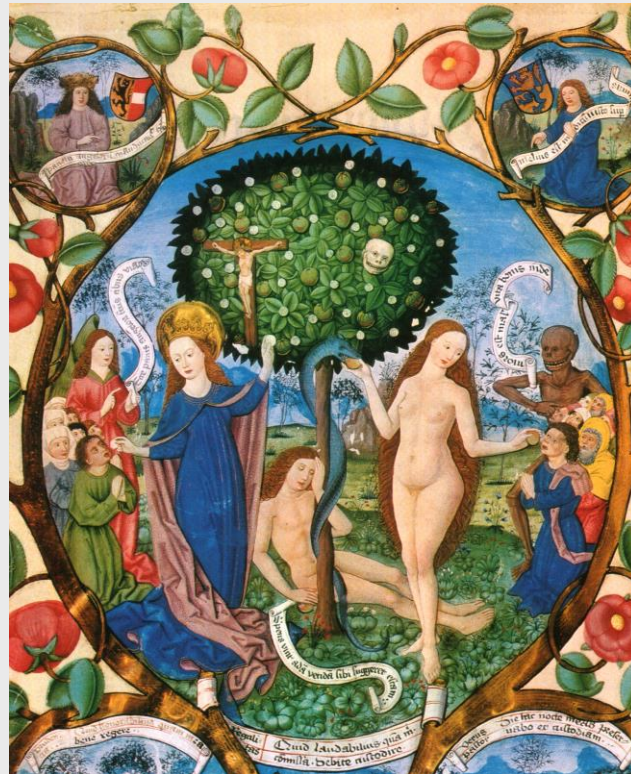


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Jung's Archetypes and Religion



Ljubljana, November 23, 2009

Jung's main works on Western religion(s)

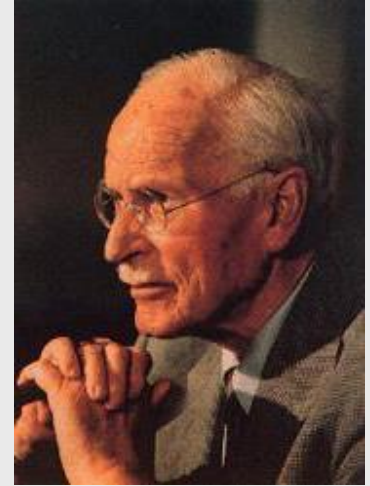
C. G. Jung: *Psychology and Religion: West and East*, translated by R. Hull (*The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, Volume XI), Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1969 (2nd ed.):

- *Psychology and Religion* (The Terry Lectures of 1937)
- *A Psychological Approach to the Dogma of the Trinity* (from: *Symbolic des Geistes*, 1948)
- *Transformation Symbolism of the Mass* (from: *Von den Wurzeln des Bewusstseins*, 1954)
- *Answer to Job* (*Antwort auf Hiob*, 1952)

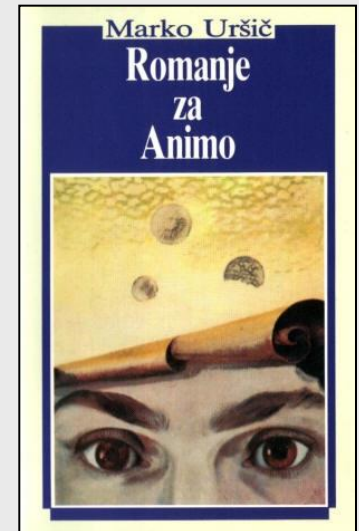
Memories, Dreams, Reflections, recorded and edited by Aniela Jaffé, trans. by Richard and Clara Winston, revised edition, Vintage Books, Random House, New York, 1989 (in Slovene: *Spomini, sanje, misli*, prev. Božidar Kante, DZS, Ljubljana, 1989).

Religija in psihologija – Carl Gustav Jung (selected texts and studies), ed. Marko Uršič, *Poligrafi*, Založba Nova revija, 1996; including my paper “Teorija arhetipov – nostalgija po platonizmu?” (“The Theory of Archetypes – Nostalgia for Platonism?”)

In my younger days, I have written a novel *A Pilgrimage to Anima* (in Slovene: *Romanje za Animo*, Cankarjeva založba, Ljubljana, 1988). The place of the story is Jerusalem ... Some more information about this book is available in my web page: <http://www2.arnes.si/~mursic3/english.htm>



Carl Gustav Jung
(1875-1961)



“God as an obvious psychic and non-physical fact”

Answer to Job, a fragment from chapter XIX (underlined by M.U., in all slides):

- “... I have been asked so often whether I believe in the existence of God or not that I am somewhat concerned lest I be taken for an adherent of ‘psychologism’ far more commonly than I suspect. 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, and must consequently come to the conclusion that either the uranium itself or the laboratory equipment created the atom bomb. That 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. Equally, these people have still not got it into their heads that the psychology of religion falls into two categories, which must be sharply distinguished from one another: firstly, the psychology of the religious person, and secondly, the psychology of religion proper, i.e., of religious contents.” (C. W., XI, pp. 463-64)

Answer to Job (from chapter VII) – “myth is not a fiction”:

- “The fact that the life of Christ is largely myth does absolutely nothing to disprove its factual truth – quite the contrary. I would even go so far as to say that the mythical characted of a life is just what expresses its universal human validity.” (*Ibid.*, 409)

Is Jung's psychology of religion a kind of phenomenology?

Psychology of Religion (The Terry Lectures, 1937), from the 1st lecture:

- “Although I have often been called a philosopher, I am an empiricist and adhere as such to the phenomenological standpoint. [...] I believe that experience is not even possible without reflection, because ‘experience’ is a process of assimilation without which there could be no understanding. [...] Inasmuch as religion has a very important psychological aspect, I deal with it from a purely empirical point of view, that is, I restrict myself to the observation of phenomena and I eschew any metaphysical or philosophical considerations.” (C. W., XI, pp. 5-6)
- “This standpoint 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 judgement. When psychology speaks, for instance, of the motif of the virgin birth, it 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. The idea is psychologically true inasmuch as it exists. Psychological existence is subjective in so far as an idea occurs in only one individual. But it is objective in so far as that idea is shared by a society – by a *consensus gentium*. (*Ibid.*, p. 6)
- “...This is not Platonic philosophy but empirical psychology.” (*Ibid.*, p. 7)
- “...Not only does the psyche exist, it is existence itself.” (*Ibid.*, p. 12)

But – what does it actually mean: the existence of psyche, of ideas ... of the mind?
(These questions are philosophical *par excellence*.)

See also: Roger Brooke, *Jung and Phenomenology*, Routledge, London, 1991.

Religious ideas and/or images, based on the numinous archetypes

Answer to Job, from introduction (*Lectori benevolo*):

- “But, although our whole world of religious ideas consists of anthropomorphic images that could never stand up to rational criticism, we should never forget that they are based on numinous archetypes, i.e., on an emotional foundation which is unassailable by reason. We are dealing with psychic facts which logic can overlook but not eliminate.” (C. W., XI, p. 361)

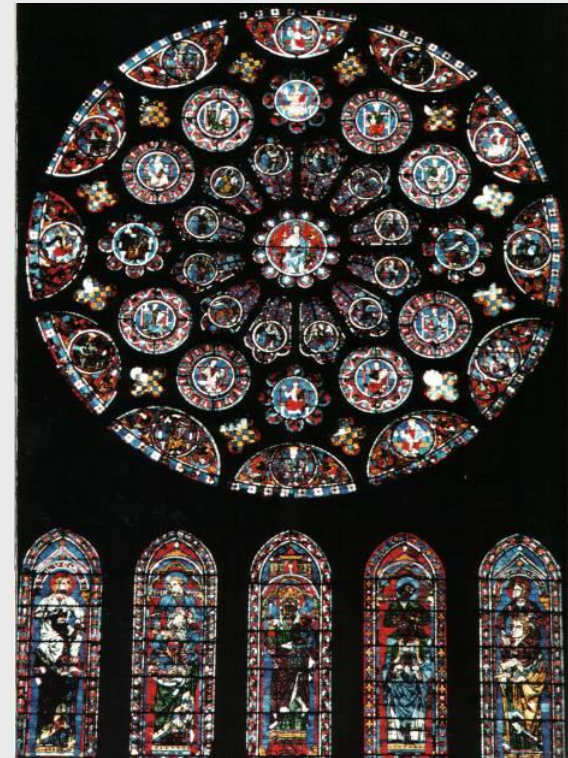


William Blake:
Lucifer before the Fall,
~ 1800.

God and the unconscious, the archetype of wholeness, “God-image”

Answer to Job, from ch. XIX:

- “It is only through the psyche that we can establish that God acts upon us, but we are unable to distinguish whether these actions emanate from God or from the unconscious. We cannot tell whether God and the unconscious are two different entities. Both are border-line concepts for transcendental contents. But empirically it can be established, with a sufficient degree of probability, that there is in the unconscious an archetype of wholeness which manifests itself spontaneously in dreams, etc., and a tendency, independent of the conscious will, to relate other archetypes to this centre. Consequently, it does not seem improbable that the archetype of wholeness occupies as such a central position which approximates it to the God-image.” (C. W., XI, pp. 468-69)

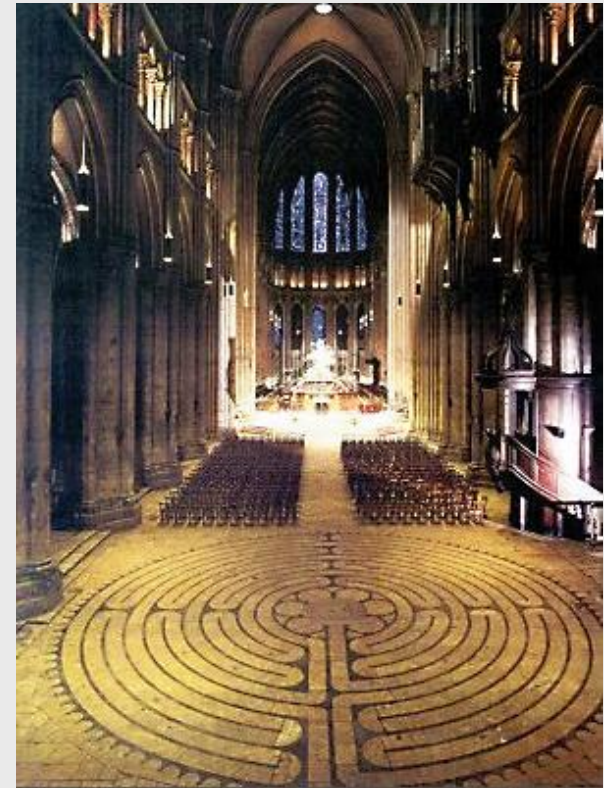


Chartres, cathedral,
south rose window,
13th century

God-image as the archetype of the self

From the same chapter of *Answer to Job*:

- “...a certain qualification of our above thesis concerning the indistinguishableness of God and the inconscious: strictly speaking, the God-image does not coincide with the unconscious as such, but with a special content of it, namely the archetype of the self. It is this archetype from which we can no longer distinguish the God-image empirically.”
(C. W., XI, p. 469)
- “The religious need longs for wholeness, and therefore lays hold of the images of wholeness offered by the unconscious mind, rise up from the depths of our psychic nature.”
(*Ibid.*)



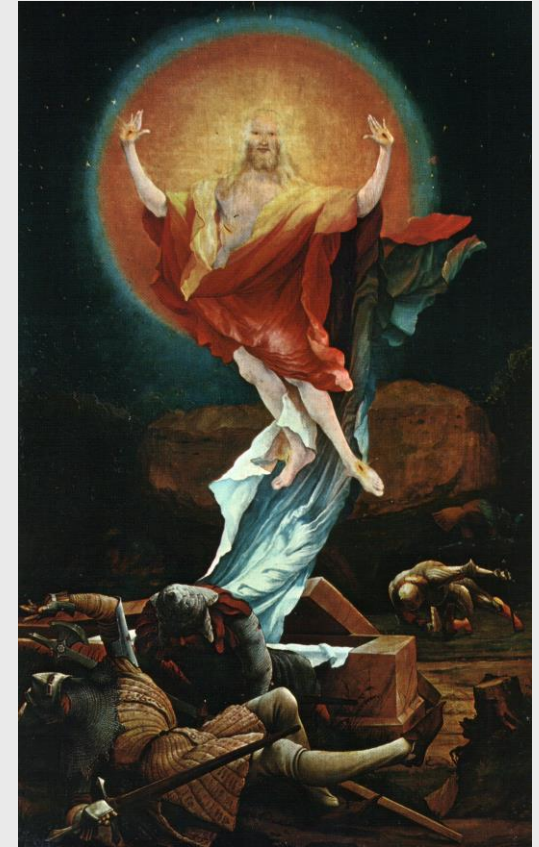
Labyrinth in the Notre
Dame of Chartres

Christ as the archetype of the self

A Psychological Approach to the Trinity, from chapter II:

“Christ as Archetype”:

- “This archetypal idea [of an overpowering, all-embracing, complete or perfect being] is a reflection of the individual’s wholeness, i.e., of the self, which is present in him as an unconscious image. [...] It was this archetype of the self in the soul of every man that responded to the Christian message, with the result that the concrete Rabbi Jesus was rapidly assimilated by the constellated archetype. In this way Christ realized the idea of the self. But as one can never distinguish empirically between the symbol of the self and a God-image, the two ideas, however much we try to differentiate them, always appear blended together, so that the self appears synonymous with the inner Christ of the Johannine and Pauline writings, and Christ with God (‘of one substance with the Father’) ...” (C. W., XI, p. 156)
- “The self is defined psychologically as the psychic totality of the individual. Anything that a man postulates as being a greater totality than himself can become a symbol of the self.” (*Ibid.*)



Mathis Grünewald,
Resurrection
(The altar of Isenheim,
1515)

The archetypal development of the Holy Trinity – a “divine drama”

A Psychological Approach to the Trinity, from ch. IV: “The Three Persons in the light of psychology”, section 1: “The hypothesis of the archetype”:

- “The sequence of creeds illustrates the evolution of the Trinity idea through the centuries [... and] is a perpetual stumbling-block to the liberal-minded rationalist. Religious statements are, however, never rational in the ordinary sense of the word, for they always take into consideration that other world, the world of the archetype. Of which reason in the ordinary sense is unconscious, being occupied only with externals. Thus the development of the Christian idea of the Trinity unconsciously reproduced the archetype of the homoousia of Father, Son, and Ka-mutef which first appeared in Egyptian Theology. Not that the Egyptian model could be considered the archetype of the Christian idea. The archetype *an sich*, as I have explained elsewhere [*On the Nature of the Psyche*], is an ‘irrepresentable’ factor, a ‘disposition’ which starts functioning at a given moment in the development of the human mind and arranges the material of consciousness into definite patterns. That is to say, man’s conceptions of God are organized into triads and trinities ...” (C. W., XI, pp. 148-49)

However, the principal problem of Jung’s treatise on the Holy Trinity is “The Problem of the Fourth” (chapter V), i.e., of Antichrist – but this is another topic of discussion ...

Answer to Job: Jung's archetypal and gnostic interpretation of the Bible

The biblical person Job is in the centre of the archetypal Trinitarian drama. God the Father and Creator of the world – Yahweh “reflects” Him-Self in Job's unjust suffering, and following Jung, the real “answer to Job” is God's own incarnation in Christ and His death on the cross for the salvation of human souls (*nota bene*: and for salvation of Himself – the concept of the “saved savior” is gnostic by origin):

Jung's *Answer to Job*, a fragment from ch. VII:

- “...the despairing cry from the Cross: ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’ Here his [Jesus'] human nature attains divinity; at that moment God experiences what it meant to be a mortal man and drinks to the dregs what he made his faithful servant Job suffer. Here is given the answer to Job, and, clearly, this supreme moment is as divine as it is human, as ‘eschatological’ as it is ‘psychological’. And at this moment, too, where one can feel the human being so absolutely, the divine myth is present in full force. And both mean one and the same thing.” (C.W., XI, p. 408)
- “The life of Christ is just what it had to be if it is the life of a god and a man at the same time. It is a symbolum, a bringing together of heterogeneous natures, rather as if Job and Yahweh were combined in a single personality. Yahweh's intention to become man, which resulted from his collision with Job, is fulfilled in Christ's life and suffering.” (*Ibid.*, p. 409)

Time and eternity in the gnostic and Neo-Platonic *pléroma* – are Jung’s archetypes a kind of unconscious Platonic Ideas (Forms), after all?

- In Christ as the archetype of self and wholeness (or “fullness”), two distinct levels of being, temporal and eternal, coincide one with another. Jung named the eternal level of being *pléroma*, following the ancient Neo-Platonic and gnostic philosophies (*pléroma* literary means “fullness of spirits”). In *Answer to Job* we read (ch. V):
- “Although the birth of Christ is an event that occurred but once in history, it has always existed in eternity. For the layman in these matters, the identity of a nontemporal, eternal event with a unique historical occurrence is something that is extremely difficult to conceive. He must, however, accustom himself to the idea that ‘time’ is a relative concept and needs to be complemented by that of the ‘simultaneous’ existence, in the Bardo or pleroma, of all historical processes. What exists in the pleroma as an eternal process appears in time as an aperiodic sequence, that is to say, it is repeated many times in an irregular pattern.” (C. W., XI, p. 400)

My answer to the question whether Jung is a (cripto) Platonist is – o, yes, exactly!

In the end of Jung’s Way, his archetypes returned to their historical origin: *arché-týpoi*, i.e., timeless and spaceless Ideas (Forms) in Neo-Platonism and/or Gnosticism.

Two questions instead of a conclusion

In the “Late Thoughts” of *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* Jung’s “programme” of a psychological and/or philosophical (indeed gnostic) “redefinition” of religion(s) is resumed, for example, in the following passage:

- “If, therefore, we speak of ‘God’ as an ‘archetype’, we are saying nothing about His real nature but are letting it be known that ‘God’ already has a place in that part of our psyche which is pre-existent to consciousness and that He therefore cannot be considered an invention of consciousness. We neither make Him more remote nor eliminate Him, but bring Him closer to the possibility of being experienced.” (*Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, pp. 347-38)

This conclusion raises (at least) two questions:

1. If we accept Jung’s archetypal, i.e. symbolic “redefinition” of God and religion(s), what do we gain in the theological or even religious sense? – The tentative answer is that we gain a lot in the sense that different religions, conceived as “symbolic languages” come much closer together, so that religious fundamentalism and exclusiveness might be overcome or at least diminished.
2. But what do we lose, especially from the Christian point of view? Why are Christians not very well disposed towards Jung’s “psychological” approach to Christianity? – Because the reality of corporal/physical resurrection and salvation is lost in this way, or at least it is moved into a symbolic domain. Another problem for a Christian reading Jung is that the Bible as The Holy Scripture is exposed to “relativism”, since from the symbolic/archetypal point of view, there are many different holy scriptures.

Thank you for your attention!