

JUNG AMONG THE CHRISTIANS

By ANGELA TILBY

WHEN IT COMES TO SPIRITUALITY, we are all, in some sense, Jungians. Jung has provided us with a vocabulary which most of us take for granted, especially if we are engaged in spiritual formation, direction or counselling. We talk of the *shadow* and of the *archetypes*, of the *complexes* that inhibit us, of the *anima*, which leads men to wholeness and the *animus* which negatively possesses women. We speak of *individuation* as the goal of personal growth. Even when we use words like the *self* and the *unconscious* we are likely to do so with a Jungian nuance. We have recovered *dreaming* as a state of potential revelation.

But even more than a vocabulary Jung has provided us with an overview of human life in which spirituality makes sense. The idea that life is a pilgrimage towards wholeness in God is deeply informed by Jung. Jung's theory of psychological types has become an important tool in guiding individuals in vocation and prayer. Marriage preparation and counselling look to Jung's notion of the bi-sexuality of the self. Even the practice of religious celibacy has been strengthened by Jung's notion of the inner marriage as a mark of individuation.

So Jung has enabled psychological insights to enrich and inform Christian spirituality in a variety of ways. Without him, things would have been different. We can begin to appreciate this if we look at how he differed from his mentor, friend and later rival, the great founder of psycho-analysis, Sigmund Freud.

Freud and Jung

Freud came to psychology through physiology and neurology. He always insisted that psycho-analysis was a science.¹ He laid the foundations for a description of human personality that was strictly based on physical drives.

Jung also had a medical background and practised as a physician in a mental hospital. His first major work was a study of schizophrenia. Jung came to believe that, though the structure of the

psyche could be demonstrated empirically through the analytic techniques Freud had developed, there were within that structure openings onto other universal and numinous realities, which could not be wholly explained in organic terms.

Over the years he developed the idea of a collective unconscious, a bedrock of shared images and myths which were expressed in the form of universal archetypes. The fount of the archetypes was the psyche's image of its own wholeness and integrity: the image of God. For Freudians, of course, this was a retreat away from science into the obscurities of mysticism. But then, for strict Freudians religion itself is a pathological disorder. Jung thought life without religion was disordered.

The two men differed over the purpose and goal of analysis. For Freud psychic health was directed outwards and consisted of the capacity to love and work. For Jung psychic health was a development, first outward in achievement and relationship, then inward in integration. The whole process was one of discovering an authentic self. This he called individuation. It included an acceptance of the numinous nature of the self and its bi-sexuality. Jung saw myth and ritual as the language of the collective unconscious. Freud viewed them as examples of what he called primary process thinking, which he characterized as childish and superstitious attempts to manipulate the world.

Freud believed that the personality was formed in the earliest years. Analysis could help unblock the troubled memories of those years which led to neurosis. Through word association and dreams the patient was encouraged to bring to light repressed material which was usually of a sexual nature. The act of re-membering was enough to dissolve the neurosis. The main purpose of analysis was in healing the damage of the past and was no use once the adult personality had formed.

Jung on the other hand was always future-orientated. He was himself most interested in his middle-aged patients, those who came to him because of depression, or bad dreams, or a sense of inner emptiness. He saw in these often vague symptoms a prompting from the inner self to re-orientate itself. He expected the unconscious to produce terrible and terrifying images in its struggle to bring the self to wholeness. He described the repressed reality which manifests in these phenomena as the shadow—the undeveloped, primitive aspects of the self. He believed that the process of

coming to maturity requires us to encounter the shadow and its contents.

For Freud, the soul's story remains pre-determined by bodily drives. What is left to us is to reflect and direct our lives by the power of reason. We owe to Jung on the other hand, the idea that psychological development is possible in adult life, and that this development will be less to do with our achievements and relationships in the world than with our emotions and spiritual aspirations.

Jung also believed that we could help our own development by setting aside time for personal reverie and the exercise of the imagination. He saw that it was the tragedy of men and women of the western world to have lost touch with the spiritual dimension of life. He kept in touch with ministers of religion throughout his life, and wrote extensive psychological treatises on such themes as the Trinity and the symbolism of the Mass.

Catholic apologists like Gerald Vann O.P.; spiritual directors like Christopher Bryant S.S.J.E., and Christian counsellors like the Methodist Leslie Weatherhead have found in Jung both a visionary and a prophet.

Jung the religious rebel

What has not been greeted so enthusiastically is Jung's theology. Jung always claimed to be incompetent in theology. Yet what he meant was that for him there was no such thing as theology divorced from its psychological interpretation. Don Cupitt, the radical Anglican theologian, greets Jung as one of the founding fathers of a 'non-realist' theology. He recognizes that Jung was a religious rebel at his very roots.

In his autobiographical writings Jung invites us to look at the reasons for his rebellion. He begins with a candid, but painful account of his Christian childhood. Jung was the son of a Lutheran pastor. He was a sensitive and isolated child in a household full of dark rooms. His parents' relationship was cool and formal. As he grew up he became haunted by religious problems. He had a terror of Catholic churches and of the black-clothed Jesuits. He also developed a profound distrust of 'the Lord Jesus' who was associated in his mind with funerals, death and the men in black coats.

In his twelfth year he began to suffer from fainting fits. In spite of his problems with 'the Lord Jesus' the question of God was urgent in his mind. He was particularly haunted by the fear of committing a great, primal and unavoidable sin. In a particularly

important passage of *Memories, dreams, reflections* he describes how his school was set up in the square of the great cathedral at Basle. One day he was particularly struck by the beauty of the world, the shining blue sky, the glittering cathedral roof. He began to think of God above it on his throne, the creator of all the beauty. His reverie was smashed by the terrible fear of a thought which must not be thought. The day was ruined, and he crept to bed in terror of judgement.

On the third night after this experience insight came in the form of a dream. He saw God seated on heaven's throne high above the world. Beneath the throne stood the cathedral with its shining roof. Then, from under the throne, the dreamer saw a huge turd fall on the cathedral roof, shattering it, and breaking the walls beneath it. This dream was a revelation. Jung describes it as an experience of total grace and bliss. In place of the expected judgement was relief and release. It freed Jung from his guilt and anxiety and enabled him to recognize the presence of God as one who was not bound to the institutions which proclaimed him. Indeed he was capable of shitting on them:

It was as though I had experienced an illumination. A great many things I had not previously understood became clear to me. That was what my father had not understood, I thought; he had failed to experience the will of God, had opposed it for the best of reasons and out of deepest faith. And that was why he had never experienced the miracle of grace which heals all and makes all comprehensible. He had taken the Bible for his guide; he believed in God as the Bible prescribed and as his forefathers had taught him. But he did not know the immediate living God who stands, omnipotent and free, above his Bible and his Church, who calls on man to partake of his freedom, and can force him to renounce his own views and convictions in order to fulfil without reserve the command of God. In his trial of human courage God refuses to abide by traditions, no matter how sacred.²

Later, Jung's father prepared him for confirmation. It was a deadly exercise. Jung would have liked to discuss his religious doubts and yearnings with his father, but he knew in advance what his answers would have been. The realization deepened that his father's faith was dead. His life took on tragic significance for Jung. After his confirmation and first experiences of communion Jung knew that he would never be able to participate in the

eucharist: 'It is an absence of God; the church is a place I should not go to. It is not life which is there but death'.³

The conversion of Jung

I take the above passages in Jung's writings to be an account of religious conversion, which is strangely consonant with that of the founder of the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther. Luther spent his young manhood in terror of God. He was tormented by the fear of judgement. He hated God, recognizing that God both required righteousness from human beings, yet found all their efforts wanting. God had him over a barrel, and the tension and anxiety drove him towards breakdown. For Luther release came with the discovery that righteousness was not an achievement, but a gift. God accounted the sinner righteous out of free grace. It became possible for Luther to see himself as *simul justus et peccator*. At the same time he now had a mission. Grace fostered rebellion against the Church which denied its supremacy and inhibited the discovery of God's life-giving paradox. Luther's task was to turn his rebellion against Rome and proclaim the gospel to the Church.

I believe Jung had a similar sense of vocation and mission. Where Luther saw God 'free above his Church' Jung saw God free above both Bible and Church. He saw in the dream of the turd that God's omnipotence was a call, not into conformity or obedience, but into risky rebellion for the sake of freedom. The relief and release of conversion and the subsequent fear and dread of the dead letter of the law are as present in Jung as they are in Luther.

But Jung went significantly further than Luther in his understanding of God. Where Luther recognized that our only human security comes from accepting the paradox that we are righteous sinners, Jung completes the picture by detaching God himself from the obligation to be good. This is immensely important for understanding the theology in which Jung claimed, perhaps mischievously, to be so incompetent.

Jung's God

Jung's God is not all good. Jung's God is a totality of opposites. Everything hinges on this, including the insights into human growth and development that we all find so helpful. This new recognition of God as the totality of opposites enabled Jung to look with new eyes on the scriptures and the Christian tradition. It gave him the confidence that his rebellion, however disturbing, could be a positive movement in accordance with the will of God.

In his *Answer to Job* Jung allows himself to react with passionate emotion to the character of God in the scriptures. He finds in the Old Testament a God who is composed of antithetical characteristics; a mixture of light and dark, good and evil, righteousness and blind wrath. These two sets of characteristics are not related to each other, they seem to operate independently.

So the bit of God which relates to man is not the whole of God, nor is God aware of the rejected parts of his totality. Man is in the unhappy position of experiencing God in different modes at different times, as light and dark, wrath and mercy. Jung is the only interpreter of the Lord's Prayer who is able to make sense of Jesus's plea 'Lead us not into temptation'. For Jung this is a prayer from the heart, for God is one who not only can but does lead us into temptation in what Jung calls 'his trial of human courage'.

According to Jung, it is through human beings that God is reminded of the missing and split off parts of himself. When the dark side is operating, it is the human task to remind God of his righteousness. Jung gives an example of this from the story of Abraham. God has heard of the wickedness of the people of Sodom (Genesis 18,20ff) and goes to see what is going on. Abraham recognizes that God is in a destructive mood, and steps in to question the divine purpose: 'Wilt thou indeed destroy the righteous with the wicked?' It is then that Abraham bargains with God, careful always to keep his distance and respect. It is Abraham's role to challenge God's overwhelming wrath, and to remind him of his righteousness: 'Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?' (v 15).

In Jung's view Job has a similar role in the divine purpose. God delivers him up to Satan out of a hidden envy and fear. God knows unconsciously that Job is more righteous than he is, and condemns him out of anxiety about his own hidden dark side. Job's only weapon is his knowledge of God's righteousness, yet he has to suffer the darkness of God until the sheer force of his rhetoric persuades God to engage with him. And even then God's answer is a form of bullying, a spectacle of amoral divine power. Jung finds in the scriptures, and particularly in Job, a recognition that man has in some respects advanced beyond God as a moral agent. Because of this the incarnation is a necessity. God needs to become man in order to reach divine integration.

This is, of course, a very odd way to read the scriptures. It is profoundly shocking to think of God as somewhat primitive and underdeveloped, as needing the incarnation for his own good. But

it should not be forgotten that Jung does not read the scriptures for information about God. For him the material of faith is less *prescriptive* than *descriptive*. It is more interesting for its insights about the ways of God and the soul than for its historical accuracy or its metaphysical conclusions about the nature of the universe. He reads them as descriptions of the human psyche and of the God who forms within them. There is no theology without psychological interpretation.

Jung's understanding of spiritual guidance

How then do we progress? What spiritual guidance can Jung give us? It must be remembered that Jung saw the contents of the psyche as both ordered and chaotic. The great religions are the filters by which individual experience comes to be understood and integrated. In Hinduism this is achieved by the various forms of yoga which are themselves suited to different types of personality and different stages on the spiritual path. Jung believed that the dogmas of Christianity were symbols, produced by the psyche at a particular stage of historical development. He was not interested in the historical Jesus, or in the exact nature of the conflicts which led to his crucifixion, or in the possibility of a literal resurrection. I think he saw all these as trivial concerns of the over-intellectualized, western mind.

For Jung the value of the story of Jesus, and the beliefs that grew around him, were that they constellated a new world. The Christian world was born from the marriage of Hellenism with the Hebrew scriptures. Christianity came on the world as an old and new faith; old in that its particular symbol system was rooted in symbols and myths that were already familiar, new in its radical and redemptive arrangement of those symbols. Christ, the God-man, the Incarnation, the Atonement, the Trinity and the Resurrection, provided the shape and goal of the new age. As long as these basic Christian symbols matched the developing contents of the psyche they functioned effectively as spiritual guidelines. Psychology and theology went hand in hand and produced the western equivalent of yoga, linking the individual soul to the great drama of heaven and earth, witnessed in the scriptures and the creeds.

It is in this context that Jung discusses the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius Loyola, which he sees as the most notable example of western yoga. The inner autonomous growth of the soul is

matched, guided and led on by the gospel story. Ignatius's purpose is to impress 'fixed concepts about salvation on the psyche'.⁴ Jung clearly admires Ignatius and recognizes the fruitfulness of his system. But he adds a warning:

The procedure is 'right' as long as the symbol is still a valid expression of the unconscious situation. The psychological rightness of both Eastern and Western yoga ceases only when the unconscious process—which anticipates future modifications of consciousness—has developed so far that it produces shades of meaning which are no longer adequately expressed by, or are at variance with, the symbol.⁵

In other words, Jung did not believe that the contents of the psyche are fixed or that the advent of Christianity or any other faith could provide a symbolic 'last word' on the story of the human soul. The mind of whole cultures could flower and decline, the universal soul itself was open to development, and the pattern of the universal archetypes was not fixed, but was subject to modification and re-orientation.

As for the divine reality that might lie behind or within these changing psychic manifestations Jung had nothing to say. In his famous television interview with John Freeman he was asked outright whether he believed in God. His famous reply, 'I do not believe—I know', was enthralling to witness but hardly settled the question.

Deficiencies in Christianity

What is certain is that he believed deeply that traditional Christianity had run its course in certain respects and was no longer wholly spiritually valid for western man. He thought there were two areas in which Christianity had become deficient. Both are anticipated in his *Answer to Job*. The first is one with which we are all consciously concerned, the second one which we are wrestling with, though still from a point of un-recognition. The first concerns the place of the feminine, the second the problem of evil. Jung anticipates modern feminism by recognizing that the two belong together.

The feminine

Jung has been much criticized by feminists for his concepts of the *animus* and the *anima*. The *animus* is the image of the masculine

in woman, the *anima* the corresponding image of the feminine in man. It is probably also true that the way he interprets the *anima* has helped perpetuate an unreal idealization of the feminine, which judges and condemns real women as inferior. But, within his limitations, Jung did at least recognize that the Christian God was far too male. In *Answer to Job* Jung claims that God has forgotten his own feminine side. God was male and female in the creation narrative of Genesis 1 (v 26). There are also hints that God might have an eternal feminine counterpart in the figure of wisdom (Proverbs 8, 22ff). Yet in the historical books of the Old Testament God has renounced his divine androgyny and has 'married' Israel, expressing himself in wholly masculine (and, feminists might say, patriarchal) imagery.

Jung believed that this lopsidedness was changing. The archetypes themselves were shifting to form a new balance in which the feminine aspects of the collective unconscious would come to greater prominence. The dogma of the Assumption of our Lady, promulgated by Pope Pius XII in 1950, was for him a sign of recognition of the feminine side of the Godhead. He was particularly excited by the fact that the new dogma was a response to the needs of the faithful. It was not imposed by theologians. It had for him the hallmarks of a new manifestation of the feminine in the Christian soul.

If Jung's interpretation of events in the Christian world seems eccentric we must remember that he did not expect good things from orthodox Christianity. The second area where he looked for change is more controversial and upsetting. Again it is anticipated in the *Answer to Job*. It is the issue of evil.

Evil

For Jung, as we have seen, the God of the scriptures is not primarily an ethical God, but unvarnished, primitive force, a totality of inner opposites. This is 'the indispensable condition for his tremendous dynamism, his omnipotence and his omniscience'.⁶ Many Christians might accept this judgement about the God of the Old Testament. But Jung is no Marcionite. He sees all too clearly that the God of the Old Testament is equally present in the New. Why else does God let his beloved son die in the agony of the Cross? Why does Jesus warn of hell and Satan as realities in the human world? And why does the New Testament end with the horrors of the Book of Revelation?

The problem of the New Testament for Jung is that it understands Christ as the incarnation only of God's goodness. The badness is still left outside, split off. Jesus rejects Satan in the wilderness, and the Book of Revelation ends with Satan being cast out of heaven. So Christianity has perpetuated the split in God, and failed to help God come to terms with his dark side. The consequence of this is that Christianity has trivialized evil, and denied its reality with enormously destructive consequences. Jung is particularly critical of Augustine. For Augustine defined evil in terms of the absence of good—*privatio boni*. Evil was radically opposed to God, who himself is described as *summum bonum*—the totality to the good. God, for Augustine and for the mainstream Christian tradition,⁷ is absolutely good and contains no darkness at all. As God is Creator the works of his hands, too, must be radically good and, indeed, he declares them to be so (Genesis 1,4 etc.). Since all being comes from God any defects in creation must be understood as deficiencies of being, a lack of that fundamental goodness with which all being is endowed. Evil in this sense is not real in the way that good is, it is a lack of goodness, and hence of being and reality. It is bound, in the end, to turn in on itself and collapse though lack of substance.

Jung believed that Christianity's attempt to disown the dark side of God has led to a lopsidedness in the Christian psyche parallel to the lopsidedness caused by the subordination of the feminine. Historic symptoms of this lopsidedness might be manifested in Christianity's obsession with unity and purity of doctrine, its cruelty to its own dissenters, its sexual rigidities, its self-righteousness, its difficulties in recognizing its inner dividedness, and its narcissistic detachment from the messiness of ordinary human relationships.

On the political scale there is no doubt that Jung believed we were ill equipped by Christianity to deal with the reality of evil in the human psyche. The wars and genocides of the twentieth century, the massive dependence on armaments for our security, and the invention of the nuclear bomb were all symptoms of a refusal to recognize the polarities of our own nature, grounded as they must be in the nature of God.

But Jung did not give up hope for Christianity. He urged western people to stick with their own tradition and not look for salvation by turning, for example, to eastern faiths. He gave very little indication of how theology might adjust to his insights, though he

did provocatively suggest that Satan should be included as the fourth member of the Trinity. Such suggestions are not altogether helpful.

Is Jung right about evil? Though we may baulk at facing the question directly, we cannot but be aware of a significantly widening gap between theology and pastoral practice. We are being moved to a far less moralistic account of human damage and error. Evil is now, for many of us, a difficult word, as is sin. We can just about attach it to acts of terrorism or gross exploitation of the innocent. But it has become an extreme word, a word which does not connect with ordinary experience. While this is happening to the *word* evil we are in fact becoming quite comfortable with other expressions of psychic polarity: dark and light, strength and weakness, masculine and feminine. Perfectionist models of Christian growth put the emphasis on choosing between these, *pruning* the less favoured qualities as the disturbed or rebellious aspects of the will. Most of us think more naturally these days about re-arranging the contents of the self and recognizing how our inner polarities hold us together.

However much moral theology might outlaw certain acts, such as adultery or theft, it is rare these days for Christians to approach adulterers or thieves with threats of hell. The natural Christian response is more likely to be compassion and the search for understanding. Evil is not to be cut out of the body so much as to be redeemed and healed, as far as it can be. We may not be ready to see it yet but I believe the agenda is already set for a recognition that radical evil may have to be included in the map of the psyche, rather than excluded, denied and projected on to others.

I suspect that some who read this article will be sympathetic to the changes that I have described in the Christian psyche. They will recognize the value of feminism and welcome a compassionate, developmental stance in spiritual direction and counselling. Perhaps they will recognize that much is owed to Jung. I suspect at the same time they will feel baffled and even repulsed by his theological speculations, if not by his insistence on a new formulation of the place of evil, then at least by his fearsome recognition of the dark side of God. For in the end, his insistence on our need to encounter the shadow and to integrate its dark wisdom depends on the belief that to do so is to mirror God who is not so much *summum bonum* as *pleroma*—the fullness of all things.

It might be argued that Jung's insights, far from helping the renewal of Christianity, are fundamentally destructive, not only to

our morality but our belief. I believe that one of the reasons why conservative theology remains attractive is that it recognizes how deeply modern pastoral practice, influenced by Jung and thinkers like him, undermines the way our central affirmations have always been held. It does not do so overtly, its influence is much more subtle. This would explain the anxiety about authority that is going on in the mainstream churches at the moment, the need for oaths of loyalty and synodical resolutions on the precise meaning of credal statements. It would explain why the women's movement arouses such fundamental and hysterical panic, why new and condemnatory statements need to be made about homosexuality, and why the anti-abortion cause is pursued with such vigour.

We may need Jung's insights, but we do not like them, for his agenda is no less than the continuation of the Reformation, the dissolution of the objective God into human experience. Jung is a rebel with a Lutheran tinge. He locates himself on the extreme left wing of Protestantism. His God is above bible and Church, above moral distinctions, an androgynous God who longs to be manifest in the human psyche, and apart from such manifestations is unknowable, possibly non-existent. This is the ultimate threat to most forms of Christian identity, and it is not surprising that the conservative wing of the Church fears that we may be blind to what is really going on and wants to beat it out of us before it is too late.

At least with Freud we could have stayed where we were, the shining cathedral of centuries intact and its members secure and safe from the world in the indulgence of their primary processes.

NOTES

¹ Freud always claimed to be scientific. Yet, as the psychotherapist John Lee has pointed out to me, his use of concepts was unscientific and his practice was often in stark contrast to his clinical theory.

² Jung, C. G. : *Memories, dreams, reflections* (Collins Fount, 1979), pp 56-7.

³ *Ibid.*, p 73.

⁴ Jung, C. G. : 'The symbolism of the mandala', in *Dreams* (ARK, 1985), p 201.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Jung, C. G. : *Answer to Job* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), p 10.

⁷ Though John Hicks discusses the beginnings of an alternative theodicy in Irenaeus. See Part Three of his *Evil and the God of love* (Collins, 1970).