

of stories and myths of some of the Southwestern American Indians, the Navaho and Apache, who were originally hunting peoples who came down into an area where agriculture had been developed and took on an agricultural system of life. In their stories of the beginnings, there is typically an amusing episode where the shamans are disgraced and the priests take over. The shamans say something that offends the sun, and the sun disappears, and then they say, "Oh, I can bring the sun back." Then they do all their tricks, and these are cynically, comically described. But their tricks don't bring the sun back. The shamans are reduced, then, to a shaman society, a kind of clown society. They are magicians of a special power, but their power is now subordinate to a larger society.

MOYERS: We talked about the effect of the hunting plain on mythology, this space clearly bounded by a circular horizon with the great dome of heaven above. But what about the people who lived in the dense foliage of the jungle? There's no dome of the sky, no horizon, no sense of perspective—just trees, trees, trees.

CAMPBELL: Colin Turnbull tells an interesting story of bringing a pygmy who had never been out of the forest onto a mountaintop. Suddenly they came from the trees onto the hill, and there was an extensive plain stretching out before them. The poor little fellow was utterly terrified. He had no way of judging the perspective or distance. He thought that the animals grazing on the plain in the distance were just across the way and were so small that they were ants. He was just totally baffled, and rushed back into the forest.

MOYERS: Geography has done a great deal to shape our culture and our idea of religion. The god of the desert is not the god of the plains—

CAMPBELL: —or the god of the rain forest—the gods, plural, of the rain forest. When you're out in the desert with one sky and one world, then you might have one deity, but in a jungle, where there's no horizon and you never see anything more than

ten or twelve yards away from you, you don't have that idea anymore.

MOYERS: So are they projecting their idea of God on the world?

CAMPBELL: Yes, of course.

MOYERS: Their geography shapes their image of divinity, and then they project it out and call it God.

CAMPBELL: Yes. The god idea is always culturally conditioned, always. And even when a missionary brings what he thinks is God, his god, that god is transformed in terms of what the people are able to think of as a divinity.

There is an amusing story about a British missionary in Hawaii who was paid a visit by a priestess of the goddess Pele. Now, a priestess of Pele would be, in a sense, a minor incarnation of Pele herself. So the missionary was actually talking to a goddess there. He said, "I have come to bring you the message of God." And the priestess said, "Oh, that's your god, Pele's mine."

MOYERS: Is the idea "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" purely a Hebraic idea?

CAMPBELL: I've not found it anywhere else.

MOYERS: Why only one god?

CAMPBELL: This I do not understand. I do understand the accent on the local social deity for people who are living in a desert. Your whole commitment is to the society which is protecting you. Society is always patriarchal. Nature is always matrilineal.

MOYERS: Do you think goddess religions emerged because in the domestication of the human race women played such a dominant role in the planting and harvesting activities of those early societies?

CAMPBELL: There is no doubt about it. At that moment, the



women become the most important members of the society in terms of magic power.

MOYERS: It had been the man hunting—

CAMPBELL: Yes, and now it moves over into the woman. Since her magic is that of giving birth and nourishment, as the earth does, her magic supports the magic of the earth. In the early tradition, she is the first planter. It is only later, when the plow is invented in the high culture systems, that the male takes over the agricultural lead again. And then the simulation of coitus, with the plow plowing the earth, becomes a dominant myth figure.

MOYERS: So these differing approaches to myth are what you mean by the "way of the animal powers," the "way of the seeded earth," the "way of the celestial lights," and the "way of man."

CAMPBELL: These have to do with the symbolic system through which the normal human condition of the time is symbolized and organized and given knowledge of itself.

MOYERS: And what it values?

CAMPBELL: The values will be a result of the conditions that govern life. For instance, the hunter is always directed outward to the animal. His life depends on the relationship to the animals. His mythology is outward turned. But the planting mythology, which has to do with the cultivation of the plant, the planting of the seed, the death of the seed, so to say, and the coming of the new plant, is more inward turned. With the hunters, the animals inspired the mythology. When a man wanted to gain power and knowledge, he would go into the forest and fast and pray, and an animal would come and teach him.

With the planters, the plant world is the teacher. The plant world is identical in its life sequences with the life of man. So you see, there's an inward relationship there.

MOYERS: What happened to the mythic imagination as human

beings turned from the hunting of animals to the planting of seeds?

CAMPBELL: There is a dramatic and total transformation, not just of the myths but of the psyche itself, I think. You see, an animal is a total entity, he is within a skin. When you kill that animal, he's dead—that's the end of him. There is no such thing as a self-contained individual in the vegetal world. You cut a plant, and another sprout comes. Pruning is helpful to a plant. The whole thing is just a continuing inbeingness.

Another idea associated with the tropical forests is that out of rot comes life. I have seen wonderful redwood forests with great, huge stumps from enormous trees that were cut down decades ago. Out of them are coming these bright new little children who are part of the same plant. Also, if you cut off the limb of a plant, another one comes. Tear off the limb of an animal, and unless it is a certain kind of lizard, it doesn't grow again.

So in the forest and planting cultures, there is a sense of death as not death somehow, that death is required for new life. And the individual isn't quite an individual, he is a branch of a plant. Jesus uses this image when he says, "I am the vine, and you are the branches." That vineyard image is a totally different one from the separate animals. When you have a planting culture, there is a fostering of the plant that is going to be eaten.

MOYERS: What stories did this experience of the planter inspire?

CAMPBELL: The motif of the plants that you eat having grown from the cut-up and buried body of a sacrificed deity or ancestral personage occurs all over the place, but particularly in the Pacific cultures.

These plant stories actually penetrate what we normally think of as a hunting area in the Americas. The North American culture is a very strong example of the interaction of hunting and planting cultures. The Indians were chiefly hunters, but they



were also growing maize. One Algonquin story about the origin of maize tells of a boy who has a vision. In this vision, he sees a young man who comes to him with green plumes on his head and who invites the boy to a wrestling match. He wins and comes again and wins again, and so on. But one day the young man tells the boy that next time the boy must kill him and bury him and take care of the place where he has been buried. The boy then does what he has been told to do, and kills and buries the beautiful youth. In time, the boy returns and sees the corn growing where the plumed young man has been buried, or planted, you might say.

Now, this boy had been concerned for his father, who was a hunter but old. The boy was wondering whether there might be some other way to get food besides hunting. The vision came to him out of his intention. And the boy says to his father at the end of the tale, "We no longer need to go out hunting now." That must have been a moment of great awakening for these people.

MOYERS: But the idea is that the plumed man in the vision has to die and be buried before the plant can grow from the remains of his body. Does that story run through one myth after another in the planting cultures?

CAMPBELL: It does. A duplicate of this story comes up throughout Polynesia, for instance. There is a girl who loves to bathe in a certain pool. A great eel is also swimming around in the pool, and day after day he scrapes across her thigh as she is bathing. Then one fine day he turns into a young man and becomes her lover for a moment. Then he goes away and comes back again, and goes away and comes back again. But one time when he comes, he says, just as the plumed man in the Algonquin story had said, "Now, next time I come to visit you, you must kill me, cut off my head, and bury it." She does so, and there grows from the buried head a coconut tree. And when you pick a coconut, you can see it is just the size of a head. You can even see eyes and the little nodules that simulate the head. If we are

to believe what most of our American anthropologists tell us, there is no connection between the Pacific cultures and the cultures of middle America from which our planting myths have come.

MOYERS: So we have the same story springing up in cultures unrelated to each other. What does that say about it?

CAMPBELL: That is one of the amazing things about these myths. I have been dealing with this stuff all my life, and I am still stunned by the accuracies of the repetitions. It is almost like a reflex in another medium of the same thing, the same story. Instead of corn, or maize, it's a coconut.

MOYERS: The stunning thing to me about these stories from the planting cultures is that for the first time we have people arising from the womb of the earth. The womb keeps appearing again and again and again in so many of these stories.

CAMPBELL: It is particularly conspicuous in legends of the American Southwest, where the first people come out of the earth. They come forth out of the hole of emergence, and that becomes the sacred place, the world axial center. It is associated with a certain mountain.

The story is that there were people down in the depths who weren't yet really people, who didn't even know they were people. One of them breaks a taboo that nobody knew was a taboo, and the floodwaters begin coming in. They have to ascend, to get out by a rope through the hole in the ceiling of the world—and then they are in another world. In one story, the shamans become aggressive in their thinking and insult the sun and moon, which then disappear, so everybody is in the dark.

The shamans say, oh, they can get the sun back, and they swallow trees and bring the trees out through their bellies, and they bury themselves in the ground with only their eyes sticking out, and do all these great shamanic magic tricks. But the tricks don't work. The sun doesn't come back.

Then the priests say, well now, let the people try. And the



people consist of all the animals. These animal people stand in a circle, and they dance and they dance, and it is the dance of the people that brings forth the hill that grows then into a mountain and becomes the elevated center of the world, out of which all the human people come.

And then comes an interesting thing, just as in the Old Testament—all we have heard is the story of this particular group, the Navaho, let's say. But when they come out, the Pueblo people are already there. It's like the problem of where did Adam's sons get their wives? There is the creation of these people, and the rest of the world is somehow there by another accident.

MOYERS: This is the idea of the Chosen People.

CAMPBELL: Sure it is. Every people is a chosen people in its own mind. And it is rather amusing that their name for themselves usually means mankind. They have odd names for the other people—like Funny Face, or Twisted Nose.

MOYERS: The Indians from the northeast woods of America told of a woman who fell from the sky and gave birth to twins. The Indians of the Southwest told a story of twins born to a virgin mother.

CAMPBELL: Yes. The woman from the sky originally comes from a hunting-culture base, and the woman of the earth comes from the planting culture. The twins represent two contrary principles, but quite different contrary principles from those represented by Cain and Abel in the Bible. In the Iroquois story, one twin is Sprout or Plant Boy, and the other is named Flint. Flint so damages his mother when he is born that she dies. Now, Flint and Plant Boy represent the two traditions. Flint is used for the blade to kill animals, so the twin named Flint represents the hunting tradition, and Plant Boy, of course, represents the planting principle.

In the biblical tradition, the plant boy is Cain and the flint boy is Abel, who is really a herder rather than a hunter. So in

the Bible, you have the herder against the planter, and the planter is the one who is abominated. This is the myth of hunting people or herding people who have come into a planting-culture world and denigrate the people whom they have conquered.

MOYERS: It sounds like a great range war in the old West.

CAMPBELL: Yes. In the biblical tradition, it is always the second son who is the winner, the good one. The second son is the newcomer—namely the Hebrews. The older son, or the Canaanites, were living there before. Cain represents the agriculturally based city position.

MOYERS: These stories explain a great deal about contemporary conflicts, don't they?

CAMPBELL: Yes, they do indeed. It's fascinating to compare the coming together of an invading planting society or an invading hunting or herding people in conflict with planters. The counterparts are exactly the same across the planet—two systems in conflict and conjunction.

MOYERS: You said that the woman who fell from the sky was already pregnant and the woman who gave birth on earth to twins was already pregnant. What does it say to you that in so many of these cultures there are legends of virgins giving birth to heroes who die and are resurrected?

CAMPBELL: The death and resurrection of a savior figure is a common motif in all of these legends. For example, in the story of the origin of maize, you have this benign figure who appears to the young boy in a vision, and gives him maize, and dies. The plant comes from his body. Somebody has had to die in order for life to emerge. I begin to see this incredible pattern of death giving rise to birth, and birth giving rise to death. Every generation has to die in order that the next generation can come.

MOYERS: You write, "Out of the rocks of fallen wood and leaves, fresh sprouts arise, from which the lesson appears to have



been that from death springs life, and out of death new birth. And the grim conclusion drawn was that the way to increase life is to increase death. Accordingly, the entire equatorial belt of this globe has been characterized by a frenzy of sacrifice—vegetable, animal and human sacrifice.”

CAMPBELL: There is a ritual associated with the men's societies in New Guinea that actually enacts the planting-society myth of death, resurrection, and cannibalistic consumption. There is a sacred field with drums going, and chants going, and then pauses. This goes on for four or five days, on and on. Rituals are boring, you know, they just wear you out, and then you break through to something else.

At last comes the great moment. There has been a celebration of real sexual orgy, the breaking of all rules. The young boys who are being initiated into manhood are now to have their first sexual experience. There is a great shed of enormous logs supported by two uprights. A young woman comes in ornamented as a deity, and she is brought to lie down in this place beneath the great roof. The boys, six or so, with the drums going and chanting going, one after another, have their first experience of intercourse with the girl. And when the last boy is with her in full embrace, the supports are withdrawn, the logs drop, and the couple is killed. There is the union of male and female again, as they were in the beginning, before the separation took place. There is the union of begetting and death. They are both the same thing.

Then the little couple is pulled out and roasted and eaten that very evening. The ritual is the repetition of the original act of the killing of a god followed by the coming of food from the dead savior. In the sacrifice of the Mass, you are taught that this is the body and blood of the Savior. You take it to you, and you turn inward, and there he works within you.

MOYERS: What is the truth to which the rituals point?

CAMPBELL: The nature of life itself has to be realized in the

acts of life. In the hunting cultures, when a sacrifice is made, it is, as it were, a gift or a bribe to the deity that is being invited to do something for us or to give us something. But when a figure is sacrificed in the planting cultures, that figure itself is the god. The person who dies is buried and becomes the food. Christ is crucified, and from his body the food of the spirit comes.

The Christ story involves a sublimation of what originally was a very solid vegetal image. Jesus is on Holy Rood, the tree, and he is himself the fruit of the tree. Jesus is the fruit of eternal life, which was on the second forbidden tree in the Garden of Eden. When man ate of the fruit of the first tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he was expelled from the Garden. The Garden is the place of unity, of nonduality of male and female, good and evil, God and human beings. You eat the duality, and you are on the way out. The tree of coming back to the Garden is the tree of immortal life, where you know that I and the Father are one.

Getting back into that Garden is the aim of many a religion. When Yahweh threw man out of the Garden, he put two cherubim at the gate, with a flaming sword between. Now, when you approach a Buddhist shrine, with the Buddha seated under the tree of immortal life, you will find at the gate two guardians—those are the cherubim, and you're going between them to the tree of immortal life. In the Christian tradition, Jesus on the cross is on a tree, the tree of immortal life, and he is the fruit of the tree. Jesus on the cross, the Buddha under the tree—these are the same figures. And the cherubim at the gate—who are they? At the Buddhist shrines you'll see one has his mouth open, the other has his mouth closed—fear and desire, a pair of opposites. If you're approaching a garden like that, and those two figures there are real to you and threaten you, if you have fear for your life, you are still outside the garden. But if you are no longer attached to your ego existence, but see the ego existence as a function of a larger, eternal totality, and you favor the larger against the smaller, then you won't be afraid of those two figures, and you will go through.



We're kept out of the Garden by our own fear and desire in relation to what we think to be the goods of our life.

MOYERS: Have all men at all times felt some sense of exclusion from an ultimate reality, from bliss, from delight, from perfection, from God?

CAMPBELL: Yes, but then you also have moments of ecstasy. The difference between everyday living and living in those moments of ecstasy is the difference between being outside and inside the Garden. You go past fear and desire, past the pair of opposites.

MOYERS: Into harmony?

CAMPBELL: Into transcendence. This is an essential experience of any mystical realization. You die to your flesh and are born into your spirit. You identify yourself with the consciousness and life of which your body is but the vehicle. You die to the vehicle and become identified in your consciousness with that of which the vehicle is the carrier. That is the God.

What you get in the vegetation traditions is this notion of identity behind the surface display of duality. Behind all these manifestations is the one radiance, which shines through all things. The function of art is to reveal this radiance through the created object. When you see the beautiful organization of a fortunately composed work of art, you just say, "Aha!" Somehow it speaks to the order in your own life and leads to the realization of the very things that religions are concerned to render.

MOYERS: That death is life, and life is death, and that the two are in accord?

CAMPBELL: That you have to balance between death and life—they are two aspects of the same thing, which is being, becoming.

MOYERS: And that is in all of these stories?

CAMPBELL: All of them. I know no story in which death is

rejected. The old idea of being sacrificed is not what we think at all. The Mayan Indians had a kind of basketball game in which, at the end, the captain of the winning team was sacrificed on the field by the captain of the losing team. His head was cut off. Going to your sacrifice as the winning stroke of your life is the essence of the early sacrificial idea.

MOYERS: This idea of sacrifice, especially of the winner being sacrificed, is so foreign to our world. Our ruling motif today is winner take all.

CAMPBELL: In this Mayan ritual, the name of the game was to become worthy to be sacrificed as a god.

MOYERS: Do you think it is true that he who loses his life gains his life?

CAMPBELL: That is what Jesus says.

MOYERS: Do you believe it is true?

CAMPBELL: I do—if you lose it in the name of something. There is a report by the seventeenth-century Jesuit missionaries in eastern Canada of a young Iroquois brave who has just been captured by an enemy tribe. He is being brought to be tortured to death. The Northeastern Indians had a custom of systematic torture of their male captives. The ordeal was to be suffered without flinching. That was the final test of real manhood. And so this young Iroquois is being brought in to endure this horrible ordeal; but, to the Jesuits' amazement, it is as though he were coming to celebrate his wedding. He is decorated and loudly singing. His captors are treating him as though they were his welcoming hosts and he their honored guest. And he is playing the game along with them, knowing all the while to what end he is being conducted. The French priests describing the occasion are simply appalled by what they interpret as the heartless mockery of such a reception, characterizing the youth's captors as a company of savage brutes. But no! Those people were to be the young brave's sacrificial priests. This was to be a sacrifice of the



altar and, by analogy, that boy was the like of Jesus. The French priests themselves, every day, were celebrating Mass, which is a replication of the brutal sacrifice of the cross.

There is an equivalent scene described in the apocryphal Christian Acts of John, immediately before Jesus goes to be crucified. This is one of the most moving passages in Christian literature. In the Mathew, Mark, Luke and John gospels, it is simply mentioned that, at the conclusion of the celebration of the Last Supper, Jesus and his disciples sang a hymn before he went forth. But in the Acts of John, we have a word-for-word account of the whole singing of the hymn. Just before going out into the garden at the end of the Last Supper, Jesus says to the company, "Let us dance!" And they all hold hands in a circle, and as they circle around him, Jesus sings, "Glory be to thee, Father!" To which the circling company responds, "Amen."

"Glory be to thee, Word!"

And again, "Amen."

"I would be born and I would bear!"

"Amen."

"I would eat and I would be eaten!"

"Amen."

"Thou that dancest, see what I do, for thine is this passion of the manhood, which I am about to suffer!"

"Amen."

"I would flee and I would stay!"

"Amen."

"I would be united and I would unite!"

"Amen."

"A door am I to thee that knocketh at me. . . . A way am I to thee, a wayfarer." And when the dance is ended, he walks out into the garden to be taken and crucified.

When you go to your death that way, as a god, in the knowledge of the myth, you are going to your eternal life. So what is there in that to be sad about? Let us make it magnificent—as it is. Let us celebrate it.

MOYERS: The god of death is the lord of the dance.

CAMPBELL: The god of death is at the same time the lord of sex.

MOYERS: What do you mean?

CAMPBELL: It's amazing: one after another, you discover these gods who are at once of death and of generation. The death god, Ghede, of the Haitian Voodoo tradition, is also the sex god. The Egyptian god Osiris was the judge and lord of the dead, and the lord of the regeneration of life. It is a basic theme—that which dies is born. You have to have death in order to have life.

This is the origin of the head hunt in Southeast Asia, particularly in Indonesia. The head hunt is a sacred act, a sacred killing. Before a young man can be permitted to marry and become a father, he must go forth and have his kill. Unless there is death, there cannot be birth. The significance of that is that every generation has to die in order that the next generation can come. As soon as you beget or give birth to a child, you are the dead one. The child is the new life, and you are simply the protector of that new life.

MOYERS: Your time has come.

CAMPBELL: That is why there is the deep psychological association of begetting and dying.

MOYERS: Is there some relationship between what you are saying and the fact that a parent will give his or her life for a child?

CAMPBELL: There is a magnificent essay by Schopenhauer in which he asks, how is it that a human being can so participate in the peril or pain of another that without thought, spontaneously, he sacrifices his own life to the other? How can it happen that what we normally think of as the first law of nature and self-preservation is suddenly dissolved?



In Hawaii some four or five years ago there was an extraordinary event that represents this problem. There is a place there called the Pali, where the trade winds from the north come rushing through a great ridge of mountains. People like to go up there to get their hair blown about or sometimes to commit suicide—you know, something like jumping off the Golden Gate Bridge.

One day, two policemen were driving up the Pali road when they saw, just beyond the railing that keeps the cars from rolling over, a young man preparing to jump. The police car stopped, and the policeman on the right jumped out to grab the man but caught him just as he jumped, and he was himself being pulled over when the second cop arrived in time and pulled the two of them back.

Do you realize what had suddenly happened to that policeman who had given himself to death with that unknown youth? Everything else in his life had dropped off—his duty to his family, his duty to his job, his duty to his own life—all of his wishes and hopes for his lifetime had just disappeared. He was about to die. Later, a newspaper reporter asked him, "Why didn't you let go? You would have been killed." And his reported answer was, "I couldn't let go. If I had let that young man go, I couldn't have lived another day of my life." How come?

Schopenhauer's answer is that such a psychological crisis represents the breakthrough of a metaphysical realization, which is that you and that other are one, that you are two aspects of the one life, and that your apparent separateness is but an effect of the way we experience forms under the conditions of space and time. Our true reality is in our identity and unity with all life. This is a metaphysical truth which may become spontaneously realized under circumstances of crisis. For it is, according to Schopenhauer, the truth of your life.

The hero is the one who has given his physical life to some order of realization of that truth. The concept of love your neighbor is to put you in tune with this fact. But whether you love your neighbor or not, when the realization grabs you, you may

risk your life. That Hawaiian policeman didn't know who the young man was to whom he had given himself. Schopenhauer declares that in small ways you can see this happening every day, all the time, moving life in the world, people doing selfless things to and for each other.

MOYERS: So when Jesus says, "Love thy neighbor as thyself," he is saying in effect, "Love thy neighbor because he is yourself."

CAMPBELL: There is a beautiful figure in the Oriental tradition, the bodhisattva, whose nature is boundless compassion, and from whose fingertips there is said to drip ambrosia down to the lowest depths of hell.

MOYERS: And the meaning of that?

CAMPBELL: At the very end of the *Divine Comedy*, Dante realizes that the love of God informs the whole universe down to the lowest pits of hell. That's very much the same image. The bodhisattva represents the principle of compassion, which is the healing principle that makes life possible. Life is pain, but compassion is what gives it the possibility of continuing. The bodhisattva is one who has achieved the realization of immortality yet voluntarily participates in the sorrows of the world. Voluntary participation in the world is very different from just getting born into it. That's exactly the theme of Paul's statement about Christ in his Epistle to the Philippians: that Jesus "did not think God-hood something to be held to but took the form of a servant here on the earth, even to death on the cross." That's a voluntary participation in the fragmentation of life.

MOYERS: So you would agree with Abelard in the twelfth century, who said that Jesus' death on the cross was not as ransom paid, or as a penalty applied, but that it was an act of atonement, at-one-ment, with the race.

CAMPBELL: That's the most sophisticated interpretation of why Christ had to be crucified, or why he elected to be crucified. An earlier one was that the sin in the Garden of Eden had