

Religious Discourse Facing Early Modern Geographical Discoveries: A "Disenchantment"?

Abstract

In the early modern period, the Bible is not only a work of theology, but also a work of geography. The Book of books offers a reading of the world conveying meaning to landscapes and great spaces such as mountains, deserts and seas, as well as geological events such as rock slides or earthquakes, which were often perceived as the expression of a divine intervention. The Bible also provides a vertical reading of the world, from the infernal abysses to the highest summits pointing at the sky. This widely spread notion can be found in numerous sermons, saints' lives, or religious plays. But what about its influence on the geographical discourse and knowledge of the time? Faced with this new developing science of space, which offers to describe the topographical and chorographical reality of places, how does the symbolic interpretation of Creation evolve? Is it possible to talk about a "disenchantment" of the geographical knowledge in response to the budding supremacy that will be granted to the practice of space and the tangible reality of the world between the end of the 15th century and the beginning of the 18th century?

From the end of the 15th century, European geographical knowledge greatly expanded due to the great sea travels towards Africa, Asia, and America. The discoveries contributed to cast a doubt on the biblical and Christian readings of the world. From this period and over a long span of centuries, some sociologists and historians have identified a so-called disenchantment of the world. German sociologist Max Weber first developed the concept in his well-known *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* from 1905, and again in *Politics as a Vocation*, in 1919¹. French philosopher and historian Marcel Gauchet has revisited this concept in two seminal works: *The Disenchantment of the World, a Political History of Religion*

¹ Max Weber, *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*, translated by Talcott Parsons, original title: *Protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus* (1905), London; New York, Routledge, 2001; Max Weber, *Politics as a Vocation*, trans. by H.H. Garth and C. Wright Mills, original title: *Politik als Beruf* (1919), Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1968.

published in 1985, and a critique and expansion of this study in *Un monde désenchanté?* in 2004². Both authors, as well as others more recently, define the disenchantment of the world as a general process of the decline of religions in the early modern times, resulting in a world deprived of spiritual meaning, potentially reduced to a material knowledge³. This concerns both the natural and the human domain⁴. Yet the disenchantment happens here within Christianity and Christian culture. The concept of the disenchantment of the world appears as a political history of religion and not a religious or theological history. It is a long process, spread over several hundreds of years, beginning in the 11th century but not visible until the 16th century. This process of "exit from religion" in Marcel Gauchet's words, is still happening in the beginning of our 21st century. The vanishing of the religious, as a social structure, becomes visible in the 16th century because of the double crisis of mediation, both religious through the Reformation, and political, with the assertion of the states. That is why the first two centuries of the early modern period are essential to this change. Geography occupies a prominent role in the disenchantment process. Indeed, the space occupied by a community, its territory and description constitutes some core principles to human societies. From a political point of view, it is a time of assertions for various states, in particular when it comes to their spatial entity and their identity. For the various communities in early modern Europe, it is also a time of identity building. From a religious point of view, describing the territory is linked to the Christian interpretation of the world as it is presented in the Bible. It is influenced by philosophical questions about reality, knowledge, and the experience of the world (as they are developed for example by Immanuel Kant and Maurice Merleau-Ponty⁵). Eventually, there is an intimate link between knowledge and power (as shown by Michel Foucault⁶), in particular between geography, society and power. However,

² Marcel Gauchet, *Désenchantement du monde*, Paris, Gallimard, 1985 (*The Disenchantment of the World: A Political History of Religion*, translated by Oscar Burge, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1999; Marcel Gauchet, *Un monde désenchanté ?*, Paris, Les Éditions de l'Atelier/Éditions Ouvrières, Pocket, 2007 (1st ed. 2004 ; which book hasn't been translated into English yet, to my knowledge).

³ "The rendering of the world as totally profane and without spiritual significance" (Bronislaw Szerszynski, *Nature, Technology and the Sacred*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2005, p. 7).

⁴ Gilbert G. Germain, *A Discourse on Disenchantment: Reflections on Politics and Technology*, New York, State University of New York Press, 1993, p. 34.

⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), translated by T.K. Abbott, Amherst, Prometheus, 1996; Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The world of perception* (1945), translated by Oliver Davis, London; New York, Routledge, 2009.

⁶ In particular *Power/knowledge : selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977*, edited by Colin Gordon, translated by Colin Gordon ... [et al.], New York, Pantheon Books, 1980; *Archaeology of knowledge (L'Archéologie du savoir*, 1969), translated by A.M. Sheridan Smith, London; New York, Routledge, 2002.; *L'Ordre du discours*, Paris, Gallimard, 1971; *Dits et Écrits*, Paris, Gallimard, 4 vol., 1994; *Leçons sur la volonté de savoir*, Paris, Gallimard, 2011; *Subjectivité et vérité*, Paris, Seuil, 2014.

while the question of the disenchantment of the world is largely explored by sociologists, political scientists, philosophers or theologians, and epistemologists, it rarely appears in the works of cultural historians and historians of knowledge⁷. It is very surprising since Marcel Gauchet acknowledges that the disenchantment is a general movement, cultural et spatial, not only political, economic and social⁸. We have to face a second problem because most authors dealing with the disenchantment do so within a contemporary history frame, in the English acceptance ("Histoire du temps présent" in French), instead of an early modern one. Eventually, some approaches are not operating such as secularism or the important question in the 20th century of the relation between nature and technics⁹, are simply not working.

My goal is to question the historical relevance of the concept of the "disenchantment of the world" applied to the geographical field in an history of knowledge. My main sources are early modern cosmographies as well as other types of discourse on geographical space, such as travel diaries, map making or cartography, and universal histories mainly published between the mid-15th and end of the 17th century. I will first talk about the relationship between geography and Christian readings of the world. I will then study the moving back of the religious in early modern times. Finally, I will question the limits of the disenchantment of the world in the early modern period.

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In the 15th century and well into the following one, geography is intimately linked to theology and reveals a Christian reading of the world. Indeed, natural theology¹⁰ looks for God through the ordinary knowledge of man and the world,

⁷ See for instance Bergmann, Sigurd, "Theology in its Spatial Turn: Space, Place and Built Environments Challenging and Changing the Images of God", *Religion Compass*. vol. 1, Issue 3, mai 2007, p. 353-379 ; Peter Dews, *The Limits of Disenchantment: Essays on Contemporary European Philosophy*, London; New York, Verso, 1995; H. Floris Cohen, *The Scientific Revolution: A Historiographical Inquiry*, Chicago, The Chicago University Press, 1994, in particular, p. 177-179; John Hedley Brooke, *Science and religion: some historical perspectives*, Cambridge; New-York, Cambridge University Press, 1991.

⁸ Marcel Gauchet, *Un monde désenchanté ?*, Paris, Les Éditions de l'Atelier/Éditions Ouvrières, Pocket, 2007, p. 152-153.

⁹ Bronislaw Szerszynski, *Nature, Technology and the Sacred*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2005; Gilbert G. Germain, *A Discourse on Disenchantment: Reflections on Politics and Technology*, New York, State University of New York Press, 1993.

¹⁰ See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1975, chap. 1, 3 ; Gounin-Habert, Mireille, Montaigne traducteur de la "Théologie naturelle" : plaisantes et saintes imaginations, Paris, Éd. Classiques Garnier, 2010 ; Roger Pouivet, « Théologie naturelle et épistémologie des croyances

namely through science and philosophy. From this standpoint, cosmography becomes a way to know the work of God the Creator and His Mightiness. In his 1575 *Universal Cosmography*, French cosmographer André Thevet presents the reader with this very principle from the foreword on. Talking about cosmography, he says:

I think no science, after Theology, is abler to uncover and admire the divine Greatness and Power than [cosmography]. If you reflect carefully, you will know as true that any praise directed to nature can only be owned to the Creator¹¹.

According to Thevet, then, all believers must contemplate God's power and can do so thanks to cosmography's panoptic virtue. Cosmography enables a knowledge of the Divine because it claims to describe the entire world. There are numerous passages in the Bible or the Church Fathers writings inviting to discover God's work in the physical world. From the book of Wisdom, the author says that God "is the one who gave me the true science of what is, the one who unveiled the structure of the world, of its elements and their properties to me [...] for it is the maker of everything I have learned¹²". For the doctor of the Church Saint Bonaventure, God created all things "not to increase His glory, but in order to show and communicate this glory to men¹³". And indeed up to the 15th century, geography and history lend themselves well to the description of the progresses of men from Genesis to the end of times (eschatology). These two fields are human discourses fitting into a Christian vision of the world.

Beyond natural theology, revealed theology seeks the knowledge of God through the study of Revelation, namely the way God chose to historically manifest himself to men (see the history of Israel, and most of all with Christ). Just like natural theology, revealed theology also highlights strong links between geography and theology. In his foreword to the *Universal Cosmography* again, Thevet explains that:

This science is more likely to advance our understanding of the spectacle of Nature; it also enables us to better know the divine power. In order to make us understand the divine, the Holy Spirit exhorts and teaches us to look at the great magnificence of this universe which, however admirable it could be, is nothing compared to the worth of its Maker whose hands are so great that He contains the entire world in just one, and has the earth spin in between two or three fingers¹⁴.

religieuses », *Revue des sciences religieuses*, 81/2, 2007, p. 155-173 ; Scott Mandelbrote, 'Early Modern Natural Theologies', in Russell Re Manning (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook to Natural Theology*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 75-99.

¹¹ André Thevet, *Cosmographie universelle*, Paris, Guillaume Chaudiere, 1575, t. 1, Préface, n. p.

¹² Sg 7, 17-21.

¹³ Sent. 2, 1, 2, 2, 1.

¹⁴ André Thevet, *Cosmographie universelle*, Paris, Guillaume Chaudiere, 1575, t. 1, Préface, n. p.

What to me appears fundamental here is Thevet's insistence on the extra-worldly nature of the Christian God, as it is defined by the theology of Incarnation¹⁵. The author explains that there are two worlds, the earthly one and the celestial one, permanently separated ever since the first day of Creation. The Christian God is very far from men, he predates the world of men; He is exterior and superior to it. There is a hierarchy between heavens and earth, between the things from this world and the divine, a submission of the visible to the invisible, of the natural to the supernatural ("la nature et la surnature," using Marcel Gauchet's terminology). From this perspective, describing the world is also describing the work of God as well as approaching an understanding of the divine.

This approach explains the existence at the Renaissance of so-called "cosmographic meditations," which are spiritual meditations drawing from both the Bible and geography books. The expression was coined by Gerardus Mercator for his great *Atlas* published in 1595, which full title is *Atlas sive cosmographicae meditationes de fabrica mundi et fabricati figura* (*Atlas, or, Cosmographic Meditations on the Creation of the World and the Image of Creation*) (translated in French in 1607 by La Popelinière)¹⁶. Mercator's *Atlas* introduction is a commentary of the first chapters of Genesis¹⁷. Cosmographic meditations are viewed as a way to follow Augustine's or Calvin's teaching, according to whom God has "engraved in each one of His works certain signs of His majesty by which He offered Himself to be known from us according to our small capacity"¹⁸.

Another idea that shows the relations between geography and the Christian readings of the world is about the meaning of places. Even though cosmographies are seen first and foremost as works of theology, they still present a geography of the world, especially of the Eastern Mediterranean regions, which symbolic reading gives it a universal value. 16th century works are still shaped by medieval teaching. Structured by the thought of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, they invite the reader to switch from natural theology to revealed theology when it comes to geographical places in

¹⁵ « L'extra-mondanéité établie par la foi selon l'Incarnation » (Marcel Gauchet, *Un monde désenchanté ?*, 2004, p. 69, and see also p. 150-151).

¹⁶ Gerard Mercator, *Atlas sive cosmographicae meditationes de fabrica mundi et fabricati figura*, Duisburgi Clivorum, [Excudebat Albertus Busius], [1595], 5 t.

¹⁷ English writer Richard Hakluyt has commented on beautiful maps he was shown by his cousin in 1589, said to have taken him "from the mappe to the Bible."

¹⁸ Jean Calvin, Elsie Anne McKee, *Institutes of the Christian Religion: The First English Version of the 1541 French Edition*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2009, p. 30. The concept of the sign in protestant theology has been extensively studied by Randall Zachman in "The Universe as the Living Image of God," in *Image and Word in the Theology of John Calvin*, Notre-Dame University Press, 2007, ch. 1, p. 25-54.

holy texts. Following *La mer des Hystoires (The Sea of History)*, a widespread chronicle of the history of the world first published in Lubeck in 1475, Augustine defines two ways of analysis for the biblical text, corresponding to the four methods of interpretation: literal or historical, spiritual which is divided in allegorical (or interpretation of the mysteries of the Holy Scriptures), topological or moral, anagogical or divine. And during the Renaissance what is true for the history of the world is true for the geography of the earth. The earthly reality of the geographical subject is always crossed with its meaning and object, the ultimate intelligence behind Life and the World. This very semantic crossroads defines and lays the basis for the Christian reality of the world through discourse. The same goes for landscapes, read through a religious lens. It is the case for instance with seascapes¹⁹ or mountains, with scenes from the Mont Aiguille in the French Dauphiné region, which ascent in 1492 (by Antoine de Ville) marked the beginnings of mountaineering²⁰. The summit is described like a growth from the earth to the sky and Heavens, just like Genesis' Earthly Paradise. Between the end of the 15th century and the beginning of the 18th century, we find multiple examples of this cultural reception of the concept of mountain in European societies, be it through the chosen location of monasteries isolated from the rest of the world, in "alpine deserts" such as the Grande Chartreuse for instance, or through certain pilgrimages like the one in Notre-Dame de la Guérison (*Our Lady of the Recovery*) at the bottom of the Italian side of the Mont Blanc.

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However, geographical knowledge shows a moving back of the religious between the end of the 15th and the 17th century. The evolution of world maps is indicative of a decreasing religious interpretation of the earthly space. As we can see on the first printed world map in an edition of *Etymologiae (Etymologies)* by Isidore of Seville in 1472, until the end of the Middle Ages, the Earth is traditionally represented

¹⁹ Jerry H. Bentley, Renate Bridenthal, Kären Wigen, *Seascapes: Maritime Histories, Littoral Cultures, and Transoceanic Exchanges*, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 2007; Alain Cabantous, *Le ciel dans la mer. Christianisme et civilisation maritime. XVI^e-XIX^e siècle*, Paris, Fayard, 1990.

²⁰ Etienne Bourdon, *Le voyage et la découverte des Alpes. Histoire de la construction d'un savoir (1492-1713)*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de Paris-Sorbonne, 2011, chap. IX; Serge Brunet et Phillippe Martin, *Paysages et religion. Perceptions et création chrétiennes*, Paris, CTHS, 2015.

on a map divided into three continents - Europe, Asia and Africa - with a city at its center and three characters. These maps are called T and O maps from *Orbis Terrarum* or "circle of the lands," with the letter T inside an O. They are a Christian adaptation of a type of representation found in the Greek antiquity with Hecataeus of Miletus (circa 550-480 BC, who may have taken it from Anaximander, c. 610-546 BC). The city in the middle of the map was Delphi, "the navel of the world." This representation of the world begins again with a Christian interpretation in the 7th century with Isidore of Seville and in the 8th century with Venerable Bede. This type of representation appears in early printed books. It can be found in the early printed great medieval encyclopedias such as the 13th century ones by Bartholomeus Anglicus. T and O maps are also found in universal histories like Jean Mansel's *Fleur des hystoires* (*Flower of History*) around 1460 (1459-1463), where the historiographer is concerned with human history under the reign of Charles VI, king of France (1380-1422). In this ambitious history of the world in four volumes there is clearly a symbolic fusion between the geographical representation of the world and its biblical meaning. We can see Jerusalem at the center, instead of Delphi, different rivers (the Tanaïs or Don, and the Nile, horizontally, and the Mediterranean vertically). As it is often the case, the garden of Eden is somewhere East. It is composed of a river, springing from it and divided into four arms, including the Tigris and Euphrates rivers; the Tree of life and the Tree of knowledge of good and evil (representing the ability of the self to decide of what is good or bad, hence a sin of pride; forbidden fruits). We can see Mount Ararat where Noah landed his ark, and three characters standing for the sons of Noah, according to Venerable Bede's interpretation. Shem, the eldest son, received Europe and should be the ancestor of Abraham and the Hebrews; Ham, the youngest son who saw Noah naked, and his son Canaan, the recipient of the curse of Ham by Noah, received Africa (Egypt, Nubia, Arabia); Japheth inherited Asia Minor and the Mediterranean islands. The repetition of the number "3" on the map clearly sends back to the Trinity, a theological concept in conformity with the shape of the world as it was known from the end of the Middle Ages, to the Three Kings from the New Testament who symbolize the recognition of Christ as the Messiah by pagan kings. Incidentally one of the Three Kings' skin is made black in order to represent the African continent. We can see that T and O maps are less a geographical than a theological representation of the shape and history of the peopling of the world. This very representation

disappears quickly at the end of the 15th century. From the 15th century on, map making refers to ancient Greek knowledge, more precisely. At the same time other, more modern representations of the earth appear, such as Martin Waldseemüller's in 1507 bearing the name "America" in the Brazil region named after Amerigo Vespucci, for the first time on a map. A few years earlier Amerigo Vespucci had published different letters, one in 1504 named *Mundus Novus* recounting the travel of Pedro Alveres Cabral (1500), and another one, the next year in 1505, named *Lettera di Amerigo Vespucci delle isole nuovamente trovate in quattro suoi viaggi*. In the 16th century the influence of the Bible only appears in two specific types of works. One in adaptations of Ptolemy's newly printed maps as in Ptolemy's planisphere in Hartmann Schedel (1493). The sons of Noah are only represented to adorn the map, alongside Plinian monsters on the sides. And we can see that they are out of the geographical world. A second type of maps keeps following the T and O pattern in the 16th century but with no geographical purpose. It can be seen with the *Itinerarum Sacrae Scripturae* by Heinrich Bunting, published in 1582²¹, in which the three continents appear as petals. The author is both a pastor and a theologian and his book is a reworking of the Bible into a travel book illustrated with ten maps. The resolutely stylized representation into three petals refers to the clover, present on the coat-of-arm of his native town of Hanover. But even Heinrich Bunting went to the trouble of including the America in a corner of the map, therefore distancing himself from the Biblical text.

While these examples offer no obvious topographical representations of the world, the persistence of the Noachian tradition also takes place in subtler ways. Faced with an increasingly sound geographical knowledge, some cartographers attempt a synthesis between the knowledge of their time and the three continent model. Some illustrated Bibles follow this trend, such as the famous multilingual *Royal Bible*, published in Antwerp between 1569 and 1573 by Christophe Plantin. The Bible includes a world map summarizing the geographical knowledge of the time but also locating Moses' descendants. The Eurasian continent does not end but it collides into the American continent. The map also gathers the Eurasian and American continents in order to introduce supposed biblical ancestors for the Amerindian people. We can see another example with Jacques Signot's *La Division du Monde (The Division of*

²¹ Heinrich Bunting, *Itinerarum Sacrae Scripturae*, Helmstadt, Jacobus Lucius, 1582.

the World) first published in 1539²². The general outline still follows a biblical framework. After mentioning the Creation, the Great Flood and the tower of Babel, Jacques Signot organizes the description of the Earth according to the continents offered to the sons of Noah. He starts with Shem's Asia, then Japheth's Europe and eventually Ham's Africa. The book was reprinted several times throughout the 16th century but the biblical framework disappears later on. Only few religious considerations remain in the foreword of works such as François de Belleforest's *Cosmographie universelle (Universal Cosmography)* in 1575, starting with a narration of the Creation²³. But André Thevet's *Cosmography*, published the same year, does not mention the Creation. There are hardly any other examples of these maps after 1575. Another manifestation of the moving back of religious history is the disappearance, in later years, of the systematic and explicit interpretation of Creation in works of geography. Miracles and divine interventions also disappear from the works of geography in the 17th century. Even natural catastrophes such as the collapsing of the Granier mountain in 1248 is not described as a divine sanction but a mere geological event. The geographical influence of holy texts only prevails in works of geography dedicated to the Eastern Mediterranean regions. This disappearance is a first element of the so-called disenchantment as a moving back of Christian interpretations in the geographical fields.

We could easily imagine that geographical knowledge remains a very sensitive field of study from a theological standpoint, in the wake of the 16th and 17th century religious conflicts; potential contentious topics are numerous. However, theological controversies linked to the geographical field of knowledge are actually quite rare. The debates are deprived of intensity and often limited to personal rivalries. As we have seen, the switch from three to four continents happens often. The debate around the humanity of the native American and African peoples does not interfere with their exploitation. The same goes for the unavoidable question about Revelation and its reception or not by the newly discovered indigenous peoples. The medieval quest of Paradise's earthly location as well as the Kingdom of Prester John's quickly becomes vain and quite simplistic. Even the major theological debate around the

²² Jacques Signot, *La Division du monde, contenant la déclaration des provinces et régions d'Asie, Europe et Aphricque, ensemble les passaiges, lieux et destroitcz par lesquelz on peut entrer et passer de Gaille es parties d'Italie. Traictant de plusieurs belles matières... par lesquelles on pourra facilement avoir la description de la charte gallicane*, Paris, A. Lotrian, 1539.

²³ François de Belleforest, *La Cosmographie universelle de tout le monde, en laquelle... sont au vray descriptes toutes les parties habitables et non habitables de la terre et de la mer*, Paris, M. Sonnius, 1575.

Eucharist and the question of the transubstantiation (doctrine of the Real Presence versus consubstantiation) does not seem to have any consequence on the works of geography. Indeed, since geography studies the peoples and its *mores*, the debate could have easily overlapped. During the so-called "Guanabara polemic" in 1557 between French Catholic and Protestant settlers in Brazil, the Calvinists compare the Catholic rite of the Eucharist to the ritual cannibalism of the indigenous people, the Tupinamba²⁴. While the debate spread to Europe, its consequences regarding the field of geography are minimal. The statement of French theologian Theodore Beza during the 1561 Colloquy of Poissy mirrors the contemporary evolution of the field. He argues something very important for us: "The body of Christ is as far removed from the bread and wine as the highest heaven is from earth"²⁵. It is the recognition of a separation between the divine and earth. How can we explain that geography, as opposed to astronomy or anatomy, was the object of so few attacks, while the field was in the midst of so profound a change? For geography is, after all, a fundamental knowledge about the World. There are several reasons to this relative tolerance. Early modern geographers remain careful and tend to not question the theses condemned by the Church. Belleforest condemns "Copernic's fantastical opinion" according to which the Earth moved. André Thevet submits the first copy of his *Universal Cosmography* to the censorship of the Sorbonne, French faculty of theology. In 1544, when Pierre Apian (Peter Benewitz) contradicts Saint-Augustine's denial of a spherical earth, he does so citing the Apostles, and in particular Saint Thomas who died a martyr in Southern India (in 70 AD). André Thevet again refuses to study the 11th heaven and leaves it to theologians. Belleforest leaves out astronomy entirely from his *Cosmography*. His topic is earth and nothing else. The second reason is that the knowledge presented in the Scriptures increasingly appears as an ancient and imperfect knowledge. When Belleforest comes to the question of locating Jerusalem at the center of the world according to the tradition of the Church Fathers, he rebukes Thevet for his critique against "the ancient Fathers" and for "blaming them for having ignored the exact location and description of the world."²⁶ It is interesting to see that here, the very catholic Belleforest implicitly acknowledges that the Church Fathers were wrong. To summarize, geo-theological

²⁴ Frank Lestringant, *Une sainte horreur, ou le voyage en Eucharistie, XVI^e-XVIII^e siècle*, Paris, PUF, 1996.

²⁵ Bernard Cottret, *Calvin. A Biography*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000, p. 248.

²⁶ François de Belleforest, *La Cosmographie universelle de tout le monde*, Paris, M. Sonnius, 1575, t. 2, p. 1006.

controversies invite geographers to a more careful attitude and to drop the field of religious history and theology to focus on pure geography. This new attitude leads to a separation between knowledge about the world on the one hand, and theology on the other.

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It may seem that from the 16th century on, man was able to map, measure, quantify and locate the world, without any mediation of the divine, like a kind of disenchantment. But this vision, about the topic of knowledge, is too limiting. Is there really a world rising without meaning? But what sort of world does geography try to describe? It applies to the world in its material acceptance (a mountain or a city here, a mine there) and to the organization of temporal powers around a given territory, its partition and the wars waging around it. This kind of geography says nothing about the meaning of the world, but it does not claim to do so any either. This is the meaning of André Thevet's comment about the Church Fathers and their ignorance of the location of Jerusalem, when he concludes: "it is well known that when it comes to the Holy Scriptures, their meaning, spirit and very substance cannot be scattered by what lies at the surface, the mere bark and naked history"²⁷.

Religious interpretations of the world therefore can still be found with very specific types of non-geographical works. Geography is not the only way to deal with earth. It is the case with the lives of the saints, religious theater, panegyrics and sermons. All of these sources contain numerous geographical references applied to religious history, sometimes playing a key role: see the story of St Bernard of Menthon in the Alps²⁸, for instance, whose name was given to the Little and the Great St. Bernard Passes in Switzerland. Travel diaries are also very prone to describe an experience of the world through the religious lens, starting with accounts from pilgrimages. In 1582 French Abbot Philippe de Caverel thanks God the Creator for the beauty of Alpine streams while in 1591 Jacques de Villamont pays tribute to "the divine painter

²⁷ André Thevet, *Cosmographie universelle*, Paris, Guillaume Chaudiere, 1575, t. 1, f° 175 v.

²⁸ Christopher Lucken, « Exorciser la montagne. Saint Bernard de Menthon au sommet du Mont-Joux », dans *Montagnes médiévales*, Société des historiens médiévistes de l'Enseignement supérieur public, Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne, 2004, p. 99-120.

and worker of the entire Nature"²⁹ in the most popular travel book of the time. In 1614 Pierre Le Monnier eventually considers that mountains show the "great miracles of Nature and the greatest secrets of God the highest"³⁰. Other diaries include Biblical quotations to their travel account. It is the case of Scottish theologian and historian Gilbert Burnet who, in 1685, still compares the chaotic landscape of the Alps to the day after the Great Flood. He interprets the 1618 landslide of Plurs, in the Valtellina region, as a divine punishment due to the depravity of the Milanese people. His account re-tells the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, with the characters of Lot and his wife switched for rich Milanese merchants³¹. Situations with a very strong emotional charge are also conducive to religious interpretations. We can see it with the account of the 1689 *Glorious Return*, where the return of a thousand of Waldesian people to their valleys is described as a real fight between the forces of Good and Evil, where geographical space is filled with theological interpretations. It can even be read as a spiritual voyage, inspired by works on the Waldesian Church by their pastors Jean-Paul Perrin, Pierre Gilles, and Jean Léger, or even Pierre Jurieu on the interpretations of prophecies³². These various examples show that discourses on space, beyond Geography as a science, can still celebrate the "Great Worker".

More again, we see a geographical mediation appear. We saw how André Thevet considered geography only second in dignity to theology; this shows how much this subject played a key part in the quest for knowledge in early modern times. Through the human gaze cast upon the outside world, geography contributes to involve man in the Creation. The study of maps and lands offers a cognitive tool in the mediation between men and God. Thanks to the articulation between the visible and invisible, 16th and 17th century geography can therefore pretend to reinstate unity or rather mend the split between the human world and the divine. Geography therefore contributes to a "sacral economy of the world"³³. This function appears most clearly

²⁹ Jacques de Villamont, *Les voyages du seigneur de Villamont*, Paris, C. de Monstr'oeil et J. Richer, 1595, p. 82.

³⁰ Pierre Le Monnier, *Antiquitez, mémoires et observations remarquables d'épithaphes, tombeaux, colosses, obélisques*, Lille, C. Beys, 1614, p. 45.

³¹ Gilbert Burnet, *Some Letters containing an account of what seemed most remarkable in Switzerland, Italy, etc.*, Rotterdam, A. Acher, 1686; *Voyage de Suisse, d'Italie et de quelques endroits d'Allemagne et de France, fait ès années 1685 et 1686 par M. Burnet, avec des Remarques d'une personne de qualité touchant la Suisse et l'Italie*, Rotterdam, A. Acher, 1687, p. 180; Thomas Burnet, *Telluris Theoria sacra* (1681), trad. *The Theory of the earth, containing an Account of the Original of the earth... the two first books concerning the Deluge and concerning Paradise*, London, R. Norton, 1684. See in the Bible: Gn 19, 26; Lc 17, 31-32.

³² Etienne Bourdon, « La Glorieuse rentrée des Vaudois (1689), un voyage militaire et spirituel », in *Voyages et voyageurs*, Actes du 130e Congrès national des sociétés historiques et scientifiques, CTHS, Paris, 2009.

³³ Marcel Gauchet, *Un monde désenchanté ?*, Paris, Les Éditions de l'Atelier/Éditions Ouvrières, Pocket, 2007 (1st ed. 2004), p. 64.

in the Waldensian accounts. The same meaning is carried through the word "cosmography" which very meaning refers to the union between Heavens and Earth. The strong hierarchy between Heaven and Earth, supported by an ontological dissociation of the orders of reality also allowed geographers to appropriate their topic more freely, the "here below" not being sacred *per se*.

This consequence leads to Marcel Gauchet's statement according to which "Christianity is the religion of the departure from religion"³⁴. The geographical discourse also fits into the humanist framework, granting mankind an elevated dignity in the realm of Creation (Pico della Mirandola, Erasmus, Montaigne for example) as well as appreciating man's knowledge of the world. Geography becomes therefore a way to reduce the extreme metaphysical devaluation to the lowest degree of the being and to find "the ontological One uniting God with the world"³⁵, namely the relationship between the earthly and the divine. At the same time, like all subjects, geography represents a mediation between men and the world, and therefore in between men themselves, as it aims to offer a clearly understandable description of it. This very mediation between men and the divine marks a turning point in the evolution of early modern geography. Because geography leads to the emancipation of the discourse on reality and the tangible world, from the invisible world and its meaning, cosmographers are going to gradually concentrate on the study of the physical world, seen as their own field of expertise, leaving any "unwordly" or spiritual considerations to theology. A series of steps which led to this "split between the two self-substantiating orders of reality"³⁶. Initially, geographers were careful to separate the celestial sphere from the earthly one, in conformity with the Ptolemaic model. Just like we can see with François de Belleforest, they will then limit themselves to talk about the earth. Eventually they will drop the word "cosmography" which will gradually be replaced by the ancient word *Geography, Universal Geography, Theatre*

³⁴ Marcel Gauchet, *The Disenchantment of the World: A Political History of Religion*, translated by Oscar Burge, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1999, p. 101 ("A religion for Departing from religion". For this translation, see André Cloots, "Modernity and Christianity. Marcel Gauchet on the Christian Roots of the Modern Ways of Thinking", *Milltown studies* (61), 2008, p. 26.

³⁵ Marcel Gauchet, *The Disenchantment of the World: A Political History of Religion*, translated by Oscar Burge, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1999, p. 53.

³⁶ Marcel Gauchet, *The Disenchantment of the World: A Political History of Religion*, translated by Oscar Burge, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1999, p. 77.

of the whole World or "*Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, ABC of the world, and so on*"³⁷ ... In the field of geography, we see an evolution from a religious to a political interpretative paradigm, better accounting for the complexity of the contemporary reality of the world which shows a torn Christianity, a splitting-up of the states, political rivalries sometimes overriding religious divides; this is the case for instance with Catholic states at war with each others, Catholic states allied with Protestant states; Catholic or Protestant states allied to Ottomans against other Christians. As a result of this shifting paradigm, as noticed by the English historian John Hale, the concept of Christianity gradually fades away to be replaced with the concept of Europe. While the former pretended to (an illusory) unity, the latter takes on the diversity of the states composing it. The switch from a theoretical, spiritual realm to strict earthly considerations is reinforced by the evidence and immediacy of the world: what is "there" (a sea, a city, a mountain, Jerusalem's location) cannot also be "elsewhere." The knowledge of geography is essentially visual. From this point forward every single individual, as long as he or she is willing to experiment, is able to contradict the wisest men. Common people such as sailors, pilgrims, merchants or soldiers can indeed access geographical knowledge, and geographical experience is no longer the privilege of the few. However, geography retains some enduring concepts inherited from Christianity. The disenchantment of the world or rather "metabolization" (idea of a diffused substance) after Marcel Gauchet, prevents neither the anthropological and cultural approaches to religion, nor a metaphysical humanization of the world after a moving back of the religious³⁸.

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To conclude, we cannot, therefore, talk about a disenchantment of the world, but about a disenchantment of the scientific discourse of the world among early modern geographers. For in the 16th and 16th centuries, the world hasn't become

³⁷ Abraham Ortelius, *Theatrum orbis terrarum*, Antverpiae, Apud Ægid. Coppenium Diesth, XX. Maij, 1570; *The Theatre of the whole World, etc. (Parergon, sive Veteris Geographiæ aliquot tabulæ. The Life of A. Ortel, written first in Latine by F. Sweert ... and now translated into English by W. B. An Epistle of Humfrey Lhoyd, written to A. Ortel, wherein ... he discourseth of the iland Mona*, London, Iohn Norton, 1606; Pierre Duval, *L'A B C de tout le monde, avec les positions géographiques des païs et plusieurs observations pour l'histoire moderne*, Paris, L'auteur, 1651; Pierre d'Avity, *Le Monde, ou la Description générale de ses quatre parties, avec tous ses empires, royaumes, estats et républiques, avec un discours universel comprenant les considérations générales du monde céleste et terrestre*, Paris, C. Sonnius, 1637.

³⁸ Marcel Gauchet, *Un monde désenchanté ?*, Paris, Les Éditions de l'Atelier/Éditions Ouvrières, Pocket, 2007 (1st ed. 2004), p. 138.

meaningless and science does not pretend to give meaning to the world. Also, we cannot forget that in the 16th and 17th centuries the geographical discourse remains out of reach and useless to the vast majority of the people. Aside from sailors, soldiers and a few men of science, geographical knowledge is still part of a theoretical discourse from the moment it can't be "known" through direct experience. The early modern world is not disenchanted but becomes equipped with a new tool to describe its material part, natural without supernature. Geography contributes to this "dissociation between the two orders of reality" and was born to the field of knowledge at the very heart of the Christian vision of the world as it is described in the theology of Incarnation. Since there are two worlds, the earthly one and the celestial one, permanently separated ever since the first day of Creation, Geography can escape from divine determination. More still Geography is a vector of the split between the human and the divine, later joined by sociology and economy, to describe the worldly reality. As opposed to astronomy (with Giordano Bruno and Galileo) and anatomy, the geographic field was spared by the great theological controversies. Indeed, geography is concerned with the tangible world, not sacred *per se* but the mere support of the invisible and the divine. Geography is at a good distance from God. Thus, geography does not get involved neither with God's heavens, nor the physical materiality of Man, made "in the image of God" (Genesis, 1:27), real "tabernacle of the Lord" (Numbers, 19:13), necessary on the Last Judgement. Religion belongs to the realm of belief and is carried by faith while geography belongs to knowledge and is rooted in understanding. That is one of the great evolutions of the European Renaissance. Geography is simply not the field voicing that discourse anymore but deals with the sense of the world. Religion and geography have become two different fields. This movement of moving back of the religious in Geography will continue until today.

Etienne Bourdon
University Grenoble Alpes, France
Laboratoire de Recherches historiques Rhône-Alpes

