

## **Jungian Spirituality: The Question of Victor White**

The troubled relationship between the founder of Analytic Psychology and a Dominican friar reveals two levels of interpreting Jungian psychology as a spiritual resource.

James Arraj is a Jun Ian psychologist who lives in Chiloquin, Oregon, with his family. Founder of Tools for Living Publications, he has also written a number of books and articles on Jung and spirituality, including *St. John of the Cross and Dr. C. G. Jung* (1987).

IN 1960, when Fr. Victor White lay dying in England, C. G. Jung wrote to the Mother Prioress of the convent where the Dominican scholar had been cared for: "I had nursed the apparently vain hope that Fr. Victor would carry on the magnum opus." Intriguing words from one of the giants of twentieth century psychology with regard to an English priest and Thomistic theologian. Behind them lay one of the most significant modern attempts to mend the split between psychology and religion, an attempt that had brought these men together and later almost destroyed their friendship.

More than a dozen years before his death, Victor White had sent Jung some of his first writings, including his essay "On the Frontiers of Psychology and Theology,"(1) which expressed his interest in bringing Jung's thought into closer relationship with philosophy and theology. Jung had responded warmly. At seventy, far from retirement, he was about to enter one of the most productive phases of his career, finally articulating his feelings about religion, so deeply rooted in his childhood. From his earliest years, Jung had experienced powerful dreams and visions, unsought revelations so personal that they only reached the public in the posthumous *Memories, Dreams, Revelations*.(2) These were occasions that he felt revealed to him the mystery of God, so that "God was for me at least, one of the most certain and immediate of experiences."

### **THE SEEKER AND THE SAGE**

Carl Gustav Jung had grown up in the bosom of organized religion -- in this case, the Swiss Reformed Church. His father and eight of his uncles were clergymen, and his own powerful inner experiences had taught him what he felt was another face of God, God as a living mystery deep in the psyche who could be personally encountered and could not be equated with the God of church ceremonies and Sunday sermons. A tension developed in his mind between these emotionally-laden dreams and visions and what he felt were the empty words of formal religion. The stress was exacerbated by the crisis of faith into which his father had fallen but tried to repress by refusing to think about his doubts. Jung therefore began to place knowledge and experience on one side and, on the other, split off from them, faith and theology. This division was to remain in his mind and play an important role in his relationship with Victor White.

When Fr. White sent Jung his first articles, he was already an accomplished philosopher and theologian. But at age forty three, he was ripe for a new adventure, which was to attempt bringing Jung's psychology into accord with Catholic thought. For Jung, the appearance of the Dominican

was one of those meaningful coincidences he delighted in. Not only had he been engaged in an interior debate with Christianity since his youth, but he had also developed a particular fascination with Catholicism -- one composed of equal parts of attraction and repulsion. In Catholic dogma, he intuitively perceived profound analogies with his own psychological discoveries, but he saw problems as well. His interest in religion had already resulted in his being labeled a "mystic" by his scientific colleagues, and had aroused some ire among Catholic and Protestant theologians. He shuddered to think what would happen if he began to speak his mind about the dogma of the Trinity, the problem of evil, etc.

Thus, if Victor White stood on one bank of the chasm separating traditional philosophy and theology from the sciences, on the other side Jung looked across and extended his hand in friendship. Wouldn't it be ideal if they could work on the project of bridging together, each from a position of his own expertise and a deep interest in the other's field? Soon, Jung invited White to his retreat at Bollingen, the scene of much of his intensive interior work.

## **WHITE AND JUNG**

They got along well together, exchanging dreams and confidences. But the separation between science and religion had been growing unchecked for more than three hundred years. Each man had a distinctive and autonomous vocabulary, and this was true even when they used the same words. Jung was a scientist immersed in the empirical material he found in the psyches of modern men and women, attempting to understand it by comparing it to the treasury of symbols found in mythology, alchemy, and religion. This was an approach that was highly congenial to him. From his university days he had used Kant's Critique of Pure Reason as a way to fend off his principal intellectual opponents, the scientific materialists and the theologians. He wanted freedom to explore the psyche in all its concrete manifestations and not have it reduced either to insignificance or dominated by metaphysical or theological conceptions. He had at once formally and legitimately limited himself to the methodology of his natural science of the psyche, but unconsciously put up epistemological barriers that tended to deny the possibility of genuine knowledge through metaphysics and faith.

Thus, a variety of factors, including scientific inclinations as well as his childhood experiences of Christianity, precluded Jung's seeing that metaphysics and theology could be taken seriously as ways of knowing. As his discussions with White proceeded, this ambiguity began to make itself felt. White was at a disadvantage. He greatly admired Jung and saw how much the Church had need of a viable empirical psychology as an indispensable element in pastoral counseling and spiritual direction. Jung offered the psychological experience that he wanted to acquire, an experience which was, in a certain sense, religious. Jung had seen many patients who in the second half of life had felt the need to discover something beyond the ego. They had experienced the healing power that came from the personal realization that the ego was part of a greater totality composed of both ego and unconscious, which Jung called "the self." This self became manifest in dreams by means of various symbols -- circles, crowns, gems, and "quaternities;" that is, four-fold figures.

But for Jung, this deep religious sense was not a matter of faith in the way that Catholics understood it. The Trinity was not a living reality, the subject of a personal and loving relationship. In virtue of

his empirical method, Jung could not deal with "the thing in itself," but rather with the psychic images through which it manifested itself in the soul. And the Trinity as a god-image did not coincide with the four-fold symbols that so often characterized psychic completeness and wholeness. This led Jung to speculate boldly. Could not the doctrine of the Assumption be a sign of attempting to balance the masculine Godhead with a feminine "fourth"? Or could not Satan symbolize the need to bring the reality of evil into conjunction with the all-good God?

## **WHITE VERSUS JUNG**

Jung was genuinely distressed by the reaction of Catholics to such speculations, especially the difficulty White had in accepting them. Hadn't he made it clear over and over again that he was speaking as an empirical scientist who wanted to stay within his field and had no thought of talking of God, but only of the god image that could be seen in the psyche? This was true, and Victor White knew it better than most. But there was something else that disturbed the priest, though he had great difficulty in articulating it.

This something was, I believe, Jung's attitude towards metaphysics and theology. It did not dawn on him in a practical way that enlightened modern people could take metaphysics and theology seriously as ways to know realities that cannot be known in the same way by the natural sciences. He understood that people could believe that they knew, but he could not understand that such a belief could actually cross the chasm that existed between belief and knowledge in his own experience.

For example, Jung debated with White very patiently about the question of evil as the privation of good. For Jung, the doctrine of *privatio boni* meant saying that evil did not really exist. Such a principle would have the effect of allowing people not to take it seriously, and therefore bring devastating consequences upon themselves. He knew evil was as real as good in terms of its psychological reality. And thus, the metaphysical doctrine of evil left him disturbed.

These discussions also left White suspended over a void. He was already under attack in the Church for championing Jung's psychology, and he was personally trying to cope with the inner process of individuation. If we add to this his close contact with Jung's psychological genius, mixed as it was with deep religious aspirations, but with little appreciation of the legitimacy of the metaphysics and faith to which the Dominican had devoted his life, we can begin to understand the state of perplexity into which White fell. This in turn led him, at times, to intemperate and misdirected criticisms of Jung and was ultimately the rock on which their friendship foundered.

Perhaps some day the details of their estrangement will be clarified by the discovery and publication of White's letters to Jung. They have been the object of searches in England, all of which fared no better than that of the English scholar, Prof. Andrian Cunningham, who was led to a trunk used by White in his travels, only to find it empty. A number of White's letters do exist in Zurich, but publication has been withheld because of their personal nature and their mention of living persons. In any event, the crux of the difficulty seems clear enough, and this brings us to the situation today.

## **JUNGIAN SPIRITUALITY: TWO INTERPRETATIONS**

Have we really outgrown the problems that bedeviled Victor White and C. G. Jung? Sometimes, it appears so. We are in the springtime of new interest on the part of Christians in Jung's psychology. This interest has shifted from the theoretical to the practical, from a concern with philosophy and dogma to practical attempts to use Jung's psychology in the spiritual life. This practical turn is being expressed in books, articles, lectures, and workshops all over the United States and beyond. From the Jungian side, it is met with an equally great interest in the religious significance of Jung's work. In fact, it might appear illconceived to speak of a Christian side and a Jungian one, for they have drawn together in individuals with professional training in both regards: John Sanford, Morton Kelsey, John Dourley, Russell Holmes, Murray Stein, and others.(3)

Many Christians make their first acquaintance with Jung's psychology under the heading of what could be called "Jungian spirituality." It is by examining the import of this phrase that we can extend the discussions between Jung and White to our own day, for the words "Jungian spirituality" can shelter two very distinct meanings.

The first interpretation results from the meeting between a vigorous new psychology and a spirituality in decline. It has produced an almost irresistible temptation to discover in this psychology a way to experience the realities that were too often merely talked about in the spirituality of the past. Jung's psychology becomes the way in which to experience the interior life. Is not the pneuma moving over the waters of the psyche the action of the Holy Spirit? Are not dreams the way God speaks to us individually in the depths of our hearts in the same way God spoke to the saints? Is not the journey to wholeness the path to holiness, and the experience of the self the experience of contemplation? In short, isn't Jungian psychology a contemporary way to come to grips with the age-old religious mysteries that are at the heart of the life of prayer?

Such an identification, I suggest, is born less out of a conscious intellectual decision and more from the atmosphere created by the very real need for a genuine renewal of spirituality. It is, in addition, a tendency reinforced by a certain ambiguity in Jung's formulations on the knowability of the religious object. As we have seen, he was firmly convinced that he was doing science and not philosophy or theology. And so he was. But at the same time, he framed the philosophical presuppositions of his empirical science in Kantian terms. This led him to have grave reservations about the ability of metaphysics and theology to provide knowledge of the religious object inaccessible to a natural science of the psyche. This mistrust of theology tended to deprive it of its distinctive subject matter and made it but another expression of the psychic realities that psychology studied more exactly and with less presumption.

The first interpretation of Jungian spirituality means, then, identifying what is experienced in the process of individuation and what happens in the life of prayer. Carrying out this tendency formally would be a serious mistake. It neglects the distinct ways of knowing they employ and the different goals they aim at. James Kirsch, the noted Jungian analyst, once asked Jung whether the "Dark Night" of St. John of the Cross was to be identified with the process of individuation. Jung replied, "John of the Cross' Dark Night of the Soul has nothing to do with this. Rather, integration is a

conscious confrontation, a dialectical process . . . ."(4)

So an easy identification deflects spirituality from the indispensable task of renewing its own life, which is based on faith. It will ultimately do a disservice to analytical psychology as well, for it deprives it of the important stimulus it could have from an authentic dialogue with the extensive ascetical and mystical traditions of the West. Where is dialogue if spirituality is but an instance of individuation? Any criticism of the idea of a Jungian spirituality runs the risk of being seen as a sterile defense of the status quo. But if we fail to distinguish these different dimensions of the one human spirit, the great benefits that can come to spirituality from Jung's psychology will not be realized. This brings us to the second interpretation of Jungian spirituality. In it there is no spiritual separation, as if psyche and pneuma inhabited different parts of the soul, but neither is there a facile identification. Instead, the process of individuation and the ascent of the spirit to God are seen to interact intimately with each other. In this interpretation, Jungian psychology becomes a delicate and invaluable instrument with which we can explore the psychological foundations of the life of prayer and see how they shape and influence the interior life. This is a constructive process that safeguards the autonomy of both. As such, it is just a beginning.

A concrete example will clarify what is at stake. It is the use of Jung's science of human differences, his "psychological types," which is rapidly spreading in religious circles.

## **PERSONALITY TYPES AND INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES**

Briefly, driven by the maturing of his own thought and its divergence from that of Sigmund Freud and Alfred Adler, Jung cast about for a way to describe the different perspectives involved. In 1913 he delivered a paper on extraversion and introversion which signaled his determination to find his own way and the beginning of his definitive break with Freud. In the years that followed, he underwent the powerful inner journey of individuation he described in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, and at the same time he broadened his typological understanding. He realized that there were various kinds of introversion and extraversion which could be clarified by the introduction of the four functions: sensation, intuition, thinking, and feeling. But even more important was the fact that typological development was the personal face of the process of individuation itself. Thus when *Psychological Types* appeared in 1921, it described not only the eight basic types, but in embryo the whole process of individuation that he would explicate in future years. Therefore, he found it particularly irksome when he saw people take up typology without grasping its ultimate implications. Typology used interpersonally must be continually balanced by typology understood intrapersonally as an aspect of individuation.

Suffice it to say that Jung developed a highly detailed yet flexible framework within which we can attempt to understand the legitimate differences among persons and the inner development they are called to. Certainly past spiritualities had no adequate way to deal with these differences. In practice, a uniform rule and prescribed spiritual exercises were often imposed in a mistaken quest for unity. We differ in our needs for food, sleep, and exercise. We vary in our capacity for solitude and social life, and in our reactions to joy and sorrow. In short, we differ in our very physical and psychic makeup and in our ways of perceiving and judging the world within and without. This means that

we will be attracted to different forms of prayer and service, for our spiritual gifts will tend to build on the distinctive natural gifts we possess.(5) The trajectory of our interior lives will intermingle with the movement towards our own distinctive form of typological wholeness. Jung's typology, then, is an excellent tool with which to begin to revitalize the practical science of spiritual direction. But there are three distinct levels at which this process can take place. It is by delineating these levels that we can see the issues of Jungian spirituality in practice.

## **LEVELS OF SPIRITUAL INDIVIDUATION**

The first level is the simple discovery of our psychological type and its application in the ways just described as an instrument for understanding human differences within the field of spirituality. Of great value, this is the level at which a significant amount of the present encounter between Jung's psychology and spirituality is taking place.

The second level can emerge from this acquaintance with typology. We begin to perceive that typology is not only interpersonal, a way we relate to those around us, but also an intrapsychic process that is no different from the process of individuation itself. We begin to feel the pull of the outgoing tide that leads to the fascinating and terrible night sea-journey of psychic transformation. It is only by means of such a journey that we truly begin to grasp what typology really meant to Jung and what are the psychic contents that exist under the names of the shadow, anima, animus, and self. It is this experience that will sensitize us to the psychological dimension that exists and must exist in the whole of the spiritual life. There is literally no place for the spiritual life to take place but in the psyche, and we now grasp this psyche in all its immediacy and in all the continual process which strives for wholeness. Here, too, there can be no objection to the employment of Jungian psychology in the spiritual life, but rather only a sense of gratitude that we can finally deal with the psychological dimension that exists in all our spiritual activities.

There is a third level where this encounter will more and more take place and has taken place in certain individuals like Victor White. The process of individuation as it is found in Jung and many of his followers is wrapped in an epistemological fabric which resists a Catholic understanding of faith. It is abundantly evident. Jung himself comments, for example,

For lack of empirical data I have neither knowledge nor understanding of such forms of being which are commonly called spiritual. From the point of view of science it is immaterial what I may believe on that score, and I must accept my ignorance . . . All comprehension and all that is comprehended is in itself psychic, and to that extent we are hopelessly cooped up in an exclusively psychic world.(6)

Similarly, he indicates that he sees individuation as a more evolved stage of consciousness to which Christianity stands as a deficient stage. If in being guided by Jung to the experience of individuation, we unconsciously imbibe this presentation of it, we will find ourselves in the state in which Victor White found himself -- torn on one hand by a living awareness of the reality of the individuation that Jung describes, but sensing that the way it was presented conflicted with his faith.

## **JUNGIAN AND CHRISTIAN**

A Catholic Jungian must live in two worlds, the world of faith and that of individuation, and strive to integrate them. Jung lived in one and had no real comprehension of the other. This appears to pose no real problem so long as we remain on the first level of interpretation with its discovery of type and the practical application of these discoveries. But the more we enter into the heart of the process of individuation, the more we enter into Jung's formulations of it and breathe his particular conception of Christianity. Living in two worlds then becomes much harder. At this point we can be tempted to wander off into either of two directions: rejecting Jung's typology as anti-Christian, or accepting his transformation of basic Christian beliefs. Neither path is warranted or necessary. Continuing on to the second, deeper level of interpretation, we discover that the world of faith and that of individuation are not identical, but mutually influence one another in the one psyche.

Another example will help clarify these interactions, which are the authentic subject-matter of a spiritual direction making use of Jungian psychology. A person devoted to the Blessed Virgin Mary can experience a lively sense of her presence and intercession as a vital part of the beginning of the life of prayer. But this interior awareness has both a psychological and spiritual element. Spiritually, it is a combination of sensible consolation and genuine faith, and the director will need to distinguish between these two aspects, especially when the more tangible part of this devotion begins to disappear. Yet, psychologically, in Jungian terms, this relationship with Mary is effected by the state of our anima or animus, the parental images we carry deep within us, and the position of our feeling function in our particular type.

These are real and operative factors in how we conceive of Mary's role in our life. It is in this connection that Jung's formulations on trinity and quarternity, the balancing of the masculine god-image and the feminine fourth should be read. Jung never meant them to be theology, nor is it the role of analytical psychology to comment on Mary as an object of faith. It would be a serious mistake to let the discovery of this archetypal dimension of Marian piety obscure the existence of a transcendent spiritual dimension. It may be we were drawn to Our Lady by motives we now see as mixed with subjective psychic factors, or we have developed an antipathy to certain forms of Marian devotion. But genuine psychological knowledge can liberate an authentic attitude of faith and love from these psychological burdens.

A director who is unaware of this psychological side of relationship with Mary will be unable to help free us from defects which spring from our own limitations, inadequate theological formulations, and the excesses of popular enthusiasms, etc. At the same time, a director who sees Mary simply as a manifestation of the archetype of the anima will miss the message of faith and pursue this archetype and its links with other archetypal configurations. He can help us on that night sea-journey, which is the process of individuation, but, again, this is not identical to the journey by which we grow in faith and deepen our appreciation of the role Mary plays in our interior life.

## **MAGNUM OPUS**

What are the prospects, then, for that magnum opus that Jung desired to carry out with Victor White? From the Christian side we must repair our lack of practical knowledge of Jung's psychology and clearly leave behind the theological imperialism of the past which wanted to keep psychology

in its place by reducing it to the merely empirical or relegated it to a separate realm which had no commerce with the spirit. Progress is being made on both these fronts. Just as it is being made or even because it is being made, the issue of Jungian spirituality arises. We face the temptation to discover in Jung's psychology, so rich in insights and the fascination of the numinous, a complete remedy for problems in the life of prayer. This is especially so in the contemplative life, in which a difficulty can be traced in the history of spirituality to the time of the death of St. John of the Cross four centuries ago. It is the temptation to erase our inner poverty by creating a facile Jungian spirituality which would simply identify the inner experience of the problem of individuation with the stages of the soul's ascent to God in prayer.

From the Jungian side, there must be a recognition of the implicit and accidental epistemological position that Jung took when he formulated his psychological discoveries. For if there can be no metaphysics of faith as a way of genuine knowing, then there is no ground for dialogue, but only the hope that Christians will awaken to how Christianity must be transformed and completed by Jung's psychology.

Overcoming these impasses is a challenge that is directed in a special way to those who devote themselves to the life of prayer, especially the contemplative life, whether by gift of God, by aspiration, or by religious profession. It is here that these two experiences can grow side by side, their interactions examined, and their distinctive natures clarified without suppressing each other. The impasse between Victor White and C.G. Jung, and the very difficulties their relationship fell into, will finally eventuate in their hoped-for magnum opus.

#### NOTES

1. This article was published in White's *God and the Unconscious* (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1982). White also wrote *Soul and Psyche* and *God the Unknown*, both now out of print.
2. C. G. Jung, *Memories Dreams, Reflections* (New York: Pantheon, 1963).
3. For works published before August, 1972 see James Heisig, "Jung and Theology: A Bibliographic Essay," *Spring* (1973): 204ff.
4. C. G. Jung, *Letters*, Vol. 2 (1951-61) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 159.
5. See James Arraj, *A Tool for Understanding Human Differences*, and, for another example of the issues involved in Jungian spirituality, James Arraj, *St. John of the Cross and Dr. C. G. Jung: Christian Mysticism in the Light of Jungian Psychology* (Chiloquin OR: Tools for Living Press, 1987).
6. *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, pp. 351-52.