

## The Triune God from the perspective of depth psychology

### Introduction

#### The Church dogma of the Trinity

The traditional belief in the triune God appears in the new Catechism of the Catholic Church from 1993 in paragraphs 232 et seq.:

"The faith of all Christians rests on the Trinity" (§ 232). ...

"Christians are baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (§ 233). ...

"The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the *central* mystery of Christian faith and life. It is the mystery of God in himself. It is therefore the source of all the other mysteries of faith, the light that enlightens them. It is the most fundamental and essential teaching in the «hierarchy of the truths of faith»" (§ 234).

It is clear that the Trinity continues to have top priority in the «hierarchy of the truths of faith». Cardinal Ratzinger, later Pope Benedict XVI, was responsible for the writing of this catechism. The dogma is sacrosanct for as long as the church exists.

Church members today, however, think differently about the triune God. A survey among Christians of Western Europe produced a devastating result for the erudite guardians of tradition, as most members of the Church know that - despite perennial religious education - the "mystery of God in himself" is hardly more than the age-old formula: "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Once this was different: In the past the inquisitive wanted to know how God's being was constituted. *Tempi passati!* The doctrine of the Trinity - established in the Councils of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381) - was reduced in modernity to an empty phrase.

#### New Content

Jung tried in his work: *A Psychological Approach to the Dogma of the Trinity* (1948; CW 11 pp. 107-200) to refill this empty husk, but in doing so he fell between two stools. For the Church he was an infidel, and for scientists he was suspect, because the Trinity was not an issue for them. Moreover, Jung opened his text with the words of a Father of the Church from the 4th century, St. Augustine (354-430):

*Noli foras ire, in teipsum redi; in interiore homine habitat veritas.*  
(Go not outside, return into thyself: Truth dwells in the inward man.)  
Augustine, *Liber de vera religione* XXIX (72).

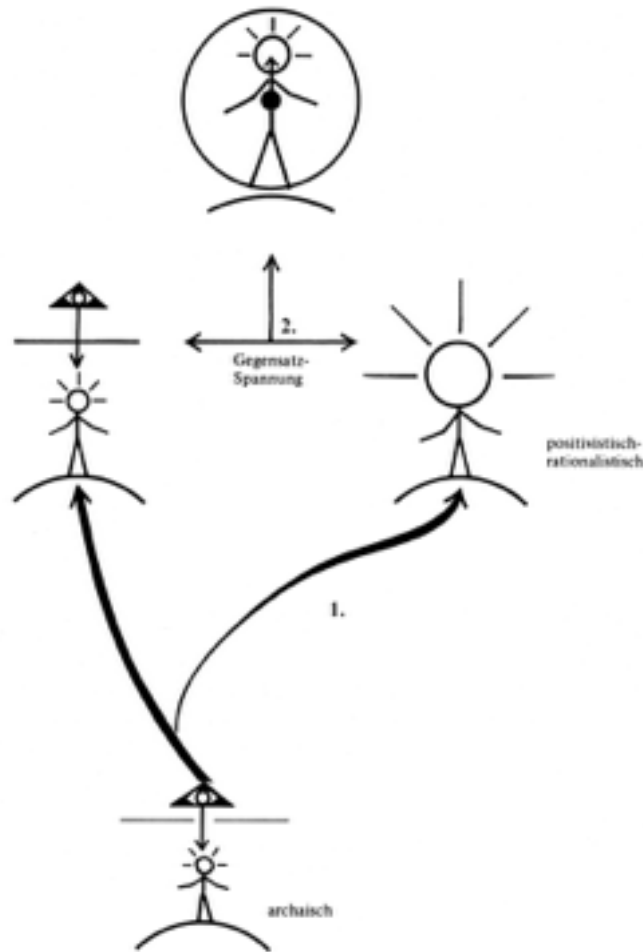
Whoever turns inwards, and attends to their inner perceptions, is subjective; they begin to fantasize somewhat. Science, however, is committed to objectivity; it turns outwards to prove its hypotheses empirically, and fantasizing is frowned upon. Because of the St. Augustine quotation, Jung seemed to scientists to be a dubious "mystic" who lacked the courage to burn the bridges to the Middle Ages. They wanted a real scientist, not to look inward like a contemplative monk!

Conclusion: By trying to revitalize the old dogma, Jung got between the warring fronts of "faith" and "knowledge", of religion and science.

This tension of opposites is also portrayed in the diagram of Willy Obrist: "The two steps of mutation" (in: "Die Mutation des Bewusstseins", 1980, p. 216) [only available in German]

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### Die zwei Schritte der Mutation



The graph shows the history of the development of thought in Western Europe over the last centuries. According to Obrist, this started a *mutation of human consciousness*.

At the bottom is the dualistic worldview of the ancients that prevailed from the Paleolithic era to the end of our Middle Ages. In this the totality of being was consigned to two domains together: that which is visible, named „this world“, and the invisible hereafter. The idea of a second world arose because the images of inner perception in dreams, visions, waking fantasies, intuitions, ideas and so on were construed *concretely*, as recalling things that really existed. Since one perceived these images only with the inner, "spiritual" eye, they were seen as pictures "from over there": a mysterious realm outside this world; such images supposedly provided insights into the afterlife.

Among educated people in Western Europe, this has been expunged from the positivist-rationalist worldview since the 18th century. That was the first step of the mutation. It consisted of the rejection of religion by modern science. It was God replaced through reason (the graph shows this rationalist attitude with an expanded head; this symbolizes the excessively "all in the head" stance of modernity).

Religion, especially Islamism nowadays, has defended itself against this first step.

The evolution of consciousness brought modern science to power. With this, religion lost its influence, and the associated power struggles took place in Christian Europe long before they raged in the Muslim world today. In Jung's time it was the conflict between "belief" and "knowledge" that preoccupied educated people. It was because of this that Jung studied science rather than theology, and was not a pastor like his father and countless relatives, but a doctor and psychiatrist.

When thinking about this conflict, Jung arrived at an ingenious solution: "The contact of the ancients with the realm outside this world was actually contact with the archetypes in the foundation of our soul." This stroke of genius was the second step of the mutation, in which the supernatural, that supposedly lay outside the world in the hereafter, was actually a function of the natural psyche.

Jung's solution is so simple and obvious, but let us not forget that he entered new territory and felt his way all alone in the dark ahead. This inhibited the flow of his thoughts, which is why they are often not very clearly formulated. His *Introduction* to his 1948 treatise on the Trinity gives an impression of this. He was then 73. I quote:

"My attempt to make the most sacred of all dogmatic symbols, the Trinity, an object of psychological study is an undertaking of whose audacity I am very well aware. ... To many people it may seem strange that a doctor with a scientific training should interest himself in the Trinity at all. But anyone who has experienced how closely and meaningfully these *représentations collectives* are bound up with the weal and woe of the human soul will readily understand that the central symbol of Christianity must have, above all else, a psychological meaning, for without this it could never have acquired any universal meaning whatever, but would have been relegated long ago to the dusty cabinet of spiritual monstrosities... But since the dogma stands in a relationship of living reciprocity to the psyche, whence *it originated in the first place*, it expresses many of the things I am endeavoring to say over again, even though with the uncomfortable feeling that there is much in my exposition that still needs improvement" (§ 171).

Jung speaks modestly. In order not to antagonize, he plays down his discovery as smaller than it was, and undervalues it. The conclusion of the work is in a similar vein:

"If I have ventured to submit old dogmas, now grown stale, to psychological scrutiny, I have certainly not done so in the priggish conceit that I knew better than others, but in the sincere conviction that a dogma which has been such a bone of contention for so many centuries cannot possibly be an empty fantasy. ... It was only when I realized this that I was able to establish any relationship with the dogma at all. As a metaphysical "truth" it remained wholly inaccessible to me, and I suspect that I am by no means the only one to find himself in that position. ... It told me absolutely nothing. ... Such being the case, I cannot pretend to myself that the object of archetypal statements has been explained and disposed of merely by our investigation of its psychological aspects. What I have put forward can only be, at best, a more or less successful or unsuccessful attempt to give the inquiring mind some access to one side of the problem - the side that can be approached. It would be presumptuous to expect more than this."

Jung concludes all this with his thought-provoking, weighty final sentence:

"For it seems to me that the world, if it should lose sight of these archetypal statements, would be threatened with unspeakable impoverishment of mind and soul" (§§ 294 et seq.).

The longer this statement stands, the truer it becomes: When we lose contact with the world of the archetypes - the foundation of our soul - life is superficial and meaningless; we intellectualize and alienate ourselves from inner and outer nature. In fact, the secularisation of life went hand in hand with a loss of depth:

Just as in earlier times we turned inward and searched for God, nowadays we turn to our cell phones in order to be "in" (informed). The desire for contact with "the other side" gave way to the need for *news* from around the world.

Jung wanted to confront this trend. In old age he worked intensively on the Trinity, the "central symbol of Christianity". He wanted to make the precious treasure contained in religion newly available to his time. He replaced the way of the soul to god with the

process of individuation. But the transformation of traditional religion into contemporary spirituality is an alchemical *opus magnum* full of pitfalls. Jung's work shows this too: Although he said clearly that the dogma was *intrinsically* a product of the psyche, he didn't adhere consistently to this position. What stopped him, was the *neophobia of religion*, internally as well as externally. He was brought up religiously, and his numerous church kin considered him to be an *Enfant terrible* who wanted to replace faith with psychology. Under these circumstances, he did not want to add fuel to the fire.

### Transformation of Religion

Had Jung been entirely free, he could have said bluntly:

"The idea of a supernatural afterlife is based on a projection. The images of the archetypes at the base of our psyche were previously apperceived *concretely*, construed as images of real things and projected on the sky. Depth psychology withdraws these projections; it grounds the otherworldly God in the psyche. The notion of the divine Trinity is rooted in the Trinity of the psyche: 'God the Father' represents the *unconscious* centred on the Self, the 'Son' *consciousness* centred on the ego, and the 'Holy Spirit' is the omnipotent healing spirit emanating from the ego-Self axis. What the ancients considered the triune God is a psychological, not a transcendental, reality because inner perceptions are to be understood not concretely, but symbolically, as images of an *inner* reality that is inherently invisible. The foundation of religion is therefore not the afterlife, but the psyche; nowadays this is explored not by theology, but by depth psychology. Theology was self-knowledge projected to heaven; therefore it was interesting. Today this time is over."

That would have been plain speaking, but brutal: a real *Copernican insult*.

Many, especially in Jung's circle, would have felt such a statement to be a slap in the face. At that time the collective was still religious and went - time permitting - to church.

Moreover, Jung did not want to wake the *rabies theologica* that was all too familiar to him, the wrath of many theologians always lying in wait for him. He did not want to destroy faith, but to renew it, and he hoped until the end of his life to win theology around to his idea.

Theology's decisive: „No!“ made this hard to achieve. He was mistaken. He was convinced that his idea stood to reason. True enough. However, the Church's doctrine did not require insight, but obedience... Jung didn't clearly realize just how much he shook the foundation of religion: the archaic worldview. All the Christian festivals were built upon this, and the church could not let go of it.

There is an old wisdom: "Before something new can arise, the old must die." This also applies to religion, and is clearer now than in Jung's time. Jung *began* with the transformation of the old religion. That was an act of epochal meaning that will take some centuries to complete.

To sum up: Jung had a stroke of genius, seeing how outdated beliefs could be renewed. He worked his way out of the egg of the archaic-mythical world view, but some archaic eggshells still remained stuck to him. In my view, it is time to remove these residues.

In the next hour we want to go a little further into the question: "What kind of *psychic powers* do the three archaic-mythical persons of God symbolize:

"God the Father", "God the Son" and "God the Holy Spirit"?

But now we have a little time to talk. Does anyone wish to say something?

➔ *conversation ...*

## The dogma of the Trinity as understood through depth psychology

### 1. God the Father

The "Nicene Creed" established in Nicaea and modified in Constantinople in the 4th century begins as follows:

"We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth."

Depth psychology recognizes in "God the Father" a symbol of the Self, the central agency of our psyche. This originally *inwardly* perceived image was understood *concretely* by the ancients. They personified the Self as „the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth" and located it in the afterlife. From there too, eternal heavenly "sacred" law came to them (in modern times: "Human rights" developed from this "God's law").

At the beginning of the evolution of consciousness, the unconscious set the tone; the ego was still small, like a child who is guided by his instincts and the environment.

So much for the symbol: "God the Father" that is rooted in our Self.

The dogma goes on to state that, from the "father", the "son" went forth. In depth psychological terms, this means that consciousness arose from the unconscious. The „son" - in depth psychology, the ego - is the subject of the second article of the dogma.

### 2. God the Son

The creed of Constantinople (381) declares that the "son" was

"begotten of the Father before all aeons (worlds), Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father."

The text stresses that "father" and "son" are the same entity (Greek: *homo-ousios*; this term has been hotly debated). In terms of depth psychology, this means that the two main psychic forces, the ego and the Self (the central agencies of consciousness and the unconscious), are a *single* entity since they belong to the same psyche - it's so simple. Now, a characteristic of the ego is that it, like any child, wants to become "big and strong". This instinct is innate. It promotes individual development and cultural evolution. In maturation process a second being emerges from the self: the increasingly conscious ego. The growth impulse emanates from the Self, promoting the growth of consciousness with visions, dreams and other inner phenomena. The will to be "big and strong" is stored in the genes. It therefore cannot be suppressed indefinitely. Whoever tries to do so is running against evolution - a pointless exercise, because nature is stronger than culture, the Self more powerful than the ego.

Now we cast a glance back at the history of ideas. Why did the symbol of the "son" become of central importance in Christianity? This is bound up with the evolution of consciousness. Two thousand years ago in the Middle East this found a stage on which the "son" was important:

Orthodoxy, which set the tone in Judaism, wanted the Torah to prevail root and branch. Sticking to the paternal tradition held back the spiritual development that had advanced in the Hellenistic culture of the time and gained a foothold in Israel. There they tried, on behalf of orthodoxy, to stop evolution rather than letting the "son" come of age; the guardians of orthodoxy could not allow that.

As a result, the Jewish collective split into two hostile camps: orthodox and innovators. The latter left the patriarchal father's house with the Holy Temple and founded a new religion, which embraced both the "father" and the "son". "The Father and I are one", says Jesus in John 10<sub>30</sub>. Thus the doctrine of the Trinity progressed towards the centre of the faith. From the new "*father and son*", spirit was now incorporated as the third element.

### 3. God the Holy Spirit

The creed of the Western Church holds that the Holy Spirit emanates from the Father *and* from the Son, in Latin *filioque* (and from the Son). This explains the catechism; I quote:

"The Latin tradition of the Creed confesses that the Spirit «proceeds from the Father *and* the Son (*filioque*)». He is eternally from Father *and* Son. He proceeds eternally from both as from *one* principle" (§ 246).

An influential representative of Latin, "western" thought was the theologian Anselm from Canterbury (1033 - 1109), who established the momentous principle: "*Fides quaerens intellectum*" (faith seeks rational understanding). Anselm argued for appreciation of the intellect: the "Son". That went too far for the Eastern Orthodox Church; the orthodox tradition - the „Father“ - were not willing to give up so much power. In 1054, because of the *filioque*, a break formed between the two churches. The Eastern Church condemned the *filioque*; it believes to this day that the spirit emanates from the Father *alone*.

With this doctrine the Russian people were bound to the paternal tradition. That is why the Western European Enlightenment was never able to gain a foothold in Russia. The alliance of throne and altar impeded the evolution of consciousness.

The belief that the Spirit comes "from the Father alone" continues to suppress the democratic process of the civil rights movement as before. "Father" Putin, back in the lap of the true church, bullies the rebellious „son": He throws Chodorkovsky, and Pussy Riot, who danced in the church, into jail.

Since a millennium Russia has a negative "West complex", with its roots in the *filioque*. As it passes undetected and is not worked upon, this complex has obstructed evolution until the present day.

Finally let's have a look at the the *filioque*-professing Western church:

Under its auspices, *filioque* degenerated to mere lip service; religious evolution also ground to a halt in Western Europe. After *Anselm*, the Reformation and liberal theology paralysed the will to progress. The Church subordinated the "son" to the old tradition. It did not take the *filioque* seriously. It did not want to admit that *life is evolution* (Darwin); the Catholic Church condemned Darwin and has still not rehabilitated him.

Therefore our evolutionary energy drifted out of the church and flowed into science. The sons of the pastors did not study theology any more, but medicine or other modern sciences. Religious evolution is now even further outside the church.

I summarise:

The doctrine of the Trinity expressed - in archaic-mythical language - the evolutionary progress with which Jesus and his followers had challenged the Orthodoxy. The *filioque* of the Western Church reinforced this and underlined the importance of the "Son". So did Anselm from Canterbury with his "*Fides quaerens intellectum*". The Western Church at that time made a valuable contribution to religious evolution. That was then.

In our time, Jung embarked - outside of the church - upon a brilliant, scientifically sound approach to the further advancement of religion by examining internal perceptions with modern scientific methods. Thanks to his discovery, archaic-mythical collective religion can now be transformed into contemporary individual spirituality, in the process of a natural individuation. That is an urgent task of our time - a task for more than one generation. Collective religions will lose the religious monopoly position. Therefore let Rome and Mekka be alone! They anyway will come to their end.

And I will end here and open the discussion. Thank you for your attention.

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