# Towards an Understanding of Philippine Myths

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## Introduction

"That's a myth!" is an expression commonly heard when people refer to something that is not true to facts. However, when people speak of the "myth of freedom," or the "myth of nationalism" or even the "myth of Christianity," although the element of un-truth may still be hinted at, still there is something more than the lack of "truth" which is alluded to. This something is quite positive and belongs to another kind of truth, beyond the truth of fact. You may call it the truth of nature, the truth of experience, the truth of life.[1] The unpopularity which has stigmatized the concept of myth for so many centuries since

1. Writers like Louis F. Haftmann, C.S.S.R. and Geraldus van der Leeuw distinguish between "Denkwahrheit," an eternally true idea in the ordering of life, and "Tatsachewahrheit," or the truth of a concrete fact. The truth of myth belongs to the first kind. (Cf. "Myth," in *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Bible* (New York-Toronto-London: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1963), p. 1585ff; and *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, trans. J. E. Turner (2 vols.; New York and Evanston, 1963). In this connection, it is well to mention, too, what Oscar Cullman writes about the myths in the Old Testament. He brings out quite clearly the difference between mythical and historical truth:

"Much of biblical narrative, including the sagas of *Genesis*, is concerned with the relations between God and man, and in the last resort rests upon an historical basis. But there are certain central themes which were of vital significance to the editor or author of *Genesis* whom we might call Yahwist. And these themes lie beyond the sphere of historical categories." (Underscoring supplied). Some of these themes are first, the creation of the universe, second the presence of sin and its dreadful consequence and third the moment and manner of its entry into the world, etc. In expressing these timeless truths, myth, *instead of being untrue,* is the divinely chosen means for expressing truths which lie far deeper than historical truth. ("Rudolf Bultmann's Concept of Myth and the New Testament," *Concordia Theological Monthly*, vol. 27 (1956), 13–24).

the days of Xenophanes (ca. 565–470 B.C.) in Greece, through St. Paul and the Fathers of the early Church until the 19th century has been primarily due to the fact that myth has been equated with lack of truth, the hard truth of facts, or, if you wish, historical, that is, recorded truth.[2]

## 1. Myth Ancient Yet New

Now it is a fact that myth is more ancient than the science of history; before science and systematic thought we call philosophy and theology, there was myth. Myth is ancient like the folktale, the riddle, the fable, like magic, and religion. It is as ancient as man himself.

Voming to terms with myth in our life as a people imperative. Many modern thinkers have lamented the fact that most modern writers have lost their myths.[3] Scientism, the over emphasis on science, and the child of science, the machine, have rendered man hard and unfeeling. Thus the need to rediscover our myths, if modern man, even when served by science and technology, will not lose his humanity.[4] Rediscovering our myth does not mean that we must believe in these myths again the very same way our ancestors did. That is quite impossible. But it means we must rediscover ourselves when we were children, and see the permanent values of childhood, its freshness, its simplicity, its truth.[5]

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2. Cf. Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, trans. from the French by Willard R. Trask, New York and Evanston: Harper and Row (1963), 1ff, and 139–194. Rev. Louis Bouyer, *Rite and Man: Natural Sacredness and Christian Liturgy*, (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press (1963), esp. pp. 14–37).

3. Mircea Eliade, *Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism* (trans. by Philip Mairet) (New York: Sheed and Ward (1952), 18ff).

4. Jung writes: "Myths . . . have a vital meaning. Not merely do they represent, they *are* the psychic life of the primitive tribe, which immediately falls to pieces and decays when it loses its mythological heritage, like a man who has lost his soul. A tribe's mythology is its living religion, whose loss is always and everywhere, even among the civilized, a moral catastrophe. . . . *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. Trans. by R. C. Hull; Bollingen Series, 20. New York (1959), p. 154.

5. See esp. the remarks of Eliade on Tylor and Frazer who, like good positivists, regarded the magico-religious life of archaic humanity as a mass of childish "superstitions," the product of ancestral fears or of "primitive stupidity." For him this value judgement is in contradiction to facts. For "the magico-religious behavior of archaic humanity reveals an existential awakening of man's consciousness of the Cosmos and of himself." Eliade, *Images and Symbols*, p. 176.

## 2. The Truth of Myth

The truth of myth is not the truth of history. It is the truth of experience, of the real, of life, the holy, the sacred. A person who kneels before the image of his Santo Niño and with all his heart prays for the recovery of an only child, to a modern scientific sophisticate, may be a superstitious man, weak and cringing, allaying his fears with the opium of religion. But that man is finding truth in his prayers. His son may not be cured. He may even die. But to have prayed for a while has put order in that disordered spirit, has restored in him the calm of the mountaintops. The truth of myth is analogous to the truth an anguished person finds once he has prayed to God with all his might before that statue of the Christ Child: the experience of peace, of resignation.

An artist impelled by the strong desire to understand the presence of evil in the world; and desirous to recall his fellow man to awareness of the activity of the Prince of Liars who has caused so much misery in the world ever since he deceived early man into believing that he could take the place of God and become a law into himself, this artist has written a book and this book has been made into a movie. It is not historical. It is fiction. But fiction based on experience of evil. And the book and the movie are both very real. They make people cry, swoon, and vomit. They fill movie houses across the U.S.A. Such is *The Exorcist*.[6] Book and movie. Fiction. Myth. But very real. It produces results.

What can be more mythical than the dream of a society that is classless, wherein there will be neither rich nor poor, no ruled and ruling; wherein peace, contentment, fraternity, will abound: a veritable heaven on earth. The communist dream. Such a dream has produced certain effects which are really tangible in China today. Even in the Philippines, the New Society falls within the category of myth. Not that it is false. But that it is still and will always be a dream. But it is effective enough to make people change their minds. And that even without the

6. Cf. the lead article in *Newsweek* (Feb. 11, 1974), pp. 26–31. The author of the book *The Exorcist*, a paperback bestseller, was William Peter Blatty. The book is said to have been based "on an actual case of exorcism officially documented by the Church involving a fourteen-year-old Maryland boy in 1949. . . ." Thus reported Judith Crist in "Bewitched, Bothered, and Therefore, Bewildered," *New York* (January 21, 1974), p. 56ff. See another write-up on it by William J. O'Malley, S.J. "Behind the Exorcist," in *The Jesuit* (New York, Winter, 1973), 6–7.

force of arms. People who now fall in line, who no longer litter the streets with garbage, do so not because of fear necessarily. They see value in order and cleanliness.

We could multiply examples. What is clear that mythic thinking and world view are not dead. They are alive. People draw strength from them where abstract, reasoned, philosophic thinking fails to supply inspiration.

### 3. Modern Conception of Myth

With the help of modern psychology, especially psychoanalysis, as developed by Freud and Jung as well as of the sciences of comparative religion and anthropology, there has come about a better understanding of the value of myth.[7] This understanding is premised not so much on the truth of myth as seen in relation to history and the truth of facts, but rather on truth of myth as related to its function.[8] The truth of myth is thus related to cult or ritual. Or rather that myth and ritual are facets of one and the same reality: the *gut-experience* of life, in its varied aspects.

### 4. Myth Defined

What then is myth? It is the spoken or recited portion of ritual or cult.[9] Cult is a ceremony which consists in actual drama or presenta-

7. Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, trans. by Rosemary Ward (Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company—Meridian Books), 1963, p. 410–411. Cf. also his *Images and Symbols*, 57ff; and Jung, *op. cit.*, p. 154, informs us "Not the world as we know it speaks out to his (i.e., the primitive man's) unconscious, but the unknown world of the psyche. And we know that the psyche mirrors our empirical world only in part, and that it molds the empirical world in accordance with its own psychic assumptions. . . ."

8 Myths are models for actions that are strictly religious as well as for "other significant human actions, as, for instance, navigation and fishing." Cf. Eliade, *Patterns*, p. 411.

9. There is an unresolved controversy among ethnologists, anthropologists and other scholars as to the historical priority of either myth or ritual. See S. H. Hooke, "Myth and Ritual: Past and Present," in *Myth, Ritual and Kingship: Essays on the Theory and Practice of Kingship in the Ancient Near East and in Israel*, edited by S. H. Hooke (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), pp. 1–21; also S. G. F. Brandon, "Myth and Ritual Position Critically Considered," *ibid.*, pp. 261–291. For the anthropological position in this controversy, consult Clyde Kluckholn's "Myth and Ritual: A General Theory," *Harvard Theological Review*, 35 (1942), 45–79, reprinted in W. A. Lessa and E. Z. Vogt, *Reader in Comparative Religion* (Evanston, Illinois and White Plains, New York, 1958), pp. 135–151.

tion of an event in the distant past which has something to do with the beginning of life or which sustains or increases life. Cult is worship of deity, thanking him for gifts given or favors received; cults are for curing a sick person, for starting the new year, for closing the old, for baptizing or circumcizing a boy, for installing a king, ordaining a priest or shaman, for building a house, harvesting, planting, marrying, for waking the dead, burying him or putting an end to the period of mourning. In other words, cult comes in at every significant human event where the foundations of life and the increase or sustenance of life are involved.[10] We shall leave till later the question: "What impelled man from the very beginning to indulge in myth-telling or perform cult?"

If myth is the accompanying narration that goes with the cult, then we can assume that for every cult there was a myth, and for every myth, there was a ritual or ceremony.

## 5. Living Myths

Myths thus conceived are what we call *living* myths. These myths are clearly still very vital, and influence the life of man. Myth and ritual go hand in hand. For it is through the recital of myth that the meaning of the rite is internalized and made reflective. And it is necessary that this reflection takes place if the intention of the ritual is to be achieved and appropriated by the members of the community. Otherwise, if drama alone is made use of without the concommitant narration, the meaning will be lost as soon as the rite is over. Indeed, it may move and grip the attention while it lasts. But the effect will be lost unless internalized through recitation.[11]

10. Cf. Note 12, p. 38, *infra*, quote from R. Pettazzoni.

11. Oral recitation of the myth during the ritual is necessary at least on two counts: one, in order to internalize the story on the part of the hearers or audience (Ernst Cassirer, *Myth of the State*), and, too, by the evocative power of the spoken word, in order to effect or bring about what the word says. In this connection cf. again the passage from Pettazzoni, *infra.*, note 12, p. 38. Eliade also writes that the recital of myth during ritual is "equivalent to revealing a mystery. For the persons of the myth are not human beings; they are gods and culture heroes, and for this reason their *gesta* constitute mysteries; man could not know their acts if they were not revealed to him.... To tell a myth is to proclaim what happened ab *origine*. ... The myth proclaims the appearance of a new cosmic situation or of a primordial event. Hence it is always the recital of a creation; it tells how something was accomplished, began to be.... Myth reveals absolute sacrality, because it relates the creative activity of the gods, unveils the sacredness of their work ... it describes the various and sometimes dramatic irruptions of the sacred into the world. That is why, among many

## 6. The Function of Myth and Ritual

Raffaelle Pettazzone, an Italian scholar, has written some very enlightening passages on the special truth of myth as well as its links with ritual. He tells us that myth is true 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 power of healing. All these events are far removed in time, and yet from them came the present structure of society, which still depends on them.
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> Myth is . . . 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 increase of life. . . . 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.

Then he goes on to identify this efficacy of myth for the ends of cult.

> It lies in the magic of the word; in its evocative power, the power of *mythos* in its oldest sense, of the *fa-bula* . . . a secret and potent force, akin, as its very etymology shows, to the power of *fa-tum*. . . .[12] (That which has been spoken. And that which spoken is "expressed thought—or *logos*.")

There is always someone who has thought and who has expressed that thought in words. And his word is powerful. It is capable of effecting what it says. It is what has been called performative word. This word is the product of one who has power and authority to effect what he

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primitives, myths cannot be recited without regard for time or place, but only during the seasons that are ritually richest (autumn, winter) or in the course of religious ceremonies—in short, during a *sacred period of time*. It is the irruption of the sacred into the world, an irruption narrated in myths, that *establishes* the world as a reality. . . . (*The Sacred and Profane*, trans. by Willard R. Trask (New York, 1959), 95–98).

12. "The Truth of Myth," in *Essays on the History of Religions*, Supplement to *Numen*, Vol. I, pp. 11–23. *Fatum* comes from the Latin word *for, fari, fatus sum* "to speak"; it connotes the meaning of "decisive word" spoken by a deity.

says.[13]

## 7. Our Problem

Where in the world may we find such living myths? Such narrations which are still related vitally with ritual? Wherever there are still people who believe that through the recitation of sacred story during ceremonies, things are effected, there you have living myths. Usually such people now live in isolated pockets where the pace of life is still pre-industrial revolution: in the hills of New Mexico,[14] in the uplands of Bukidnon,[15] and the highlands of Bontoc.[16] Yet even in the modern poblaciones of the Philippines, in the barrios and the hinterlands, along the coasts, there are still people who live out their faith in their rituals and their stories; I speak particularly of the *arbolarios*, the *mananambals* and the *baylans* or the shamans. They may be living in the city but their beliefs and practices are still of neolithic or protohistoric vintage. Nor is this limited only to the modern arbolarios, the medicine-men. I believe that wherever you have people who are truly religious and who

13. On "performative word," Cf. Benjamin Ray, " 'Performative Utterances' in African Rituals," *History of Religions*, Vol. 13/1 (August 1973), 16–35, esp. 26–28. Commenting on the efficacy of Trobriand spells, the author tells us that the "operational" meaning of these spells ". . . lies in the *authority* involved *in the act of uttering the words*. They are meaningful and effective only when uttered by authoritative persons. For example, in connection with canoe-building rites, Malinowski observed that the spells must be uttered "by the man entitled to do it through his social traditions and through certain observances he must keep" (B. Malinowski *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (New York, 1961), p. 427). Though Trobrianders do believe in a certain 'force' located in the stomach and conveyed by the speaker's breath, everyone possesses this property, not just the priests; and it is not the special source of their verbal power. Rather, the question is not a matter of the words themselves, as mere sounds, but of the culturally defined authority which is exercised in the act of uttering them. The casual reality of perlocutionary acts lies in the institutionalized authority of the people who speak them, together with other appropriate acts, in the appropriate circumstances. In other words, the notion of 'powerful' speech is based on the sociolinguistic fact that when authorities speak, things usually happen."

14. For the Mexicans in New Mexico, cf. Carlos Castañeda's books esp. *The Teachings of Don Juan: a Yaqui way of Knowledge* (New York, Ballantine Books, 1971) and *A Separate Reality* (New York, Pocket Books, 1972).

15. For the Bukidnons, of Northern Mindanao, cf. Francisco Claver, S.J., Vincent Cullen, S.J., and William Biernatzki, S.J., and their writings on *Bukidnon Politics and Religion*, edited by Alfonso de Guzman, II, and Esther M. Pacheco, IPC Papers No. 11 (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila (1973), esp. pp. 7ff; 23ff; 40ff. Also Cole, J. C. *The Bukidnon of Mindanao* (Chicago: Chicago Natural History Museum (1956), 79–80).

16. For the Ifugaos, cf. R. F. Barton, *The Religion of the Ifugaos*, Philadelphia, American Anthropological Association, 1946. *Passim.*

believe in the presence of God and his power in the world, I think there are many mythic elements, if not whole myths, in their thought and behaviour. The Catholic Church, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism have many mythic elements in their rituals.[17] Anyone who lives his faith in any of these world religions today, still lives by living myths.

## 8. Faith

We must now mention the one essential condition for myth to be a living one. It is what we call faith, or belief. This is above all an interior attitude of mind. It is based on the knowledge and realization that one is totally dependent for the origin of life as well as for the continuance and preservation and increase of life upon some one other than oneself.

## 9. Faith: An Interpersonal Relation

When you say you believe in someone, it means that you are willing to take him seriously: his position, his opinions, his advice, his ideals. And you do it because you have known and are convinced that he is worthy of being taken seriously. The person has credibility and is worthy of trust. When you believe in the Power that rules the world, this means, too, that you take him seriously—that you trust him, that you depend on him, that you even surrender yourself to him in com-

17. The Mass is a re-enactment of the drama of salvation—the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ who, a Christian believes, ransomed him and the entire world from the cluches of sin and the father of sin—the Evil One. The Mass is sacred action. It is drama. At the Offertory, the priest in the name of Jesus Christ and the community offers the bread and wine to the Father, and these are symbols of the total self-offering of the members of the community, singly and collectively. At the moment of Consecration, the priest, empowered by his ordination, speaks in the name of Jesus Christ who is both the Victim and the Offerer or the High Priest. Thus the self-offering of the community, through the High Priest. Thus the self-offering of the community, through the action of Christ the High Priest, becomes transformed into his own Body and Blood. Then at Holy Communion, Christ offers himself back to the community. But what he offers, His Body and Blood, originally came from the materials that the community had first brought and offered in thanksgiving to God for the gifts he has given them. Thus God gives back to us our offerings but now transformed into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ of which the faithful partake in Holy Communion. Thus union between God and man is effected which is the intention of ritual. And life is sustained, increased: "I came to give life and give it abundantly." I take this example because it is a common occurence and it is also very often not understood by even those who practice it.

plete and total self-giving;[18] knowing that your gift will not be wasted; that it is in the best of hands.

## 10. The Object of Faith Must be Credible

For the object of belief to be credible it must be experienced as being credible. This is where the experience of the mystics come in. All religious peoples of whatever generation and denomination are at one in their experience of the Object of Faith. You cannot argue out of their faith persons who have had experience of God as both a powerful and a loving Father. Neither can you persuade one who has had no experience at all to believe in God. But the reality of God in the lives of those who believe, even as his unreality in the lives of those who do not, is very clear.[19]

18. On faith cf. *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 5 (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967), 79ff; also *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology*, by Karl Rahner with Cornelius Ernst and Kevin Smyth, vol. I (London: Burns & Oates, 1968), p. 318ff. One could also see Jean Mourroux's and Romano Guardini's works, exp. on faith as self-surrender.

19. M. L. L. Von Franz writing on the way people react to religious symbols says: "... human beings can be divided into three types: First, there are those who still genuinely believe their religious doctrines, whatever they may be. For these people, the symbols and doctrines "click" so satisfyingly with what they feel deep inside themselves that serious doubts have no chance to sneak in. This happens when the views of consciousness and the unconscious background are in relative harmony. People of this sort can afford to look at new psychological discoveries and facts without prejudice and need not fear that they may be caused to lose their faith. Even if their dreams should bring up some relatively unorthodox details, these can be integrated in their general view.

The second type consists of those people who have completely lost their faith and have replaced it with purely conscious, rational opinions. For these people, depth psychology means an introduction into newly discovered areas of the psyche, and it should cause no trouble when they embark on the new adventure and investigate their dreams to test the truth of them.

Then there is a third group of people who in one part of themselves (probably the head) no longer believe in their religious traditions, whereas in some other part they still do believe. The French philosopher Voltaire is an illustration of this. He violently attacked the Catholic Church with rational argument (*écrasez l'infâme*), but on his deathbed, according to some reports, he begged for extreme unction. Whether this is true or not, his head was certainly unreligious, whereas his feelings and emotions seem still to have been orthodox. Such people remind one of a person getting stuck in the automatic doors of a bus; he can neither get out into free space or re-enter the bus...." Then he adds this significant observation: "The complicated situation of those who are caught in a no man's land between the two states of mind is partly created by the fact that all official religious doctrines actually belong to the collective consciousness (what Freud calls super-ego); but once, long ago, they sprang from the unconscious...." Cf. his "The Process of Individuation," in *Man and His Symbols* (conceived and

## 11. Lack of Full-Blown or Living Myths For The Greater Majority of Modern Filipinos

Except for the Mangyans, the Ifugaos, the Manobo, Bukidnons and a few of the mountain tribes, and the truly religious people among us, most Filipinos no longer have the experience of living myths. This means that they very seldom have the chance to really be moved by drama in ritual and the mythic narrations that go with ritual drama. What do they have instead? Only fragments of myths about the origin of the world, the beginning of man, of death, the first animals, the sun, the moon and the stars, etc. But for most modern Filipinos there are no records of truly living myths.[20] For most of us then, there is only half the reality of the culture which our forebears had, and by which they fashioned their daily lives. It might be proper to ask, then, for what use is it to collect and study these fragments of myths if we cannot recover the rituals which went with them?

## 12. Living Fossils

Despite the fact that the rituals to which those myths refer cannot be ascertained for sure, perhaps, it is possible, eventually, through the labor of scholarship, and with the aid of the rites and ceremonies of our so-called minority groups which still obtain today, to rediscover the ritual part of our myths. But what if we cannot reconstruct the rites? Eliade still thinks that it is imperative for a nation to come to terms

edited by Carl G. Jung), Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1969), 227. By way of criticism, I quite agree with M. L. Von Franz in most of his observations on the 3 types of people vis-à-vis religious symbols. I would, however, remark that perhaps he has omitted to consider what is very basic in this regard, namely the varying capacities of people for growth in religious faith and attitudes. I don't think the loss of faith in a number of once religious people can be explained, even partly by the fact that the official religious doctrines which now compose the collective consciousness long ago belonged to the unconscious. Because people with religious capacities do grow even in the understanding and internalization of dogma. Instead of these becoming fossilized, they become more and more fructifying and satisfying, as they grow older and their experiences of life in its varied manifestations become more and more rich. Such people, if they experience God genuinely will never give up belief in him again. Perhaps Voltaire never really had a true religious experience due perhaps to faulty religious training, or else, he had a very minimal religious capacity.

20. One simply has to pick up a collection of folktales compiled or edited by either foreign or native scholars, and there is hardly a mention even of the very vital relationship between myth and ritual. I refer especially to collections from our lowland Christianized peoples throughout the length and breath of the Archipelago.

with its mythic tradition.[21] For these myths are still the products of the psyche as it has developed from the depths of the unconscious. In much the same way, Carl G. Jung writes equally of the value of studying the myths not only of our own people but also of the rest of the world. He also suggests that a study of dreams be pursued. For dreams and myths, like art and religion have their roots in the underground base of the unconscious.[22] Knowing this unconscious base, that is to say, training the lights of awareness and understanding on it, we can integrate it into the ever expanding ground of consciousness. This in turn will bring about gradually, through many turns and twists, the desired maturity of a group, both individual and collective.

## 13. Two Important Relics For The Understanding of Myths: Motif of the Center and Shamanism

But we are not altogether without resource to understand the function of myths. Although it is true that outside the so-called peoples still living in the neolithic age, as well as the truly religious peoples among us, there are scarcely any myths among the lowland peoples which one might consider living, nevertheless, we have enough indications to understand the meaning and structure of myth and ritual even today. There are at least two sources of evidence: first, the myths of beginning which are closely allied with the motif of the "Center", and the institution of shamanism which is still found in the Philippines today. Both the myths with the motif of the Center as well as the shaman serve notice of the need to return to the Center if man and the world are to continue in existence, as well as increase their life.

## 14. The Motif of the Center

10.22 The motif of the Center is pervasive, students of comparative religion tell us.[23] However, it comes in many guises. It could be a hill or a mountain-top; it could be an island, rock, or the back of a crab or a tortoise. Invariably the Center is linked with the stories of the beginning of the world and of man, or with the stories of creation. As we

21. Cf. Joseph L. Henderson, "Ancient Myths and Modern Man," in *Man and His Symbols*, ed. Carl G. Jung, p. 106ff.

22. Cf. Joseph L. Henderson, *loc. cit., passim*; also Carl G. Jung, *loc. cit., passim*; and Eliade, *Myth and Reality* (New York Evanston, 1963), *passim.*

23. On the motif of the Center, Cf. Eliade, *Patterns*, pp. 367ff; also *Images and Symbols*, pp. 27ff.

know the act of creation is also variously imaged.[24]

## 15. Fixing the Center

Although the act of creation is variously pictured, still there is a very common motif which recurs in many stories of creation: the motif of the primordial waters.[25] Very many myths, of creation, though not all, mention the pre-existence of the waters.[26] It is because of this element that in the beginning there was no fixed or stable place. This instability of the world before the act of creation is sometimes pictured as a state of chaos where the elements of things milled about pellmell, without rhyme or reason;[27] or like an egg floating aimlessly in the waters;[28] or as mud or dirt brought up from the bottom of the ancient ocean upon the snout of a boar or between the teeth of a toad or the claws of a crab.[29] The precious bit of soil out of which the big world was later to be fashioned, poised so precariously, its retrieval threatened on everyside, is so vividly portrayed in these myths of the earth-divers or of the earth-procurers from far away lands. The fundamental idea in these myths is this: in the beginning, the world lacked a foundation; it needed someone to fix it firm in the midst of the waters. This fixing of the place, that is, the act of centering the world, in order to give it stability and firmness, had to be accomplished first, before the ordering or the filling in of the elements of the cosmos could be brought about. Even in the Hebrew *Genesis*, I, 3–13, Yahweh after he had created light

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24. The act of creation can be an act of thought (Winnebago and Omaha Indians), or the act of uttering a word (Hebrew and Maiori) or the churnings of the primeval ocean (Vedic Indian and Japanese), or the breaking of the shell of the primordial egg (Vedic Indian, Greek, Hawaiian); or it can be the act of diving for a piece of dirt or mud from the bottom of the primordial waters (Vedic Indian, Maidu of South Central California; Iroquoi and Boholano in the Philippines); or the fetching of soil from a far away country. (Bagobo, Tausug in the Philippines); or the retching of the creator god (Boshongo); or the dismembering of the body of the primordial being or giant or god (Sumerian or Babylonian, Indian, Chinese), or the gradual ordering of the cosmos from an original chaos as in Hesiod's *Theogony*. The various myths of creation may embody one or more of these motifs or symbols. Cf. Eliade, *From Primitive to Zen; a Thematic Sourcebook of the History of Religions* (Harper and Row, Publishers, New York Evanston, 1967), pp. 83ff.

25. Cf. *ibid., passim.*

26. Cf. Gudmund Hatt. *Asiatic Influences in American Folklore* (Copenhagen, 1949), p. 17ff.

27. Cf. Eliade, *Patterns,* pp. 188ff; 191ff; 195ff.

28. Cf. Eliade, *From Primitive to Zen,* p. 88.

29. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 88ff.

had to separate the dry land from the wet. For in separating the land, he fixed it.

## 16. Characteristics of the Center

Eliade has isolated for us these characteristics of the Center which if seen clearly have to do with the need to situate man and his world in the realm of the real, the definite, the holy.[30] (1) The Center is where the activity of the gods is most intense and manifest; (2) it is there, too, that the activity of the opposing forces, the enemies of the gods, are felt keenly. For it is only after the gods (in this case the creators) had successfully vanquished their rivals that the act of creation took place; (3) it is also at the Center that the souls of the dead as well as of the ancestors dwell; (4) where the passage from the Upper to the Lower world and vice versa is possible; (5) from the Center it was, that the children of the first parents departed in order to people the world; (6) where the children of the ancestors had to be born, thither they must repair again after death if they are to be reborn; (7) it is at the Center where marriage must be performed; where oaths must be taken; and sacrifices made acceptable to the gods; where valor and wisdom are vouchsafed to heroes, where the initiation of priests and shamans and medicinemen takes place; where kings are consecrated; and, finally, it is at the Center that the shaman must go in order to get the message from the gods, as well as to conduct the souls of the dead or to recapture the souls of the sick.

## 17. Reversibility of the Center

Under whatever image it may appear, mountain, island, tree, cave, etc., the Center has the amazing capability of being brought to contemporary historical time. Now this capacity is common to all myths, especially the so-called myths of beginning or origin, which are still living, that is, which have a link with cult. This reversibility of origin myths is necessary because it is only thereby that the profane world once again partake of the sacred, and therefore with power and reality. It is precisely because historical time can be periodically suppressed during the celebration of the rites and the retelling of myths of the beginnings of the world and of man that the resources of reality, holiness and energy

30. Cf. Eliade, *Images and Symbols*, pp. 27–56, esp. 41ff.

in the cosmos are replenished.[31] This is the concept that underlies ancient man's efforts to constantly situate himself and his work and life within the realm of the holy. For the real, the holy, the powerful and effective —all are found in the Center. There the gods are operative and their divine power pervasive. Outside the Center, there is chaos, disorder, weakness: defeat by the forces of unreason, instinct, brute power, darkness and death.[32] This is behind the Muslim concept of the *Dar-ul-Islam*, and its opposite *Dar-al-Hard*.[33] I need not say, too, that this perhaps is the basis for much ethnocentrism of many people and races.

On the credit side, this appreciation of the Center seems also to be the basis behind all efforts by individuals and by groups for identity, for self-fulfillment, for a need to belong and to be accepted. All sound and necessary concepts. But once exaggerated productive of much harm.

## 18. Shamanism and the Center

The other living relic which help us understanding the function of myth and ritual is the institution of shamanism. Briefly, shamanism is a very ancient institution. Lommel tells us that it began as soon as man was able to distinguish between the two essential parts of his being: the body or material component from the spirit or immaterial part.[34]

Now the motif of the Center is also central to shamanism. For the shaman is first and foremost a person who stands at the center of things in a primitive community. Eliade calls him the one who preserves

31. For Eliade, creation being divine work implies the irruption of creative energy into the world. Since every creation springs from an abundance, but of an excess of power, an overflow of energy. And because myth recounts these sacred ontophanies, these victorious manifestations of a fulness of being, the myths become the paradigmatic models of all human activities; for they reveal the real, the superabundant, the effective. (*Sacred and Profane*, 97–98).

32. Cf. Schärer in his book on the Concept of God among the Ngaja Dyaks writes: "All ceremonies of transition, such as birth, initiation, marriage and death, correspond very closely with each other in that on every occasion they repeat the drama of primeval creation. Man passes into death and returns to the total godhead and the Tree of Life, and then the godhead re-enacts the creation and man issues again from the Tree of Life as a new creature. The idea of the sacred world of the Ngaju is closely linked with the idea of the Centre. Only within the sacred world is man in relationship with the godhead. Outside of the sacred world, there is only fear and uncertainty. #80, p. 165.

33. From interview with a Muslim scholar during the VIth ASAIHL meeting in Manila, May 1974.

34. Andreas Lommel, *Shamanism: the beginnings of Art* (New York and Toronto: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967), p. 26, 71.

the psychic equilibrium of the community.[35] He is able to do this because he has already stepped beyond the limits of mortal life. In short, he is a person who has already experienced death and has returned to the world of mortals. Because he has died, he is already familiar with the world of spirits, he is at home in dealing with them both the kindly ones as well as the vicious demons.[36]

His death, however, is not actual, but symbolic; or, if you wish, a psychic one.[37] This death happens during his initiation; and his dying and rebirth or return to life afterwards is repeated everytime he shamanizes. Like all other initiatory experiences, shamanic initiation follows three phases: separation, transition, and incorporation.[38] The separation is a kind of death, and the transition is partly death and also partly beginning of rebirth, and the incorporation is actual rebirth and the possession of new powers and capacities. Thus a person who before his call to shamanism may have been an ordinary, happy-go-lucky fellow, after his initiation and training becomes a quite different person. He turns serious-minded, sober, concerned with the good of his fellowmen and of the community wherein he lives.[39]

The symbolic or psychic death is exteriorly signified by the person's being lost for a while, either in the woods, or inside a cave, or up the branches of a balete tree and so on. Usually when he is found, he or she is "out of this world;" completely oblivious of the people around him, his attention seems totally absorbed with some persons whom he claims to see, but are altogether unseen to others. Sometimes he struggles because he does not want to go along with the spirits when they come to fetch him.[40] If he goes, he is usually brought to some far away

35. Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (New York: Random House, Inc. 1964), 237 and 508. Cf. also his "Recent Works on Shamanism," *History of Religions.* I, 184–185.

36. *Ibid., passim.*

37. *Ibid., passim.*

38. Joseph L. Henderson, *loc. cit.*, p. 128ff.

39. This has been the experience of everyone who has had an opportunity to observe such persons. Even among the Filipinos, a person who becomes a baylan undergoes certain very marked personality changes for the better.

40. However, the person who is thus invited or called by the spirits must willy-nilly go along with the spirits. In a number of cases he may become permanently crazy or even die. Eliade quotes from Willard Z. Park's *Shamanism in Western North America:* A Study in Cultural Relationships. (Evanston and Chicago, 1938), (Northwestern University Studies in the Social Sciences), p. 26, who says: "Usually a person is reluctant to become a shaman, and assumes his powers and follows the spirit's bidding only when he is told by other shamans that otherwise death will result." And Eliade tells us that this resistance to "divine

land beyond the mountains or the seas, or up the clouds and, beyond them, into the home of the gods, or, going underneath the earth, he visits the land of the dead. In all this he is generally accompanied by helping spirits, usually in the form of animals or birds.[41] These animals may at first threaten his life, but if he is able to subdue them, ever after, they become his faithful servants and protectors. Then he is made to undergo the experience of death. In vision or dream he sees himself dismembered, his intestines taken out, his head pierced with stakes, his flesh scraped off his body until he is reduced to the status of a skeleton. But a new set of intestines is given him, and he is invested with new flesh, that of the spirits.[42] Along with this experience is the onslaught of a kind of madness which again is but a symbol of psychic death: the dismemberment of his personality. In terms of the science of religion, this is but another manifestation of a return to the status of chaos and disorder and formlessness which was characteristic of the cosmos before the act of the creation. The shaman is made to undergo, as it were, in his own psyche, the process of being reduced to the state of chaos which is another symbol of death, in order that through the experience of chaos, he too might experience the creative act of the gods, and through the experience of death also experience a return to life. The experiences the shaman candidate undergoes are part of his transition stage when he is gradually weaned from the old ways and prepared to undertake new tasks and responsibilities. When he returns to his community after his absence, he seeks the company of older shamans, and becomes an apprentice of theirs. After sometimes, he is publicly incorporated into the ranks of the "spiritual beings," and then he begins to practice his trade for the community. Thus he is fully reborn and endowed with a new being and dignity—that of the spirits.

In shamanic initiation as well as in subsequent shamanic seances, the motif of the Center is very prominent.[43] When the candidate dis-

election" is explained by mankind's ambivalent attitude toward the sacred. "For . . . in primitive man as in all human beings to desire to enter into contact with the sacred is counteracted by the fear of being obliged to renounce the simple human condition and become a more or less pliant instrument for some manifestation of the sacred (gods, spirits, ancestors, etc.)" Cf. *Shamanism*, p. 23 and *Patterns*, pp. 459ff.

41. Cf. Eliade, *Shamanism* s.v. Index under "animals." Cf. also Lommel, *op. cit.*, p. 59ff.

42. Cf. Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation: The Mysteries of Birth and Rebirth* (New York: Harper & Row—Harper Torchbooks, 1958), pp. 81–102, esp. 87ff. Cf. also Lommel, *op. cit.*, p. 54ff.

43. Eliade, *Shamanism*, p. 269.

appears he is in reality brought to the Center by his helping spirits; it is at the Center that he is initiated; where he learns the ways of the spirits; it is there that he is instructed in healing arts, in clairvoyance, in prophecy, in penetrating the secrets of hearts and minds. It is there that he learns wisdom, the wisdom of the dead and of the earth; it is there that he is reborn, and given a new life and a new being: the being of the spirits. Later on, when he practices his trade, he must again repair to the Center; it is there that he speaks to the gods, that he learns what remedies to apply against a particular disease, what sacrifice to offer in order to conciliate and appease the anger of the gods, what means to use in order to vanquish demons; or when he enters the trance-state in search of the souls of the sick or in order to conduct the souls of the dead to the land of the dead which is also another image of the Center.

In the performance of the shaman we also understand the reversibility of mythic time and of the Center. He can situate himself in the Center at any point of time or place. It is altogether at his discretion when to make the Center contemporary or near. He only has to will it, and he can suppress historical time and bring himself and his audience back to the days of the original creation. He can bring about his dying and rebirth at will. In this way he transcends time and space, even as the gods and the spirits do.

And it should be mentioned that historians of religion have pointed out the intimate links between the telling of myths in rituals and the practice of the shamans. For they are the custodians of most myths, particularly those which tell of the origin of the world, or the tribe or the community; as well as the origins of the more significant human events like marriage, consecration of kings, ordination of priests and shamans, as well as the origin of death. Through the myths that the shamans tell their audience at seances and sacrifices during death, and the period of mourning, the harsh and otherwise unintelligible reality of death has become intelligible to man; the passage of the soul from earth to the land of the dead has been made familiar to him; the various stages and stations which a soul must pass through as he progresses in his journey, have been described in detail by the shamans who had been through these stages themselves. For instance, it must have been shamanic experience which informed the Sulods that dying is like passing through a narrow door.... Some distance away from the door, which is also the deathbed, is an anthill. One goes around this anthill

and finds oneself near the bank of the stream called *Muruburu*. Along the bank of this river live the *mahikawon* (evil spirits) which eat the new arrival, unless they are propitiated by the living before the time the soul starts its journey to the land of the dead. It was the shaman who informed the Sulods that in Muruburu the soul puts aside its funeral garments and takes a bath in order to wash away all "mountain smell or aspects" and to remove the odor of the *Kamangyan* (native incense), ginger and other herbs which were used to wash the corpse before dressing it and depositing it inside the coffin. In order that the soul of the dead man may be welcomed upon its arrival in the land of the dead, it must be well attired and provided with precious things besides. Having cleansed itself, the soul or *umalagad*, proceeds on its journey to *Limawen*, a deep lake whose dark and sticky water whirls and bubbles towards its *panibwangan*, or navel.

On the banks of this lake lives Banglae, a huge man with hairy body. His shoulders are broad, measuring 7 *dangaw* (length of thumb and index finger). He ferries the soul to the other side.

However, before bringing them across the lake, Banglae questions the soul as to how many wives or husbands it had while living. The male *umalagad* is castigated for having only one wife. Such a soul is not carried on the giant's shoulders, but made to swim clinging to the hair of his thigh. The verdict on the female *umalagad* is based on the reverse of the male. The soul cannot tell a lie because the *tuma* (or body louse) is called upon by Banglae to testify for its host.

Having crossed Lim-awen the soul follows a trail which leads to another stream the *Himbarawa-en* over which is a bridge made of timber and is guarded by Balugu. Here another cross examination, with the body louse testifying for its host, is conducted. After it passes this test, the dead relatives of the newly arrived welcome him. He is now inside the land of Madyaas, but not yet in its final resting-place.

At the entrance of Madyaas, is a cockpit. The newcomer is made to bet on one of the spurred roosters. From there the soul goes to the rest house called *Haramyangan*. It remains there until the rituals, which are intended to strengthen its spiritual body and to ransom it from the power of Balugu, have been performed by its living relatives. If they fail to perform these rituals, the soul is transferred to another place where Hulubaw (the guardian) transforms it into a *mirispis* (*amimispis*, a nocturnal insect, whose singing many Bisayans consider a

death omen)[44] or any other animal and sends it back to earth. However, if the needed rites are performed, the soul is brought to the center of Madyaas where it enjoys a normal happy life. After some years, it joins the community of environmental spirits and actively participates in the affairs of the living.[45]

The same shamanic experiences must have been behind the tradition of the Bukidnons in the hinterlands of Balingasag, Misamis Oriental, who thus picture the journey of the dead after death. When a man dies, his soul must make its way to Mt. Balatukan. This journey is long and tedious, full of many obstacles. First of all, the soul must pass through Liyang, a huge rock, in upper Napiliran. Thence it proceeds to Binagbasan where the Tree of Record grows. Here he makes a notch on the tree to show that it has arrived at Pinagsayawan, where it dances the ritual dance of atonement for sins. It does not stop to dance until it begins to sweat profusely. Next it undergoes a haircut at Panamparan, thence it proceeds to Kumbirahan where a banquet is offered it to satiety. Then the god Andalapit conducts the soul to Kadatuan which is at the foot of Mt. Balatukan. Here the gods pass judgement on the soul. If adjuged good, it is sent to Dunkituhan, at the summit of Mt. Balatukan, the cloud-capped stairway to heaven. If adjudged wicked, the soul is sent to a river where it is punished. Along with other wicked companions, the soul is made to fetch water night and day until its sins are forgiven.[46]

The same could be said of the exact geography of the land of the dead which we read from Homer,[47] to Vergil,[48] to Dante[49] among the Westerners, and the many other descriptions of the region beyond the grave which our various peoples of the Philippines and elsewhere tell during their death rituals. These stories have been provided for the instruction and comfort of the entire community through the shamans.

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44. Cf. Francisco Demetrio y Radaza, S.J. *Dictionary of Philippine Folk Beliefs and Customs* in 4 vols. (Cagayan de Oro: Xavier University, 1970), "Omens: Insects," XXI, I, 2430; also "Direction: East," VIII, E, 1121).

45. F. Landa Jocano, *Sulod Society* (University of the Philippines, 1968), 221–218.

46. Francisco Demetrio, S.J., "Death: Its Origin and Related Beliefs among the Early Filipinos," *Philippine Studies*, vol. 14, No. 3 (July 1966), 377–378.

47. Cf. *The Odyssey*, Book XI, the visit of Odysseus to the Underworld, to consult the dead seer Teiresias.

48. The *Aeneid*, Book VI, the hero Aeneas in company with the Sibyl of Cumae goes down to the Underworld to visit his father Anchises who had bidden him come.

49. *The Inferno* of the *Divina Comedia.*

Having traversed these long and lonely ways in their psychic travels, the shamans can give very exact descriptions of the land of the dead, and thereby forewarn the community against the obtacles and dangers they will encounter when their turn comes to make the journey. There is no telling what strength and comfort the community draws from these descriptions. For to know the place and the foes one will have to encounter is half the battle won. The land of the dead when thus rendered familiar is thereby exorcised of much fear.

## 19. Shaman and the Arts

Another significant point which must bear mentioning in this connection, although it would require a much longer treatise to give it full justice, is the deftness with which the shaman renders these psychic experiences of his immediately present and perceivable to his audience.[50] Toward this end, he summons all the devices which a modern mass media communication expert would himself not hesitate to emply: music, costuming, dance, especially the mime, poetic-language, painting, drama. It is quite probable that in many places of the world the drama was born under shamanic influence. For indeed when he practises his art, the shaman is a consummate actor. His powers of concentration, verbal command, vocal flexibility, and role-playing and of identifying himself with his various characters are beyond compare.[51]

## 20. Summing Up

To recapitulate then, we have seen that myth is vitally linked with ritual; that only myths thus linked are living myths because they are still believed in by the people who practice the rituals and recite the narrations that accompany these rituals. Except for a few of our cultural communities and the truly religious among us, the modern secular Filipino of the lowlands has no longer a chance to experience the moving effects of myth and ritual. For most of our myths are fragments and the rituals are all but gone.

Thus it is quite difficult for the modern Filipino to understand the full meaning of the myths, and it might be objected to what purpose then do we collect our oral traditions from the folks? It is a fact, however, that there are relics among our folk traditions which give us

50. Lommel, *op. cit.*, pp. 105–149, esp. 106, 137, 148.
51. *Ibid.*, pp. 145ff.

enough indication of the function and value of myths of our people in the past, and this value and function to us moderns are still intelligible. And our awareness of them can make us better human beings, for the meaning or truth of these myths are still valid even today. Among these living relics are the motif of the Center which features very importantly in the myths of origin, as well as the institution of shamanism which in turn is closely linked with the motif of the Center. Chief among the myths that the shaman has helped to fashion in the consciousness of our people is that of the land of the dead and the trials to which the dead are subjected on their way thither.

## 21. Myth Making And Shamanism Born of Man's Contingent Existence

We come finally to a consideration of the factors which compelled our own forbears in the past to perform their rituals and recite their myths, as well as to establish the institution of shamanism. Briefly, one would posit a theory which is however founded upon a wide experience in collecting, analysing and comparing a considerable number of myths both in the Philippines and from other places. One of man's initial experiences, the moment he became a man, was that of fear. For man is a creature born environed in fear and anxiety; that is why perhaps the child comes out of the womb crying. This fear is lodged deeply in man's being and is, in reality, a manifestation of the fundamental character of his being which, to use an old but still valid term, is contingent; that is, man is a being who *well might not have been,* or in another phrase, a being who is *not needed at all in the Cosmos.* That is why he is called a creature. If he exists at all, that is *not altogether because* of him; rather, because of *some other.* Man ever since he became conscious has insighted this truth. His most important myths are those of the beginnings of the world, of plants and animals, and of man himself. If man by nature was needed in the world, then there would have been no need of his being created at all. He would have always been. He would not be a contingent being. He would be a *necessary* being. He would be God.

Myths of the beginnings and the motif of the Center which they contain are foundation myths. That is, they are related and re-enacted in ritual precisely in order to give firmness to the macrocosmos: the earth, the heavens, the firmament, as well as to the microcosmos, man's interior world of his own psyche. The firmness which the myths give is both

cosmological and psychological. Even as the world was originally formless, indefinite, precariously poised on the snout of a boar or caught within the claws of a crab and threatened by chaos on all sides, so too, the psyche, of which consciousness is a part, was originally unformed and unshaped. Only gradually through the archetypes of the unconscious, both collective and personal, the psyche gives birth to consciousness and reason incited by experiences both from within and without. This gradual emergence of consciousness from the ground of the psyche is homologizable to the act of creation, giving it definite form and content. So that the story which the myths tell is really the story of the precarious birth and gradual emergence and strengthening of human consciousness and personality. To go into this subject fully would require another paper. Suffice it to add that besides the foundation myths, the myths of the origin of death as well as of the land of the dead and the journey to that land are also very important for the psychic growth of the human person. For death as a phenomenon is indeed a breakdown of the psychic strength and certainty which consciousness and reason have achieved at great pains. To die is not only to be dissolved: the body breaks down and decays; it is also the complete dissociation of the psyche as a joint product of the union of soul and body. So death is, in effect, an unmistakable proof of man's contingency. At death we can truly say of a friend or a loved one: he *was*, and he is *no more*. The primordial waters have engulfed him again and he is back to the state of the elements, formless, shapeless, indefinite, to all appearances, nothing. But the myths describing the origin of death as well as giving the stages which a soul goes through as he journeys to the land of the dead, and giving the exact details of that shadowy land, the sights one sees, the sounds he hears, the judgements he will undergo, the struggles and foes he will encounter—all these are so many strands that make up the cord of courage and trust and strength that can pull a man across the unknown and unexperienced land of the dead. By telling this, the shaman who himself has gone over these regions in his initiation and séances, gives hope and courage to his hearers. Thus he is pointing up the way of hope to mortal men. The hope of a rebirth and a return to life.

That hope, I think, the study of our Philippine myths and rituals can give us today. For there are many prophets of doom in our midst. And they destroy human nature; they dehumanize. For it is human to hope; in-human to despair.