

## THE YEARNING FOR PARADISE IN PRIMITIVE TRADITION

In his book on the myths of the African peoples Hermann Baumann sums up the myths of a primeval paradisaical era. In those times, he says, men did not know of death: they understood the language of the animals and were at peace with them; they did not work, and found abundant nourishment at hands' reach. Following upon a certain mythical event—which we will not undertake to discuss—this paradisaical stage ended and humanity became what we know it to be today.<sup>1</sup>

We encounter the 'paradise myth' all over the world in more or less complex forms. Besides the paramount paradisaical note, it always has a certain number of characteristic elements, chiefly the idea of immortality. These myths may be classified into two great categories: first, those concerning the primordial close proximity between Heaven and Earth; and second, those referring to an actual means of communication between

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<sup>1</sup>Baumann, Hermann, *Schoepfung und Urzeit des Menschen im Mythos Afrikanischer Voelker* (Berlin, 1936), pp. 236 *et seq.* In Africa a certain number of paradisaical myths have become myths of creation; actually they explain the origin of death. Cf. Abrahamson, Hans, *The Origin of Death, Studies in African Mythology*, Upsala, 1951.

Heaven and Earth. This is not the place to analyse the many variations of each of these two types, nor to give precise indications of the areas of their distribution or their chronology. For our purposes, a single feature concerns us: in describing the primordial situation the myths reveal its paradisaical quality by the fact that *in illo tempore* Heaven is said to have been very near Earth, or that it was easy to reach it by means of a tree, a vine, or a ladder, or by climbing a mountain. When Heaven was rudely 'separated' from Earth, when it became 'distant' as it is today, when the tree or the vine leading from Earth to Heaven was cut, or the mountain which touched Heaven was levelled—the paradisaical state was over and humanity arrived at its present state.

Actually, all these myths show primitive man enjoying blessedness, spontaneity, and liberty, which he has most annoyingly lost as the consequence of the 'fall', that is, as the result of a mythical occurrence which has brought about the rupture between Heaven and Earth. *In illo tempore*, in that paradisaical time, the gods descended to Earth and mingled with men, and men could ascend to Heaven by climbing a mountain, a tree, a vine, or a ladder, or have themselves carried there by the birds.

A careful ethnological analysis will throw light on the cultural context of each of these two types of myths. For example, it may be possible to show that the myths about the extreme nearness of Heaven and Earth are found primarily in Oceania and in south-east Asia and are in some way connected with a matriarchal ideology.<sup>3</sup> And again, it might show that the mythical symbol of an *Axis mundi*—mountain, tree, vine, which occupies the 'centre of the Earth' and connects Earth with Heaven (a symbol already found among the most primitive tribes (Australia, pigmies, Arctic regions, etc.)—has been developed principally in pastoral and sedentary cultures, and has been handed on to the great urban cultures of Eastern antiquity.<sup>3</sup> But we need not go into these ethnological analyses. For the purposes of this article the classification of the myths will suffice.

Let us enumerate the specific characteristics of the man of the 'paradisaical' period without considering their respective contexts: immortality, spontaneity, liberty, the ability to ascend to Heaven and 'easy access' to the gods, friendship with the animals and knowledge of their language. This

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<sup>3</sup>Cf. Fischer, H. Th., 'Indonesische Paradiesmythen', *Zeitschrift fuer Ethnologie*, xiv, 1932, pp. 204–245; Kiichi Numazova, Franz, *Die Weltanfange in der japanischen Mythologie*, Paris-Luzern, 1946.

<sup>3</sup>Eliade, Mircea, *Le Mythe de l'Éternel Retour* (Paris, 1949), p. 21.

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combination of privileges and powers was lost in consequence of a primordial event: the 'fall' of man may be interpreted equally well by an ontological mutation in his own state as by a cosmic rupture.

It is, however, not uninteresting to find that through the exercise of special techniques the shaman tries to overcome the actual conditions of human life—those affecting 'fallen man'—and to reconstitute the state of primordial man as we know it by the 'paradisial myths'. We know that among the other manipulators of religion in archaic cultures the shaman is the specialist in ecstasy *par excellence*. It is because of his ecstatic power—thanks to the fact that he can at will leave his material body and undertake mystical journeys anywhere in the cosmos—that the shaman can be healer and guide as well as mystic and visionary. None but the shaman can follow the wandering and lost soul of the diseased, capture and restore it to its body. It is he who accompanies the souls of the dead to their new dwellings. No other than he may undertake the long ecstatic journeys to Heaven to lay before the gods the soul of the sacrificed animal and pray for the divine blessing. In a word, the shaman is the expert in 'matters of the spirit'; he, above all others, knows the various dramas, risks, and perils that concern 'the soul'. For 'primitive' societies, the whole complex 'shaman' represents what, in more elaborated religions, we have agreed to call mysticism and mystical experience.

The shamanic séance usually contains the following elements: (1) call to the helper spirits (for the most part these are animals) and conversation with them in a 'secret language'; (2) drum playing and dancing in preparation for the mystic journey; (3) the trance (feigned or real) during which the soul of the shaman is considered to have left his body. The goal of the whole shamanic séance is to arrive at ecstasy, for only in ecstasy can the shaman 'fly' through the air, or 'descend into Hell', in other words, fulfil his mission of healer and psychic guide.

It is significant that in order to prepare for the trance the shaman makes use of a 'secret language', or, as it is called in some regions, 'the language of animals'. On the one hand, the shaman imitates the behaviour of the animals, on the other, he tries to imitate their cries, above all those of birds. Shieroszewski has observed it among the Yakutsk shamans:

Mysterious noises are audible sometimes from above, sometimes from below, sometimes in front of, sometimes behind the shaman . . .

You seem to hear the plaintive call of the lapwing mingled with the croaking of a falcon interrupted by the whistle of the woodcock, all that is the voice of the shaman, varying the intonations of his voice—

you hear the screaming of eagles mingled with the plaints of the lapwing, the sharp tones of the woodcock and the refrain of the cuckoo.<sup>4</sup>

Castagne describes the *bacqa* of the Kirghiz-Tatars, 'Imitating with remarkable fidelity the songs of the birds and the sound of their wings'.<sup>5</sup> As Lehtisalo has observed, a good share of the words used by the shaman during the séance have their origin in the cries of birds and other animals. This is particularly true with regard to the refrains and the yodelling, most frequently founded on onomatopoeia, on phonemes and trills which plainly show that they come from the calls as well as the songs of birds.<sup>6</sup> In general, the shaman speaks during the séance with a high voice, a head tone, a falsetto, as if to emphasise that it is not he who speaks but a 'spirit' or a 'god'. But we must note at this point that the same high voice is used as a rule for intoning magic formulas. 'Magic' and 'song'—especially song like birdsong—are often designated by the same word. The Germanic term for the magic formula is *galdr* used with the verb *galan*, 'to sing', which is applied more particularly to the cries of birds.

If one takes into account the fact that during his initiation the shaman is supposed to meet an animal who will reveal to him certain secrets of his profession, teach him 'the language of animals', or become his 'helper-spirit' (familiar) it is easier to understand the relations of friendship and familiarity which are established between the shaman and the animals: he speaks their language and becomes their friend and their master. We must say at once that to obtain the friendship of the animals so that they freely accept his control over them, does not, to the mind of the primitive, imply any regression on the part of the shaman to a lower biological rank or stage. In one respect the animals are the bearers of a symbolism and mythology very significant for the religious life; to have contact with them, to speak their language, to become their friend and master means the possession of a spiritual life much more abundant than the simple human life of an ordinary mortal. In another sense, and as viewed by primitive man, animals possess considerable prestige, inasmuch as they know the secrets of life and of nature and even possess the secrets of

<sup>4</sup> Shieroszewski, W., 'Du chamanisme d'après les croyances des Yakoutes', *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, XLVI, 1902.

<sup>5</sup> Castagne, J., 'Magie et exorcism chez les Kazak-Korghizes et autres peuples turcs orientaux', *Revue des Etudes Islamiques*, 1930, pp. 53-151, p. 93. See also Eliade, Mircea, *Le chamanisme et les techniques archaïques de l'extase* (Paris, 1951), pp. 180 *et seq* and *passim*.

<sup>6</sup> Lehtisalo, T., 'Beobachtungen ueber die Toder', *Journal de la Société Finno-Ougrienne*, xviii, 1936-37. Eliade, 'Techniques de l'extase et langages secrets', *Conferenze del'Istituto italiano per il medio ed estremo Oriente*, Vol. II, 1951-1952.

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longevity and immortality. Thus, in returning to the condition of the animals, the shaman comes to share their secret knowledge and enjoys the fuller life which is theirs.

We should emphasise this fact: friendship with the animals and knowledge of their language represents a 'paradisial' syndrome. *In illo tempore*, before the 'fall', such friendship was an integral part of the primordial situation. The shaman restores part of the 'paradisial' situation of primordial man and he does this by recovering animal spontaneity (imitating animal behaviour) and speaking animal language (imitation of animal sounds). It is important to state that the dialogue with the animals or their 'incorporation' by the shaman (a mystic phenomenon not to be confused with 'possession') constitutes the pre-ecstatic stage of the séance. The shaman cannot abandon his body and set out on his mystic journey before he has recovered, by his intimacy with the animals, a blessedness and a spontaneity inaccessible to his profane, every-day state. The vital experience of this friendship with the animals advances him far beyond the general situation of 'fallen' humanity, while it permits him to return to *illud tempus* of the 'paradisial' myths.

As for the state of ecstasy itself, it comprises, as we have seen, the abandonment of the body and the mystical journey to Heaven or to Hell. Here one fact is of supreme interest: namely, that the shaman's ascent to heaven is accomplished by the instrumentality of a tree or upright pole, symbols of the Cosmic Tree or Pole. Thus the Altaic shaman uses for the séance a young birch tree with its lower branches lopped and seven, nine, or twelve steps cut into the trunk. The tree symbolises the Tree of the World, the seven, nine, or twelve steps represent the seven, nine, or twelve Heavens, in other words, the different celestial levels. After having sacrificed a horse, the shaman climbs the steps, one after the other, till he reaches the ninth Heaven where Bai Ulgan, the supreme God, resides. As he ascends he describes to his audience, in great detail, everything he sees in each one of the Heavens. Finally, in the ninth Heaven he falls down before Bai Ulgan and offers him the soul of the sacrificial horse. This episode is the climax of the ecstatic ascent of the shaman: he collapses exhausted. After some time, he rubs his eyes, as though waking from deep sleep and greets the audience as though returning after long absence.<sup>7</sup>

The symbolism of the heavenly ascension by means of a tree is also clearly exemplified by the initiation ceremony of the Buriat shamans.

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<sup>7</sup> Eliade, M., *Le chamanisme et les techniques archaïques de l'extase*, pp. 175 et seq.

The candidate clammers up a birch tree inside the hut, reaches the top and exits through the vent made for the smoke. But this vent for the smoke is known to represent the 'hole' made by the polar star in the firmament. (Among other races the tent pole is called 'Pole of the World' and likened to the polar star which also holds the tent of heaven like a pole and is called 'Nail of Heaven'.) Thus the ceremonial birch inside the hut is a representation of the 'Cosmic Tree' which is located in the 'Centre of the World' and at the top of which shines the polar star. By climbing it, the candidate enters Heaven, and that is why, when he has left the tent by the vent, he shouts to invoke the help of the gods; up there he is in their presence.<sup>8</sup>

A similar symbolism explains the role of the shamanic drum. Emsheimer has shown that the dreams or initiation ecstasies of the future shamans signify a mystic journey on the Cosmic Tree at whose summit resides the Lord of the World. From one of the branches of that tree, dropped by the Lord for that purpose, the shaman fashions the cylinder of his drum.<sup>9</sup> We know that the Cosmic Tree is supposed to be at the 'Centre of the World' and that it connects Heaven and Earth. Because the cylinder of the drum comes from the very wood of the Cosmic Tree, the shaman, while drumming, is magically brought close to that tree, that is, to the Centre of the World, where there is a possibility of going from one cosmic level to another.

Accordingly, whether he climbs the seven or nine steps cut into the ceremonial birch tree, or whether he beats his drum, the shaman is on his way to Heaven. In the first case, he laboriously mimics the ascent of the Cosmic Tree; in the second, he 'flies' to the tree by the magic action of his drum. 'Shamanic flight' is in any case very frequent and often identified with the ecstasy itself. Among the numerous variations of 'shamanic flight' we are chiefly interested in the 'flight' to the Centre of the World'; there we find the Tree, the Mountain, the Cosmic Pole, which connect Earth with Heaven. And it is there that we find the 'hole' made by the polar star. As he climbs the Mountain, as he ascends the Tree, as he flies or comes up through the 'hole' to the summit of the heavenly vault, the shaman effects his ascent to Heaven.

We know that *in illo tempore*, in the mythical time of 'Paradise', there was a Mountain, a Tree, a Pole, or a Vine which connected Earth with Heaven and that primordial man could readily pass from one to the other

<sup>8</sup> Eliade, *ibid.*, pp. 116 *et seq.*

<sup>9</sup> Emsheimer, E., 'Schamanentrommel und Trommelbaum', *Ethnos*, 1946, pp. 166-181; Eliade, *Le chamanisme*, pp. 159 *et seq.*

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by climbing them. Communication with Heaven was easy *in illo tempore*, and the meeting with the gods took place in actuality. The memory of these 'paradisial' days is still very lively among 'primitive' people. The Koryaks remember the mythical era of the hero Great-Crow when men could ascend to Heaven without trouble; they add that in our days only the shamans can do this. The Bakairi of Brazil believe that for the shaman Heaven is no higher than a house, and therefore he can reach it in the twinkling of an eye.<sup>10</sup>

This means that during this ecstasy the shaman recovers the 'paradisial' state. He re-establishes the easy communication as *in illo tempore* between Heaven and Earth. For him the Mountain or the Cosmic Tree again becomes the actual method of attaining Heaven, such as it was before the 'fall'. For the shaman, Heaven again comes close to Earth; no higher than a house, just as it was before the primordial rupture. Furthermore, the shaman re-establishes friendly relations with the animals. In other words, the ecstasy restores, though only provisionally and for a restricted number of persons—the 'mystics'—the initial state of all humanity. Thus the mystic experience of 'primitive' peoples is equivalent to a *return to the beginning*, a reversion to the mythical days of a 'Lost Paradise'. For the shaman in the state of ecstasy, this world, this fallen world—which according to modern terminology is governed by the laws of Time and History—no longer exists. True, there is a great difference between the situation of primordial man and that restored by the shaman during ecstasy; the shaman can only temporarily abolish the rupture between Heaven and Earth. He ascends to Heaven 'in spirit', no longer *in concreto* as did primordial man. He does not abrogate death (all the ideas of immortality found among primitive peoples imply—as they do among civilised ones—a preliminary death; that is to say, that the immortality is always a post-mortem, 'spiritual' one).

To sum up: the paramount mystic experience of primitive societies, that is to say, shamanism, reveals this 'yearning for Paradise', the wish to return to a state of blessedness and liberty such as existed before the 'fall', to restore contact between Heaven and Earth; in a word, it reveals the wish to abolish everything which has changed in the structure of the Cosmos itself and in the manner of man's existence since the primordial break. The ecstasy of the shaman recovers largely the paradisial situation: he has regained the friendship of the animals; by his 'flight' or by his

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<sup>10</sup>Eliade, *Le chamanisme*, pp. 235 *et seq.*, 419 *et seq.*; cf. also *ibid.*, pp. 227, 295.

ascension he has again linked Heaven and Earth; up there in Heaven he meets again face to face the celestial Being and speaks to him in person as he was wont to do *in illo tempore*.

One finds an analogous situation in the most recent and most elaborate mysticism in existence, namely in Christian mysticism. Christianity is dominated by the yearning for Paradise. Turning to the East during prayer is connected with paradisaical themes—it appears as an expression of the yearning for Paradise.<sup>11</sup> The same symbolism of paradise is attested in the ritual of baptism: ‘Contrasted with Adam, who falls under the domination of Satan and is driven from Paradise, the catechumen is as though freed from such domination by the New Adam and led back to Paradise.’<sup>12</sup>

Christianity thus appears as the realisation of Paradise, ‘Christ is the Tree of Life’ (Ambrosius, *De Isaac*, 5, 43) or the ‘fount of Paradise’ (Ambrosius, *De Paradiso*, 3, 272, 10). But this realisation of Paradise is on three successive levels. Baptism is the entrance into Paradise (Cyril of Jerusalem, *Procatech*, P. G. xxxiii, 357A); the life of mysticism is a deeper penetration into Paradise (Ambrosius, *De Paradiso*, 1, 1); finally death conducts the martyrs into Paradise (*Passio Perpet.*, P.L. III, 28a). It is indeed remarkable that we find this paradisaical vocabulary applied to these three aspects of the Christian life.<sup>13</sup>

It is mysticism, then, that best reveals the restoration of the paradisaical life. The first syndrome of this restoration is the renewed control over animals. As is well known, Adam at the beginning was told to provide names for the animals (Genesis, II, 19); for to name them is the same as to dominate them. St. Thomas thus explained the power of Adam over creatures not endowed with reason: ‘The mind commands by its rule the sensitive appetites, such as the passions of anger and of desire which, in a certain way, do obey reason. Hence in the state of innocence, man by his command ruled over the other animals.’<sup>14</sup> But, ‘both giving names and changing names played an equally important role in eschatological pronouncements. . . . The Messianic kingdom brings about a moral conversion

<sup>11</sup> Danielou, Jean, S. J., *Bible et Liturgie* (Paris, 1951), p. 16.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>13</sup> Danielou, *Sacramentum futuri* (Paris, 1950), p. 16.

<sup>14</sup> Dom Anselme Stolz, *Theologie de la mystique* (Chevetogne, 1947), p. 104.



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in men and even in animals . . . conversions characteristic of the world made by the hand of God.’<sup>15</sup> In the mystic stage the animals are often subject to the saint as they were to Adam. ‘The history of the early Fathers of the monastic era shows—such cases are not infrequent—that they were obeyed by the wild beasts which they fed as they would domestic animals’ (Dom Stolz, *op. cit.*, p. 31). Saint Francis carries on the tradition of the desert Fathers. Friendship with wild beasts and control over animals by their own consent are manifest signs of the return to a paradisaical state.

In the same way we can observe the paradisaical symbolism of the churches and the monastic garden. The landscape which surrounds the monk represents the earthly paradise: in a certain way it anticipates it. But it is above all the mystical experience as such which interests us. As Dom Stolz has very well shown, the typical Christian mystical experience is the ascension to Heaven of Saint Paul: ‘I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man (whether in the body or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) How that he was caught up into paradise and heard unutterable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.’ (Second Epistle to the Corinthians xii. 2, 3, 4.) We need not dwell here on the ascensional symbolism of Christian mysticism: in it the ladder to Paradise plays an important role. The various degrees of contemplation are the steps in the ascent of the soul toward God. However, Saint Paul has stated precisely that this mystical ascension brings man to Paradise: the ‘unutterable words’ which he has heard, are they not the words of God Himself? For Adam in Paradise, as Saint Gregory tells us, ‘delighted in frequent communion with God’ (Dom Stolz, *op. cit.*, p. 111).

Accordingly, although Christianity was permeated with the yearning for Paradise, only the mystics were able to achieve its partial restoration: friendship with the animals, ascension to Heaven and meeting with God. We find the same situation in ancient religions: a certain ‘yearning for Paradise’ appears at all levels of the religious life<sup>16</sup> but it shines out with greatest brilliance in the mystic experience, that is to say, in the ecstasy of the shaman. The specific characteristics of the restoration of *illud tempus* are the same: friendship with the animals, ascension to Heaven, conversation with God in Heaven. Just as does the Christian saint, the shaman in

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<sup>15</sup>Danielou, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>16</sup>Cf. Eliade, *Traité d'Histoire des religions* (Paris, 1949), pp. 321 *et seq.*

ecstasy recovers Paradise only provisionally; for neither of them can abolish death, in other terms, neither of them can re-establish the condition of primordial man.

Finally, one might remember that for Christian tradition Paradise has become all the more inaccessible because of the fire which surrounds it, or, which amounts to the same thing, because its approach is guarded by angels with flaming swords. 'God', says Laetantius (*Divin. Instit.*, II, 12), 'has expelled man from Paradise and surrounded it with fire so that men may no longer enter.' This is what Saint Thomas means when he explains that Paradise is no longer accessible to us, principally 'because of the heat which keeps it away from our lands' (Dom Stolz, *op. cit.*, p. 24). For this reason he who wants to enter Paradise must first cross the flames surrounding it. 'In other words, only he who has been purified by fire may thereupon enter paradise. Thus the cleansing process precedes the mystic union, and the mystics do not hesitate to put this purification of the spirit on the same level as the purifying fire which leads to paradise . . .' (Dom Stolz, *ibid.* p. 32).

These few citations will suffice to sum up and demonstrate the doctrine of the purifying fire which guards the entrance to Paradise. We will not go into a discussion of the symbolism of fire in Christian mysticism and theology. It is significant, however, that a similar symbolism may be observed in quite a number of shamanic techniques: witness the well-known 'mastery of fire'. In fact, the shamans are always and everywhere considered 'the masters of fire': during the séances they swallow live coals, they touch the burning flame, they tread on fire. The shamans of the earliest cultures already bear witness to this mastery of fire; it is as much a part of shamanism as the ecstasy, the ascent to Heaven, and the understanding of animal language. The ideology implied by this mastery of fire is not easy to unravel: the primitive world (indeed all popular cultures in general) make a distinction between the 'spirits' and human beings on the ground of the formers' 'insensitivity to fire', that is to say, their ability to resist the heat of the live coals. The shamans are said to have got beyond the condition of man and to share in the condition of the spirits: just like spirits, they become invisible, they fly in the air, they ascend to Heaven, they descend to Hell. And finally they, too, enjoy 'insensitivity to fire'. This mastery of fire transposes their 'transcendence of human conditions' into terms perceptible to the senses; here as elsewhere the shaman proves that he has adopted a 'spiritual state', that he has become—or may become during the séance—a 'spirit'.

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If one compares the purifying fire of Christian tradition as it surrounds Paradise with the 'mastery of fire' as practised by the shamans, one notes at least one common feature: in both cases the act of braving the fire without harm is the sign that the human state has been overcome. But for Christianity, just as for the elder cultures, the present state of humanity is the result of the 'fall'. Consequently to do away with this state, even if only provisionally, is equivalent to re-establishing the primordial condition of man, in other words, to banish time, to go backward, to recover the 'paradisial' *illud tempus*. How precarious this recovery of primordial condition is, is shown, above all, by the circumstance that the shaman obtains it by imitating the state of the 'spirits'. We have already noted this in connexion with other shamanic techniques; during the trance, it is not the shaman who flies to the Heavens but only his 'spirit'. A similar situation prevails in Christian mysticism: only the 'soul', purified by fire, may enter Paradise.

The analogies which we have just stated seem important: it follows as a corollary that there is no break of continuity between the ideology of the 'primitive' mystic experience and Judeo-Christian mysticism. Among the 'primitive' peoples, just as among the saints and the Christian theologians, mystic ecstasy is a return to Paradise, expressed by the overcoming of Time and History (the 'fall') and the recovery of the primordial state of Man.

Let us make it clear: in uncovering these similarities we do not pretend to make value judgments on the content of the various mystical experiences, whether 'primitive' or otherwise. All we mean is that their ideologies contain as a kernel, a focal point, 'the yearning for Paradise'. Of course such a conclusion does not exclude the many differences between primitive and Judeo-Christian mysticism as well as those among the various schools of Christian mysticism. On the other hand, we have purposely chosen to compare Christianity and the most ancient type of mystic experience omitting the great tradition of the East: although the 'setting aside of Time' and the abolition of History are the essential elements of every mystical experience and therefore also of Eastern mysticism, it seems to us that the 'paradisial' elements are better preserved in the elder mysticisms. In certain ways, the comparisons between the forms of 'primitive' mysticism and Christian mysticism have a stronger basis than those between the latter and the Indian, Chinese, and Japanese mysticisms.

Although we cannot attempt to give in these few pages a comparative study of mysticism, the chief result of our inquiry should be stressed: the complete ideological continuity between the most elementary forms of

mystical experience and Christianity. At the 'beginning' as well as at the 'end' of the religious history of Man, we find the same 'yearning for Paradise'. If we take into account the fact that the 'yearning for Paradise' is equally discernible in the general religious attitude of early man we have the right to assume that the mystical memory of a blessedness without history haunts man from the moment he becomes aware of his situation in the cosmos. Thus there opens a new perspective for the study of archaic anthropology. This is not the place to enter upon such a study. Suffice it to say that, in the light of all that has been noted above, certain features of 'primitive' spirituality which were considered 'aberrant' are not indeed to be considered as such. The imitation of animal cries by the shamans, so impressive to the observer, has at times been considered by anthropologists as manifesting a pathological 'possession' whereas, on the contrary, they reveal the wish to recover friendship with animals and thus to re-establish the primordial 'paradise'. The ecstatic trance, no matter what its phenomenology, is 'aberrant' only if its spiritual significance is disregarded. In reality, the shaman, as we have seen, is seeking to re-establish the contact between Heaven and Earth which the 'fall' disrupted. The 'mastery of fire' likewise is not a 'savage superstition' but, on the contrary, shows how the shaman partakes of the state of the 'spirits'.

Viewed from its own angle, all the strange behaviour of the shaman reveals the highest form of spirituality; it is actually part of a coherent ideology, possessing great nobility. The myths which make up this ideology are among the richest and most beautiful we possess, they are the myths of Paradise and the 'fall', the immortality of primordial man and his communion with God; of the origin of death and of the discovery of the 'spirit' (in every sense of that word). All this is not without significance for the understanding and evaluation of the 'primitive' and, in general, of the nature of non-European man. Too often Western man allows himself to be moved by the *manifestation* of an ideology, while ignoring the one thing which he should know, the ideology itself, that is to say, the myths that constitute it. The *manifestations* depend on local customs and cultural styles, and the latter may or may not be directly accessible. Impression, accordingly, determines judgment: a ceremony with masks is judged 'beautiful', a certain form of dance is 'sinister', an initiation rite is 'savage' or 'aberrant'. But if we take the trouble to understand the ideology which underlies all these 'manifestations', if we study the myths and the symbols which condition them, we may abandon the subjectivity of 'impressions' and arrive at a more objective viewpoint.

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At times the comprehension of the ideology is sufficient to re-establish the 'normality' of a certain behaviour. Recall one single example: the imitation of animal cries. For over a century, the strange cries of the shaman were felt to prove his mental aberration. But their basis was quite different: it was the yearning for Paradise, which haunted the minds of Isaiah and of Virgil, sustained the sainthood of the Fathers of the Church and came to glorious flower in the life of St. Francis of Assisi.