

Mary in 1689. And, finally, a further rubric has been added enabling the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland to deliver the Bible jointly with the Archbishop.⁷

MODES OF THOUGHT IN PRIMITIVE SOCIETY¹

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NO one who studies savage societies would say, today, that there are modes of thought which are confined to primitive peoples. It is rather that we ourselves have specialised ways of apprehending reality. The contributors to this series may, indeed, have described notions which we do not easily take for granted, but which are commonplace among many peoples without our modern science and technology. But any historical sense of proportion—and our historical thought, our sense of relativities, is among our distinguishing characteristics—reminds us that it is some of our own habits of thought which are newly-formed and uncommon. We stand more or less alone, for example, in not taking witchcraft seriously, or distant kinship; and our indifference in such matters divides us equally from savages, and from those ancient cultures whose civilisation, in other respects, we are proud to inherit.

Further, since the eighteenth century at least, we have been rather disposed to forget that a satisfying representation of reality may be sought in more than one way, that reasoning is not the only way of thinking, that there is a place for meditative and imaginative thought.

Our thought has in some ways broken the traditional mould; and a regret for a lost integrity of thought and feeling which seemed to be part of primitive experience led such men as D. H. Lawrence, for example, or Gauguin, to depict a gnostic savage, instinctively aware of some harmony absent from modern urban life—a savage vigorous, active, unreflec-

⁷ *The Form and Order of the Coronation of her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II* is published by the Oxford University Press (Standard Edition 5s.).

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tive. Perhaps many of us who have lived with primitive peoples come to sense what a difference it makes to the nature of apprehension when the mind turns directly towards what it seeks to know, without also being concerned with itself as an object of knowledge. This was the point of William James's comments on Walt Whitman's neo-paganism, when he wrote of Whitman's 'conscious pride in his freedom from flexions and contractions, which your genuine pagan would never know' and contrasted this with 'the integrity of the instinctive reactions' and 'freedom from all moral sophistry and sham' which, James said, 'gives a pathetic dignity to ancient pagan feelings'.

These, however, are impressions of the unselfconsciousness of primitive thought. Anthropologists seek first a knowledge of its content. When we live with savages and speak their languages, learning to represent their experience to ourselves in their way, we come as near to thinking like them as we can without ceasing to be ourselves. Eventually, we try to re-present their conceptions systematically in the logical constructs we have been brought up to use; and we hope, at the best, thus to reconcile what can be expressed in their languages, with what can be expressed in ours. We mediate between their habits of thought, which we have acquired with them, and those of our own society; in doing so, it is not finally some mysterious 'primitive philosophy' that we are exploring, but the further potentialities of our own thought and language.

The problem of describing to others how members of a remote tribe think, then begins to appear largely as one of translation, of making the coherence which primitive thought has in the languages it really lives in as clear as possible in our own. For this sort of translation, concise dictionaries, with their simple equivalents, are of little use. If, for example, I report without further comment that some primitive men speak of pelicans as their half-brothers, I do little more than offer the reader a form of words which, as it stands in English, suggests the atmosphere of the fairy tale, or nonsense. Of course, we understand, from many writings on savages, that such situations exist; but thus stated, we cannot say that we properly understand them in

themselves. Among the people who relate men and birds or beasts in this way, there is, however, a naturalness in the association, a taking for granted that such things are possible, and in what sense they are possible, which eludes a simple literal translation. In order to make this understood in English, it would be necessary to give a full account of views about the relations of the human and non-human quite different from those which we entertain, but not, therefore, necessarily, less reasonable.

It is when we try to contain the thought of a primitive society in our language and categories, without also modifying these in order to receive it, that it begins in part to lose the sense it seemed to have. I have often been told in the Sudan that some men turn themselves into lions, indeed *are* lions existing also in the form of men, Put thus in English, the statement seems curious and superstitious, because we think at once of man and lion as necessarily two different beings. It does not at once occur to us that they may represent two possible ways of viewing the same being. The question arises of whether a creature is 'really' a man, or 'really' a lion, for it is not usual for us to think of any creature as existing in more than one mode. This, however, is what is asserted in parts of the Sudan, when some men are said to be beasts of one kind or another.

We are inclined, moreover, to translate this equivalence of men and lions into a simile or a metaphor, or to look round for reasons why such a 'confusion', as we may be tempted to put it, could have occurred. But the people themselves do not confuse men with beasts; they merely do not distinguish *all* men from *all* beasts in the same way as we do. They seem to suggest that an animal nature, and a man's nature, may be co-present in the same being.

As anthropologists, we have to give at least a temporary assent to such ways of thinking. By assenting to them, I mean merely being prepared to entertain them in the mind, without at once trying to rationalise them to fit them into a place, so to speak, already prepared for other, more familiar ideas. Only by such suspension of criticism can one learn gradually how thought of this sort, in its context, is a representation of experience which at least is not obviously self-

contradictory; and which can satisfy men no less rational, if less rationalising, than ourselves. We have our neat distinctions between metaphor and fact, and we are bound at first to assume that the assertion 'Some men are lions' is an assertion of one or the other kind, either figuratively or literally accepted. We have to learn that often, in translating primitive languages, it is not possible to make just such sorts of distinction between the literal and the metaphorical; and we have to be content to recognise that such statements made by primitive people cannot really be said to be of the one sort or the other. They lie between these categories of ours. They do not properly fit.

How, for example, can a European assent to African thought about witchcraft? It is a matter, I think, of not at once trying to bring arguments to bear against witchcraft as an existential reality, of trying first to see what a belief in it represents to a particular society. The fullest study of witchcraft in Africa we have is Professor Evans-Pritchard's book, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande*; and since witchcraft seems, perhaps, as remote from our thought as any notions of primitive peoples, I should like to suggest, by reference to the Azande, what we do when we study primitive modes of thought.

The Azande are a highly intelligent people of the Southern Sudan and the Belgian Congo. In order to understand what witchcraft means to them, we have to start, as in assenting to anyone's thought, by making one or two assumptions which they make. We have to assume that a man's death or misfortune demands specific explanation; we have to assume that human beings, without any physical act, can injure each other; and we have to suppose that a possible way of accounting for death or suffering is to say that someone, some human witch, is responsible for them. Further, we have to accept it as possible that oracles can reveal truth when other means fail.

To make these assumptions may seem to separate us at once from the Azande; but we perhaps seem less remote from them when we learn that they also recognise what we should call the *natural* causes of death and misfortune, according to their scientific knowledge which is, of course,

defective compared with ours. They are not satisfied, however, to regard natural causes as the only causes; and from this point of view, their reasoning about causes is more searching than our own. We are usually content, in cases of death or trouble, to speak of 'accidents', often assuming that further questions are pointless. But the Azande do ask a further question—why should it happen that a particular man, and at a particular time, becomes ill or meets his death? Theoretically another man might equally have suffered in his place; or the accident might not have happened. What, then, has placed that man in the very circumstances where he is killed?

If we should ask such questions, we answer them generally by saying that it was Providence, or Fortune, or coincidence. We cannot, however, act against these; and the Azande in misfortune seek some explanation which gives them an opportunity for action. They want to deal with the trouble at its source, to save further suffering. They thus hold witches responsible for some misfortunes and they seek to find out which particular people have injured them by putting before an impersonal oracle the names of those they suspect of wanting to harm them.

Their system of consulting the oracle shows certain affinities between their thought and ours in a situation which is otherwise far removed from anything we know. They give a special poison to fowls, and then ask this oracular poison in the fowls the questions which they want to have answered. They tell it that if such-and-such is the case, then the poison should kill the fowl, whereas if the reverse is true, the fowl should live. If a fowl survives after the first question, then often it must die when the same question is put again negatively in order to confirm its first answer.

Usually, a number of such matters are placed before the oracle at one session. If it contradicts itself over one or two of the questions, the interference of a witch is suspected, and these questions are held over till another day. But if the poison kills all the fowls, it is called a foolish poison, and if it spares them all, it is called a weak poison. A poison that is suspect is tested with a deliberately absurd question, as for example:

'Poison oracle, tell the chicken about those two spears over there. As I am about to go up to the sky, if I will spear the moon today with my spears, kill the fowl. If I will not spear the moon today, poison oracle, spare the fowl.'

It will be seen that the object of the consultation is to discover certain sorts of truth not otherwise accessible; but it is interesting to note that in administering poison to chickens, the Azande yet show an affinity with our more rigorous procedures for determining truth. They attempt to test a hypothesis both positively and negatively; and they use also the test of absurdity in extreme cases.

Yet, our own belief in the importance of wider critical and experimental testing of conclusions is not found among the Azande. They do not seek to generalise their experience of witchcraft and oracles into a single, and self-consistent, theory; and they could not do so; for their confidence in their notions is supported, not by a logical inter-relationship between them on the plane of abstraction, but by their adequacy to explain particular isolated situations. Thus, the anthropologist's theory of Azande witchcraft would not demolish their belief in the reality of witches; rather it would provide for them a theoretical and critical understanding of the subject, to supplement their practical rule-of-thumb experience.

Now this is not because the anthropologist becomes committed to a belief in witchcraft as the Azande understand it. *He* views it from quite a different angle. By reference to witchcraft, the Azande account for certain sorts of misfortune, and death; the anthropologist does not seek to account for these troubles by his theory of witchcraft, but to explain what happens when they are attributed to witchcraft, and not, as among ourselves, to other causes.

There is one more feature of witchcraft I should mention too. It is that generally, people suspect those people of bewitching them whom they suspect of hating them, and whom, therefore, they hate. As a psychological analysis of a situation, we understand this perfectly. We know that we suspect of evil intentions those towards whom we ourselves feel uncharitable. But the same situation may appear quite strange when what we see as the *internal* workings of bad

feelings and attitudes are externalised, when it is thought that they can do real harm of a sort we attribute only to physical agents. In Zande, instead of wondering which people have the inclination to do us an injury, we ask the oracle which, of the people we know, are trying to bewitch us.

There are other examples, too, from primitive peoples, of what we see as coming from *within* the mind, a state of conscience, perhaps, being represented as something external to it, a force working upon it from without, not produced by it. What here in England, for example, would be described as a nervous or psychological derangement may be regarded in primitive societies as possession by a spirit or demon. The figures appearing in dreams similarly are often clearly distinguished from the dreamer who encounters them; they come *to* him, not, as we often see it, *from* his mind. In some ways we thus distinguish less clearly than primitive peoples between the self as subject of experience, and what is not the self as the object of experience. For increasingly we seem to regard the human mind as in some way creating what it then proceeds to know.

On the whole, I have been talking about what primitive peoples are said to 'believe'; and generally, what may be regarded as their faith has received more publicity than their scepticism. Yet scepticism, and an ironical recognition of the ambiguities of human experience and knowledge, are undoubtedly found among them. I have met many individuals whose apparent agnosticism about matters to which, nevertheless, they give a certain assent, would surprise those who regard intelligent doubt as a recent European accomplishment. Some primitive peoples may question, upon reflection, the religion which they still practise, remarking on the unlikelihood, even the silliness, of some of the mythical situations upon which it is yet founded. Many improbable happenings, about which they have been told in the traditional lore of their society, clearly seem strange to them as they do to us; but, unlike us, they do not dismiss such happenings as impossible, merely because they seem unlikely. In any case, a myth is 'what men say'; it is not something of which one can acquire the direct experience which can

be called knowledge. In some primitive societies, at least, no one would pretend to *know* whether the story of human origins was true in itself. People know about what they have been told, and that is enough. They often recognise also that other peoples have different traditions; but they do not feel obliged, therefore, to seek for a consistency in different stories, nor to assert, dogmatically, the truth of one rather than the truth of another. The same man can thus entertain in his mind different accounts of the same mythical event, not 'believing' one rather than the other, yet not regarding either as fictitious. When earlier travellers record, therefore, that a primitive people 'believes' this or that, they sometimes create an unjustified impression of savage credulity. Most have had the experience of being laughed at for their own credulity, in taking too literally some story told by the people they have studied. It is as though, having heard it said in England that there was a man in the moon, a foreigner were to proceed to talk to the English as though they believed that.

One may be told, for example, that at one time animals could talk like men, and men and animals formed one single society. Our reaction to such stories is to ask whether people accept them as statements of historical fact, which is what 'believing' has come to mean to us. We soon find that they do nothing of the sort, and that, as with our fiction, it is irrelevant to them whether the stories are *objectively* true, as we might say. They lack our tradition of the critical discernment of fact from fiction in the scientific study of history, and they do not, therefore, equate the true with the factual, as we are inclined to. Still, in many primitive societies there *is* something of the distinction we make between myth and history, events of the recent past being understood in a different sense from those of remotest, original time, which, by being placed at the very beginning, really transcend historical time, sequence, and probability. Consequently, it gives a quite wrong impression of what primitive people are able to be convinced of, if we suppose that their myth has for them the sort of validity which our history has for us.

It was Lévy-Bruhl who laid the foundations of the study

of primitive thought. He was the first to see clearly that often, in studying it, it was necessary to seek for the nature of its coherence outside the logical principles of our own formal thinking. Unfortunately, in doing so he created a theoretical 'primitive mentality', with a structure and orientation quite different from our own. By what he admitted to be a conscious distortion, he presented a savage whose thought consisted almost entirely of the fusion of what *we* see as the qualities, and properties, of things; whose language was often the scarcely-transformed representation of direct, sensuous experience. Some more recent writers have tried to refine upon his notions by saying that, for primitives, the distance between subject and object, knower and known, seems less than among ourselves. These are attempts at a compromise between the old-fashioned literalism of our interpretations, which often made savages seem childish and irrational, and Lévy-Bruhl's somewhat impressionistic accounts of primitive peoples as being 'utterly mystical' in the apprehension of reality. It is not true, of course, that primitive peoples are less practical and logical than ourselves in the ordinary course of their daily lives. All value empirical knowledge, and exercise skill, foresight and common-sense; and to this extent we understand their reasoning without effort. We should not therefore suppose that all thought attempts to become like our own, as our own appears when we reflect upon it as 'thought'—either concerned, that is, with the logical demonstration of truth and error, *or* meditative and imaginative. If we suppose this, we introduce into primitive thought distinctions which we have arrived at by elaborate systematic reflection upon our own. We do not see it as it is.

The study of some primitive thought, then, reminds us that it is not always appropriate to suppose that metaphorical and literal interpretations of experience are, in the very nature of thinking, distinct; it is only when we, unlike most primitive peoples, think about thought, that we begin to make such distinctions. It is in the apprehension of analogies that much non-scientific thought seems to lie—analogies such as, for example, sky is to earth as God is to man, as rain is to crops, as high is to low, and so on. Such systems

of analogy vary from society to society, and they are accessible to anthropological study. It is only when we take them to be other than they are—to assert the identity of rain and God, for example, and not an analogical relationship between them—that we begin to wonder how reasonable beings could come to ‘believe’ them.

THE FINALY CASE AND THE CHURCH

ROLAND HILL

NO event has so stirred up the dormant forces of anti-clericalism, anti-semitism and nationalism in post-war France as has the recent *Affaire Finaly*. The fate of two Jewish children, Robert and Gerard Finaly, who were baptised and taken to Spain by their Catholic protectors when the court had ordered that they should be given up to their Jewish relatives, have become a national scandal comparable to the Dreyfus affair. The Church and individual Catholics have been the targets of bitter attacks in the French press and radio, and the old cleavage between Catholic and anti-Catholic Frenchmen, barely healed in the last war and in the changed political atmosphere since 1945, seems to have opened up again.

The facts of the case are briefly these: The Jewish doctor, Fritz Finaly, and his wife, who had found refuge in France after the Nazi occupation of Austria, were arrested in Grenoble by the Gestapo on February 14, 1944. They were sent to Buchenwald concentration camp where they were killed in the gas chamber. Shortly before their deportation they had entrusted their two children, then aged two and three years, to the Sisters of St Vincent de Paul. The mother superior of that convent was unable to keep them and approached the Sisters of Notre Dame de Sion who handed the children to Mlle Brun, the head of the municipal orphanage, who was already hiding ten other Jewish children. When threatened by her own employers that she must hand these children to the Gestapo or leave her post, Mlle Brun installed them in an old château at Vif, in the country, where she looked after them like a mother, and