

DEPTH-PSYCHOLOGY, CHRISTIANITY  
AND THE EVOLUTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

RUNNING HEAD: Psychology, Christianity and Consciousness

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ABSTRACT

In this essay I briefly discuss different perspectives on the nature of the evolutionary leap in consciousness taking place today. There is a need for Western humankind's participation both by way of transformed collective institutions, specifically Judeo-Christian religion, and for some people to be consciously involved in the process of individuation. By being aware of the underlying forces at play, the depth-psychologist can assist individuals, traditional religion and the culture in making the necessary adjustments.

## DEPTH-PSYCHOLOGY, CHRISTIANITY AND THE EVOLUTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

### Introduction

The title of a recent article in the Victoria Times-Colonist reads “Spiritually Thirsty avoid Churches” (Alanna Mitchell, 1990). As a percentage of population, church attendance in Canada has plummeted from sixty-seven percent (67) in 1946 to twenty-seven (27) percent in 1990. Although most Canadians continue to believe in God, Professor Bibby of the University of Lethbridge observes, they have a “strange ignorant” poorly articulated understanding of the actual nature of spirituality.

### The Evolution of Consciousness

Although there is considerable confusion about the nature of religion and spirituality and a general sense of meaninglessness we are living in times of momentous change and potential for spiritual realization. We are, according to Jung, not simply at the turn of an age, but at the beginning of a new *aeon*. “We are living,” he writes, “in what the Greeks called the *kairos*, the right moment - for a “metamorphosis of the Gods, of the fundamental principles and symbols” (Jung, 1970). This apocalyptic statement is not mere intellectual speculation but a vision supported by empirical evidence that continues to be amassed throughout the world. The collective unconsciousness is in the process of profound transformation.

Jung is not the only one to have come to this conclusion. There are others, including such pre-eminent personalities as Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Jean Gebser and Sri

Aurobindo who each, from his own perspective, has written extensively on the inevitable evolutionary change that is shaking the foundations of the world today. What they all hold in common is that, at its core, the change that is taking place is due to an evolutionary leap in consciousness.

### Sri Aurobindo

In his sweeping overview of history, Sri Aurobindo (1971) observes that consciousness moves in a spiral-like fashion which includes times, which are spiritually oriented and periods, like today, which are materialistic. He sees the present concern with materialism and matter as a need for humankind to become more aware of that area of life. But now, he contends we have evolved into a subjective age, where the ultimate demands are for the development of increased consciousness and an integral personality.

Sri Aurobindo (1971) traces humankind's evolution through various stages of development. They include the symbolic age, which was organized around authentic religious and spiritual values, followed by the typical age, which had a predominantly psychological and ethical orientation. The typical eventually degenerated into convention, for example, during the late Middle Ages, where life and institutions became divorced from the inner person. The lifelessness of the conventional period led to its overthrow during the following individualistic Age of Reason, which in its turn has given way to the subjective age, the one we live in today.

The statement that “all life is yoga” can sum up Sri Aurobindo’s (1972) evolutionary view of life. He also argues that the evolutionary process of transformation can be precipitated through one’s conscious participation. He, therefore, proposes an integral approach to yoga which requires the divinization of all aspects of human life, from the intellectual, aesthetic and ethical functions to the multi-various dynamic play of vital pleasure and power and the physical, that is bodily nature itself. His approach to yoga essentially involves following “the method of spirit in nature” (Aurobindo, Sri, 1971). Accordingly, Sri Aurobindo’s path diverges radically from traditional Hindu yoga, at least since the time of the Buddha and Shankara, which he views as spiritually too ascetic and introverted, without sufficient attention paid to integrating life values. Instead, he urges his disciples to “become divine in consciousness and act and live inwardly and outwardly the divine life” (Aurobindo, Sri 1971).

#### Jean Gebser

In a fashion similar to that of Sri Aurobindo, although in more detail, Jean Gebser (1989) maps out humankind’s evolutionary history. He traces the mutations of consciousness from the archaic through the magico-religious and mythical ages to the mental age, which, he believes, is now reluctantly giving way to an integral structure of consciousness. With the mental age there is consciousness of space and time, division, duality, focus and directedness, along with separation from mythological rhythmic polarity. The more highly focused intellect, however, developed with access to an increasingly narrowing range of consciousness.

As the mental age gives way to an integral structure, characterized by Gebser (1989) as being a diaphanous presence, he argues that there is potential transparency to all levels of being and harmony with spiritual verition or authenticity. Gebser also observes that a precondition for integral consciousness is the integration of time and felt-intensity of experience. This, he contends, requires “the concretion of time”... as “only the concrete can be integrated” (Gebser, Jean, 1989). Such a view, in agreement with Jung’s, implies the need for conscious experience of the psychoid-based archetype, which includes and transcends both spirit and matter.

#### Teilhard de Chardin

Whereas both Sri Aurobindo and Gebser delineate a vision that goes beyond any specific religion or cultural heritage, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1971) restricts his thoughts to the Christian world and, as he sees it, the evolution of Christianity. Although he acknowledges the importance of the historic incarnation of Christ through the man Jesus, he puts decided emphasis on the universal Christ who, he argues, evolves throughout time as “Christ the Evolver” (Teilhard de Chardin, Pierre, 1971).

Teilhard (1971) emphasizes Christ’s prophecy in John 16:12-13 where he declared that “I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into the truth.” He suggests that it refers to “humanization by evolution” rather than the traditional Christian position of humanization through redemption. He gives evidence that humankind has been evolving over a vast period of time towards harmony and unity at, what he refers to as

the Omega point, the place from where the universal Christ radiates. His view of Christianity includes a pantheism that leads to greater differentiation of elements, which are related to a deeper center (Teilhard de Chardin, Pierre, 1971). Teilhard's understanding is similar to Jung's notion of archetypes, which are all subordinated to the supreme archetype and center of being, the Self. There is, accordingly, an evolution of consciousness towards a greater more highly differentiated diversity, or individuation of parts contained in unity.

### Jung

As doctor of the soul, Carl Jung (as reported in Jaffè, Aneila, 1989) was preoccupied with the transformation of the Judeo-Christian image of God and the individuation of Western humanity. In his mind, the true history of humankind involves an evolution of consciousness along with a progressive incarnation of the Deity. Based on a view articulated by Joachim de Fiore, a twelfth (12<sup>th</sup>) century monk, Jung (as reported in Stein, Murray, 1986) proposes that the Judeo-Christian world has been evolving through three stages of transformation.

The first stage was the age of the Father, represented by Yahweh and the values and laws of the Old Testament. As the New Testament succeeded the Old Testament, the age of the son replaced that of the Father. In his attitude toward the Pharisees and the law, which he saw as repressive, Jesus particularly exemplified this new value. Such a view led to separation from the Father and a measure of independence through reason and reflection. Similar to Teilhard, Jung refers to Jesus' observations about the coming

of the Paraclete as the third stage, which he interprets as meaning the transformation of the individual to the point where the ego recognizes the primacy of the unconscious, if not its actual subordination to the Self. As Jung sees it, the goal for Western humankind has now become the fulfillment of the Self as symbolized by the life of Christ. There is, in the process, the need for detachment from personal conceptions of Jesus and a concomitant internalization.

In his insightful book, Jung's Treatment of Christianity, Murray Stein (1986) clearly demonstrates how Jung relates to Christianity as if it were a patient. He shows how the latter interprets the present status and development of the Western religious tradition both reductively and prospectively, paving the way for its transformation and reconstruction. In several places in his writings, Jung discusses at length Christianity's overly masculine orientation, its one-sidedness, and its drive for perfection and anti-naturism, along with the resulting psychic split between good and evil and the masculine and feminine. In addition, he shows how mainline Christianity repressed both Gnosticism and alchemy, each of which is an important complementary spiritual path. Jung's genius also allowed him to place Christianity in an evolutionary perspective by acknowledging the historical value of its underlying archetypal structures and symbols, as well as its role in encouraging the development of moral differentiation.

Jung points to the doctrine of the Assumptio Mariae as indicative of a process of collective individuation (as reported in Jaffè, Aniela, 1989). He sees Pope Pious XII's

dogmatic proclamation in 1950 as a move on the part of official Christendom to integrate the repressed, that is evil as well as the maternal and earthly feminine principle (as reported in Dourly, John, 1984). Furthermore, he insists on the need for the concept of the Trinity to find its natural completion in a quaternary by including these elements (Stein, Murray, 1986). Likewise, he sees the traditional symbol of Christ as being of too much “light” and observes that Christ on the cross between two thieves, one going to heaven and the other to hell, is a more appropriate symbol of the Self (Stein, Murray, 1986). Individuation involves both a vertical aspiration and the descent of the light of consciousness that comes along with the power of transformation to increasingly obscure realms of being.

In many ways Jung’s vision is similar to that of Teilhard’s especially in his concern with the transformation of Christianity. However, he brings far more psychological sophistication and understanding of the practical implications of the transformation necessitated by the evolutionary forces at play. He also paints a picture similar to that of Gebser and, particularly in his pragmatic psychological perspective, Sri Aurobindo. Whereas for the latter “all life is yoga,” for Jung “everything living dreams of individuation” (as reported in Johnston, David, 1990). They each see a need for a process of individual transformation which involves both a spiritual descent and that follows the spirit or light in nature while embracing all life (Dourly, John, 1984). Sri Aurobindo (1971) calls for humankind’s conscious participation, while Jung observes that God needs man as man needs God (as reported in Jaffè, Aniela, 1989).

### Implications

#### The Church

It's no wonder that Canadians are ignorant and confused about the meaning of spirituality and religion. So are the churches. As both John Dourly, 1984 and Murray Stein, 1986 observe, there are still relatively few significant changes in Christian teaching, structure and symbols that are in line with Jung, or even Teilhard's vision. In Paul Tillich's (1957) view, in the Protestant church, the mystery behind the sacramental nature of the symbol, along with its healing power, is virtually no longer understood at all.

The conscious and unconscious aspirations of the contemporary person are, therefore, not being addressed. It is not necessary that everybody goes through a conscious process of individuation or has extraordinary spiritual interests per se. But a Church more in line with the deeper needs of the evolving *zeitgeist* would embrace healing on a collective level, by way of encouraging *participation mystique* with sacred symbols and rituals. As demands for change are formidable, however, there needs to be a considerable *prise de conscience* on the part of official Christendom for this to ever happen.

#### The Role of the Depth-Psychologist.

In the meantime, depth-psychologists are called upon to provide healing for individuals in a wounded Judeo-Christian civilization. Understanding the evolutionary forces at play, as well as Christianity's present shortcomings, helps the process of healing. Most

people may still simply require a psychic realignment and an adaptive approach to psychology. It is important here for the therapist to have some understanding of personal repression resulting, at least in part, from Christian dogma. For those propelled onto the path of conscious individuation, there is also a demand for increased consciousness on the part of the analysand, not only of personal repressions but, eventually, of underlying collective forces as well, including religious and spiritual dynamics.

According to Jung, the path of individuation is symbolically represented by the life of Jesus Christ. What happens in his life, writes Jung (as reported in Edinger, Edward, 1987), "happens always and everywhere." Since "the [Occidental] soul is by nature Christian, we must all do what Christ did," warns Jung (as reported in Edinger, Edward, 1987), "make our experiment" live "our own vision of life," make our own mistakes. For the contemporary person, this includes the need to integrate shadow qualities along with aspects of the chthonic feminine and related spirit. It means integrating inner experiences similar to those reported by the Gnostics and alchemists.

To bring this discussion into focus, I will briefly discuss the case of a fifty-year old man who is going through a career change to become a practicing depth-psychologist. Some fifteen years ago while living in India, he dreamt that he was given a statue resembling the "Caesar of *Portofina*," which depicts a standing Augustus authoritatively extending an arm. At the same time he heard women's voices declaring the "Ides of March," words used to augur the downfall of Julius Caesar, and considered

inauspicious in his time. It is, perhaps, noteworthy here that in ancient Rome the “Ides of March,” that is March 15, actually initiated the mysteries of Attis, son-lover and sacrificial victim of the Great Mother as Cybele. This fertility ritual involved dismemberment and a sacred marriage of love-in-death with the Goddess and resurrection, a pre-figuration of the holocaust of Christ (Baring, Anne and Cashford, Jules, 1991/1993). This emphasizes the need to come to terms with the divine feminine principle.

After his return to Canada the man worked, first in business then as a college teacher in business management and finally as a college administrator, directly involved, that is to say, in the contemporary “world of Caesar.” Time after time his ambitions were defeated despite his best efforts. It seems that the unconscious repeatedly put him in a position of experiencing the “Ides of March.” With hindsight, it is also clear that his experiences were, in a different way, and over a more prolonged period of time also similar to Christ’s temptation for power. Jung (as reported in Edinger, Edward, 1987) interprets Christ’s temptation in the wilderness as coming from the “power intoxicated desire of the prevailing Cesarean psychology.” Today, the only way to assimilate shadow and aspects of the feminine is by being tempted in such a fashion and to some extent, at least, going along with it for the sake of consciousness.

But, there comes a time where it becomes clear that the Self has other intentions, as indicated by Jung’s third stage of transformation, the influence of the *Paraclete* in life and subordination of the ego to the Self. Recently, this man had two other dreams,

which fit the Christian tradition. In one dream he found two books on St. Bernard by Thomas Merton, a contemporary American Cistercian with considerable insight, in his living room bookcase. In another, he saw himself with large bare breasts. Suffice it to note here that St. Bernard, who founded the Cistercian Order, cautions against the urge to teach others [about spiritual matters] until truly inspired by the Holy Ghost. He also notes that Martha and her “breasts for preaching” are “better, more necessary and more fruitful than the wine of contemplation” (as reported in Merton, Thomas, 1980).

Such a message from the unconscious must, of course, be adapted to the conditions and life of the man under discussion. It may well prove to be the case that his new vocation as a psychotherapist will now be the appropriate one for the Self’s fulfillment. For purposes of this essay, however, this example is meant to support the thesis that the Western soul is by nature Christian and that civilization is now in the process of evolving into the age of the Paraclete, as Jung observes. From a more general perspective, however, it simply indicates the spiritual need for the ego to be subordinated to the Self.

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In conclusion, there is a profound transformation in consciousness taking place today that is affecting all our lives. The depth-psychologist needs to be aware of the underlying forces at play in both the individual psyche as well as in the collective soul. There is a need for some people to participate consciously in the evolutionary change that is taking place today. This comes along with a radical transformation of the psyche in what Jung calls the individuation process. For the Occidental, there is evidence to

suggest that the life of Christ and an evolutionary Judeo-Christianity can provide the appropriate instructions and symbols for the contemporary individual on this path. Institutionalized Christianity itself can help on a collective level by moving in the direction recommended by Jung.

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