Text 7: Homo religiosus – Additional Notes

Summary

This text offers a religious-studies and anthropological analysis of rituals, magical practices, sexual symbolism, and secret structures within archaic and premodern societies.

The text combines ethnological eyewitness accounts (such as those of Jacques Lantier) with phenomenological analyses (including those of Th.P. van Baaren, G. van der Leeuw, and W.B. Kristensen) and Biblical perspectives.

1. Judgement, Death, and Justice (7.1)

In archaic communities, the administration of justice is closely connected with the sacred world. In an ordeal, a magician administers a poisonous plant mixture to establish guilt or innocence; anyone who dies is considered guilty.

Sacred objects or fetishes (such as the *tinse* in Upper Volta) are also used to deliver verdicts through ancestral spirits.

In the judgement of the dead, villagers ask the spirit of a victim to identify the perpetrator through ritual movements of a corpse being carried.

Among the Kabré of Togo, a magician's funeral is intended to prevent reincarnation in newborn children. In Gabon, judges act as interpreters of the ancestor Byeri and the plant spirit Mundju after consuming the hallucinogenic plant *iboga*.

In contrast to these nature religions, the Biblical tradition (including Jeremiah 13) presents an immanent sanction or a law of sowing and reaping: those who surrender themselves to nature rituals experience the internal consequences of their own deviation.

Anthropologically, these practices are based on dynamism (belief in life force or *dunamis*) and kratophany (the manifestation of power).

2. Magic, Rituals, and Supernatural Forces (7.2)

Magical rituals serve to restore cosmic order.

Among the Luba, a possessed woman is healed by introducing a lizard, regarded as a protective spirit, into her vagina through a cow's horn.

Among the Kirdi, a rainmaker uses an imitation of the female sexual organs, chicken blood, and *melopeias* (ritual chants) to summon a fertile phallic cloud and rain.

Among the Bakongo, the ability to change shape, for example into a crocodile, is attributed to specific aspects of the soul (*yembo* and *kasasa*).

A curse or bewitchment is defined as an energetic hold over a person, manifested in extreme loss of energy, despondency, physical complaints, and strange phenomena.

The use of amulets or *gris-gris* also illustrates how magical objects can compel psychological and ritual behavior.

3. Myths, Gods, and Symbolism (7.3)

Societies venerate mythical animals and symbols believed to embody the highest life force.

Among the Ngbandi, the mythical serpent is known as the Toro (Supreme Spirit) and is closely associated with twins.

The concept of the Supreme Being in Black Africa has a unique status: God has no equal, transcends everything, and comes especially to the fore when the ordinary order of the world is seriously disrupted.

Sacred masks represent the visible presence (*mana*) of founding ancestors. The veneration of the Mother Goddess (such as Shakti Kali/Durga in India or the living Kumari in Nepal) shows that male power depends on female energy as its underlying foundation.

The Sardinian Argiadance employs erotic incantation rituals to appease malevolent spirits (*argia*) associated with insects.

4. Religion and Sexuality (7.4)

In nature religions, sexuality has a deeply sacred character. Among the Kikuyu, sexual culture derives from the myth of Mumbere and Moombi, with rituals such as *ngweko* (ritual masturbation) intended to preserve virginity.

Among the Yombe and Kongo, the woman is regarded as the sacred tabernacle of the ancestral deity. Her virginity and initiation, guided by the Mama Mfumu and Kumbi, ensure that the deity impregnates her through her husband.

Clitoridectomy directs sexual desire entirely towards marriage after initiation. Wooden figures such as the *prokondo* (sacred phallus) serve as magical messengers of fertility. In contrast to this ritual sanctity stand abuses such as the cruel ritual rapes committed by the secret Simba society.

In Eastern Tantrism, sexual life force is transformed into an expansion of consciousness through strict discipline involving *asana*, chakras, and *kundalini*.

5. Secret Religious Structures (7.5)

Secret societies preserve binding ancestral traditions. The Manja society has initiation myths centered on the monster Ngakola, in which the candidate is “devoured” and “reborn” as a new person.

The Leopard Men demand ritual murders, often involving the killing of relatives, and the consumption of organ meat in order to achieve magical unity with the predator.

Among the *fetisjeuses* of Dahomey, women undergo a three-year initiation, after which they demonstrate their power by swimming unharmed among crocodiles.

Female societies such as Nyembe in Gabon perform closed rites involving an earthen phallus.

Finally, in classical Rome, the virgin Vestal priestesses guarded the sacred hearth fire of Vesta. As *amatae* of the hearth god (*deus Fascinus*), any breach of chastity led to their being buried alive as a ritual punishment for disrupting the cosmic life force.