
An Introduction to Jung's Psychology: Religion and Individuation

Contributed by Frieda Fordham

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Chapter 4: Religion and the Individuation Process

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We think ourselves more rational to-day, and more tolerant, or rather we did so until those modern versions of religious persecution arose, which were disguised as political necessities. There was scarcely any hiding the fact that, for instance, in Germany 'a religious spirit' expressed almost openly as the worship of Wotan, with all its pagan accompaniments, supplied some of the dynamic energy that permeated the Nazi movement,(1) just as 'a religious spirit' also

1. The Nazi German youth movement celebrated the solstice and sacrificed sheep. An evangelical clergyman, dressed in S.A. uniform and top, boots, in a funeral address, sped the deceased on his journey to Hades, and directed him to Valhalla, the home of Siegfried and Baldur, the heroes. Cf 'Wotan' (C.W., 10), par. 397, n. 16. Jung opposed this movement, but there is a persistent tendency in us to dissociate ourselves from such things. We are sure they could not happen to us. Jung reminds us, however, that these movements are manifestations of the collective unconscious which is common to all mankind. Moreover, 'the archetypes of the unconscious can be shown empirically to be the equivalents of religious dogmas' and they correspond to all the known religious ideas. (This must not be taken to mean that the unconscious actually produces religious dogmas - these are the product of conscious thought working on and refining the raw material. of the unconscious.)

Through the study of the archetypes of the collective unconscious we find that man possesses 'a religious function' and that this influences him in its way as powerfully as do the instincts of sexuality and aggression. Primitive man is as occupied with the expression of this function - the forming of symbols and the building up of a religion - as he is with tilling the earth, hunting, fishing, and the fulfilment of 'his other basic needs; and in spite of the modern attitude of denigration, men and women are just as naturally religious as ever they were. Much, however, of the energy that formerly flowed into ritual and religious observance now find, expression in political creeds, or is frittered away in peculiar cults, or attached to something extraneous like the pursuit of knowledge. 'A scientist has no creed', says William James, 'but his temper is devout', while Julian Huxley suggests in all seriousness that we should have a religion based on evolution:(2)

1. Psychology and Alchemy, par. 20.

2. Quoted from a series of radio talks entitled 'The Process of Evolution' published in the Listener, 22 November 1951. ... evolutionary humanism, it seems to me, is capable of becoming the germ of a new religion, not necessarily supplanting existing religions but supplementing them. It remains to be seen how this germ could be developed - to work out its intellectual framework, to see how its ideas could be made inspiring, to ensure their wide diffusion. Above all, it would be necessary to justify ideas by facts to find the areas of frustration and point out where they were being reduced; to show how research into human possibilities was providing new incentives for their realization, as well as demonstrating the means for realizing them.'(1)Such a religion, for all its nobility of purpose, would fail to fill the deepest human need - that is, to relate the inner and outer man in equal degree. It is an essential feature of religion to give conscious expression to the archetypes - no completely rational system can succeed in this, and religious 'truths' are therefore always paradoxical. If religion tries to avoid paradox it merely weakens itself.

Jung defines religion as 'a peculiar attitude of mind which could be formulated in accordance with the original use of the word 'religio', which means a careful consideration and observation of certain dynamic factors, that are conceived as 'powers': spirits, daemons, gods, laws, ideals, or whatever name man has given to such factors in his world as he has found powerful, dangerous, or helpful enough to be taken into careful consideration, or grand, beautiful, and meaningful enough to be devoutly worshipped and loved. (2)

The operative word in this definition is 'dynamic'; it is the dynamism of the religious function that makes it both futile and dangerous to try to explain it away. This dynamism was expressed in the past in the great proselytizing movements, in crusades, religious wars, and persecutions, in heresy hunts and witch hunts, and in the creative efforts which caused men to build vast tombs and places of worship filled with every kind of treasure. Today much of this energy finds its expression in the various 'isms' - Communism, Nazism, Fascism, &c. - and rouses men to dangerous ardour, or expends itself in cults which have borrowed indiscriminately from the East. Superstition is rife in spite of general education, and persecution in varying degrees of cruelty and intolerance is all too common.

1. Quoted from a series of radio talks entitled 'The Process of Evolution' published in the Listener, 22 November 1951.
2. 'Psychology and Religion', par. 8. What organized religion has always tried to do, with varying success, has been to provide satisfying forms for those deep human needs which now find such dangerous or banal expression, and to express 'the living process of the unconscious in the form of the drama of repentance, sacrifice and redemption'. Dogma, creed, and ritual are crystallized forms of original religious experience, worked over and refined, sometimes for centuries, until they reach the forms in which we know them. In this way channels are made which control the unruly and arbitrary 'supernatural' influences. A living church protects men from the full force of an experience which can be devastating; instead of being gripped by the collective unconscious, they can participate in a ritual which expresses it sufficiently to 'purge' by its reflection.

What this original experience may mean is vividly recorded for us in the Bible, in the stories of the prophets and the account, for instance, of the conversion of Saul. After Saul had seen the bright light that shone from heaven and heard a voice saying unto him 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?' he became blind for three days and could neither eat nor drink, and from his recovery his whole life was changed.

Jung illustrates the effort of 'immediate' religious experience by the story of the Swiss mystic and hermit, 'the blessed brother Nicholas von der Flue'. Brother Nicholas had a vision of threefoldness', so terrible in its nature that his whole face was changed and his appearance from then on terrified people. He himself was so preoccupied by the vision that he made wide researches into its nature and even painted it on the wall of his cell. A contemporary picture in the parish church of Sachseln shows us that this painting was a mandala, divided into six, with the crowned countenance of God in the centre.

1. 'Psychology and Religion', par. 82. This is clearly not the original terrifying vision, but a development from it. Brother Nicholas, as Jung says, in struggling to get his original experience into tangible form, [was] inevitably led ... to the conclusion that he must have gazed upon the Holy Trinity itself - the summum bonum, eternal love. This is borne out by the 'expurgated' version now in Sachseln. ... This vision, undoubtedly fearful and highly perturbing, ... naturally needed a long labour of assimilation in order to fit it into the total structure of the psyche and thus restore the disturbed psychic balance. Brother Klaus came to terms with his experience on the basis of dogma, then firm as a rock; and the dogma proved its powers of assimilation by turning something horribly alive into the beautiful abstraction of the Trinity idea. (1) The experience of the God-image or archetype of the self is at once the most vital and the most overwhelming that can happen to man, and without some anchor he may be swept away. The dogma provided this anchor for Brother Nicholas. Furthermore the expression of the archetype depends upon the receiving consciousness; it can be infinitely developed and refined, as it has been in the highest religions of the world, or it can be relatively simple and archaic, as in the more primitive cults.

It can also destroy a weak consciousness altogether, so that the result is not a religious development, but insanity, or a pathological manifestation, as in the woman who believes she is to repeat the miracle of the virgin birth, or the decrepit old man who asks everyone he meets whether they are saved'.

To suggest that there are psychic factors which correspond to the divine figures, and that there can even be a like element in the absurdities of the insane and the experiences of the mystic, might be (and often is) taken as a devaluation of the latter, and even 'smacks of blasphemy', yet we are prepared to accept that 'genius is next to madness'. Jung, however, far from belittling religious experience, not only demonstrates the existence of the religious function in individuals and opens a way to its comprehension 'by reason as well as feeling', but stresses that 'it is the prime task of all education (of adults) to convey the archetype of the God image, or its emanations and effects, to the conscious mind'. (2)

1. 'Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious', pars. 12, 17.

2. Psychology and Alchemy, par. 14. This is what Christian education has tried to do, but 'the Western attitude, with its emphasis on the object, tends to fix the ideal - Christ - in its outward aspect and thus to rob it of its mysterious relation to the inner man'. (1)

It is this attitude which, in projecting everything good on to a remote figure of God, and everything bad on to an even

more remote figure of the Devil, robs the psyche of its value and meaning and leads on the one hand to an over-valuation of consciousness and on the other to the deification of abstractions like the State. In addition, creed and ritual have become so elaborated and refined that they no longer express the psychic state of the ordinary man, and religion has congealed into externals and formalities.

Man needs to experience the god-image within himself and to feel its correspondence with the forms that his religion gives to it. If this does not happen there is a split in his nature; he may be outwardly civilized, but inwardly he is a barbarian ruled by an archaic god.

1. Psychology and Alchemy, par. 8.

Not the individual alone but the sum total of individual lives in a people proves the truth of this contention. The great events of our world as planned and executed by man do not breathe the spirit of Christianity but rather of unadorned paganism. These things originate in a psychic condition that has remained archaic and has not been even remotely touched by Christianity. The Church assumes, not altogether without reason, that the fact of *semel credidisse* (having once believed) leaves certain traces behind it; but of these traces nothing is to be seen in the march of events. Christian civilization has proved hollow to a terrifying degree: it is all veneer, but the inner man has remained untouched and therefore unchanged. His soul is out of key with his external beliefs; in his soul the Christian has not kept pace with external developments. Yes, everything is to be found outside - in image and in word, in Church and Bible - but never inside. Inside reign the archaic gods, supreme as of old; that is to say the inner correspondence with the outer God-image is undeveloped for lack of psychological culture and has therefore got stuck in heathenism. Christian education has done all that is humanly possible, but it has not been enough. Too few people have experienced the divine image as the inner-most possession of their own souls. Christ only meets them from without, never from within the soul; that is why dark paganism still reigns there, a paganism which, now in a form so blatant that it can no longer be denied and now in all too threadbare disguise, is swamping the world of so-called Christian culture. (1) This pagan unconscious, which has also influenced our literature and art, is clearly expressed in dreams long before it becomes apparent in action. A clergyman, for instance, in some doubt about his faith had the following dream:

Coming into his church at night, he finds that the whole wall of the choir has collapsed. The altar and ruins are overgrown with vines hanging full of grapes, and the moon is shining in through the gap. 'faith - i.e. the Church' (2) This dream is picturesque and symbolic and remembering the symbolical and analogical character of dream imagery it is not very difficult to grasp that the outward expression of - is collapsing, and that something 'natural' is creeping in. The vine was an early Christian symbol - 'I am the vine and ye are the branches'; it was also an important symbol of the orgiastic worship of the God Pan. The moon gives a romantic and slightly mysterious air to the whole picture; once it was regarded as a god or goddess and worshipped accordingly, and it is significant to remember this.

In these analogies we have a hint of what this dream meant to the dreamer; here is another which pictures even more clearly a state of mind that is out of harmony with a modern rational outlook - it was dreamt by a patient of mine, a cultivated middle-aged woman:

There was an enclosed but empty space. In the centre, on the ground, burnt a small fire with a plume of smoke rising from it. I was on my knees in front of the fire, and bowing my head I chanted rhythmically, 'God is in the smoke, God is in the smoke'.

1. Psychology and Alchemy, par. 12.

2. *Ibid.*, par. 179. There are also dreams which point in the opposite direction and can demonstrate (if he will but take notice) to a confirmed agnostic that he is really a believer at heart, or lead a renegade back to the faith he has forsaken. Many a neurosis can be cured if the sufferer can find his way back to the Church where he belonged, or experience a conversion * but these solutions cannot be imposed, they must arise from the inner need of that particular person and his awareness and understanding of that need. If, however, the mental health of the individual and the progress of civilization depend to so large an extent on the suitable expression of the religious function, what solution is there for those who cannot return to any Church, or find in the 'Christian drama' no satisfactory expression of their needs?

Jung found the answer to this question gradually evolved itself during years of work with patients, and borrowed the word 'individuation' to describe it. There were, he found, a relatively large number of people who, while cured in the ordinary sense of the word, either persisted in continuing their analytical treatment, 'the dialectical discussion between the conscious mind and the unconscious', or followed it on their own account away from the analyst. They were mature people, and were not 'hanging on' to their analyst from fear of life or because of that peculiar attachment which in psychological terms is called 'a transference';² it was rather that they were unconsciously and yet unswervingly seeking a goal, which eventually defined itself as the quest of wholeness - that mysterious entity 'the whole man' - and which necessitated the forging of a link between the conscious and the unconscious aspects of the psyche. The experience could also be formulated as the finding of the God within or the full experience of the archetype of the self.

This is a state which cannot be reached without suffering, and necessitates accepting freely many things which are shunned by the ordinary man or woman; nor is analysis the only way of reaching the goal, but it is one which fits the 1. Psychology and Alchemy, par. 3. 2. See Chapter 5. modern dilemma particularly well. This dilemma is summed up in

the passage already quoted in Chapter 3:

There is no deity in the [modern] mandala, nor is there any submission or reconciliation to a deity. The place of the deity seems to be taken by the wholeness of man.(1)The individuation process is one which develops gradually during a person's life, more noticeably in the second half of life, and though it was observed by Jung in 'patients', one must not think of it as either a neurotic or a pathological phenomenon.

To be whole means to become reconciled with those sides of personality which have not been taken into account; these are often but not always inferior, for there are people who do not live up to the possibilities inherent in themselves. No one who really seeks wholeness can develop his intellect at the price of repression of the unconscious, nor, on the other hand, can he live in a more or less unconscious state.

Conscious and unconscious do not make a whole when one of them is suppressed and injured by the other. If they must contend, let it at least be a fair fight with equal rights on both sides. Both are aspects of life. Consciousness should defend its reason and protect itself, and the chaotic life of the unconscious should be given the chance of having its way too - as much of it as we can stand. This means open conflict and open collaboration at once. That, evidently, is the way human life should be. It is the old game of hammer and anvil: between them the patient iron is forged into an indestructible whole, an 'individual'. This, roughly, is what I mean by the individuation process.(2)The whole man is an individual, but he is not individualistic, which means being ego-centred, and is often used as an excuse to develop peculiarities at the expense of other people or to behave in an egotistical fashion. The individuated person, on the other hand, through his acceptance of the unconscious has, while remaining aware of his unique personality,

1. 'Psychology and Religion', par. 139.

2. 'Conscious, Unconscious, and Individuation' (C.W., 9, i), pars. 522-3.realized his brotherhood with all living things, even with in organic matter and the cosmos itself.

No man is an island, intire of itselfe; every man is a peece of the Continent, a part of the maine; if a Clod bee washed away by the sea, Europe is the lesse, as well as if a Promontorie were, as well as if a Mannor of thy friends or thine own were; any man's dead diminishes me, because I am involved in ManKind; and therefor never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.(1)Individuation is not usually an aim or an ideal for th very young, but rather for the mature person or for those who have been impelled by a serious illness, a neurosis, or some unusual experience to leave the ordinary safe paths and look for a new way of living. This not infrequently happen to middle-aged people, who having been successful in their chosen career, suddenly wake to a feeling of emptiness and lack of meaning in their lives. Such a case is described in detail by Jung in The Integration of the Personality.

Jung regards it as extremely important to differentiate between what he calls 'the stages of life'. The first half he compares to the morning, when the sun seems to rise above the horizon and climb slowly to the meridian, the second half to the afternoon, when the sun, completing the curve, sinks again and finally disappears. What is appropriate to the morning of life is not suitable for the afternoon. The young man needs to establish himself in the world, find a suitable wife, and build up a family, the young woman to marry, have children, and fulfil the social obligations of her position. Each needs to concentrate on one aspect of his or her personality: in the man's case the development of his intellect or his special skill, and in the woman's case the sacrifice of those gifts and qualities which would enable her to make her mark in the world are required. From both, usefulness, efficiency, and social adaptation are demanded, and their energies must be directed this way. Our society is based on scientific knowledge and technical skill, and in acquiring this men are inevitably forced to develop one-sidedly, sharpening

1. Devotions upon Emergent Occasions (1624), No. xvii. John Donne. their conscious minds, and repressing their instinctive natures. Unfortunately, women too are often expected to follow this way, and both pay a heavy price for their conscious development. It seems possible for most young people to pay this price, though even among these there are some who cannot afford to disregard their real natures, and who in doing so break down and become ill; but for many people in the second half of life it becomes imperative to understand those aspects of themselves which in the struggle for existence and the pursuit of ambition or pleasure they have ruthlessly repressed. There is a marked increase in the cases of Mental depression and nervous disturbance round about the age of forty, when the ambitions of youth no longer satisfy and the ideals and values that have been cherished no longer seem of such lustre and importance.

The problem of the second half of life is to find a new meaning and purpose in living, and this, perhaps strangely enough, is best found in the neglected, inferior, and undeveloped side of the personality. Many people, however, cannot face such a possibility, and prefer to cling to the values of youth, and even pursue them in an exaggerated fashion; for them the concept of individuation can have no meaning.

The individuation process is sometimes described as a psychological journey; it can be a tortuous and slippery path, and can at times simply seem to lead round in circles; experience has shown, however, that a truer description would be that of a spiral. In this journey the traveller must first meet with his shadow, and learn to live with this formidable and often

terrifying aspect of himself: there is no wholeness without a recognition of the opposites. He will meet, too, with the archetypes of the collective unconscious, and face the danger of succumbing to their peculiar fascination. If he is fortunate he will in the end find 'the treasure hard to attain', the diamond body, the Golden Flower, the lapis whatever name and guise have been chosen to designate the archetype of wholeness, the self. One cannot be certain that the goal will be reached, there are too many hazards by the way:

Although everything is experienced in image form, i.e., symbolically, it is by no means a question of fictitious dangers but of very real risks upon which the fate of a whole life may depend. The chief danger is that of succumbing to the fascinating influence of the archetypes. If we do, we may come to a standstill either in a symbolic situation or in an identification with an archetypal personality.(1) This is what has already been described as an inflation.

The unconscious can only become known by experience, when it is then no longer unconscious in the true sense of the word, but presents itself as strange, wild, chaotic, and apparently meaningless ideas, fantasies, dreams, and visions, which can appear from time to time, or burst upon a person like a flood. Anyone experiencing this is likely to fear that they are going mad, which is why the presence of an analyst - someone who has seen this kind of thing happen before and knows that it need not necessarily or permanently overwhelm consciousness, someone moreover who can provide analogies and say with confidence 'men have been here before, and won something of value from the experience' - can have a calming and helpful effect.

The psychological elucidation of these images, which cannot be passed over in silence or blindly ignored, leads logically into the depths of religious phenomenology. The history of religion in its widest sense (including therefore mythology, folklore, and primitive psychology) is a treasure-house of archetypal forms from which the doctor can draw helpful parallels and enlightening comparisons for the purpose of calming and clarifying a consciousness that is all at sea. It is absolutely necessary to supply these fantastic images that rise up so strange and threatening before the mind's eye with a sort of context so as to make them more intelligible.(2) Jung makes much use of mythological parallels for this purpose; he also discovered the unexpected affinity between individual dream symbolism and medieval alchemy.

1. 'Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious', par. 82, and *The Integration of the Personality*, p. 90.

2. *Psychology and Alchemy*, par. 38. Alchemy is popularly regarded as superstitious nonsense, or at best as a curious interlude preceding the development of the science of chemistry. It is scarcely known that it was taken seriously by such men as Thomas Aquinas, Isaac Newton, and Robert Boyle, and that it had important connexions both with medieval philosophy and with religion. The alchemist is understood as one who tries to make gold, and certainly there were many of this type, but there were equally many others - high-minded and intelligent men - for whom the chemical processes they followed were largely symbolic, and the end in view was not the creation of gold, but the discovery of the philosopher's stone. This mysterious stone containing the whole secret of the 'art' - was on the one hand a product of their work and on the other a gift from God without which alchemy could not exist; it both held a spirit and was considered to be the spirit itself. In searching for it the alchemist was endeavouring to liberate the spirit he believed to be concealed in matter, and in so doing preserved the bridge to nature - i.e. the unconscious psyche which the Church, with its emphasis on its sinfulness, was steadily destroying.

The alchemists thought of themselves as good Christians, but they were like many moderns in preferring to seek knowledge through their own experience, rather than to accept by faith what tradition insists on. They wed their chemical processes to promote visions, and they recorded their experiences in symbols which have many counterparts in the dreams of to-day.(1)

There are other parallels to be drawn between the alchemical and the analytical process, though the latter has no need of furnaces and retorts, but '[when a patient dreams that] a pot is set upon the fire, then one knows that transformation is under way'.(2)

1. Some 400 of such dreams are studied by Jung in *Psychology and Alchemy*.

2. *The Integration of the Personality*, p. 94. It is not enough, however, simply to have remarkable dreams or strange experiences; there are those who have a luxuriant fantasy life without any positive results - quite the opposite, in fact. Anyone can experience the archetype in dreams, even those of the self, without a corresponding development of personality; it is as if something flowered in the night and withered by day without producing any seed. Whereas the person who has started willingly, or unwillingly, on the way must cherish and cultivate whatever strange, grotesque, or beautiful growths appear. He must work on his material, describing, painting, or modelling it, striving by every means to bring it into a form where it can be contemplated and studied, and its hidden meaning discerned. In this way the work of the analyst can be compared to the opus of the alchemist, and 4)c transformation that he hopes will come about to the alchemical transmutation.

Jung has also made use of analogies from the East, particularly from China, in his work and in his writing. It was in fact contact with Richard Wilhelm the sinologist that first led him to formulate the concept of individuation, and in collaboration the two published *The Secret of the Golden Flower*. In this book the close parallels between a method of Chinese mysticism and the experiences of the patients on the path to individuation were explored. The Chinese philosophy on which the method of meditation described in the text of *The Golden Flower* depends is 'to a certain extent, the common property of all Chinese philosophical trends. It is built on the premise that the cosmos and man, in the last analysis, obey the same law - that man is a microcosm and is not separated from the macrocosm by any fixed barriers. The very same laws rule for the one as for the other, and from the one a way leads into the other. The psyche and the cosmos are to each other like the inner world and outer world. Therefore man participates by nature in all cosmic events, and is inwardly as well as outwardly interwoven with them. The Tao, then, the Way, governs man just as it does invisible and visible nature (heaven and earth).' (1)

1. Wilhelm, in *The Secret of the Golden Flower* (1962), p. 11. 'The Tao, the undivided, Great One, gives rise to two opposite reality principles, the dark and the light, yin and yang', and it is the method of 'reconciling these opposites with which the Golden Flower meditation is concerned.' (1)

And of the person who has passed through the ordeal of the individuation process? Of this Jung says:

It is as if a river that had run to waste in sluggish side-streams and marshes suddenly found its way back to its proper bed, or as if a stone lying on a germinating seed were lifted away so that the shoot could begin its natural growth. (2) The personality is liberated, healed, and transformed and becomes individual in the fullest sense of the word, but not however individualistic.

1. *The Secret of the Golden Flower* (1962), p. 64

2. 'The Development of Personality' (C.W., 17), par. 317. © Frieda Fordham 1953, 1959, 1966. PenguinPutnam Books, London.