THE CONCEPT OF MOVEMENT IN HISTORY OF RELIGIONS:

a Religio-Historical Study of Reindeer in the Spiritual Life of North Eurasian Peoples

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Introduction

Theoretical interest in religion is by no means a unique phenomenon of our day only. Yet, this theoretical interest has, in the last hundred years, occupied a far more important place in the social and humanistic sciences than ever before. There can be no doubt that the urgency scholars and philosophers have felt to give an objective account of religion and of the activities of religious man, stems from the avowed a- or anti-religious situation of modern Western man himself, however wrongly he may construe his own spiritual life. Our theologians of today who crusade through the countryside proclaiming the death of God and the dawn of a new age, though an extreme case, perhaps show most clearly the curious situation of Western man. For, it is not insignificant that the death of God must be proclaimed, and not stopping at that, demonstrated at great length. Religion and religious man have been and are present in the total history of mankind as a glaring fact. Indeed, something is there to be explained. Unfortunately, explanation has all too often taken the form of explaining away. This is true not only for the more blatant theories of the Marxists and positivists, but also for the classical theories of Frazer, Taylor and Freud, and even those of Durkheim and Jung. All these attempts at taking into account the phenomenon of religion tend in varying degrees toward reductionism, that is, the reduction or transformation of religious phenomena to something else, whether it be social organization, psychological structures, human deception, etc.

In the face of all this, the positive scientific studies of the great historians of religion G. van der Leeuw, R. Pettazzoni and M. Eliade
have come as an immeasurable contribution to our understanding of man, that is, man as homo religiosus. “It appears that "homo religiosus" is to be found nowhere else than where "homo' himself is found," said van der Leeuw. And further, ... “Only he who is not yet human, not yet conscious, is no "homo religiosus".” 1) In myth Pettazzoni saw the true history of archaic man which could be seen in no other wise, for "myth is not pure fiction; it is not fable but history, a "true story" and not a "false" one.” 2) The work of M. Eliade, devoted to the structure and meaning of religious symbols, has not only provided a solid scientific basis for the study of primitive and archiac religion, but has also shown the religio-symbolic situation of "homo religiosus" to be that of man in general.

But, having shown that man is always also religious man does not put a stop to the problem of man's religious orientation. For the scholar, it should not be a matter of merely cataloguing and “filling in” with factual information the interpretive frameworks already at our disposal. Eliade has underlined the very danger of the breakdown of humanistic studies generally, and more specifically, of the history of religions, into specialistic divisions which seem to lead nowhere save the augmentation of “the number, already terrifying, of documents classified in archives, awaiting electronic computers to take them in charge.” 3) And we agree that “creative hermeneutics” must constantly be recognized as a model for our endeavours. As a matter of necessity the scholar is obliged to interpret, as a matter of integrity he is obliged to interpret according to the human testimony of his materials, not the wooden or foreign framework which is not his own nor fits his final image of man. The example of Nietzsche's rejuvenating effect on Continental philosophy should make us aware of our own situation and capabilities, says Eliade. Though, “certainly that is not to say that the historian of religion ought to imitate the style or mannerisms of Nietzsche, It is rather his freedom of expression that should be underlined.” 4)

1) De primitieve mensch en de religie, (Groningen-Batavia, 1937), p. 160 and 165.
3) “Crises and Renewal in History of Religions”, History of Religions, 5, 1, (1965) p. 16.
4) Ibid., p. 10.