Summary

The Revenge of the 'Primitives':
History of Religions from Neanderthals to New Age

A new framework for the general history of religions is offered in this study. I discuss first the reasons why I have developed it. They are [1] the need to replace the current defective division of humankind's religions in primitive, ancient and world religions by a more adequate one; [2] the need to treat them as objects of the comparative study of religion(s); and [3] the need to enhance the explanatory power of comparative religion. The framework I propose conceives the general history of religions as part and parcel of the general history of the societies of humankind. It consists of six types of human societies and six corresponding kinds of religions. The study concludes with 'the revenge of the "primitives"' by demonstrating that the marks of the earliest religions have re-emerged in the most recent ones.

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The Revenge of the 'Primitives': History of Religion from Neanderthal to New Age

'As a Londoner gets drawn more and more into the vortex of industrial society, his religious ideas seem to approximate more and more those of the pygmy'.[1]

This article proposes a new framework for the general history of religion. I first discuss why I have developed it. I then outline its basic assumption, to wit that mankind's religious history is constrained and shaped by the history of human societies. Next I discuss the six types of societies that have emerged in the course of the history of humankind, and the six types of religions that correspond with them. I conclude with the revenge of the 'primitives'.

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[1] Douglas 1983: 36

Three reasons for this bold venture

In the comparative study of religion(s), religions have primarily been treated since 1900 as a-historical entities. Leertouwer called the systematic study of religion an 'anatomy of religions',[2] as Tiele did earlier,[3] dissecting religions into 'phenomena' and arranging them in the timeless framework of analytical synchronicity.[4] Though such an a-historical overview does create helpful insights, van Baaren and Leertouwer (1980) nevertheless called their introduction to comparative religion the *Labyrinth of the Gods*. Religions, however, are historical events that are radically rooted in, constrained by, and shaped by the histories of human societies. They must therefore be examined as such in the comparative study of religion(s).[5]

The general history of religion(s), a subdiscipline of comparative religion,[6] is available for that purpose. Since the rise of the phenomenology of religion, however, this discipline has been anxiously avoided by scholars of religion(s) for fear of 'insufficiently substantiated generalizations and [..] dilettantism'.[7] In textbooks of comparative religion, the general history of religions is either not mentioned at all,[8] or gets only a few lines to explain why this subject has in fact remained an empty shell since 1900.[9]

In this article I sketch an outline of a general history of religions that does not strip religions of their embedment in the general history of human societies. I propose a framework that allows us

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[2] Van Baaren & Leertouwer 1980: 243

[3] Tiele 1901: 8-9

[4] Some phenomenologies of religion did devote some attention to diachronics. Bleeker (1956: 7, 82-95; 1973: 158, 191-199) and Van der Leeuw (1933: §§ 94-95; 1948: 156-1570) briefly discussed the 'entelechy' or 'dynamics' of religious phenomena. Van der Leeuw (1933: §§ 89-102; 1948: 157-160) and Mensching (1959: 58-118) in addition designed a 'historical typology' of religions. Frick (1928), Mensching (1959: 278-288), and Bleeker (1956: 89) shed light on the 'caesuras' in the general history of religion, while Van der Leeuw (1933: §§ 103-108; 1948: 160-161) and Mensching (1959: 288-302) sketched typical stages in the development of religions. However, they presented religious 'developments' exclusively within the confines of the history of religions without any link to the history of human societies. Or they rejected that link explicitly (Frick 1928: 13-14). Where it is present, it is used selectively to explain why a religion disappeared (Bleeker 1956: 87), or to explain the history of a society from the history of religion (Van der Leeuw 1948: 48).

[5] Rudolph 1985: 28-29

[6] In my view, a general history of religion can only be developed from the comparative study of the histories of single religions. I therefore take a different position from that adopted by Wach (1924) and most other scholars of comparative religion. Wach divided the science of religion(s) into a historical branch working with longitudinal sections, and a systematic part studying cross-sections. He therefore conceived the general history of religion as a part of the historical study of religions only, and not as part of the systematic study of religion(s) (see Flasche 1978: 177-192). My approach is closest to that of Brelich (1970) and Meslin (1976), who insist that religions are historical realities, and that diachrony must ground and correct synchronic analysis.

[7.] Adriaanse, Krop & Leertouwer 1987: 68; Rudolph 1985: 25-26; Sharpe 1978: 12, 13-14, 17; Brelich 1970: 38

[8] E.g. Greschat 1988; Cancik, Gladigow & Laubscher 1988

[9] See van Baaren 1973: 45; van Baaren & Leertouwer 1980: 243; Smart 1978: 17-18; Mulder 1985a: 37-38; Rudolph 1985: 30; Waardenburg 1986: 72, 78-79; 1990: 73, 79; Stolz 1988: 186. Bleeker subsumed the general history of religions in part in his phenomenology (as the study of entelechy), but limited it to 'groundwork for solving all kinds of general questions', such as the origin of religion; whether religion is a panhuman phenomenon; why religions die; whether a hierarchy can be established between religions; and whether there is "a certain 'progress' in mankind's religious knowledge" (Bleeker 1973: 16).

to compare religions as constrained and shaped by the general history of the societies of human-kind. The outline I propose embraces the entire history of the societies and religions of humankind, from paleolithic time till now, and in their full historical diversity. It should enable us to begin to practice again the kind of comparative science of religions the founding fathers of this discipline had in mind.[10]

I am aware that I am taking a huge risk. The 'insecure realms of comparative religion'[11] apply particularly to the general history of religion(s). No scholar of religion(s) can ever pretend to have sufficiently mastered all relevant material. The scheme proposed will inevitably be marred by insufficiently tested generalizations, dilettantism, and the unconscious or covert introduction of extra-scientific views. This field of research has therefore been avoided for a reason by historians of religion(s),[12] or has been declared possible only by team work.[13] It should therefore come as a surprise that exactly I, who for precisely these reasons called for a rigorous limitation of the unlimited comparison in comparative religion,[14] propose that a general history of religions, from Neanderthals till now, should all none the less be developed.

It needs to be developed for two more reasons. One is the need for a more adequate classification of the religions of mankind. The other is the need to augment the explanatory power of the comparative study of religions. I explain them in the rest of this paragraph by a brief survey of the history of comparative religion, an academic discipline in Dutch universities since 1876. Its history can roughly be divided in three phases: (1) an evolutionary one, 1870 – 1920; (2) a systematical one, 1920 – 1960; and (3) a methodological one, 1960 – now [viz. 1990].[15]

1870-1920

In the evolutionary phase, comparative religion explained the synchronous diversity of the religions of mankind by means of a diachronic division, in two versions: a progressive colonialist variant, and a degressive missionary version.[16] The progressive variant was the dominant view. It postulated that humanity had evolved, biologically as well as culturally, along certain necessary stages, from savagery through barbarianism to civilization.[17] This theory was widely used not only

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[10] Tiele 1876: 2

[11] Leertouwer 1989: 54

[12] Less by anthropologists (see Redfield 1953; Bellah 1964, 1965; Gellner 1988), although in anthropology too the 'world-historical outlook' that was characteristic of the founders of anthropology of religions (Morris 1987: 2) was relegated to the background after 1925 by the hegemony of functionalism's preoccupation with the 'ethnographic present' in order to hide that traditional societies were modernizing rapidly, and since 1960, by structuralist analysis 'situé hors du temps' (Meslin 1976: 1320).

[13] Puech 1970: XVIII

[14] Platvoet 1982

[15] All three phases are marked by a broad transition period: 1900-1920 between (1) and (2); and 1950-1970 between (2) and (3). The appointment of Kristensen at Leiden University in 1903, and that of Van der Leeuw at Groningen University in 1918 were the caesuras between (1) and (2). In anthropology the transition is marked by Malinowski's appointment at LSE, the *London School of Economics*, in 1923. And in German *Religionswissenschaft* by Wach's *Habiltationsschrift* (1924).

[16] Tiele called them respectively the development and the corruption theories (Tiele 1873: 7-25). Western religion, and even its irreligion, were regarded in both views as the top stage of civilization, and all other religions as either at the bottom or on their way upwards to that pinnacle.

[17] Tiele (1876: 3) presented these stages as the result of 'natural growth' according to 'the criterion [..] that there is nothing in the full grown [plant] that was not already locked up in the bud' (Tiele 1901: 10).

to 'explain' and 'justify' Western cultural and religious supremacy,[18] but was also to present the colonization (and exploitation) of 'barbarian' and 'savage' societies as a moral duty.[19] As Kipling did in his imperialist poem *The White Man's Burden* (1899) urging that whites colonize 'the new-caught, sullen peoples, half devil and half child',[20] and redeem them from their 'heathen folly'.[21]

The degressive variant held that a pure religion had originally been bestowed on all humans either in a primeval revelation[22] or in a primeval[23] religious experience,[24] which had since degenerated by being infected with superstition and magic. According to orthodox – RC and other – missionary points of views, true primeval religion had since been restored in a second revelation, in the Bible and Christ. Liberal Protestant theologians, however, attributed this restoration as due too to 'natural religion' being still active in religions at large. They regarded their further purification and the restoration of original religion in modern humans as a task of the academic study of religions, with modern liberal lay Christianity, or even the de-churched religiosity of the modern, academically trained, religious Western intellectual serving as model for that true original religion.[25]

We owe our current academic and popular division of the religions of humanity in primitive,[26] ancient and world religions, or for short, in natural, cultural and global religions, to the progressive variant of these two ethnocentric theories. This tripartite classification is still in general use and not discussed critically anywhere. But it is both biased and incorrect. I refute it for six reasons:

Tiele (1876: 3) did not take a position in the question whether these stages had evolved in a unilinear or multilinear manner. But he regarded the latter more likely.

[18] Most pronounced in Tiele (1901: 12-59).

[19] See, for example, Tiele (1873: 11-12): 'The religions of the Savages are [...] the least developed origins of an originally even cruder religion [..] from which all religions [...] originated'. He explicitly stated that the 'natural religions' [of his time] (Tiele 1873: 7) are not identical to primal religion, because 'there is historical life also among primitive peoples'. But they are closest to that even lower 'oldest religion of mankind' (Tiele 1873: 11).

[20] Cf. Miller 1982: 5 for the poem and its use in 1898 by the USA to establish colonial rule over the Philippines, Porto Rico and other islands.

[21] From 1961 to 1969, I myself was part of that Western colonial project. As a missionary priest and member of the *Societas Missionum ad Afros*, I taught History in St Teresa's Minor Seminary at Amisano, Ghana, from 1962 to 1966. My pupils have risen to high positions in the RC Church in Ghana and elsewhere. One is Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson, a cardinal since 2003 who has been appointed to important positions in the Vatican since 2009. He is reputedly *papabilis*.

[22] See Schmidt 1911; Brandewie 1983: 24-31, 41-46, 77

[23] This Schleiermachian tradition was developed in liberal Protestant Philosophy of Religion. It was the point of departure for both Müller, who adhered to degressive evolutionism (see e.g. Müller 1867-1875, I: XIV), and Tiele who adopted progressive evolutionism (see e.g. Tiele 1900, II: 184-206).

[24] The primordial revelation approach and the primordial experience theory, however, differed only slightly. Both viewed revelation and man's response to it as complementary. According to Wilhelm Schmidt humans are rational and therefore keen to discover (divine) causality (see Brandewie 1983: 25, 28), and according to Müller (1978: 22), because man possesses 'a spiritual faculty' that enables him 'to grasp the infinite in finite reality'. Tiele (1901: 121-122; 81-83) combines both views. He held that man, though he is not aware of it, 'is endowed with the idea of the infinite' which he '[combines] with that innate form of thought we call the urge to discover causality'.

[25] As propagated by e.g. Max Müller in particular (see Morris 1987: 92-94; Tull 1991: 41-44) and by Mircea Eliade (see Eliade 1969: preface, 8, 9, 36, 57-71; Olson 1989).

[26] They were also called the religions of the 'savages', or of the 'animists', or 'tribal', or 'archaic'', or recently 'primal' religions. The neutral category in which I group them is – see below – the community religions of preliterate societies, or for short, preliterate religions.

1. As for 'primitive' religion(s): we know nothing about the origin of religion.[27] We cannot, therefore, call any religion primitive. All religions, preliterate and other, are historical religions. By the predicate 'primitive' we deny preliterate religions their histories. Moreover, they are much more open to external influences than are 'historical' religions and change more easily, as I will show below. As such they are more 'historical' than literate religions.[28] Moreover, as a group they are the oldest religions of humans, with by far the longest history.

2. The antithesis 'natural *versus* cultural' religions is nonsense.[29] All religions are the products of a culture. Even Tiele referred to 'the [..] civilization of the Savage'.[30]

3. The evolutionary classification of some religions as primitive or natural, and others as civilized serves to induce us Westerners to regard Western worship as civilized, and to depreciate that of others as primitive, superstitious, as Kipling's 'folly', and as (despicable) magic and witchcraft.

4. The label 'world-religion' is unscientific. It expresses the theological claim of some religions to be the one and only religion for all humankind and the exclusive way to salvation 'for anyone anywhere'.[31] The term expresses a view of their own identity and aspiration but not a global historical reality.[32]

5. In the current classification of natural/cultural/world religions, the latter are presented as the conclusion of the history of religion. 'World religions' fails to duly integrate the significant developments in the religious scene that have taken place in the last two, three centuries, and are still in full swing in our own time. The very different religions that emerged after them and in addition to them are viewed as a residual wastebin category.

6. Equally popular and incorrect is the division in animist, polytheist, and monotheist religions. 'Animist' is incorrect, because Tylor's animist theory was not meant to apply to preliterate religions only but to all religions. Nor can its later, equally erroneous meaning as 'worship of spirits' be regarded as marking only the so-called 'primitive religions', for spiritual beings are worshipped in all religions. As for polytheism, that too is found in both 'animist' and 'monotheist' religions and therefore does not fit one peculiar kind of religions. The same is true for monotheism. It has more variants than the exclusive one of (doctrinal) Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The animism/polytheism/monotheism division is therefore just as ethnocentric and incorrect as that in nature, culture, and world religions.[33]

1920-1960

In the second, systematizing phase scholars of comparative religion focused on the so-called religious phenomena. The very term 'phenomenon', 'that which appears'/'becomes visible' (to the contemplative mind), shows that phenomenologists of religion approached the comparative study

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[27] Van Baaren 1986: 14

[28] Despite his statement quoted above in footnote 19, Tiele denied them their historical character, for however 'colourful and diverse' these religions may be, they are all governed by 'one view', the animist (Tiele 1873: 12-13); and they are 'the lowest stage of religious development that we know of' (Tiele 1873: 15).

[29] Schlatter 1988: 158

[30] Tiele 1873: 13

[31] De Jonge 1991: 3

[32] See also Young 1992; Pye 1992: 29; Fitzgerald 1990

[33] Brelich 1970: 42–43

of religions in an a-historical, de-historicizing manner.[34] Religious phenomena were not made 'manifest' by them in crude history, but extracted and abstracted from treatises on individual religions that themselves had already been systematized after the model of doctrinal Christianity. Only after they had been stripped of their complex historicity and crude particularity were they made to 'appear' in the phenomenologist's systematizing mind as starting points for their *Wesensschau*: the search for their *eidos*, their essential form, or *Gestalt*, in e.g. 'sacrifice', 'prayer', or 'god', or 'soul', or 'witch', or 'demon'. Through this contemplative reflection, phenomenology of religion came to designate both the a-historical comparison of religions by Van der Leeuw and his followers,[35] and a Christian philosophy of religion deemed capable of providing a 'scientific' foundation for a liberal theology of religions.[36]

1960-1990

Comparative religion, however, must shun all theology (and ideology) and bind the study of religions only to complex empirical historical reality. In the most recent phase attention mainly focused on the need to develop a scientific comparative religion. Van Baaren, Rudolph, Smart, Pye, Wiebe and others pursue a metaphysically neutral practice of scholarship stripped bare of prejudicial extra-scientific points of view.[37] It investigates religion only insofar as it can be scientifically and empirically examined, namely as an element in, and function of, human culture.[38] The focus is now on the design of precise, neutral, technical terms;[39] on the verification of the reliability of the historical data to be compared;[40] on controlled comparison; and on the explanation of religious behaviour, religions, and religion.[41]

While comparative religion showed a theoretical hubris in the first phase, and in the second an aversion to, and fear of, explanation,[42] it now seeks to describe, understand *and explain* their cultural-historical shape and functions, but without deliberately aiming to explain their postulated metaphysical truth 'away'.[43] This can be done only by (trying to) exclude every extra-scientific

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[34] Between 1920 and 1960, its secular counterpart, anthropology of religions, equally de-historicized preliterate religions by its synchronous functionalist approach. It studied societies and religions either as contributing to the vital needs of its members (Malinowski), or to the stability of the structure of a society (Radcliffe-Brown) (see van Baal & van Beek 1985: 171; Morris 1987: 127).

[35] Brelich 1970: 42

[36] I use 'liberal' here in the sense of any position in modern Christian theology that has relinquished the traditional orthodox, *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* position and assigns, one way or another, a salvific function to non-Christian religions.

[37] I borrow the term 'metaphysically neutral' from the Buddhologist Gombrich (1988: 9). Other terms are 'permanent epoché' (van Baaren 1973: 48; Platvoet 1982: 4–12), 'methodological agnosticism' (Smart 1977: 54; Pye 1992: 22), and 'methodological atheism' (Berger 1967: 100, 180; Hilhorst 1976: 65).

[38] Van Baaren & Leertouwer 1980: 3. 'Culture' is used here in a neutral and technical meaning without implying approval or disapproval. Religiously inspired 'evil' acts such as religious wars, witch hunts or human sacrifices, may therefore be presented neutrally as part of (a) 'culture', though they will need to be condemned from a moral point of view.

[39] In order that we may compare religions neutrally and technically without the undercover introduction in the analytical apparatus of all kinds of assumptions alien to the religions to be compared (van Baaren 1973: 52-54; Leertouwer 1980: 12).

[40] Platvoet 1982: 3- 4, 13-15, 18-19, 29-35

[41] Leertouwer 1980

[42] Zie Bjerke 1979: 242; Wiebe 1983: 287

[43] Leertouwer 1980: 15

point of view, theological and ideological, from the empirical study of religions. Scholars of religion(s) therefore cannot, and must not, take any position in respect of the metaphysical truth claims of any religion,[44] whether they are made by adherents or opponents. For the foundation of the 'truth' of these claims lies beyond our empirical world. Their truth cannot, therefore, be examined empirically before a forum of neutral, competent scholars. Nor can they be verified or falsified scientifically. Metaphysical truth or falsity claims therefore cannot provide the basis of a theory in empirical scholarship of religion(s). On the same methodological grounds, however, an empirical science of religion(s) cannot, and should not, claim to have completely explained religion; or, in 'religionist' terminology, to have explained religion 'away'.

Moreover, with regard to those aspects of the form and function of religion which are in principle researchable, testable and explainable, the science of religion must be aware of the immense extent and complexity of its field of research; of the 'qualitative', relatively subjective nature of its means of research;[45] and of the fundamentally provisional nature of science, especially in respect of religion(s), which will be proven true or false only after death.

Within these limits of the relative 'truth' which empirical scholarship of religions may produce as a historical science of religions, itself also constrained and shaped by the histories of human societies, comparative religion strives to understand and *explain* the form and functions of specific religions in their peculiar historical settings.[46] These insights must be formulated in testable statements. They should clarify why religions are likely to have the forms and functions that we actually find.

The goal of the scheme I am presenting is, therefore, to increase the explanatory power of the science of religion(s) by deducing historical explanations for the general history of religion(s) from the general history of human societies. My three reasons for this bold venture are therefore:
= to replace the erroneous current tripartite division of human religions into natural, cultural and world religions;
= to make the general history of religion(s) an object of the comparative study of religion(s) within the framework of the general history of human societies; and
= to increase thereby its explanatory power.

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[44] This against Wiebe 1981. Although Wiebe is an outspoken protagonist of the explanatory trend in North American scholarship in religions, he also stated in Wiebe 1981 and in earlier publications that the question must be asked whether religion is, or is not, 'true'. He reproached both empirical and religious scholars of religions (and philosophers of religion as well) of 'non-cognitivism' by 'dogmatically' excluding from research of religions the [metaphysical] question of the truth of religion by alleging that its truth cannot not be established (Wiebe 1981: 2-5, 46, 76, 176). Which would absolve them from having to decide which religions were false. Wiebe accused non-cognitivists of 'a lack of nerve' (Wiebe 1981: 136). Wiebe seems to have abandoned this position (see Wiebe 1983; 1989, 1990).

[45] Using as its main instrument of research the professional, culturally conditioned (inter)subjectivity of researchers, trained to seek objective, empirically testable knowledge after the highest standards of their discipline.

[46] A fine example of such an explanatory approach is the pragmatics of the Near-Eastern 'redemption religions' (Judaism, Christianity, Gnosticism and Shi'a Islam) that Kippenberg (1991) developed. He examines the use their faithful have made in the political history of this culture area of the meanings with which these religions provided them. And he deduces certain formal characteristics of these religions from them.

The general history of human societies and the general history of religions

The socio-historical comparative study of religion(s) that I propose is based on six assumptions:

1. How religions develop and function is determined largely by the ecology, technology,[47] and economy of their societies, and the measure of differentiation of their institutions.

2. The epochs and societies in which a new kind of religion appears for the first time can be correlated with previous non-religious changes in those societies, so much so that a probable connection can be demonstrated between features of that new type of society, and the marks of that new type of religion.

3. The general history of human societies has so far generally been one of many kinds of continual scale increase, such as in technology, skill, food production, demographic growth, institutional differentiation, means of communication, increased preservation of the products of the human mind, the gradual shift from mere personal to also functional and contractual relations, and from smaller to wider mental worlds, spatially, socially and historically.

4. In addition to these numerous increases in scale, two major time- and place-bound cognitive transformations occurred over time. One first appeared in early sedentary agrarian societies in fertile river valleys with villages, walled cities and city states with rulers, in which a tiny upper class elite emerged with much free time (ςχόλή, scholè) for specialist tasks, political, economic and cultic. But also for beginning to clarify by reflection elements of the complex (inarticulate, multistranded, multitask) thought that as a matter of course governs social conduct in all human societies. From which reflection writing also developed, and limited literacy, the earliest literate religions, and the mental and religious revolution of the 'axial age'.

   The other occurred in modern industrializing societies. Analysis, dividing complex matters into their constituent parts for their separate examination and explanation, became the central mode of thought in science, technology and organization. It caused huge changes in the cosmology of the 'second axial age' as I will show below.

5. A few scale decreases have however also occurred in the past, with reversals in the direction in which social relations, cosmology, thought and religion have mostly changed.[48] The processes of scale increase and scale decrease that have hitherto determined the course of the social and religious history of humankind, were therefore not 'natural' processes which must inevitably occur, but contingent historical processes. They were the cultural consequences of human choices. They might have taken a very different course from the one they actually took.

6. My last assumption is that the religions of each type of human societies possess a number of group traits in common despite their mutual differences and constant changes.[49] These group traits constitute the bedrock that constrains the latitude for change for the single religions of the group. But they also provide them with the means for developing their peculiar identities vis á

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[47] With the role of ecology being greater the smaller that of their technology is (Hultkrantz 1988: 582).

[48] Cf. e.g. the changes that occurred in an exclusive transnational faith religion (see type 5 below) when it became the community religion of isolated nomadic societies with a less diverse economy, as was the case in Buddhist Lamaism in Mongolia in medieval time. Mensching (1959: 301) derogatorily called this an example of the *Paganisierung der Universalreliogionen*.

[49] Constant change is especially a mark of preliterate religions because they have no mechanism for curtailing it. Most changes moreover occur without the believers noticing them. In addition, our archaeological and historical knowledge of them is tiny to nil and biased. Generally speaking, however, the older a particular group of societies and religions is, the more their religions differ, with the possible exception of the youngest religions.

vis each other in the course of the history of each particular kind of religions. Religions can surpass the constraints of their bedrock only after huge changes have occurred in the societies of their group. Whether or not they survive such change, and if so, how, is an important field of comparative research.

Two reservations must be made. One is that this vast and complex research matter involves so many variables that it is hardly ever possible to establish compelling causal connections between social and religious processes of change. In addition, there is the role of human religious creativity, producing e.g. markedly different religions in societies with identical ecologies, economies and social structures. Furthermore it cannot a priori be excluded that a metaphysical agent or factor 'really' did play, or still plays, a part in the general history of religion because it and its activity can neither be verified nor falsified. The six phase scheme proposed below is therefore a hypothesis that must be tested for its heuristic usefulness in research, and for the empirical validity of its findings.

The second reservation is that this approach owes its potential explanatory power to a deliberate one-sidedness. The general history of religion that I propose is a 'socio-centric' one. It examines how societies have shaped religions. Its reverse is the 'religio-centric' approach. That studies how religions have shaped societies, and especially how some religions have thoroughly permeated one or several societies. This religio-centric approach has so far been the dominant model in the comparative study of religions and societies. It is not part, or at most an incidental part, of the socio-centric general history of religions research project that I propose.

The practice of this method consists of three steps. First, a six level outline of the general history of human societies, from paleolithic times till now, is developed by identifying the traits, marks, properties or institutions, that have in various ways and degrees constrained and shaped human societies at each of these six levels. They are their ecology, technology, economy and level of prosperity; their demographic size; their degree of institutional differentiation and stratification; the frequency and intensity of their communication *ad intra* by the exchange and preservation of mental assets such as about the organization and histories of their societies, stories, myths, ritual practices, beliefs, etc.; and *ad extra* through the migration of people, trade and the exchange of ideas; their modes of thought; whether literacy is absent, incipient or developed; and the spatial extent and historical depth of their worldview. Secondly, the common marks of the religions at each of the six levels are examined. Thirdly, these group marks are matched at each level with the general traits of that type of society, its cosmology and its cognitive habit.

By these means I distinguish six types of societies and religions. They can be ordered as historical sequences, for, except for the oldest type, they appeared at a definite moment in the general history of mankind. Tylor's and Tiele's a-historical 'evolution' from savage to civilized is thereby refuted and rejected. At stake is not evolution, but history, that of the continuous transformation of humankind's religions because human societies never fail to change. Any order of societies and religions into lower and higher would, therefore, at most be a temporary and accidental one, and most likely a biased one.

Six phases in the general history of human societies

The earliest indications of religious behavior by humans appeared late in the history of anthropogenesis.[50] The burials with grave gifts and red ochre,[51] dated at about 100,000 BP[52] and found with both our ancestors (*homo sapiens sapiens)*[53] and Neanderthals, should not be regarded as 'primitive', or primeval, or earliest human religion, for these burials are very similar to those found in modern preliterate religions. On the basis of current state of paleontological research, it seems reasonable to set the beginning of the documented religious history of mankind at 100.000 BP for the time being.[54]

From then to now five junctures occurred in human history at which a new kind of society, and a new type of religion, began to develop. Those five periods began at:

= 12.000 BP/10.000 BCE[55] at the beginning of the neolithic revolution;
= 6.000 BP/4.000 BCE, when wet and other types of advanced agriculture emerged;
= 3.500 BP/1.500 BCE at the onset of the 'first axial age';[56]
= 2.250 BP/250 BCE, at the center of the 'first axial age'; and
= 500 BP/about 1.500 CE,[57] at the beginning of the 'second axial age'.

At each of these junctures, a distinctly new type of society began to developed in addition to the oldest, pre-neolithic one, and previous ones. Ordered by seniority, they are the following six kinds of societies.

1. Food gathering bands

The oldest kind of human society is constituted by tiny nomadic food gathering bands. After *homo sapiens*'s origin sometime between 300.000 and 200.000 years ago in Africa, they roamed Africa in tiny bands till about 130.000 BP when they began spread all over the globe, a first wave arriving in China about 80.000 BP but getting extinct. At about 74.000 BP, when the icehouse climate of the Weichselian glacial and the volcanic winters caused by the immense volcanic Toba Lake magma chamber eruption had reduced humans in Africa and elsewhere to only a few thousand, some of the survivors departed from Africa shortly after 70.000 BP. Sea level reduction by about 60 m. allowed them to migrate along the southern coasts of Asia and reach Australia at about

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[50] But much earlier than the earliest documented art. Until recently, it has not been possible to date art before 30.000 BP and only with our direct ancestors, the *homo sapiens sapiens* (Delporte 1990: 92, 103; Jellinek 1990: 104). The recent finds in Australia of rock samples dated to 43.000 BP (Anonymus 1982) will significantly shift this limit forward if this date is accepted.

[51] Zie o.a. Leroi-Gourhan 1976: 549, 553-554, 558-561; Petersen 1990: 123

[52] 'Before present'

[53] R. Cann and A. Wilson argue on the basis of biochemical research that modern man originated in Africa at about 200.000 BP. The oldest finds outside Africa are skeletons in the caves of Qafzehand Skhul in Israel, which are about 90.000 years old, and in Europe they are those of the 'Cro-Magnon people', who are dated between 25.000 and 20.000 BP (Vandermeersch 1990: 81-86).

[54] Against Von Koenigswald (1961: 161), James (1963: 12; 1971: 23), Clemen (1966a: 12–13), Bergou-nioux (1965: 16, 23-24, 42, 56-57) and Lumley & Lumley (1990: 52-54, 61, 67) who date the earliest religion back to the 'cannibalistic headhunter rituals' (von Koenigswald) that the Beijing people reputedly practiced some 450.000 BP. See also the criticism of Arens (1979) on the anthropological myth of cannibalism; and Leroi-Gourhan 1976: 555, 561.

[55] 'Before the common era'

[56] The term 'axial age' is explained below.

[57] 'Common Era'

50.000 BP, and also to spread through the Near East and Europe. They arrived in the Americas at about 15.000 BP, in Tiera del Fuego in the southern-most tip of Latin America at about 6.000 BP, and in New Zealand 700 years ago. Being few and spread over the entire globe, food gathers had ample roaming space even after 10.000 BP when sedentary societies with larger populations and territories began to trim down theirs. The recent demographic explosion and territorial expansion of industrial societies, however, have reduced their present roaming space to nearly nil now. As a result, this oldest type of human society may soon become extinct.

Spreading across the entire globe, from the hot savannas and tropical forests of Africa to the ice covered arctic regions of Eurasia and the prairies and pampas of the Americas, the nomadic food gathering bands managed to adapt to every ecological setting on offer on the globe. By trial and error, bricolage and luck they developed sufficient and sufficiently adequate knowledge about the edible fruits, nuts, seeds, bulbs, animals, fish and other seafood they might gather or hunt in their particular ecology. And also the skills and instruments for gathering and hunting, such as poisoned arrows and boomerangs for use in the hunt of animals for their meat, and harpoons for hunting seals; fire for cooking food, and for keeping warm in their caves, igloos or makeshift tents at night, and animal skin as dress; and canoes for catching fish, etc. These skills differed of course according to each ecological setting and were usually skillfully adapted to it.[58]

Foraging did not provide nomadic bands with welfare. But it often brought them much wellbeing, e.g. much free time in the company of the members of their band for whom they cared from cradle to grave and with whom they shared the food collected and the meat of animals hunted.[59]

Foraging forced nomadic bands to keep their number small. They consisted usually of one, two or a very few, closely related families and a few 'friends', often no more than a three dozen members, and 100 at most when food happened to be ample, or when a few foraging bands congregated for social and ritual purposes, as they did at set times.

Because of this small group size, the relations between the members of a band were exclusively of a personal kind with no one in a position of authority or leadership. Contractual relationships were absent, as was institutional differentiation and stratification. Their relations were differentiated by gender only but without gender inequality: the sexes were generally almost equal in their societies.[60] Members were also equal because there was no reserved knowledge or skill. All youngsters were taught all the knowledge and skills available to the band. Their mutual social responsibility was strong and their mutual tolerance great.

Their thought was not savage, primitive, wild, magical, or superstitious, but of the same multistranded, multipurpose, inarticulate kind that to this very day governs common pre-reflective social behaviour of the members of all human societies, ours included. This complex inarticulate thought fuses multiple lines of thought for inducing socially acceptable behaviour in the members

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[58] See e.g. Turnbull (1978: 176sq.) on !Kung technology

[59] See e.g. Katz 1982: 13-25 over the ! Kung and their culture of sharing

[60] See e.g. Morris (1982: 48-49, 147-148, 158sq.) on the 'pervasive egalitarianism' and the culture of the autonomy of the individual person among the Mountain-Pandaram, a society of forest-nomads in South-India; Katz (1982: 26-27, 231-232, 240, 255) and Turnbull (1978: 176-183) about the ! Kung, a 'Bushmen'/San society in the Kalahari Desert, and their culture of sharing (Platvoet 2000); and Turnbull (1978: 112-116), Dupré (1975: 156, 152-159) and Mair (1974: 14-24) about the Bambuti Pygmies in the Ituri rainforest in Zaire.

of a human society. By not reflectively clarifying them, it induces members to defer to the social norms of their society, and to behave 'decently' after the norms in which they have been socialized and which tradition expects them to respect.[61]

Their languages were often extremely rich and complex, and the wealth of their stories and proverbs large. Due to gathering food for generations in the same area, food gathering bands received relatively few ideas from outside but lived at ease in their own tiny ecological world. But also in a mental world with little historical depth, as is apparent from their stories about creation which they date usually at two, or at most a very few generations ago. The dearth of external input did not, however, cause their cultures to stagnate. Their own creativity constantly reshaped them and adapted them by bricolage in inventive ways as circumstances changed.

2. Early food producing societies

The second oldest type contains the somewhat larger societies that evolved since the Mesolithicum (± 10.000 BP/8.000 BCE). The size of early food producing societies at first increased only slowly, because severe climate change with hot summers with much reduced rainfall and soft, wet winters forced them as well as enabled them to supplement the severely decreased yields of nomadic food gathering by semi-sedentary 'arid agriculture'. E.g., by the cultivation of drought resistant grains such as rye;[62] and later, from 8.000 BP/6.000 BCE, by beginning to keep live-stock, such as sheep, goats, pigs, and cows when there were too few wild animals left for the hunt.

Sedentary agrarian societies gradually settled, at first seasonally, later permanently, in villages and finally abandoned nomadic food gathering. In this millennia long process of sedentism, supplemented with incidental food foraging, they also developed the new skills and technologies that are collectively known as 'the neolithic revolution', such as pottery and weaving.

Most sedentary societies developed unilineal kinship as their central social institution,[63] either patrilineal or matrilineal, with inequality between the sexes being particularly high in patrilineal societies.

Among the demographically larger early food producing societies early forms of political and economic organization emerged as well as some institutional differentiation.[64]

However, some of the main marks of food gathering societies, such as multistranded thought, little external input through isolation, a complex mental microworld, and a rich immaterial culture and language, were also found, *mutatis mutandis*, in this group of semi-nomadic or early sedentary food producing societies.

3. Societies with early metallurgy producing food by irrigation

The third type is constituted by societies in tropical and subtropical river valleys and deltas from 6.000 BP/4.000 BCE along the lower Nile and in Mesopotamia, from 5.000 BP/3.000 BCE along the Indus, and from 3.600 BP/1.600 BCE in the valley of the Huang He (Yellow River) with

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[61] My summary of Gellner 1988: 43-67

[62] As 'Natufians' living in caves and tents on the West Bank of the River Jordan in Palestine did as early as 12.500 BP, harvesting rye with stone sickles, and baking bread and possibly brewing beer with it. Cf. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natufian_culture

[63] For contemporary examples of these societies, see e.g. Middleton & Tait 1970; Mair 1974: 3, 5-7, 38-136

[64] See e.g. Fortes & Evans-Pritchard 1970; Mair 1976: 137–244; Schoffeleers 1978

agriculture by irrigation and earliest metallurgy. Other societies developed other forms of advanced agriculture in Crete from 4.500 BP/1.500 BCE; in the Andes and Central America from 3.000 BP/1.000 BCE,[65] in Japan from 2.300 BP/300 BCE,[66] etc.

Typical of these societies are a strong demographic growth, the emergence of cities, of monarchy as central political institution, the increase of institutional differentiation within the framework of these early city-states, the rise of empires and long distance trade, and a sharp increase in the movement of goods, people and ideas between them.

Markets being as yet absent, simple proto-writing systems began to be developed by the use of mnemonic and ideographic symbols (cuneiform in Mesopotamia; hieroglyphic in Egypt; logographic in China, Mesoamerica and perhaps the Indus valley) for the administration of e.g. the agricultural products stocked in royal warehouses and goods obtained through trade.[67]

Another trait of these societies was their division into town and countryside, and into an upper class and that of common men. By levying taxes on the produce of the commoners, the elite enjoyed much leisure – in Greek: scholè – , most of which they devoted to pleasant pastimes, but some also to schooling and specialization.

As prosperity increased, so did the wealth and power imbalance between the rich and the poor, and between male and female, with women increasingly becoming the guarded property of men. Viewed as unclean and adulterous, females were locked in in houses and harems or hidden under veils.

4. Societies with iron technology

A fourth kind of human societies developed from 3.500 BP/1.500 BCE in the Middle East and later elsewhere when iron technology became available. It enabled a number of type three societies to further expand their empires by warfare with cavalry equipped with iron weapons.

Other developments were incipient seafaring; the simplification and increased use of writing, including for literary purposes; limited literacy; and the earliest forms of an entirely new development: reflective systematizing thought.[68]

5. Societies of the first axial age

The fifth type consists of a small number of societies that developed in the Near East, India, China from about 1.400 BCE, and later elsewhere. They were a further development of the types (3) and (4) societies, but with one capital difference for the history of religions: in them a small part of the upper class began to develop reflective systematical thinking. As a result, the history of philosophy started in the last millennium BCE, in India from 2.800 BP/800 BCE, in China from 2.600 BP/600 BCE, as well as in Greece.

Karl Jaspers coined the term 'axial age' for the period 2.800-2.200 BP, 800-200 BCE to mark it as the unique turning point in the history of mankind because of philosophy's origin in it, and the concomitant religious developments to be discussed below. [69]

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[65] See Baraclough 1981: 38-39, 40, 46, 52-53, 54-59, 62-65, 66
[66] See Vos 1974: 348; Kamstra 1988: 13
[67] See Barraclough 1981: 55
[68] See Baraclough 1981: 51-67
[69] See Jaspers 1949: 15-106, especially 18-25, 98-106.

I adopt the term and view of Jaspers but extend this axial age significantly: from Zarathustra, dated at 3.400 BP/1.400 BCE,[70] to Mohammed at 632 CE. Moreover, I call that period the 'first axial age', because I suggest against Jaspers[71] that recent developments in the history of human societies and religions, to be discussed below, need to qualified as 'the second axial age' in the general history of human societies and their religions.

6. Societies of the second axial age

Following Jaspers, scholars of religions have regarded the changes that took place in the axial age as a unique historical process. It is not. The processes of scaling up in the West since Henry the Navigator (1394-1460),[72] and worldwide since Western colonial hegemony, are producing the sixth type of human societies in which fundamental changes occur in societies, minds, and religions that are even more dramatic than those from the Neolithic revolution to the first axial age. It is therefore to be expected that the processes of religious change produced by the second axial age will be at least as revolutionary as were those of the first axial age, not only in the West but also globally. And they will affect also, in various ways and degrees, all earlier kinds of religions.

I go through my list of scale increases in type six societies;[73]

= Technology: after the stone, bronze and iron ages we have now arrived in the age of plastic and cybernetics; after walking, horseback riding and boating we now travel with the TGV, jet plane and space shuttle; after warfare with club and sword we now destroy with intercontinental missiles. Books were printed since 1500. They are stored by dozens now on a CD–ROM and are read with a beam. Communication frequency has grown exponentially with a radio, TV and computer in every home. And we call or fax to virtually anyone anywhere in the world.

= Food production: agriculture, livestock farming and horticulture have become complex, sophisticated industries that produce 'lakes' of surplus milk and 'mountains' of superfluous meat, butter and grain.

= Demographics: population growth is apocalyptic. From its inception, some 200.000 years ago, and near-extinction at 74.000 BP to the eighteenth century, mankind grew from near zero to 725 million. That number is now added to the world's population every five years. It stands now (1991) at 5.4 billion.

= The organization of society: after the cave, tent, village and city phase, we have now arrived at that of the metropolis. The countryside still offers room for motorways, dormitory towns and the parks of the holiday industry, but hardly any jobs in agriculture due to its industrialization.

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[70] I follow Mary Boyce's dating of Zarathustra (1984: 11-12): 'between 1400 and 1200 B.C.'.

[71] Jaspers explicitly speaks of one *Achsenzeit* only. In his euro-centric view, it constituted the decisive turning point for modern man and by implication for mankind forever. He wrote: '*In dem zwischen 800 und 200 stattfindenden geistigen Prozess, dort entstand der Mensch mit dem wir bis heute leben*' (Jaspers 1949: 19). In his view, the developments of the last four centuries should not be seen as a second axial time, because they are '*eine reine europäische Erscheinung*' – purely a European phenomenon, and of a merely technical, natural scientific kind (104-105). He regarded the period after 200 BCE moreover as a decline in which 'dogmatic points of view became fixed and were levelled out' (24). Finally, Jaspers never questioned the then current tripartite division of the general history of religions in *Naturreligion, Kulturreligion, Weltreligion*.

[72] He conquered Ceuta in 1415 and initiated the discovery of (the coasts of) Africa in 1435.

[73] See above, p. 8, sub 3

= Education: a century and a half ago, literacy level was very low, even in the West. Illiteracy is now a marginal phenomenon worldwide. We have now entered the era of permanent education.

= The political order: with the spread of wealth, education, communication and critical thinking, the political orders are increasingly shifting from monarchical and other totalitarian systems to one-person-one-vote democracies, as is the case now (1991) in Eastern Europe and South Africa, be it with violent backlashes.

= Gender: for the first time since the Paleolithic, there has been a significant shift in the balance of power and opportunity between the sexes in favour of women in some societies other than those of food gatherers – be it again with severe backlashes. Due to education, the pill and small families, many domains, tasks or professions are no longer strictly gender-bound in Western societies. The old *Twents* saying: *Waor boks bint mot rök swiegn*[74] is outdated, not only because trousers have become standard dress for women, but also because few women choose to be the property of men locked up in salons, if they are rich, or kitchens if they are not.

= Cosmology: the worldview of modern humans has changed, and is changing, dramatically. The modern mind is fed by a continual stream of information about other societies, cultures and religions. As a result, most modern humans have acquired, in various degrees and modes, a global mindset and outlook. Moreover, that mind may have an awareness of the past of not only four thousand years of history and ten thousand years of prehistory, but also of four million years of anthropogenesis, four billion years of the evolution of life on this planet, and perhaps even some awareness of the almost 14 billion years since the origin of this universe. As a result, religious protologies are being replaced by a worldview based on astronomy, radio telescopes, man's visit to the moon in 1969, and probes penetrating deep into space. Science fiction, time travel and extraterrestrials are characteristic of the modern imagination and the latest religions.

The six types of religions

The six types of human societies produced six different kinds religions in the course of the general history of religion(s). They are in chronological order:

1. The community religions of food gathering societies
2. The community religions of the early food producing societies
3. The community religions of early state societies with rudimentary writing
4. The community religions of societies with writing, literacy, scriptures and sects
5. The transnational exclusive doctrinal faith religions
6.. The transnational inclusive doctrinal faith religions

These six types are very crude distinctions that should certainly be further subdivided in order to do justice more adequately to the general history of human societies and religions.[75] Just as the six types of societies have more in common the closer they are historically and geographically, so do the six types of religions. I will first briefly discuss what the community religions, the first four, have in common. Then I will detail what traits the first two, the religions of preliterate societies, share. Finally, I describe in rough strokes what is specific to each type of the six kinds of religions.

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[74] In the presence of trousers skirts must keep quiet.

[75] For a further classification of the religions of the hunter-gatherer societies, see Hultkrantz 1988.

Community religions

The first four types of religions are similar by the fact that they coincide with a particular society.[76] As such, they are the religion of everyone in a society, regardless of his or her actual faith assent and religious praxis. And of no one outside that society. They are religions into which one is born, matures and dies. They provide all members of their societies with direction and meaning in life. Its rituals are practiced by everyone as custom, or accident or need requires. As relations between the members of these societies are exclusively or predominantly personal, and kinship is their central institution, so are relations between humans and their presumed spiritual world(s)[77] of a personal kind and fully integrated into their kinship, ecology, economy, politics, etc.. As a result, community religions have no or limited visibility, and their rich languages have no word for 'religion', nor for our concept of 'faith'. The modern Western core analytical concepts, 'nature *versus* supernatural', 'material *versus* spiritual', 'holy *versus* profane', 'empirical *versus* meta-empirical', 'the seen *versus* the unseen' are usually inapplicable to these religions and, though indispensable analytically for Western scholars of religions, misleading rather than heuristically helpful, for in these community religions, the spiritual is material and the supernatural part of nature.

This immersion of community religion in social life expresses itself in another way. These complex religions offer many explanations of good fortune and evil, and provide their believers with many options for taking action against evil. The salvation they seek consists in any and every form of well-being in this life and in this world. These religions are thereby that pragmatic and utilitarian that Western scholars often qualified them as mere 'magic'.

Within the group of community religions, we may distinguish further between the community religions of preliterate societies (types 1 and 2) and those with writing (types 3 and 4).

1. The community religions of small preliterate societies

Types 1 and 2 are constituted by the community religions of small preliterate societies all over the globe, from paleolithic times till now, such as the food gathering bands of the San and Pygmies in Africa; the Aboriginals in Australia; the Inuit in the Artic; the Ainu and Gilyaks or Nivkh in the North of Japan and on the Sakhalin Peninsula; some isolated Aborigines societies in India, Vietnam, Philippines and Indonesia; and a few on the northern seaboard of Canada and California, in the prairies of North America, and in the Amazon forest.

And of the earliest small food producers that began to emerge after the neolithic revolution from 10.000 BP/ 8.000 BCE. In them, two sub-types may be distinguished. One is that of pastoral nomads, with traits that resemblethe religions of the hunter-gatherers,[78] e.g. Khoi in South Africa; the Nuer, Dinka, and other pastoralist societies of the Sudan and the Sahel; the Evenk and other reindeer keeping societies in North Siberia; the horse keeping Mongols in Central Asia, and the bison hunting 'Indians' on the prairies of North America.

The other is those of earliest sedentary food growers, such the proto-Japanese, proto-Chinese and proto-Korean farmers; early Dravidians and Arians in India; Bon in Tibet; Indo-Europeans in Persia and Europe; the earliest 'Semitic' societies of the Middle East and North Africa; the

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[76] See Van der Toorn 1985: 114; Fitzgerald 1990: 116.

[77] The Akan of southern Ghana were in touch with five relatively independent 'societies' of invisible beings: [1] Nyame ('Sky-God') and the *abosom*, 'gods'; [2] the *nsamaŋfo*, ancestors; [3] the *moatia*, 'forest gnomes'; [4] the *abayifo*, 'witches'; and [5] the amulets, 'medicines', drums, and other man-made artefacts, which derive their 'power' from a 'soul' with revenge power (*sasa*).

[78] Hultkrantz 1988: 584

horticultural societies in tropical West Africa; the Bantu societies of Central and Southern Africa; early food producing societies in North, Central (the Inca) and South America; and on the Melanesian, Polynesian and Micronesian islands in the Pacific Ocean.

The most important trait that these type 1 and 2 religions of these small preliterate societies have in common is that they never articulate their beliefs. These religions are therefore vague, varied, disorderly and often inconsistent systems of beliefs.[79] As multi-stranded thought,[80] they effectively incite their believers to behave in appropriate ways. towards the presumed invisible beings and their fellow members

Due to inarticulation they are open, tolerant, adoptive and adaptive religions that allow for a lot of variation, as well as for skepticism and disbelief, and for competition in the religious market. As a result one finds in these religions a high turnover of lower, marginal invisible beings. They are replaced when they fail to meet the expectations of the believers. The stock of lower beings is constantly replenished by spirit possession and/or import from neighboring religions, preliterate or missionary.

The visibility of type 1 and 2 community religions is very low due to the lack of means. The desire to mark religion with much ostentation is absent. Magnificent temples are nowhere found. Contrary to what is claimed in romanticizing descriptions of archaic religion, and despite the frequent intimate communication of believers with unseen beings in spirit possession rituals and divination, believers of preliterate religions are generally quite irreligious. Laxity is, for economic reasons, a structural characteristic of these religions. Resources being scarce, social as well as religious relationships are established, maintained and restored after neglect through expensive gift giving. As a result, these religions are quite expensive when they are practiced.

As these religions are open and adoptive in matters of religious beliefs, their adherents usually 'convert' to an exclusivist religion by the syncretic practice of plural religious allegiance, blending elements of their community religion with parts of the newly arrived missionary religion.[81]

Unlike missionary religions, community religions have no intimate connection with ethics.[82] They do have certain prescriptions, negative and positive, but not of a moral kind. Concepts of sin and guilt, and reward in heaven or punishment in hell after death are absent. There is a belief in life after death but mainly because it is believed that the dead, especially the ancestors, continue to be actively involved in this world and in the lives of their descendants. But where and how the deceased live after death is not elaborated. These community religions often have a rudimentary protology, but never an eschatology. Many of them are 'mono-', 'poly-', as well as 'pan-theistic' religions, meaning that these qualifications are useless in the analysis of these religions.

The type 1 religions of food gatherers are special among preliterate religions by the tiny number of invisible worlds, one only usually, with which their believers need to deal,[83] by the very few spiritual beings 'inhabiting' them, their intimate connection with the natural environment, and

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[79] Which does not mean that these religions do not have coherence and structure. Ethnography has brought this to light mainly through structuralist research. For a good example, see Bartle 1983.

[80] See above p. 11 and footnote 62 on multi-stranded thought

[81] See e.g. Platvoet 1979

[82] See Kudadjie 1976

[83] Zie Morris 1981: 203-212; Katz 1982: 28-31, 40-41, 102; Dupré 1975: 156, 157, 158sq., 172sq..

the tiny time depth of their worldview.[84]   In addition, the blunt manner in which their believers ritually deal with their invisible beings is striking,[85] as is their aloof, often hostile attitude towards them.[86] All this reflects their society and ecology.[87]

As type 2 societies of the small early food producing societies preeminently have kinship as the institution structuring and organizing their demographically slowly expanding societies, ancestors take the central place in their religions, and with a genealogical memory reaching back several, and even as many as ten, generations, the depth of their pasts remembered increased significantly, 'long ago', when the Sky God walked on earth,[88] being dated as far back as two or three centuries ago.

The complexity of these religions increases significantly, both because of the greater number of 'invisible worlds',[89] and the greater number of their presumed inhabitants. Though the religions of early food producers remain closely linked to all aspects of collective and individual life, earliest forms of specialization and institutionalization also begin to appear with part-time priests, spirit mediums, diviners, healers, herbalists, amulet makers, etc. setting up business, and rooms or even buildings set apart for religious rituals. This early religious institutionalization in larger societies usually coincides with early political organization legitimized by the cult of royal, or mythical, ancestors, with the chief, monarch or other political leader in the role of the public liturgist.

Spirit possession is, however, still the central institution of these religions. Invisible beings are believed to be physically present and addressable in them. In addition, a variety of kinds of mechanical divination offers believers more indirect means of 'communication' with the unseen. The central ritual act of these religions, however, is gift giving, especially by sacrifice, of food, but also of blood, and of life, by the killing one of the animals they keep.

2. The pre-axial community religions of early state societies with advanced agriculture
Type 3 community religions are those of societies with advanced agriculture, e.g. of ancient Akad/Sumer and Babylonia in Mesopotamia; of Harapa and Mohenjo-Daro in the Indus valley; of ancient Egypt, Greece/Hellas, and Rome; and those of the Maya and Aztecs; and community

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[84] E.g. there is no memory of, nor ritual interaction with, deceased who died more than two generations ago (Morris 1981: 211). Primeval time, when everything came into being, is as close-by, and how that went wrong is told in savory stories (Katz 1982: 30-31).

[85] In these religions, trance is the central ritual and not reserved for ritual specialists. In the case of the Mountain-Pandaram 'one in eight adults seem to have this ability [...] which is looked upon as something of a natural gift' (Morris 1981: 205). The !Kung have a pedagogy of dissociation to ensure that 40 to 50% of adult men, and 10 to 20% of adult women (Katz 1982: 97) regularly go into trance in their frequent, night long trance sessions. In addition, there is often the culture of the shamanic soul journey (see Morris 1981: 205-208, 210, 214; Katz 1982: passim; Hultkrantz 1988: 584; Goodman 1988: 285-286). Gift and prayer are by far not as central in the religions of food gatherers as are trance rituals (Morris 1981: 205, 208, 209, 210, 211).

[86] See Morris 1981: 208-209; Platvoet 1999

[87] Morris 1981: 207–208

[88] See Platvoet 2004, 2012 on Akan protology and on how encounters since the 16th century with Muslim and Christian merchants and their beliefs about Allah/God as creator began to transform Akan beliefs about the sky god Nyame from a god visible in the sky, audible in thunder, tangible in torrential rain, and in close touch with humans 'long ago', towards a transcendent creator god resident in a heaven behind the sky after Muslim and Christian models. A gradual transformation that was still incomplete in the early 20th century.

[89] Cf footnote 78

religions that are still in full flourish such as 'Hinduism' in India and in the Hindu diaspora,[90] and Shintoism.

Increased food production in fertile valleys and consequent demographic growth caused city states to emerge after 6.000 BP/4.000 BCE with impressive temple complexes at the center of these early cities. These temples were staffed with large full-time priesthoods around, or replacing, the central liturgist, the monarch. They regularly conducted extensive rituals to promote the king's and the state's political fortune. In addition to the state religion at the city center, the common people, mostly farmers, practiced their 'folk'-religion in the surrounding countryside, which was at that time already dismissed by the writing elite as stupid superstition and magic. In both state and folk religion beliefs remained inarticulate, open and adoptive.

4. The community religions of the first axial age with writing, literacy and sects

Type four community religions are those of societies in fertile valleys and also elsewhere with early forms of advanced agriculture by irrigation, urbanization, the monarchical state, long distance trade and empires, iron technology and cavalry warfare as well as early seafaring, script simplification and its use not only for administration but also for legal and literary purposes as well as for reflection on dualist ethics and apocalyptic religious beliefs.

Typical religions are Taoism and Confucianism in China; Jainism and Sikhism in India; Tibetan and Mongolian Lamaism; Mazdeism in Persia and Parsis in India; Judaism and its esoteric Kabbala; Greek-Roman Hellenistic 'mystery cults'; Mandaeism; late 19th century 'Cargo Cults' in Melanesia and Papua New Guinea; Peyotism or Native American Church (founded in 1918); and Vietnamese Caodaism (founded in 1925).

This type 4 religion emerged in Persia at about 3.500 BP/1.500 BCE when horsemen with iron weapons burned down villages of farmers in celebration of their worship of drunken war gods.[91] In response, Zarathustra founded the first religion with ethics as its core and an apocalypse to undergird it. He prescribed behaviour that was considered morally just in itself, and he forbade 'evil'. His religion was the first religion with an absolute dualism at its heart, that between the *Ahuras* who symbolized the ethical order, and the drunken *Daevas* who legitimized warfare and plundering. Zoroastrianism was also the first religion that required an explicit confession of faith on joining it.[92] Thereby it was also the first 'sect': a 'school of thought'[93] in matters of faith. And it foreshadowed the pre-eminent characteristic of type five religions, the missionary religions of the first axial period: conversion.

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[90] 'Hinduism' is a Western umbrella term and colonial container term that was only designed in the 19th century. See Fitzgerald 1990

[91] Boyce 1979: 19; 1984: 11

[92] See Boyce 1979: 19-29, 30-31; 1984: 57

[93] I use 'sect' in the neutral sense of *secta*, a 'line of conduct', 'school of thought', 'doctrine' (philosophical, religious, legal, or other), 'faith community'. *Secta* is etymologically derived from *sequor*, to 'follow' (a teacher), and join his or her company of 'followers', i.e. disciples. In this sense, any religious organization which requires that aspirants 'convert' by an explicit assent to its *creed* or *symbolon* is a 'sect'. I explicitly reject 'sect' in the pejorative sense popularized by Christian theologians in their polemics against 'heretics' and 'schismatics'. They use it to denote, and condemn, believers that had 'cut themselves off' (from *secare,* 'to cut', *sectum*, 'cut off') from the 'true church', the exclusive salvific faith community. See Kehrer 2001.

Sects grew numerous from about 2,600 BP/600 BCE. Itinerant teachers began to systematize the beliefs of their unarticulated community religions in a competition to formulate the 'purest' or 'truest' version of its faith. By gathering many followers, sects fragmented the unity of the unarticulated community religions. As a result, community religions were no longer co-extensive with their societies. By this fragmentation, they created religions and religious communities that were demographically smaller than those of their societies of origin.

Founders of sects brought about another fundamental change by dogmatizing the community religion: the transition from unarticulated orthopraxy pursuing tangible salvation in this life without any explicit claim to the truth of their beliefs, to religions of 'faith': articulated systems of beliefs promising salvation in an afterlife, after death, with a claim to an exclusive, polemical truth.

This transition from ortho-prax to ortho-dox religion[94] coincided with a number of other shifts, such as people migrating from the countryside to the cities and thereby moving from the micro mental world of the peasant or villager to the wider worlds of the city dweller. And it is in particular among city dwellers that 'sects' recruited their followers.

In these community religions of early urbanizing societies with writing, and with sects fragmenting community religions by rearticulating them as faith religions, the foundation was laid of the religions of type 5 transcending the societies in which they had emerged as sects.[95]

5. The exclusive transnational dogmatic religions of the first axial age
The fifth type consists of the doctrinal missionary faith religions of the first axial age: Buddhism, Christianity, Manicheism, esoteric Gnosticism, and Islam. Their history is commonly said to start with the Buddha Gautama Siddharta, at about 2,500 BP/500 BCE. That is not correct. The earliest Buddhist missions began only some 250 years later when Buddhist monks in North India followed Emperor Ashoka's lead and began to spread the teachings of the Buddha beyond the Indian subcontinent.[96]

Typical of the three main faith-based religions, however, is not their success in spreading over several societies, but their claim to teach the one 'really' redemptive insight, in the case of Buddhism, and their contention that they taught the full and final revelation, in the case of Christianity and Islam. Which all three recorded in a canonical collection of scriptures. They declared the search for any other, or any additional redemptive insight closed, and denied the very possibility of receiving a new or additional revelation.[97] Every claim to a new enlightenment or revelation was rejected as a pernicious delusion. All they proclaimed themselves as the unique way to salvation for all humankind and declared all other religions the product of ignorance and deceit.[98] The salvation they promised lay in redemption from rebirth in the case of Buddhism, or in a life after death in heaven or paradise in the case of Christianity and Islam.

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[94] See Gombrich 1988: 25-28, 36, 38-49; Fitzgerald 1990
[95] Smart (1973: 15) calls them 'trans-societal religions' and contrasts them with 'group-tied religions'. Pye (1992: 15, 19) uses the (less fortunate) terms universal and particularistic religions.
[96] Zie Scott 1985; Gombrich 1988: 131, 134-136
[97] This sealing off of revelation was never completely successful. Some believers, especially the poor on the fringes of society, continued to claim that they received revelations, and/or used spirit possession to proclaim new or additional revelation. Cf. also the numerous 'apparitions' of Mary at Lourdes, Fatima, Medjugorje, etc.
[98] See Gombrich 1988: 62-63; Wagtendonk 1984: 48

6. The inclusive transnational faith religions of the second axial age

Modern human society worldwide is pre-eminently that of the prosperous metropolis with millions of inhabitants, jet travel, and *éducation permanente*. It is producing its own, type six, religions, and indirectly transforms religions of the earlier five types too.[99]

One of its main features is the sharp divide between the empirical 'natural' world and the meta-empirical 'supernatural'. It structures belief representations of believers as well as non-believers since the rise of the natural sciences. Other main features are the pluralism of modern societies, secularization, and religious privatization. As a result, belief in, and the practice of, communication with the supernatural has increasingly become difficult psychologically for modern believers.

In addition, the crucial claim to salvific exclusivity is mitigated or abandoned by many believers of type 5 exclusive missionary religions.[100]

Both developments have evoked fierce reactions in those religions. One is a militant orthodoxy that clings all the more fiercely to the literal truth of the canonical scriptures.[101] The other are the numerous ecstatic movements that regain the certainty of their faith in dissociation.[102]

However, the morphology of the most recent religions is much more important for our overview than are the processes of transformation in modern type 5 religions.

Most religions of the second axial age originated after 1827, when Joseph Smith had a vision on a mountain near New York, in which the angel Moroni handed him golden tablets with, in hieroglyphs, the Book of Mormon, a new book of the Bible incorporating the Wild West into the history of Israel and the Christ.

This exemplifies an important trait of type six inclusive missionary religions. Revelation, closed down by type 5 missionary religions, is again in full swing in type 6 religions. These religions are also well versed in the history of religions and (seem to) adopt a tolerant attitude towards other religions. But they often also claim to have absorbed all earlier religions and thereby to have transformed themselves into the one and only true world religion that will at last bring true and lasting salvation to humankind.

Their continual reception of new revelations and 'tolerance' towards other religions allow type 6 religions to adapt well to the current religious market. Nor do they offer clear-cut doctrine or exercise doctrinal discipline. Their main marketing resources are the bookstore, mailing, and the meditation weekend in the mountains or forests. Heaven and hell have given way to a science fiction spiritualism with education continued on other planets and an occasional reincarnation on this one. They offer the 'salvation' for which there is a demand among the well-to-do: personal attention; group support; mental welfare; 'prenatal, primal scream, and reincarnation therapy'; personality growth; mind expansion; cosmic integration. And they claim that all that will result in a good health, a lower health insurance premium, and a successful career for their disciples. And have as collateral benefit for secular society reduced crime-, conflict- and accident-rates. And they will equip their believers to become the leaders of the future world government that will eliminate war, poverty, and inequality, and end the destruction of the environment.

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[99] Throughout the history of religion, religions of earlier types undergo changes through encounter, or confrontation, with religions of later types. See Kamstra 1975.

[100] For the development of inclusivism in Theravada Buddhism, see Gombrich 1988: 199, 201

[101] For so-called fundamentalism, see e.g. Boele van Hensbroek e.a. 1991

[102] For possession in Theravada Buddhism, see Gombrich 1988: 203-207; in Christianity, see Platvoet & ter Haar 1989, and ter Haar 1992.

Despite these claims, these religions mostly present themselves as para-religions, a religion on the side. They welcome the participation of Christians, Muslims, or Buddhists.

An incomplete list of type 6 inclusive religions of the second axial age includes Macrobiotics; Moon's Unification Church; New Japanese Religions; Hare Krishna; Ananda Marga; Divine Light Mission; Yoga-Vedanta; Meher Baba; Bhagwan; TM; 3HO (Happy, Healthy, Holy); Maitreya Movement; Coconut Religion; Mazdaznan; Rosicrucianism; Freemasonry: Theosophy; Anthroposophy; Spiritism/Spiritualism; Mormonism; Jehovah's Witnesses; Christian Science; Scientology; Rebirthing; Wicca; UFO religions; Sufism; Ahmadiyya; and Baha'I Ulla.

The revenge of the 'primitives'

Numerous nuances should have been made in this outline in order to do justice to the general history of religion(s). Moreover, I have sketched the six types of society and the six kinds of religion, but not demonstrated the connection between the two, whether the relationships between social and religious changes are causal or incidental. So the proof is lacking. Instead, I conclude by pointing to one particular current development in history of religion(s): 'the revenge of the primitives'.

Exclusive religions have tried to exterminate other religions the more fiercely, the more they were 'primitive' in their eyes. If one looks at the census figures in e.g. Africa, one might think they will succeed. However, the tide of history is turning against exclusive religions. If one compares the first three types of religions with the sixth type, then it is clear that the characteristics of the first three are now completely back in the religious market. I point to the vagueness and variability of beliefs the first three and sixth type of religions have in common; to the scope that both offer for selective, pragmatic belief and doubt; to their tolerance, their capacity for adaptation, integration and synthesis; and to their opaque nature. Both also offer salvation in material, social and mental forms. In both, the focus is on ongoing revelation. Dissociation is therefore in frequent use in both, and there is communication with the deceased again. It is precisely thanks to the privatization of religion that the youngest religions, like the community religions, can merge completely with certain other sections of society such as health care and big business management. In short, prosperous world citizens of today in need of religion stock their basket critically and selectively in the modern supermarket of religions. They appear at the box office with their very personal selection from what numerous religions have on offer, as do Africans in their practice of plural religious allegiance.

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