

## FOLK-LORE AND THE SUPERNATURAL

BARON VON HUGEL compared the interpenetration of nature and grace to the movements of a hand inside a glove: "God everywhere but stimulates and supports man whom He has made, and His Hand moves ever underneath and behind the tissue—a tissue which, at best, can become as it were a glove, and suggest the latent hand. The Divine Action will thus stimulate and inform the human action somewhat like the force that drives the blood within the stag's young antlers, or like the energy that pushes the tender sap-full fern-buds up through the hard, heavy ground."<sup>1</sup> All that can be seen is the outward veil. But the movements of it are of such a kind that they point to a power within, other than, on another plane of being than, the glove.

So also in the history of divine activity among men, the raising of fallen humanity according to those concrete needs which spring from the combined historic facts of original justice, original sin, and Redemption, we see only the race, each individual human being. But as in the movements of the glove, so in the activity of grace-impelled men, those movements, that activity, point beyond the visible fringes of the natural vehicle to a Presence of an altogether different kind, working, planning, for the good of men, things far above what we can conceive, or, having conceived, could achieve.

Grace and nature, that is to say, are intimately interwoven. They are not alongside one another, as material bodies are alongside one another, but they completely interpenetrate one another organically. "Each," wrote von Hügel again, "as it were passing right through the other, and not *adding* to the *quantity*, but profoundly *modifying* the *quality* of the other."<sup>2</sup>

This interpenetration of nature and grace has been recognized always. But the recognition has been more or less, in different degrees, at different times. That is, the exact way

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<sup>1</sup> *Mystical Element of Religion*, II, p. 134.

<sup>2</sup> *Selected Letters*, p. 91.

in which grace and nature interweave, into a single pattern, has never been worked out in all its details. Nor will it ever be so worked out, unfolded, projected, as it were, on to the two-dimensional plane of propositions and clear concepts, that nothing further will be left over to be conceived and verbally expressed. For we are dealing with a *Persona*—the individual concrete being of a man—and in it we are faced by endless possibilities, a deep well of unfathomable darkness, and of ever-discoverable strata of being, formalities, *rationes*, never to be exhausted.

But with the homogeneous development (and not least *because* it is homogeneous) of theology, philosophy, and the physical sciences, we can, and in fact do, discover more and more about those inexhaustible riches of the individual human being, as it is given us, once fallen, now redeemed, with all its needs and capacities<sup>3</sup> and the indications within it of the divine fulfilment of those needs and capacities. St. Thomas knew far more about it than Augustine, Augustine far more than Justin. But St. Thomas's contribution to the harmoniously evolving stream of thought was homogeneous with Augustine's, and Augustine's with Justin's. Justin left gaps, theses to be filled in, enriched. Augustine left gaps. So has St. Thomas left gaps. And these our masters left those gaps just because they were men with finite minds, and because the subjects they studied and discussed were the human being and God, each a *Personal* substantial reality, and consequently never completely known, and hence, again, unendingly knowable. Therefore, if we, to-day, fill in the details of the outlines left to us by them, we are neither crossing their T's irreverently and unlawfully, nor being tendentious and arbitrary, but only following St. Thomas's own synthetic method, appreciative of all truth, irrespective of its origin, so long as it be true, when he

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<sup>3</sup> i.e., of man *quâ* fallen, redeemed, and under the impulsion of grace. That is "concrete, substantial, *personal*," man; and Analytical Psychology and Comparative Religion know no other. These are the needs and capacities *connatural to mankind-in-the-concrete*, to human beings "*secundum naturam individui, sicut naturale est Socrati vel Platoni esse ægrotativum vel sanativum, secundum propriam complexionem.*" St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia, IIæ, q. 51, a. 1, *corpus*.

brought all Dogma and the entire Mediaeval world under the searchlight of Aristotelian philosophy. Thus, for example, St. Thomas leaves us a vast field for study and fertile expansion in the single doctrine of the universal need of an appropriate imaginal phantasm for every intellectual act this side heaven. *Deepen*, fill in the implications of, *that* notion, and you get the dizzy chasm of the *Unconscious* before you. Then work out the relationships of those *two* ideas—of the very general, schematic, notion, of phantasm-conditioned human knowledge, and the determined, relatively express, doctrine of the *Unconscious* with its many-levelled structure and variously-conditioned modes of knowing and loving—and you have, by hypothetically correlating the two, *mapped* the former in the light of a detailed empirical study of the latter. That is what is meant by filling in the outlines. Not heterogeneous evolution, but homogeneous growth, where the critical instrument gives absolute formulation to the new problems and theories of every generation, expressing what is hitherto largely a mere Nominalist description, in terms of transcendental concepts. At the same time that same instrument—that transcendental synthesis of the *Philosophia perennis*—is ever newly enriched and explicitly unfolded in its applications to new facts and new problems.

It is especially in that relationship of nature and grace, philosophy and revealed truth, psychic tendencies and divine fulfilment, that expansion, explicitation, and enrichment, seem possible to-day. For even a minimalist acceptance of the religious applications of analytical psychology<sup>4</sup> indicates a most fruitful line of enquiry into the delicate interlockings and interpenetrations of supernatural revelation with psychic tendencies. Where the Psyche forms *phantasy*, as a sluice for the deepest currents of the *libido*, God gives *reality*, a reality which exactly canalizes that unconscious torrent of longing, infinitely more efficaciously,

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<sup>4</sup> i.e., there is no need to prove Jung's thesis in every detail. The *substance* is enough, and that is proved, or rather set forth as self-evident, if, as seems to be the case, it be nothing more than that *peripheral interpretation* of the experimental data which is a minimum *sine qua non* of their coherent *description*. It is all Jung himself appears to claim.

richly, and objectively, than those poor and inadequately subjective phantasy-projections, whose initial impulse was, indeed, very probably from supernatural grace, but whose ultimate formulation is predominantly human, superstitious, and corrupt.

Yet it is often objected that such a programme of exact correlation, between the revealed context of supernatural religion and the psychology of the *Unconscious*, tends towards a dangerous "naturalism." It is felt that the end of such an enquiry can hardly be anything less than an explaining away of the supernatural in terms of the natural. If so much pagan mythology is reducible to the *Œdipus* Complex, and the same has been done with Christian dogma and our liturgical, even our sacramental, symbolism, have we not come perilously near to dismembering our Creeds? Look at Jung's essay on *Occult Phenomena* in his *Collected Papers on Analytical Psychology*. Why cannot all revelation, all contact with invisible powers, from Jahwe in the thunder of Sinai to the "Messianic Consciousness" of Jesus, be explained away in terms of Somnambulic Personalities and hypnagogic visions? If Jung's patient dreamed herself into a higher ideal state through the intervening fiction of "Ivenes," what is to prevent our saying that the historic Jesus dreamed Himself into a Messianic rôle through the mediation of the Messianic ideal? And will not any attempted synthesis, of Jungian psychology with the content of supernatural religion, lead us at least into a position dangerously resembling the syncretist Form-Criticism of Bultmann and Dibelius?

And yet, again, the objection is altogether without foundation, for the following reasons:

(i) The detailed working out of the interpenetrations of nature and grace can no more be to the detriment of grace than the detailed working out of the delicate relationships of the physiological and neural organism to consciousness can be to the detriment of the latter. And just as the psycho-physiological interrelations and necessary mutual conditionings are on explicitation of the Aristotelian doctrine of the essential unity of body and soul, and are a

further<sup>5</sup> empirical verification of that doctrine—they are what we should *expect*—so the psycho-pneumatic interpenetration of God and the soul, worked out in detail, is a possible verification of the Catholic notion of “grace perfecting nature.” It is exactly what we should *expect*, in a sphere where St. Thomas and the theologians have left us ample room for explicit unfolding and deepened precision.

(ii) Secondly, fundamental Catholic Apologetics—the nucleus tradition of the perennial Apologetic of the Church—is impregnable, both objectively, in itself, and subjectively, for the mind which really examines it in its many-sided givenness.

The traditional apologetic of the Church, that is to say, when torn out of an emotional and ephemeral mould giving it expression for this or that age, is rationalistic, in the same sense in which Thomism is rationalistic. The apostle who draws upon the never-obscured sources of that Apologetic, is using for his approach, for his method of guiding his hearers and opening their eyes, as it were, to catch the supernatural light of faith, material which is very formal, exact, based upon the transcendental properties of *being* and the immutable nature of mind and its infallible certitudes. His proofs are rational, self-contained in themselves, and completely valid and satisfying quite independently of faith. Hence they compel the assent of him who does not yet believe, if, as we have said, he can be brought to contemplate them in the many-sidedness of their concrete reality. And we can assert this perfectly safely, just because they are the exact proofs, principles, witnesses, and terms, given to us by our own Faith, by the authority and tradition of the Church, as the precise and perfect rational vindication of her own supernatural claims. Thus it is that we can be perfectly sure that the classical motives of credibility (*motiva credibilitatis*) are no more minimized or vitiated by Analytical Psychology than the Aristotelian proofs for the immaterial-

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<sup>5</sup> The original doctrine in its most elementary terms is also empirically demanded, by inspection of the facts, and is by no means *a priori*, as is sometimes supposed by modern psychologists. Cf. Aristotle, *De Anima*, B 1, (St. Thomas's *Comm.*, 2 12), and the whole movement of Bk. A.

ity, and consequent immortality, of the soul are obscured by neurology. Just as no datum of physiological research will ever explain away reflexive mental acts in terms of quantitative relations of tissues and synaptic resistances, so no analytical psychologist will ever explain away real miracles, prophecies, or the holiness of Christ and His Church, in terms of projected material from the *Unconscious*.

And, again, fear of such a thing arises, not from the psychological source-literature, but from an over-credulous assimilation of journalistic versions of that literature, with the whole gamut of their facile generalizations and misleading clichés.<sup>6</sup>

For it is hard to find anything at all, in the mode of massing and developing the empirical material by the writers of the great psychological schools to-day, which even begins<sup>7</sup> to

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<sup>6</sup> For example, we find a recent writer summarizing Jung's doctrine of the "Collective Psyche," by saying that, in psychoanalysis we finally get beyond "man" to "Man"; which is fantastic misrepresentation, of a careful student of empirical data, who never claims absolute philosophical validity for his terms. Comparable is the often repeated observation that Jung is "Mystical" in his synthesis.

<sup>7</sup> The fact that Jung has notions, about the historicity of the Gospel narratives, which are as effete as mid-nineteenth century Tübingen, is, of course, clear to anyone familiar with his works. But these notions have nothing whatever to do with his psychological theory, in its substantial, empirically verifiable, theses. Moreover they only appear sporadically, as *obiter dicta*, springing from his very provincial philosophico-religious milieu. His psychology stands quite apart, as anyone who will examine his experimental data, and make these very necessary discriminations, can ascertain for himself. The same applies in the case of Freud. It has become fashionable to dismiss Freud because of his ethics, and Jung because of his antiquated critical notions, and in both cases the precious substratum of empirical fact—their *Psychology*—has been only too often ignored. It is, indeed, time that the dangers of that ignorance were suggested. For there is just this much truth in the prejudicial fear of the "New Psychology"; whereas a Catholic theologian could work out a most powerful apologetic instrument by a synthesis of the "New Psychology" with his own philosophical and theological material; so also, nevertheless, can the non-Catholic critic forge an equally dangerous weapon of offence. For, like any *in se* unmoral instrument, the data of the "New Psychology" can find good or bad applications. One has only to remember Bultmann, Durkheim, Dibelius and the *Gemeindeftheologie* to appreciate some of the possible dangerous uses. If Christianity does not take those new materials reasonably seriously then the enemies of Christianity will. We shall have the pathetic Anthropological story over again—not merely a half-defended position, but a strong "offensive" standpoint, most persuasive and intelligible for the world of 1937, discarded, unformulated and unfaced, in the grime of our public libraries.

touch either Catholic Dogma on its supernatural, revelational, side, or the traditional Catholic Apologetic in its transcendent, and therefore immutable, motives of credibility. The case is rather the contrary, for probably all seemingly supernatural manifestations among non-Catholic sects are easily resolvable to certain natural causes,<sup>8</sup> whilst the grand outlines of the perennial Apologetic stand out in bolder relief and more massive power for conviction than before. An hysterical woman receiving puerile messages from her grandfather and a number of other somnambulist personalities whose sense of values never rises above the patient's own natural appreciativeness (all are explained as "hysterical dissociations" in the superficial layers of the "ego-complex" and their ætiology is explained perfectly satisfactorily by the "anamnesis"—enquiry into past life, character, etc.—in terms of her own natural character), is not comparable to the Stigmatic Saint who survives many years without food or drink and sees and holds converse with Christ in His superhuman majesty. Because the hysterical somnambulist has been exhaustively analyzed, it is unscientific and literally weak-minded to conclude that the Stigmatic might also be exhaustively analyzed in the same way—altogether abstracting from the metaphysical principles of Catholic Apologetics, which preclude any possibility whatsoever of reducing the truly miraculous to merely natural causality; reasons, that is, utterly transcending all possible or actual contingencies of scientific research.<sup>9</sup>

(iii) Thirdly, and lastly, a naturalistic reduction of Christian origins, of a "nothing-but-this" variety, is impossible in virtue of historical criticism. You cannot conclude that the Gospel narrative is "nothing but" a solar myth, if the events related are empirically proved to have occurred in

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. the first paper, on *Occult Phenomena*, in Jung's *Analytical Psychology*, in the light of which perhaps all ordinary Spiritualistic manifestations are reducible to unconscious natural causes limited entirely to the Psyche.

<sup>9</sup> Thus cf. the Vatican Council's definitive utterance on miracles: "*Cum Dei omnipotentiam luculenter commonstrent, divinæ revelationis signa sunt certissima et omnium intelligentiæ accomodata.*" (Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 1790.) And Cf. P. R. Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., *De Revelatione*, 3rd Ed., Vol. II, pp. 63-106, for an exposition of the critical basis for the cognoscibility of miracles.

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space and time two thousand years ago. It may be recognized as true, more or less, at different times, as fashions ebb and flow, that historical Christianity adapted itself, as far as it could, without compromise and contamination, to the age-long rhythm of the pagan festivals of the ancient world. But that will never mean that primitive Christianity had not a more substantial factual foundation than those pagan cults, or that it had no credentials of its supernatural, revelational, origins, more adequate than theirs. In agricultural rites, we are told, the spirit of vegetation is killed in the spring, about the time of Easter. For the spirit of vegetation is "both the old and the new corn, and a new incarnation or effigy is necessary for his revival."<sup>10</sup> Adonis died in the spring and rose the next day. Attis was slain on March 28th. Osiris was annually crucified on his cross-pillar or *Ded*. There were similar rites of Dionysus, and of Proserpine. We read of the *Meriah* of the Khonds, an annual human sacrifice for the crops,<sup>11</sup> of the Mexican vernal crucifixions to Centeotl, the goddess of maize, and of the paschal victims at the festival of Tezcatlipoca.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, "The death and resurrection of Attis were officially celebrated at Rome on the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth of March, the latter being regarded as the spring equinox, and therefore as the most appropriate day for the revival of a god of vegetation who had been dead or sleeping throughout the winter. But according to an ancient and widespread tradition Christ suffered on the twenty-fifth of March, and accordingly some Christians regularly celebrated the Crucifixion on that day without any regard to the state of the moon. This custom was certainly observed in Phrygia, Cappadocia, and Gaul, and there seem to be grounds for thinking that at one time it was followed also in Rome . . . The inference appears to be inevitable that the Passion of Christ must have been arbitrarily referred to that date in order to harmonize with an older festival of the spring equinox. This is the view of the learned ecclesiastical

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<sup>10</sup> Crawley, *The Tree of Life*, p. 89.

<sup>11</sup> Frazer, *Golden Bough*, II, 137, 241, 245 sqq.

<sup>12</sup> *Golden Bough*, II, 342.



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historian, Mgr. Duchesne, who points out that the death of the Saviour was thus made to fall upon the very day on which, according to a widespread belief, the world had been created. But the resurrection of Attis, who combined in himself the characters of the divine Father and the divine Son, was officially celebrated at Rome on the same day. When we remember that the festival of St. George in April has replaced the ancient pagan festival of the Parilia; that the festival of St. John the Baptist in June has succeeded to a heathen Midsummer festival of water; that the festival of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin in August has ousted the festival of Diana; that the feast of All Souls in November is a "continuation" of an old heathen feast of the dead; and that the Nativity of Christ Himself was assigned to the winter Solstice in December because that day was deemed the Nativity of the Sun; we can hardly be thought rash or unreasonable in conjecturing that the other cardinal festival of the Christian Church—the solemnisation of Easter—may have been in like manner, and from like motives of edification, adapted to a similar celebration of the Phrygian god Attis at the vernal equinox."<sup>13</sup> All this, together with many of the more radical analogies between the actual New Testament narrative and pagan myths—analogs which are both anthropological and, above all, psychological—can readily be conceded. But it does not touch the historicity of the Gospel narrative, established by modern criticism. The difficulty, indeed, remains with the anthropologists and psychologists—to explain the factual working out of a mythic *motif* in space and time, in living Flesh and Blood. That is to say, the problem is theirs, not ours—if indeed there is a problem, for the general principles

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<sup>13</sup> *Golden Bough*, abridged ed. 1922-1933, pp. 359, 360. Cf. p. 5, on the identity of Virubis of the grove of Nemi, for another typical and interesting case of parallelism; and Lawson, *Modern Greek Folklore and Ancient Greek Religion*, pp. 79-81, for the classic Demeter-Demetrius-Demetra continuity. But P. M.-J. Lagrange, O.P., *Sens du Christianisme* l. 9, should be seen, for an outlined treatment of the radical syncretists, and for the general attitude of clear discrimination of reality from myth presupposed throughout this essay. (The *fragmentary* nature of many myth parallels has, however, a secondary importance here. Our concern is with their *emotional significance*, pointing to an unconscious uniformity of *motif*. Cf. Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, p. 223.)

of synthesis seem clear: All that is needed, above all in and through the psychological approach, is balanced discrimination, between the specifically Christian, revelational, and given, and the generally human, natural, and dispositive. We cannot reduce the Gospel narrative to an *Œdipus* phantasy projected from the *Unconscious*, but we can recognize that natural tendency winding despondently in search of an object, and we can see the divine condescension coming down upon a human plane, infusing into man supernatural gifts corresponding to, working along the lines of, and perfecting on a supernatural plane, that natural tendency.

The Divine Wisdom knew what was in men, even down to the uttermost fringes of the *Unconscious*, long before He risked sending His only Begotten Son into the world.

So, too, though we cannot reduce all preternatural phenomena to purely psychological terms, we can and must deepen and explicitate our apprehension of the ways in which God lifts up, uses, and perfects, purified, those unchanging trends and symbolic longings of the *Unconscious*, which, when left to themselves, tend to produce pseudo-supernatural signs—perhaps in virtue of a dim memory of prophetic stirrings of extra-covenantal grace, lingering in the abysmal recesses of the "collective psyche," inherited down the millennia from generation to generation.

And in the same way, although we cannot reduce the historic narrative of the Incarnation to a Solar Myth, or a Myth of the spirit of vegetation, or a supremely formalized and efficacious *Œdipus*-phantasy projected purely naturally from the *Unconscious*, nevertheless we can and must see in that narrative, in a greater or less degree, as anthropological and psychological research require it, indications of that same divine condescension recognizing the power and psychological validity of those elements of humanity's religious past, which are thus retained, however dimly, however deeply buried and encrusted over with the crumbling debris of archaic superstition and infantile desire, in the "collective unconscious" of every human being. If the myth of Demeter and Persephone, the myth of the corn-

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spirit, dying, wept over, to rise again as the breath of the vernal vegetation and life, is "perhaps one of the oldest myths in the world,"<sup>14</sup> then it lies curled up in the *Unconscious* of all men, as a dumb longing, an all-persuasive power, a principle. That God, in His supernatural dealings with mankind, should make use of it, making Christ, not indeed a Corn-Spirit, nor a Sun-god, nor a replica of Ædipus, nor in any other way a docetic lie, *but a Reality which manifests and includes the idea of the Corn-Spirit, behaves like the Corn-Spirit, or any other traceable myth-motif*, and so draws men's love according to one of its most cherished longings, is no fantastic hope, no mere *Deus ex machina* to get rid of the anthropologists and the psychologists, but a vital precision of the general doctrine that "grace perfects nature." "For He descended to the greatest depths to which descent is possible, when Deity assumed the vesture of our humanity" (St. Catherine of Siena).

Grace thus inundates mankind in its organic totality. It flows back across the centuries, rejuvenating and giving reality to all humanity's drooping memories and frustrated loves. Demeter and Persephoue, Isis and Osiris, Attis and Dionysus, play a rôle in the Resurrection of the Dead. For grace floods the earth—like the returning waters of the Nile.

NORBERT DREWITT, O.P.

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<sup>14</sup> Lewis Spence, *Introduction to Mythology*, p. 130. E. O. James, *Origins of Sacrifice*, C. II., *The Corn-Mothers*.