

How Religions Arise.

The stream of human history can be viewed from different levels of observation. We are, for instance, accustomed to seeing it as a series of growing, maturing, decaying and perishing political organisations which fight each other for survival, which cluster into groups, the better to withstand the ravages of time, which break up into smaller units, in short, which behave very much like some primitive living organisms, for instance the Protozoa. This is the view we learn in school, and it is not necessarily the most profound one. We can view human history as a progressive refinement and consequent complication of the social fabric, starting with the hypothetical primitive horde, which consisted of the strong male surrounded by females and young ones and fought off the weaker males trying to overpower the male in charge, and which gathered fruits, roots and eggs in the hypothetical tertiary forest, and leading to the highly mechanized and specialized industrial societies of our more enlightened era. This is the view which both Marxists and liberals would like us to take. We can view history as the ever growing treasure of the products of man's inventiveness and creative power, as an ever expanding picture gallery, public library and technological museum. Such a view will not give us a picture of something that progresses along a path, like the two previous views, but of something that grows and unfolds like a tree. In my opinion this view, being more organic, is also "truer". We can see in human history the manifestation of human will struggling blindly for knowledge, beauty and righteousness, in short for happiness, and, while getting ever more refined, always failing. This is the pessimistic view modern existentialists would like us to take. In this view history appears to be nonprogressive, though dynamic, and although one cannot disprove it and has to live with it, it is profoundly unsatisfying. History can also be seen as the unfolding of Divine purposes which are veiled to human understanding and become evident as history progresses. This is the view of almost all Occidental religions, but it is based on faith, not evidence, and is therefore not subject to rational analysis, which can neither prove nor disprove it. There are, of course, an almost unlimited number of other possible viewpoints, but I shall waive them, because I believe that the subjectivity and incompleteness of every opinion concerning history has been demonstrated. This does not mean, however, that all these opinions are equally "mistaken". Some of them are more fruitful than others, they lead to a fuller and therefore I believe truer view on history, and I shall try to analyse one such level, which is emerging in our time. It views the stream of history as the unfolding of mythological ideas (in the Platonic sense of the word, i.e. pictures) in the collective and individual unconscious mind. In other words, it believes that human history is the outward and conscious manifestation of the inward and unconscious development of the "Godhead" within the soul. And the emergence of Baha'i is a very good example for this theory.

The idea of taking mythology seriously and subjects it to rational analysis rather than ridicule it as children's fairy tales is not new. German romantic philosophers studied classical and Hebrew myths very profoundly, and Schelling based his entire philosophy of history upon mythological considerations even before 1830. Indian myths, when they became known in Europe, profoundly influenced the philosophy of Schopenhauer, who may be said to be a mythological thinker. When, later, Chinese myths on the one hand, and primitive African and American myths on the other hand, became known, they had a decisive influence (and still have it) on existentialist and phaeomenological thought. But it is through two very different channels, and more introspective channels, that myths appear as the hidden springs of history to the modern observer. I mean depths psychology and mathematical logic.

To take the last one first: Mathematical logic analyses the relations of pure symbols as they appear in the conscious mind or on paper. But it is only lately that the purely symbolic character of logic appears and becomes evident. The question now arises: what do these symbols mean? Unless we find an answer to this question, the whole of logic, and mathematics, and science, which is based on them, becomes or remains meaningless. The question itself is extralogical, because logic cannot be applied to its own foundations. The answer therefore must be epistemological, or, to say it openly, metaphysical, and the only plausible answer is: The symbols of logic and mathematics "mean" the hidden myths of the modern soul, in other words the modern rational mind means the unconscious mythological soul, is based on it and has to revert to it always to gain meaning. To give an example: What the symbols in Einstein's equation concerning matter mean and symbolize, is the unconscious eternal myth, which has been previously symbolized as the Goddess Gea, or Ishtar, or Shechinah, "the spirit"

of God who was on the waters" according to Genesis. In other words: what ishtar was to the Ancients, "m" is to us, a conscious symbol of an unconscious myth. 2
Thus logic, paradoxically, compels us to an extralogical, a mythological, point of view, to an irrational "Weltanschauung". No wonder that it is the exact scientists who are becoming religious in our days.

I now come to depth psychology. Ever since Freud analysts have been impressed by the fact that the deeper levels of the mind reveal characteristics which are closely parallel to ancient myths of which the analysed person was consciously unaware. One of the most famous Freudian "complexes" is not called "Oedipus complex" for nothing. Jung has revealed a wealth of traits in the modern European mind, which repeat classical, tibetan, egyptian or even African myths, the so-called "archetypes", and it is still a shock to us when we see an elderly Swiss middleclass lady, when insane, draw pictures closely akin, nay identical, to hieroglyphical symbols of the second Egyptian dynasty. Gestalt psychology has gone beyond that and has brought to light patterns, "Gestalten", within the modern mind, which are identical with the patterns of say a chicken or a spider. Mind appears to be a bottomless pit of age-old traits, as old as life itself, or even older, topped by a very thin level of conscious symbols which we call the rational modern soul. And human history appears as the continuous swallowing up of that top layer and substituting it for a new, more "modern" one. In other words, what was consciously "known" in the Middle Ages, now lies on the threshold of consciousness. We have, in one sense, surpassed it, and in another sense, we have forgotten it. But we have assimilated it to the general economy of the mind for at least as long as the human species abides on this planet. Now these new insights can be interpreted in the following way: There is an unfolding process within the human soul, if seen as a collective soul, or even in the collective soul of Life itself, (if we are to believe the Gestalt psychologist) by which the consciousness is pushed ever further from its origin and ever nearer to an understanding of itself. This seems to be a paradox, that the consciousness understands itself better the farther it travels from its origin, but it is an empirical fact. This collective soul now appears as something which develops in order to see itself, or to say the same thing differently, it is God creating life in order to become successively revealed to it. This is the reason why we are progressing when we seek God, because we are thus pushing consciousness further. Or, to say the same thing the other way round, this is the reason why we are approaching God the more we push our consciousness forward. And we can seek him while studying life and the world around us, because He manifests Himself there in the manner described above. And we can seek Him even more directly by looking into our own soul, because our soul is so to speak a miniature of the world outside.

Now I am not saying that the conclusions I have just drawn are compelling or necessary, but I put them on paper because they seem to me to be of great intellectual attraction, and they are, at the same time, in accordance with science, with religious and mystical thought, and they are aesthetically well rounded. All this, of course, does not suffice to make us believe them. What we need to do that is faith, but this cannot be willed.

Now, on the basis of these considerations, I shall take up Baha'i, however shortly and however small my knowledge of it may be. First I should state that the Baha'i creed is roughly in accordance with my conclusions, (like most Western religions), but with a difference: It lays stress on the gradual and unfolding character of God's revelation. It lays stress on the fact that all religions are "true", in the sense that they once corresponded to the topmost layer of the soul, the conscious layer, but have now been assimilated and therefore surpassed. They have become, to speak with Jung, archetypical, they have become "Gestalten". In the meantime mind has developed further, God has revealed Himself fuller, and in this sense the old religions are no longer true. Now Baha'is believe that the character of this development, this revelation, is not mainly continuous, but that it proceeds in steps, in creative shocks, that it, so to speak, "facit saltum". God reveals Himself, they say, through specially selected persons, "prophets", "avatars", and it is their job to push consciousness further. The last but one prophet in this sense was Mohammed, and it took the collective human soul all the time from the sixth to the nineteenth century to catch up with the push that prophet gave it. When that impetus was exhausted and when Islam was assimilated, another personal revelation became necessary. Islam remained true in the sense that it now had become a reality, but it was no longer true in the sense that it did not lead further any more. Therefore God revealed Himself again, and fuller and more consciously, in the person of Bahau'llah, a Persian of the nineteenth century. This revelation contains therefore all the previous revelations, in the same sense as the soul contains all previous archetype

types, and it surpasses all previous revelations in the sense the conscious mind surpasses the unconscious. This push, which this new revelation has given the collective soul, has hardly been felt yet, but it will lead eventually to radical changes both within the soul and in the outer manifestations, i.e. in human history. These changes will be accompanied by catastrophic events which will inaugurate a new era, a new "aion", which will last for at least a thousand years. After that, when the collective soul has caught up with this revelation, a new and even more complete revelation is to be expected.

The objections to such an interpretation of history are twofold: First it is not evident that the development of mankind had that discontinuous, step by step character which is postulated. And second, even if this be granted, there is no evidence that the person of Bahau'llah represents such a step. I shall modify these objections and say that evidence for both statements can be produced, but it is not convincing, much less complete. After all, one can produce evidence for every statement, however absurd. But then, my argument is not to the point, because both statements are believed not on evidence, but on faith. And faith moves in a circle, namely such: What Bahau'llah says is true, because He is a Revelation of God, and He is a Revelation of God, because He says so. It is therefore not only impossible, but silly to argue against faith; either one has got it or not. But there is a sense in which Bahau'llah's revelation is true even in an intellectual way, and I shall try to analyse it.

The Baha'i faith is in accordance with mythology to a degree the Baha'is themselves do not realize. Their sacred writings are bathed in Freudian, Jungian and Gestalt symbols, their whole attitude to life is archetypal, and the person of their founder is himself a typical myth. He symbolizes the eternal idea of the "Great Father", of Marduk and Ormuzd, Jehovah and Wotan, he is in fact a recently deceased fertility symbol. This is a very exciting fact and I am sorry that our scientists do not know of it yet: It means that before our own eyes the age old myths take on new garments, in other words that before our own eyes a new religion is being born. And in this sense the Baha'i faith is true, just as the Christian, the Jewish, the Buddhist faiths are true, they are all true symbols of the immortal myths. The truth of Baha'i is vouchsafed by the naive enthusiasm, the inner conviction and the organic integration of its followers. And, I believe, this is all the truth it claims. It does not claim to be true in a scientific, a pragmatic sense, its truth is self-evident. It does not rely on outer evidence for its truth, it finds it within. It only claims that outer evidence cannot disprove it, and in that it is right: for how can logic or the senses disprove a faith? It stands above it.

I shall now conclude my observations with the following: Baha'i is objectively fascinating, because it is a living example for the working of history, it discloses a mainspring of the human soul: mythology. It shows how religions arise to guide and direct the course of history. And it is subjectively interesting to the highest degree, because, though it does not dwell sufficiently (for my taste) on personal salvation, it still has all the characteristics of a faith satisfying both the ethical and moral longings of modern man and his intellectual honesty. It is a noble faith and should be studied very carefully even by those who are unable to accept its metaphysical tenets.