Text 8: Theology: Phenomenological

Summary

This text offers a religious-studies and phenomenological analysis of the concept of the 'sacred', the operation of invisible forces (mana, dunamis), animistic concepts, and the conceptual evolution from primitive dynamism to biblical monotheism.

1. Theology and the Nature of the Sacred (8.1)

Phenomenological theology investigates what religion is, beyond any specific religious belief or irreligion. According to Nathan Söderblom, the decisive criterion for religion is not primarily belief in God, but the fundamental distinction between the sacred and the profane.

The sacred manifests itself through aretalogy or signs of power (aretè, dunamis, biblical gebura). This manifestation of power can have either a positive or a pejorative meaning (such as fables or false spirits).

At the everyday level, the Swedish countryside illustrates this through the concept of *maktstulen* ('robbed of power'), referring to a horse or person when the normal course of events is disrupted by black arts, and through the idea of the 'power bite' in food.

2. Manaism and Kratophany (8.2)

According to R. H. Codrington, Melanesian religion revolves around belief in mana: a supernatural, invisible force that is independent of physical power and can be harnessed for one's own benefit. The concept of a Supreme Being is foreign to this culture.

Mana is impersonal in itself, but is associated with and directed by individuals, nature spirits or the souls of the deceased (ghosts). Kratophany is the manifestation of this power, for example when an unusually shaped stone bestows exceptional fertility upon a tree or garden.

Authority and leadership within the tribe depend directly on the amount of mana a person manifests.

3. Sacred Formulas, Apocalypse and the Harmony of Opposites (8.3–8.4)

Sacred power may be concentrated in archaic sacred formulas or chants (as among the Canadian Indigenous peoples), whose efficacy belongs exclusively to their rightful owner.

Apocalypse means the revelation of what is hidden, as when the powerful soul of a deceased person (tindalo) demonstrates its power through a canoe

rescue or a war council. Practices such as headhunting serve to appropriate the mana of others.

According to W. B. Kristensen, sacred power embodies a harmony of opposites: mana brings about both healing and illness, favorable conditions and violent storms, and toxicity as well as salvation. This makes morality within a purely manaistic culture extremely flexible.

4. Dynamism, Animism and the Multiplicity of Souls (8.5–8.6)

G. van der Leeuw defines dynamism as belief in dunamis (life force) as an empirically experienced cause in people and things, evoking feelings of awe and dread.

Opposed to this primitive monism is biblical supernaturalism, in which the prophets associate God's holiness with an absolute ethical demand and reject what is morally inferior ('the flesh').

E. Tylor introduced animism (belief in souls), which finds expression in animatism (natural things that are alive without possessing a separate soul), animate natural phenomena and the indwelling of spirits.

In Haitian Vodou (W. Davis), there is a multiplicity of souls: alongside the corpse (corps cadavre) and the life soul (n'âme), one distinguishes the z'étoile (star of fortune), the gros bon ange (cosmic energy) and the ti bon ange (individual personality and memory).

Supernatural phenomena such as possession by a loa or zombification specifically affect this ti bon ange.

5. Transmigration of Souls, Manism and Words of Power (8.7–8.8)

Among archaic peoples, the transmigration of souls rarely means the reincarnation of an individual soul (begu or shraman), but rather the transfer of 'soul substance', life force or name-power (tendi, sumàngat, kra) to descendants.

Manism (H. Spencer) concerns the veneration of ancestral souls (manes). Research into psychogenealogy (A. Ancelin Schützenberger) and traditions in Okinawa show how emotionally charged words of power (paroles fortes) or historical curses can have transgenerational effects.

Examples include Cato's declaration (*Delenda*), which influences sex change among descendants in Tunisia, and the curse of the Templar Jacques de Molay, which affected thirteen generations of French kings.

6. Hierarchy of Life Force and Monotheism (8.9)

In the phenomenology of religion, one recognizes a hierarchy of causal power: from the individual soul and mana, through manism (in which all the dead become divine sh Xikwembu), and culture heroes, to the *deus otiosus*

(such as the absent creator Tsjuok among the Shilluk). A. Lang, W. Schmidt and R. Pettazzoni point to the existence of primordial monotheism among hunters, pastoralists and agriculturalists.

In biblical monotheism, this concept reaches its absolute form: as Creator (*bara*), God is the sole and absolute source of creative life force (*ruach*), with holiness inextricably linked to moral purity.