

D0092
 Class 12
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The Renewal of the Christ Image: The Work of Sebastian Moore

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Continuation of last week's discussion

1 Subtleties of what Jung says can be easily misunderstood as shifting what was previously a model of self-transcendence to a model of self-fulfilment (ego-gratification). Nuanced: unity of light and darkness, reconciliation of good and evil, is *more* conscious than light and more valuable than good.

2 We have the work of a Christian theologian, and one in our midst at that, who has taken the first major step in the renewal of the Christ image along lines harmonious with Jung's demands.

Today, first period at least, continuation of last week's discussion on the Self and the functioning of the Christ image in the Christian psyche. Sebastian: renewal of Christ image, meets Jungian criteria.

We are at the heart here of the two issues that are currently occupying me:

(a) the methodological issue of the relation of Jungian psychology and Christian theology

(b) the foundational issue within Christian theology of the *religious* significance of Jungian psychology. (I.e., what is the relation of the Jungian-inspired process of individuation to religious and moral conversion?) Involves understanding of Jung's notion of evil.

Because this is currently occupying me, both psychically and religiously, I will be necessarily *tentative* in relating my understanding in this regard. Much more tentative than anything else that I've presented thus far.

So, after dealing with the question of the possibility of the renewal of the Christ image to meet Jungian criteria, we will move a discussion of Jung's understanding of evil.

A. The Renewal of the Christ Image: Three Methodological Prolegomena

1 Clear by now: 'the focus of Jung's entire activity was to lay bare the dynamics of *individuation*: the process whereby one becomes himself or herself.' This remains the criterion of all, including religious symbols. While *ego* is the me that I have a hand in making, *self* is what I am invited to discover. The self is a lure. It represents what I am called to become and holds the power which, when released, will bring me there. The self always outreaches my actual self now, yet contains the materials which intimate what I will be.

2 This means a change in our image of religion. Relating to God is not something one is called to do, over and above this task. Jung's model for human development is religious, if by religiousness one means with Kierkegaard attentiveness to the shape of the inbuilt task of becoming oneself. Moreover, the model entails transformation and transcendence, in the sense of being called beyond one's present self. It is at the farthest remove from an ego-gratification model, where the self, already constituted and presumably autonomous, sets out to satisfy its needs and protect its interests. Individuation is not conceived by Jung as self-fulfilment, a model which conduces to me (incomplete).

3 At this point Jung's psychological exploration moves unavoidably into theological territory. And, as David Burrell indicated, Jung had a certain respect for the enterprise of theology, if not for its practitioners. 'He could not fail to notice how powerful religious symbols proved to be in bringing individuals to some sense of the wholeness possible to them.' Jung's prescription for a theologian – one he hardly ever found them following – was that he let himself be guided by the symbols which form his proper subject matter. Then he will be able to appreciate the realities involved in his inquiry and to respect its objective character. Jung suggests that the theologian's *understanding* of the symbols be expressed psychologically rather than metaphysically. He invites the theologian to show how religious symbols stand for psychic (and cosmic) wholeness – for psyche is, at bottom, world – and in this way to articulate their objective character.

I think this is what Sebastian as theologian has done in his articulation of the symbol of the Crucified as image of the Self. I will now present my understanding of Sebastian's work within the framework of Jung's exposition of the dynamics of individuation.

B. Renewal of the Christ Image: The Self as Image of God

For Jung, as we saw last week, the self cannot be distinguished from an archetypal God image. This declaration exposes the full scope of the process of individuation according to Jung: individuation will invoke a renewal and transformation of the God image. As Marie-Louis von Franz points out, the God image has undergone many transformations in the course of human history. That is to say, the dominant or governing symbolic conception of God on the part of the collective consciousness of a culture and of its institutions has frequently become outworn and in need of renewal. It has become egocentric and rigid. The dynamics of the process of individuation are thus for Jung a means of transforming and renewing the God image today.

We saw last week that one way in which the Self functions as a God image is by the creation of order out of chaos. Beyond this, we may say also that Self, as what one *discovers* rather than *makes*, manifests that one does not create oneself, but is part of a larger context which invites one out of his *separate individuality* into *individuation*. I.e., as with everything archetypal, there is something *objective* and *impersonal* about the Self, something spontaneous, autonomous, and numinous. This objective, impersonal background, to which one is intimately related, is indispensable for wholeness. Wholeness involves a release from the *necessity* of creating oneself into the freedom of the process of *becoming* oneself. The self-symbol provides a background of universality where the pattern is rich enough that one can make a *story* out of his life, can give it a plot. One becomes a person only by incorporating archetypal meaningfulness – and this is objective, impersonal.

By saying this Jung does not mean it is inappropriate to relate to God in personal terms. But he does mean that such relating, if we become habituated to it, makes us think we are relating to God as to another human being, another individual: an inappropriate paradigm for relating to the source of all, who means to be 'all in all.' The self-symbol and the God symbol thus coincide in their *unknown*, *impersonal* dimensions, the dimensions of what each of us is called to live his way into. If we overlook this inbuilt task, the self and God become Freud's superego, a source of perpetual moral conflict, a matter of public opinion. But for Jung, if one can withdraw this projection, one becomes one's yea and nay, a law unto oneself. The self is then no longer superego, no longer involved in moral conflict, but a

union of opposites *beyond* the conflict. This, says Jung, constitutes ‘the most immediate experience of the Divine which it is psychologically possible to imagine’ (11, 261). This language means: if one undertakes the inner journey leading to individuation, he cannot fail to meet God. Burrell, 221. This experience of being brought *beyond* the opposites, however, is not *achieved*. It appears, says Jung (MDR 335) seemingly of its own accord and unpredictably, out of nature, and is felt as grace.

C. The Renewal of the Christ Image: The Work of Sebastian Moore

1. It is within this context that we can understand the critique of Jung that we saw last week of the functioning of the image of Christ in the Christian psyche – the Christ image has not represented something beyond the opposites but far short of them. The dark side – matter, instinct, the body – has been excluded from it and projected onto Satan, who has become for the Christian psyche the archetype of matter and instinct.
2. The presumption, always hidden, of this procedure is that there is something about our constitution that is unredeemable, or, in psychological terms, that cannot be integrated into wholeness. The implicit upshot of this procedure is that the scandal which the Pharisees took at Jesus for his seemingly antinomian procedures – eating and drinking with tax collectors and prostitutes, violating a collectively sanctioned understanding of the Holy Day, etc., etc. – would also be intolerable to the Christian psyche, involving as it does the declaration that *there is nothing that is unredeemable* by God’s grace. Only the denial of this declaration is unredeemable, and perhaps that is what Jesus means by the sin against the Holy Spirit, the only sin that will not be forgiven.
3. Thus for the Christian psyche matter, instinct, the body, and all that these entail – and principally, of course, sexuality – have remained unredeemed, unintegrated into the Christian psyche. The Christ image has become an ego ideal of a perfectionistic attitude. As such it has failed to supply the energy needed for the task of liberating the true man: despite the recorded claims of Jesus that adherence to him would entail precisely such liberation. The unredeemed part has been projected outside, onto scapegoats, and the world has been inflicted with the impossible task of acting out the conflict that can be resolved only in the psyche of the individual.
4. I think this whole context is needed for understanding the significance of Sebastian’s work. For it is *this* Christian psyche that Sebastian’s work speaks to, the split psyche for whom Christ has functioned as an ego ideal or superego, the

psyche that thinks following Christ is something stoical, a matter of will power, of 'mind over matter.' The Christ image Sebastian deals with is the image of the *Crucified*, and the Crucified functions in his theology as a symbol for precisely those aspects of the totality that the ego has rejected, repressed, killed, in its pursuit of *pleasure*, or of *power*, or of *perfection* (all of which are ego-gratification).

5. Sebastian's restoration of the Christ image to a position where it functions in harmony with Jung's model of individuation involves the following steps:

- a. Being saved, redeemed, can be understood if we contrast it with being lost. In ordinary discourse, to be lost is to be out of touch with oneself. 'You really saved me' is the expression of myself to another of the restoration to myself provided me by the other in one way or another: a clue, a prod, the provision of a trusting atmosphere, etc.
- b. It makes no sense to speak of being saved in any situation if, in fact, we have 'saved ourselves.' Being saved has about it the quality of gratuity and gift.
- c. There are degrees of the experience of being saved, ranging from 'You got me off the hook' to 'You changed my life.' What determines the depth and reach of the experience is the extent to which we are restored to touch with ourselves, the extent to which we are shown who we truly are. E.g., you may say of a person who is fast becoming an alcoholic, 'I can't save him.' What you mean is not: I can't rescue him from an embarrassing situation, but 'I can't bring him to his senses; no matter what I seem to say or do, I can't help him to face himself. *I can't restore him to himself and help him see what he is killing in himself.* Thus, the more radically we are shown who we truly are, the more radically we are saved.