

Holy and Not So Holy Ghosts!

Psychopathogenetic Shadows in Religious Images and Ideas

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Abstract

The article represents an answer to the question, "How did Jung's psychology alter your way of doing theology?" The work of David Miller on the anti-Christianism of depth psychology is traced from 1969–1988, both in Eranos lectures and publications. The intent was to discover shadow theology in psychological complaints and complexes, unconscious Christianity working negatively in the psyche. Theology's ideas were pressed backward into pagan mythology, and followed forward into contemporary art and poetry. The task was neither to make apologia psychologically for Christian imagery nor iconoclastically to blame religion for present-day illness. Rather, the task was to take note of psychological nuances and shadings in the narratives of religion.

Keywords

Eranos, Christianity, Jung, mythology, negative, psychopathology, religion, shadow, theology.

Archetypal Theopoesis

In the 1960s, while a graduate student at Drew University working on the relation of ancient Greek religion to the comic theory of Aristophanes, I found myself confronted with what I thought of as a possibly exciting intuition. Werner Jaeger had just given the Carl Newman Jackson lectures at Harvard. His presentations were published under the title of *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia*. He also had written during this period the book *Theology of Early Greek Thinkers*, and the *magnum opus* in three volumes entitled *Paideia*. Jaeger's thesis was clear and straightforward: namely, that Greek philosophy is ancient mythology abstracted, and renamed. What had been character (Gods and Goddesses) and plot (*mythos*) was translated by philosophical thinkers into idea and logic (*logos*). Behind the Presocratics, Plato and Aristotle lurk Homer and Hesiod. Indeed, Aristotle had already observed that his philosophy was present in mythology and Greek popu-

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lar religion. Hesiod's theogony, Aristotle argues, was a *sophizesthai* in *muthikos*, i.e., a philosophy constituted by mythic form.

This was heady stuff for a young graduate student who had already learned from the writings of Adolf Harnack in seminary that Christian theology is formally constituted of Greek philosophical thought forms in which are situated Jewish apocalyptic and Jesus' life and teachings. I wondered whether the two—Harnack and Jaeger—could be joined. That is, if Christian theology is Greek philosophy, and Greek philosophy is Greek religion and mythology, I wondered if it could be plausibly shown that ultimately Christian theological ideas and images were sublated forms of Greek myths. Could it be that all the Gods and Goddesses are subliminally present in baptized canonical form in Christianity? Might Christian monotheism actually be polytheism *redivivus*? Is it the case that behind one God there are many? I thought that this could be seen as a radical recontextualization of Christianity, against the then-current opinion that behind Christian theology is Jewish thinking. I determined to explore this possibility in what I intended to be a depth theology inspired by the archetypal psychology of C. G. Jung and James Hillman.

Nobody had entertained this possibility before, even though there are hints in ancient times in the work of Clement and Origen of Alexandria, and in modern times Irwin Goodenough had implied as much. But, so far as I then knew, only the circle of the Jesuit Richard Reitzenstein at Innsbruck, which included Hugo Rahner (Karl Rahner's brother), had worked on this possibility. Some of their work had been reported at early Eranos conferences in Jung's presence. But this work was largely unknown in the United States.

So, from 1969 until 1988 I researched and wrote about the possibility of a depth theology. What I thought that I was doing was giving archetypal context, psychological and pagan mythological background, to Christian ideas and images. As a member of the Eranos circle during this period, I reported on my findings in nine lectures from 1975 until 1988 at Eranos. Many of the findings reported in those lectures, together with my own constructions, were recast in book form in *Christs: Meditations on Archetypal Images in Christian Theology*; *Three Faces of God: Traces of the Trinity in Literature and Life*; and *Hells and Holy Ghosts: A Theopoetics of Christian Belief*. The prolegomenon to the logic of the research program was announced in the earlier work *The New Polytheism: Rebirth of the Gods and Goddesses*.

James Hillman, to whom I was so very much indebted in this work, heard all of this at Eranos over the years and he said nice things about it in 1983 in his book *Inter Views*. But he also added a caveat. Hillman (1983) wrote: "He [Miller] shows that Christianity is loaded with forgotten meanings. It's full of soul, he says. He shows the clown in Christ and the drunk in Christ and not only the hero myth. This opens a whole new way out—but, it's still theology, apologetics, still committed to saving Christianity, and I want something . . . more psychological" (p. 77). This certainly was not my intention. I wasn't trying to save anything, as if I (or anyone else) could. Christianity will, of course, do and be whatever it is and wants. But neither was I trying to do the opposite iconoclastically, though some have thought as much. Christianity, it seems to me, is, among other things, in our psychology, always already, whether we are Christian or not. Theology is, I

believe, for good or ill, depth psychology. That is what I was trying to expose. I was trying not to avoid, but to work with what might be called the psychological *massa confusa* of Christian ideas that are in the Occidental cultural air. I was trying—as Wolfgang Giegerich has put it to me—to cook the *prima materia* a bit. But I now believe that something else was going on also, something that I sensed only dimly until after a Jungian analysis beginning in 1975 and, later, a Freudian analysis beginning in 1984.

Shadow Theology

My method in my twenty-year project had been to identify a problematic idea, to probe its depth so as to uncover its (or one of its) fundamental unconscious images, to press that image back into its narrative emplotting and ancient mythical underpinnings, and then to explore what that mythic image is now doing poetically and metaphorically in the contemporary self and world. For example, deep within the idea of perfectionism, so well known in the complex of obsessive-compulsive disorder, I found historically the image of shepherding, grounded in Christianity's notion of the good shepherd commandment. I searched the background context of this imaginal notion, and I discovered Greek mythic images of monstrous and rapacious shepherds, e.g., Polyphemos. Following upon the death of the pastoral tradition in literature and art, which carried this image from Hellenistic times to the 16th and 17th centuries, I found in the modern poetry of, say, Robinson Jeffers, a critique of the image and its concomitant perfectionism. As this California poet put it in a letter to a friend, the savior/shepherd complex is "the most insidious and seductive syndrome to attack people of good will" (Alberts, 1933, pp. 56–57).

I discovered further shadows in other Christian images and ideas: the necessity of the third in love relationships; the notion that going down and in is hell and leads to depression, low self-esteem, and dependency; and so on. That is, I discovered that religion can make us sick, that religious images and ideas, in the cultural unconscious, are psychologically dangerous. My point was that, among other ways, we suffer theologically. Even Kierkegaard (1975), the Christian, said: "Christendom is the invention of Satan," calculated to make human beings unhappy (p. 494). And G. K. Chesterton (1909), another Christian, observed: "When a religious scheme is shattered [as Christianity was in his view shattered during the Reformation], it is not merely the vices that are let loose. The vices are, indeed, let loose, and they wander and do damage. But the virtues are let loose also; and the virtues wander more wildly, and the virtues do more terrible damage. The modern world is full of the old Christian virtues gone mad" (p. 1). Nietzsche (1974) once wrote: "After Buddha was dead, his shadow was still shown for centuries in a cave—a tremendous, gruesome shadow. God is dead; but given the way of his people, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown. . . . We still have to vanquish his shadow" (p. 108).

This is reminiscent of Jung's (1976) saying in the Tavistock Lectures: "Some people have sexual trouble and others have other problems. I chiefly have other troubles. . . . My problem is to wrestle with the big monster of the human mind, the problem of Christianity. Other people are not worried by such problems; they

do not care about the historical burdens Christianity has heaped upon us. . . . It's a tremendous human problem" (para. 279). And I believe that it is near to Hillman's view that "Psychotherapy has to be worried about . . . the shadow of Christianity and its effect on the soul" (p. 77). As a theologian, I was simply attempting, not to save Christianity, but to put some historical and psychological flesh on such assertions by Jung and Hillman, not to mention similar ones by Freud and Lacan. On the one hand, I had not only been attempting to build an archetypal theopoiesis, but, on the other hand, I was also attempting to specify the psychopathogenetic nature of religion, and particularly Christianity.

My view came to be that religion, among other things, is a ghost that haunts the self psychologically, a holy ghost that is not so holy, *post mortem Dei*, long after the death and dearth of religion. I recently heard Slavoj Žižek, the cultural theorist and critic, make the same point in a public lecture at Syracuse University: namely, that "beliefs work even when we don't believe in them." He cited the Rabbi who, when asked if he ate pork, said: "No. I don't believe in kosher law, but it's part of my culture." It is like Niels Bohr who said, "I don't believe in evolution, but I understand that it works anyway." And there is Lacan's joke, cited by Žižek: "A crazy man believed that he was a grain of wheat and so he had a fear of chickens. The psychiatrists convinced him that he was not a grain of wheat. But he came running back to the clinic, having encountered a chicken. The doctors said, 'But didn't we convince you that you were not a grain of wheat?' 'Yes,' he said, 'but who is going to convince the chicken.'"

Much has been written since 9/11/2001, and particularly in the last few months, about the shadow side of religion. There have been major statements by, among others, Frank Rich, Maureen Dowd, Thomas Friedman, Salman Rushdie, Nicholas Kristof, and Bill Moyers. But these are *sociopolitical* in nature and they have to do with the individual and collective ego. My work has been to try to stress the *psychological* shadow sides of religion. The work is not focused wholly on negative religion as over against positive religion, but—according to the psychological logic of synchronicity and the *complexio oppositorum* of the self—the work explores the possible negative aspects of both negative religion and positive religion. I have been attempting to expose the shadows of the good as well as the bad. Something similar is stressed by Ron Schenk's (2001) notion of "dark light" in the book of the same name and also by Stanton Marlan's (2005) concept of the "dark side of light" in his recent book, *The Black Sun*. When talking about the dark eye of soul, Marlan writes: "Looking for what went wrong is often looking in the wrong place" (p. 23). Looking at the shadow of what went "right" may be a more important work psychologically. As Adolf Guggenbühl-Craig (1995) put it, the psychological work involves not only the good of evil, but also the evil of good (*Vom guten des Bösen* is the title of his book translated as *From the Wrong Side*). Or as Rainer Maria Rilke (1942) wrote: *Von den Göttern ein Schatten fällt*, "a shadow falls from the gods" (pp. 28–29).

Conclusion: Achieve the Negative!

Over against the suggestion of James Hillman that my work's function may be too positive, some have complained that I have been too one-sidedly negative.

Perhaps so. But I guess that I feel vocationally that theologians are, or might be, like plumbers. I don't want a master plumber to come into my home and tell me how wonderful my dishwasher is. I want her or him to find the leak in my toilet that will not get rid of the shit and find out why my Insinkerator will not dispose of the garbage. The theologian, I should have thought, is in the same business, plumbing the complex psychological depth of religion, exposing the shit and garbage. As Jung implied, there is a shadow in everything, even in the light. As Ralph Waldo Emerson (1904) put it: "There is a crack in everything" (p. 107). And as more recently Leonard Cohen (1992) has added: "There is a crack in everything; that's how the light gets in" ("Anthem").

I have recently been reminded of a classical Buddhist greeting: "Most reverend madam or sir, how may I engage in your misery. If, of course, you are not suffering, or think that you are not suffering, then there is no point in our talking further and I will leave you." This is reminiscent, to be sure, of Jesus' saying: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick [do]" (Matthew 9:12, Mark 2:17, Luke 5:31).

But more than these religious injunctions, I have been vocationally guided psychologically and theologically by Franz Kafka (1975), who once wrote: "What is laid upon us is to accomplish the negative; the positive is already given" (p. 167).

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