

Carl Jung

By Douglas Groothuis, Ph.D.

Date: July 26, 1875 – June 6, 1961

Select Publications: *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (1959), *Synchronicity* (1952), *Psychology and Alchemy* (1944)

Key Words: Individual Unconscious, Collective Conscious, Collective Unconscious, Archetypes, Active Imagination

INTRODUCTION

Over six decades after his death, Jung's influence is considerable. While Freud's star is waning, Jung's is waxing.¹ Much of the recent interest in "the new spirituality" or just "spirituality" (terms that have largely replaced "the New Age") draws deeply from the Jungian well. For instance, the immensely popular television series and book *The Power of Myth* (1987) featured the ruminations of Joseph Campbell (d. 1987), a professor of literature and a follower of Jungian thought, who edited *The Portable Jung*. Campbell's treatment of mythology, religion, and Christianity reflects Jungian themes, as when Campbell praises the Gnostics and criticizes Christians for being too literal in their dogmas.² Thomas Moore has produced several best-selling books, including *Care of the Soul* and *Soul Mates*, which resonate deeply with Jungian themes on the deity of the self, the hazards of orthodox Christianity, and an interest in occult³ practices such as alchemy and astrology.⁴ Jung's influence has reached far and wide, even popping up in beer commercials and episodes of "Star Trek: The Next Generation," which invoke the Jungian notion of "the collective unconscious."

As many men and women seek out their own individualized forms of non-Christian spirituality, Jungian ideas propel them along the way. The secular men's movement looks for the masculine warrior archetype within, while many pagan feminists search for the goddess or the wild woman buried somewhere in their psyches, as discussed in Clarissa Pinloola Estes's best-selling book *Women Who Run with Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype*.⁵

Jung was a key player in the origin of the psychoanalytic movement in Europe and America. The young Swiss psychiatrist was mentored by Sigmund Freud and accompanied him on his short but influential visit to America in 1909. Their intense friendship—initiated by a thirteen-hour discussion—ended in a bitter break in 1914 and a life-long estrangement. Jung rejected Freud's views on the psychological centrality of sexuality and his rejection of religious impulses as intrinsically neurotic. Jung, always the spiritual explorer, sought to fathom the spiritual needs of the soul while presenting his brand of psychoanalysis (analytical psychology) as a burgeoning empirical science.

Despite Jung's ambitions, Freud's theories proved far more influential in the coming decades and became a kind of orthodoxy in their own right. (Freud theories are equally unbiblical, but in different ways.)⁶ Richard Noll's scholarly study of Jung's intellectual history and influence, *The Jung Cult*, notes that "Jung and his theories have remained well outside the established worlds of science and medicine, as they have been regarded, with justification, as inconsistent with the greater scientific paradigms of the twentieth century."⁷ Nevertheless, "in sheer numbers alone, it is Jung, who has won the cultural war and whose works are more widely read and discussed in the popular culture of our age."⁸

JUNG AND SPIRITUALITY

Some Christians are attracted to Jung because of his recognition of the spiritual nature of humanity unlike atheists such as Freud, B. F. Skinner, and Albert Ellis, who offer no solace for a soul that they deny exists. Jung delves deeply and sympathetically into a variety of spiritual topics. When asked in a 1959 BBC interview if he believed in God, Jung replied, "I don't believe—I know."⁹ Some Christians claim that Jung provides a fruitful model for the elusive integration of psychology and spirituality. A raft of books written by Morton Kelsey, John Sanford, and others attempt to

affect such an integration. Today, the most influential Jungian is Jordan Peterson, although his religious orientation is unclear. Nevertheless, any Jungian-Christian synthesis is ill-fated, because the Jungian worldview is deeply non-Christian even anti-Christian. As the Apostle warned, “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?” (2 Corinthians 6:14).

Jung was not a Christian, but non-Christians can sometimes offer legitimate psychological insights that do not violate Christian truth, and which bear good fruit in the counseling situation. Just as God gives rain to the righteous and unrighteous (Matthew 5:45) through His common grace, so God equips some non-Christian thinkers with insights into human psychology. Viktor Frankl, the founder of Logotherapy, was Jewish, but offered many valid insights into the human psyche and how to treat its troubles.¹⁰ And his theory is far more compatible with biblical truth than Jung’s. All truth is God’s truth.¹¹ However, when a theorist’s views are incorrigibly enmeshed in a worldview that radically opposed Christianity, these views are incompatible with Christian thought—whether in psychology, psychiatry, or any other discipline. Richard Noll, a scholar and critic of Jung makes the judgment that Jung, “ranks with the Roman emperor Julian the Apostate (fourth century C. E.) as one who significantly undermined orthodox Christianity and restored the polytheism of the Hellenistic world in Western Civilization.”¹²

In *The Jung Cult* and *The Aryan Christ*,¹³ clinical psychologist Noll amply documents Jung’s immersion in the paganism and occultism of German culture near the turn of the last century. Although raised in a Christian environment, Jung focused on the rediscovery of ancient mystery religions that emphasized occultic initiations and sun worship. He immersed himself in the study of mythology and archeology¹⁴ in the hope of finding a primordial wisdom that had been obscured and rejected by the Christian conquest of paganism. Jung resolutely rejected the Christian view that a personal God transcends the creation. Instead, he embraced pantheism, with its god within or divine self. Moreover, Jung deemed himself a kind of liberator who would lead his followers out of the dead ends of Christianity and atheism and into a richer spirituality. He viewed his version of psychoanalysis as something of new religion. Jung was a highly intelligent and mesmerizing personality who was believed by his followers to have a charismatic authority and esoteric insights.

Mystical paganism was a mere theory to Jung. Noll reports Jung’s claim that in 1913 he himself became a god through an extended visualization exercise based on the elements of the initiation rituals of the ancient mystery religions, especially Mithraism. Noll comments that it “is clear that Jung believed he had undergone a direct initiation into the ancient Hellenistic mysteries and had even experienced deification in doing so.”¹⁵ This was not an isolated event in Jung’s life.

Jung also claims to have contacted various spirit entities through his process of “active imagination,” or directed visualization. By 1916, an entity called Philemon had become Jung’s spiritual guru, and functioned much like the “ascended masters” of the Theosophical¹⁶ movement in Jung’s day. These entities were not occasional visitors with little influence on Jung’s work. According to Noll, these encounters helped shape the whole pattern of Jung’s theoretical work.¹⁷ According to Jung, they had “their own life. Philemon represented a force which was not myself.”¹⁸ That is, they existed independently from his consciousness. Jung’s autobiography, *Memories, Dreams, and Reflections*, records a haunting of the Jung house, which, he claims, involved paranormal phenomena.¹⁹

Jung wrote a short essay called the “*Septem Sermones ad Mortuos*” (the Seven Sermons to the Dead), under the pseudonym Basilides (the name of a second Century Gnostic writer). Jung says that “I was compelled from within, as it were, to formulate and express what might have been said by Philemon. This was how the *Septem Sermones ad Mortuos* with its peculiar [Gnostic] language came into being.”²⁰ The sermons are directed at deceased Christian souls who arrive at the Jung household because they have failed to find liberation through the church. The first six sermons present a Gnostic world view and prepare the dead for the final sermon. Here, Jung tells them to stop seeking salvation outside of themselves, but to look inward toward the “innermost infinity,” which is also referred to as the inner “Star” or the “one guiding god.” Having received this revelation, the restless dead disappear and rise into the night sky, apparently to find their own inner stars. Jung’s sun worship and Gnostic predilections appear in this essay.²¹

Much more could be documented to establish Jung’s deeply anti-Christian worldview, such as his interest in mystical alchemy. Surely, the burden of proof lies on anyone who would attempt to draw healing waters from such a polluted well. Out of Jung’s occult experiences came the substance of all his work. He wrote: “I can say that I have never lost touch with my initial experiences. All of my works, all my creative activity, has come from those initial fantasies and dreams which began in 1912.”²² These “conversations with the dead formed a kind of prelude to what I had to communicate to the world about the unconscious.”²³ Jung never dismissed these occult experiences as psychotic or delusional, although some of his defenders have. Christians, however, know that the devil and demons are objectively real and can deceive the unwary (1 John 4:1-6; 2 Corinthians 11:13-14).

IMPLICATIONS OF JUNGIAN SPIRITUALITY

Given Jung's worldview, it is not surprising that his major theoretical claims have little if anything to contribute to a Christian model for psychology and counseling or to Christian spirituality. He rejects the Christian view that God is outside of us and has the authority both to redeem us and command us. Stanton Jones and Richard Butman highlight this fact: "The experiential nature of analytic psychology resists an external, authoritative understanding of truth, emphasizing, in contrast, the personal myth and story of the individual."²⁴ This influence is abundantly evident in the work of Jungian thinker Thomas Moore, who, in *Care of the Soul*, rejects the idea of objective spiritual truth as damaging to the soul.²⁵ Because of this inner focus, Jones and Butman warn that "the Christian reader of Jung and Jungian psychology must be extremely cautious when encountering phrases and concepts borrowed from Christian theology."²⁶

Jung's subjective approach, with its exploration of the unconscious, lacks clear moral guidelines or a reliable spiritual orientation. As Schaeffer says, he lacks "an infinite reference point." This is evident in the Jungian notion of the shadow, or the dark and submerged side of our personalities, which we typically deny or explain away in favor of cultivating our public face (or persona). According to Jung, the shadow lacks a moral dimension; it is, rather, an unintegrated and immature aspect of the self that must be brought to consciousness and integrated with the whole personality. Because Jung rejects the authority of a personal and moral God outside of the individual, he can only look within for redemption. This is the essence of sin—autonomy from the God who is there. Therefore, the shadow cannot be rejected on the basis of a higher standard above the person. It must be accepted and integrated into the self.

Jung wrongly claimed that the Christian doctrine of God was psychologically inadequate because "the dogmatic aspect of the evil principle is absent from the Trinity."²⁷ In equating the unconscious with the divine, he advocated instead a quaternity as "the formula of the unconscious mind," which ought to include the devil.²⁸ The notion of fusing good and evil appears in the works of many Jungians, including Joseph Campbell, who counseled that "one of the great challenges of life is to say 'yea' to that person or act or that condition which in your mind is the most abominable."²⁹ Thomas Moore blasphemously claims that Christ's death on a cross between two criminals sanctifies evil as holy.³⁰ Jungian therapist and author John Sanford believes that evil is necessary for the development of personality and that the apostle Paul was psychologically imbalanced because he counseled Christians to put away the flesh when he should have told them to integrate their shadow side.³¹ These remarks all flow from the Jungian perspective. Since Jung himself broke from Christianity as a young man and renounced Christianity, it is unreasonable to take his spiritual-psychological notions and try to synthesize with Christianity.

The incorporation of evil into the Godhead and the refusal to take seriously the reality of evil is both theologically absurd and practically dangerous for counseling. Christ challenges us to get to the root of our sin and uproot it if we are to be His disciples (Matthew 5:29-30). Jesus Christ offers pardon for those who confess their sins and trust in His loving forgiveness (1 John 1:8-10). Those flirting with Jungian themes should remember the warning of the prophet Isaiah, "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness" (Isaiah 5:20) as well as the words of the Apostle John, "This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5).

Jung advanced the idea of a hidden storehouse of racial memories that manifest themselves in dreams and fantasies. Jung's notion of the collective unconscious and its archetypes adds a mystical dimension to psychotherapy not admitted by Freud. The collective unconscious is a "psychic system of a collective, universal, and impersonal nature which is identical in all individuals" and is inherited, not acquired.³² Jung believed that similarities in the world's religions and myths could be accounted for by this construct, and it assumes a privileged place in the Jungian understanding of the soul and the practice of analytic psychology. In the collective unconscious, he offers its initiates access to an esoteric resource hidden from the masses. Noll documents that this notion is pantheistic³³ in nature and rooted in occult doctrines that were plentiful in Jung's day. Furthermore, it lacks scientific corroboration. Pivotal cases cited by Jung to prove that patients were calling up archetypal images can be explained simply in terms of previous personal knowledge.³⁴ Jungians often take the collective unconscious as an item of faith instead of arguing cogently for its existence.³⁵

CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

Christians need not look to a collective unconscious as a source of revelation and redemption. Finite and sinful beings need a revelation from an infinite-personal God in order to find the truth that will set us free (John 8:31-32; 2 Timothy 3:15-17). Jung's topography of the unconscious and its archetypes includes a spiritual dimension best understood as demonic and dangerous.³⁶

Jung advocated “active imagination” as a means of connecting with the personal and collective unconscious in order to find greater personal wholeness. Much of modern visualization methods are rooted in Jung’s approach, which is itself based on spiritistic and occult methods for gaining access to the world of the spirits (see Isaiah 8:19-20).³⁷ The Bible’s strong condemnation of the occult (divination, magic, and necromancy) must be brought to bear in analyzing any worldview or any spiritual practice (Deuteronomy 18:9-14; Micah 5:12; Galatians 5:20; Revelation 21:8). The fallen spiritual realm can be cunning and deceptive, as Paul warns concerning false apostles: “And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve” (2 Corinthians 5:14-15; see also John 8:44).

Jung’s deification experience was occasioned by a visionary exercise. Jungian visualization requires the suspension of rational judgment to facilitate the formation of inner images. Such occult and irrational elements in Jungian therapy should give pause to any Christian counselor who believes that Jungian visualization practices can be healing to the soul.

Of course, not everything Jung advocated was occultic or dangerous; some of his ideas are probably relatively harmless or even helpful, such as his theories of introversion and extroversion. Nevertheless, a careful consideration of the sources and nature of Jungian thought reveals a worldview utterly and inexorably alien and hostile to biblical faith. Having rejected the Christian God, Jung admitted that he could find no “Archimedean point” (transcendent standpoint) from which to judge the soul.³⁸ But that is exactly what the Bible gives us—a true and transcendent reference point for all of life. As Paul taught, “the Holy Scriptures...are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:15-17; see also 2 Peter 1:20-21).

In Paul’s words, since Jung neither glorified God, nor gave him thanks, his thinking became futile, and his heart was darkened. Claiming to be wise he became a fool and exchanged the glory of God for the poverty of the fallen self without benefit of Jesus Christ as Savior, Lord, and Guide (Romans 1:21-22).³⁹

Notes

- 1 See my review of the film, “Freud’s Last Session” (2023), which unrealistically gives Freud the upper hand over C. S. Lewis in an imagined dialogue. <https://worldviewbulletin.substack.com/p/freuds-last-session-a-review>.
- 2 A separate 4-page Profile has been published related to this subject: Douglas Groothuis, *Gnosticism: Profile Notebook* (Arlington, Texas: Watchman Fellowship, Inc. 1994-2024). A complete collection of Profiles (over 660 pages) is available at www.watchman.org/notebook. This Profile is available at: <https://www.watchman.org/files/ProfileGnosticism.pdf>
- 3 James K. Walker, “The Occult,” *Profile Notebook*, available at: <https://www.watchman.org/profiles/pdf/occultprofile.pdf>.
- 4 Marcia Montenegro, “Astrology,” *Profile Notebook*, available at: <https://www.watchman.org/files/profileastrology2018.pdf>.
- 5 See Amanda Hess, “The Wild Woman Awakes,” *New York Times*, December 17, 2019, which claims the book’s themes are still pertinent to pagan feminism.
- 6 See R. J. Rushdoony, *Freud* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 2006) and Hans Kung, *Freud and the Problem of God*, enlarged edition (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).
- 7 Richard Noll, *The Jung Cult: Origins of a Charismatic Movement* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 8.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 6.
- 9 Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oBYEFX2dqpM>.
- 10 See his classic work, *Man’s Search for Meaning* (New York: Beacon Press, 2006). Originally published in 1946.
- 11 See Arthur Holmes, *All Truth is God’s Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977).
- 12 Richard Noll, *The Aryan Christ: The Secret Life of Carl Jung* (New York: Random House, 1997), xv.
- 13 *Ibid.*
- 14 Jung’s ideas of archetypes are a foundational piece to the use of tarot cards. See Brady Blevins, “Tarot Cards,” *Profile Notebook*, available at: <https://www.watchman.org/ProfileTarot.pdf>.
- 15 Noll, *The Jung Cult*, 213.
- 16 Viola Larson, “Theosophy,” *Profile Notebook*, is available at: <https://www.watchman.org/profiles/pdf/theosophyprofile.pdf>.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 210; see also Carl G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, and Reflections* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), 182-85.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 183.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 190-191.
- 20 Thomas Moore, *Care of the Soul: A Guide for Cultivating Depth and Sacredness in Everyday Life* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1992), 246-247.
- 21 See *Ibid.*, 378-390 and Noll, 242-246.
- 22 C. G. Jung, *Psychology and Religion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1938), 73.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 192.
- 24 Stanton L. Jones and Richard E. Butman, *Modern Psychotherapies: A Comprehensive Christian Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 122.
- 25 Thomas Moore, *Care of the Soul: A Guide for Cultivating Depth and Sacredness in Everyday Life* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1992), 246-247.
- 26 Jones and Butman, 122.
- 27 C. G. Jung, *Psychology and Religion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1938), 73.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 73-74.
- 29 Joseph Campbell with Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 66.
- 30 Moore, 133.
- 31 John A. Sanford, *Evil: The Shadow Side of Reality* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 10, 67-84. For Paul’s discussion of the conflict between the flesh versus the Spirit, see Galatians 5:16-26.
- 32 Carl G. Jung, “The Concept of the Collective Unconscious,” in *The Portable Jung*, ed. Joseph Campbell (New York: Viking, 1971), 60.
- 33 Douglas Groothuis, “Pantheism,” *Profile Notebook*, available at: https://www.watchman.org/Pantheism_Profile.pdf.
- 34 Noll, 181-84.
- 35 Francis A. Schaeffer offers an alternative language-based understanding of what Jung was trying to explain in *The God Who is There*, signature classic edition (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 74-75.
- 36 Charles Strohmmer, “Man of Mystic Proportions: C.G. Jung: The Fountainhead of Joseph Campbell,” by Charles Strohmmer, *SCP Journal*, Vol. 9:2, 1990, pp 32-44.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 202-204, 215. For a critique of visualization methods used for spiritual ends, see Don Matzat, *Inner Healing: Deliverance of Deception?* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1987) and Brooks Alexander, *Brooks Alexander*, “Mind Power and the Mind’s Eye” (*SCP Journal*, Fall 1990).
- 38 Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, 12, 62.
- 39 This profile is expanded and revised from Douglas Groothuis, “The Hidden Dangers of Carl Jung,” published in *Christian Counseling Today* in 1996.



Profile is a regular publication of Watchman Fellowship, Inc. Readers are encouraged to begin their own religious research notebooks using these articles. Profiles are published by Watchman Fellowship approximately 6 times per year, covering subjects such as new religious movements, counterfeit Christianity, the occult, New Age Spirituality, and related doctrines and practices. Complete Profile Notebooks containing all Profiles published to date are available. Please contact Watchman Fellowship for current pricing and availability. Copyright © 2024 by Watchman Fellowship. All rights reserved.