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CONTEMPORARY FAITHS

I

THE MYTHS OF THE MODERN WORLD

What exactly is a myth? In the language current during the nineteenth century, a "myth" meant anything that was opposed to "reality": the creation of Adam, or the invisible man, no less than the history of the world as described by the Zulus, or the *Theogony* of Hesiod—these were all "myths". Like many another cliché of the Enlightenment and of Positivism, this, too, was of Christian origin and structure; for, according to primitive Christianity, everything which could not be justified by reference to one or the other of the two Testaments was untrue; it was a "fable". But the researches of the ethnologists have obliged us to go behind this semantic inheritance from the Christian polemics against the pagan world. We are at last beginning to know and understand the value of the myth, as it has been elaborated in "primitive" and archaic societies—that is, among those groups of mankind where the myth happens to be the very foundation of social life and culture. Now, one fact strikes us immediately: in such societies the myth is thought to express the *absolute truth*, because it narrates a *sacred history*; that is, a transhuman revelation which took place at the dawn of the Great Time, in the holy time of the beginnings (*in illo tempore*). Being *real* and *sacred*, the myth becomes exemplary, and consequently *repeatable*, for it serves as a model, and by the same token as a justification, for all human actions. In other words, a myth is a *true history* of what came to pass at the beginning of Time, and one which provides the pattern for human behaviour. In *imitating* the exemplary acts of a god or of a mythic hero, or simply by recounting their adventures, the man of an archaic society detaches himself from profane time and magically re-enters the Great Time, the sacred time.

Clearly, what we are dealing with here is a complete reversal of values; whilst current language confuses the myth with "fables", a man of the traditional societies sees it as the *only valid revelation of reality*. Little time was lost before conclusions were drawn from this discovery. Little by little, one ceased to insist upon the fact that the myth narrates impossibilities or improbabilities: one was content to say that it constituted a way of thinking different from ours, but that in any case we ought not to treat it *a priori* as an aberration. One went still further; one tried to integrate the myth into the general history of thought, by regarding it as the most important form of collective thinking. And, since "collective thinking" is never completely abolished in any society, whatever its degree of evolution, one did not fail to observe that the modern world still preserves some mythical behaviour: for example, the participation of an entire society in certain symbols has been interpreted as a survival of "collective thinking". It was not difficult to show that the function of a national flag, with all the affective experiences that go with it, was in no way different from the "participation" in any of the symbols of the archaic societies. This was as much as to say that, *upon the plane of social living*, there was no break in the continuity between the archaic world and the modern world. The one great difference was that of the presence, in the majority of the individuals who constitute modern societies, of a personal thinking that was absent, or almost so, among the members of traditional societies.

This is not the place to begin a discussion of the general considerations raised by this "collective thinking". Ours is a more modest problem: if the myth is not just an infantile or aberrant creation of "primitive" humanity, but is the expression of a *mode of being in the world*, what has become of myths in the modern world? Or, more precisely, what has taken the *essential* place occupied by the myth in traditional societies? For, if certain "participations" in myths and collective symbols still survive in the modern world, they are far from filling the central part played by the myth in traditional societies; in comparison with these, our modern world seems destitute of myths. It has even been held

that the diseases and crises of modern societies are rightly attributable to the absence of a mythology appropriate to them. When Jung entitled one of his books *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, he implied that the modern world—in crisis ever since its profound break with Christianity—is in quest of a new myth, which alone could enable it to draw upon fresh spiritual resources and renew its creative powers.¹

It is true that, at least apparently, the modern world is not rich in myths. It was said, for instance, of the General Strike, that this was one of the rare myths created by the modern world. But that was a misunderstanding: it was supposed that an *idea*, accessible to a considerable number of individuals and therefore "popular", could become a *myth* for the simple reason that its realisation was projected into a more or less remote future. But that is not the way myths are "created". The General Strike might be an instrument of political combat, but it has no mythical precedents, and that alone is enough to exclude it from mythical status.

Very different is the case of Marxian communism. Let us leave aside all question of the philosophic validity of Marxism and of its historic destiny, and consider only the mythological pattern of communism and the eschatological meaning of its popular success. For whatever we may think of the scientific claims of Marx, it is clear that the author of the *Communist Manifesto* takes up and carries on one of the great eschatological myths of the Middle Eastern and Mediterranean world, namely: the redemptive part to be played by the Just (the "elect", the "anointed", the "innocent", the "missioners", in our own days by the proletariat), whose sufferings

¹ By the "modern world", we mean contemporary Western society; but also a certain state of mind which has been formed by successive deposits ever since the Renaissance and the Reformation. The active classes of the urban societies are in this sense "modern"—that is, the mass of mankind which has been more or less directly shaped by education and official culture. The rest of the population, especially in central and south-eastern Europe, still maintains its attachment to a traditional and half-Christian spiritual universe. The agricultural societies are, as a rule, passive towards History; most of the time they merely undergo it, and when directly involved in the great historical turmoils (for instance, the barbarian invasions of late antiquity), their reaction is that of passive resistance.

are invoked to change the ontological status of the world. In fact, Marx's classless society, and the consequent disappearance of all historical tensions, find their most exact precedent in the myth of the Golden Age which, according to a number of traditions, lies at the beginning and the end of History. Marx has enriched this venerable myth with a truly messianic Judæo-Christian ideology; on the one hand, by the prophetic and soteriological function he ascribes to the proletariat; and, on the other, by the final struggle between Good and Evil, which may well be compared with the apocalyptic conflict between Christ and Antichrist, ending in the decisive victory of the former. It is indeed significant that Marx turns to his own account the Judæo-Christian eschatological hopes of an *absolute goal of History*; in that he parts company from the other historical philosophers (Groece, for instance, and Ortega y Gasset), for whom the tensions of history are implicit in the human condition, and therefore can never be completely abolished.

In comparison with the grandeur and the vigorous optimism of the communist myth, the mythology propagated by the National Socialists seems peculiarly inept; and this not only because of the limitations of the racial myth (how could one imagine that the rest of Europe would voluntarily accept submission to a master-race?), but above all because of the fundamental pessimism of the Germanic mythology. In its effort to abolish Christian values and rediscover the spiritual sources of "the race"—that is, of Nordic paganism—Nazism was obliged to try to reanimate the Germanic mythology. But from the point of view of the depth-psychologists, such an effort was, in effect, an invitation to collective suicide; for the *eschaton* prophesied and expected by the ancient Germans was the *ragnarök*—that is, a catastrophic *end of the world*. This included a gigantic combat between the gods and the demons, ending in the death of all the gods and all the heroes and a final regression of the world into chaos. It is true that, after the *ragnarök*, the world was to be reborn, regenerated (for the ancient Germans, too, knew the doctrine of the cosmic cycles, the myth of recurrent creations and destructions of the world); nevertheless, to substitute Nordic mythology for Christianity was to replace an eschatology rich in promises

and consolations (for to the Christian, the "end of the world" completes and at the same time regenerates History) by an *eschaton* that was frankly pessimistic. Translated into political terms, this substitution almost amounted to saying: Give up your old Judæo-Christian stories, and re-ignite, in the depths of your souls, the beliefs of your ancestors the Germans; then prepare yourselves for the last grand battle between our gods and the demonic forces: in that apocalyptic battle our gods and our heroes and we ourselves with them will all perish; that will be the *ragnarök*; but another world will be born later on. The wonder is, how such a pessimistic vision of the end of history could ever have fired the imagination of even a portion of the German people; and the fact that it did so has not yet ceased to raise problems for the psychologists.

2

Apart from these two political myths, modern societies do not seem to have entertained any others of comparable range. We are thinking of the myth as a *type of human behaviour* and, at the same time, as an *element of civilisation*—that is, of the myth as one finds it in traditional societies. For at the level of *individual experience* it has never completely disappeared: it makes itself felt in the dreams, the fantasies and the longings of the modern man; and an abundant psychological literature has now accustomed us to rediscoveries of both the big and the little mythologies in the unconscious and half-conscious activity of every individual. But what now interests us above all is to find out what it is, in the modern world, that fills the *central* position occupied by the myth in traditional societies. In other words, while recognising that the great mythical themes continue to repeat themselves in the obscure depths of the psyche, we still wonder whether the myth, as an exemplary pattern of human behaviour, may not also survive among our contemporaries in more or less degraded forms. It seems that a myth itself, as well as the symbols it brings into play, never quite disappears from the present world of the psyche; it only changes its aspect

and disguises its operations. Would it not be instructive to prolong the enquiry and unmask the operations of myths upon the *social plane*?

Here is one example. It is clearly the case that certain festivals observed in the modern world, though apparently secular, still preserve a mythical structure and function: the rejoicings over the New Year, or the festivities following the birth of a child, or the building of a house, or even the removal into a new flat, show the obscurely-felt need for an *entirely new beginning*, of an *incipit vita nova*—that is, of a complete regeneration. Remote as these profane rejoicings may be from their mythic archetype—the periodic repetition of the creation¹—it is none the less evident that modern man still feels the need for periodic re-enactments of such scenarios, however secularised they have become. There are no means of estimating how far modern man is still aware of any mythological implications of his festivities; what matters to us is that such celebrations still have a resonance, obscure but profound, throughout his being.

That is but one example; it may enlighten us, however, with regard to what appears to be a general situation: that certain mythical themes still survive in modern societies, but are not readily recognisable since they have undergone a long process of laicisation. This has long been known: indeed, modern societies might be simply defined as those which have pushed the secularisation of life and of the Cosmos far enough: the novelty of the modern world consists in its revaluation, at the secular level, of the ancient sacred values.² What we want

¹ Cf. my book *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, Trans. by W. R. Trask, London, 1955, pp. 83ff.

² This process is very well exemplified by the transformation of the values ascribed to Nature. We have not abolished the relationship of sympathy between man and Nature; nor was that possible. But this relationship has changed in value and in its orientation; for the magico-religious sympathy we have substituted emotion, either æsthetic or simply sentimental; sporting and hygienic appreciation, etc.; while contemplation of Nature has been ousted by observation, experiment and calculation. It could not be said of a physicist of the Renaissance, or of a naturalist of our own days, that he did not "love Nature"; but in this "love" one could no longer find anything of the spiritual attitude of the man in the archaic societies—such as that which is still maintained in European agricultural societies.

to know, however, is whether anything else of the "mythical" survives in the modern world, besides what presents itself merely in the form of procedures and values re-interpreted to fit the secular plane. If all the phenomena were of that description, we should have to agree that the modern world was radically opposed to all the historical forms that had preceded it. But the very presence of Christianity excludes such a hypothesis. Christianity admits none of the secularised views of the Cosmos or of life which are characteristic of all "modern" culture.

The question this raises is not a simple one; but since the Western world, or a great part of it, still claims to be Christian, it cannot be evaded. I shall not insist upon what are at present called the "mythical elements" in Christianity. Whatever may be said about these "mythical elements" it is a long time since they were Christianised, and, in any case, the importance of Christianity must be judged in another perspective. But, from time to time, voices are raised asserting that the modern world is no longer, or is not yet, Christian. For our present purpose we need not concern ourselves with those who put their hopes in *Entmythologisierung*, who believe it is necessary to "de-mythologise" Christianity to recover its essential truth. Some think just the opposite. Jung, for instance, believes that the crisis of the modern world is in great part due to the fact that the Christian symbols and "myths" are no longer lived by the whole human being; that they have been reduced to words and gestures deprived of life, fossilised, externalised and therefore no longer of any use for the deeper life of the psyche.

To us the question presents itself differently: to what extent is Christianity maintaining, in modern secularised and laicised society, a spiritual horizon comparable to that of archaic societies, where the myth predominates? Let us say at once that Christianity has nothing to fear from such a comparison: its specificity is assured, it is guaranteed by *faith* as the category *sui generis* of religious experience, and by its valorisation in *history*. With the exception of Judaism, no other pre-Christian religion has set a value on history as a direct and irreversible manifestation of God in the world, nor on faith—in the sense inaugurated by Abraham—as

a unique means of salvation. Consequently the Christian polemic against the religious world of paganism is, historically speaking, obsolete: Christianity is no longer in danger of being confused with any other religion or gnosis whatsoever. This having been said, and in view of the discovery, which is quite recent, that the myth represents a certain mode of being in the world, it is no less true that Christianity, *by the very fact that it is a religion*, has had to preserve at least one mythic attitude—the attitude towards liturgical time; that is, the rejection of profane time and the periodical recovery of the Great Time, *illud tempus* of “the beginnings”.

For the Christian, Jesus Christ is not a mythical personage: on the contrary, he is a historical personage; his greatness itself is founded upon that absolute historicity. For the Christ not only made himself man, “man in general”, but accepted the historical condition of the people in whose midst he chose to be born; and he had recourse to no miracle to escape from that historicity—although he worked plenty of miracles in order to modify the “historical situations” of others—by curing the paralytic, raising Lazarus, etc. Nevertheless, the religious experience of the Christian is based upon an imitation of the Christ as *exemplary pattern*, upon the liturgical repetition of the life, death and resurrection of the Lord and upon the *contemporaneity* of the Christian with *illud tempus* which begins with the Nativity at Bethlehem and ends, provisionally, with the Ascension. Now, we know that the initiation of a transhuman model, the repetition of an exemplary scenario and the breakaway from profane time through a moment which opens out into the Great Time, are the essential marks of “mythical behaviour”—that is, the behaviour of the man of the archaic societies, who finds the very source of his existence in the myth. One is always *contemporary with a myth*, during the time when one repeats it or imitates the gestures of the mythic personages. Kierkegaard's requirement of the true Christian was that he should be a contemporary of Christ. But even one who is not a “true Christian” in Kierkegaard's sense still is, and cannot *not* be, a contemporary of Christ; for the liturgical time in which the Christian *lives* during the divine service is no longer profane duration but is essentially sacred time, the

time in which the Word is made flesh, the *illud tempus* of the Gospels. A Christian is not taking part in a commemoration of the Passion of Christ, as he might be joining in the annual celebration of the Fourth of July or the Eleventh of November, for example. He is not commemorating an event but re-actualising a mystery. For the Christian, Jesus dies and resurrects before him *hic et nunc*. Through the mystery of the Passion or of the Resurrection, the Christian dispels profane time and is integrated into time primordial and holy.

It is needless to insist upon the radical differences that divide Christianity from the archaic world: they are too obvious to give rise to misunderstandings. But there remains the identity of behaviour that we have just recalled. To the Christian, as to the man of the archaic societies, time is not homogeneous: it is subject to periodical ruptures which divide it into "secular duration" and a "sacred time", the latter being indefinitely reversible, in the sense that it repeats itself to infinity without ceasing to be the same time. It is said that Christianity, unlike the archaic religions, proclaims and awaits the end of Time; which is true of the "profane duration", of History, but not of the liturgical time inaugurated by the Incarnation. The Christological *illud tempus* will not be done away with at the end of History.

These few cursory observations have shown us in what sense Christianity is prolonging a "mythical" conduct of life into the modern world. If we take account of the true nature and function of the myth, Christianity does not appear to have surpassed the mode of being of archaic man; but then it could not. *Homo naturaliter Christianus*. It remains, however, to enquire what has taken the place of the myth among those of the moderns who have preserved nothing of Christianity but the dead letter.

3

It seems unlikely that any society could completely dispense with myths, for, of what is essential in mythical behaviour—the exemplary pattern, the repetition, the break with profane duration and integration into primordial time—the first two at

least consubstantial with every human condition. Thus, it is not so difficult to recognise, in all that modern people call instruction, education and didactic culture, the function that is fulfilled by the myth in archaic societies. This is so not only because myths represent both the sum of ancestral traditions and the norms it is important not to transgress, and because their transmission—generally secret, initiatory—is equivalent to the more or less official "education" of a modern society. The homology of the respective functions of the myth and of our public instruction is verified above all when we consider the origins of the exemplary models upheld by European education. In antiquity there was no hiatus between mythology and history: historical personages endeavoured to imitate their archetypes, the gods and mythical heroes.¹

And the lives and deeds of those personages, in their turn, became paradigms for posterity. Livy had already assembled a rich array of models for young Romans to emulate, when Plutarch wrote his *Lives of Famous Men*, a veritable mine of examples for the centuries to come. The moral and civic virtues of these illustrious personages continued to provide the supreme criteria for European pedagogy, especially after the Renaissance. Right to the end of the nineteenth century European education for citizenship was still following the archetypes of classical antiquity, those models which had been made manifest *in illo tempore*, in that privileged interval of time which educated Europeans regarded as the highest point of the Greco-Latin culture.

But they did not think of assimilating the functions of mythology to the process of instruction, because they overlooked one of the chief characteristics of the myth, which is the creation of exemplary models for a whole society. In this, moreover, we recognise a very general human tendency; namely, to hold up one life-history as a paradigm and turn a historical personage into an archetype. This tendency survives even among the most eminent representatives of the modern mentality. As Gide has rightly observed, Goethe was highly conscious of a mission to lead a life that would be exemplary

¹ Upon this point, one may refer to the researches of Georges Dumézil. Cf. also my *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, pp. 37ff.

for the rest of humanity. In all that he did he was trying to *create an example*. In his own life he, in his turn, was imitating, if not the lives of the gods and mythical heroes, at least their behaviour. As Paul Valéry wrote in 1932: "He represents for us, *gentlemen of the human race*, one of our best attempts to render ourselves like gods."

But this imitation of model lives is promoted not only by means of school education. Concurrently with official pedagogy, and long after this has ceased to exert its authority, modern man is subjected to the influence of a potent if diffuse mythology that offers him a number of patterns for imitation. Heroes, real and imaginary, play an important part in the formation of European adolescents: the characters in tales of adventure, heroes of war, screen favourites, etc. This mythology is continually enriched with the growing years; we meet, one after another, the exemplary figures thrown up by changes of fashion, and we try to become like them. Critical writers have often pointed out modern versions of, for example, Don Juan, the political or the military hero, the hapless lover; of the cynic, the nihilist, the melancholy poet, and so forth: all these models are carrying on mythological traditions which their topical forms reveal in mythical behaviour. The copying of these archetypes betrays a certain discontent with one's own personal history; an obscure striving to transcend one's own local, provincial history and to recover some "Great Time" or other—though it be only the mythic Time of the first surrealist or existentialist manifesto.

But an adequate analysis of the diffuse mythologies of the modern world would run into volumes: for myths and mythological images are to be found everywhere, laicised, degraded or disguised; one only needs to be able to recognise them. We have referred to the mythological basis of New Year celebrations, and of the festivities that mark any "new beginning"; in which we can discern anew the nostalgia for a *renewal*, the yearning for the world to be renovated; that one might enter upon a new History, in a world reborn; that is, *created afresh*. It would be easy to multiply instances. The myth of the lost paradise still survives in the images of a paradisiac island or a land of innocence; a privileged land where laws are abolished and Time stands still. For

it is important to underline this fact—that it is, above all, *by analysing the attitude of the modern man towards Time that we can penetrate the disguises of his mythological behaviour.* We must never forget that one of the essential functions of the myth is its provision of an opening into the Great Time, a periodic re-entry into Time primordial. This is shown by a tendency to a neglect of the present time, of what is called the "historic moment".

The Polynesians, when setting out upon a grandiose maritime adventure, are careful to deny its "novelty" its unprecedentedness, its spontaneity; for them, it is only a case of repeating the voyage that was made by some mythical hero *in illo tempore*, to "show men the way", to set an example. But thus to embark on a present adventure as the reiteration of a mythic saga is as much as to put the present time out of mind. Such disinclination to face historic time, together with an obscure desire to share in some glorious, primordial, *total* Time, is betrayed, in the case of modern people, by a sometimes desperate effort to break through the homogeneity of time, to "get beyond" duration and re-enter a time qualitatively different from that which creates, in its course, their own history. It is with this in mind that we can render the best account of what has become of myths in the world of today. For modern man, too, by means that are multiple, but homologous, is endeavouring to liberate himself from his "history" and to live in a qualitatively different temporal rhythm. And in so doing he is returning, without being aware of it, to the mythical style of life.

One can understand this better if one looks more closely at the two principal ways of "escape" in use by modern people—visual entertainment, and reading. We need not go into all the mythical precedents for our public spectacles; it is enough to recall the ritual origins of bull-fighting, racing and athletic contests; they all have this point in common, that they take place in a "concentrated time", time of a heightened intensity; a residuum of, or substitute for, magico-religious time. This "concentrated time" is also the specific dimension of the theatre and the cinema. Even if we taken no account of the ritual origins and mythological structure of the drama or the film, there is still the important fact that these are

two kinds of spectacle that make us live in time of a quality quite other than that of "secular duration", in a temporal rhythm, at once concentrated and articulated, which, apart from all æsthetic implications, evokes a profound echo in the spectator.

4

When we turn to reading, the question is of greater subtlety. It is concerned, on the one hand, with the forms and the mythical origins of literature and, on the other, with the mythological function that reading performs in the mind that feeds upon it. The successive stages of myth, legend, epic and modern literature have often been pointed out and need not detain us here. Let us merely recall the fact that the mythical archetypes survive to some degree in the great modern novels. The difficulties and trials that the novelist's hero has to pass through are prefigured in the adventures of the mythic Heroes. It has been possible also to show how the mythic themes of the primordial waters, of the isles of Paradise, of the quest of the Holy Grail, of heroic and mystical initiation, etc., still dominate modern European literature. Quite recently we have seen, in surrealism, a prodigious outburst of mythical themes and primordial symbols. As for the literature of the bookstalls, its mythological character is obvious. Every popular novel has to present the exemplary struggle between Good and Evil, the hero and the villain (modern incarnation of the Demon), and repeat one of those universal motives of folklore, the persecuted young woman, salvation by love, the unknown protector, etc. Even detective novels, as Roger Caillois has so well demonstrated, are full of mythological themes.

Need we recall how much lyric poetry renews and continues the myths? All poetry is an effort to *re-create* the language; in other words, to abolish current language, that of every day, and to invent a new, private and personal speech, in the last analysis *secret*. But poetic creation, like linguistic creation, implies the abolition of time—of the history concentrated in language—and tends towards the recovery of the paradisiac, primordial

situation; of the days when one could *create spontaneously*, when the *past* did not exist because there was no consciousness of time, no memory of temporal duration. It is said, moreover, in our own days, that for a great poet the past does not exist: the poet discovers the world as though he were present at the cosmogonic moment, contemporaneous with the first day of the Creation. From a certain point of view, we may say that every great poet is *remaking* the world, for he is trying to see it as if there were no Time, no History. In this his attitude is strangely like that of the "primitive", of the man in traditional society.

But we are interested chiefly in the mythological function of reading in itself; for here we are dealing with a specific phenomenon of the modern world, unknown in earlier civilisations. Reading replaces not only the oral folk traditions, such as still survive in rural communities of Europe, but also the recital of the myths in the archaic societies. Now, reading, perhaps even more than visual entertainment, gives one a break in duration, and at the same time an "escape from time". Whether we are "killing time" with a detective story, or entering into another temporal universe as we do in reading any kind of novel, we are taken out of our own duration to move in other rhythms, to live in a different history. In this sense reading offers us an "easy way", it provides a modification of experience at little cost: for the modern man it is the supreme "distraction", yielding him the illusion of a *mastery of Time* which, we may well suspect, gratifies a secret desire to withdraw from the implacable becoming that leads towards death.

The defence against Time which is revealed to us in every kind of mythological attitude, but which is, in fact, inseparable from the human condition, reappears variously disguised in the modern world, but above all in its *distractions*, its amusements. It is here that one sees what a radical difference there is between modern cultures and other civilisations. In all traditional societies, every responsible action reproduced its mystical, transhuman model, and consequently took place in sacred time. Labour, handicrafts, war and love were all sacraments. The re-living of that which the Gods and

Heroes had lived *in illo tempore* imparted a sacramental aspect to human existence, which was complemented by the sacramental nature ascribed to life and to the Cosmos. By thus opening out into the Great Time, this sacramental existence, poor as it might often be, was nevertheless rich in significance; at all events it was not under the tyranny of Time. The true "fall into Time" begins with the secularisation of work. It is only in modern societies that man feels himself to be the prisoner of his daily work, in which he can never escape from Time. And since he can no longer "kill" time during his working hours—that is, while he is expressing his real social identity—he strives to get away from Time in his hours of leisure: hence the bewildering number of distractions invented by modern civilisation. In other terms, it is just as though the order of things were reversed from what it is in traditional societies, for there, "distractions" hardly exist; every responsible occupation is itself an "escape from Time". It is for this reason that, as we have just seen, in the great majority of individuals who do not participate in any authentic religious experience, the mythical attitude can be discerned in their distractions, as well as in their unconscious psychic activity (dreams, fantasies, nostalgias, etc.). And this means that the "fall into Time" becomes confused with the secularisation of work and the consequent mechanisation of existence—that it brings about a scarcely disguisable loss of freedom; and the only escape that remains possible upon the collective plane is distraction.

These few observations will suffice. We cannot say that the modern world has completely eliminated mythical behaviour; but only that its field of action is changed: the myth is no longer dominant in the essential sectors of life: it has been repressed, partly into the obscurer levels of the psyche, partly into the secondary or even irresponsible activities of society. It is true that mythical behaviour persists, though disguised, in the part that is played by education, but this is almost exclusively in what concerns the very young; and, what is more, the exemplary function of education is on the way to disappearance: modern pedagogy encourages spontaneity. Except in authentically religious life, the myth functions, as

we have seen, chiefly in distractions. But it will never disappear; in the collective life it sometimes reasserts itself with considerable force, in the form of a political myth.

It is no less safe to predict that the understanding of the myth will one day be counted among the most useful discoveries of the twentieth century. Western man is no longer the master of the world; he is no longer managing "natives" but talking with other men. It is as well that he should learn how to open the conversation. It is necessary for him to realise that there is no longer any break in the continuity between the "primitive" or "backward" world and that of the modern West. It is not enough, as it was half a century ago, to discover and admire the art of Negroes or Pacific islanders: we have now to rediscover the spiritual sources of these arts in ourselves; we must become aware of what it is, in a modern existence, that is still "mythical", and survives as such simply because this, too, is part and parcel of the human condition, in that it expresses the anxiety of man living in Time.