

Jung's Conception of God and Religion

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Abstract

This paper studies the problem of God and religion in the works of Carl Jung. To Jung's mind, religion is a psychic phenomenon. God and religion, in this theoretical framework, are reduced to psychic categories. Religious experience, then, is found in the depth of man's psyche. According to Jung, God is not found outside man but inside them; therefore, God is known through the archetypes that exist in man's unconscious psyche. Jung divides facts into two categories: psychical facts and physical facts. He believes that psychical facts are as real as physical facts and even more accessible to the human mind than physical facts. Jung claims that the best way to access to the unconscious is dreams analysis. In short, his central core of theories about religion is that the thoughts of the unconscious are not ones own thoughts, that religious experience force themselves upon the consciousness of the individual and the source of God is the human unconscious psyche.

Keywords: unconscious, archetypes, religion, dreams, psychic, religious experience.

"It was then that it dawned on me: I must take the responsibility, it is up to me how my fate turns out. I had been confronted with a problem to which I had to find the answer. And who posed the problem? Nobody ever answered me that. I knew that I had to find the answer out of my deepest self, that I was alone before God, and that God alone asked me these terrible things".²

Such was Carl Jung's description of the situations in which he found himself when faced with religions question. It is clear that Jung did not believe that these questions were his own and that he could find answer to them in the Bible. Rather, he believed that God had forced these questions

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2. Carl Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston, ed. Aniela Jaffe (New York: Random House, 1965), p. 47.

upon his consciousness and that he alone must find the answers. He wondered what kind of God would pose such terrible problems, and what types of conclusions this God desired him to reach. For himself, Jung answered these questions introspectively by analyzing his own religious experiences; for others, he formulated a psychological answer to the question of the existences and nature of God. Though Jung stressed in his book *psychology and religion* that his conclusions are based entirely on empirical data; it is quite clear from his autobiography (*Memories, Dreams, Reflections*) that his own religious experiences must have influenced significantly his interpretation of these data. Let us then analyze in detail Jung's conception of the relationship between psychology and religion.

Before examining Jung's actual theories, we must first consider his methodology. Jung states at the very beginning of *Psychology and Religion*: that he is an empirical psychologist dealing with religion "from a purely empirical point of view"; that is, not being a philosopher, he will "refrain from any application of metaphysical or philosophical considerations."¹ Jung thus conveys to his reader that his theories about God are based on actual experiences and do not require any sort of faith or belief. He explains further:

*"That kind of psychology which I represent ... is exclusively phenomenological, that is, it is concerned with occurrences, events, experiences, in a word, with facts. Its truth is a fact and not a judgment. Speaking for instance of the motive of the virgin birth, psychology is only concerned with the fact that there is such an idea but it is not concerned with the question whether such an idea is true or false in any other sense. It is psychologically true in as much as it exists."*²

He then states that psychological truth is subjective when an idea is held by only a single person; when an idea is established by a society, however, its truth is objective.³

Erich Fromm raises strong objections to Jung's concept or truth. First, he labels as untrue Jung's assertion that "Truth is a fact and not a judgment." truth, contends Fromm, must "always and necessarily" refer to a judgment by its very definition. Secondly, Fromm attacks Jung's idea that anything which is psychologically existent is psychologically true. Fromm argues, "Jung ... states that an idea is 'psychologically true in as much as it exists.'

1. Carl Jung, *Psychology and Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 2.

2. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, P. 3.

3. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, P. 3.

But an idea 'exists' regardless of whether it is a delusion or whether it corresponds to fact. The existence of an idea does not make it 'true' in any sense."¹ Fromm further argues that Jung's distinction between subjective and objective truths is meaningless, for in recent times we have witnesses instance in which millions of people have held a belief which is no less delusional and irrational than that of a psychotic. Fromm contends, therefore, that there is no meaning in saying that this belief is objective.²

Jung answers these objections very convincingly. Though he does not state it explicitly, the key to Jung's arguments is the distinction between physical and psychical truth (Or existence). Jung, illustrates this distinction by citing several instances in which he successfully treated neurotics. For instance, in many cases of hysterical neurosis³, Jung reports seeing patients cured almost instantaneously by a mere confession of certain feelings. "Such experiences," he concludes, "make it exceedingly difficult to believe that the psyche is nothing, or that an imaginary fact is unreal."⁴ Thus, Jung is saying that psychical facts may have consequences which are just as real as those of physical facts; it is therefore foolish to call a psychical fact unreal or untrue merely because it does not represent a corresponding physical reality. Jung takes this argument one step further, asserting that psychical facts are actually more accessible to the human mind than physical facts. He states that "the only form of existence we know of immediately is psychic. We might well say, on the contrary, that physical existence is merely an inference since we know of matter only in so far as we perceived psychic images transmitted by the senses."⁵ The result of this argument is that we must accept psychical facts as real (or true or existent) even when they do not correspond to physical realities. Using Jung's own example of the virgin birth, then, it is legitimate to deal with this event as a psychological truth without passing judgment on whether or not it occurred physically.

Having thus defined and defended this methodology, Jung proceeds to make several empirically derived observations about the human psyche. First, he asserts that it is incorrect to consider the individuals psyche as "a merely personal affair and to explain it from a personal point of view."⁶ It is

1. Erich Fromm, *Psychoanalysis and Religion* (new haven: Yale University Press, 1950) p.15.

2. Fromm, *ibide*, p. 16.

3. A Hysterical neurosis is a mental illness with physical symptoms.

4. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, p 12-15.

5. Junes, *Psychology and Religion*, p. 11.

6. Junes, *Psychology and Religion*, p. 16.

easily observed, Jung says, that in the face of danger, human beings respond in much the same way, that is, in a distinctively human fashion. They respond by calling up instinctive force which, to the individual, "appear to be wholly unexpected, new, and even strange."¹

What is the origin of these forces which are common to all men yet familiar to none? Jung argues that they are products of the primitive² human psyche. Drawing an analogy with physical evolution, Jung states:

*"Just as the body has an anatomical prehistory of millions of years, so also does the psychic system. And just as the human body today represents in each of its parts the result of this revolution, and everywhere still show traces of its earlier stages, so same may be said of the psyche... The psyche of the child in the preconscious state is anything but a tabula rasa; it is already... equipped with all specifically human instincts, as well as with the a foundations of the higher functions."*³

Thus, the human psyche contains more than what we put into it; it also contains certain elements of the primitive psyche.

Jung asserts that, in addition to instinctive forces, there are certain ideals which "exist almost everywhere and at all-times and they can even spontaneously create themselves quite apart from migration and tradition "⁴ Because these ideas are nearly universal, they clearly cannot be the products of the individual, psyche. "They are not made by the individual," Jung insists, "but they rather happen, they even force themselves upon the individual's consciousness. This is not platonic philosophy but empirical psychology."⁵

One such universal and involuntary idea is religion. Jung defines religion as "a careful and scrupulous observation of what Rudolph Otto aptly termed the 'numinous,' that is a dynamic existence or effect, not caused by an arbitrary act of will. On the contrary, it seizes and controls the human subject which is always rather its victim than its creator."⁶ Jung goes on to observe that historically, people have always attributed this "religious" feeling of the numinous to a cause external to the individual. Traditionally, the cause of this religious experience has been endowed with divine qualities. Religion, Jung concludes, "is the term that designates the attitude peculiar to a

1. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, p. 16.

2. *The word primitive*, as Jung uses it, is a temporal, rather than a pejorative term.

3. Jung, *Memories Dreams, Reflections*, p. 348.

4. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, p. 4.

5. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, p. 4.

6. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, p. 4.

consciousness which has been altered by the experience of the numinosum."⁷

It is important to distinguish here between the terms religion and creeds as Jung uses them. According to Jung, religion refers to the experience of the numinous, whereas creeds are "codified and dogmatized forms of original religious experience."¹ Therefore, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism are all examples of creeds rather than religions. Jung asserts that the psychologist, because he is a scientist rather than a philosopher, must not attempt to evaluate the extent to which each individual creed represents ultimate truth. Rather, "he must keep his eye on the human side of the religious problem, in that he is concerned with the original religious experience quite apart from what the creeds have made of it."²

Before we proceed to analyze religious experience in greater detail, we must first understand more about Jung's conception of the human psyche. Jung states that the "human personality consists of two things: first, of unconscious and whatever this covers, and second, of an indefinitely large hinterland of unconscious psyche,"³ Jung does not believe that the existence of the unconscious is a self-evident fact because the unconscious, by its very nature, can never really be known. rather, the existence of the unconscious is merely an assumption:

*There is unavoidably an illimitable and indefinable addition to every personality, because the latter consists of a conscious and observable part which does not contain certain factors whose existence, however, we are forced to assume in order to explain certain observable facts. The unknown factors form what we call the unconscious.*⁴

This assertion will become important later on. Next, we must understand Jung's view of the contents of the unconscious psyche. As we have already noted, Jung believes that the psyche of the child is "anything but a *tabula rasa*"; this is the equivalent of saying that the unconscious psyche contains more than just repressed and suppressed material. What, then is the nature of the additional information contained in the unconscious? The answer to this question is crucial, for later it will form an integral part of Jung's "proof" of the existence of God. Jung answers this question as follows:

Dreams are made of collective material to a very high degree, just as

7. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, p. 6.

1. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, p. 6.

2. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, p. 7.

3. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, p. 47.

4. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, pp. 47-48.

in the mythology and folklore different peoples, certain motives repeat themselves in almost identical form.

I have called these motives archetypes and by them I understand forms or images of a collective nature which occur practically all over the earth as constituent of myth and at the same time autochthonous, individual products of unconscious origin. The archetypal motives presumably start from the archetypal patterns of the human mind which are only transmitted by tradition and migration but also by heredity. The latter hypothesis is indispensable, since even complicated archetypal images can be possible direct tradition.¹

Before we continue, a word about Jung's theory of archetypes seems warranted. In the above statement, Jung leaves us with the impression that his assertion about the existence of archetypes is based on a fairly large body of empirical evidence—evidence such as the collective nature of dream material, the spontaneous reproduction of complex archetypal image, etc. In the absence of a core informed opinion, we shall have to take his word that the body of evidence is sufficiently large to prove that archetypes do indeed exist.²

At this point, we are almost ready to deal with Jung's observations about religious experience. As his explanation relies heavily on the dream material of many of his patients, it is first necessary to mention his views on the nature of dreams. Jung believes that dreams are a reasonably accurate representation of undergrounds psychical processes.³ He openly disagrees with Freud's view that dreams are cunning devices which are meant to hide the true desires of the unconscious mind.⁴ Instead, Jung argues that "the dream occurs when consciousness and will are to a great extent extinguished. Moreover, we know so little about the psychology of the dream process that we must be more than careful when we introduce elements foreign to the dream itself into its explanation."⁵ Jung kept extensive records of the dreams of many of his patients. He reports that in hundreds of carefully recorded dreams of many (an unspecified number) of his patients, there existed a voice of unknown origin which seemed to speak with unconditioned authority. Jung has interpreted this voice "an important and even decisive

1. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, pp. 63-64.

2. Perhaps someday sociobiologists or molecular biologists will be able to determine definitively whether fairly complex psychical information can be transmitted genetically.

3. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, p.26.

4. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, p.30.

5. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, pp. 30-31.

representation Perhaps someday sociobiology's or molecular biologists will be able to determine definitively whether fairly complex psychological information of the unconscious."¹ Observing that the voice often shows more insight than does the subject's conscious mind, Jung concludes that "there is hardly any doubt that this fact is a basic religious phenomenon."² Thus, Jung believes that this voice, which occurs often in the dreams of many of his patients, is actually the voice of God.

One may object that the voice merely represents the individual's own thoughts "That may be," Jung answers,

But I would call a thought my own, when I have thought it, as I would call money my own when I have earned or acquired it in a conscious or legitimate way. If somebody gives me the money as a present, then I will certainly not say to my benefactor, "Thank you for my own money," although to a third person and afterwards I might say: "This is my own money." With the voice I am in a similar situation. The voice gives me certain contents, exactly as a friend would inform me of his ideas, it would be neither decent nor true to suggest that what he says are my own ideas.³

One might argue here that Jung himself has said that the human psyche is up of two parts; the conscious and unconscious. Therefore, his differentiation between conscious and unconscious thoughts is meaningless, 'for both can still be considered the dreamer's own thoughts.

Jung counters this argument with a point we have already noted. He argues that the idea of a personal unconscious is merely an assumption made for the sake of convenience, and that in reality the unconscious cannot be considered as a "merely personal affair." Furthermore, the dreamer is "not only incapable of producing the phenomenon at will but is also unable to anticipate the mental contents of the voice. Under such conditions it would be presumptuous to call the factor which produces the voice [his own] mind,"⁴ Jung asserts, however, that there is one condition under which it is fair to call the voice one's own, namely, if one considers his conscious personality to be a part of a larger entity. "A little bank clerk, showing a friend around town, who points at the bank building, saying, 'And here is my bank, is using the same privilege.'⁵ Therefore, Jung believes that the voice

1. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, p. 45.

2. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, pp. 45-46.

3. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, p. 46.

4. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, p. 46-47.

5. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, p. 47.

shows a superior intelligence because it is "a product of the more complete personality to which the dreamer's conscious self belongs as a part."⁶ Thus according to Jung, this voice constitutes one type of religious experience. In addition, there are two other elements of dream which Jung regards as religious. Both of these elements are symbol with which a historical explanation, as being, indubitable religious. Both are symbols of the deity, the second one producing in the dreamer a feeling of most sublime harmony."¹ We must emphasize here Jung's empirical approach to the interpretation of dream symbolism. When confronted with complex symbols, Jung does not attempt to interpret them logically, nor does he force them to assume certain meanings which happen to fit his thesis. Rather, he is not satisfied that a symbol has been interpreted correctly until he has found a close parallel from another period in history in which this symbol was endowed with a certain meaning.

The first symbol is the quaternary, or the numbers four. Jung; that in many cases the numbers four, for reasons unknown to the dreamer, assumed crucial importance and endorsed the dream with "numinous character."² "It would of course be a different thing with the three," explains Jung, "since the Trinity represents an acknowledgement symbolic, number accessible to everybody. But four conveys no more [to the conscious mind] than are other number."³ Since the meaning of the number four is unknowns to the dreamer, Jung concludes that the importance of this symbol has an unconscious origin.⁴

Jung then proceeds to explain the symbolic importance of the number four throughout history. He observes, in far greater detail than need interest us here, that to such wide ranging groups as the Pythagoreans the ancient Egyptians, the Christians and Arabs of the middle ages, the hermetic; the alchemists and the red Indians, the number four symbolized the world-creating deity.⁵ Jung then notes that "although the four is an age-old, presumably prehistoric symbol, always associated with the idea of a world-creating deity, it is, however-curiously enough-rarely understood as such by

6. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, p. 49.

1. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, p. 80.

2. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, pp. 65-66.

3. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, p. 65.

4. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, p. 65.

5. For greater detail, see Jung, *Psychology and Religions*, pp. 64.

those modern people to whom it occurs.⁶ Jung thus concludes that the symbol of the four is an archetypal pattern derived from primitive man. It is important to understand precisely what Jung is saying here we have already noted Jung's belief that the unconscious contains more than just repressed and suppressed material. "If Nile unconscious is anything at all," Jung asserts in his autobiography, "it must consist of earlier evolutionary stages of our conscious psyche."¹ In other words, the materials which in modern man exist as archetypal images were once conscious in primitive man. Therefore, Jung believes that the quaternary that is, the archetypal image of the deity which appeared in the dreams of his derived from medieval or even classical times; rather, these were merely other periods of history when this same archetypal idea was very much in the foreground.² This archetype was derived from a far more primitive, probably a prehistoric, culture. There is one other aspect of the quaternary which deserves mention. Jung states that in the history of the symbol, the application of the comparative method undoubtedly shows the quaternary as being a more or less direct representation of the God manifested in his creation. True, it might, therefore, be concluded that the symbol, spontaneously produced in the dreams of modern people, means the same thing *the God within*.³ Thus, as in the case of the voice, Jung arrives at the conclusion that God is to be found in man's unconscious psyche. Now let us examine the second religious symbol which Jung has found in the dreams of his patients. Important does Jung consider this symbol that Lie states, "In point of fact my whole discourse about the quaternary is no more than a regrettably short and inadequate introduction to the final and crowning piece of my paradigmatic case."⁴ We must note at the outset that Jung does not say it clearly exactly how widely this symbol occurs in his patients. He describes the symbol precisely as it occurred to one of his patients, but we do not know how many others had similar experiences.

The second symbol, a very complex structure, is the dreamer's vision of the universe, which Jung refers to as a mandala. The mandala consisted of two qualitatively different concentric circles one vertical, one horizontal.

6. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, P. 71.

1. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, P.348.

2. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, P. 71.

3. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, P. 72.

4. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, P. 78.

The vertical circle was divided into thirty-two partitions with hard rotating upon it. The dreamer referred to the complete structure as a "world clock."⁵ Jung proceeds to analyze this symbol, drawing analogies between it and Plato's Times, medieval representations of the world, and Buddhist Mandalay. But he soon finds a fundamental difficulty with all these analogies. "No matter how striking these analogies are, they are not satisfactory, because they all emphasize the center to such an extent that they seem to have been made in order to express the importance of the central fissure. In our case, however, the center is empty."¹ Jung finally finds a suitably analogy to this symbol in fourteenth-century poet Guillaume de Douglasville's vision of paradise. In an explanation which is far too long and ante detailed to interest us here, Jung explains, "A patient's vision is a symbolic answer to the question of the centuries. That is probably the deeper reason why the image of the world clock produced the impression of 'most sublime harmony.'² After a thorough analysis of the symbol of the Mandala, Jung attributes to it a meaning similar to that of the voice and that of the quaternary. "A modern Mandala is an involuntary confession of a peculiar mental condition. There is no deity in the Mandala, and there is no submission or reconciliation to a deity; the place of the deity seems to be taken by the wholeness of man."³ At this point, one may stop and ask why Jung has taken such great care in explaining these two symbols. Do they really reveal anything more than that certain people believe that God exists, within man? Having previously discussed Jung's theory of archetypes, we are now in a position to understand his final explanation of the importance of these symbols:

All this detail is an attempt to put my psychological observations into their historical setting. Without this historical connection, they would remain suspended in mid-air, a mere curiosity. As I have already pointed out, the connection of modern symbolism with ancient theories and beliefs are not established by their usual direct or indirect tradition. The most careful inquiry has never revealed any possibility of my patients being acquainted with books or having any other information about such ideas. It seems that their unconscious mind has worked along the same line of thought which

5. For a complete text of the vision, see Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, pp. 80-81.

1. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, p. 82.

2. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, p. 87.

3. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, p. 99.

has manifested itself, time and again, within the last two thousand years. Such continuity can only exist if; we assumed a certain unconscious condition carried on by biological inheritance ... I have called [this phenomenon] "archetype."⁴

Thus, by showing these symbols representing God to be present in the unconscious of his patients, by tracing their (the symbols') history back through two thousand years, and by establishing that his patients knew nothing of the existence or the history of these symbols, Jung has proven the existence, in the human unconscious psyche, of archetypal image of God. But he sounds a note of caution, lest anybody mistake his observations for proof of the existence of God. "They prove only the existence of an archetypal image of the Deity, which to my mind is the most we can assert psychologically about God."¹ At last, we are ready to look at some of Jung's general observations about original religious experience. We may recall that the vision of the mandala produced in the dreamer a feeling of "most sublime harmony." Jung concludes, therefore, that "since the experience of [the archetypal image of the deity], has the quality of luminosity often to a high degree it ranks among religious experiences."² Because Jung is an empiricist rather than a philosopher, he makes no attempt to evaluate religious experience in any way. Rather, he believes that "religious experience is absolute. It is indisputable. You can only say that you have never had such an experience; and your. Opponent will say: 'Sorry, I have, and there your discussion will come to an end'.³ And since he is not searching for absolute truth, Jung takes what may best be called a pragmatic approach to religion:

No matter what the world thinks about religious experience, the one who has it possesses the great treasure of a thing that has provided him with a source of life, meaning and beauty that has given a new splendor to the world and to mankind. He has peacefulness and peace. Where is the criterion by which you could say that such a life is not legitimate, that such experience is not valid and that such a thing is mere illusion is there, as a matter of fact, any better truth about ultimate things than the one that helps you to live?⁴

Such a pragmatic view of religion is strongly reminiscent of William

4. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*; pp. 111-112.

1. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, P. 73.

2. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, P. 73.

3. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, p. 113.

4. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, pp. 113-114.

James. In his book *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, James asserts that sacrifices and surrenders are a necessary part of everyone's lives. He maintains that in non-religious affairs, these sacrifices are, at very best, only tolerated, whereas in religious matters they are made willingly. He concludes that "religion thus makes easy End felicitous what in any case is necessary; avid if it be the only agency that can accomplish this result, its vital importance as a human faculty stands vindicated beyond dispute."¹ Thus, to a certain extent, both Jung and James see the value of religion in terms of the results it achieves.

What, then, is Jung's opinion of all those religious creeds, which do attest to make statement about ultimate truth? Constantly stressing that he is a scientist rather than a philosopher, Jung of course is uninterested in determining which, if any, of the creeds espouse truth to the greatest degree. Rather, he views these creeds as an empiricist, as a pragmatist. "What is usually and generally called 'religion' is to such an amazing degree a substitute that I ask myself seriously whether 'his kind of 'religion,' which I prefer to call a creed, has not an important function."²

Let us look at what Jung considers to be the function of religious creeds. In some instances, Jung speaks of creeds as a substitute for true religious experience. "The substitution has the obvious purpose of replacing immediate experience by a choice of suitable symbols invested in a solidly organized dogma and ritual."³ In other cases, Jung sees creeds as a defense against original religious experience. "There are any amount of creeds and. ceremonies that exist for the sole purpose of forming a defense against the unexpected, dangerous tendencies of the unconscious."⁴ At still other times, Jung refers to dogmas as actual "immediate experiences."⁵ Clearly, Jung's view of the relationship between creeds and experience is complex and requires further elucidation. Jung's explanation of this relationship requires that we recall his theory of archetypes. He maintains that Christian dogmas such as the Immaculate Conception, the Virgin Birth, the God-man, the Cross and Trinity are by no means unique to Christianity. Rather, they are archetypal images which were once conscious in primitive man and which, in the last several

1. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Random house, 1929), p. 51.

2. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, p. 52.

3. Jun, *Psychology and Religion*, p. 52.

4. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, p. 21.

5. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, p. 56.

thousand years, have reappeared spontaneously through visions, dreams, and trances. These archetypal images have become cruised in the ritual and ceremonies of religious creeds (which are as we said before, dogmatized and codified forms of original experience).⁶ Jung concludes that "the dogma is like a dream, reflecting the spontaneous and autonomous activity of the objective psyche, the unconscious. Such an expression of the unconscious is [an] efficient means of defense against further immediate experiences."¹

Thus, we can now understand how creeds can be a substitute for and a defense against original religious experience, while at the same time being itself an actual immediate (though not original) experience. This view of the relationship between religious creeds and experience is similar to that of existential psychologist Abraham Maslow. Maslow has written:

*Apparently it is one danger of the legalistic and organizational versions of religion that they may tend to suppress naturalistic peak, transcendent, mystical or other core-religious experiences and to make them less likely to occur. Conventional religions may even be used as defenses against and resistances to the shaking experiences of transcendence.*²

Maslow adds that the immediate experience of the creed is much less intense than original Religious experience and of dogmas and repetition [of dogmas and rituals] produces a lowering of the intensity and richness of consciousness familiarization, in a word, makes it unnecessary to attend, to think, to feel, to live fully, to experience richly.³

In order to illustrate the importance and the effects of creeds, Jung compares Catholicism and Protestantism. Catholicism has retained many of the practices, rituals, and ceremonies which Protestantism has largely eliminated, including the confession, the mass, and the greater part of the liturgy, the sacrificial importance of the priesthood; and the papacy. Keeping in mind that original experience is not always easily understood, Jung sees the dogmas and rituals of the Catholic Church as an effective defense against "an onslaught of the terrible ambiguity of an immediate experience."⁴

Viewing Catholicism pragmatically Jung concludes, "I support the

6. Jung, *Psychology and Religions*, p. 56.

1. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, P. 57.

2. Abraham Maslow, *Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences* (New York: Penguin Books, 1978), P. 33.

3. *Maslow*, p. 34.

4. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, p. 55.

hypothesis of the practicing Catholic while it works for him. .. I support [this] means of defense against a grave risk, without asking the academic question whether the defense is more or less an ultimate truth. I am glad when and as long as it works."⁵

Protestantism, in contrast, has abolished many of the rituals and ceremonies which serve to protect Catholics against the ambiguities of original experience. As a result, the Protestant is left in a somewhat precarious situation. On the one hand, he has the opportunity for things which most Catholics will never have the good fortune to experience. "If a Protestant survives the complete loss of his church and still remains a Protestant, that is, a man who is defenseless against God and is no longer shielded by walls or by communities, he has the unique spiritual chance of immediate religious experience."¹ On the other hand, the Protestant has given up his defense against what is potentially a devastating experience. He has, in fact, lost "the ritual, which, since time immemorial has been a safe way of dealing with the unaccountable forces of the unconscious mind."² Thus, Jung sees Protestantism as a calculated risk, in which the Protestant lives up the safety, conservatism, and security retained by Catholicism, in hopes of experiencing God more directly.

Jung observes further that as a result of recent scientific advances, many have left the church. If these people were all "dull rationalists or neurotic intellectuals," Jung states, this loss would be neither Kling nor distressing. "But many of them are religious people, only incapable of agreeing with the actually existing forms of creed."³ Jung then notes the effect of each of these creeds, Catholicism and Protestantism, on those whom it has alienated. "The Catholic who has turned his back on the church usually develops a secret or manifest inclination toward atheism, whereas the Protestant follows, if possible, a sectarian movement. The absolutism of the Catholic church seems to demand an equally absolute negation, while Protestant relativism permits variations."⁴

Thus, Catholicism, even with all its provisions for protection and consolation, runs the greater risk of the complete alienation of its followers

5. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, p. 55.

1. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, p. 62.

2. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, p. 58.

3. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, p. 23.

4. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, p. 23.

due to the absolutism of its dogma. Though Jung believes that the established religious creeds perform a useful function in society, and that they do indeed represent meaningful immediate experience, he nevertheless asserts that it is the individual original experience which is most important to the religious man.

The few dreams I have chosen as an example of what I call "immediate experience" are surely unobtrusive to the inexperienced eye. They make no show being modest witnesses of a merely Individual experience. A creed is always the result and fruit of many minds and many centuries, purified from all the oddities, shortcomings and flaws of individual experience. But for all that, the individual experience, with its very poverty, is immediate life, it is the warm red blood pulsating today. It is more convincing to a seeker after truth than the best tradition.¹

Jung supports his assertions about the importance of religious experience by noting the reactions of his patients to such experiences. He reports that his patients, after a profound experience, begin to look at life in an entirely different way: they become reconciled to and learn to understand themselves, their circumstances, and even the world.² Jung concludes his explanation of religion on a pragmatic note, echoing the words of William James, who once said that religion is a case in which "faith in a fact can help create the fact. This is confusing point, so, further explanation is required. Jung does not believe that faith in God is of primary importance in religion; rather, he believes that faith is a secondary phenomenon caused by a previous religious experience.³ Therefore, the word faith in James's quotation refers not to "faith in God," but rather to "faith that through the perception of one's own unconscious one can learn how best to live one's life." Jung expresses this idea himself by saying, "Nobody can know what the ultimate things are. We must, therefore, take them as we experience them. And if such experience helps to make your life healthier, more beautiful, more complete, and more satisfactory to yourself and to those you love, you may safely say: 'This was the grace of God.'"⁴

After analyzing Jung's psychological theories about God and religion, people often wonder just exactly what he perceives God to be. Is God an actual existing

1. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, p. 63.

2. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, p. 99.

3. Carl Jung, "The Undiscovered Self," in *Civilization in Transition*, Vol. X of The Collected Works of C. G. Jung, trans. R. F. C. Hull., ed. Sir Herbert Read (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964), p. 265.

4. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, p. 114.

being? a hypothesis to explain certain unknown facts? a creation of man? Perhaps it is best to quote Jung directly in answering this question.

The idea of God is an absolutely necessary psychological function of an irrational nature, which has nothing whatever to do with the question of God's existence. The human intellect, can never answer this question, still less give any proof of God. Moreover, such proof is superfluous, for the idea of an all powerful divine Being is present everywhere, unconsciously if not consciously, because it is an archetype. Our intellect has long known that we can form no proper idea of God, much less picture to ourselves in what manner he really exists, if at all. The existence of God is once and for all an unanswerable question.¹

Thus, Jung appears to take an agnostic view of God, asserting that we can never know anything about God Himself, only about the archetype of God. Does this mean that God is not real, that He is a figment of man's imagination? Again, we would do best to use Jung's own words in answering this question.

I have been asked so often whether I believe existence God or not that I am somewhat concerned, what most people overlook or seem unable to understand is the fact that I regard the psyche as real, They believe only in physical facts; anti must consequently come to the conclusion that either the uranium itself or the laboratory equipment created the atom bomb. is no less absurd than the assumption that a non-real psyche is responsible for it. God is an obvious psychic and non-physical fact, i.e. a fact that can be established psychically but not physically.²

Thus, from the standpoint of psychological truth which we discussed earlier, Jung asserts emphatically that God is real. God may or may not be real in the physical sense, but in the psychical sense He is undoubtedly real. In looking at Jung's overall conception of God and religion, we can notice significant similarities between his views and those of Maslow and James. We have already noted Jung's opinion that the most important aspect of religion is original immediate experience. He believes that all religious creeds are derived.. though in vastly different ways, from immediate

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1. Carl Jung, "The Psychology of the Unconscious," *in two Essays en Analytical Psychology*, Vol. VII of The Collected works of C. G. Jung, trans. R. F. C. Hull, ed. Sir Herbert Read (New York: Pantheon Book's, 1953), p. 70.
 2. Carl Jung, "answer to job," in *psychology and religion: west and east*, vol. xi of the collected works of c.g. jung, trans. r.f.c. hull, ed. Sir Herbert read (new york: pantheon books, 1958), pp. 463-464.

experience. Maslow holds a similar view of religion. he writes, even the social act of belonging to a church must be a private act, with no great social or political consequences, once religious pluralist: has been accepted, once any religion is seen as a local structure, in local terms, of species-wide, core-religious, transcendent experience."³

In addition, Jung's view of the close association between God and the human unconscious is similar to that of William James.

Let me then propose, as a hypothesis, that whatever it may be on its farther side, the "more" with which in religious experience we feel ourselves connected is on its hither side the Subconscious¹. Continuation of our conscious life. The theologian's contention that the religious man is moved by an external power is vindicated, for it is one of the peculiarities of invasions from the subconscious region to take on objective appearances, and to suggest to the subject an external control.²

Thus James, like Jung, believes that God is associated with the unconscious and explains why most people nevertheless perceive God to be external.

At the very beginning, I posited that Jung's psychological conception of religions was probably influenced by his personal experience. Perhaps by looking in detail at one of Jung's earliest and most profound experiences, this point will become clearer.

One summer day when he was twelve years old, Jung went to the cathedral square. He noticed the uncommon beauty of the blue sky, the shining sun and the glittering tile on the roof of the cathedral. He was overwhelmed by the beauty of this sight, and he thought of God sitting majestically on His golden throne, high above all His wonderful creations. Suddenly something, terrible entered Jung's mind. He did not know what it was, but he knew that he must resist any further thought about this sight lest he commit a frightful sin against God. For three days he could not sleep. The more he tried to prevent this thought from entering, his consciousness, the weaker he felt.

He questioned the origin of this thought, for he knew that it was not his own. And he wondered why God should challenge his faith this way, why He should force Jung to think such terrible thoughts about Him. Jung finally reasoned that it was not faith, but rather courage which God demanded of him. He must have the courage to face God, to think through this thought.

3. Maslow, p. 55.

1. James's term subconscious is entirely equivalent to the modern term unconscious.

2. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, pp. 502-503.

This thought.³ Jung writes, several years after this experience: "I gathered all my courage... and let the thought come. I saw before me the cathedral, the blue sky. God sits on His golden throne, high above the world-and from under the throne an enormous turd falls on the sparkling new roof, shatters it, and breaks the walls of the cathedral asunder."⁴

Suddenly a feeling of relief came over him, and the misery of the past three days was transformed into feelings of grace and illumination. He began to understand why he had feared this thought- and what it actual;' meant. He explains:

It was as though I had experienced an illumination. A great many things I had not previously and 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 reasons and out of the 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's commandments as his guide; he believed in God as the Bible prescribe-c 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.¹

In this one experience, we can see the central core of Jung's later theories about religion: the idea that the thoughts of the unconscious are not ones own thoughts; that religious experiences forced themselves the consciousness of the individual; that the source of God is the human unconscious psyche; and that faith and ritual are of secondary importance to the immediate experience the living God. Thus, while Jung was able to derive his entire theory of religion almost solely from empirical observations on his patients, seems reasonable to conclude that his own personal experience must have played a significant role in guiding him. That is to say, had a man like Freud who held profoundly different views, constructed theory of religion from the identical data available to Jung, we can be sure that his theory would have been vastly different from Jung's. Freud probably would have reached the same conclusion that he reached in *The Future of an Illusion*, namely, that religion is a universal obsession neurosis, rather than a beneficial and distinctively human experience.²

Thus we have seen Jung's complex, yet, for me, profound and satisfying

3. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, pp. 36-39.

4. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, p. 39.

1. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, p. 40.

2. Sigmund Freud, *the Future of an Illusion*, trans. James Strachey. New York: Norton, 1961, p.43.

conception of religion, which is inextricably tied to psychology. On the whole, I think he kept rather well to his promise of remaining an empiricist, with only a few philosophical digressions. I believe he presented his theory convincingly, and his conclusions were justified based on the empirical data. Let us end, then, with Jung's own words, a sort of summary of religion up to the present day:

Modern psychological development leads to a much better understanding as to what man really consists of. The gods first lived in superhuman power and beauty on the top of snow-clad mountains or in the darkness of caves, woods and seas. Later on they drew together into one god, and then that god became man. But the gods in our time assemble in the lap of the ordinary individual and are as powerful and as awe--inspiring as ever, in spite of their new disguise--the so-called psychical functions, Man thinks of himself as holding the psyche in the hollow of his hand. He dreams even of making a science of her But in reality she is the mother and the maker the psychical subject and even the possibility of consciousness itself. The psyche reaches so far beyond the boundary line of consciousness that the latter could be easily compared to an island in the ocean. While the island is small and narrow, the ocean is immensely wide and deep, so that if it is a Question of space, it does not matter whether the gods are inside or outside.¹

1. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, p. 102.

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