

An Introduction to the Religious Thought of C. G. Jung

by
Philip Sherrard

Studies in Comparative Religion, Vol. 3, No. 1. (Winter, 1969) © World Wisdom, Inc.

www.studiesincomparativereligion.com

TWO preliminary remarks must preface this paper. The first concerns the source material on which it is based. Jung had no "religion" in the commonly accepted sense of the word. He did not belong to any branch of the Christian Church, nor did he affiliate himself to any other explicit religious tradition, like Islam or Buddhism. Therefore on the face of it he did not accept any system of doctrine or dogma based on revelation and elaborated by the spiritual interpreters of the tradition in question. On the contrary, he claimed that he was a natural scientist, and that such religious ideas as he had were developed over the course of his life in relation to his empirical experience as a psychologist and the reading he undertook in order to reach an understanding of what he had experienced. If this is true, then his religious thought was in a continual state of growth and modification. It was fluctuating, rather than something stable. What he perceived or believed at certain times might be altered or even reversed by subsequent experience and reading. Therefore one would risk being unfair to Jung if one were to extract concepts and thoughts from the developing body of his work and to say that these represent his religious ideas. One would have to make sure that they were concepts or thoughts he maintained up to the end, and did not reject or modify out of recognition. Consequently, for the purposes of this short paper, it has seemed best to confine attention to his autobiography, *Memoirs, Dreams, Reflections* (London 1963), put together during the last years of his life and expressing his ideas at their most mature and most intimate level. This has the advantage that the English edition at least of this book has been supplied with a glossary giving, through extracts from earlier works, explanations of his central psychological concepts and terminology.

The second remark can be put in the form of a question: to what extent are we entitled to speak of "religious thought" at all where Jung is concerned? Religious ideas normally speaking derive from and refer to a world or truths that are regarded as supernatural or meta-physical. They are to do with metaphysical realities. It is not that Jung refused to discuss problems commonly called religious. It is even stated in the introduction to his autobiography that he "explicitly declared his allegiance to Christianity". But, as the introduction continues, he looked at religious questions from "the standpoint of psychology, deliberately setting a bound between it and the theological approach". In fact, this is an understatement, at least where intention is concerned. Jung not only sought to set a bound between psychology and theology. He denied the very basis of theological statement altogether. This he did from, as it were, both ends. First, he denied the objective existence of those metaphysical or meta-psychical realities which theological statements presuppose, and affirmed that there is no truth but purely subjective truth. "We are still a long way from understanding what it signifies", he writes (p. 15), "that nothing

has any existence unless some small—and oh, so transitory—consciousness has become aware of it". Then he denied—as a necessary consequence, it might be said, of this initial denial—that there can be any statement or comprehension at all other than the psychological. The passage is worth quoting in full, since it shows how far Jung was willing to go in rejecting the validity of the theological standpoint (at least as theologians themselves understand it), and illustrates the contradictions in which he is involved as a result. "All conceivable statements", he writes (pp. 322-323), "are made by the psyche . . . The psyche cannot leap beyond itself. It cannot set up any absolute truths, for its own polarity determines the relativity of its statements . . . In saying this we are not expressing a value judgment, but only pointing out that the limit is very frequently overstepped ... In my effort to depict the limitations of the psyche I do not mean to imply that only the psyche exists. It is merely that, so far as perception and cognition are concerned, we cannot see beyond the psyche . . . All comprehension and all that is comprehended is in itself psychic, and to that extent we are hopelessly cooped up in an exclusively psychic world". There are, in other words, no supra-psychic realities that man can comprehend, and all so-called theological statements that pretend to derive from and refer to such realities are really no more than psychological statements (if that) invested by their authors with a status which in the nature of things they cannot possess.

As is so often the case with those over-anxious to deny a point of view other than their own, Jung in fact is led into a position which contradicts what he wishes to affirm. In saying that "every point of view is necessarily relative" (p. 198), and that "all conceivable statements are made by the psyche", and that "all comprehension and all that is comprehended is in itself psychic", clearly what he wishes to emphasize is that no theological or metaphysical statement has the significance which a theologian or metaphysician would claim for it. It must in the nature of things be subjective, relative, psychic, and refer only to subjective, relative, and psychic realities. We are exclusively doomed to this relative, subjective, psychic world. But if that is the case, Jung's statements themselves are not exempt from these conditions. They too are relative, subjective, psychic. In that case, their categorical appearance is all bluff. Objectively, as enunciations of general truths they can have no significance. To say that "every point of view is necessarily relative" is virtually a meaningless thing to say, since, taken at its face value, then it itself represents but a relative point of view and so cannot apply as a general statement valid for every point of view. For a statement to be valid for every point of view there must be some point of view which is not relative but capable of embracing all points of view. Similarly, if all comprehension and all that is comprehended is in itself psychic, then Jung's statement that "all conceivable statements are made by the psyche" is again virtually meaningless. It has no status at all as a general truth, applicable to all statements, but simply represents Jung's own relative and subjective point of view. It could only have a general validity applicable to all statements on condition that it is true in a non-relative and non-subjective manner. But this, Jung says, it is impossible for any statement to be. Why, then, does Jung make this statement in such categorical terms, as if he were making a pronouncement which applies to all statements? Why, in effect, is he issuing a dogma—one, it is true, designed to undermine the traditional basis of religious dogma, but no less a dogma on that account?

The answer would seem to be fairly clear. Indeed, it is precisely this, that he did wish to undermine the traditional basis of religious dogma, as well as of all theological thought

of the traditional kind. He wanted to clear the ground, establish a kind of *tabula rasa* on which to build afresh. So long as the great structure of Christian doctrine and dogma, regarded as sacred and inviolate, stood in the way, his own ideas could make little progress. But if he could show that this structure shared in all the necessary limitations of human thought as he conceived them, and was in fact essentially subjective and relative and psychic, its authority would be shaken. It would be seen to have no greater claims to validity and belief than any other system of thought. Indeed, it might even have fewer claims than other such systems, since these could often point to what is called empirical evidence in their support, whereas many of the dogmatic formulations of Christianity appear to flout such empirical evidence. Jung's task had therefore a twofold direction. First he had to demonstrate that the claim of theology and dogma to possess a kind of eternal and objective status independent of the judgment and even the consciousness of particular individuals was groundless, and that in the nature of things they could possess no greater or more significant—less relative and subjective—status than any other thought-forms or mental formulations; and this he attempted to do in the way we have shown, by insisting that all statements are made by the psyche and that where our understanding is concerned we are hopelessly cooped up in an exclusively psychic world. And second, he then had to create his own system of thought, and to put it forward not as the truth in a theological sense, but simply as a series of tentative, limited observations based upon his purely pragmatic investigations of the human psyche. In other words, his system of thought could claim validity not because it was metaphysical, but precisely because it was not metaphysical; and he frequently asserts that unlike the theologians he does not overstep the limit, but bases what he has to say, individual and relative as it is, on solid scientific ground. "My *Answer to Job*", he writes (pp. 206-207), "was meant to be no more than the utterance of a single individual . . . I was far from wanting to enunciate a metaphysical truth. Yet the theologians tax me with that very thing, because theological thinkers are so used to dealing with eternal truths that they know no other kinds. When the physicist says the atom is of such and such a composition, and then he sketches a model of it, he does not intend to express any-thing like an eternal truth. But theologians do not understand the natural sciences and, particularly, psychological thinking".

This is very disarming, and one might well be taken in by it were it not for the fact that when it comes to the point Jung is quite as capable of making categorical statements lacking all so-called empirical basis as the most dogmatic theologian. Those few already cited could be matched by others occurring throughout the book. Indeed, it is quite clear from a reading of this book that Jung's thought is essentially religious. It may even be said that he regarded himself as the apostle of a new religion, one that should replace for western man the exhausted formulae of Christianity, and one that in this scientific age would stand far greater chances of acceptance if its own tenets could be presented in the guise of scientific theory, underpinned by solid psychological observation. Moreover, there seems to be little doubt that Jung regarded his mission as God-given. He was, it may be recalled, the only son of a Protestant pastor, and eight of his uncles were also pastors. Religion, one might say, was in his blood. But it was not the religion of his father, or indeed of Christianity as the Church presented it. This religion was in many ways abhorrent to him. In his youth, he tells us (p. 55) the Church was a place of torment for him, and not until the age of thirty could he confront *Mater Ecclesia* without a sense

of oppression (p. 30). Though greatly traveled, he could never go to Rome, and when in old age he at last decided to make the journey he had a fainting fit while buying the tickets and had to turn back (p. 269). But this dislike of the Church and its theology did not mean that he was therefore an atheist. On the contrary—and it is here one can discern to what extent he felt his mission was God-given—he considered that God disliked the Church and its theology just as much as he did, if not more. When still quite young, he had a terrifying and "sinful" thought. He thought of God sitting high up in the clouds on a golden throne and excreting a large turd which fell on the cathedral of his home-town and shattered it (p. 50). Later, in relation to this experience, he writes (p. 98): "Now I understood the deepest meaning of my earlier experience: God Himself had disavowed theology and the Church founded upon it". Therefore in undermining and denying the basis of traditional Christian theology and in propagating his own new gospel in its place, Jung did not feel he was acting in an arbitrary and irresponsible or godless manner. He felt he was carrying out the will of God. He had been entrusted by God with this mission: to make clear to men what God had disavowed and why He had disavowed it; to save God Himself, and man with Him, from the theology and the Church which smothered them, and to proclaim a new religion of life to take the place of a moribund Christianity.

It is this that entitles us to speak of Jung's ideas as religious without doing them any violence. The main lines of his thought, his central concepts and images, constitute what really amounts to a theology and a mythology. Moreover, he did not himself regard this theology and mythology as anti-Christian. As we have seen, he professed his allegiance to Christianity. He thought Christianity of central importance for western man (p. 200). But he considered it needed to be "seen in a new light, in accordance with the changes wrought by the contemporary spirit". Otherwise, he writes, "it stands apart from the times, and has no effect on man's wholeness" (pp. 200-201). In effect, he thought Christianity had concentrated too much on the ideal, bright, and good side of man's nature, and this at the expense of the non-ideal, dark, and sinful side. When he was a young boy he had a dream of a phallus on a throne in an underground cavern. This had made it difficult for him to accept the conventional image of the Christian Saviour. "Lord Jesus never became quite real for me", he writes (p. 27), "never quite acceptable, never quite lovable, for again and again I would think of his underground counterpart, a frightful revelation which had been accorded to me without my seeking it". According to one interpretation of the dream the phallus represented the dark side of Jesus. Later it was revealed to him as "the breath of life", the "creative impulse" (p. 36). He thought that God, who had disavowed the theology and the Church that had concentrated on the ideal and good side of man, was now wanting "to evoke . . . his darkness and ungodliness" (p. 77). As we had, through traditional Christianity, failed to overcome or escape our anxiety, bad conscience, guilt, compulsion, unconsciousness and instinctuality from the bright, idealistic side, "then perhaps we shall have better luck by approaching the problem from the dark, biological side" (p. 149). In a way, one might say that Jung regarded it as his task to redeem the Devil. The Devil in Christian thought had come to represent everything that was evil, godless, instinctive, dark in life. All this was regarded as the opposite of God, Who was exclusively good, rational, bright. Consequently Christians had concentrated on suppressing all these "diabolic" aspects of themselves and on developing only their good, rational, bright aspects. The result had been the warping and sterility of human life. Now these "diabolic" elements needed to be released and

integrated into man's experience of himself. Moreover, they must be seen not as belonging to the Devil as the enemy of God, but as aspects of God's own nature. What traditional Christianity had foisted on to the Devil as a figure diametrically opposed to God and had driven out into the wilderness as a kind of scapegoat, must now be seen to have its source in God. The Devil is also God. God is "the dark author of all created things, who, alone was responsible for the sufferings of the world" (p. 97). The chthonic spirit, the spirit indicated in the dream of the underground phallus is the "other face of God", the "dark side of the God-image" (p. 163). It is God who has created the world and its sins (p. 206), and in failing to recognize this, in failing to recognize that God is the author of evil just as much as of the good, Christianity had promulgated a false idea of God whose acceptance had resulted in the gradual atrophy of man's creative life. Now God was calling for His dark evil side to be recognized and accepted once more, so that the dark evil side of human nature could also be recognized and accepted. Both God and man were seeking to be liberated from imprisonment in the good, ideal, bright, rational side of themselves, so that they could again function in their original wholeness. It was this call for liberation on the part of God and man to which Jung felt compelled to respond. It was this that constituted his religious mission and it was to the realization of this mission that he devoted his creative life and developed his religious thought and mythology.

From an autobiographical and historical point of view, Jung's religious thought may be said to have begun as a reaction against the type of Protestant Christianity represented by his father, and then, by extension, against the extreme rationalism of the nineteenth-century western world. This Christianity seemed to amount to a more or less blind adherence to various articles of faith which one never questioned and which effectively cut one off from any real experience either of man or God. "The arch sin of faith, it seemed to me", he wrote (p. 98), "was that it forestalled experience". Together with the passive acceptance of this untested and un-lived religious dogma went an elementary moral code based on a clear-cut and equally unquestioned opposition between good and evil, black and white. Living the Christian life seemed to consist solely in maintaining faith in this abstract bundle of Christian precept by turning a deaf ear to everything that assailed it, and in conforming to the prescribed moral code. It was a mixture of mental bigotry and moral will-power. Nor did the rationalism of current nineteenth-century scientific thought, against which men like Jung's father *were* so stubbornly opposed, seem any more satisfactory. This too seemed solely a device for shutting man off from any living contact with real life. The attempt to dominate everything by the reason seemed but to serve the secret purpose of placing one at a safe distance from real experience and "of substituting for psychic reality an apparently secure, artificial, but merely two-dimensional conceptual world in which the reality of life is well covered up by so-called clear concepts". Both the intellectual idealism and ethical dualism of Protestant Christianity and the naive rationalism of nineteenth-century science seemed to leave out of account and provide no explanation for those realities of which his youthful visions and experiences had made him aware. They seemed to leave out of account and offer no explanation for the whole irrational, dark, primitive, "evil" side of man's nature. This he was able to perceive more objectively when at a later stage in his life he made a journey to North Africa and came into contact with the Arab world. The passage in which he speaks of this, though it includes expressions and ideas deriving from a more fully

formulated phase of his thought, deserves to be quoted because it demonstrates what he must have less explicitly realized when at the outset of his intellectual development he reacted against the religion of his childhood and the rationalism of modern western man. "The emotional nature of these unreflecting people (the Arabs)", he writes (pp. 230-231), "who are so much closer to life than we are exerts a strong suggestive influence upon those historical layers in ourselves which we have just overcome and left behind, or which we think we have overcome. It is like the paradise of childhood from which we imagine we have emerged, but which at the slightest provocation imposes fresh defeats upon us . . . The sight of a child or a primitive will arouse certain longings in adult, civilized persons—longings which relate to the unfulfilled desires and needs of those parts of the personality which have been blotted out of the total picture in favour of the adopted persona . . . The predominantly rationalistic European finds much that is human alien to him, and he prides himself on this without realizing that his rationality is won at the expense of his vitality, and that the primitive part of his personality is consequently condemned to a more or less underground existence ...".

Since the lifeless abstractions of the Christian faith, though supposedly referring to supernatural realities, and the two-dimensional conceptual world of the rationalists were both creations or at least appurtenances of man's everyday consciousness, and belonged to what he consciously believed or thought, Jung found it convenient to give that primitive part of the personality which modern western man had condemned to a more or less underground existence an opposite label and to call it the unconscious. This concept of the unconscious, later elaborated into the "collective unconscious", is crucial to Jung's whole system of thought, so it is important to try to get clear what he meant by it. This is not an easy task, since in spite of its crucial position in Jung's thought it nevertheless remains a somewhat vague concept. To begin with, Jung seems to have thought of the unconscious as a kind of repository of all those psychic elements and drives which have either not entered man's conscious world, or been driven out of it, suppressed, because of his inability or unwillingness to admit them on the conscious level. He first became graphically aware of it in a dream. In this dream, Jung found himself in a two-storey house. He was on the upper floor. He first descended to the ground floor, and then to the cellar, and finally down into a cave cut out in the rock beneath the house, where there were two human skulls lying among scattered bones and broken pottery (p. 155). He interpreted the dream as a kind of structural diagram of the human psyche. The upper floor where he first found himself represented the consciousness; the ground floor stood for the first level of the unconscious, while the cave itself was the world of the primitive man in every human being. This primitive and deepest part of man's unconscious psyche borders, he writes, on the animal soul, just as the caves of prehistoric times were usually inhabited by animals before men laid claim to them (p. 156). On this interpretation the dream appeared to postulate "something of an altogether *impersonal* nature" underlying the psyche (p. 157). This, Jung says, was his first inkling "of a collective *a priori* beneath the personal psyche". He took it to be "the traces of earlier modes of functioning". Later, "with increasing experience and on the basis of more reliable knowledge", he recognized these earlier modes of functioning "as forms of instinct, that is, as archetypes" (p. 157). These archetypes and forms of instinct ("archetype" and "instinct" are synonyms in Jung's terminology, and their sense must on no account be confused with that of "archetype" in the traditional Platonic meaning of the word) constitute the unconscious. He calls this

unconscious "collective" because, "unlike the personal unconscious (represented by the ground floor in the dream), it is not made up of individual and more or less unique contents but of those which are universal and of regular occurrence . . . The deeper "layers" of the psyche lose their individual uniqueness" (p. 357, note on the *Unconscious*). The collective unconscious is common to all people (pp. 136-137) and it consists of "archaic psychic components which have entered the individual psyche without any direct line of tradition" (p. 35).

This schematic representation of the psyche in the form of a house gives what one might call its vertical cross-section. But this vertical progression from lower to higher, from the cave to the upper storey, has its corresponding horizontal extension in man's actual historical evolution. Although Jung had become aware of limitations in the rationalism of nineteenth-century scientific thought, he did not on that account reject its theories, or at least all of them; and one of these theories which he accepted totally and interwove with his own thought so intimately that one can say that they stand or fall together, was the Darwinian theory of man's evolution. This theory he "married" to his own conception of the human psyche, and particularly of the unconscious. That is to say, he thought that the various layers of the human psyche had their counterparts in the various phases of man's evolution through the centuries on earth. The conscious aspect of the psyche represented man's present phase of evolution; those aspects of the psyche which in the course of his evolution western man has condemned to a more or less underground existence correspond to those historical layers in himself that he has overcome and left behind in the course of his evolution, but that still remain buried within him. Thus it is that the deepest level of the collective unconscious, the deepest part of man's nature, "borders on the life of the animal soul" (p. 156). This correlation of the psyche with man's evolutionary progress led him, inevitably, to reject Christian ideas of man's creation and consequently of the structure of the human psyche, and to substitute his own ideas. "If the unconscious is anything at all", he writes (p. 320), "it must consist of earlier evolutionary stages of our conscious psyche. The assumption that man in his whole glory was created on the sixth day of Creation, without any preliminary stages, is after all somewhat too simple and archaic to satisfy us nowadays. There is pretty general agreement on that score... Just as the body has an anatomical pre-history of millions of years, so also does the psychic stream. And just as the human body represents in each of its parts the result of this evolution, and everywhere still shows traces of its earlier stages—so the same may be said of the psyche. Consciousness began its evolution from an animal-like state . . .". The Christian idea of man's psyche—that man's consciousness has its roots in the Divine and that only as a consequence of his degradation and immersion in earthly and animal existence has it become obscured—would seem here to be turned on its head: human consciousness began in the world of the animals and plants and over the centuries has been gradually emerging into the light of complete evolution. Perhaps nowhere does Jung's thought appear to be more non-Christian, not to say anti-Christian, than in relation to this crucial concept, the idea of the collective unconscious.

Man's psyche, then, is made up of its conscious and its unconscious components; and although fully-evolved consciousness is the goal towards which man's life is ultimately directed, only too often his actual state of consciousness, even in this latter-day phase of his evolution, is pathetically meager. Largely through an over-development of his reason, and his refusal to admit into consciousness anything which is not rational or capable of

being rationalized, he has driven underground, suppressed, locked up in the unconscious all those primitive, irrational, instinctive contents of the psyche on which his vitality and creativeness depends. To such an extent has he done this that what one may take to be the proper relationship between consciousness and the unconscious in fully-evolved man has now been reversed; and far from man being truly aware of what he is, what he thinks he is bears little or no relationship to his total being. In fact, his true life now is not his conscious life at all, but his unconscious life. "Our unconscious existence", he writes (pp. 299-300), "is the real one and our conscious world is a kind of illusion, an apparent reality constructed for a specific purpose, like a dream which seems a reality as long as we are in it." The tenacity with which none the less modern western man clings to this conscious world, this illusion, at the expense of the unconscious world results not only in reducing his existence to a kind of shadow-play but also in chronic psychic dislocation. It is in fact the extreme resistance which the consciousness of modern western man offers to the unconscious contents of the psyche that produces the vast range of psychic disorders, both individual and collective, that characterize our time. Modern man has identified himself with what is at best but a superficial aspect of himself, and his real self lies buried within him, in the obscure substrata of the unconscious. It follows from this that if modern man is to recover his psychic health and realize what Jung calls his wholeness or complete form he must once again allow his submerged, suppressed, unconscious existence to enter his conscious world.

To this process whereby man bit by bit releases the submerged contents of his unconscious into consciousness and so achieves his wholeness of being Jung applies the term *individuation*. Individuation, the glossary states (p. 352), "means becoming a single, homogeneous being, and, in so far as individuality embraces our innermost, last, and incomparable uniqueness, it also implies becoming one's own self. We could therefore translate individuation as "coming to self-hood" or "self-realization". It must not on any account be confused with the coming of the ego into consciousness, which results simply in ego-centeredness and autoeroticism. The self, that has to be realized through individuation, comprises infinitely more than the ego. The self embraces not only the conscious, but also the unconscious psyche; and it does not simply embrace them, it is the centre of this totality, just as the ego is the centre of the conscious mind. The self is the wholeness of the personality (p. 187), that which we are, the "principle and archetype of orientation and meaning" (p. 190). It is realized through a process of self-knowledge by means of which "we approach the fundamental stratum or core of human nature where the instincts dwell . . . This core is the unconscious and its contents" (p. 305). Through self-knowledge the psyche is transformed by changing the relationship between the ego, or human consciousness in the ordinary restricted sense, and the contents of the unconscious. What was before hidden and forced underground is now brought out into the open and liberated. In this psychic transformation what Jung calls the *anima* (or, in woman, the *animus*) plays a vital part. The *anima is* in a sense the transforming instrument, the go-between operating between the conscious and the unconscious world. She is a kind of psychopompos, establishing the relationship with the unconscious. Related to the unconscious in this way, she has, like the unconscious, a strongly historical character. "As the personification of the unconscious she goes back into prehistory, and embodies the contents of the past. She provides the individual with those elements that he ought to know about his prehistory. To the individual, the *anima is* all life that has been

in the past and is still alive in him" (p. 267). She functions thus as a bridge or a door, leading into the unconscious. There, in the unconscious, she produces a mysterious animation, and gives visible form to ancestral traces, the collective contents (p. 183). Like a medium, she gives these contents a chance to manifest themselves. This they do in terms of images and myths. Images and myths are not human inventions. They are the spontaneous forms in which the unconscious reveals itself. Projected by the unconscious into the *anima* they can be grasped by the consciousness. Received in the consciousness, and there interpreted, they provide the means through which the contents of the unconscious are released into the consciousness. It is through myth and symbol that individuation is achieved. Through them, man can begin to live all those phases of his evolutionary past that are still present within him. Through them too he comes into contact with his primitive instinctive life, with those pre-existent dynamic factors which ultimately govern the ethical decisions of his consciousness (p. 305). Consciousness and unconscious are thus brought into relationship and harmony. Man reaches the goal of his psychic development, represented by the self. He achieves his wholeness.

These notions of the unconscious, the *anima*, and the process of individuation could be derived, Jung claimed, from empirical observation of his own and other people's psychic activity, although, as he admits (p. 192), psychology is subject far more than any other science to the personal bias of the observer. In fact, he seems to have arrived at them after a lengthy and dramatic confrontation with his own unconscious (see chapter VI), a confrontation which lasted over some eight years (1912-1920) and on which he embarked after his split with Freud. Hence it could be maintained that these notions are purely scientific notions and do not enter into the sphere of religious ideas at all. But they not only are so embedded in his religious ideas that it is impossible to speak of the latter without including them; they also—and this is more important—presuppose the acceptance of certain ideas which in this context one can only call religious. This is particularly true where the process of individuation is concerned. The process of individuation, or psychic transformation, through which the contents of the unconscious are released into the consciousness depends entirely on the understanding and interpretation of the myths and symbols in which these contents have revealed themselves to the consciousness. Their meaning and significance must be known and recognized. If they are not understood and interpreted there is danger of miscarriage and the whole process of psychic development is in danger of failing or at least of being arrested. This means that before one can successfully complete the process of psychic transformation one must already be in possession of certain *a priori* principles of understanding and interpretation in the light of which one can give significance to the myths and images which the *anima* bears from the unconscious to the consciousness. Without these principles, one is simply working in the dark. There is no objective pattern of meaning, nothing according to which one can read the signs in which the unconscious is urgently seeking to transmit its messages. The process of individuation therefore pre-supposes the acceptance of certain ideas, certain principles of understanding, which cannot themselves be derived from empirical observation but which must be applied as it were *ab extra* to the psychological process that is being observed. This is an inescapable condition of individuation. Its implications are considerable. They lead directly into the sphere of what in this context can only be called religious ideas.

Jung already recognized this, though perhaps not clearly, at quite an early stage in his

career. His interest in mythology started before his own personal confrontation with the unconscious. It started, he writes (p. 158), in 1909, when he "read . . . through a mountain of mythological material, then through Gnostic writers . . ."; and it is evident that already the basic principles according to which he began to interpret the significance of the fantasies he experienced during his long personal confrontation with the unconscious were derived from his reading at this time. But after his personal confrontation, the need to find an objective standard of reference, a structure of *a priori* ideas allowing him to interpret the significance of the myths and images thrown up by the unconscious, became far more pressing. To understand the fantasies arising from this confrontation, he had, he writes (p. 192), "to find evidence for the historical prefiguration of my inner experiences". He had to discover where the premises underlying his experiences had already occurred in history. Unless he could do this, he writes (p. 192), he would never have been able to substantiate his ideas, since a psychologist depends in the highest degree upon historical and literary parallels if he wishes to exclude at least the crudest errors in judgment. In this crucial quest, Jung once more turned to the Gnostics. Between 1918 and 1926 he again "seriously studied the Gnostic writers, for they too had been confronted with the primal world of the unconscious" (p. 192). Whether it was because they provided a confirmation and elucidation of Jung's own personal experiences and intuitions, or whether it was because they consciously or unconsciously began increasingly to condition those experiences and intuitions themselves, there is no doubt that it was in the central religious ideas of the Gnostic writers that he found that objective pattern of meaning, that framework of *a priori* principles of understanding and interpretation, according to which he evaluated the significance of the myths and images not only of his own and his patients' collective unconscious but also of the various religious systems in which they had in the past been enshrined. They were the historical configuration for which he sought; and having discovered them and accepted them, he from then on applied them with faithful conformity in his interpretation both of the dreams and fantasies he encountered in the course of his professional work and of such Christian and Biblical themes as the dogma of the Trinity or the story of Job. He also applied them in his interpretation of alchemical symbolism.

Jung's interest in alchemical symbolism seems to have arisen directly out of his reading of the Gnostics. Though the Gnostics provided him with his basic theological notions, he felt they were too remote in time to link up immediately with the psychological questions of today (p. 192). Accepting as he did the Darwinian hypothesis of evolution and applying it to the life of the psyche through pre-historical and historical times, he had to find a corresponding evolutionary progress in the symbolic patterns in which the various stages of the emerging subterranean life of the unconscious had been reflected during the last two thousand years or so—between, that is, the time when the Gnostics had "confronted the unconscious" and the years in which he had confronted it. At first he failed to discern this progress; and it seemed that the tradition which might have connected the Gnostics with the present had been severed. Finally however he thought he discovered it, in the works of the alchemists. Alchemy, he claimed (though his claim is based on little other than his desire to establish the connection) represented the historical link with Gnosticism. "Grounded in the natural philosophy of the Middle Ages, alchemy formed the bridge on the one hand into the past, to Gnosticism, and on the other into the future, to the modern psychology of the unconscious" (p. 193). In alchemy, Jung

writes (p. 196), "I had stumbled upon the historical counterpart of my psychology of the unconscious. The possibility of a comparison with alchemy, and the Uninterrupted intellectual chain back to Gnosticism, gave substance to my psychology"; and it was through the understanding of alchemical symbolism that he arrived at the central concept of his psychology: the process of individuation (p. 200). The chain was—or appeared to be—complete; and to demonstrate it Jung wrote his *Psychology and Alchemy* and his monumental *Mysterium Coniunctionis*. But this seemingly unbroken chain and its demonstration in Jung's works should not blind one to the fact that if it was the understanding of alchemical symbolism that led Jung to the central concept of his psychology, and so appeared to give it an objective authenticity, it was on the religious theories of the Gnostics that he based his understanding of alchemical symbolism itself. It was these theories that gave him his doctrinal premises. They are the ultimate key to his psychology and to the significance which he attributed not only to alchemy but also to human life in general.

We have already glanced briefly at certain of these theories, though without referring to their Gnostic antecedents. Their point of departure in Jung's case would seem to lie in his often repeated conviction that God is the author of evil and suffering as well as of good. Put in Biblical terms, God in His omniscience created everything so that the original parents of mankind—Adam and Eve—would have to sin. It was God's intention that they should sin (p. 49). This leads inescapably to the conclusion that in the final analysis God is responsible for the sins of the world (p. 206). The conventional Christian idea of God, therefore, as essentially and exclusively good, and as the author only of what is good, must be modified. God not only includes goodness in His nature; He also includes evil. He is *a complexio boni et mali*. In fact, not only good and evil are bound together in God; all opposites are bound together in Him. He is female as well as male. This Gnostic idea of a God who is the union of all opposites in a total complex form is at the basis of Jung's religious thought. In its light he refashioned the traditional Jewish and Christian idea of God. The God of the Old Testament is now shown to be a half-Satanic demiurge. The Christian Trinity is enlarged to a Quaternity, with the Devil as a holy fourth. In the account of Job's sufferings "we have a picture of God's tragic contradictoriness" (p. 206). Job is a prefiguration of Christ. He, like Christ, though to a lesser degree, is the suffering servant of God. Both had to suffer because of the sins of the world. It is God who is responsible for these sins. Because of His "guilt" in creating a world full of evil, God must perform an act of total expiation. This He does in subjecting Himself to ritual killing in the Crucifixion of Christ. It is this act of Christ that individual Christians seek to imitate in their lives. In this manner they help God atone.

From what has been said it is clear that in spite of his protests to the contrary, Jung oversteps the boundaries between psychology and theology all along the line. His claim to reject the metaphysical and to restrain himself to the psychological is merely a device for attempting to make the psychical the only legitimate metaphysic. His psychology is virtually a new religion. It is true that this religion, unlike the frankly metaphysical religions, is not concerned with the relationship between the human soul and the supra-psychic transcendent Reality that nevertheless acts intimately upon and within the human soul. It is concerned with the relationship between the consciousness and those psychic events which do not depend upon consciousness but take place on the other side of it in the darkness of the psychical hinterland. It is a religion of pure psychic immanence. It is

in confronting the soul's own immanent contents that man encounters the Divine. And this soul is simply the soul as it is, the "materialized" soul, not the soul detached and purified from "earthly" influences and contradictions. There is no question of any birth of the supra-psychical Spirit in the soul. There is only the realization of the self. Again it is true that Jung called this self the *imago Dei* in man. But in its realization man calls back the projection of his self on to a God outside or beyond him. It is not that this God is explicitly denied. It is simply that He is not any longer regarded, as He is by the metaphysical religions, as the initiator and perfecter through His deifying power of that process of psychic transformation which is completed only when God has *taken the place of the self*. For the practical purposes of the realization of the Jungian self, God is unnecessary. One need neither pray nor have faith nor require the assistance of grace. It is the self alone that is regarded as the unifying, "deifying" power, the regulator and balancer and harmonizer of the conflicting forces in man. The self, in other words, assumes in man the status and function of the Gnostic God. It is the incarnation of this God—a god who unites male and female, good and evil, in a wholeness in which all opposites are integrated. In this way man becomes his own deity. He is the final form of the Gnostic *complexio*—*Christ* and Satan in one—now destined to appear on the earth as the identity of God and man.

Set in its historical context, Jung's psychology can be seen as a much-needed protest against the simplifications of scientific rationalism. It is a plea for man to face the realities of his own inner world, to take his own path in the fulfilment of his personal created destiny, and not to barricade himself, as is so often the case, behind an abstract structure of religious or metaphysical principles whose only real function is to prevent him from ever realizing who or what he is, to prevent him from ever developing the potentialities of his own unique being. "Anyone who takes the sure road is as good as dead", he writes (p. 277), and against this death he proclaimed "the risk of inner experience, the ad-venture of the spirit" (p. 140). He sought to affirm what the mechanistic attitude of the modern western mind ignored or denied—man's deep affinities with the natural world, the world of animals and plants, the beauty of earth and sky. He wished to see the spirit of life recognized in everything, not only in man but also in inorganic matter, in metal and stone ; and he held that the phenomena of the natural world were expressions of the same energy—psychic energy, as he called it—as that which underlay the various phenomena of the human soul (p. 201). In his study of myths and symbols, he asserted against those who saw in these nothing but futile speculation or childish fantasies their prime significance as the spontaneous irreplaceable language of the human soul. "No science will ever replace myth", he wrote (p. 313), "For it is not that 'God' is a myth, but that myth is the revelation of a divine life in man". But together with, or in spite of, all this, he accepted that hypothesis of scientific rationalism which perhaps more than any other is inimical and stultifying to man's inner growth—namely, the Darwinian hypothesis of evolution. And he also accepted a "metaphysic" which by affirming the idea of a purely immanent deity led inescapably to an idea far more dangerous to human life than atheism itself—the idea of man as a naturally deified or divine creature. Man cannot take the place of God, since man's being can never attain to the essence of God. When nevertheless man tries to take the place of God, he steps over into the sphere not of God, but of the infernal powers of his own soul.

In his autobiography, Jung recounts (pp. 207-208) a dream he had quite late on in his

life. In this dream, Jung and his father enter a house. They come into a large hall which was the exact replica of the council hall of Sultan Akbar at Fatehpur Sikri. Only from its centre a steep flight of stairs ascended to a spot high up on the wall. At the top of the stairs was a small door, and Jung's father said to Jung: "Now I will lead you into the highest presence". Then he knelt down and touched his forehead to the floor. Jung imitated him, likewise kneeling, but he could not bring his forehead quite down to the floor. Meditating on this dream afterwards, Jung declares that this failure to put his forehead to the floor in the dream "discloses a thought and a premonition that have long been present inhumanity: the idea of the creature that surpasses its creator by a small but decisive factor".

In ancient Iranian literature there is a story of a primeval king, Yima, whom the highest god, Ahura Mazda, sets over the world he has made, to protect it and nourish it. This Yima does. In response to his sacrifices the gods free man and cattle from death, and water and trees from drought. They give Yima command over all lands, and also over all the demons, so he can free Ahura Mazda's creatures from evil. But in the course of time the world falls into materiality and Ahura Mazda says he will send a great winter over the earth so that no creature can live on it. Yima is told to make a fold, a kind of fortress, and there to gather the seed of all living things. This Yima does as well. Then, however, he begins to extol himself. He begins to think that all that has happened, all the great benefits that have come to the world and its creatures, has happened and have come as a result of what he is and what he has done. He begins to see himself as the real lord of creation, and to ascribe his mastery over all the powers of nature and his own being to himself, and to boast that he is the author of life and immortality. At precisely this moment his royal glory leaves him and he falls into the grip of the demons who drive him out over the face of the earth and eventually destroy him. When Yima regards himself, and what he is in his own created existence, as self-sufficient, and so feels that he is relieved of all need to look for true being beyond himself, he relegates his god and creator, Ahura Mazda, to the realm of the unnecessary. He virtually proclaims himself his own creator. It is at this point of self-assertion that he falls into the power of the demons that eventually destroy him.

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Jung's own thought, culminating in the idea of the creature that surpasses its creator by a small but decisive factor, attains an identical point of self-assertion, with all the disastrous consequences this has for the integrity of human life.