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Renaissance Cosmographical Knowledge and Religious Discourse A ‘Disenchantment of the World’?

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Abstract

Sociologists, philosophers and historians (Weber, Blumenberg, Gauchet) have identified a so-called ‘disenchantment of the world’ which began to be perceptible during the Renaissance. The article discusses the historical relevance of the concept and that of secularization as applied to the history of early modern cosmographical knowledge. I draw a distinction between geography and cosmography in arguing that the process of ‘disenchantment’ was an uneven and complex process. On the one hand, cartography and geography moved away from biblical and Christian readings of the world. On the other hand, cosmography was seen as enabling a form of knowledge of the Divine describing the entire Creation. At the same time, it will be argued that geography in its mediation of earthly knowledge promoted a resetting and restructuring of a system of re-enchantment. All in all, knowledge, science and rationality contributed to appease a ‘panic-stricken Christianity’ (Crouzet).

Keywords: *Cosmography, Disenchantment of the World, Geography, Knowledge, Renaissance*

1. Introduction

From the second half of the fifteenth century onward, European geographical knowledge greatly expanded thanks to major voyages of discovery to Africa, Asia and America. These discoveries cast doubts on biblical and Christian readings of the world. Sociologists, philosophers and historians have identified a so-called ‘disenchantment of the world’ related to this period. The aim of this essay is to analyse the circulation and transformation of Renaissance cosmographical knowledge as it confronted religious discourse. It will question the relevance of the concepts of ‘disenchantment of the world’ and secularization

applied to the geographical field in the history of knowledge in the early modern period. It will endeavour to demonstrate that there was then no such thing as a simple and universal 'disenchantment of the world'. Indeed, the process was complex and uneven. Rather than an overall 'disenchantment of the world', I will argue that there was a resetting: a new composition of the system of enchantment actually took place. The relation between knowledge of the world and the concept of disenchantment needs, therefore, to be analysed on various levels. During the period, a new, more complex and stimulating situation emerged, involving multiple and sometimes contradictory discourses.

Max Weber first developed the concept of 'disenchantment of the world' in his well-known work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904-1905), and later in *Politics as a Vocation* (1917-1919). Weber's theory does not elaborate specifically on the spatial dimension of the world, yet his central argument is that the place of magic in our understanding of the world gradually shrank. This idea plays a key role in Hans Blumenberg's reflections in his *Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (1966). Marcel Gauchet revisited the concept in two fundamental works, *The Disenchantment of the World, a Political History of Religion* (1985), and a critique and expansion of this study, *Un monde désenchanté?* (2004). These three authors, as well as other contemporary writers, defined the 'disenchantment of the world' as a general process in the decline of religion in early modern times – a process that resulted in a world deprived of spiritual meaning, potentially reducible to material knowledge (Szerszynski 2005, 7). This 'exit from religion', as Marcel Gauchet wrote (1985 and 1998), has been a lengthy process. Spreading over several hundred years, it began in the eleventh century, although it was not manifest until the sixteenth century.

The role of geography in this changing outlook has not been fully addressed. This is a significant omission, for the space or, more precisely, the territory occupied by a community constitutes one of the core elements of societal formation. From a political standpoint, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were a time of assertion for various states, not only of their spatial identity, but also in the shaping of their national identity (Bradshaw and Roberts 1998; Hampton 2001; Yardeni 2005; Tallon 2007). From a Christian point of view, describing territory was linked to a religious interpretation of the world (Büttner 1974 and 1979; Park 1994). Moreover, the close connection between knowledge and power, shown by Michel Foucault (1980), appertains to geography, society and politics. Indeed, the question of the 'disenchantment of the world' has been studied by few historians (Brooke 1991; Soergel 1997; Walsham 2008; Balzamo 2010). In the main it has been explored by sociologists, political scientists, philosophers, theologians and epistemologists (Isambert 1986; Cohen 1994; Dews 1995; Monod 2002; Walsham and Ruggiu 2003; Saler 2006; Bergmann 2007; Aspren 2014; Sharpe and Nickelson 2014; Josephson-Storm 2017). Consequently, the debate on disenchantment often lacks a cosmographical or geographical perspective. Geography should be reintroduced into the debate and should be used primarily to question the historical reality of the decrease of religious interpretations in early modern knowledge. Sources considered in this essay are Renaissance cosmographies (Münster 1544; Belleforest 1575; Thevet 1575), brought together with other types of discourse on geographical space, such as travel diaries, cartography and universal histories, mainly published between the mid-fifteenth century and the later part of the seventeenth century. After exploring the gradual disappearance of religious interpretations in cosmography and geography, this article will question the limits of the concept of disenchantment in knowledge before offering a new interpretation of the links between Renaissance, geographical knowledge and the re-enchantment of man.

2. *A Gradual Disappearance of Religious Interpretations*

Religious interpretation indisputably fades away from geographical knowledge. It can be first perceived in encyclopaedias from the thirteenth century (such as the *Speculum maius* by the Dominican friar Vincent de Beauvais, 1263) and then in Renaissance cosmographies as well as atlases such as Abraham Ortelius' *Theatrum orbis terrarum* (1570), the first atlas exclusively made up of modern maps. The evolution of world maps is indicative of a decrease in religious interpretation of the earthly space. The first incunabula of medieval encyclopaedias still contain T and O world maps as can be seen on the first printed world map in the 1472 edition of Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae* (Etymologies). Such maps are part of a long tradition, earlier illustrated in the *Ymago Mundi* (1410) by theologian Pierre d'Ailly. T and O is the acronym of *Orbis Terrarum*, showing the letter T inside an O. These maps often represent the earth divided into three continents – Europe, Asia and Africa – with a city in its centre. They constitute Christian adaptations of a type of representation found in Greek antiquity in the works of Hecataeus of Miletus (c. 550-480 B.C.), who may have taken it from Anaximander (c. 610-546 B.C.). According to the ancient Greek conception, the world was as round and flat as a shield, and the city in the middle of the map was Delphi, the omphalos (ὀμφαλός), 'the navel of the world'. This illustration of the world prompted a Christian interpretation in the seventh and eighth centuries in the works of Isidore of Seville and (Pseudo) Venerable Bede. T and O maps are also found in universal histories like Jean Mansel's *Fleur des hystoires* (Flower of Histories) around 1459-1463, in which, under the reign of Charles VI, king of France (1380-1422), the historiographer elaborated on human history. In this ambitious history of the world, one map drawn by Simon Marmion is a symbolic fusion between Greek tradition, the geographical representation of the world and its biblical meaning (Ms 9231, 281v). Maps of this kind display Jerusalem, instead of Delphi, in their centre. The two bars of the letter T are represented by two horizontal rivers (the Tanais or Don, and the Nile), and the Mediterranean Sea vertically. The Garden of Eden and its four rivers – unsurprisingly – lie somewhere East. Nearby, the Tree of Knowledge is pictured. In the background stands Mount Ararat where Noah's Ark made landfall, along with three characters representing the sons of Noah, according to Venerable Bede's interpretation. Shem, Noah's eldest son, inherited Asia Minor and the Mediterranean islands. He is considered the ancestor of Abraham and the Hebrews. His youngest son Japheth inherited Europe. Ham is described as the last son who dared to look at Noah drunk and naked and, as a punishment, his own son, Canaan, was cursed and received Africa. The repetition of number 3 on the map clearly refers to the Trinity, a theological concept in conformity with the shape of the world as it was known until the end of the Middle Ages. From the same perspective, the Three Kings in the New Testament symbolize the recognition of Christ as the Messiah by pagan kings, one from each continent. Notably, the skin of one of the kings is coloured in black in order to represent the African continent.

This kind of map is clearly more a theological rendering of the world than a geographical illustration. It displays the shape of the world and the biblical history of its population. From the end of the fifteenth century, we can find only a few examples. The adaptations of Ptolemy's newly printed maps and Ptolemy's planisphere in Hartmann Schedel's *Liber chronicarum* (1493) both display biblical influence. The sons of Noah are represented although only to adorn the map alongside Plinian monsters in the corners. Further, these biblical figures are shown outside the geographical world. Other maps from this period still follow the biblical pattern of the sixteenth century, yet without real geographical purpose. In his *Itinerarum Sacrae Scripturae*, published in 1582, Heinrich Bünting presented a map of the world (4-5), which he called 'a

universal cosmography' illustrating that 'Ut universi orbis terrarum positus, tantò facilius percipi posset, Cosmographiam universalem in forma trifolii, inclytæ urbis Hannoveræ dulcissimæ & dilectissimæ meæ patriæ sigillo proponere volui. Granum sive semen huius trifolii, est ipsius Ecclesiæ domicilium, Judæa videlicet, cum sanctissima urbe Jerosolyma, medium totius orbis terrarum obtinens' (1598, 21).¹ The three continents appear as the petals of a trefoil, 'the seed or the grain of this clover is the house of the holy Church, Judea, with, in the centre, the holiest city of Jerusalem', unsurprisingly since the author was both a minister and a theologian. His book consists of a commentary on 'The travels of the holy Patriarchs, Prophets, Judges, Kings, our Saviour Christ and his Apostles, as they are related in the Old and New Testaments'.² This resolutely stylized representation of the world in three petals refers both to the Trinity and to the clover which appears in the coat of arms of Bunting's native and beloved town of Hanover. The arguments are rooted in theology, and they come from the author's very identity rather than from cosmography or geography. When he thinks through a geographical perspective, Bunting makes sure America is included, albeit shown in the bottom left-hand corner of the map, hence clearly giving a message of distantiation from the biblical text. Moreover, at the end of the map commentary, he points out that 'Non tamen ex omni parte vera terræ imago trifolio conformis est. Si quis igitur veram terræ marisque; effigiem habere voluerit, is in subsequenti tabula omnia exactius inveniet expressa & declarata (1598, 25); Declaratio secundæ tabulæ, quæ veram effigiem terræ marisque Representat (25b)'.³ Most of the seven other maps are, indeed, more realistic. The *Cosmographiam universalem in forma trifolii*'s map is no longer included in subsequent editions, such as the 1598 English version. These representations disappeared at the end of the fifteenth century and were not found in modern cosmographical works. At the same time, more modern representations of the earth appeared, such as Martin Waldseemüller's celebrated world map of 1507, bearing the name 'America', after Amerigo Vespucci, for the first time on a map. From the end of the fifteenth century onwards, the influence of the Bible seldom appeared on maps and in cosmographical texts.

The persistence of the Noachian tradition, however, remains in subtler ways. Faced with increasingly detailed geographical knowledge, some cartographers attempted to provide a synthesis between the knowledge of their time and the tri-continental model. Such a synthesis can be seen in the famous multilingual *Royal Bible* published in Antwerp by Christophe Plantin (1569-1573). This Bible includes a world map that summarizes geographical knowledge of the time and locates Moses' descendants. The Eurasian continent does not end, but collides with the American one. The map also joins the Eurasian and American continents in order to introduce theoretical biblical ancestors to the Amerindian peoples. Another example of the co-existence of biblical and geographical knowledge is found in Jacques Signot's *La Division du Monde* (The

¹ (In order that the whole world might be so much more easily understood, I wanted to present the universal cosmography in the form of a trefoil, the seal of the famous city of Hanover, my sweetest and most beloved country. The grain or seed of this clover is the home of the Church itself, namely Judea, with the most holy Jerusalem, holding the centre of the whole world). Unless otherwise stated, all translations are mine.

² Bunting Heinrich (1682), *Itinerarium totius Sacræ Scripturæ, or, The travels of the holy patriarchs, prophets, judges, kings, our Saviour Christ and his apostles, as they are related in the Old and New Testaments. With a description of the Townes and Places to which they travelled, and how many English miles they stood from Jerusalem. Also a short Treatise of the Weights, Monies, and Measures mentioned in the Scriptures, reduced to our English valuations, quantitie, and weight / Collected out of the Works of Henry Bunting; and done into English by R.B.*, London, T. Basset.

³ (the image of the clover is not in keeping with each part of the earth. If someone wants true portraits of the lands and the seas, he will find some more precise and clearer' in the following 'tables which are true representations of the earth).

Parts of the World), first published in 1539. The general outline follows a biblical framework. After mentioning the Creation, the Great Flood and the Tower of Babel, Signot organizes the description of the earth according to the continents offered to Noah's sons. The description starts with Shem's Asia, then turns to Japheth's Europe and ends with Ham's Africa. It is significant that while the book was reprinted several times throughout the sixteenth century, the biblical framework was no longer used in the later editions. Only a few religious considerations remain in the foreword of works such as Sebastian Münster's *Cosmographie. Beschreibung aller Lender* (1544) or François de Belleforest's *Cosmographie universelle* (1575), both starting with a narration of the Creation. But André Thevet's *Cosmographie universelle*, published the same year, does not begin with a description of the Creation.

Another manifestation of the decline of biblical and religious history in later years is the disappearance of the systematic and explicit interpretation of the Creation in works of geography. Miracles and divine interventions also gradually disappear from such works in the seventeenth century. Even natural disasters such as the collapse of the Alpine Granier mountain in 1248 are no longer described as divine sanctions but as geological events. The influence of holy texts prevails only in works of geography dedicated to the Eastern Mediterranean regions. The deletion of biblical elements in descriptions and maps of the world is an early sign of disenchantment, conveying the decline of Christian interpretations in the fields of cosmography and geography.

In the wake of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century religious conflicts, cosmography was potentially a sensitive field of study. Theological controversies linked to the geographical field of knowledge were, however, comparatively rare and when they did occur, debates were without intensity and often limited to personal rivalries. As we have seen, the switch from three to four continents took place without much debate. The same goes for the unavoidable question of Revelation and whether it was received by the newly discovered indigenous peoples. The debate around the humanity of native American and African peoples did not interfere with their exploitation. The medieval quest for the earthly location of Paradise as well as the Kingdom of Prester John were perceived as vain and quite simplistic by cosmographers and geographers.⁴ The major theological debate – the question of transubstantiation, or Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist species, as opposed to consubstantiation, which insists on the symbolic presence only – would not seem to have any consequence for the works of geography. Yet, in 1557 the so-called 'Guanabara polemic' opposed the French Catholic Nicolas Durand de Villegagnon (1561) together with Protestant settlers in Brazil to Pierre Richer, Jean Calvin and his followers. The Calvinists compared the Catholic rite of the Eucharist to the ritual cannibalism of the indigenous people, the Tupinamba (Lestringant 2012, 87-108). The debate spread to Europe (France, the Netherlands, England); François de Belleforest, for example, reported it in his *Cosmographie universelle* (1575) in a polemical way. The statement of French theologian Theodore Bèze during the 1561 Colloquy of Poissy captures the contemporary political, theological and cultural evolutions of the era. Bèze made a crucial point for our purpose: 'Nous disons que son corps est esloigné du pain & du vin, autant que le plus haut ciel est esloigné de la terre' (1580, vol. I, 516).⁵ Here is encapsulated a recognition of a sharp separation between two orders of reality, what is divine as opposed to what is earthly. A parallel process can be identified in the dynamics of cosmographic knowledge.

How can we explain that geography, as opposed to astronomy or anatomy, was the target of so few attacks in the midst of profound changes and questionings of ancient and traditional

⁴ However, the myth endures in other types of source (see Brewer 2015).

⁵ (The body of Christ is as far removed from the bread and wine as the highest heaven is from the earth).

knowledge? Several reasons for this relative tolerance can be offered. Renaissance cosmographers were cautious and tended not to defend theses condemned by the Church. For example, François de Belleforest left astronomy out of his *Cosmographie* and condemned ‘Copernicus’s fantastical and too audacious opinion’ (1575, vol. I, n.p.) regarding the movements of the earth. André Thevet refused to study the eleventh heaven and explicitly left it to theologians. When cosmographers criticized the authority of a saint, they remained circumspect. In 1544, Pierre Apian (Peter Benewitz) contradicted Saint Augustine’s denial of a spherical earth, prudently citing the Apostles, and in particular Saint Thomas, who died a martyr in Southern India in A.D. 70. At the same time, geographical knowledge presented in the Scriptures increasingly appeared as imperfect. When Belleforest came to the question of locating Jerusalem in the centre of the world according to the tradition of the Church Fathers, he rebuked Thevet for his criticism of the ancient Fathers and for ‘blaming them for having ignored the exact location and description of the world’ (1575, vol. II, 1006). Here, Belleforest, as a devout Catholic implicitly, and with finesse, acknowledged that the Church Fathers were wrong. Overall, geo-theological controversies encouraged geographers to adopt a cautious attitude and to ignore religious history and theology so as to focus on geography alone, leading to a separation of knowledge of the world (geography) and of the meaning of the world (theology).

The distance between geography and religion appeared then in a number of ways. Clerics were no longer the main producers and holders of knowledge. In the orientation of maps, Mercatorian Europe and Jerusalem were no longer identified as the centre of the world. Maps, which used to be oriented to the East for religious reasons, were now shifted towards the Septentrion. A process of secularization also appeared in the primacy granted to knowledge of the earthly world rather than of the divine, celestial world. It was also seen in men reading and trusting the astronomical skies, in coordinates (Ptolemy) or in climates (Jean Bodin), and no longer in the divine heavens to describe the world. Moreover, the same process affected the principles of causality (geophysical mechanisms as opposed to divine intervention) and the intentionality presiding over the use of knowledge to serve the prince’s glory (the king’s, the duke’s), and less and less to celebrate the Lord’s. Likewise, readers began to accept that geographical descriptions could be unencumbered by biblical history and references. Geographical temporality (the world in the present) must prevail over religious temporality (for example, Creation, Christian ages of humankind) in describing the world (Bourdon 2017). However, while religious interpretations were losing ground, the disenchantment of the world had its limits, even in the field of geography. Raising the question of these limits will be the object of the next section.

3. *The Limits of the Disenchantment of the World*

From the perspective of the history of knowledge, the function of theology was to bestow meaning upon Creation and upon the world God built from the void to highlight his greatness and his might. Most of the fields of knowledge concerning the world, including cosmography, were then subordinated to theology and united in the belief in a universe divinely ordained and, in this sense, enchanted. However, as we have seen, geography gradually ceased to deal with religious and theological issues. Its aim became that of describing the concreteness of the world. Geographical knowledge was founded on spatiality and location. It could be said that, from the sixteenth century onwards, man was able to map, measure, quantify and locate places without any mediation of the divine. We could define this operation as a form of disenchantment. Renaissance contemporaries, however, needed not only a physical description of the world but also spiritual elements to understand it (the

role played by theology). Cosmography and theology shared the same ambition to 'tell the world' (Wolff 1997). In contrast with geography, cosmography remained intimately linked to theology throughout the sixteenth century, sanctioning a Christian reading of the world. As a consequence, cosmography became a way to know the work of God the Creator and his might. In his 1575 *Cosmographie universelle*, André Thevet, from his foreword onwards, presents the reader with this very principle. Talking about cosmography, he writes: 'Je pense qu'il n'y a science, apres la Theologie, qui ayt plus grande vertu de nous faire cognoistre la grandeur & puissance divine, & l'avoir en admiration que celle la [la cosmographie]. Ce que vous cognoistrez est vray, si bien vous considererez, que si nature merite quelque louange, qu'elle ne peut estre attribuee à autre qu'au createur' (1575, vol. I, Preface).⁶

According to Thevet, all believers must contemplate God's power and can do so through cosmography's panoptic virtue. Cosmography enables acquisition of knowledge of the Divine because it claims to describe the entire Creation. There are numerous passages in the Bible or in the Church Fathers' writings inviting the reader to discover God's work in the physical world.⁷ Beyond natural theology, revealed theology seeks the knowledge of God through the study of Revelation, namely the way God chose to manifest himself to men historically (as in the history of Israel, and most of all with Christ). As in natural theology, revealed theology also highlights strong links between cosmography and theology as Thevet explains in the foreword to his *Cosmographie universelle*:

Cette science [la cosmographie] nous induit plus avant au spectacle de nature, elle nous donne aussi plus grande cognoissance de la divine puissance: laquelle le saint Esprit nous voulant faire entendre, nous admonnest & enseigne de regarder la grande magnificence de cest vnivers, lequel encores qu'il soit trouvé admirable, toutesfois il n'est rien au pris de l'auteur, qui a les mains si grandes, qu'en une il contient tout le mo[n]de, & entre deux ou trois doigts il tourne toute la terre. (1575, vol. I, Preface)⁸

What appears fundamental here is Thevet's insistence on the extra-worldly nature of the Christian God as defined by the theology of Incarnation. The author explains that the earthly and the celestial worlds coexist and have been separated ever since the first day of Creation. The Christian God is remote from men. He predates the world of men. He is exterior and superior to it. There is a hierarchy between the heavens and the earth, between the things of this earthly world and those of the divine. It corresponds to a submission of the visible to the invisible, of the natural to the supernatural (see Gauchet 1984, 155). From this perspective, describing the world also entails describing the work of God as well as approaching and understanding the divine.

Thevet considered cosmography next in dignity to theology. He explained the existence of so-called 'cosmographic meditations', spiritual meditations drawn from the Bible and cosmographical works and described by Gerardus Mercator in his *Atlas sive cosmographicae*

⁶ (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 owed to the Creator).

⁷ See for example the Bible (Sg 7, 17-21) or Bonaventure (Sent. 2, 1, 2, 2 and 1).

⁸ (This science [cosmography] 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 may be, is nothing compared to that of its Maker whose hands are so great that He contains the entire world in just one, and has the earth spin between two or three fingers).

meditationes commonly known as *Mercator's Atlas* (1595). Cosmographic meditations are viewed as a way of following 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 by us according to our small capacity' (Calvin 2009, 30).⁹ The world could then be 'read' through the four methods of exegetical interpretation: the literal, the allegorical, the topological and the analogical. The same goes for landscapes, read through a religious lens. It is the case, for instance, with seascapes (Cabantous 1990; Bentley, Bridenthal and Wigen 2007) or mountains (Bourdon 2011, IX; Brunet and Martin 2015). While geography may have ceased to integrate theology in its arguments, theology remained intrinsic to cosmography. Geography, as an autonomous discipline, represents only a small proportion of the available discourse about the world in the Renaissance since its scope was limited to the description of the visible world. Geographical works, concerned with the visible world, were mainly known by educated social elites who accounted for only five to ten percent of the population. Cosmography's geographical dimension was confined to the visible world in its materiality, its envelope, detached from the deeper theological or metaphysical meaning of the world. This is precisely expressed in André Thevet's comment on the Church Fathers and their ignorance of the location of Jerusalem, when he concludes: 'On sçait bien qu'és saintes Lettres il fault plus adviser le sens, esprit & moelle, que s'amuser à la simple escorce, & histoire nue' (1575, 175v).¹⁰

Geography was not the only way to describe the earth: religious interpretations were offered in certain types of non-geographical works. Descriptions of the earth appeared in religious literature such as the lives of the saints, religious plays, panegyrics and sermons, or else in pilgrims' diaries. All these religious sources contain geographical information that sometimes played a key role in topography. For instance, the Little and the Great Saint Bernard Passes in Switzerland were named after the story of Saint Bernard in the Alps (Lucken 2004). Pilgrims' diaries often describe an experience of the world through a religious lens. In 1582, Abbot Philippe de Caverel thanked God for the beauty of Alpine streams, while in 1591 Jacques de Villamont paid tribute to 'divin peintre & ouvrier de toute la nature' (1595, 1v)¹¹ in his travel diary. In 1614, Pierre Le Monnier considered that mountains show the 'grands miracles de nature & tres-hauts secrets du haut Dieu' (1614, 45).¹² Other diaries include biblical quotations in their travel accounts (Bourdon 2011, 486-498). The theologian and historian Gilbert Burnet in 1685 compared the chaotic landscape of the Alps to the day after the Great Flood and interpreted the 1618 landslide of Plurs, in the Valtellina region, as a divine punishment for the depravity of the Milanese people. His account re-told the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, in which he replaced the characters of Lot and his wife with rich Milanese merchants (Burnet 1686, 180). Situations with a very strong emotional burden were also conducive to religious interpretations. For instance, in the account of the 1689 Glorious Return, the return of a thousand Waldesian people to their valleys is described as a conflict between the forces of Good and Evil (Arnaud 1710). The description of the geographical space is filled with theological interpretations and can even be read as a spiritual voyage inspired by works on the Waldesian Church by their pastors Jean-Paul Perrin, Pierre

⁹ The concept of the sign in protestant theology has been extensively studied by Harrison (1998) and Zachman (2007).

¹⁰ (It is a well-known fact about the Holy Scriptures that we need to search their meaning, spirit and very heart rather than trifle with the mere bark and naked history).

¹¹ (the divine painter and author of the whole of Nature).

¹² (great miracles of Nature and the greatest secrets of God the highest).

Gilles and Jean Léger, and by Pierre Jurieu's interpretations of prophecies (Bourdon 2009). These various examples show that discourses on space, beyond geography as a science, could still celebrate the Creator.

4. *Geography, Humanism and the Re-Enchantment of Man*

While geography ceased to tackle issues directly related to religion, leaving them to theology, it was to play a role in the resolution of the mediation crisis. With its hope (or aim) of giving a precise description of the world, it mediated between the human and the divine by showing men the world in its spatial materiality. Hans Blumenberg emphasized how 'theological absolutism' (1999, II) of late medieval nominalism defined God and the world as inaccessible to human intellection. The primacy of the arbitrary divine will was incarnated in the Augustinian *quia voluit* (because he wanted it). By rejecting the ancient cosmological conception, theological absolutism denied man the rational understanding of Creation. It thus induced a 'system meant to make man extremely uneasy about the world – with the intention, of course, of making him seek salvation outside the world, driving him to despair of his this-worldly possibilities and thus to the unconditional capitulation of the act of faith' (Blumenberg 1999, 151). Beyond the political and socio-cultural dynamics at stake in sixteenth-century Europe, this 'panic-stricken Christianity', as Denis Crouzet describes it (2008, 43), triggered a terrible eschatological anxiety which stemmed from the failure of theological discourse to address people's need for security (Blumenberg 1999). In this context, scientific discourse, especially geographical knowledge which purposely kept at a distance from theology, was reassuring, for it displayed only the materiality of the world. This concrete approach could correspond, following Blumenberg's reflection, to a reassuring overhaul of benchmarks, a shift towards earthly landmarks and time marks.

Geographical discourse fits into the humanist framework that granted mankind an elevated dignity in the realm of Creation as much as it valued knowledge of the world. It contributed to finding 'the ontological One uniting God with the world' (Gauchet 1999, 53), namely the relationship between the earthly and the divine. At the same time, geography represented a mediation between men and the world, and therefore between men themselves. The humanist vision of human dignity and its ability to gather 'the many fine flowers' of knowledge (Pierre Belon 1555, 3r) in a celebration of the Creator puts the idea of an absolute disenchantment into perspective. Rabelais had already claimed the coming of a 'century so full of light' in 1532 (1872, vol. II, 513). Pierre Galland, in his funeral oration for Francis I in 1547, proclaimed that 'nowadays, we can understand something in all sciences and have truly become human' (1547, 11v) thanks to *studia humanitatis*. Humanists, among them Pico de la Mirandole, Erasmus, Dolet, Budé, Rabelais and Montaigne, demonstrate that knowledge, curiosity and research through experience and reason make man more fully human. This changed relationship to the world, expressed by this new (or sometimes renewed) knowledge, highlights the dignity of man and his life in the present of his terrestrial existence.

This emergent knowledge is embedded in human time, in the earthly world, at the expense of a divine temporality out of time. The development of sciences became another way of rationalizing the world; science became the soothing, modestly human, counterweight to the overwhelming divine presence. It was no longer a question of saying what the world is in its essence and what it has always been, but of describing what it is in the contemporary and provisional present. In leaving the celestial sphere, scientific discourse valued the terrestrial globe, thus dealing with human temporalities and their shifting, unstable and impermanent

nature. Thenceforth, it is human knowledge of the world of men, produced by men themselves, a knowledge in their temporary and limited, finite and imperfect image.

It is not a surprise that Thomas Aquinas, who tried to synthesize Aristotelian philosophy with the principles of Christianity, enhancing the human quest for knowledge, was declared one of the Doctors of the Church in 1567 and that the first edition of his complete works was published in 1569-1571. In Aquinas' theology, the sixteenth century finds a new paradigm organizing more harmoniously Christian belief with the new European aspiration towards knowledge. In contrast, the religious controversies at the turn of the sixteenth century and the wars of religion were marked with the over-enchantment of a theodicy which had become incomprehensible. Thus, eschatological and violent over-enchantment combined with an ontological enchantment that elevated man to the dignity of a rational being, capable of understanding the world he inhabited. Between the 'disenchantment of the world', the re-enchantment of man and the over-enchantment during the wars of religion, we could say that a whole economy of enchantments surged with its transfers, its mutations, its emergences, its extensions and its withdrawals.

The evolution of geographical knowledge showed, in Blumenberg's words (1966), that there was no substantial transference or displacement (*Umsetzung*) from the spiritual world (theology) to the secular world (human), but rather a reinvestment of certain functions, a redistribution (*Umbesetzung*) of questions-and-answers systems leading from theological to scientific discourse. This crucial question was actualized in Montaigne's 'Que sais-je?' (What do I know?). This new questioning required the development of new disciplinary tools. The emergence of cosmography followed by geography fulfilled this function. As Blumenberg has shown with regard to providence and progress, in opposition to Karl Löwith (1949), there was no straightforward secularization. Renaissance geographical discourses on the world brought new descriptions and explanations of old problematic questions already found in classical thought. While the answers are new, addressing reactivated and updated concerns, the questions are old. They are the marks of a 'new metabolism' (Gauchet 2007, 166) of the 'mortgage of prescribed questions' (Blumenberg 1999, 65) that already existed in antiquity and were now seen through the lens of Christianity.

Finally, the disenchantment of the world does not entail a loss of meaning in the relation between man and the world, but rather the transfer from an enchantment of the world to a humanist enchantment of man. It is a transfer from an enchanted world, the essence of which cannot be accounted for other than by theology, to a world where man, who is rational, is inspired by the Creator and seeks to shape forms of knowledge observable from here-below and which could be confirmed through simple experience.

5. Conclusion

This article has highlighted different processes in the complex relations between cosmographical and geographical knowledge and the dynamics of disenchantment, re-enchantment and over-enchantment of the world. It has been argued that while, indisputably, there was a disappearance of religious interpretations in Renaissance geography, the consequence was not a profound disenchantment of the world. Geography did bring reflection about the world down to a human scale, leaving the unveiling of the deeper meaning of the world to theology and religion. But, in so doing, it partook of a more general humanist celebration of men by offering them a core place in the world and giving prime importance to their outlook on the world. Humanism and, similarly, Christian theologies, whether Thomist, Calvinist or Lutheran, re-enchanted humankind by granting them again their once lost dignity: this enchantment strongly motivated the geographical exploration of the earth within a Christian frame. Claims for a disenchantment

of the world in the Renaissance or its secularization need, therefore, to be nuanced. As the world transitioned from medieval to early modern, it did not become wholly meaningless or totally disenchanted. Emerging from the heart of cosmographical encyclopaedias, whose ambition was to describe the totality of the Creation as celestial and terrestrial spheres, geography was able to mediate between God and man.

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