Summary of course C.7-3: Elements of the Philosophy of Religion (1994–1995).

General

The course Elements of the Philosophy of Religion offers an extensive ontological and phenomenological investigation into the nature, manifestations and value for life of religion as a human orientation towards the sacred.

Starting from the Latin re-ligere - paying reverent and careful attention to what is holy - the course analyses how religious consciousness relates both to everyday profane reality and to the world of invisible forces.

Through the three levels of scholarly inquiry (hierography, hierology and hierosophy) and Van der Leeuw's phenomenological method, the course examines a wide range of religious phenomena: from divination, witchcraft and the three basic structures of magic (similarity, connection and sacrifice) to animistic conceptions of the soul, soul-bodies, fertility rites and the worship of dema beings.

Finally, the course analyses Platonic divine inspiration (mania), the ambivalence of numinous forces and the dangers of occult-demonic intrusion, culminating in the liberating and purifying power of Christian prayer, which is rooted in the moral order of the Decalogue and the loving reality of the Holy Trinity.

1: Philosophical Foundations, Method and the Nature of the Sacred

The philosophy of religion does not investigate religion as a passing illusion, but as a fundamental act of the human mind directed towards the reality of the sacred. The word 'religion' derives from the Latin re-ligere: to pay close, reverent and careful attention to what is holy, as opposed to neg-ligere (to neglect or ignore). The course examines both the existence (actual being) and the essence (mode of being) of religious phenomena.

To analyse the domain of religion scientifically and philosophically, the course distinguishes three successive levels of inquiry:

- *Hierography*: the purely descriptive and narrative recording of religious facts, rituals and symbols in time and space.
- *Hierology*: the systematic and typological classification of these facts in order to reveal universal patterns, essential characteristics and historical lines of development.
- *Hierosophy or hiero-analysis*: the ontological and philosophical investigation of foundations that evaluates the truth and value for life of the sacred.

Within the phenomenology of religion (building on Chantepie de la Saussaye and G. van der Leeuw), the method employs epochè (the provisional suspension of judgement about whether a religious claim is factually true) and eidetic reduction (the search for the essence, or eidos, of the phenomenon).

Crucial here is syn-axiomatics: the researcher's willingness to enter empathetically into the presuppositions (axiomata) of the religious person. Without this empathetic attitude (sympatheia), the sacred remains a blind spot, and the deeper meaning of religious action cannot be understood.

2: Divination, Magic and the Three Structural Forms of Life Force

A large part of the history of religion unfolds in the domain of divination and magic. Divination (mantic practice) responds to a universal human condition: confronting uncertainty about fate and the future. Through boundary experiences, shamanism and concentrated expansion of consciousness, the diviner seeks hidden information in the universe.

Magic (sorcery) is essentially the ability to consciously control and direct the ubiquitous, subtle life force — referred to as mana, dunamis, virtus or soul-substance — in order to solve concrete problems.

The course distinguishes three fundamental structural forms of magic:

- *Similarity magic* (imitative or metaphorical): based on the maxim similia similibus ("like is influenced by like"). An action performed on a model or image produces an analogous effect on the original.

- *Connection magic* (contagious or metonymic): based on the principle that things once in physical or essential contact remain connected through an invisible bond. An example is manipulating a lock of hair or a nail clipping in order to affect the whole person.

- *Sacrificial magic* (sacrificial): the voluntary or ritual surrender of a valuable part, such as a sacrificial animal or crop, in order to save the whole, the community or life itself.

The magician acts as the one who knows (viësjtsjii) and, in premodern cultures, often functions as the sacred guardian of social order and tribal laws.

3: Animism, Soul-Bodies and Subtle Energies

In contrast to the narrowed modern conception of animism as merely a primitive superstition, the course argues that animism expresses the

universal insight that everything that exists possesses a dual reality: a visible, gross-material body and an invisible, ethereal and subtle-material soul-body (ochêma, aura or kuia). The soul is not an abstract, free-floating fiction, but possesses its own subtle geometry and energy density.

In many traditional religions, such as Haitian Vodou, the soul is understood as having multiple components. A distinction is made between the life-soul that animates the biological body (n'âme) and the individual conscience and personality soul (ti bon ange). When the latter is separated or captured through magical intervention, phenomena such as zombification may arise.

The course also discusses how subtle energy flows in the human body - such as nei kung in the Chinese tradition, Tantrism in India, and teachings about the chakras and lymphatic systems - are used to regenerate life force, expand consciousness and protect people against deterioration.

4: Fertility Rites, Dema Deities and the Kumo Person

Fertility religion forms the historical core of human worship. Because human survival depends on the continuation of plant life, animal life and offspring, the generation and regeneration of life are experienced as a divine mystery.

A specific and profound form of this is the worship of dema beings. Dema are mythical primordial ancestors from the beginning of time. According to the myth, a dema being was killed and sacrificed in primordial times, after which essential cultivated crops, such as the coconut palm or taro, and social institutions emerged from its body parts. Annual dema rituals seek to make this primordial event present again. Associated with this are magical objects and fetishes in which magical powers are concentrated to secure good fortune or ward off evil.

A dark parallel reality is the phenomenon of the Kumo person (witchcraft) in New Guinea. Kumo is a destructive, antisocial form of magical intrusion in which the witch feeds on the invisible "inner essence" (kuia) of victims, leading to illness and death.

5: Expanded Consciousness, Intrusion, Ambivalence and Christian Prayer

The course explores the Platonic idea of divine rapture (mania): a state of expanded consciousness that stands above ordinary everyday reasoning. Plato

distinguishes four forms of divine rapture: the Apollonian (divination and prophecy), the Dionysian (ritual purification and invocation), the Muse-inspired (poetic inspiration) and the erotic (the upward striving towards Beauty).

However, numinous forces outside the biblical tradition display a profound ambivalence: they constitute a "harmony of opposites" (mysterium tremendum et fascinans) in which salvation and calamity, good and evil, are inextricably intertwined. When human rituals become detached from a moral framework, the danger arises of spiritual intrusion, obsession and demonic influence — the entry of impure, parasitic spirits or larvae into the structure of the human soul.

In contrast to the arbitrariness and dangers of the magical-animistic system, the course presents the liberating power of Christian prayer. Prayer is not magical coercion, but a transformation of consciousness through which the believer takes a stand within reality.

Christian prayer rests on two pillars:

- *The Decalogue* (the Ten Commandments): the moral and conscientious alignment of the human will, which purifies and elevates emotional and energetic life.
- *The Lord's Prayer and the Holy Trinity*: the prayer of supplication addressed to God as loving Father, through the Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Spirit.

Where pagan and magical forces remain trapped in the earthly cycle of ascent and decline, the Holy Trinity breaks through this circle. Christian prayer enables the believer to survive in a disturbed world, purify the soul of impure stains and ascend towards eternal, glorified life.