

and subordinate creation our universe would be a chaos. God's law is a help, not a hindrance. It is a moral guide to men whom revelation has not reached, and it is not superseded by the positive law known to those who have been enlightened still further by revelation. It reaches to the most secret places of our thoughts and desires. Emphasised, clarified, and sometimes supplemented by positive law, divine and human, ecclesiastical, and even sometimes by the civil law, it makes known to us God's will. I say 'even sometimes by the civil law', for some civil laws are bad laws, and as such according to St Thomas they are not true laws but violences. We should not chafe under this guidance, but be ever grateful for it, as for our Father's hand leading us along to happiness, and we should be grateful to the Church which reaches out to help us when by our own folly and perversity we have lost touch with the law of God.



THE DYING GOD¹

Pagan, Psychological and Christian: Differences

VICTOR WHITE, O.P.

IN my last talk I drew attention to some of the striking similarities between—on the one hand—the traditional Christian rites of Holy Week, and several incidents in the Gospel narrative of the Passion and Resurrection of Christ, and—on the other hand—the so-called pattern of the Dying and Rising God which emerged largely as the result of Frazer's researches in *The Golden Bough*. Fifty years or so ago, it seems to have been widely supposed that these discoveries of similarity between Christian and pagan mysteries, collected by scholars like Robertson Smith and Frazer, popularised in tendentious paper-backs by writers like Grant Allen, somehow made nonsense of Christianity. And it must be admitted that they did make nonsense of a great many nineteenth-century ideas *about* Christianity; at least they made it impossible to regard it just as some sort of transcendental ethic,

¹ The unabridged script of the last of a series of five talks, transmitted on the B.B.C. Third Programme on November 16th, 1951. The previous talk was printed in our last issue.

dropped ready-made from the sky, without roots in the earth, in history, without relevance to the basic and perennial needs of human society and the human psyche, or to the forms and forces that shape them. But I remember when, as a boy, I read one of those books published by the Rationalist Press, it had just the opposite effect on me to that intended. The Christian Scriptures and the Catholic rites to which I was accustomed, without losing their wonted sense, gained a quality and a sense of which my pastors and catechisms had told me nothing: a sense of solidarity with creation, with the processes of nature, with the cycles of the seasons. Dramatisations of the processes of vegetation they might be, but had not Christ himself drawn the analogy between the Christian self-sacrifice and the grain of wheat which must die if it is to bear fruit? Moreover these books gave me a new sense of solidarity with humanity as a whole; whatever else I was doing when I attended Mass, or followed the Church's calendar of fast and feast, I was doing something not entirely different from what men and women of every creed and colour seemed to have been doing since the world began.

Frazer himself saw that his 'discoveries' were as patient of a Christian interpretation as of the materialist one which he himself favoured. He wrote: 'In the great army of martyrs who in many ages and in many lands . . . have died a cruel death in the character of gods, the devout Christian will doubtless discern types and forerunners of the Saviour—stars that heralded in the morning sky the advent of the Sun of Righteousness—earthen vessels wherein it pleased the divine wisdom to set before hungering souls the bread of heaven. The sceptic, on the other hand, with equal confidence, will reduce Jesus of Nazareth to the level of a multitude of other victims of a barbarous superstition, and will see in him no more than a moral teacher, whom the fortunate accident of his execution invested with the crown of a god.'

However startling to the Victorians and Edwardians, these 'discoveries' of similarity between the pagan and Christian mysteries were nothing new to the Christian church. The early Christians did not indeed have a Frazer, a Robertson Smith, a Lewis Spence, a Lord Raglan, a Hocart to ransack the literature of the world for traces of the dying god, and to collect the results conveniently in books. They did not know, as we know, how age-long and wide-spread they are; but they had something even more impressive;

the rites of spring and the dying god were being enacted, one way or another, by their non-Christian neighbours on their very doorsteps; and their writers were much occupied in trying to account for the resemblances. It is noteworthy that they were, in one important respect, more sympathetic with Frazer's 'sceptic' than with Frazer's 'devout Christian'; at least they were more vocal about the barbarity and superstition in the pagan rites than about the types and forerunners. The similarities they usually accounted for very simply; they were specious imitations and anticipations, inspired by the devil, to lure souls from the way of limitless self-sacrifice exemplified and demanded by Christ. Of course, if we regard Christianity as just one religion among many, that is a piece of gratuitous sectarian prejudice. But they did not, and could not, so regard it. With St Augustine they held that the coming of Christ had made religions, in the plural, obsolete and regressive. Whatever elements of truth and beauty they might have contained, along with much so manifestly false and ugly, they could not be only barriers fulfilling a diabolic purpose. For the devil, for them, was precisely the spirit which sets up the relative as a substitute for the absolute, the part for the whole, the reflection for the reality, the shadow for the substance. 'Types and shadows have their ending, for the newer rite is here', we still sing in a hymn translated from St Thomas Aquinas. In the Gospel story they saw the realisation alike of the hope of Israel and the desire of the nations; and as St Paul, writing to the Galatians, saw something blasphemous and outmoded in continuing the rites which expressed Israel's ancient hopes, so early Church Fathers saw something blasphemous and outmoded in the continuation of the pagan rites that expressed the world's desires.

But nowadays we need a more empirical and factual approach to the problem; and we notice that this levelling down of Jesus Christ to just one of the countless dying gods, ignores some important facts. As Professor Frankfort was telling us about the differences between the dying gods of Mesopotamia, of Egypt, and of the Greek mysteries, it occurred to me how remarkably those very differences were combined in the Gospel story and in the interpretations we find of it in the Acts and Epistles of the apostles. That opens a line of enquiry which might well be followed up and extended. But more important are the entirely new elements that the Christian story introduces into the dying god pattern, and

which, I suggest, transform it completely. Remembering that we must distinguish, but cannot divorce, the symbolic fact and the symbolic meaning, let us briefly examine some of its features which, taken together, set the Christian story poles apart from the general 'dying god pattern'.

In the first place, and most obviously, it is *historical*. I am not now raising the question whether the events related in the Gospels 'really happened', I am only concerned to point out that they are related as if they had really happened, and that their whole point for the writers lay in the fact that they really happened. However many features we may find in the accounts of the Passion and Resurrection which resemble those of ritual and mythology, those features are embedded in matter-of-fact historical narrative about events that take place, not in the sanctuary or the theatre, but in the workaday world of fact. It would be instructive, did time permit, to show how those very incidents which may strike us as the most poetic and mythological, which display the closest resemblances to the archetypal ritual pattern, are inextricably interwoven by the evangelists with down-to-earth existence at its most personal and individual, its most prosaic and even squalid; and it is precisely in and through this that they see the transcendent mystery. If Christ is the victim of a ritual murder, he is still more obviously the victim of commonplace human passions and vested interests, the jealousy of the clergy, the avarice of Judas, the punctilious conservatism of the Pharisees, the disappointed fury of the revolutionary mob, the appeasement diplomacy of Pilate. If there is a Sacrifice, it is now a sordid and secular execution; if there is a Labyrinth, it is now the actual winding streets used by the man-in-the-street in a provincial capital; if there is a Search, the searcher is now no goddess, but a very human woman called Mary of Magdala, setting about the very human task of embalming a dead human body. All this reverses the normal process of folk-memory, which, we know, tends to mythologise history; now it is rather the mythological pattern that is realised in historical fact. It is also the very reverse of the old rites. In his stimulating little book, *The Myth of Eternal Return*,² the eminent Rumanian historian of religion, Mircea Eliade, sees in the old New Year rites a periodic effort to escape from the profane to the sacred, to abolish time past and utterly destroy the previous year to make a

² *Le Mythe d'Eternel Retour*. (Paris, Gallimard.)

new start in a state of consciousness which is outside time altogether, to escape from the vicissitudes and miseries of temporal existence to archetypal origins, from earth to paradise, from the uncertainties and disorder and strife of Becoming to the certainty and order and tranquillity of Being. In spite of the efforts of the higher religions and philosophies to make some sense of earthly existence and suffering—notably in India with its doctrine of karma—it was, he finds, only in Israel, with its new dimension of ‘faith in the absurd’, that it was possible for historic existence to be regarded as itself a manifestation of God and the divine purpose, in and through which deliverance and recreation is to be found. The fulfilment of this the Christian sees in the Incarnation; his emphasis on the matter-of-factness of the Passion and Resurrection (so painful to the poet and the myth-lover to this day) is in line with his central belief that the creative Word, the divine message of healing and life, has become flesh and blood in determined units of space and time. The inner reality which the ancient rituals had expressed is now lived through. With Georges Berguer we may say, ‘Jesus had incarnated in his death and resurrection an inner experience that had existed potentially for centuries in the human soul, but that had never passed beyond the sphere of the dream. He translated into life the secular dream of the peoples.’³

This translation into actual life of the perennial dream means—in psychological jargon—that the unconscious projection is now withdrawn: it is now interiorised, made fully conscious, and is now voluntarily *lived* out—no longer blindly, instinctively, periodically just *acted*. The Christian scriptures stress this ‘interiorisation’. In my last talk I remarked how the ‘agony’, or combat, is now an interior one fought out in sweat and tears in Gethsemane. The Gospels stress constantly the willingness with which Christ goes to his death; he *can* evade it, but he declines; he lays down his own life, no one, he says, takes it from him; inward love for his friends, not outer compulsion, leads him to the cross; Pilate, Herod and the rest are but instruments of a divine purpose; Christ freely offers himself, and ‘he is offered because it is his own will’—the priest and the victim are one and the same.

With this consummation in a unique *self-sacrifice* of the old

3. *Some Aspects of the Life of Jesus*, p. 266, quoted by R. Scott Frayn, *Revelation and the Unconscious*, p. 182.

sacrifices, in which one slew another, the old multiplicity of sacrifices becomes obsolete, for the willing self-sacrifice has a universal validity. Just because it has become particularised, it is now for each and for all. 'It is expedient that one should die for the people, and the whole nation perish not', said the last priest of the old order; and the evangelist of the new at once glosses that 'Jesus should die . . . not only for the nation, but to gather together in one all the dispersed children of God'.

But the self-sacrifice of Christ is not only new, it is also *final*—and this is perhaps the most startling novelty. Frazer, and still more Eliade and other writers, have drawn attention to the fact that it is of the very essence of the old dying god ritual that it should be repeated over and over again *ad infinitum*. You remember the verse from Macaulay about the priest of Nemi which Frazer quoted at the beginning of his work,

The priest who slew the slayer,
And shall himself be slain.

Compare that with St Paul's, 'Christ, rising from the dead, dieth now *no more*. Death shall *no more* have dominion over him. For in that he died to sin, he died *once*; but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God.' Just because it has been lived and died out in fact and history, consciously and voluntarily, the myth is, not destroyed, but fulfilled; its endless repetition is broken together with its unconscious, compulsive power. Indeed, in becoming fact, it ceases to be mere myth.

I am not, you understand, now arguing that these beliefs about the crucified Nazarene are true; I am only recalling, in a brief and broad summary, that such was and is the significance he had, and has, for Christians. Further research and reflection may show more clearly how far these beliefs also are anticipated in pre-Christian varieties and developments of the dying god pattern. We know now, at least, that the nineteenth-century 'Quest for the Historic Jesus' was a vain illusion, if by this is meant the isolation of naked facts apart from any significance they had for Christ's own mind, or the minds of his followers: a 'historical Jesus' other than the 'Christ of faith' is a pseudo-scientific abstraction who could not have existed, and of whom there is not any historical record. Our only evidence for assessment is in the records, and (whatever historical or literary criticism may say of their provenance, date and

construction), what the records record is that the Word is made flesh, the meaning is embodied in the facts and the facts disclose the meaning.

I cannot however conclude without referring briefly to two questions which, these days, we can hardly evade, and which must have occurred to you if you have borne with me so far. The first is this: If the events on Golgotha put an end to the endless repetition of the rites of dying gods, why then does the Church ritual go on repeating them—as we have seen that it does? The second is more general, and more serious: if Golgotha spelt the twilight of the gods, a transmutation of religions into religion, must we not now confront a further stage in which even that must be left behind—and face a ‘death of God’ in the manner of Nietzsche? Has not science made Christ also obsolete and superfluous?—in particular, has not the psychology of the unconscious, with its study and application of psychic transformation through symbolism, outmoded also the dying God-Man of Calvary?

This question raises others too vast to be dealt with in the short time still at my disposal. But in answering the first, perhaps I can at least illustrate what I believe to be the answer to the second.

Yes, it is true that the ancient Christian liturgies of Holy Week and Easter closely resemble the old rites of Spring. But their *significance* for those who take part in them is found wholly in what Christ is related to have done ‘once for all’: they are done in remembrance of him. But, and this is important, the Paschal ceremonies are not—with one single, significant exception—obligatory. A Catholic is quite free to attend, or stay away from, most of them: the Church does not force them on him, though she continues to make them available if he finds them helpful to the self-sacrificial following of Christ. If we try to evade that self-sacrifice by projecting that task on to him, he tells us we cannot be his disciples unless we take up our own cross and follow him. The Incarnation means that the projection must be wholly withdrawn; we may not again mythologise or ritualise the pattern that must now be lived out in fact. If the transforming power of the ancient symbols helps us to do that, they are available to that end. But the Church insists that these rites and ceremonies are what she calls optional ‘sacramentals’; any efficacy they have is what theologians call ‘*ex opere operantis*’, wholly dependent, that is to say, on the response of the participant to the stimulus of the symbol. That

this is true of symbols generally has been amply confirmed by analytical psychology.

But there is one striking exception to all this: the Church insists that participation in the Easter *thysia* (or sacrifice) and *deipnon* (banquet)—the Mass and Communion—is indispensable and of obligation. For here, she explains, is something whose efficacy does *not* depend on our response, but is inherent in what is done—*ex opere operato*. Something is done which we cannot do for ourselves, nor do without. The sacrifice and sacrament, to be genuine at all, must be an act of God, of which we may be the instruments or the recipients, but which we cannot originate. Paganism has always sensed that the Giver, the Gift and the Receiver of Sacrifice must somehow be one, and somehow divine:

I knew that I hung on the wind-swept tree
 Nine nights through,
 Wounded by a spear, dedicated to Odin
 I myself to myself.

—Rachel Levy's *The Gate of Horn* has indicated how already in a Stone Age environment, sacrifice is considered to be a giving of God by God to God, in and through the human priest and victim or his surrogate. St Paul sees that in the very human death on Calvary, it is 'God in Christ who is reconciling the world to himself', and it is on that account that the Church dogma has insisted on the unmixed and undiluted Godhead and manhood of her Lord. It is one of the achievements of analytical psychology to have shown the psychological grounds for this. We talk loosely of self-sacrifice, and we may mean quite heroic selflessness and altruism. But, as C. G. Jung explains in his remarkable work on *The Transforming Symbolism of the Mass*, that is not yet sacrifice. Self-sacrifice means whole self-giving, an unqualified renunciation of every claim on what we possess—and we do not possess ourselves. Indeed, the more we advance in self-knowledge and self-possession, with or without the aid of psychology, the less we find we know, the more we find that is beyond our dominion and control, the more we know we are *not* our own, and therefore are incapable of self-sacrifice. Only a Lord of all who possesses all can initiate and consummate the sacrifice and impart to us the new life which springs from death.

Psychology can tell us, in a new way, why such things would be so, and, within the limits of empirical observation, how, why

and what the symbols work. But more than that it cannot tell us: it cannot tell us if there be any such Lord (even though it finds it must postulate a 'superordinated personality'); it cannot assure us that such sacrifice really exists. As Jung puts it in the essay I have mentioned, 'Psychology can deal with the matter only from the phenomenological standpoint. The truth or reality of religion lies beyond the competence of psychology.' Yet the psyche's own deepest yearning, even for its own health and sanity, is for truth and reality, whatever may be the cost of abandoning agreeable make-believe. At this very point, however, the limitations of psychology's own empirical method compels it ever to confess its ignorance, and to point elsewhere for any answer there may be. Perhaps analytical psychology itself is doomed to degenerate into a regressive mythology, an esoteric sect of initiates, if it fails to recognise the Word made flesh, the Christian demand for the earthly realisation of the symbol.

But this is not to say that analytical psychology has nothing to offer us, even those of us who call ourselves Christians. Professor Frankfort has told us how Jung's interpretations have elucidated a variety of Egyptian texts and usages which had hitherto been entirely obscure to the Egyptologist. But to many a modern man, the symbols employed by Christ and the Church have become every bit as obscure as the sarcophagus or titles of a Pharaoh. They leave him cold, because he no longer sees their significance and relevance to his own daily life. But there are some who have re-discovered that significance and relevance through analytical psychology, working through from the seemingly petty, personal superficial problem to the collective, archetypal factors found behind it, so destructive when neglected or rejected, so healing when recognised and placated. And this, it is always found, can only come about by way of sacrifice; by total dispossession of what possesses us. But we find also that, while sacrifice is indispensable, it is also impossible to the conscious ego—to you and me; that it can be possible only to a greater power within us, the power which men have called God. Jung has said that no matter how much he and his patients contribute to an analysis, they can at best only prepare the way, remove the obstacles, to healing. Healing itself, he says, always comes in some wholly unexpected way from the unknown, '*wie ein Wunder*'—like a miracle. For when the sacrifice is made, it is given back transformed and transforming. But sacrifice there

must be, whether or not expressed in external ordinances; and psychology has strangely confirmed what theology has always maintained, that sacrifice can only be complete and perfect when it is the free and whole self-oblation of a dying man, who must also be the Dying God.



VIDETUR QUOD NON

PAUL FOSTER, O.P.

I HAD just switched on the light in my reputedly haunted room when the door of the cupboard swung slowly and purposefully open and a heavy thud behind it proclaimed that the skeleton therein had decided to take action.

It was a suitcase, precariously balanced on a mound of junk, that had, by its pressure, forced the door open at last, and the hollow sound of its falling was a proof that the policy of keeping a room tidy by throwing everything into a cupboard and slamming the door shut is no policy at all. It is a short cut, and a short cut is often an evasion of responsibility. Tidiness is not order.

Among the results of the fall of man, this attempt to take a short cut back to Paradise is perhaps the most disastrous in its consequences. Mankind was scarcely on the hither side of the flaming sword when it was first essayed, and Cain murdered Abel in order to obtain an illusion of order by destroying the evidence of a righteousness superior to his own. Abel's sacrifice was visibly accepted, Cain's rejected. The Lord God showed Cain that the cause lay in his own bad will. 'If thou do well, shalt thou not receive? But if ill, shall not sin forthwith be present at the door?' Cain found the rebuke to his pride intolerable. He murdered his brother to remove the offending evidence of his own inferiority. Whatever his previous sin had been, he committed a far graver one to erase its consequences. It is the classic picture of fallen humanity failing to acknowledge its own perversity and sinning more deeply still in order to create an illusion of being in a state of justice. Slam the skeleton into the cupboard and close the door firmly.

But the door will eventually swing open. It is part of the