The Religious Dimensions of Some Philippine Folktales

By

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As is at once evident, there are at least two important terms to be defined in this paper: 1) "religious" and 2) "folktale." The third term: "dimensions" will become delimited once we have clearly defined the first two.

The Folktale

The term "folktale" is obviously composed of two English words: "folk" and "tale." Equally obvious, too, is the meaning of the term: "a tale told by or among the people."[1] Yet the meaning is not that simple. For there are more than one kind of tales or stories or narratives which are connected with the folk. We shall discuss these kinds presently. Right now we shall consider the term "folk" itself.

The term "folk" is quite vague in meaning. The meaning generally accepted by many, has been that "folk" means the peasant society or rural groups. This narrow conception would rule out the city dwellers as not having any folktale at all, or for that matter, any folklore. Again, folktale has been conceived as coming to us from the hoary past. Therefore there are no more folktales today, in fact, if there are any left at all, they will soon die out completely. What is perhaps true in this regard is that certain types or categories of folktales and folklore might eventually die away, but certainly not all. A third definition of the folk which seems to be gradually gaining ground among scholars is the following: the folk is any group

1. Cf. Alan Dundes, *The Study Of Folklore,* Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1965, p. 2.

of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor and which has a common body of traditions belonging to that group and which helps the group to possess a sense of identity.

In this sense, then, the Bisayans, or a particular group of Bisayans, say, the Dumagueteños, or the Bacolodnons, or the Cebuanos, can be considered a folk. And their common link will be their place of provenance. In like manner, a military unit or a college or university community like the University of the Philippines or Silliman can be considered a folk. The important point is that the members of any group should possess in common a body of traditions which they call their own and which furnish them with a sense of belonging to that group. (cf. Dundes, op. cit., p. 2).

One might have to add, however, that this concept of the folk is perhaps based upon the assumption that there exist in any community whether primitive or progressive, archaic or modern, various levels or at least the existence of various groupings of the members of the community at large. For instance, among the Tobrianders, Malinowski tells us, there are various tribes and totemic groups: the Lukulabuta whose totemic animal is the *Kaylavasi* or iguana; the Lukuba clan whose totemic animal is the Dog, the Malasi clan with the Pig as totem, and finally the Lukwasisiga totem often represented by the Crocodile, by the Snake or the Opposum.[2]

Now each tribe or group has its own body of tales which only the members of the group have a right to tell, at a particular time of the year; and this right is acknowledged and respected by all. Despite the stratification and varied groupings of these people, there is no one who would deny the term "folk" to any one of these tribes and totemic groups.

It is common knowledge, too, that the Enlightenment and the Romantic Movement did help to impress the meaning of the word "folk" in the minds of westerners as applied to the rural people. This observation is good to bear in mind because it is a fact that the earliest collectors of folklore and folktales, Straparola in his *Nights* (sixteenth century), Basile in his

2. Bronislaw Malinowski, "Myth in Primitive Psychology," in *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays,* Garden City, New York, Doubleday Anchor, 1955, p. 112 ff.

Pentameron in the seventeenth century, the various French authors of the *Contes des fées* in the 18th century, and even some of the German Romantics, were quite far removed from the people. It was Perault among the French towards the last decade of the 17th and the earlier half of the 18th centuries, and the Brothers Grimm in the first quarter of the 19th century who did cultivate the peoples of the rural areas in the writing of their *Contes Populaires* and *Kinder- und Hausmaerchen.* Of course, the activity of the Russian and Finnish folklore scholars did center around the folk, or the common people as opposed to the nobility. In Finland, Elias Loennrot published his *Kalevala* in 1835, and the ensuing period which may be termed the period of the *Kalevala* studies was characterized by romantic nationalism and introspection. In Russia, after the Revolution of 1919, we saw studies on the folklore and folktale of the common people by such eminent scholars as Skaftymov's *The Poetics and Genesis of Byliny* who emphasized the significance of the study of structure over that of ideology; and Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale.* This last studies the structure of the magic tales on the basis of the function of the *dramatis personae;* he concludes that all fairy or folktales are uniform in their structure.[3] This historical excursus will allow us to get some idea of the reasons why the term folk has been for so long connected with the rural or country areas. And the folktale studies for the most part had been connected with the movement of subject peoples towards the emancipation of the peasants from the landed gentry.

In the Philippines, too, Dr. Jose Rizal and Don Isabelo de los Reyes who were the pioneer Filipino folklorists and mythologists thought and worked in the context of a surging nationalism and the ferment of revolutionary ideas against the rule of Spain.

But the peculiar twist of history at the latter end of western culture which gave the folk an equivalent meaning of peasant, was not true when western civilization was at its springs. Among the Greeks in the time of Homer and Hesiod as well as among the Romans during the days of Ovid, Livy, Horace and

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3. Richard M. Dorson, *Folklore Research Around the Worlds. A North American Point Of View,* JAF 76 (Oct.-Dec. 1961), p. 77 f.

others, the folk out of which these writers collected their lore and tales were not necessarily the peasant class alone. The folk included the vendors in the Forum, the soldiers, the slaves, the farmers; in other words, the people. There were *literati,* rich merchants, lawyers, senators even among the people.

Folktale: A Many Splendored Thing

One mistake we must avoid is to lump together all the narratives or stories connected with the folk as though they were all of the same hue.

Without being too technical, we can at least present 4 main divisions generally accepted by all in folktale classification: 1) Fairytales, *Maerchen* (German), *Contes Populaires* (French), Household Tales (English); 2) Legends (local and migratory), 3) Hero Tales and Epics, 4) Myths.

The Fairytale

The name itself serves to inform us that this is a tale wherein fairies (or *engkantos*) are found. Yet the great majority of such tales have no fairies. A fairytale is defined by Stith Thompson,[4] as a tale or narrative of some length, involving a succession of motifs or episodes; it moves in an unreal world without definite locality or definite characters and is filled with the marvellous. Its main aim is to entertain.[5]

The Legend (German: Sage)

Unlike the fairytale, legend (whether local or migratory)

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4. The Folktale, New York, 1946, p. 7.

5. Under this category fall such stories as A. Tales Of Magic (Types 300-749 in Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson's *The Types of the Folktale. A Classification and Bibliography* (Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1961, FF Communications No. 184). Under this general heading of Tales of Magic are also stories about Supernatural Adversaries (Types 300–379); Supernatural or Enchanted Husband (Wife) or Other Relatives (Types 400–459); Supernatural Tasks (Types 460–499); Supernatural Helpers (Types 500–559); Magic Objects (560–649); Supernatural Power or Knowledge (Types 659–699); Other Tales of the Supernatural (Types 700–749). The other big classification of the Fairytale besides A. Tales of Magic are: B. Religious Tales (750–699); C. Novelle (Romantic Tales). Literary examples of this form are seen in the *Arabian Nights* or Boccaccio. The Action occurs in a real world with definite time and place. Marvels also occur, but not in a manner they do in the fairytales. *Sinbad the Sailor* and his adventures fall under the form of the novelle. D. Tales of the Stupid Ogre (Types 1900–1199).

has a basis in an extraordinary event which is believed to have actually happened at a definite time and place. The event could have happened at some particular hill, river, cave or mountain; the event could have been a meeting with marvellous creatures: fairies, ghosts, water-spirits, devils; the hero or person concerned could be a well-known figure on the local, regional or national scales. Thus we have legends of mountains like Taal, Makiling, Canlaon, Arayat; legends about lakes (Legend of Lake Panimaloy), legends of personages: Pablo Maralit (Lipa, Batangas); Isidro Guintu (Macabebe, Pampanga); other legends are: *El Arbol de Oro* (Tagalog), Antamok (Igorot, Benguet), *El Pilapil del Diablo.* Among the migratory legends we might mention: *The Pied Piper of Hamelin, Old Frederick Barbarossa* sleeping under a mountain, *Ashuerus* (or the Wandering Jew), the *Flying Dutchman, Ichabod Crane.* Legends are almost exclusively told of saints especially in Spain. Under the legend too may be subsumed the various etiological tales or "Just-So" Stories or *Pourquoi* Stories. Local legends often explain the existence of some hill or cliffs or tell why a certain river flows in this direction. Similar stories explain the origins and characteristics of various animals, plants, the stars, mankind and its institutions. Sometimes the explanation seems to be the only reason for the existence of the story (especially true in the case of place-name legends, etc.) It is recognized, however, that these explanations may be attached to almost any narrative form.

The Hero Tales

These consist of a series of adventures of the same individual. The tales cluster around the superhuman struggles of men like Hercules, Theseus, Moses, Oedipus, and so. In general it may be said that these heroes are the world's "symbolic carriers of the destiny of everyman." Joseph Campbell in his *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*[6] details the stages of the biography of a hero: First: The Stage of *Separation* or *Departure* which contains these subsections:

(1) The Call to Adventure; or the signs of the vocation of the hero; (2) Refusal of the Call; or the folly of the flight from

6. Meridian Books (New York, 1956), pp. 36–36.

the vocation of a hero; (3) Supernatural Aid, or the unsuspected assistance that comes to one who has undertaken his proper adventure; (4) the Crossing of the First Threshhold; and (5) The Belly of the Whale or passage into the realm of the night. Then the next stage: *The Stage of the Trials And Victories of Initiation* which in turn contains these subsections: (1) The Road of Trials, or the dangerous aspects of the gods; (2) Meeting with the Goddess (*Magna Mater*) of the bliss of infancy regained; (3) Woman as Temptress, the realization and agony of Oedipus; (4) Atonement with the Father; (5) Apotheosis; (6) The Ultimate Boon: Freedom to Live.

The Epic

The folk epic in many ways is very much like the hero tales. Perhaps one of the main differences between the two is that the folk epic is quite often secular in tone rather than religious; it exploits not so much the inner life of a person, but rather the ideals and aspirations of a nation or a tribe. The epic is more social rather than personal in tone. However, this is but a shallow differentiation.[7]

An Explanation

Before going on to the last category which I intend to dis-

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7. We present the definition of epic found in E. Arsenio Manuel's article, "A Survey of Philippine Folk Epics," *Asian Folklore Studies,* 22 (1963), 3f. An epic is (1) a narrative of sustained length; (2) based on oral tradition; (3) revolving around supernatural events or heroic deeds; (4) in the form of verse; (5) which is either chanted or sung; (6) with a certain seriousness of purpose, embodying the beliefs, customs, ideals and values of the people. At once it is clear that an epic is not exactly like the hero tale. For the hero tale does not treat of supernatural events or deeds and loves of the gods and goddesses; nor is it necessarily chanted or sung in verse form; nor is it always embodying a high seriousness; nor does it always embody the beliefs and ideals of the people. We think of the adventures of our heroes: Juan Tamad or Juan Pusong.

Some of our folkepics are: *Biag ni Lam-ang, Handiong* in *Ibalon,* the *Hudhuds Hudhud hi Aliguyon, Aliguyon at Hananga, Hudhud of Aliguyon Who Was Bored By the Rustle of the Palm Tree at Aladugan;* the *Alim* (religious) *Bindian* (Ibaloy), *Hinilawod* (Sulods of Central Panay): *Epic of Labaw Dunggon, Epic of Humadapnon, Paransisku Bulawan; Tuwaang* (Epic of the Upland Bagobo); *The Maiden of the Buhong Sky; Tuwaang Attends A Wedding Matigsalug Ulod;* the *Daragen* of the Maranaws and especially the famous hero *Bantugan,* the *Parang Sabir* of the Tausug; the *Baybayan* of the Bukidnons, and last but not least, the *Ulahingan* (Manobo epic) which has been studied by Dr. Elena Maquiso.

cuss, namely, the myths, I would like to make this observation in connection with the theme of this paper: the Religious Dimensions of the Folktale. I still have to define religion and the religious. But suffice it to say right now that none of the folktales so far covered can qualify strictly as religious. Certainly not the fairytales for the general intent of such tales whether among primitives or modern peoples is to entertain. Nor the legends, except perhaps the legends of the saints. But then, even here, the term religious might mean only this: edifying, that is, as satisfying the demands of the moral imperative: do good and avoid what is evil. Even in the longer stories about the saints and their virtues and deeds, the moralistic tone is highly pronounced. The "religious" as an experience of the *numinous* (to use the word of Rudolf Otto) or of the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* is hardly there. True the epic may contain many allusions to the religious beliefs of the tribe or people and one might very well spend time to study the religious implications of the Philippine folk epics. But then this religious side of the epic is not due to it as epic, rather, it is due to it inasmuch as it partakes of the character of myth. We know, for instance, that many of the Philippine folk epics are entirely secular or profane in their drift: the *hudhuds,* Fr. Lambrecht tells us is purely secular, although it may be recited during festivities centered around a religious period; so is the *Darangen* very secular, although it may contain passages about the gods and souls, and the journey of the souls to the land of the dead.

We shall make more precise what we mean by "religion" below. Right now, however, let us go into the explanation of the last category of folktale where the religious dimensions may be fully seen.

The Myth

Myth from the Greek *mythos* is probably from the I-E root *MUDH which means to "think, reflect, consider." Cf. the English word *mood,* the German *Mut,* "vermuten," and the Homeric Greek word "*muthos*" which means "plan, purpose or design."

In actual Greek usage, however, *mythos* was used to mean:

(a) an *expressed* thought, that is, in the sense of "word, speech, saying, advice, proverb, command, talk." In

this sense, then, *mythos* is much like the other *logos.*

(b) it meant also from the oldest text: "story, tale, narrative" with no distinction originally made between the *truth* or *falsity* of the story.

(c) Attic Greek used the term myth technically to mean: ancient stories about the gods which to the later sophisticated Greeks appeared more or less fictitious.

(d) Finally we come upon a separation of what were originally synonymous terms: *mythos and logos*: *mythos*=fable, old wives tale (Plato, *Republic* I, 350^{e}), logos=a historical account (Herodotus, Thucydides

(e) In the hands of the creative poets, myth came to mean: the materials for tragedy or comedy, or it was made equivalent to "fiction." (Aristoteles: *Historia Animarum,* 6, 35, 480 a 14).

Hence, *mythologein* which originally meant

(a) to tell a story of any kind came to mean:

(b) to tell legends, "tall tales" and finally:

(c) to tell fabrications or to tell lies (Lucian, *Herm.* 72)

(f) Suidas, a lexicon compiled around the end of the 10th century A.D. tells us that *mythos=logos kenos* or *logos pseudes* (i.e., "empty" or "lying" tale).

Myth In The New Testament

The conception of myth as a story that has no basis in historical fact is what entered into the writings of the N.T.; where it is generally taken to mean:

"a foolish story," 1 Tim. 1, 4 where myth is condemned as being on a par with "endless generations;"

or in 1 Tim 4, 7: where myths are called "old wives tales;"

or 2 Tim. 4, 4; where myth is said to be incompatible with truth;

in Titus 1, 14, myths are equivalent to the commandments of men;

in 2 Peter: the cleverly devised (*sesophismenoi*) myths are contrasted with the true reports of eye-witnesses.

The Fathers of the Church and the early Christian theologians took myth in the sense which had become current in the Greco-Roman world centuries before: as fable, fiction, or a lie. In

a way these early Christian thinkers were forced to take this attitude towards myth because they had to defend the historicity of Jesus against the Docetists, the Gnostics and the pagan philosophers. Nor did myth fare any better in the hands of the medieval and scholastic philosophers and theologians. And the years following the break-through of Christianity were not kind to myth and symbol at all.

Historians of Religion and Myth

The rather pejorative connotation of "falsity" which attached itself to the term myth lasted for more than two millenia if we take as our starting point the 5th century B.C., or a little later, and more specifically, the rise of the sophistic leaders in Athens.

It was only with the beginning of the twentieth century, because of the findings of the students of comparative religion that we finally came to see the unfairness of the imputed falsity of myth.

This new approach to myth may be briefly described thus: in the traditional view, the norm for the validity of myth was its "truth" (i.e., historical truth) and since it obviously was devoid of this, myth was invalid as an approach to reality. (There were exceptions, however, I refer particularly to Plato and his use of myth in his *Dialogues*. But we cannot now enter into this rather intriguing but difficult subject). In the modern view, the norm for validity of myth is its function rather than its historical truth. There is postulated, however, a truth in myth which is much deeper than mere historical truth: the truth of symbols.

THE SYMBOL

Here we must distinguish between the *sign* and the *symbol*. Both the sign and the symbol point out or indicate to someone an actual something: a state of affairs, an event or a person. But a symbol is more than that. It not only indicates, it *represents*, it brings to mind here and now something which has long been dead or forgotten. It enables us to *conceive* something, to think about a person.

Carl Jung defines a sign thus:

"Sign always has a fixed meaning because it is a conventional abbreviation for, or a commonly accepted indication of, something known."[8] Whereas a symbol for him is an "indefinite expression with many meanings, pointing to something not easily defined and therefore not fully known," it has therefore "a large number of analogous variants, and the more of these variants it has at its disposal the more complete and clear-cut will be the image it projects of the object."[9] And Paul Tillich defined the *function* of the symbol thus: "This is the great function of symbols: to point beyond themselves, in the power of that to which they point, to open up levels of the human mind of which we otherwise are not aware." Tillich thus postulates a two-fold complementary depth to which the myths appeal: Depth in the macrocosm and depth in the microcosm.

The truth postulated for the myth, then, is the truth of the symbol, i.e., its meaning for human existence itself. And this meaning is generally religious, i.e., it touches on the ultimate or the breaking points of life. For myths have their roots in life: they express the human concern for life, for the ways and means of evading death, or, after death, of making sure that life must continue, for ensuring fertility among people, for abundance of game and food stuff, plentiful rain at planting season. To quote Eliade again:

> "The religious symbol translates a human situation into cosmological terms and vice-verse; more precisely, it reveals the continuity between the structures. This means that man does not feel himself 'isolated' in the cosmos, but that he 'opens out' to a world which, thanks to a symbol, proves familiar. On the other hand, the cosmological values of symbols enables him to leave behind the subjectivity of a situation and to recognize the objectivity of his experiences."[10]

This reversal in the modern conception of myth is the result of what we might term "ecumenism" among scholars of various disciplines: Gerardus van der Leeuw, Mircea Eliade, Raffaele Pettazzoni in the field of comparative religion, Wilhelm Schmidt, Levy-Bruhl, Alfred Kroeber, Robert Lowie, in

8. *Symbols of Transformation,* p. 124.
9. *Ibid,* p. 124.
10. *Methodological Remarks,* p. 86, ff., and 103.

ethnology, Bronislav Malinowski in anthropology, Freud, Carl G. Jung and others in psychology, Max Scheler, Brede Kristensen, Edmund Husserl in phenomenology and in the phenomenology of religion, and Rudolf Otto in the philosophy of religion.

Myth and the Religious Dimensions of Folktale

As we mentioned above it is in myth that we come face with the religious dimensions of folktale. And this is so because myth is in itself a truly religious phenomenon. A religious phenomenon according to the historians of religion may be characterized thus:

(1) Man's response to the final reality behind all things, which he apprehends as a sovereign being who is transcendent but with whom he can enter into some relationship; (2) Any approach of this being demands a total response from man, and one in which his own whole being, mind, body, and emotions are involved; (3) The intensity and the completeness of the experience which results from this approach of the sovereign being not only affects the whole man, but the experience appears to him as something that is qualitatively different from any other kind of experience; (the religious experience is altogether unique); (4) This experience cannot leave man as it found him: it is a radically creative experience that tends to change man altogether.[11]

Religious Dimensions

In brief, then, a truly religious experience is a discovery or contact with the power that is at once transcendent and yet immanent in man; when this power makes its presence felt by man, it demands a total response of the total being of man; this total response is altogether different from any other human experience precisely because of its radically transforming effect: man is no longer the same as he was before the religious experience. A new thing has entered into his life which makes him be and act differently than before.

It is moreover, in the modern conception of myth that we can appreciate its religious dimensions. For the norm or its

11. Joachim Wach, *Comparative Religion* (New York, 1958), towards the end of the Conclusions.

validity is not so much its historical truth as its functional and dynamic aspect. And it is in relation to its functional and dynamic aspect that myth is linked with cult or ritual. For according to the modern view, myth is a word which defines and records an event, and then becomes active by being repeated, and therefore myth determines the present moment.

Myth is a word: i.e., an expressed thought, and is usually presented in the form of a tale, narrative or story.

Myth is a word that defines an event: i.e., it tells or narrates an event at a particular time or place: for instance, among the Pawnee and Wichita Indians and the Cherokee, the myths are told only at night; among the Pima Indians who live between California and New Mexico, the myths are not told if women are present, and only a few experts are expected to know them. Among these tribes myths are told only exclusively in winter and autumn, only exceptionally during summer, but in any case never told during the day but always at night or in the evening. Among the ancient Babylonians, the creation epic, *Enuma elish,* was told only during the *akitu* or the New Year festival.[12]

Myth is a word that record an event; the recording is usually done by word of mouth, even when it has been reduced to writing. It seems that the *oral* recitation of myth is necessary for its activation or efficacy. It is not enough to *know* the myth. One must *repeat* it *orally.*

Myth defines and records an event: the event is usually related to the beginning of the world and of things; how the heavenly bodies came into being, how the gods, mankind, the animals and the plants were brought into existence. The event too, tells how the origin of a pattern of behavior like marriage, agriculture, sacrifice, weaving, dancing, fishing began; also how the social classes started, how the institutions of shamanism, magic and the art of healing by the medicine-man first came to be.

Myth is a word that defines and records an event which becomes active by being repeated: How is the myth activated? It is activated precisely through the gestures and actions which

12. Raffaele Pettazzoni, "The Truth of Myth," in *Essays on the History of Religions,* supplement to *Numen,* Vol. I, pp. 11–23.

the people perform in imitation of the actions and performances of the supernaturals in the beginning (or original time). This is where myth and ritual are seen to be closely related: an insight and a realization that was not dreamt of at all in the traditional view of myth. For according to the traditional view the only thing that mattered was the text of the myth. We have now come to realize that that was to miss half of the reality contained in myth, and perhaps the more important half. For it is through the recitation of the myths and the *dromenon* or the dramatic re-enactment of the deeds and passions of the gods that the primordial moment is once again made present in the world of time and history. With the presence of the gods in the midst of the assembled tribe or people, power, force, efficacy, reality and holiness are once again given entry into the world; as they did during the early times. That is why for the primitive, in order for the universe to continue in being, in order for the plants, the animals and mankind itself to continue in existence and not be depleted of their energies, it is necessary ever so often, at definite times, usually at the beginning of the year, in spring and in winter, for the myths to be recited and for the rites and sacrifices to be celebrated.

Repetition is absolutely necessary for the myth to be activated. This flows from the peculiar characteristic of mythic events that they are not irreversible; they are capable of being repeated. Through this repetition man is made contemporaneous with the events of the primordial times; or the events of the primordial times irrupt into this world of change and history. Thus, through the myths and the rituals man breaks through the veil of profane time and enters into the realm of the holy and the sacred. And when man enters the realm of the holy and the sacred, he is thereby also made to enter the realm of the real.[13] In other words, it is myth and ritual that guarantee or give validity and reality to human events and actions. And this brings us to the last characteristic of myth which is again a totally new insight made possible by this modern view: the event recorded in myth and acted out in ritual is always exemplary or paradigmatic of human action *now*.

13. Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion,* translated by Rosemary Ward (New York 1963), *passim*.

When a man goes a-fishing he is doing exactly the same thing that was done by the gods or his ancestors in the beginning; even the Judaeo-Christian institution of the sabbath rest is an *imitatio Dei.* Sabbath rest reproduces the primordial gesture of the Lord, for it was on the 7th day that God rested from all the work he had made (*Genesis,* 2–2).

In the Iranian tradition, it took Ohrmazd a whole year to do the work of creation which he did in periods, each period being punctuated by a rest of five days: first the sky, then the waters, the earth, the plants, the animals and then man. Ohrmazd is supposed in this way to have instituted the principal Mazdean festivals which commemorate his days of rest (Eliade, *Patterns,* p. 410, ff).

The bacchant through his orgiastic rites imitates the drama of the suffering Dionysos; an Orphic through his initiation ceremonial repeats the original gesture of Orpheus who went down to hell and came out of it again. A Christian who does penance on Holy Thursday, washing the feet of his fellows, is only imitating the command of Jesus: "For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done." In the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, Christians, too, through the liturgical action and words, make present once again, the events of the Last Supper and the sacrificial death of Christ on the Cross which wrought our redemption.

The marriage rites among the Vedic Indians have a divine model: the human marriage reproduces the hierogamy or sacred marriage between the two primal deities : heaven and earth: "I am heaven" says the husband "and thou art earth," to his wife. And even St. Paul speaks in the same mythic pattern in regard to marriage: "In loving his wife a man loves himself. For no one ever hated his own body: on the contrary, he provides and cares for it; and that is how Christ treats the Church, because it is his body, of which we are living parts." Thus it is that (in the words of Scripture) "a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one single body."

(*Hoc magnum sacramentum est—Vulgate*) It is a great truth that is hidden here. I for my part refer it to Christ and to his church, but it applies also individually: "each of you must love his wife as his very self; and the woman must see that she

pays her husband all respect."[14] (Ephesians 5, 28–33).

It remains for us in the third part of this paper to apply this modern conception of myth to our own Philippine myths in order to see their religious dimensions.

Like any tribe or group of people that has emerged into the surface of history, the Filipinos have responded to the pre-

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14. Myth, then is not pure fiction. It is a "true" story not a "false" one. Myth is a true story because its contents are true. For these are an account of events that really took place, "starting from those impressive happenings which belong to the beginning of things, the origin of the world and of mankind, that of life and death, of the animal and vegetable species, of hunting and of tilling the soil, of worship, of initiation-rites, of the associations of medicine-men and of their powers of healing. All these events are far removed in time, and (yet) from them our present life had its beginning and its foundation, from them came the present structure of society, which still depends on them. The divine or other superhuman persons who play their parts in the myths, their remarkable exploits and surprising adventures, all this world of wonders is a transcendent reality which may not be doubted, because it is the antecedent, the *sine qua non* of present reality."

Myth then is true because of its contents. But myth is true history because it is a sacred history. It is sacred by reason of the sacred forces which it sets going. The recital of myths of beginning is incorporated in cult because it is cult itself and because it contributes to the ends for which cult is celebrated. These ends of cult are the preservation and the increase of life. Among the various peoples of Australia, during the initiation-ceremonies, the stories of the mythical age are told, the endless journeyings of the totemic ancestors who were the progenitors of the individual clans. These recitals, besides keeping alive and reinforcing the tribal traditions, also promote the increase of the various totemic species. To tell of the creation of the world helps to keep mankind in being, that is to say, the community or tribal group. The recital of the institution of the initiation-rites and shamanistic practices has the power to ensure their efficacy and their duration in time.

That is why myths are true stories, not false ones. They are true both by reason of their contents and true by reason of the sacred forces which their recital in the midst of the ritual reactivates for the preservation and increase of life.

This truth of myth has no origin in logic. Nor is it of a historical kind. It is above all of a religious and, more especially, a magical order. Wherein does the efficacy of myth for the ends of cult, the preservation and increase of life lie? It lies in the magic of the word; in its evocative power, the power of *mythos* in its oldest sense, of the *fa-bula* not as a "fabulous" (or fantastic narrative), but as a secret and potent force, akin, as its very etymology shows, to the power of *fa-tum*. It is said that it is so and therefore it is so; that was the sentence in which an Eskimo of the Netsilik tribe expressed forcefully the magical truth, that is, the power to make real which the spoken word possesses. He was referring especially to the Netsilik narratives, which "are both their real history and the source of all their religious ideas." (Pettazzoni, *op cit*, pp. 12–13).

sence of the numinous in their myths and rituals. They, too, in the words of the Constitution on Relationship to Non-Christian Religions of the Second Vatican Council, have been confronted with the questions which today even as in times past deeply stir the human heart: "What is man? What is the meaning and the purpose of life? What is goodness and what is sin? What gives rise to our sorrows and to what intent? What is the truth about death, judgement, and retribution beyor the grave? What, finally, is that ultimate and unutterable mystery which engulfs our being, and whence we take our rise, and whither our journey leads us?"

These questions are religious questions because they bring us face to face with the final reality behind all things; they are religious because they stir the heart and being of man to their depths, an experience which every man realizes is quite different from his experience of any other encounter with nature, with a friend, a wife, a principle or any other merely human experience. Its difference lies in this that once man has come face to face with this Ultimate Reality, in whatever manner, that man is no longer the same; he is no longer neutral towards that Being: he is either for it or against it. He cannot be indifferent.

Even a brief and cursory review of the various myths of the Philippines cannot fail to alert an observer that they impinge upon these ultimate problems, and that these myths, together with the rituals which must have accompanied them when they were still lived and living forces in the fabric of the community, did attempt in symbols to express if not to resolve the religious problems.

1. Whence did the world arise? Tagalogs, Bisayans, Aëtas and Bagobos tried to supply the answer. The Boholanos believed that their ancestors came from heaven that is why they are peaceful, peace-loving and good natured:

> The people were living beyond the sky. One day, the chief's daughter fell sick. The medicine man of the barangay said: "The cure is in the roots of this wild *Balite* tree (*Ficus closiodes*). Dig around it and let her arms touch the root."
>
> They dug around the root and they placed the sick girl in the trench, when suddenly the woman fell through the hole in the sky. Below the sky was a big water. Two *gakits* (wild ducks: *Anas poecilorhyncha luzonica*) saw the woman fall. They caught her lightly on their backs where she

rested. The *gakits* found Big Turtle. When Big Turtle saw the woman, he called a council of all swimming animals. They said: "We must save the woman and make her a home."

The leader commanded the frog: "Dive and bring up dirt from the tree roots." The frog tried and failed.

The mouse tried also and failed. Finally, the Big Toad volunteered: "I will try."

At this, all animals jeered and laughed except Big Turtle who said: "You do well to try. Perhaps you will be lucky."

The Old Toad took a long breath and went down, down. At last a bubble of air came up and the Old Toad followed. In its mouth she carried a few grains of sand, which she spread around the edge of Big Turtle's shell. Then an island grew on Big Turtle's back, and it became Bohol island, and the woman lived upon it.

If anyone will examine carefully the shape of the turtle's back, he will find some similarity to the shape of the island of Bohol.

The woman seemed to feel cold. She needed more light to keep her warm. The animals held a council again. Said Little Turtle: "If I could only get up into the sky, I could gather the lightning and make a light."

"You do well to try, perhaps you will be lucky," said the Big Turtle. One day, not long after dark, a whirling cloud carried Little Turtle up into the sky where he gathered lightning, and made sun and moon that gave light to the woman.[15]

There follows then the woman's living with an old man whom she found on the island and how they begot twins: Good One and Bad One. After the disappearance of Bad One, Good One made the Boholanos by "taking two lumps of earth and shaped them like figures. Then he spat upon them and they became man and woman. They were endowed by Good One with sterling qualities, like industry, hospitality, obedience, good-nature and peace-loving."

We should link this myth with the myth of the Ascension into Heaven according to which Tubigan, the legendary hero of Bohol, himself a demi-god brought his entire people up to heaven in a boat. This return to heaven is in reality a return to their home: for, according to the myth, the Boholanos originated from the heavenly realms.

Another tale mentions how in the beginning there was only darkness. Then the heavens covered the earth so that the two together looked like an immense *tabo* or coconut-shell bowl. Within the bowl a rat was born. It gradually grew in size

15. Maria C. Pajo, *Bohol Folklore* (M.A. thesis, University of San Carlos, Cebu City. 1954), p. 45ff.

until it transformed itself into the giant Angngalo, the Bisayan Atlas who carried the heavens on his shoulders. One day, he eased himself, and from his feces and urine were born the islands, lakes and rivers, of the Archipelago. God who saw him thus occupied gave him a kick which sent him to China by way of Mariveles. (Two very large footprints are still visible today in the Mariveles mountains.)[16]

Unique in this myth, to my mind, is the combination of two very ancient and universal mythic motifs: the hierogamy (or sacred marriage) between the world parents: here the earth and the sky, and the mountain motif. The earth covered by the sky looked like an immense tabo or coconut-shell bowl turned backside up. An immense coconut-shell bowl turned upside down can also look like a mountain. And the mountain in mythic thought is closely related to the time and place of creation. It is the center of the universe, the particular point wherein passage is possible between the three cosmic layers: the heavens, the earth, and the underworld. The mountain, too, is closely linked with the symbol of the pillar of the world, like the world tree. It is both *in* this world and *out* of it. Its base is imminent with human life, but its summit is hidden high in the clouds where the gods dwell. It is therefore very appropriate as the ladder connecting the earthly region with the heavenly. Next, there is the motif of transformation. The rat born of the sky covering the earth is said to grow in size until it transformed itself into a huge giant named Angngalo. Thirdly, there is the implicit motif, too, of the raising of the sky high above the earth; or the breaking up of the original union of earth and heaven. This termination is concretely expressed by depicting the offspring of heaven and earth as carrying the weight of the firmament on his shoulders after the manner of Atlas.

Then, too, the myth of the giant Angngalo born from earth covered by the sky which looked like a giant *tabo,* might also be a variant of the motif of the cosmogonic egg. Also a very common motif. We know that Chaos and Cosmic Egg are homologous in that both reflect the condition of reality before

16. F. Demetrio, S.J., "Creation Myths Among The Early Filipinos," *Asian Folklore Studies*, XXVII-1 (1968), p. 50.

the "centering" of the cosmos by a definite conception and form. The egg even as chaos contains a mass that is formless, indeterminate. But at the same time the egg has an added note which chaos alone does not have. I refer to the spherical, ovoid shape of the egg; even though it tells of indetermination and formlessness, it also hints at some kind of unity, or wholeness, or totality. The spherical shape delivers a message, the message of togetherness, of totality when everything was yet at their primeval source or seedbed, before forms were created, and the original round fragmented.[17] This idea of original totality and wholeness is closely akin to the notion of the egg as potential source of all life. Like the womb which is also spherical or ovoid, it is an incubator. It is big with promise of the issuance of all kinds of life. Or at the substratum of the cosmic egg symbolism lies the structure of fertility and fecundity, of never exhausted life. That is why the egg symbolizes, not so much birth, but rebirth.[16]

So the raising up by Angngalo of the heavens above the earth may be taken as the moment of the separation of the two halves of the cosmic egg, the earth below and the heavens above. And this cosmic separation of the World Parents, the primordial feminine from the primordial masculine also marks the moment of creation when definite forms and limitations were established: the dichotomy of male and female among human beings, animals and plants, historicity, and time: past and future.

The picture of the giant easing himself and his excreta becoming the islands and his urine the sea of the archipelago, may seem crude and vulgar at first blush. But let us look at the point behind the rough expression. The giant is after all, a semi-divine, or even divine being. And, although he has human needs, nevertheless these are satisfied in a manner that is superhuman. For this waste becomes creative of our earth: the Philippine Archipelago and the seas which wash the shores of our islands. In a sense, therefore, our land and our waters are by origin divine, or at least semi-divine, gigantic. In this myth, then, no less is claimed for the entire Philippines than

17. Charles H. Long, *Alpha*: *The Myths of Creation,* (New York, 1963), p. 116.

18. *Ibid,* p. 113.

was claimed by the earlier myth of Bohol: both the parts and the whole of these islands are in origin heavenly. Here is again a religious phenomenon: the endeavor on the part of primitive man always to live within the sphere of the context of the sacred. Why? Because the sacred and the real are for the primitive man synonymous.[19]

2. Whence comes death? Universal folklore is rich with myths depicting the origin of death. Frazer has classified these myths into 4 types:[20] 1. The type of the *Two Messengers* especially common in Africa. God sent the chameleon to the mythical ancestors with the message that they would be immortal, and he also sent the lizard with the message that they would die. The chameleon was dilatory and so the lizard arrived ahead of him, and delivered her message. Another variant tells how the chameleon arrived first but fell to stammering while delivering his message. The weaver-bird, a lying bird, came and said to the gathered multitude that God had said men would die "like the roots of the aloe." Only then did the chameleon remember his message, but too late. For the magpie intervened and said that "the first speech was the wise one." That is why men have died since then. The second type: *The Waxing and Wanning Moon.* A legend of one of the natives of South-East Australia tells how there was a time when all animals were men and women, and some of them died. But the moon used to say "You up again," and they came to life again. But at that time there was an old man who said, "Let them remain dead." Then none ever came to life again except the moon, which still continued to do so. Another variant says that the moon once sent an insect to men saying: "Go to men and tell them, as I die and dying live; so you shall also die, and dying live." The insect went, but a hare overtook her. Having known the message from the insect the hare proceeded ahead of her; but the message he delivered to men was the opposite. He returned to the moon to report what he had told men. The moon was greatly wrought at the hare, took

19. Mircea Eliade, *op cit,* passim.

20. Mircea Eliade, *From Primitives To Zen: A Thematic Source Book on the History of Religions,* New York, Harper and Row, 1967 pp. 139–144. Paul Radin, ed. *African Folktales And Sculpture,* (New York, 1964), pp. 60–63.

up a piece of wood and struck the hare on the nose. That is why its lip has been split. The third type: *The Serpent and His Cast Skin.* Men were said never to die before. But when they grew old they simply cast off their skins like snakes and crabs and their youth was restored. A woman once went into the river to shed off her skin. She watched it float down the river and get caught against a stick. She returned to her house, but to her dismay, the child she had left behind refused to recognize her, crying that her mother was an old woman not like the young "stranger." To pacify the child the woman returned to the river, recovered her old skin and put it on again. Since then men stopped to cast their skin and to die. The fourth type is that of *Stone and the Banana* or the Type of *The Two Bundles,* one of which contained Life, the other Death. Among the Indonesians we are told that in the beginning the sky was very close to the earth. Every day God would lower down a rope containing his gifts to men. Once God lowered a stone. But the first parents would have nothing to do with it. They complained to God for his doing so. God raised the stone up. After a while, he lowered the rope again and at its end was a banana. Our first parents ran up to it and took it. Then a voice said from heaven: "Because you have chosen the banana your life shall be like its life. When the banana tree has offsprings, the parent stem dies; so shall you die and your children shall step into your place. Had you chosen the stone, your life would have been like the life of the stone changeless and immortal." So they died. There are other two types which must be added: namely, *Death as a Result of the Arbitrary and Cruel Act of a Mythical* (giant, or an old man and sometimes) *Theriomorphic Being* (the magpie or Urbura) as in African and Australian myths; or the little bird, Tiwakawaka who could not contain her laughter as she saw Maui emerging from the mouth of the ancestral giantess, Hinenui-te-po (Polynesia). The laughter woke the ancestress up and she killed Maui. The fifth type is *Death as the Result of Man's Transgressing a Divine Command.* This is especially so in the case of the biblical account of the origin of death, as well as in the Bisayan myth as recounted by Loarca and Pavon. From the account of these early chroniclers it would appear that death came into the world as a result of man's transgressing a command or com-

mands which were however not explicitly stated, but which are inferred from the subsequent and resultant punishment. These implicit commands seem to have been: 1) Never bring a live shark to shore; (2) Do not cry over a dead fish, "The god Captan was displeased at these obsequies to a fish," (Loarca). In Pavon we read that after the death of the fish Capantaan, the first man wept bitterly invoking the god because of this monstrosity, for until then he had never seen any death, nor had there been any death. His cry was heard by the gods Captan and Maguayen who afterwards sent animals to ascertain who the dead one was. It seems that here, too, the sending of the messenger to inquire after the dead carries an implicit sanction against crying and mourning over a fish that had died. The third implicit command seems to have been this: Do not maltreat a black cat. It was because a black cat had helped itself generously to the feast which Capantaan and his wife had prepared for their friends at the burial of the fish, that Capantaan struck it with a stick. It went howling to Captan and Maguayen complaining of his maltreatment at the hands of Capantaan. So the gods launched a thunderbolt from heaven, which killed Capantaan.[21]

A number of points must be underscored at this juncture which will bring out the religious nature of these narratives. First of all, these myths alert us of death as something that somehow or other is an extrinsic factor that has been inserted into the fabric of life through some mistake (meant or otherwise), through outright cruelty or meanness on the part of an enemy, or through an unthinking rashness to grasp at a lesser good which was presented in its immediacy—the pacification of the child who refused to recognize its mother who had been rejuvenated and who longed for her as an old woman, or the choice of the first parents in favor of the banana against the stone, or the attractiveness of the fruit presented by one beloved, as in the case of Adam and Eve, or whether it be the inordinate grief of Capantaan at the death of the fish and his

21. Jose Maria Pavon, The Robertson Translations of the Pavon Manuscripts of 1838–1839 D: *Stories of the Indios Of Olden and of Today.* (Chicago Philippine Studies Program, Transcript No. 5–DS, pp. 26–27). Cf. also Miguel de Loarca. *Relacion de las Islas Filipinas.* Manila (?), ca. 1580. In: Blair and Robertson, *The Philippine Islands,* V, 123–125).

hasty hand hitting the special pet of Captan and Maguayen—the black cat—, a lesser good immediately present as against the more desirable good of continued life which appeared so far and distant then. In other words, there is in these myths an unspoken, though sometimes explicitly mentioned, sentiment that death should really not be in the first place. Then, too, the fact that immortality is depicted as having been lost once, somehow or other nurses the hope that perhaps one, some way or other, may be able to recover life even if it had been lost in death. As a matter of fact this mythic insight becomes expressed dramatically in the rites of initiation where one is made to undergo the tortures of physical death, as it were in order that he may be born to another kind of life: the life of the spirits. The same structure of life through a passage of death is again found in the various rites and rituals at the beginning and end of the year, at springtime, at the curing rites, as well as in the initiation to the office of shamanism, medicine man or hero. For as Eliade has aptly written:

> "the archaic evaluation of death as the supreme means of spiritual regeneration constitute an initiatic scenario that extends into the great religions of the world, including Christianity. This is the fundamental mystery, resumed, relived, and reinterpreted in every new religious experience. But let us consider more closely the ultimate consequences of this mystery: if we already know death here below, if we die innumerable times, continually, to be reborn to *something else*, it follows that man already sees, here below on earth, something which does not belong to the earth, which partakes of the sacred, of the godhead; he sees, let us say, a beginning of immortality, he obtains a greater and greater share of immortality . . ."[22]

3. What is sin? What gives rise to our sorrows and to what intent?

This is another religious question which the myths have tried to symbolically express if not to answer. This is especially seen in the so-called Bad Creator or Marplot Motif. Over a wide area of the world (Central Asia and South-Eastern Europe), the creator-god is not seldom closely linked with the devil in the act of creation. The devil is presented as the blood-brother of God or co-eternal with him, and without the devil's

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22. 'Mystery and Spiritual Regeneration," in *Man and Transformations, Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks* (Pantheon, New York, 1964), pp. 36).

help, God is said to be unable to *complete* the world. Making a rough statement in this regard, we might say that the various peoples of the world seem to have preserved a feeling for the need to "make a place for the devil, not only in the creation of the world—which could be understood as the need to explain the origin of evil—but also close to God, as a companion born of God's desire to escape from his solitude . . . What counts for us is that the popular mind has been pleased to imagine the loneliness of God and his comradeship with the Devil, and the Devil's role as God's servant, (as in the Prologue of Job), collaborator or even chief counsellor; to imagine, moreover, the divine origin of the Devil, for essentially God's spittle is nothing less than divine; to imagine, in fact, a certain "sympathy" between God and the Devil . . ."[23]

Among the Oceanians and the South Sea Islanders, as a counterpart for the goodness of the creator, the devil, usually shown to be equally powerful, is said to dampen the bright work of the creator: spoiling it by introducing some element of imperfection. (The tares sown by the enemy among the wheat of the Gospels).

A Bilaan myth tells how Melu-a, the creator, was just about to finish making the first two human beings (save for their noses and another part of the anatomy of one of them) when Tau Tana of Tao Dalom Tana who lived under the earth appeared on the scene demanding that Melu-a leave the noses to him. Despite the objections of Melu-a, he prevailed over him. But Tau-Tana spoiled the work. He placed the noses upside down on the faces of the first human beings. This angered Melu-a who at once left for his home in the sky, without finishing the still unfinished part of one of the original pair. When the rains came, the two were almost drowned because the water ran down from their heads into their upturned noses. Melu-a in pity came down and reset their noses. Another version tells us that when he came down from heaven to save the two from drowning, he reset their noses so hurriedly that he pressed his finger on the roots of them, thus flattening them.[24]

The Bukidnon of Mindanao have a similar myth. The crea-

23. Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion,* pp. 87–88.

24. Fay Cooper Cole. *The Wild Tribes of Davao District, Mindanao* (Chicago, 1913), pp. 136–137.

tor, Hari ta mga Magbabaya or simply, Magbabaya who lived in the 7th heaven (*ikapito ha langit*). He wanted them to be possessed of a sturdy body covering. So before breathing the gift of life into them he went back to the sky in order to secure some hard material for their skin. While he was away, his own brother, Mangilala, "the tempter," came up to the earth from the 7th tier of the Underworld where he lived. And he was pleased. He thought with himself: "Should my brother finish what he had begun, he would become more powerful than I." So he at once breathed life into the forms of clay so that they began to live as human beings. When Magbabaya returned, he found his creatures already alive and their body covering very frail. He knew it was his own brother who had spoiled his work. Instead of destroying them, he took pity on them and allowed them to continue as they were thinly covered by their skin. However, he saved the extremities of their hands and feet by providing them with the covering he had brought down from heaven. This became the nails on their fingers and their toes. But afterwards whenever people are tempted to do what is evil, the Bukidnon say that this is due to the fact that their life was breathed upon them by the Evil One.[25]

First of all, it is worth noting that there appears to be no recorded effort (as far as I can ascertain, I stand to be corrected in this regard) of our Philippine myth makers to account for the presence of evil (physical and moral) in man and in the world at large, by an appeal to the creator's (God's) loneliness and inability to create alone, and so necessitating the introduction of the bad creator who subsequently spoils the work. In this point the myths of Central Asiatic and European peoples on the one hand, and our own, on the other, vary greatly.

There is one point of agreement, however. The good and the bad creator are portrayed as co-equal in power: in the first case, the creating of the noses whose correct position on the face meant life and death for the first people, in the second, the creation of life *itself* was effected by the Evil One. The first myth fastens on the obvious fact that the Philippine natives generally have low flattened noses. If this be a defect or im-

25. Francisco Demetrio, S.J. "Creation Myths Among The Early Filipinos," *Asian Folklore Studies,* vol. XXVII-1 (1968), p .77, n. 24.

perfection (compared with the finely chiselled noses of other races), then it is attributed ultimately to the primordial act of treachery on the part of the bad creator when he placed the noses upside down. But the actual pressing down of the roots of the noses (thus flattening them) was, nevertheless, the result of the good creator's hurried action in order to save mankind from perishing. In the second myth, it was the good creator's pity for the living beings which constrained him from destroying them, although he knew that there was going to be something wrong with their life since it originated from the breath of his brother: man was going to be tempted to do evil. Nevertheless, it was life, and he respected it and would not destroy it.

In a way, then, because the defect (physical and moral) is somehow or other consequent upon the action of the good creator, perhaps we should be allowed to detect here an indirect effort to implicate the good creator in the existence of defects and imperfections (physical and moral evil) in the world. In this way, too, perhaps the mythmakers were equivalently saying that evil is somehow within the compass of the good creator (he saved the first people from drowning by his action, and he would not snuff out the life of these beings), and yet evil is not altogether under his absolute control because his saving action resulted in some evil. Here then the mind of the Central Asiatic and European peoples as well as of some of our native tribes seem to concur.

These examples and observations cannot fail to impress upon the reader the incontrovertible fact that our native people's myths along with the myths of the rest of the world have dimensions that are truly religious.

To the sophisticated moderns, these tales and myths appear naive and uncomplicated. But our analysis has shown that beneath this surface of naivety are documents of a people's existential concern for life: its preservation and increase; that through these myths people are telling the truth *about* themselves. If we cannot believe these myths ourselves, at least we can sympathize with those who still do, and we can even appreciate them as significant milestones in the Pilgrim's Progress toward more and more hominisation in the world that is getting dehumanized because perhaps overly secularized.