'loa' each have their own specific field. Ogoun, for example, is the fireloa, Agwe the loa of the sea. Erzulia is the loa of love and Ghede is the loa of the dead. Davis also mentions that mediums in trance do not seem to be hindered by fire. We quote: "Again the spirits came. Only this time they hung over a fire at the foot of the 'poteau mitan' (note: the pillar where the loa are presented). The hounsis was vigorously jumped. (Note: a hounsis is a member of the society. 'Hu' stands for 'deity', 'si' stands for 'bride', a hounsis is a 'bride' of the deity.)"

Her whole body shocked, her muscles stretched and a cramp movement ran along her spine. She knelt before the fire and shouted it out in an ancient language unknown to me. Then she got up and started running around. Like a spinning top she described ever smaller circles around the poteau mitan until, still spinning, she dropped herself into the fire. She stayed there for an impossibly long time and then jumped away in a single movement, causing sinets and ashes to fly around. She landed flat on both feet, looked around the fire and screamed shrieking like a raven. Then she put her arms around the heap of glowing charcoal. With each hand she grabbed a burning piece of charcoal, knocked it together and dropped one. On the other hand she began to lick, with long, lascivious strokes of her tongue, and then she ate from the fire: she put a piece of red-hot cabbage the size of a small apple between her lips. She ran around in circles again. She raced around the poteau mitan three times, until she finally collapsed in the arms of the mambo (note: the voodoo priestess). The glowing piece of coal was still in her mouth. When the ceremony was over, a few spectators stood up to talk to Max Beauvoir (remark: a Haitian authority on voodoo religion), but I was irresistibly drawn to the fire at the foot of the poteau mitan. I felt the heat. Carefully I took a piece of coal out of the flames with two sticks of kindling and lifted it up.

"You're surprised," it sounded. When I heard the voice, I turned around and saw one of the hounsis standing, her white dress still wet with sweat.

"Yes, it's amazing".

"The loa are strong. Therefore fire doesn't hurt their chosen medium."

After these words, she apologized and went to Beauvoir's table. Then I realized that she had spoken perfect English. It was Rachel Beauvoir (remark: Max Beauvoir's daughter). She was sixteen, and she walked as if she was still dancing.

The neoplatonist Jamblichos of Chalkis (250/333), *On the secret learning systems*, confirms that fire does not harm some when they are in a different state of consciousness: "Many people, even if they are brought into contact with fire, do not get burns. They do not notice it at all because they do not live the life of an ordinary person in this condition. Others do not feel it when they are pierced with skewers, when they hit themselves with axes in the back, or when they injure their arms with knives". Even today, we can still see such power struggles. Since ancient times these amazing signs have been known as real and unimagined 'dunameis', as signs of power or energy.

A form of slavery

J. de Brivezac, *Les sectes sexuelles sataniques*²⁶, reflects the atmosphere and axiomatics of what he calls degenerate religions: "Let's pay attention to the fact that people who have been through a rite like this once (note: for example: the mediums of the macumba) mentally (note: understand 'occult') become marked. They are mastered by this initiation and time and again they long to relive it, something that makes them religiously particularly dependent. It brings them into a form of slavery; their quiet self-determination and self-awareness is thoroughly

destroyed. They became increasingly alienated from themselves without realizing it." From this point of view, it is a tragedy. One could call such a religion a neurosis, an opium, or worse. And this despite the fact that, according to the believers, a number of life problems are solved.

So far a second sketch of a non-Biblical religion.

3.3.3. The Ngil

Father Trilles was a missionary from 1892 in West Africa, where he was the first white man to stay with the Primeval Forest Pygmies. There he met the Fang, a people from Gabon, including the 'ngil', the black-magician. As a 'sorcier', sorcerer or black-mage, he is clearly distinguishable from the 'féticheur', the 'wizard', literally 'fetish man', who is a white-mage here and who is deeply honored by the population, while the ngil conjures up deep contempt.

The white-mage and the black-mage appeal to spirits and gods. They know that their occult practices only succeed thanks to the gods they invoke. That's why they pray to them regularly.

Let us mention one of his prayers, which we read in Alfonso di Nola, *La prière*²⁷ (The prayer) Such prayers clearly show that magic and religion go hand in hand.

"O you who control the power, you, spirit of the masculine energy. Thou can do everything and without thee I can do nothing, I can do nothing. I who have dedicated myself to you, I who are addicted to you, spirit, from you comes my strength, my power. Thou hast given me the gift. Spirit of power, I call upon you: "Enter mercilessly into my song. You must obey, for I have given you what you have asked for, spirit. For the sacrifice was made, sacrifice in the forest. Spirit, I am at your disposal. You are at my disposal. Come".

So much for the black-magician's prayer. We mention it here to indicate that almost all religions focus on prayer. Every autonomy, which so many theologians and religious specialists talk about, is clearly absent here. And yet it is a truly magical prayer, because it is about giving energy, male energy for that. The sacrifice that was asked, is probably a human sacrifice. In his fascinating work *Chez les Fang*²⁸, Father Trilles gives an account of the initiation of such a Ngil. Summarizing here and there, we follow the stages of such an initiation.

Let's note that the term 'fetish man' sometimes means the black magician, sometimes the white magician, and sometimes only refers to 'a sorcerer'. It is the context that usually clarifies the ethical level, which can be high or low.

A child

Every ngil has the right and the duty to choose and form its successor. He takes a ten-year-old boy and treats him as his adopted son. From then on he forms his apprentice sorcerer. He teaches him the first secrets, teaches him to speak with the tomb voice of the ngil. The child accompanies the magician on all his journeys and serves him as a nobleman. He goes before the magician, through mountain and valley, in village or jungle, with the bell ringing. Such children constantly have bad examples in front of their eyes, live in the midst of the most hideous moral destruction and in a short period of time are corrupted right down to the marrow.

For they have "seen everything" and are at home in all the abysses where human perversion descends. They are prepared to commit all crimes. Often such children have ended up on the Catholic mission. Towed by a companion, enticed by the magic of the unknown. They remained there - sometimes until baptism - by deceiving their superiors with a hypocrisy active from the depths of their souls. They have always left the mission even worse than they arrived. Trilles concluded, "Christian formation has no grip on them". This indicates that ngil formation penetrates much more deeply into the soul, into the unconscious and subconscious layers, than, for example, Christian formation. Christianity, as a higher religion, clearly touches on its limits, set by the lower religion. For Father Trilles, the story of this initiation shows how deep in the

primeval layer of so many people - here by name Christians - paganism is stuck. It is as if his proclamation of the gospel and the administering of the sacraments to the converts simply goes over it without effect, almost like water over a duck. That's how tough that pagan primeval layer seems in man. As Freud clearly realized, the unconscious and subconscious will and drive is much stronger than its conscious form.

A second series of tests

Once eighteen years old, and after a long initiation, one calls for the initiation for the second series of tests. The apprentice wizard had to live in seclusion in a small hut in the jungle for a month. He was only fed the essentials, and only after sunset. He must give an account of his dreams, of the animals that appear to him, of the messages that the spirits pass on to him. All this is interpreted either to his advantage or to his disadvantage. Gradually, the candidate loses control of himself, his nervous system becomes sensitive. Terrible dreams disturb his sleep. Sometimes a candidate becomes insane. If he doesn't make it, he is poisoned and literally left to rot in the forest. Nobody talks about him afterwards.

Then follows the wasp test. His initiator looks for a nest of small hornets in the forest. Their sting is particularly painful. He locks them up in a gourd, fasts the wasps for two days, and then presses the open gourd on the chest of the inauguration. The latter shouldn't complain about the many stings he gets. Then there is the flogging test. The candidate is, around noon, placed on the bottom of a well behind the hut of the Ngil, and is cruelly beaten. In the meantime, very loud blows are heard on the tam-tams, so that the cries of pain are barely heard.

"Scene veritable hideuse", true hideous scene, according to Trilles. But now follows the main dish. One beats the initiation with long thin belts made from hippo leather so that the blood flows and the scattered pieces of meat swell up. Everyone who has already been initiated participates in the flogging heartedly.

Then follows the dance test. The master wizard gives an authoritative sign. The flogging stops. Now the half-dead candidate has to rise to control his pains and start to dance on the rhythm of the tam-tam. Then, still dancing, he has to climb a holy ladder that leads to a platform. Once there, he finally lays himself on that sacred table to rest.

After these tests of strength, he is taught the last secrets of the initiation, including the password, the means of communication for recognizing fellow initiates from afar. He also gets the right to make others initiates. We see that this black magic education permeates a much deeper human, or rather, an inhumane layer than the upbringing given by the mission, for example.

A relative

If a ngil wants to join the 'council of the old ngils' in a next step, he must propose himself. One examines his claims; one sees if there is a place available. A series of similar trials await him: seclusion in the forest but with long fasting. Again the same tests of strength but more intense than the first time. Finally comes the great day. The council of the Old Ngils, at least ten in number, meets on a day that has been 'carefully' (note: 're.ligere', which one does not neglect) chosen. After many a spell, one chooses the most auspicious day, the day that is free from any bad omen. The candidate is summoned. He has to bring a human, his victim, to the counsel of the ancients, for the last sacrifice. In any case, this victim must be chosen from his closest relatives. His mother precedes, then a young daughter or sister of the candidate. If he does not have one, he chooses a younger brother. From these people, the victim is ruthlessly

chosen. Replacing a slave or a prisoner of war is forbidden. The spirit, the deity, demands pure and free blood.

The preparation for the inauguration

On that day, the ngils gather in a remote spot in the forest, often close to a well, or in the depths of a dark ravine. There they cut off a tree, an 'esôm', belonging to the family of the euphorbiaceae, up to a small man's height. The ground is levelled around the tree. The little trees that stand in the way of this are pulled out and thrown a little further into the undergrowth in order to increase their impenetrability. The undergrowth is then made completely impenetrable with thorns all around, except for a narrow path. This path is made inaccessible to any other Fang with the strongest black magic divination known to the ngils. The part of the esôm tree that remains upright is roughly hollowed out to form a chalice, a work that easily falls out due to the soft spongy tissue of the trunk. The sap of the tree, mucilaginous, reddish, and slightly garlic-like in smell, gradually emerges and fills part of the cavity. Near the tree, on the edge of the undergrowth, a hut has been built and covered with leaves. The leader of the initiators stands there upright, tattooed with white and red, painted with chalk and powder of the bass plant. He has a belt of banana fibers on which, during the dance movements on his bronzed skin, move back and forth like stretched snakes.

The singing starts. Powerful songs are constantly repeated and evoke the spirits. After a while the songs are extremely tiring. A fierce fire is lit in the hut. It intensifies the general excitement because of the great heat. The "candidate-ngil" takes his place in front of the wizard's leader. He was weakened by prolonged fasting. As food he received only the fermented liqueurs of the ava, a specimen of the labiaceae, a wild mint with a strong peppery taste and a kind of mushroom. He is quickly captivated by the mysterious side of this whole scenario. He quickly falls into hysterical behavior. Trilles says: "I have often seen the ngil in daily life. I have almost always recognized him by his bewildered, bloodshot eyes. One could hardly confuse him with anyone else."

One person less, one ngil more

"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood possesses my life force". The Fang are now going to put this into practice. The sun has been setting for hours. At the full moon, one song follows another. The victim is brought in. She was tied to the esôm tree, hollowed out in the shape of a chalice, with her carotid arteries just above the chalice. Everyone takes a seat in a circle around the victim. The songs, songs of death, are resumed. They transcend the young woman's cries of fear and despair. Still tied up, she is already at her third lunar night in the jungle. With her brother, the future ngil, she has already spent two nights in the forest. She was raped by him every time - we apologize for the scratchy accuracy - . With his sperm in her body and with the light bite at the bottom of her neck she is 'ready'.

The dazed and desperate victim lets herself behave like an animal that has had her throat slit. Then the moment has come. The leader of the ngils indicates that the veins are sufficiently swollen. Especially for the sacrifice, the curved knife was consecrated. The candidate makes a long, deep circular incision around the victim's head. He has to do this without any help from others. His hand must not shake. His gaze must be accurate. The incision must end exactly where it started. A little later the blood gushes, first with a ray, then drop by drop. Nothing should fall outside the chalice. The wizard mixes the blood and the slimy esôm juice into a foamy red liqueur. The group shouts and dances fiercely and exuberantly around. A little later, the victim has stopped bleeding. The head hangs there, powerless, the veins are empty. The ties that strapped the victim are cut. A little later the young woman has found her freedom in death.

All of them are now approaching, each in turn, drawing on the disgusting brew. Everyone, in order, drinks with long sips, while the others together repeat the fate-defining cry: "A gnou méki méki mébiang! A fôla né biang! Evalèga!"

Trilles says that "biang" here means the black-magic "fetish" with all kinds of secondary meanings such as consecrated medicine and divination. There he also says that 'èvalèga' means 'remember', a word that the fetish user pronounces when he needs his fetish, in distress or in any other situation. He addresses this word to the spirit to whom he has sacrificed the blood soul of a victim in order to conclude a pact or agreement with him. The cry can be freely translated as: "He drinks the blood and the medicine! He mixes strength and destiny! He participated," or "Remember! Remember".

Now follows the second part of the ritual of the blood soul. Finally, the esôm chalice is completely emptied. After the last drop has disappeared, the cup is filled with dry wood. Then the bled-out body of the young woman is placed on the esôm trunk. A fire is lit. The meat cracks and splits under the influence of heat. The fat that falls into droplets feeds the hearth. In turn, the back and chest are exposed to the effects of the fire. Get to work now! The feast of hell is ready. The victim is done, burned out. The meat is cut into pieces, the limbs are separated from the torso. Everyone gets their share. The grounded bones crack between teeth. The flesh is weakening. Everything is eaten on the spot. Nothing is allowed to remain. Everything should be destroyed! And, when the first rays of sunshine turn the sky red, a big fire at the festival site will make the last traces of the drama disappear. There is one human less, one ngil more.

If, by chance, someone passes by, he will withdraw with dismay. As a mute witnesses to the crime, a black burnt tree trunk, the well-trodden herb and a collapsed hut will immediately make clear to him what happened there. The ngils passed by there! Woe to him who understands their mysteries, their secret rites, who even dares to speak about them or ridicules their power!

Wild spirits

Trilles: "I have often witnessed facts that prove to me that the ngils have secrets that we do not yet know and the effects of which seem astonishing to us, such as a stab to the body, without any injury, making their blood flow according to their will, or withdrawing from the laws of gravity. (o.c., 196).

For Trilles it is certain that the ngil has at least one human sacrifice on his inaugural conscience. "The young woman has found her freedom in death," he says. From a black magical point of view this is very much the question. The ngil radically submits his victim to his authority through torture and rape. Then he takes her to the "other world" by killing her. He made her go through hell on earth. She will also suffer from hell in the afterlife, where he will keep her prisoner. Thus the sacrificed souls of the victims will accompany him day and night. Although they are invisible to the ordinary eye, they're in his vicinity. Those who are clairvoyant will notice them in their immediate surroundings, in their dark and calamitous aura. Now, from the other world, they have become his serving spirits, as unscrupulous as he is. That is the basis of his magical position of power. This shows how the black magic of the ngil in West Africa literally lives from and is influenced by the world of the dead day in and day out. His magic literally mobilizes the deceased in a brutal way. The Bible speaks of the world of the dead as the 'sjeol', the underworld, in which Jesus, with his redeeming message, descended 'to hell' after his death on the cross and before his resurrection. We will come back to this in more detail.

With regard to his magical position of power, let's mention the following newspaper article. *Nigeriaanse vrouwen psychisch afhankelijk gemaakt via voodoo in prostitutie*²⁹ (Nigerian women made mentally dependent through voodoo in prostitution). "A man and his Nigerian wife have been bringing Nigerian women to our country for months, forcing them into window and street prostitution. The victims were made psychologically dependent by Voodoo conspiracies. The young women were forced to give up plucks of head and pubic hair, toenails and fingernails, and blood. Spiritual incantations were carried out by a voodoo priest in Nigeria, according to a spokesman. The impact of these rituals on women and their families is so great that they completely submit to those who force them to do so. In Africa, voodoo is part of everyday life and has deep cultural and religious roots".

The noble savage?

How far removed are we from the ideas of J.J. Rousseau (1712/1798), French-Swiss philosopher, and his 'noble savage' with the initiation of the ngil. In 1755, he wrote his "*Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*", (Discourses on the origins and foundations of inequality among men). In it he states that man is good by nature, in a primitive state such as a "bon sauvage" (noble savage), and prior to any upbringing. He gets bad from experiences in society. In his "*Emile ou de l'éducation*", (Emile or about education) among other things, Rousseau described his ideas for upbringing. However, this did not prevent him from taking his five illegitimate babies to a foundling home and having them brought up there. He confessed: " I didn't even keep the date of their birth. ".

Anyone who shares Rousseau's opinion can, for example, delve into a work such as Lucien Malson, *Les enfants sauvages*³⁰ (The wild children). The book tells the story of "Le sauvage de l'Aveyron", (The wild child of Aveyron) an approximately twelve year old "wild" child who was discovered in 1799 in Aveyron, southern France, and apparently from a very young age and until the moment of his discovery and "capture", grew up among the wolves. He walked on all four limbs like a wolf, cried like a wolf, sniffed at objects like a wolf, ate like a wolf and was, once back among the people, no longer capable of simple human communication or learning (the French) language. A doctor, Jean Itard, tried to raise Victor, as the child was called because it reacted to the sound of 'o'. However, after five years of intensive work without much result, Itard wondered disappointed whether it would not have been better for the child if it had been able to continue living in the wild.

In all this one can wonder whether glorifying a "primitive state, prior to any upbringing" is not more the product of an alien dream than of a serious reflection. Every person with common sense and even a minimal form of empathy immediately feels the profound tragedy in the life of this child, of every child that grows up, devoid of any contact with human society.

3.3.4. The life goal of a young Indian Halt! You can't go any higher!

Th. Achelis, *Die Religionen der Naturvölker im Umriss*³¹, (The religions of the primitive peoples in outline), mentions the life goal of a young Indian. The Indian tells the story. Grandfather took me by the hand. He took me deep into the forest. He looked for a tall pine tree and made it a resting place for me. We cut twigs and woven them into the pine branches. There I had to lie down. Grandfather said: "Under no circumstances should you eat or drink, pick berries, or even lick up rainwater. Under no circumstances should you leave your resting place, you should always lie still. I had to wait patiently day and night for things to happen. The first three or four fast days were terrible. I couldn't sleep at night because of the hunger and thirst.

But I mastered this. On the fifth day I no longer felt a burden. Then I fell into a dreamy state and slept. My soul was released and lucid. (Remark: the young Indian experiences an out-of-body experience or astral projection", in which his subtle body is separated from his physical body. We will return in more detail to this theme, the "astral projection" in Chapter 6).

The first nights there was nothing. Everything lay in deep silence. But on the eighth night I suddenly heard a murmur and wind through the branches. It was as if a heavy bear or moose were approaching through the bushes and forests. A great fear struck me. I had the impression that there were so many animals that I wanted to run away. The one who came to me, however, saw through my thoughts and my fear. He asked, "Why are you afraid, my son?" I replied, "Now I'm not afraid anymore. He returned, "What are you doing here?" I said again, "To fast. "What is the purpose of fasting?" he wanted to know. "In order to gain life force and to know the course of my life," I explained. "That's right," he decided. "Everything coincides perfectly with what is happening for you elsewhere. It is precisely this night that people have been thinking about you and your salvation. I have come to tell you that, as far as you are concerned, the Council's decision was very favorable. My task is to invite you in such a way that you can find out for yourself. Come and follow me.

The spirit hovered in front of me, eastward. I followed him. After a long time we came to a mountain top. There was a wigwam. We entered it. The wigwam was very large and full of creatures. There was an extraordinary council meeting going on. Four men were sitting together. One of the four men said: "Rise higher up!" He pointed to the railing of the stone seat behind me. I saw that it reached very high and climbed up, higher and higher. I came to a place where four elderly people with white hair were sitting in the open air. Above them was a dazzling shiny dome. I felt so light that I wanted to rise even higher. "Stop! You can't go any higher," that's how it sounded. "There are already plenty of clean and great things for you! Look around here. Here you will find all the good gifts of God. Health, vitality, longevity and all the creatures of nature. Bring this box of medicines with you, it serves to prevent diseases. Make use of it in case of need. If you get into trouble, remember this ecstasy. Think of us and of everything you see here. Pray to us, we will help you and assist you with the Lord of Life. You will become a formidable hunter and you will meet all the prey. Your time here is over. Go back now. Don't forget anything that has been said to you. Those who sit here will remember you. We are all your guardian spirits. We will pray for you. The young Indian descended into his body and woke up. He was still lying in his resting place, tired and with his body stiffened. So much for Achelis.

At first glance, this was a beautiful story for young children. But those who are familiar with such 'stories' knows that the young Indian had an out-of-body experience, followed by an initiation to become a shaman. After this 'dream' the Indian is no longer the same person as before. He now has a lot more occult energy or subtle life force, and the help of higher beings and ancestors to cope with his own life problems, those of the tribe and to help his people survive in difficult circumstances. The whole 'dream' tells the story of an occult rite, a kind of hidden reality. But those who are familiar with such 'stories' know that there is indeed a reality of a higher order involved. However, it is clear that they do not meet the criteria of "hard science" to be recognized as such.

R. Montandon, *Messages de l'au-delà*³², (Messages from the Hereafter), provides us a similar testimony and gives the floor to W. Johnson, a Protestant missionary. On Mackinac Island, an island in Lake Huron, he knew the magician Wau-chus-co. This Indian told the missionary that, according to the customs of his tribe, at a very young age he was forced by the

tribal elders to fast for ten consecutive days. The more his body weakened, the stronger his spirit became. Then, in a vision, he embraced the entire vast land that belonged to his tribe, after which a higher spirit made himself known, offered help and urged the young Indian to seek this help effectively in difficult times. Wau-chus-co says that during the rest of his life he repeatedly called on the help of this spirit to see his tribe's problems clearly - which is a form of revelation or apocalyptic - and to remedy them. The words that this spirit then spoke could also be heard by others. However, Wau-chus-co was the only one who understood its meaning.

And another thing: it seems contradictory to fast, to gain life force. Both Indians want to come into contact with the energies and spirits of their ancestors. If the organic body is deprived of food, the subtle body will emerge faster and higher during the sleep of the organic body. It wants to compensate for the lack of life force caused by fasting by obtaining subtle energies from the cosmos when the subtle body leaves the biological body. From an occult point of view, this is precisely the function of sleep. And it was precisely to do these energies that the Indians did it. The conviction that a person has subtle bodies is further discussed (9.2.2.).

You can't go any higher

"Halt, you can't go any higher" is how the guardian spirits commanded the young Indian. G. Van der Zeeuw, *Helderziendheid in ruimte en tijd*³³, (Clairvoyance in space and time), notes that a person who undergoes an out-of-body experience can never rise higher than his or her ethical level allows. However, going lower is always possible because every human being has experienced it during its long evolution that includes many lives. (The theory of reincarnation will be discussed in more detail). Van der Zeeuw, who speaks from his own experience as a mantic gifted man, says that most people are located with their astral bodies in these lower regions. So they are not there with their biological bodies, but a clairvoyant can perceive their actions and thoughts in these lower areas. He continues: "For many souls who are on earth as human beings, life on earth, given the height of their souls - perhaps we should say: given the lowliness of their souls - is a true paradise.

If they succeed in reincarnating, they leave a particularly unfortunate atmosphere and their suffering suddenly becomes much more bearable. They can hide in their beautiful instrument, in their material body and nobody (except for sensitives and clairvoyants) sees their demonically twisted soul. They can only be recognized by the result of their actions (but even then it's not always easy). In contrast to this, earthly life is not very pleasant for a spirit that has come from higher regions for its task on earth. He has basically descended to hell, he misses the love for one another and is not understood by the others. He has a very difficult time, and the unconscious desire for something beautiful, which he has lost, continues to haunt him as an unknown homesickness.

3.3.5. The Mennomonis, an Indian tribe in Canada White and black magic

We now consider the testimony of someone who still knew a society where the life force was central and where people were familiar with magic and were aware of subtle forces. Not only the lonely magician or witch of today, but the whole community believed in it. This social perspective is important, but an exclusively sociological explanation of magic does not do the magical reality justice by al long schot. With regard to the importance of this social aspect, we refer for an example to the Bible, *Mark 6:5*, where Jesus spoke in the Nazareth synagogue on the Sabbath. Mark mentions that many listeners were annoyed by Jesus: "And He could do no miracle there except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them".

Our text is from I. Bertrand, *La sorcellerie*³⁴ (Witchcraft). The author himself quotes a Gougenot des mousseaux, *magie au XIXe siècle*, (Magic in the 19th century), someone who personally met the missionary whom we let speak.

Cruel animals

We are in the midst of the Mennomonis, an Indian people. The missionary said that in every tribe the chief has a name: "evil healer" or "poisoner". He works under the inspiration of evil 'Manitou's', of evil spirits. The white magician or the good healer treats ailments on the basis of his ability in the field of plants (note: phytotherapy). He limits himself to the use of the life force, of the herbs. The black magician however, assembles powders, potions and magical mixtures in the remains of the most cruel predators. In the skin of a wild cat or a grey bear, among other things, a magician keeps the ingredients that serve as his magic means. Why in their mortal remains? Because these remains have been loaded by contact magic with the life forces of predators, in which the cruelty is already contained.

As a result, the black-mage shows 'predatory' behavior much more easily. The type of life force also determines the morale. In order to be able to perform his rite well, the magician dresses himself. He or she wants to impress those who are not dressed up. If he wants to practice his black magic, he dresses himself with the skins of the most cruel animals. Their furs serve as his clothes for rituals.

The evil healer is someone who provokes both fear and disdain. On the other hand: the Indians establish that the death of such a person is almost always violent and full of misfortune. They take refuge in him only in emergencies. After all, from time to time he gives the indisputable signs in favor of a power that is extra-natural. It is believed that fighting an evil can best be done with the help of another and even greater evil. The greatest evil is that in a magical battle the strongest black magician conquers the evil of the weakest black magician.

A magical 'liturgy'

The missionary told him, "As soon as the black magician makes a supplication to his angry Manitou or his angry spirit, he rushes into his tent and locks himself up. Over time, he sang a monotonous song and repeated his magic formulas endlessly. When the magical adaptation is about to succeed, one hears something like the fall of a heavy object. One also hears a trembling and stuttering voice. Finally, the heavy, fifteen-foot-high tent is tilted. Sometimes to the left, sometimes to the right. Sometimes it seems to tip over. At that moment mysterious conversations take place between the evil healer and the demon who answers the call." Here one notices the very businesslike sense of 'efficiency' with the magician. He is very well aware that prayer and supplication have an effect. So much for the background. And now the facts.

Love magic

The magician shows two figurines or wooden dolls. With the Indians they are called 'love magic'. The missionary continues: "On several occasions I was an eyewitness to the frightening effects". The figurines are about two inches long and depict men and women. They are tied together and connected at the back to a bag of textile, which is stuffed with ingredients. When the angry healer used this magical remedy to arouse erotic feelings in the heart of the Indian woman, I saw her, seized by an erotic primal urge. She ran like an arrow out of a bow to follow men in the woods for days on end. I'm not talking about a one-off event. I repeatedly deplored this hateful type of possession".

Breaking the ice.

This expression is a metonymy for mastering all weather. The missionary is speaking. "At the end of winter, the tribe brought many furs to the banks of the river. There they were loaded into canoes in order to sail to their final destination. Some years however, the river appeared to be quite frozen: ice of six to eight feet thick. And all this despite the fact that they had been counting on the thaw. The Indian trade route was completely blocked. A critical and painful moment for our unfortunate 'savages' (remark: in the first modern times, "the civilized world" spoke of other, mainly archaic, cultures, in terms of 'savages'). But it was a triumphal day for the evil healer", says the missionary, and he continues: "In such circumstances, the tribe hesitates between its good character and solving the emergency through evil means. In the end, they turned to the black magician: "Come! Quickly! Get started! And summon your Manitou". The average Indian knows that the black magician prays. "The man in whose heart it was night immediately appealed to his Manitou. If he was heard, the storm would immediately appear from the depths of the sky. One hears a shuffle and a bellowing. The ice breaks. The ice chunks are dragged along with the current. They weaken. The river is navigable". One sees: an evil, the frozen river which makes trade impossible, is counteracted with a greater evil, the consulting of a stronger black magician.

So much for the account of the 'love magic' and 'breaking the ice'. The missionary witness who, as a Biblical believer, had learned not to believe in all kinds of magic, described what he saw. We mention this to show that a Catholic missionary will not be so inclined to take the magic of the 'savages' seriously. But, like so many missionaries, if they want and dare to confess, our missionary has experienced it. The magic of the 'nations', the 'pagans', do things in time that frighten the missionaries.

So much for the dynamic side of this religion, because it is religion: it involves beings and subtle energies. The nominalist and rationalist view of reality will, of course, label all this as a foolish superstition.

3.3.6. After a first meeting

So much for a first introduction to some extra-biblical religions. An empathetic attitude might make us feel that there is 'something' going on with such religions. There is strength in it. There is 'holiness', or to use the words of Bertholet (1.3.), "Heiligkeit bedeutet gesteigerte Kraftgeladenheit", "Sanctity means increased power", here in the non-biblical sense of the word, involved.

The laws of physics are like a shield.

For the nominalist and rationalist views it is clear: there are no invisible beings and the influence that people undergo in such a trance is purely psychological in nature. Other cultures may have a different mentality and different assumptions, but there are natural explanations for this. Those who seek more than natural explanations, those who seek extraterrestrial or supernatural explanations behind them, reduce their thinking to a medieval and outdated level and are actually centuries behind. Modern and postmodern man will clearly and emphatically distance himself from such a way of thinking. For him or her, the actual results of the various religions are merely a coincidence of circumstances. That is all.

From a nominalist point of view, it becomes even more unbelievable when, with regard to the macumba, the mère-des-dieux, for example, says that the medium Tereshina drank four liters of alcohol without experiencing any detrimental effect. Let's repeat the words of the Mère-des-dieux: "Normally Tereshina doesn't tolerate that, but she is a girl of the god Exu and Exu

always wants to get drunk". The claim that a medium in trance does not burn herself when a burning candle is held against her naked arms also arouses surprise and disbelief. Once again paraphrasing Sterley, one could say that "the laws of physics surround us like a nominalistic shield behind which we only perceive what we can explain with our 'vernunft', with our modern, Western reason". This nominalist attitude will be put to the test in the further discussion of the various religions. In the first place we want to listen to what the believers have to say to us. We try to empathize with their axioms and only then, not before, draw our conclusions.

An authoritarian tone

It is also astonishing that the medium, once in a trance, is no longer herself and then has no memory whatsoever of what happened during the trance. The Bible does not at all define religion as an ecstatic or irrational behavior as it is often imagined. But apparently this is not the case for the santeria and macumba. On the contrary, the behavior of the medium is ecstatic and irrational.

For the medium, her quiet self-determination is hard to find, her own powers of observation and reasoning are simply non-existent. Yes, it becomes an outright form of slavery. The biblical man who wants to see his religion largely logically justified, will make a serious reservation here. Such a religion is indeed for him as 'opium'. Once again, we hear the authoritarian tone of the Mère-des-dieux who says: "If a medium does not comply with our laws, I dare, in order to punish her, leave her to the acts of violence of her god, who folds her in two, throws her on the ground or hits her head against the wall". And as far as their authoritarian attitude is concerned, the gods are certainly not inferior to the Mère-des-dieux, for she persecutes: "Ogum is the god of war. If one evening he decides to behave terribly, I am powerless, because it is his nature to be terrible."

"Above good and evil"

With regard to the ethical values of this religion, let's give the floor back to the mère-des-dieux: "But my son, good and evil, are human agreements. They are values that man has created and that the gods disregard. We ask the gods to work for good or evil. But the gods are above that. Our morality does not really concern them".

The lack of higher values cannot be expressed more clearly. Not only the gods have no conscience, but also the mère-des-dieux does not take ethics very seriously. She states: "We ask the gods to work for good or evil". So even tasks that involve evil are asked of the gods. "The gods are above good and evil," she explained. One can ask oneself how one can put oneself above good and evil. One can be indifferent to any ethical choice, then one is excluded. But whether the total lack of ethics would represent a higher value in the whole of reality is highly unlikely. Perhaps one feels here that the Biblical religion does not without thorough reasons speak of a supernatural force, as distinct from an extra-natural one; where conscience and a conscientious behavior are important requirements.

We have the impression of hearing Nietzsche's words through the words of the Mother of God. In his *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, he states that there is no good or evil in itself, but that these are the creations of man and therefore only interpretations of reality. He even wrote of people without a conscience: "They have the courage that all strong spirits have, namely, to be aware of their immorality". It is not only about immorality, but Nietzsche also wants to justify that kind of behavior. It has to do with 'courage', and is typical of 'strong spirits', he emphasized. How far we are from the biblical Decalogue here.

In this context, we sometimes hear some people declare that there is no absolute truth, but that there are only relative opinions. A statement with which those who speak in this way clearly express their nominalist vision. From traditional logic, however, the answer to this is that the general laws of logic ("what is, is", and "what is so, is so") have an absoluteness from which one cannot escape. And with a strict logical reasoning, there is still something to be done. If the statement "there is no truth" is true, then there is truth, namely this statement itself. We want what we say with that sentence to be true. Anyone who claims, therefore, that there is no truth is clearly at odds with himself.

The Black Sorcerer

After reading Father Trilles' text, it is also clear that the Ngil, the black-magician of Fang, has no ethics at all: "Such children constantly have "bad examples" before their eyes, living in the midst of the most hideous destruction. They are willing to commit all crimes. Christian formation has no control over them". This is how Father Trilles complained. At the initiation of the Ngil, a relative was repeatedly raped, then murdered, roasted, and eaten. The black-magician's overwhelming grip on his victim and the profound hypnotic, and even magical, humiliation that she suffered in the process meant that, after her death, her spirit literally remained in the hands of the magician. She is then, in the subtle world, the accomplice of his assignments. Hence he has his occult power. At least, that's how the Fang put it, and with them many others. Trilles often witnessed amazing facts. We will come back to such powerful achievements in detail. However, if one knows how the black magician acquired his power, there is a great dark side to every form of admiration for his ability: there is blood on his hands. His formation was accompanied by a great deal of human suffering.

However, as a mitigating circumstance, it can be said that the tribe must survive anyway. When the life of the people themselves is threatened, they turn to evil in case of emergency, in order to preserve a higher good. An evil, the downfall of a people, is fought with another and stronger evil. This showed us the story of "the man in whose heart it is night" when the ice was broken. The fact that his magic can also seize the quiet self-determination and overwhelm people in an authoritarian way is clear from the testimony to the story of the love wanderings, in which the victim's free will, her right to self-determination, was severely violated. Indeed, a recurring feature of many samples of these non-biblical religions is the fact that hardly any account is taken of respect for the free will of believers.

The layers of reality

The story of the young Indian's dream of life illustrates the layers of reality. He was not allowed to go any higher. It is clear that "the man in whose heart it is night", on an ethical level, is much "lower". This layeredness will be discussed in detail in what follows. In the meantime, it may become clear from the various samples and testimonies that for religious people, the essence of a dynamic religion has a magical and occult side. It may also be clear that every nominalism axiomatically shuts itself off from that other world and its magic.

3.4. The supernatural level of reality

After we have discussed the natural and the extra-natural level, we go into the supernatural. According to Christianity, this represents the highest form of reality. It brings us straight to holiness in its biblical and very ethical sense, as the most sublime foundation of all existence.

The Holy Trinity

According to the believer, The Holy Trinity is at the center of biblical life and is very close to him or her in all daily concerns. She is ready - even if the believer doesn't ask for anything

yet - to intervene in solving problems. This is the conviction of the following pages. In the Bible we repeatedly find the expression: "to consult God". Life can indeed be defined as a set of problems that require a solution. But we are missing, sometimes in a striking way, the necessary and sufficient data. Yet God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit know our concerns. Therefore we are never alone. Even if we were abandoned by everyone, we can still contact them directly. This is the strength of Christian prayer.

Understanding the Bible in a logical way.

Modern and postmodern science studies the Bible mainly in a historical way. It applies the requirements of historiography to its texts. First and foremost, the Bible can be viewed logically. 'Logic' is the science of the right way of thinking.

Logic is interested in the question of whether and how what is said, is related to reality. For example, the text below about the adulterous woman in *John 8:1/11* - historically speaking – couldn't have been written by John, but the content is - logically speaking - consistent with the rest of the Gospel of John and with the rest of the Bible. Let's look at the text.

But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people were coming to Him; and He sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery, and having set her in the center of the court, they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in adultery, in the very act. "Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do You say?" They were saying this, testing Him, so that they might have grounds for accusing Him. But Jesus stooped down and with His finger wrote on the ground. But when they persisted in asking Him, He straightened up, and said to them: "He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." Again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they began to go out one by one, beginning with the older ones, and He was left alone, and the woman, where she was, in the center of the court. Straightening up, Jesus said to her, "Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more."

Basic Insights

The basic couple "flesh / spirit" forms the profound logical coherence of the great mass of biblical texts. It has already been mentioned in the distinction between the holy and the profane (1.4.1). The couple "the gates of hell / the holy city" is logically connected with "flesh / spirit". The same goes for "destruction / life". Those who pay attention to this do not lose themselves in the multitude of biblical texts.

Thus we read about "the gates of hell" and "the holy city" in *Matt. 16:18*: "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it".

And *Matt. 27:53*, after Jesus' death by crucifixion and his descent to hell, mentions: "The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many".

1 Peter 3:18/20; summarize: "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting", and in *2 Peter 2:4* we read;

“For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment”.

John 5: 25 says it in his own way: "Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead (note: those who heard the divine voice but neglected it) will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live". The "dead" now hear the voice of Jesus". This explains his descent to hell, where 'life' is a kind of deadly existence rather than a real life. Christ is only fully understood in the light of this contradiction "flesh / spirit".

The couple "destruction / life" can be deduced from *Galatians 6:7*: "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap". Understand: man can sow only in the poorness of "the flesh", or he can sow "in the riches of spirit". His harvest will reflect this choice.

The voice of God

One day, Moses calls it out: "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD'S people were prophets, that the LORD would put His Spirit upon them!" (*Numbers 11:29*). Well, the characteristic of a prophet is the fact that he hears God's voice. The voice of God is first of all what is called "the voice of conscience". It is, according to *Rom 2:14*, characteristic of all people. However, it can be heard as an "inner voice" clearer and brighter than a voice of conscience, but with essentially the same message. The Decalogue, the Ten Commandments, as a folk summary of an ethical code of conduct, is the masterpiece of the whole Bible and is ultimately decisive. An unscrupulous man has a conscience, but neglects it, as is testified in *Numbers 14:22*: “Surely all the men who have seen My glory and My signs which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have put Me to the test these ten times and have not listened to My voice”. As a result, he lowers from 'spirit' to 'flesh' and, weakened as he is, it becomes more difficult to cope with many of the dangerous temptations of this world.

Let us repeat the contents of the Decalogue briefly. The first three commandments concern the divine, the Holy Trinity, to be venerated in thoughts, words and deeds as the basis of culture. The fourth commandment expresses the respect of parents and children for each other. Then follow the commandments that focus on respect for life in all its variations (5), sexuality (6,9), property (7,10) and truth (8). In our modern and postmodern times, one might be tempted to relativize the value of these ten commandments. Yet they form the basis for a mutual respect between people, even in our time, which so easily speaks of one's neighbor with contempt.

"Consulting God"

This expression can be found explicitly in the Bible, both in the Old and the New Testaments. Life can be defined as a series of problems that need to be solved. This was clearly expressed in the non-biblical religions, where a problem was presented to the gods with the request to provide a solution for it. Well, Christianity states that the Holy Trinity, the center of the whole Bible, is very precise about our daily concerns. The Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit - even if we do not ask for anything - are involved, if only because, sometimes we insinuatingly lack the necessary and sufficient information. By consulting God in prayer, we are never alone, not even in the midst of the desert: even though we have been abandoned by everyone, we can 'consult' God directly without a mediator. This conviction, at least, dominates Christianity in its dynamic view.

Dynamism

We'll mention it again. In religious science, 'dynamism' means the proposition that a religion is essentially a matter of energy, of vital power. 'Dunamis' (Ancient Greek), in Latin 'virtus', stands for 'energy'. In *Luke 8:46* : Jesus said, "Someone did touch Me, for I was aware that power had gone out of Me." Jesus speaks of "a power" emanating from him when he cured the woman who was suffering from bloodshed.

Since *Genesis 6:3*, in which Yahweh says: "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh", the Bible has set two levels of energy first, according to the "flesh / spirit" couple. The destiny of man and his biotope depends essentially on this couple. Prayer confirmed this: in *Mat. 26: 40-41*, in Gethsemane, Jesus came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "So, you men could not keep watch with Me for one hour? Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." Strength and prayer go hand in hand, just as the absence of prayer leads to weakness. Through this basic couple "flesh / spirit" Jesus clarifies himself.

The cynical judge

The purpose of biblical life is to enter into a new covenant: the uninterrupted and intimate contact of God through prayer. Something that is sometimes remarkably lacking in our days. In *Luke 18: 1f.* we read how Jesus, with a parable, illustrates to us the necessity of persevering prayer.

"In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God and did not respect man. "There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, 'Give me legal protection from my opponent.' "For a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, 'Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out.' "And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge said; now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? "I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?"

Jesus argues a fortiori: "If already, in order not to be bored endlessly by the tough widow, the shame-free judge grants a good, how much more - out of love for his creatures - will God provide goods?". The need to consult God in prayer is explained by the fact that the praying person acquires God's 'spirit', God's life force, which enables him to cope with the problems, and indeed the challenges, that earthly existence brings along. While he who is 'flesh', who lives without God's Spirit, without God's high energy, ultimately remains substandard. By praying one withdraws life force from God, which is necessary to be able to handle a problem.

Biblical miracles

These have already been mentioned (1.4.3). An inventory: the Bible, the New Testament, tells of 32 miracles of which 15 physical healings, concerning the most diverse ailments, the 'eternal miseries' of mankind: cripples, the limping, the mute, the deaf, someone with a withered hand. Six incantations or exorcisms, revivals of the dead or resurrections: Lazarus, the son of Naim's widow, the daughter of Jairus, and Jesus' own resurrection. There are also the miracles where nature is controlled: transforming water into wine, miraculous fishing, two bread multiplications, walking on water and quieting a storm. That these miracles also have a magical process-like character, can be deduced from this, for example: in the healing of the blind-born (*John 9/1-14*) Jesus does certain magical, and therefore power-charged acts: praying to his Father, spitting on the earth (saliva, like all bodily fluids, contains the life force of the owner par excellence), making mire, rubbing this on the eyes of the blind person, ordering the blind person to wash his eyes at the Siloé pond. *Mark 7:33* tells that Jesus, with His saliva, touched the tongue of a man who was mute, so that he could talk again immediately afterwards. Think

also of *2 Kings 4:8/37v*. where the prophet Eliseus (Elisha) brings a deceased child back to life. "He prayed to Yahweh, laid himself out on the dead child, eye to eye, mouth to mouth, hands on the boy's hands. So he remained bent over him until the flesh got warm. Then he walked back and forth in the house. He bent over the boy again, up to seven times. The soul of the child came back, it revived." It is clear that through these actions, life force always passes from healer to victim.

Jesus himself says (*Mk 16: 17/18*) that "These signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

The Bible, *Acts of the Apostles, 28,5* says indeed that the apostle Paul is bitten by a serpent without suffering any harm. Unfortunately, Saint Augustine, who dies in 430, observes that these gifts were practically extinct in his time. Our culture has apparently lost a great deal of its inner strength in this respect.

3.5. The natural, the extra-natural and the supernatural level: in short

Christianity divides all that is real into three inseparable but distinguishable areas: the natural, the extra-natural and the supernatural level. For the nominalist-minded man, only the natural level exists. There is nothing that transcends this level. There are no objective 'concepts', 'ideas' or 'forms of being' anywhere in a higher situated world and independent of subjective thinking. Man is left to himself, he is free. However, this freedom implies that he must invent and live up to his own ethical standards.

Of course, the natural level also exists for the various religions of the extra-natural level, but it is permeated by what goes on outside this nature. Gods, creatures, ancestors, they are all in direct contact, in connection with what is happening in nature, yes they are causally connected with it. For religious man, nature is not conceivable without the many beings of the extra-natural or the supernatural level. The whole of profane life is permeated with it, yes, it has a dimension in the sacred. We can't imagine one without the other.

Our samples of a number of non-biblical religions testify to this. We also found many indications that the gods of the non-biblical religions do not always act conscientiously. Sometimes they do good, other times they do evil. They don't seem to know the difference all the time, or don't always care about it. If they grant favors to the people, they hardly do so or not at all without getting something in its place in the form of some kind of sacrifice. This sacrifice then provides them with the necessary subtle life force to bring a given and a demand to an appropriate solution. This means that such religions on the one hand meet the practical needs of many believers, but on the other hand that they require some reservations because of their dubious ethics.

This is completely different for the supernatural level. There Yahweh, the Supreme Being in the Old Testament, or the Holy Trinity in the New Testament, adheres very strictly to the Decalogue or the Ten Commandments. The Biblical God does not ask for life force in the form of sacrifices either, for He Himself is the origin, the Creator and the giver of all life force. He does, however, ask his creatures for a conscientious living. In this sense, there is an abyss between the ethics of the Bible and the absence or fickle use of ethics in the non-biblical religions. For Christians, too, there is a constant link between the natural and the supernatural level. In everything that happens to him in his daily life, he always knows - or has to know - how to behave through these higher ideas.

References chapter 3

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