6. THE FUNCTION OF RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS

560 Although our civilized consciousness has separated itself from the instincts, the instincts have not disappeared; they have merely lost their contact with consciousness. They are thus forced to assert themselves in an indirect way, through what Janet called automatisms. These take the form of symptoms in the case of a neurosis or, in normal cases, of incidents of various kinds, like unaccountable moods, unexpected forgetfulness, mistakes in speech, and so on. Such manifestations show very clearly the *autonomy* of the archetypes. It is easy to believe that one is master in one's own house, but, as long as we are unable to control our emotions and moods, or to be conscious of the myriad secret ways in which unconscious factors insinuate themselves into our arrangements and decisions, we are certainly not the masters. On the contrary, we have so much reason for uncertainty that it will be better to look twice at what we are doing.

561 The exploration of one's conscience, however, is not a popular pastime, although it would be most necessary, particularly in our time when man is threatened with self-created and deadly dangers that are growing beyond his control. If, for a moment, we look at mankind as one individual, we see that it is like a man carried away by unconscious powers. He is dissociated like a neurotic, with the Iron Curtain marking the line of division. Western man, representing the kind of consciousness hitherto regarded as valid, has become increasingly aware of the aggressive will to power of the East, and he sees himself forced to take extraordinary measures of defence. What he fails to see is that it is his own vices, publicly repudiated and covered up by good international manners, that are thrown back in his face through their shameless and methodical application by the East. What the West has tolerated, but only secretly, and indulged in a bit shamefacedly (the diplomatic lie, the double-cross, veiled

threats), comes back openly and in full measure and gets us tied up in knots—exactly the case of the neurotic! It is the face of our own shadow that glowers at us across the Iron Curtain.

562 This state of affairs explains the peculiar feeling of helplessness that is creeping over our Western consciousness. We are beginning to realize that the conflict is in reality a moral and mental problem, and we are trying to find some answer to it. We grow increasingly aware that the nuclear deterrent is a desperate and undesirable answer, as it cuts both ways. We know that moral and mental remedies would be more effective because they could provide us with a psychic immunity to the ever-increasing infection. But all our attempts have proved to be singularly ineffectual, and will continue to do so as long as we try to convince ourselves and the world that it is only *they*, our opponents, who are all wrong, morally and philosophically. We expect *them* to see and understand where they are wrong, instead of making a serious effort ourselves to recognize our own shadow and its nefarious doings. If we could only see our shadow, we should be immune to any moral and mental infection and insinuation. But as long as this is not so, we lay ourselves open to every infection because we are doing practically the same things as *they* are, only with the additional disadvantage that we neither see nor want to understand what we are doing under the cloak of good manners.

563 The East has one big myth—which we call an illusion in the vain hope that our superior judgment will make it disappear. This myth is the time-hallowed archetypal dream of a Golden Age or a paradise on earth, where everything is provided for everybody, and one great, just, and wise Chief rules over a human kindergarten. This powerful archetype in its infantile form has got them all right, but it won't disappear from the world at the mere sight of our superior point of view. We even support it by our own childishness, for our Western civilization is in the grip of the same mythology. We cherish the same prejudices, hopes, and expectations. We believe in the Welfare State, in universal peace, in more or less equality for man, in his eternal human rights, in justice and truth, and (not too loud) in the Kingdom of God on earth.

564 The sad truth is that man's real life consists of inexorable opposites—day and night, wellbeing and suffering, birth and

death, good and evil. We are not even sure that the one will prevail against the other, that good will overcome evil, or joy defeat pain. Life and the world are a battleground, have always been and always will be, and, if it were not so, existence would soon come to an end. It is for this reason that a superior religion like Christianity expected an early end to this world, and Buddhism actually puts an end to it by turning its back on all desires. These categorical answers would be frankly suicidal if they were not bound up with the peculiar moral ideas and practices that constitute the body of both religions.

565 I mention this because in our time there are countless people who have lost faith in one or other of the world religions. They do not understand them any longer. While life runs smoothly, the loss remains as good as unnoticed. But when suffering comes, things change very rapidly. One seeks the way out and begins to reflect about the meaning of life and its bewildering experiences. It is significant that, according to the statistics, the psychiatrist is consulted more by Protestants and Jews than by Catholics. This might be expected, for the Catholic Church still feels responsible for the *cura animarum*, the care of souls. But in this scientific age, the psychiatrist is apt to be asked questions that once belonged to the domain of the theologian. People feel that it makes, or would make, a great difference if only they had a positive belief in a meaningful way of life or in God and immortality. The spectre of death looming up before them often gives a powerful incentive to such thoughts. From time immemorial, men have had ideas about a Supreme Being (one or several) and about the Land of the Hereafter. Only modern man thinks he can do without them. Because he cannot discover God's throne in heaven with a telescope or radar, or establish for certain that dear father or mother are still about in a more or less corporeal form, he assumes that such ideas are not "true." I would rather say that they are not "true" enough. They have accompanied human life since prehistoric times and are still ready to break through into consciousness at the slightest provocation.

566 One even regrets the loss of such convictions. Since it is a matter of invisible and unknowable things (God is beyond human understanding, and immortality cannot be proved), why should we bother about evidence or truth? Suppose we did not

know and understand the need for salt in our food, we would nevertheless profit from its use. Even if we should assume that salt is an illusion of our taste-buds, or a superstition, it would still contribute to our wellbeing. Why, then, should we deprive ourselves of views that prove helpful in crises and give a meaning to our existence? And how do we know that such ideas are not true? Many people would agree with me if I stated flatly that such ideas are illusions. What they fail to realize is that this denial amounts to a "belief" and is just as impossible to prove as a religious assertion. We are entirely free to choose our standpoint; it will in any case be an arbitrary decision. There is, however, a strong empirical reason why we should hold beliefs that we know can never be proved. It is that they are known to be useful. Man positively needs general ideas and convictions that will give a meaning to his life and enable him to find his place in the universe. He can stand the most incredible hardships when he is convinced that they make sense; but he is crushed when, on top of all his misfortunes, he has to admit that he is taking part in a "tale told by an idiot."

567 It is the purpose and endeavour of religious symbols to give a meaning to the life of man. The Pueblo Indians believe that they are the sons of Father Sun, and this belief gives their life a perspective and a goal beyond their individual and limited existence. It leaves ample room for the unfolding of their personality, and is infinitely more satisfactory than the certainty that one is and will remain the underdog in a department store. If St. Paul had been convinced that he was nothing but a wandering weaver of carpets, he would certainly not have been himself. His real and meaningful life lay in the certainty that he was the messenger of the Lord. You can accuse him of megalomania, but your opinion pales before the testimony of history and the *consensus omnium*. The myth that took possession of him made him something greater than a mere craftsman.

568 Myths, however, consist of symbols that were not invented but happened. It was not the man Jesus who created the myth of the God-man; it had existed many centuries before. He himself was seized by this symbolic idea, which, as St. Mark tells us, lifted him out of the carpenter's shop and the mental narrowness of his surroundings. Myths go back to primitive story-tellers and their dreams, to men moved by the stirrings of their fanta-

sies, who were not very different from poets and philosophers in later times. Primitive story-tellers never worried about the origin of their fantasies; it was only much later that people began to wonder where the story came from. Already in ancient Greece they were advanced enough to surmise that the stories about the gods were nothing but old and exaggerated traditions of ancient kings and their deeds. They assumed even then that the myth did not mean what it said because it was obviously improbable. Therefore they tried to reduce it to a generally understandable yarn. This is exactly what our time has tried to do with dream symbolism: it is assumed that it does not mean what it seems to say, but something that is generally known and understood, though not openly admitted because of its inferior quality. For those who had got rid of their conventional blinkers there were no longer any riddles. It seemed certain that dreams meant something different from what they said.

569 This assumption is wholly arbitrary. The Talmud says more aptly: "The dream is its own interpretation." Why should dreams mean something different from what appears in them? Is there anything in nature that is other than what it is? For instance, the duck-billed platypus, that original monster which no zoologist would ever have invented, is it not just what it is? The dream is a normal and natural phenomenon, which is certainly just what it is and does not mean something it is not. We call its contents symbolic because they have obviously not only one meaning, but point in different directions and must therefore mean something that is unconscious, or at least not conscious in all its aspects.

570 To the scientific mind, such phenomena as symbolic ideas are most irritating, because they cannot be formulated in a way that satisfies our intellect and logic. They are by no means the only instance of this in psychology. The trouble begins already with the phenomenon of affect or emotion, which evades all the attempts of the psychologist to pin it down in a hard-and-fast concept. The cause of the difficulty is the same in both cases—the intervention of the unconscious. I know enough of the scientific standpoint to understand that it is most annoying to have to deal with facts that cannot be grasped completely or at any rate adequately. The trouble with both phenomena is that the facts are undeniable and yet cannot be formulated in intellectual terms.

Instead of observable details with clearly discernible features, it is life itself that wells up in emotions and symbolic ideas. In many cases emotion and symbol are actually one and the same thing. There is no intellectual formula capable of representing such a complex phenomenon in a satisfactory way.

571 The academic psychologist is perfectly free to dismiss the emotions or the unconscious, or both, from his consideration. Yet they remain facts to which at least the medical psychologist has to pay ample attention, for emotional conflicts and the interventions of the unconscious are the classical features of his science. If he treats a patient at all, he is confronted with irrationalities of this kind whether he can formulate them intellectually or not. He has to acknowledge their only too troublesome existence. It is therefore quite natural that people who have not had the medical psychologist's experience find it difficult to follow what he is talking about. Anyone who has not had the chance, or the misfortune, to live through the same or similar experiences is hardly capable of understanding what happens when psychology ceases to be a tranquil pursuit for the scientist in his laboratory and becomes a real life adventure. Target practice on a shooting range is far from being a battlefield, but the doctor has to deal with casualties in a real war. Therefore he has to concern himself with psychic realities even if he cannot define them in scientific terms. He can name them, but he knows that all the terms he uses to designate the essentials of life do not pretend to be more than names for facts that have to be experienced in themselves, because they cannot be reproduced by their names. No textbook can teach psychology; one learns only by actual experience. No understanding is gained by memorizing words, for symbols are the living facts of life.

572 The cross in the Christian religion, for instance, is a meaningful symbol that expresses a multitude of aspects, ideas, and emotions, but a cross before somebody's name simply indicates that that individual is dead. The *lingam* or phallus functions as an all-embracing symbol in the Hindu religion, but if a street urchin draws one on a wall, it just means an interest in his penis. Because infantile and adolescent fantasies often continue far into adult life, many dreams contain unmistakable sexual allusions. It would be absurd to understand them as anything else.

But when a mason speaks of monks and nuns to be laid upon each other, or a locksmith of male and female keys, it would be nonsensical to suppose that he is indulging in glowing adolescent fantasies. He simply means a particular kind of tile or key that has been given a colourful name. But when an educated Hindu talks to you about the *lingam*, you will hear things we Westerners would never connect with the penis. You may even find it most difficult to guess what he actually means by this term, and you will naturally conclude that the lingam *symbolizes* a good many things. It is certainly not an obscene allusion; nor is the cross a mere sign for death but a symbol for a great many other ideas. Much, therefore, depends on the maturity of the dreamer who produces such an image.

573 The interpretation of dreams and symbols requires some intelligence. It cannot be mechanized and crammed into stupid and unimaginative brains. It demands an ever-increasing knowledge of the dreamer's individuality as well as an ever-increasing self-awareness on the part of the interpreter. No experienced worker in this field will deny that there are rules of thumb that can prove helpful, but they must be applied with prudence and intelligence. Not everybody can master the "technique." You may follow all the right rules and the apparently safe path of knowledge and yet you get stuck in the most appalling nonsense, simply by overlooking a seemingly unimportant detail that a better intelligence would not have missed. Even a man with a highly developed intellect can go badly astray because he has never learnt to use his intuition or his feeling, which might be at a regrettably low level of development.

574 The attempt to understand symbols does not only bring you up against the symbol itself, but up against the wholeness of the symbol-producing individual. If one is really up to this challenge, one may meet with success. But as a rule it will be necessary to make a special study of the individual and his or her cultural background. One can learn a lot in this way and so get a chance to fill in the gaps in one's education. I have made it a rule myself to consider every case an entirely new proposition about which I do not even know the ABC. Routine may be and often is practical, and quite useful as long as one skates on the surface, but as soon as one gets in touch with the vital problems,

life itself takes over and even the most brilliant theoretical premises become ineffectual words.

575 This makes the teaching of methods and techniques a major problem. As I have said, the pupil has to acquire a good deal of specialized knowledge. This provides him with the necessary mental tool-shop, but the main thing, the handling of the tools, can be acquired only if the pupil undergoes an analysis that acquaints him with his own conflict. This can be quite a task with some so-called normal but unimaginative individuals. They are just incapable of realizing, for instance, the simple fact that psychic events happen to us spontaneously. Such people prefer to cling to the idea that whatever occurs either is done by themselves or else is pathological and must be cured by pills or injections. They show how close dull normality is to a neurosis, and as a matter of fact such people succumb most easily to psychic epidemics.

576 In all the higher grades of science, imagination and intuition play an increasingly important role over and above intellect and its capacity for application. Even physics, the most rigorous of all the applied sciences, depends to an astonishing degree on intuition, which works by way of the unconscious processes and not by logical deductions, although it is possible to demonstrate afterwards what logical procedure might have led to the same result.

577 Intuition is almost indispensable in the interpretation of symbols, and can cause an immediate acceptance on the part of the dreamer. But, subjectively convincing as such a lucky hunch may be, it is also somewhat dangerous, because it leads to a false sense of security. It may even seduce both the interpreter and the dreamer into continuing this rather facile exchange of ideas, which may end in a sort of mutual dream. The secure basis of real intellectual and moral knowledge gets lost if one is satisfied with a vague feeling of having understood. Usually when one asks people the reasons for their so-called understanding, they are unable to give an explanation. One can understand and explain only when one has brought intuitions down to the safe basis of real knowledge of the facts and their logical connections. An honest investigator will have to admit that this is not possible in certain cases, but it would be dishonest of him to dismiss them on that account. Even a scientist is a human being, and it

is quite natural that he, like others, hates the things he cannot explain and thus falls victim to the common illusion that what we know today represents the highest summit of knowledge. Nothing is more vulnerable and ephemeral than scientific theories, which are mere tools and not everlasting truths.