

SHORT LOAN

**THE
SACRED
AND
THE
PROFANE**



THE NATURE OF RELIGION

by Mircea Eliade



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by Willard R. Trask*

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*Sacred Time
and Myths*

PROFANE DURATION AND SACRED TIME

FOR religious man time too, like space, is neither homogeneous nor continuous. On the one hand there are the intervals of a sacred time, the time of festivals (by far the greater part of which are periodical); on the other there is profane time, ordinary temporal duration, in which acts without religious meaning have their setting. Between these two kinds of time there is, of course, solution of continuity; but by means of rites religious man can pass without danger from ordinary temporal duration to sacred time.

One essential difference between these two qualities of time strikes us immediately: *by its very nature sacred time is reversible* in the sense that, properly speaking, it is *a primordial mythical time made present*. Every religious festival, any liturgical time, represents the

reactualization of a sacred event that took place in a mythical past, "in the beginning." Religious participation in a festival implies emerging from ordinary temporal duration and reintegration of the mythical time reactualized by the festival itself. Hence sacred time is indefinitely recoverable, indefinitely repeatable. From one point of view it could be said that it does not "pass," that it does not constitute an irreversible duration. It is an ontological, Parmenidean time; it always remains equal to itself, it neither changes nor is exhausted. With each periodical festival, the participants find the same sacred time—the same that had been manifested in the festival of the previous year or in the festival of a century earlier; it is the time that was created and sanctified by the gods at the period of their *gesta*, of which the

festival is precisely a reactualization. In other words the participants in the festival meet in it *the first appearance of sacred time*, as it appeared *ab origine, in illo tempore*. For the sacred time in which the festival runs its course did not exist before the divine *gesta* that the festival commemorates. By creating the various realities that today constitute the world, the gods *also founded sacred time*, for the time contemporary with a creation was necessarily sanctified by the presence and activity of the gods.

Hence religious man lives in two kinds of time, of which the more important, sacred time, appears under the paradoxical aspect of a circular time, reversible and recoverable, a sort of eternal mythical present that is periodically reintegrated by means of rites. This attitude in regard to time suffices to distinguish religious from nonreligious man; the former refuses to live solely in what, in modern terms, is called the historical present; he attempts to regain a sacred time that, from one point of view, can be homologized to eternity.

What time is for the nonreligious man of modern societies would be more difficult to put into a few words. We do not intend to discuss the modern philosophies of time nor the concepts that modern science uses in its own investigations. Our aim is to compare not systems or philosophies but existential attitudes and behaviors. Now, what it is possible to observe in respect to a nonreligious man is that he too experiences a certain dis-

continuity and heterogeneity of time. For him too there is the comparatively monotonous time of his work, and the time of celebrations and spectacles—in short, “festal time.” He too lives in varying temporal rhythms and is aware of times of different intensities; when he is listening to the kind of music that he likes or, being in love, waits for or meets his sweetheart, he obviously experiences a different temporal rhythm from that which he experiences when he is working or bored.

But, in comparison with religious man, there is an essential difference. The latter experiences intervals of time that are “sacred,” that have no part in the temporal duration that precedes and follows them, that have a wholly different structure and origin, for they are of a primordial time, sanctified by the gods and capable of being made present by the festival. This transhuman quality of liturgical time is inaccessible to a nonreligious man. This is as much as to say that, for him, time can present neither break nor mystery; for him, time constitutes man’s deepest existential dimension; it is linked to his own life, hence it has a beginning and an end, which is death, the annihilation of his life. However many the temporal rhythms that he experiences, however great their differences in intensity, nonreligious man knows that they always represent a human experience, in which there is no room for any divine presence.

For religious man, on the contrary, profane temporal duration can be periodically arrested; for certain rituals

have the power to interrupt it by periods of a sacred time that is nonhistorical (in the sense that it does not belong to the historical present). Just as a church constitutes a break in plane in the profane space of a modern city, the service celebrated inside it marks a break in profane temporal duration. It is no longer today's historical time that is present—the time that is experienced, for example, in the adjacent streets—but the time in which the historical existence of Jesus Christ occurred, the time sanctified by his preaching, by his passion, death, and resurrection. But we must add that this example does not reveal all the difference between sacred and profane time; Christianity radically changed the experience and the concept of liturgical time, and this is due to the fact that Christianity affirms the historicity of the person of Christ. The Christian liturgy unfolds in a *historical time sanctified by the incarnation of the Son of God*. The sacred time periodically reactualized in pre-Christian religions (especially in the archaic religions) is a *mythical time*, that is, a primordial time, not to be found in the historical past, an *original time*, in the sense that it came into existence all at once, that it was not preceded by another time, because no time could exist *before the appearance of the reality narrated in the myth*.

It is this archaic conception of mythical time that is of chief concern to us. We shall later see how it differs from the conceptions held by Judaism and Christianity.

TEMPLUM-TEMPUS

We shall begin our investigation by presenting certain facts that have the advantage of immediately revealing religious man's behavior in respect to time. First of all, an observation that is not without importance: in a number of North American Indian languages the term world (= Cosmos) is also used in the sense of year. The Yokuts say "the world has passed," meaning "a year has gone by." For the Yuki, the year is expressed by the words for earth or world. Like the Yokuts, they say "the world has passed" when a year has passed. This vocabulary reveals the intimate religious connection between the world and cosmic time. The cosmos is conceived as a living unity that is born, develops, and dies on the last day of the year, to be reborn on New Year's Day. We shall see that this *rebirth* is a *birth*, that the cosmos is reborn each year because, at every New Year, time begins *ab initio*.

The intimate connection between the cosmos and time is religious in nature: the cosmos is homologizable to cosmic time (= the Year) because they are both sacred realities, divine creations. Among some North American peoples this cosmic-temporal connection is revealed even in the structure of sacred buildings. Since the temple represents the image of the world, it can also comprise a temporal symbolism. We find this, for example, among the Algonquins and the Sioux. As we saw, their sacred

lodge represents the universe; but at the same time it symbolizes the year. For the year is conceived as a journey through the four cardinal directions, signified by the four doors and four windows of the lodge. The Dakotas say: "The Year is a circle around the world"—that is, around their sacred lodge, which is an *imago mundi*.¹

A still clearer example is found in India. We saw that the erection of an altar is equivalent to a repetition of the cosmogony. The texts add that "the fire altar is the year" and explain its temporal system as follows: the 360 bricks of the enclosure correspond to the 360 nights of the year, and the 360 *yajusmati* bricks to the 360 days (*Shatapatha Brāhmana*, X, 5, 4, 10; etc.). This is as much as to say that, with the building of each fire altar, not only is the world remade but the year is built too; in other words, *time is regenerated by being created anew*. But then, too, the year is assimilated to Prajāpati, the cosmic god; consequently, with each new altar Prajāpati is reanimated—that is, the sanctity of the world is strengthened. It is not a matter of profane time, of mere temporal duration, but of the sanctification of cosmic time. What is sought by the erection of the fire altar is to sanctify the world, hence to place it in a sacred time.

We find a similar temporal symbolism as part of the

¹ Werner Müller, *Die blaue Hütte*, Wiesbaden, 1954, p. 133.

cosmological symbolism of the Temple at Jerusalem. According to Flavius Josephus (*Ant. Jud.*, III, 7, 7), the twelve loaves of bread on the table signified the twelve months of the year and the candelabrum with seventy branches represented the decans (the zodiacal division of the seven planets into tens). The Temple was an *imago mundi*; being at the Center of the World, at Jerusalem, it sanctified not only the entire cosmos but also cosmic life—that is, time.

Hermann Usener has the distinction of having been the first to explain the etymological kinship between *templum* and *tempus* by interpreting the two terms through the concept of "intersection," (*Schneidung, Kreuzung*).² Later studies have refined the discovery: "*templum* designates the spatial, *tempus* the temporal aspect of the motion of the horizon in space and time."³

The underlying meaning of all these facts seems to be the following: for religious man of the archaic cultures, *the world is renewed annually*; in other words, *with each new year it recovers its original sanctity, the sanctity that it possessed when it came from the Creator's hands*. This symbolism is clearly indicated in the architectonic structure of sanctuaries. Since the temple is at once the holy place par excellence and the image of the world, it sanctifies the entire cosmos and also sanctifies cosmic life. This cosmic life was imagined in the form of a

² H. Usener, *Götternamen*, 2nd. ed., Bonn, 1920, pp. 191 ff.

³ Werner Müller, *Kreis und Kreuz*, Berlin, 1938, p. 39; cf. also pp. 33 ff.

circular course; it was identified with the year. The year was a closed circle; it had a beginning and an end, but it also had the peculiarity that it could be reborn in the form of a *new* year. With each New Year, a time that was "new," "pure," "holy"—because not yet worn—came into existence.

But time was reborn, began again, because with each New Year the world was created anew. In the preceding chapter we noted the considerable importance of the cosmogonic myth as paradigmatic model for every kind of creation and construction. We will now add that the cosmogony equally implies the creation of time. Nor is this all. For just as the cosmogony is the archetype of all creation, cosmic time, which the cosmogony brings forth, is the paradigmatic model for all other times—that is, for the times specifically belonging to the various categories of existing things. To explain this further: for religious man of the archaic cultures, every creation, every existence begins in time; *before a thing exists, its particular time could not exist*. Before the cosmos came into existence, there was no cosmic time. Before a particular vegetable species was created, the time that now causes it to grow, bear fruit, and die did not exist. It is for this reason that every creation is imagined as having taken place *at the beginning of time, in principio*. Time gushes forth with the first appearance of a new category of existents. This is why myth plays such an important role; as we shall show later, the way in which a reality came into existence is revealed by its myth.

ANNUAL REPETITION OF THE CREATION

It is the cosmogonic myth that tells how the cosmos came into existence. At Babylon during the course of the *akītu* ceremony, which was performed during the last days of the year that was ending and the first days of the New Year, the *Poem of Creation*, the *Enuma elish*, was solemnly recited. This ritual recitation reactualized the combat between Marduk and the marine monster Tiamat, a combat that took place *ab origine* and put an end to chaos by the final victory of the god. Marduk created the cosmos from Tiamat's dismembered body and created man from the blood of the demon Kingu, Tiamat's chief ally. That this commemoration of the Creation was in fact a *reactualization* of the cosmogonic act is shown both by the rituals and in the formulas recited during the ceremony.

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

Since the New Year is a reactualization of the cos-

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

The Nawrōz—the Persian New Year—commemorates the day that witnessed the creation of the world and man. It was on the day of Nawrōz that the "renewal of the Creation" was accomplished, as the Arabic historian al-Bīrūnī expressed it. The king proclaimed: "Here is a new day of a new month of a new year; what time has worn must be renewed." Time had worn the human being, society, the cosmos—and this destructive time was profane time, duration strictly speaking; it had to be abolished in order to reintegrate the mythical moment in which the world had come into existence, bathed in a "pure," "strong," and sacred time. The abolition of profane past time was accomplished by rituals that signified a sort of "end of the world." The extinction of fires, the return of the souls of the dead, social confusion of the

type exemplified by the Saturnalia, erotic license, orgies, and so on, symbolized the retrogression of the cosmos into chaos. On the last day of the year the universe was dissolved in the primordial waters. The marine monster Tiamat—symbol of darkness, of the formless, the non-manifested—revived and once again threatened. The world that had existed for a whole year *really* disappeared. Since Tiamat was again present, the cosmos was annulled; and Marduk was obliged to create it once again, after having once again conquered Tiamat.⁴

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

⁴ For New Year rituals, cf. *Myth*, pp. 55 ff.

he even participated actively in its creation (cf. the two opposed groups, representing the god and the marine monster).

It is easy to understand why the memory of that marvelous time haunted religious man, why he periodically sought to return to it. *In illo tempore* the gods had displayed their greatest powers. *The cosmogony is the supreme divine manifestation*, the paradigmatic act of strength, superabundance, and creativity. Religious man thirsts for the real. By every means at his disposal, he seeks to reside at the very source of primordial reality, when the world was *in statu nascendi*.

REGENERATION THROUGH RETURN TO THE TIME OF ORIGINS

All this would warrant detailed study, but for the moment only two features will occupy our attention: (1) through annual repetition of the cosmogony, time was regenerated, that is, it began again as sacred time, for it coincided with the *illud tempus* in which the world had first come into existence; (2) by participating ritually in the end of the world and in its re-creation, any man became contemporary with the *illud tempus*; hence he was born anew, he began life over again with his reserve of vital forces *intact*, as it was at the moment of his birth.

These facts are important; they reveal the secret of

religious man's attitude and behavior in respect to time. Since the sacred and strong time is the *time of origins*, the stupendous instant in which a reality was created, was for the first time fully manifested, man will seek periodically to return to that original time. This ritual reactualizing of the *illud tempus* in which the first epiphany of a reality occurred is the basis for all sacred calendars; the festival is not merely the commemoration of a mythical (and hence religious) event; it *reactualizes* the event.

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

Consequently, religious man reactualizes the cosmogony not only each time he creates something (his "own world"—the inhabited territory—or a city, a house, etc.), but also when he wants to ensure a fortunate reign for a new sovereign, or to save threatened crops, or in the case of a war, a sea voyage, and so on. But, above all, the ritual recitation of the cosmogonic myth plays

an important role in healing, when what is sought is the *regeneration* of the human being. In Fiji, the ceremony for installing a new ruler is called creation of the world, and the same ceremony is repeated to save threatened crops. But it is perhaps Polynesia that exhibits the widest application of the cosmogonic myth. The words that Io spoke *in illo tempore* to create the world have become ritual formulas. Men repeat them on many occasions—to fecundate a sterile womb, to heal (mental as well as physical ailments), to prepare for war, but also on the occasion of a death or to stimulate poetic inspiration.⁵

Thus the cosmogonic myth serves the Polynesians as the archetypal model for all creations, on whatever plane—biological, psychological, spiritual. But since ritual recitation of the cosmogonic myth implies reactualization of that primordial event, it follows that he for whom it is recited is magically projected *in illo tempore*, into the “beginning of the World”; he becomes contemporary with the cosmogony. What is involved is, in short, a return to the original time, the therapeutic purpose of which is to begin life once again, a symbolic rebirth. The conception underlying these curative rituals seems to be the following: life cannot be repaired, it can only be recreated through symbolic repetition of the cosmogony, for, as we have said, the cosmogony is the paradigmatic model for all creation.

⁵ Cf. the bibliographical reference in *Myth*, pp. 82 ff. and in *Patterns*, p. 410.

The regenerative function of the return to the time of origins becomes still more clear if we make a detailed examination of an archaic therapy, such, for example, as that of the Na-khi, a Tibeto-Burmese people living in Southwest China (Yün-nan Province). The therapeutic ritual proper consists in the solemn recitation of the myth of the creation of the world, followed by myths of the origin of maladies from the wrath of the snakes and the appearance of the first Shaman-Healer who brought humanity the necessary medicines. Almost all the rituals invoke the mythical *beginning*, the mythical *illud tempus*, when the world was not yet made: “In the beginning, at the time when the heavens, sun, moon, stars, planets and the land had not yet appeared, when nothing had yet come forth,” etc. Then comes the cosmogony and the appearance of the snakes: “At the time when heaven came forth, the sun, moon, stars and planets, and the earth was spread out; when the mountains, valleys, trees and rocks came forth . . . at that time there came forth the Nāgas and dragons,” etc. The birth of the First Healer and the appearance of medicines is then narrated. After this it is said: “Unless its origin is related one should not speak about it.”⁶

The important fact to be noted in connection with these magical healing chants is that *the myth of the origin of the medicines employed* is always incorporated into the

⁶ J. F. Rock, *The Na-khi Nāga Cult and Related Ceremonies*, Rome, 1952 Vol. II, pp. 279 ff.

cosmogonic myth. It is well known that in all primitive and traditional therapies a remedy becomes efficacious only if its origin is ritually rehearsed in the sick person's presence. A large number of Near Eastern and European incantations contain the history of the sickness or of the demon who has provoked it, at the same time that they evoke the mythical moment in which a divinity or a saint succeeded in conquering the malady. But we consider it certain that the origin myth was copied after the cosmogonic myth, for the latter is the paradigmatic model for all origins. This, moreover, is why, in therapeutic incantations, the origin myth is often preceded by the cosmogonic myth and even incorporated into it. An Assyrian incantation against toothache rehearses that "after Anu made the heavens, the heavens made the earth, the earth made the rivers, the rivers made the canals, the canals made the pools, the pools made the worm." And the worm goes "weeping" to Shamash and Ea and asks them what will be given it to eat, to destroy. The gods offer it fruits, but the worm asks them for human teeth. "Since thou hast spoken thus, O Worm, may Ea break thee with his powerful hand!"⁷ Here are presented: (1) the creation of the world; (2) the birth of the worm and of the sickness; (3) the primordial and paradigmatic gesture of healing (Ea's destruction of the worm). The

⁷ Campbell Thompson, *Assyrian Medical Texts*, London, 1932, p. 59. Cf. also Eliade, "Kosmogonische Mythen und magische Heilungen," *Paideuma*, 1956, pp. 194-204.

therapeutic efficacy of the incantation lies in the fact that, ritually uttered, it reactualizes the mythical time of origins, both the origin of the world and the origin of toothaches and their treatment.

FESTIVAL TIME AND THE STRUCTURE OF FESTIVALS

The *time of origin* of a reality—that is, the time inaugurated by the first appearance of the reality—has a paradigmatic value and function; that is why man seeks to reactualize it periodically by means of appropriate rituals. But the "first manifestation" of a reality is equivalent to its *creation* by divine or semidivine beings; hence, recovering this *time of origin* implies ritual repetition of the gods' creative act. The periodic reactualization of the creative acts performed by the divine beings *in illo tempore* constitutes the sacred calendar, the series of festivals. A festival always takes place in the original time. It is precisely the reintegration of this original and sacred time that differentiates man's behavior *during* the festival from his behavior *before* or *after* it. For in many cases the same acts are performed during the festival as during nonfestival periods. But religious man believes that he then lives in *another* time, that he has succeeded in returning to the mythical *illud tempus*.

During their annual totemic ceremony, the *Intichiuma*,

the Australian Arunta repeat the journey taken by the particular clan's divine Ancestor in the mythical time (*alcheringa*, literally, the dream time). They stop at all the countless places at which the Ancestor stopped and repeat the same acts and gestures that he performed *in illo tempore*. During the entire ceremony they fast, carry no weapons, and avoid all contact with their women and with members of other clans. They are completely immersed in the dream time.⁸

The festivals annually celebrated in a Polynesian island, Tikopia, reproduce the "works of the Gods"—that is, the acts by which in the mythical time the gods fashioned the world as it is today.⁹ The festival time in which the Tikopia live during the ceremonies is characterized by certain prohibitions (*tabus*): noise, games, dancing cease. The passage from profane to sacred time is indicated by ritually cutting a piece of wood in two. The numerous ceremonies that make up the periodical festivals—and which, once again, are only the reiteration of the paradigmatic acts of the gods—seem not to be different from normal activities; they comprise ritual repairing of boats, rites relative to the cultivation of food plants (yam, taro, etc.), repairing of sanctuaries. But in reality all these ceremonial activities differ from similar labors performed at ordinary times by the fact

⁸ F. J. Gillen, *The Native Tribes of Central Australia*, 2nd ed., London, 1938, pp. 170 ff.

⁹ Cf. Raymond Firth, *The Work of the Gods in Tikopia*, I, London, 1940.

that they are performed on *only a few objects* (which in some sort constitute the archetypes of their respective classes) and also because the ceremonies take place in an atmosphere saturated with the sacred. The natives, that is, are conscious that they are reproducing, to the smallest detail, the paradigmatic acts of the gods as they were performed *in illo tempore*.

This is as much as to say that religious man periodically becomes the contemporary of the gods in the measure in which he reactualizes the primordial time in which the divine works were accomplished. On the level of primitive civilizations, whatever man does has a trans-human model; hence, even outside of the festival time, his acts and gestures imitate the paradigmatic models established by the gods and the mythical ancestors. But this imitation is likely to become less and less accurate. The model is likely to be distorted or even forgotten. It is the periodical reactualizations of the divine acts—in short, the religious festivals—that restore human knowledge of the sacrality of the models. The ritual repairing of ships and the ritual cultivation of the yam no longer resemble the similar operations performed outside of the sacred periods. For one thing, they are more precise, closer to the divine models; for another, they are *ritual*—that is, their intent is religious. A boat is repaired ceremonially not because it is in need of repair but because, *in illo tempore*, the gods showed men how to repair boats. It is a case not of an empirical operation

but of a religious act, an *imitatio dei*. The object repaired is no longer one of the many objects that constitute the class "boats" but a mythical archetype—the *very boat that the gods manipulated in illo tempore*. Hence the time in which the ritual repairing of boats is performed coheres with primordial time; it is the same time in which the gods labored.

Obviously, not all varieties of periodical festivals can be reduced to the type just examined. But it is not with the morphology of the festival that we are concerned; it is with the structure of the sacred time actualized in festivals. It can be said of sacred time that it is always the same, that it is "a succession of eternities" (Hubert and Mauss). For, however complex a religious festival may be, it always involves a sacred event that took place *ab origine* and that is ritually made present. The participants in the festival become contemporaries of the mythical event. In other words, they emerge from their historical time—that is, from the time constituted by the sum total of profane personal and intrapersonal events—and recover primordial time, which is always the same, which belongs to eternity. Religious man periodically finds his way into mythical and sacred time, re-enters the *time of origin*, the time that "floweth not" because it does not participate in profane temporal duration, because it is composed of an *eternal present*, which is indefinitely recoverable.

Religious man feels the need to plunge periodically

into this sacred and indestructible time. For him it is sacred time that makes possible the other time, ordinary time, the profane duration in which every human life takes its course. It is the *eternal present* of the mythical event that makes possible the profane duration of historical events. To give only one example: it is the divine hierogamy, which took place *in illo tempore*, that made human sexual union possible. The union between the god and goddess occurs in an atemporal instant, in an eternal present; sexual unions between human beings—when they are not ritual unions—take place in duration, in profane time. Sacred, mythical time also originates and supports existential, historical time, for it is the latter's paradigmatic model. In short, it is by virtue of the divine or semidivine beings that everything has come into existence. The origin of realities and of life itself is religious. The yam can be cultivated and eaten in the ordinary way because it is periodically cultivated and eaten *ritually*. And these rituals can be performed because the gods revealed them *in illo tempore*, by creating man and the yam and by showing men how to cultivate and eat that particular food plant.

In the festival the sacred dimension of life is recovered, the participants experience the sanctity of human existence as a divine creation. At all other times there is always the danger of forgetting what is fundamental—that existence is not given by what modern men call Nature but is a creation of *Others*, the gods or semi-

divine beings. But in festivals the participants recover the sacred dimension of existence, by learning again how the gods or the mythical ancestors created man and taught him the various kinds of social behavior and of practical work.

From one point of view this periodical emergence from historical time—and especially the consequences that it has for the total existence of religious man—may appear to be a refusal of history, hence a refusal of creative freedom. After all, what is involved is an eternal return *in illo tempore*, to a past that is mythical, completely unhistorical. It could be concluded that this eternal repetition of the paradigmatic acts and gestures revealed by the gods *ab origine* is opposed to any human progress and paralyzes any creative spontaneity. Certainly, the conclusion is justifiable in part. But only in part. For religious man, even the most primitive, does not refuse progress in principle; he accepts it but at the same time bestows on it a divine origin and dimension. Everything that from the modern point of view seems to us to have signified progress (of whatever kind—whether social, cultural, technical, etc.) in comparison with a previous situation, all this the various primitive societies have accepted in the course of their long history as a series of new divine revelations. But for the moment we shall leave this aspect of the problem aside. What is of primary importance to us is to understand the religious meaning of this repetition of divine acts

and gestures. Now, it seems obvious that, if religious man feels the need of indefinitely reproducing the same paradigmatic acts and gestures, *this is because he desires and attempts to live close to his gods.*

PERIODICALLY BECOMING CONTEMPORARY
WITH THE GODS

In the preceding chapter, when we studied the cosmological symbolism of cities, temples, and houses, we showed that it is bound up with the idea of a Center of the World. The religious symbolism implicit in the symbolism of the center appears to be this: man desires to have his abode in a space opening upward, that is, communicating with the divine world. To live near to a Center of the World is, in short, equivalent to living as close as possible to the gods.

We find the same desire for a close approach to the gods if we analyze the meaning of religious festivals. To reintegrate the sacred time of origin is equivalent to becoming contemporary with the gods, hence to living in their presence—even if their presence is mysterious in the sense that it is not always visible. The intention that can be read in the experience of sacred space and sacred time reveals a desire to reintegrate a primordial situation—that in which the gods and the mythical ancestors were *present*, that is, were engaged in creating the world, or in organizing it, or in revealing the foun-

dations of civilization to man. This primordial situation is not historical, it is not calculable chronologically; what is involved is a mythical anteriority, the time of origin, what took place "in the beginning," *in principio*.

Now, what took place "in the beginning" was this: the divine or semidivine beings were active on earth. Hence the nostalgia for origins is equivalent to a *religious* nostalgia. Man desires to recover the active presence of the gods; he also desires to live in the world as it came from the Creator's hands, fresh, pure, and strong. It is the nostalgia for the *perfection of beginnings* that chiefly explains the periodical return *in illo tempore*. In Christian terms, it could be called a nostalgia for paradise, although on the level of primitive cultures the religious and ideological context is entirely different from that of Judaeo-Christianity. But the mythical time whose reactualization is periodically attempted is a time sanctified by the divine presence, and we may say that the desire to live in *the divine presence* and in *a perfect world* (perfect because newly born) corresponds to the nostalgia for a paradisaic situation.

As we noted above, this desire on the part of religious man to travel *back* periodically, his effort to reintegrate a mythological situation (the situation as it was in the *beginning*) may appear intolerable and humiliating to modern eyes. Such a nostalgia inevitably leads to the continual repetition of a limited number of gestures and patterns of behavior. From one point of view it may even

be said that religious man—especially the religious man of primitive societies—is above all a man paralyzed by the myth of the eternal return. A modern psychologist would be tempted to interpret such an attitude as anxiety before the danger of the new, refusal to assume responsibility for a genuine historical existence, nostalgia for a situation that is paradisaic precisely because it is embryonic, insufficiently detached from nature.

That problem is too complex to be discussed here. In any case, it lies outside the field of our investigation, for, in the last analysis, it implies the problem of the opposition between premodern and modern man. Let us rather say that it would be wrong to believe that the religious man of primitive and archaic societies refuses to assume the responsibility for a genuine existence. On the contrary, as we have seen and shall see again, he courageously assumes immense responsibilities—for example, that of collaborating in the creation of the cosmos, or of creating his own world, or of ensuring the life of plants and animals, and so on. But it is a different kind of responsibility from those that, to us moderns, appear to be the only genuine and valid responsibilities. It is *a responsibility on the cosmic plane*, in contradistinction to the moral, social, or historical responsibilities that are alone regarded as valid in modern civilizations. From the point of view of profane existence, man feels no responsibility except to himself and to society. For him, the universe does not properly constitute a cosmos

—that is, a living and articulated unity; it is simply the sum of the material reserves and physical energies of the planet, and the great concern of modern man is to avoid stupidly exhausting the economic resources of the globe. But, existentially, the primitive always puts himself in a cosmic context. His personal experience lacks neither genuineness nor depth; but the fact that it is expressed in a language unfamiliar to us makes it appear spurious or infantile to modern eyes.

To revert to our immediate subject: we have no warrant for interpreting periodic return to the sacred time of origin as a rejection of the real world and an escape into dream and imagination. On the contrary, it seems to us that, here again, we can discern the *ontological obsession* to which we have referred and which, moreover, can be considered an essential characteristic of the man of the primitive and archaic societies. For to wish to reintegrate the *time of origin* is also to wish to return to the *presence of the gods*, to recover the *strong, fresh, pure world* that existed *in illo tempore*. It is at once thirst for the *sacred* and nostalgia for *being*. On the existential plane this experience finds expression in the certainty that life can be periodically begun over again with a maximum of good fortune. Indeed, it is not only an optimistic vision of existence, but a total cleaving to being. By all his behavior, religious man proclaims that he believes only in being, and that his participation in being is assured him by the primordial

revelation of which he is the guardian. The sum total of primordial revelations is constituted by his myths.

MYTH=PARADIGMATIC MODEL

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

Obviously these realities are sacred realities, for it is the *sacred* that is pre-eminently the *real*. Whatever

belongs to the sphere of the profane does not participate in being, for the profane was not ontologically established by myth, has no perfect model. As we shall soon see, agricultural work is a ritual revealed by the gods or culture heroes. This is why it constitutes an act that is at once *real* and *significant*. Let us think, by comparison, of agricultural work in a desacralized society. Here, it has become a profane act, justified by the economic profit that it brings. The ground is tilled to be exploited; the end pursued is profit and food. Emptied of religious symbolism, agricultural work becomes at once opaque and exhausting; it reveals no meaning, it makes possible no opening toward the universal, toward the world of spirit. No god, no culture hero ever revealed a profane act. Everything that the gods or the ancestors did, hence everything that the myths have to tell about their creative activity, belongs to the sphere of the sacred and therefore participates in *being*. In contrast, what men do on their own initiative, what they do without a mythical model, belongs to the sphere of the profane; hence it is a vain and illusory activity, and, in the last analysis, unreal. The more religious man is, the more paradigmatic models does he possess to guide his attitudes and actions. In other words, the more religious he is, the more does he enter into the *real* and the less is he in danger of becoming lost in actions that, being nonparadigmatic, "subjective," are, finally, aberrant.

This is the aspect of myth that demands particular emphasis here. The myth reveals absolute sacrality, be-

cause it relates the creative activity of the gods, unveils the sacredness of their work. In other words, the myth describes the various and sometimes dramatic irruptions of the sacred into the world. This is why, among many primitives, myths cannot be recited without regard for time or place, but only during the seasons that are ritually richest (autumn, winter) or in the course of religious ceremonies—in short, during *a sacred period of time*. It is the irruption of the sacred into the world, an irruption narrated in the myths, that *establishes* the world as a reality. Every myth shows how a reality came into existence, whether it be the total reality, the cosmos, or only a fragment—an island, a species of plant, a human institution. To tell how things came into existence is to explain them and at the same time indirectly to answer another question: *Why* did they come into existence? The *why* is always implied in the *how*—for the simple reason that to tell *how* a thing was born is to reveal an irruption of the sacred into the world, and the sacred is the ultimate cause of all real existence.

Moreover, since every creation is a divine work and hence an irruption of the sacred, it at the same time represents an irruption of creative energy into the world. Every creation springs from an abundance. The gods create out of an excess of power, an overflow of energy. Creation is accomplished by a surplus of ontological substance. This is why the myth, which narrates this sacred ontophany, this victorious manifestation of a plenitude of being, becomes the paradigmatic model for

all human activities. For it alone reveals the *real*, the superabundant, the effectual. "We must do what the Gods did in the beginning," says an Indian text (*Shatapatha Brāhmana*, VII, 2, 1, 4). "Thus the Gods did; thus men do," the *Taittirīya Brāhmana* adds (I, 5, 9, 4). Hence the supreme function of the myth is to "fix" the paradigmatic models for all rites and all significant human activities—eating, sexuality, work, education, and so on. Acting as a fully responsible human being, man imitates the paradigmatic gestures of the gods, repeats their actions, whether in the case of a simple physiological function such as eating or of a social, economic, cultural, military, or other activity.

In New Guinea a great many myths tell of long sea voyages, thus providing "exemplars for the modern voyagers," as well as for all other activities, "whether of love, or war, or rain-making, or fishing, or whatever else. . . . The narrative gives precedents for the stages of construction, the tabu on sexual intercourse, etc." When a captain goes to sea he personifies the mythical hero Aori. "He wears the costume which Aori is supposed to have worn, with blackened face . . . [and] the same kind of *love* in his hair which Aori plucked from Iviri's head. He dances on the platform and extends his arms like Aori's wings. . . . A man told me that when he went fish shooting (with bow and arrow) he pretended to be Kivavia himself."¹⁰ He did not pray to the mythical

¹⁰ F. E. Williams, cited in Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *La mythologie primitive*, Paris, 1935, pp. 162, 163-164.

hero for aid and favor; he identified himself with him.

This symbolism of mythical precedents is also found in other primitive cultures. Writing on the Karuk Indians of California, J. P. Harrington says: "Everything that the Karuk did was enacted because the Ikkareyavs were believed to have set the example in story times. The Ikkareyavs were the people who were in America before the Indians came. Modern Karuks, in a quandary now to render the word, volunteer such translations as 'the princes,' 'the chiefs,' 'the angels.' . . . [The Ikkareyavs] remain[ed] with the Karuk only long enough to state and start all customs, telling them in every instance, 'Humans will do the same.' These doings and sayings are still related and quoted in the medicine formulas of the Karuk."¹¹

This faithful repetition of divine models has a twofold result: (1) by imitating the gods, man remains in the sacred, hence in reality; (2) by the continuous reactualization of paradigmatic divine gestures, the world is sanctified. Men's religious behavior contributes to maintaining the sanctity of the world.

REACTUALIZING MYTHS

It is not without interest to note that religious man assumes a humanity that has a transhuman, transcendent model. He does not consider himself to be

¹¹ J. P. Harrington, cited in *ibid.*, p. 165.

truly man except in so far as he imitates the gods, the culture heroes, or the mythical ancestors. This is as much as to say that religious man wishes to be *other* than he is on the plane of his profane experience. Religious man is not *given*; he *makes* himself, by approaching the divine models. These models, as we said, are preserved in myths, in the history of the divine *gesta*. Hence religious man too regards himself as *made* by history, just as profane man does; but the only history that concerns him is the *sacred history* revealed by the myths—that is, the history of the gods; whereas profane man insists that he is constituted only by human history, hence by the sum of the very acts that, for religious man, are of no importance because they have no divine models. The point to be emphasized is that, from the beginning, religious man sets the model he is to attain on the trans-human plane, the plane revealed by his myths. *One becomes truly a man only by conforming to the teaching of the myths, that is, by imitating the gods.*

We will add that, for the primitives, such an *imitatio dei* sometimes implies a very grave responsibility. We have seen that certain blood sacrifices find their justification in a primordial divine act; *in illo tempore* the god had slain the marine monster and dismembered its body in order to create the cosmos. Man repeats this blood sacrifice—sometimes even with human victims—when he has to build a village, a temple, or simply a house. What the consequences of this *imitatio dei* can be is clearly shown by the mythologies and rituals of numerous primi-

tive peoples. To give only one example: according to the myths of the earliest cultivators, man became what he is today—mortal, sexualized, and condemned to work—in consequence of a primordial murder; *in illo tempore* a divine being, quite often a woman or a maiden, sometimes a child or a man, allowed himself to be immolated in order that tubers or fruit trees should grow from his body. This first murder basically changed the mode of being of human life. The immolation of the divine being inaugurated not only the need to eat but also the doom of death and, in consequence, sexuality, the only way to ensure the continuity of life. The body of the immolated divinity was changed into food; its soul descended underground, where it established the Land of the Dead. A. E. Jensen, who has devoted an important book to this type of divinities—which he calls *dema* divinities—has conclusively shown that in eating and in dying man participates in the life of the *demas*.¹²

For all these palaeo-agricultural peoples, what is essential is periodically to evoke the primordial event that established the present condition of humanity. Their whole religious life is a commemoration, a remembering. The memory reactualized by the rites (hence by reiterating the primordial murder) plays a decisive role; what happened *in illo tempore* must never be forgotten. The true sin is forgetting. The girl who at

¹² A. E. Jensen, *Das religiöse Weltbild einer frühen Kultur*, Stuttgart, 1948. Jensen borrowed the word *dema* from the Marind-anim of New Guinea.

her first menstruation spends three days in a dark hut without speaking to anyone does so because the murdered maiden, having become the moon, remains three days in darkness; if the menstruating girl breaks the tabu of silence and speaks, she is guilty of forgetting a primordial event. Personal memory is not involved; what matters is to remember the mythical event, the only event worth considering because the only creative event. It falls to the primordial myth to preserve *true history*, the history of the human condition; it is in the myth that the principles and paradigms for all conduct must be sought and recovered.

It is at this stage of culture that we encounter ritual cannibalism. The cannibal's chief concern would seem to be essentially metaphysical; he must not forget what happened *in illo tempore*. Volhardt and Jensen have shown this very clearly; the killing and devouring of sows at festivals, eating the first fruits when tubers are harvested, are *an eating of the divine body, exactly as it is eaten at cannibal feasts*. Sacrifice of sows, head-hunting, cannibalism are symbolically the same as harvesting tubers or coconuts. It is Volhardt's accomplishment to have demonstrated the religious meaning of anthropophagy and at the same time the human responsibility assumed by the cannibal.¹⁸ The food plant is not

¹⁸ E. Volhardt, *Kannibalismus*, Stuttgart, 1939. Cf. Eliade, "Le mythe du bon sauvage ou les prestiges de l'origine," in *id.*, *Mythes, rêves et mystères*, Paris, 1957, pp. 36 ff.

given in nature; it is the product of a slaying, for it was thus that it was created in the dawn of time. Head-hunting, human sacrifices, cannibalism were all accepted by man to ensure the life of plants. Volhardt's insistence on this point is fully justified. The cannibal assumes his responsibility in the world; cannibalism is not a "natural" behavior in primitive man (moreover, it is not found on the oldest levels of culture); it is cultural behavior, based on a religious vision of life. For the vegetable world to continue, man must kill and be killed; in addition, he must assume sexuality to its extreme limit—the orgy. An Abyssinian song declares this: "She who has not yet engendered, let her engender; he who has not yet killed, let him kill!" This is a way of saying that the two sexes are doomed to assume their destiny.

Before passing judgment on cannibalism, we must always remember that it was instituted by divine beings. But they instituted it to give human beings the opportunity to assume a responsibility in the cosmos, to enable them to provide for the continuity of vegetable life. The responsibility, then, is religious in nature. The Uito cannibals affirm it: "Our traditions are always alive among us, even when we are not dancing; but we work only that we may dance." Their dances consist in repeating all the mythical events, hence also the first slaying, followed by anthropophagy.

We have cited this example in order to show that, among primitives as in the palaeo-oriental civilizations,

the *imitatio dei* is not conceived idyllically, that, on the contrary, it implies an awesome human responsibility. In judging a "savage" society, we must not lose sight of the fact that even the most barbarous act and the most aberrant behavior have divine, transhuman models. To inquire why and in consequence of what degradations and misunderstandings certain religious activities deteriorate and become aberrant is an entirely different problem, into which we shall not enter here. For our purpose, what demands emphasis is the fact that religious man sought to imitate, and believed that he was imitating, his gods even when he allowed himself to be led into acts that verged on madness, depravity, and crime.

SACRED HISTORY, HISTORY, HISTORICISM

Let us recapitulate:

Religious man experiences two kinds of time—profane and sacred. The one is an evanescent duration, the other a "succession of eternities," periodically recoverable during the festivals that made up the sacred calendar. The liturgical time of the calendar flows in a closed circle; it is the cosmic time of the year, sanctified by the works of the gods. And since the most stupendous divine work was the creation of the world, commemoration of the cosmogony plays an important part in many religions. The New Year coincides with the first day of Creation. The year is the temporal dimension of the

cosmos. "The world has passed" expresses that a year has run its course.

At each New Year the cosmogony is reiterated, the world re-created, and to do this is also to create time—that is, to regenerate it by beginning it anew. This is why the cosmogonic myth serves as paradigmatic model for every creation or construction; it is even used as a ritual means of healing. By symbolically becoming contemporary with the Creation, one reintegrates the primordial plenitude. The sick man becomes well because he begins his life again with its sum of energy intact.

The religious festival is the reactualization of a primordial event, of a sacred history in which the actors are the gods or semidivine beings. But sacred history is recounted in the myths. Hence the participants in the festival become contemporaries of the gods and the semidivine beings. They live in the primordial time that is sanctified by the presence and activity of the gods. The sacred calendar periodically regenerates time, because it makes it coincide with the *time of origin*, the strong, pure time. The religious experience of the festival—that is, participation in the sacred—enables man periodically to live in the presence of the gods. This is the reason for the fundamental importance of myths in all pre-Mosaic religions, for the myths narrate the *gesta* of the gods and these *gesta* constitute paradigmatic models for all human activities. In so far as he imitates his gods, religious man lives in the *time of origin*, the

time of the myths. In other words, he emerges from profane duration to recover an unmoving time, eternity.

Since, for religious man of the primitive societies, myths constitute his sacred history, he must not forget them; by reactualizing the myths, he approaches his gods and participates in sanctity. But there are also tragic divine histories, and man assumes a great responsibility toward himself and toward nature by periodically reactualizing them. Ritual cannibalism, for example, is the consequence of a tragic religious conception.

In short, through the reactualization of his myths, religious man attempts to approach the gods and to participate in *being*; the imitation of paradigmatic divine models expresses at once his desire for sanctity and his ontological nostalgia.

In the primitive and archaic religions the eternal repetition of the divine exploits is justified as an *imitatio dei*. The sacred calendar annually repeats the same festivals, that is, the commemoration of the same mythical events. Strictly speaking, the sacred calendar proves to be the "eternal return" of a limited number of divine *gesta*—and this is true not only for primitive religions but for all others. The festal calendar everywhere constitutes a periodical return of the same primordial situations and hence a reactualization of the same sacred time. For religious man, reactualization of the same mythical events constitutes his greatest hope; for with each reactualization he again has the opportunity to

transfigure his existence, to make it like its divine model. In short, for religious man of the primitive and archaic societies, the eternal repetition of paradigmatic gestures and the eternal recovery of the same mythical time of origin, sanctified by the gods, in no sense implies a pessimistic vision of life. On the contrary, for him it is by virtue of this eternal return to the sources of the sacred and the real that human existence appears to be saved from nothingness and death.

The perspective changes completely when the sense of *the religiousness of the cosmos becomes lost*. This is what occurs when, in certain more highly evolved societies, the intellectual élites progressively detach themselves from the patterns of the traditional religion. The periodical sanctification of cosmic time then proves useless and without meaning. The gods are no longer accessible through the cosmic rhythms. The religious meaning of the repetition of paradigmatic gestures is forgotten. But *repetition emptied of its religious content necessarily leads to a pessimistic vision of existence*. When it is no longer a vehicle for reintegrating a primordial situation, and hence for recovering the mysterious presence of the gods, that is, *when it is desacralized*, cyclic time becomes terrifying; it is seen as a circle forever turning on itself, repeating itself to infinity.

This is what happened in India, where the doctrine of cosmic cycles (*yugas*) was elaborately developed. A

complete cycle, a *mahāyuga*, comprises 12,000 years. It ends with a dissolution, a *pralaya*, which is repeated more drastically (*mahāpralaya*, the Great Dissolution) at the end of the thousandth cycle. For the paradigmatic schema "creation-destruction-creation-etc." is reproduced *ad infinitum*. The 12,000 years of a *mahāyuga* were regarded as divine years, each with a duration of 360 years, which gives a total of 4,320,000 years for a single cosmic cycle. A thousand such *mahāyugas* make up a *kalpa* (form); 14 *kalpas* make up a *manvantāra* (so named because each *manvantāra* is supposed to be ruled by Manu, the mythical Ancestor-King.) A *kalpa* is equivalent to a day in the life of Brahma; a second *kalpa* to a night. One hundred of these "years" of Brahma, in other words 311,000 milliards of human years, constitute the life of Brahma. But even this duration of the god's life does not exhaust time, for the gods are not eternal and the cosmic creations and destructions succeed one another forever.¹⁴

This is the true eternal return, the eternal repetition of the fundamental rhythm of the cosmos—its periodical destruction and re-creation. In short, *it is the primitive conception of the Year-Cosmos, but emptied of its religious content*. Obviously, the doctrine of *yugas* was elaborated by intellectual élites, and if it became a pan-Indian doctrine, we must not suppose that it revealed its

¹⁴ Cf. Eliade, *Myth*, pp. 113 ff.; see also *id.*, *Images et symboles*, Paris, 1952, pp. 80 ff.

terrifying aspect to all the peoples of India. It was chiefly the religious and philosophical élites who felt despair in the presence of cyclic time repeating itself *ad infinitum*. For to Indian thought, this eternal return implied eternal return to existence by force of *karma*, the law of universal causality. Then, too, time was homologized to the cosmic illusion (*māyā*), and the eternal return to existence signified indefinite prolongation of suffering and slavery. In the view of these religious and philosophical élites, the only hope was nonreturn-to-existence, the abolition of karma; in other words, final deliverance (*moksha*), implying a transcendence of the cosmos.¹⁵

Greece too knew the myth of the eternal return, and the Greek philosophers of the late period carried the conception of circular time to its furthest limits. To quote the perceptive words of H. C. Puech: "According to the celebrated Platonic definition, time, which is determined and measured by the revolution of the celestial spheres, is the moving image of unmoving eternity, which it imitates by revolving in a circle. Consequently all cosmic becoming, and, in the same manner, the duration of this world of generation and corruption in which we live, will progress in a circle or in accordance with an indefinite succession of cycles in the course of which the same reality is made, unmade, and remade in con-

¹⁵ This transcendence is achieved through the "fortunate instant" (*kshana*), which implies a sort of sacred Time that permits emergence from time; see *Images et symboles*, pp. 10 ff.

formity with an immutable law and immutable alternatives. Not only is the same sum of existence preserved in it, with nothing being lost and nothing created, but in addition certain thinkers of declining antiquity—Pythagoreans, Stoics, Platonists—reached the point of admitting that within each of these cycles of duration, of these *aiones*, these *aeva*, the same situations are reproduced that have already been produced in previous cycles and will be reproduced in subsequent cycles—*ad infinitum*. No event is unique, occurs once and for all (for example, the condemnation and death of Socrates), but it has occurred, occurs, and will occur, perpetually; the same individuals have appeared, appear, and will reappear at every return of the cycle upon itself. Cosmic duration is repetition and *anakuklosis*, eternal return.¹⁶

Compared with the archaic and palaeo-oriental religions, as well as with the mythic-philosophical conceptions of the eternal return, as they were elaborated in India and Greece, Judaism presents an innovation of the first importance. For Judaism, time has a beginning and will have an end. The idea of cyclic time is left behind. Yahweh no longer manifests himself in *cosmic time* (like the gods of other religions) but in a *historical time*, which is irreversible. Each new manifestation of Yahweh in history is no longer reducible to an earlier manifestation. The fall of Jerusalem expresses Yahweh's

¹⁶ Henri Charles Puech, "La gnose et le temps," *Eranos-Jahrbuch*, XX, 1952, pp. 60-61.

wrath against his people, but it is no longer the same wrath that Yahweh expressed by the fall of Samaria. His gestures are *personal* interventions in history and reveal their deep meaning *only for his people*, the people that Yahweh had *chosen*. Hence the historical event acquires a new dimension; it becomes a *theophany*.¹⁷

Christianity goes even further in valorizing *historical time*. Since God was *incarnated*, that is, since he took on a *historically conditioned human existence*, history acquires the possibility of being sanctified. The *illud tempus* evoked by the Gospels is a clearly defined historical time—the time in which Pontius Pilate was Governor of Judaea—but it was *sanctified by the presence of Christ*. When a Christian of our day participates in liturgical time, he recovers the *illud tempus* in which Christ lived, suffered, and rose again—but it is no longer a mythical time, it is the time when Pontius Pilate governed Judaea. For the Christian, too, the sacred calendar indefinitely rehearses the same events of the existence of Christ—but these events took place in *history*; they are no longer facts that happened at the *origin of time*, "in the beginning." (But we should add that, for the Christian, time begins anew with the birth of Christ, for the Incarnation establishes a new situation of man in the cosmos). This is as much as to say that history reveals itself to be a new dimension of the presence of God

¹⁷ Cf. Eliade, *Myth*, pp. 102 ff., on the valorization of history in Judaism, especially by the prophets.

in the world. History becomes *sacred history* once more—as it was conceived, but in a mythical perspective, in primitive and archaic religions.¹⁸

Christianity arrives, not at a *philosophy* but at a *theology* of history. For God's interventions in history, and above all his Incarnation in the historical person of Jesus Christ, have a transhistorical purpose—the *salvation* of man.

Hegel takes over the Judaeo-Christian ideology and applies it to universal history in its totality: the universal spirit *continually* manifests itself in historical events and manifests itself *only* in historical events. Thus *the whole* of history becomes a theophany; everything that has happened in history *had to happen as it did*, because the universal spirit so willed it. The road is thus opened to the various forms of twentieth-century historicistic philosophies. Here our present investigation ends, for all these new valorizations of time and history belong to the history of philosophy. Yet we must add that historicism arises as a decomposition product of Christianity; it accords decisive importance to the historical event (which is an idea whose origin is Christian) but to the *historical event as such*, that is, by denying it any possibility of revealing a transhistorical, soteriological intent.¹⁹

As for the conceptions of time on which certain his-

toricistic and existentialist philosophies have insisted, the following observation is not without interest: although no longer conceived as a circle, time in these modern philosophies once again wears the terrifying aspect that it wore in the Indian and Greek philosophies of the eternal return. Definitively desecralized, time presents itself as a precarious and evanescent duration, leading irremediably to death.

¹⁸ Cf. Eliade, *Images et symboles*, pp. 222 ff.

¹⁹ On the difficulties of historicism, see *Myth*, pp. 147 ff.