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Revisiting Jung's "A Psychological Approach to the Dogma of the Trinity": Some Implications for Psychoanalysis and Religion

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Abstract This article explores one of C. G. Jung's generally neglected essays, his psychological interpretation of the Trinity, and links up key theoretical notions with several more mainstream psychoanalytic concepts. It further uses the notions of oneness, otherness, thirdness, and the fourth to consider the recent points of convergence between psychoanalysis and religion.

Keywords Psychoanalysis and religion · Jung and the Trinity · The third · The fourth · Deus abscunditus

An Audacious Beginning

"*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*" (1958, p. 109). So wrote C. G. Jung in the introduction to his essay, "A Psychological Approach to the Dogma of the Trinity." Putting aside the superlative nature of his claim (i.e., regarding that which is the *most* sacred), I find in Jung's words an effective departure point for this article. Like Jung, I am well aware of the audacity of my undertaking in these pages. But I would venture to guess that the reasons underlying the audacity of the two undertakings—Jung's and mine—though similar in some ways, are really rather different.

What was it about Jung's undertaking that made for an audacity so keenly felt and so freely admitted? First, a contextual observation: Jung's essay on the Trinity was, itself, a work of "re-visiting." He had lectured on the Trinity in 1940, some 8 years before returning to the theme and working it out in its present form. Jung characterized his previous effort to reckon with the Trinity as "no more than a sketch." And he felt a sense of duty—a "moral obligation," as he put it—to return to this topic, "in a manner befitting

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its dignity and importance" (p. 109). In short, Jung recognized that he had unfinished business with the symbol of the Trinity.

Second, a brief excursus on the nature of this unfinished business: however "sketchy" Jung's earlier lecture may have been, it was no doubt provocative, causing quite a stir among his critics. Jung's "treatment" of the Trinity was controversial from the start. "From the reactions the lecture provoked," Jung explained, "it was plain that some of my readers found a psychological discussion of Christian symbols objectionable even when it carefully avoided any infringement of their religious value" (p. 109).

Jung was keenly aware that by putting the doctrine of the Trinity "on the couch," as it were, he was entering dangerous territory. Jung's detractors were primarily Christian theologians who repeatedly accused him of psychologizing religious symbols—of reducing their content to mere psychic experience. This accusation persists in some circles, and it deserves its own treatment. For the purposes of my discussion, I will here point out that in his introduction to the Trinity essay, and elsewhere in his work, Jung insisted that his concern was to make religious symbols accessible to thoughtful reflection. He wanted to rescue these symbols from their potential banishment to what he called, in a clever turn of phrase, a "sphere of sacrosanct unintelligibility" (p. 109). In sum, he wanted to enrich and enliven our connection to religious symbols by exploring their numinous and primordial content.

All of that says something about Jung's feelings of audacity about his psychological interpretation of the Trinity. But what about my undertaking in this project—what is it about exploring the relationship between psychoanalysis and religion, by revisiting Jung's essay on the Trinity, that makes for my own keenly felt audacity?

By considering Jung's essay, I am aware that I am opening up a large topic and stepping into what is perhaps unfamiliar territory for some readers. However much the recent publication of *The Red Book*, together with an unprecedented series of lectures, dialogues, and exhibitions in New York City and elsewhere, may have sparked a renewed, if not altogether new, interest in Jung's life and work, the fact is that his theory remains largely on the margins—outside the psychoanalytic mainstream.

There is something wonderfully audacious about considering Jung's work outside a specifically Jungian readership. Going forward, I plan to point out a few places of convergence between Jung's theory and more mainstream psychoanalytic theories and concepts. There is much to be gained by playing around in such places, which I prefer to regard as *transitional* or *potential* spaces—to use D. W. Winnicott's terminology—those generative and lively spaces where we can find what we create and create what we find (Ulanov 2001, 2007b; Winnicott 1971).

Several decades before Winnicott articulated his theory of transitional space and transitional experience, Jung described a similar phenomenon. In thinking about the relationship of his analytical psychology to the question of a Weltanschauung, he wrote: "Only in creative acts do we step forth into the light and see ourselves whole and complete. Never shall we put any face on the world other than our own, and we have to do this precisely in order to find ourselves" (1928, p. 329). My approach to playing around in this transitional space involves an intentional "contributing in" from the perspective of religion, which is its own audacious move. Here, I write from several of my multiple locations, particularly as a scholar of the interdisciplinary field of psychoanalysis and religion and as a practitioner of care in both these realms. It is out of these several commitments, sensibilities, and influences that I put my own face on the world. Together, they ground many of my own creative acts. They are the primary locations in which I create what I find and find what I create.

Putting our faces on the world is itself a bold and audacious process, which is why Winnicott invoked words like ruthlessness and aggression when he described it. Problems in transitional experiencing arise, in part, when we insist that the face we put on the world is the only face to be glimpsed there. But when things go well, we see many faces in our world—both our own and others. My claim here is that this kind of mutual discovery and recognition lies at the heart of both analytic process and the religious/theological enterprise. However differently we might conceive of and describe this intersubjective process or task, we might well agree that it is an urgent one for human (and even planetary) survival and flourishing.

The Trinity, as I prefer to imagine it, is a distinctly Christian way of saying that there is *room enough* for all the faces we would put onto the world; that there is something always and already holding that generative space of encounter in being for us. Philosopher of religion Richard Kearney makes use of an ancient metaphor for the Trinity—the Greek term *perichoresis*, often translated as divine round dance—to make a similar point. Kearney suggests the Trinity "holds out the promise of a perichoretic interplay of differing personas, meeting without fusing, communing without totalizing, discoursing without dissolving" (2001, p. 15).

I want to invite my readers to hold this metaphor in mind as this essay unfolds—the image of a perichoretic interplay, a dancing around of self and other, identity and difference: meeting, communing, and discoursing *without* fusing, totalizing, or dissolving. For this playful, dance-filled metaphor, I submit, holds out much promise for the interdisciplinary enterprise that exists between psychoanalysis and religion.

Jung and the Trinity

An interplay of differing personas, meeting without fusing, communing without totalizing, discoursing without dissolving….It was just this kind of provocative and paradoxical possibility that Jung must have found so intriguing about the Trinity. In his autobiography, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections,* Jung recounts his initial encounter with the Trinity. It was an encounter that occurred in the course of Jung's instruction for confirmation, conducted by his father, Paul Achilles Jung, a pastor of the Swiss Reformed Church.

Jung confessed that he was bored by his confirmation instruction. But rather than altogether withdrawing from the religious enterprise, he engaged in his own kind of independent study. Jung spent hours alone in his father's library, searching for the solutions to his religious questions within the covers of the many volumes he found there. Much "happened" as Jung wrestled for answers to his probing questions. But one moment stands out as particularly pertinent to Jung's interest in the Trinity. "One day I was leafing through the catechism," Jung writes, "hoping to find something besides the sentimental-sounding and usually incomprehensible as well as uninteresting expatiations on Lord Jesus. I came across the paragraph on the Trinity. Here was something that challenged my interest: a oneness which was simultaneously a threeness" (1963, pp. 52–53).

Jung became fascinated with the problem of the Trinity—a "problem" that centered on its paradoxical nature, or "inner contradiction," as he put it (1963, pp. 52–53). Suddenly, there was a sense of excitement about his religious instruction. "I waited longingly for the moment when we would reach this question [of the Trinity]," Jung recalled. "But when we got that far, my father said, 'We now come to the Trinity, but we'll skip that, for I really understanding nothing of it myself'" (ibid.). However much Jung may have admired his father's honesty, he was nonetheless quick to articulate his profound disappointment.

"There we have it; they know nothing about it and don't give it a thought. Then how can I talk about my secret?" (ibid.). Jung associated a non-thinking religiosity—which he connected with his father's theological silence, if not an outright loss of faith—with the isolation surrounding his own intense and often confusing experiences of the psyche.

Yet it was precisely from these early associations between religious symbolism and his own personal struggles and disappointments, that Jung worked out his positive revaluation of religion. And it was this positive revaluation of religion that would prove one of the decisive factors that lead to his break with Freud. In his book *Freud and Jung on Religion*, Palmer (1997) offers this concise comparative analysis:

> Jung… no less than Freud, believes in the *vis medicatrix naturae*—that is, in the healing power of nature, by which [man] has the capacity, through his discovery of his unconscious life, to heal himself; but whereas Freud sees this as involving the elimination of the religious neurosis in the life of the maturing individual, Jung sees the process as requiring a reorientation of the consciousness towards religion, towards those psychic processes generic to the human species which religion embodies and which are expressive of the deepest and innermost processes of the psyche. For Jung, then, *it is not the presence of religion which is a symptom of neurosis but its absence.* (p. 92)

In light of his approach to religion, it is especially significant that Jung chose these words from St. Augustine as an epigraph for his essay on the Trinity: "*Go not outside, return into thyself: Truth dwells in the inward man.*" For Jung, a psychological interpretation of the Trinity was predicated on his understanding of Trinitarian symbolism as an expression of psychic experience, resting on an irreducible archetypal foundation—one of many *représentations collectives*, inextricably "bound up with the weal and woe of the human soul." For Jung, the Trinity possessed "a relationship of living reciprocity to the psyche" (1958, p. 111). Methodologically, then, Jung took a symbolic stance in his approach to the doctrine, regarding it as an expression of the psyche, "rather as if it were a dream-image" (ibid., p. 180).

One, Two, Three…

Jung's commitment to archetypes and archetypal images—the contents and manifestations of what he termed the collective unconscious (or, objective psyche)—grounded his interpretive approach to the doctrine of the Trinity. He thus began his essay with a thorough investigation of various triadic symbols and formulations. In this process of amplification, Jung identified a number of pre-Christian parallels found in other religious and cultural contexts, most notably Babylonian, Egyptian, and Greek. Here, he observed both triadic family structures among the gods, as well as their intra-triadic relationships (e.g. Anu, Bel, Ea; Sin, Shamash, and Ishtar). In these ancient religious myths, according to Jung, we see various "prefigurations of the Trinity" (1958, p. 115).

What I find especially remarkable in Jung's cross-cultural exploration of the archetypal triadic pattern is his sustained interest in Plato's *Timaeus* dialogue. The *Timaeus* is, in part, an extended mathematical and geometrical meditation on the relationship between One and Three. Indeed, this "mystery-laden" text, with its emphasis on triangles—especially equilateral triangles—seems to have offered Jung the most provocative foundation for his preoccupation with triadic patterns and conceptual systems. "The relation of Threeness to Oneness can be expressed by an equilateral triangle, A = B = C," Jung wrote, "that is, by

the identity of the three, threeness being contained in its entirety in each of the three angles." Moreover, he concluded that the "intellectual idea of the equilateral triangle is a conceptual model for the logical image of the Trinity" (1958, p. 119). The following quote, inspired by his reading of *Timaeus*, effectively bridges Jung's archetypal approach with his psychological interpretation of the trinitarian symbolism:[1]

> The number one claims an exceptional position, which we meet again in the natural philosophy of the Middle Ages. According to this, one is not a number at all; the first number is two. Two is the first number because, with it, separation and multiplication begin, which alone can make counting possible…. Two implies a number that is different and distinct from the 'numberless' One. In other words, as soon as the number two appears, a unit is produced out of the original unity, and this unit is none other than the same unity split into two and turned into a 'number.' The 'One' and the 'Other' form an opposition, but there is not opposition between one and two, for these are simple numbers which are distinguished only by their arithmetical value and by nothing else. The 'One,' however, seeks to hold to its one-and-alone existence, which the 'Other' ever strives to be another opposed to the One. The One will not let go of the other because, if it did, it would lose its character; and the Other pushes itself away from the One in order to exist at all. Thus there arises a tension of the opposites between the One and the Other. But every tension of the opposites culminates in a release, out of which comes the 'third.' In the third, the tension is resolved and the lost unity restored (ibid., pp. 118–119).

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit…

Jung believed that, in the symbol of the Trinity, we are confronted with a primordial image—a "distinctly archaic idea"—as set forth in this movement of the One, the Other, and the Third (1958, p. 132). The world of the Father represents the original oneness, before separation or difference becomes meaningful. It is a world of innocence and child-like faith—similar to Winnicott's state of going-on-being, prior to the differentiation of subject and object; or Loewald's similar notion of the original unitary experience, with its feeling of timelessness, what some theologians (e.g. Paul Tillich) term the *nunc stans*, the eternal now (Loewald 1980, 1988; Tillich 1963; Winnicott 1965, 1971).

Jung envisioned this world of pristine oneness as one characterized by the absence of moral conflict and critical reflection: "The Father is, by definition, the prime cause, the creator, the *auctor rerum*, who, on a level of culture where reflection is still unknown, can only be One. The Other follows from the One by splitting off from it" (1958, p. 133). This "splitting off," resulting in the birth of otherness, follows from inevitable reckonings with the problem of suffering, the reality of evil, and the imperfections of creation.

Such reckonings attest to the possibility of another world—"a world filled with longing for redemption and for that state of perfection in which man(sic) was still one with the Father" (ibid., p. 135). The world of the Son, then, represents conflict, critical reflection, and differentiation. As Jungian theorist Murray Stein describes it, "Dynamically, this second stage represents a development out of and beyond the One. One, which is original

[1] Jung's theory of the archetypes evolved over the course of his thinking and writing. At one point in this essay, he defines the term *archetype* with the ecclesial rhetoric (or, "church speak") traditionally used to define catholic (universal): "The archetype is 'that which is believed always, everywhere, and by everybody" (p. 117).

unity, divides into two—one and the other—and this division represents an advance for consciousness…. Increased consciousness makes definition possible; before, the One was undefinable" (1985, p. 118). I liken Jung's Son-stage to Hans Loewald's notion of the "alienating differentiations," brought about by secondary process, that bring about a necessarily disruption of the original unitary experience (1980).

What becomes of the alienation and conflict, this "irreversible increase in consciousness," as Jung described it (1958, p. 135)? Here, Jung reaches back to the Christian doctrinal formulation, as it emerged in the Western theological tradition, which claims that the Spirit proceeds from—or is generated by—both the Father and the Son. The Spirit, for Jung, is thus the "third term" common to them both—ending the dualism and doubt inaugurated by the Son. Indeed, the Spirit is "the third element" that resolves the conflict and restores the lost unity. The stage of the Spirit, as Jung saw it is the final, culminating step in what he called the "divine drama"—the very "evolution of God" (ibid., p. 136).

The Problem of the Fourth

What is perhaps most surprising—if not ironic—about Jung's essay on the Trinity is that most of its content is ultimately focused on an archetypal pattern other than the triad. Indeed, what comes most to concern Jung is the image of the quaternity and what he refers to as "the problem of the fourth."[2] Jung generally regarded the quaternity as a more complete symbol of wholeness than triadic symbols, such as the Trinity. Why? Jung again took his cue from the *Timaeus* dialogue. In fact, he strategically invoked the opening words that put the whole dialogue into motion—the question around which the major themes and concerns of the *Timaeus* unfold: "*One, two, three—but where, my dear Timaeus, is the fourth of those who were yesterday our guests and are to be our hosts today?*" (2007, p. 1).

The "problem of the fourth," for Jung, has to do with that which has been left out, gone missing, or is lacking or otherwise absent. However much the archetype of the triad was present in the various myths and religions across culture and throughout time, the image of the quaternity was just as prominent, according to Jung, and seems to occur in tandem with triadic notions. There are four elements (earth, fire, water, and air), for example; four "corners of the earth"; four directions; four gospels. And, in Jung's own theory of personality, four psychological functions.

One, two, three—but where… is the fourth? The answer to this opening question of the *Timaeus,* in Jung's estimation, was mournfully significant. The fourth is missing, is absent, because he was sick, unwell. And the absence of this fourth—the erstwhile guest who was to have served as host—makes the whole unwell, because without the Fourth the Three are incomplete. "If we regard the introductory scene as symbolical," he writes, "this means that of the four elements out of which reality is composed, either air or water is missing. If air is missing, then there is no connecting link with spirit (fire), and if water is missing, there is no link with concrete reality (earth)" (1958, p. 122).

How does all this relate to Jung's psychological interpretation of the Trinity? When Jung looked at the Trinity, he saw a kind of provisional unity—a unity that was not quite complete. Something was missing from this ancient God-image—an "element," or series of elements, that have always been difficult to incorporate into our consciously held God-images. There was something still pressing for realization and reality, yet simultaneously

[2] Analyzing the structure of this essay rhetorically, for example, it is clear that more of the content is devoted to exploring and developing the notion of the fourth and related symbols of the quaternity.

stubbornly resistant. "The triad corresponds to the condition of 'thought' not yet become 'reality,'" Jung wrote. "For this a second mixture (i.e. of the other) is needed, in which the Different is incorporated by force. The 'Other' is the 'fourth' element, whose nature it is to be the 'adversary' and to resist harmony" (1958, p. 125). What was the "something" that got left out of the Trinity? Jung identified *three* "things" that would serve as the Trinity's *fourth*: evil, matter, and the feminine. Theology, after Jung, continues to ask after these "elements;" to ponder their place in our God-images; to consider the ways that they fall outside our experiences of ourselves, of one another, of the divine (Ulanov 2006, 1986, 1988).

No wonder Jung referred to this fourth as the "recalcitrant fourth" (1958, p. 127)! "We prefer to leave it around the corner, or to repress it," Jung wrote, "because it is such an awkward customer—with the strongest tendency to be infantile, banal, primitive, and archaic" (ibid., pp. 164–165). The fourth represents all that is unconscious, dissociated, split off, un-metabolized, and uncontained. It includes all our "unformulated experience," to use psychoanalyst Donnell Stern's phrase, which strives for creative and imaginative expression (1997). Similarly, Jung saw the fourth is potentially generative and "particularly instructive" (1958, pp. 126–128).

The Third and the Fourth

What are we to make of this "recalcitrant fourth"? What is the nature of its generative, creative potential? How might it prove instructive to us? What does the *fourth* have to do with the reconciling and uniting *third* generated by the One and its Other? In an article entitled "The Third in the Shadow of the Fourth," Jungian analyst and theorist Ann Ulanov (2007a) offers a rich and constructive grappling with such questions. Ulanov both builds on and advances Jung's work on the fourth. And she effectively summarizes the nature and work of the fourth by playing around with the notion that *the fourth does three things*:

1. The fourth destroys what seems clear and certain to us, including our definitions and fixed categories for things, because it is not fixed, but "ever living and moving us, not captured in a fixed definition for all time." It reveals to us our limits—"the limits of our perceptions" (p. 602).
2. The fourth requires our subjective, ego response—an active taking-part in shaping its purpose, moving the insights it offers to each of us into the realities of everyday existence. "Without it, the purposiveness gains no purpose, no channel into living, no stepping over into concrete life" (pp. 602–03).
3. The fourth shows itself as the One. But this One is different from the original One (the world of the Father), the beginning One of fusion and undifferentiation (pp. 602–603). It allows us to experience the unity with multiplicity and the multiplicity within unity. Through the fourth's functioning, and our consent to it, we may well glimpse what Loewald described as "separation in the act of uniting and unity in the act of separating" (1988); or—to use Winnicott's phrase—a "separation that is not a separation but a form of union" (1971).

The fourth, we might say, is *audacious*! It has many profound applications for clinical work, as Ulanov's article well illustrates. But for my purposes here, I propose that we think about what this fourth—and the three things this fourth does—offers to our ongoing efforts to navigate the complex interdisciplinary terrain between psychoanalysis and religion. How might each discipline perform the services of the fourth for the other? What

potentially generative and particularly instructive possibilities lurk about in the shadows of these subjects as they dance around one another?

One, Two, Three… Four

I think we can productively approach such questions by starting with that last thing that the fourth does, then working our way back and around. That third thing done by the fourth has to do with unity and separateness, sameness and difference—with seeing the multiplicity in our unity and the unity in our multiplicity.

As Ellenberger (1970) documented in his classic book, *The Discovery of the Unconscious*, these two disciplines—psychoanalysis and religion—were once one (recall the undifferentiated Father-stage of Jung's Trinity). Over time—given the vicissitudes of history and cultural change—discrimination, critical reflection, and conflict arose between them (recall the Son-stage). And the disciplines ultimately separated into two: One and the Other; the Other and One.

Considering the literature in these two fields, we may well sense that we have begun to experience the emergence of a "third": reconciling, mediating, working to bring to birth a new thing—a new consciousness about what we are doing. We are beginning to glimpse, more and more, points of convergence between these two disciplines—disciplines that have been so estranged, so mutually at odds. In her article "Theology after Jung," Ulanov (2006) offers this concise and evocative description:

> These two disciplines are like terrains on either side of a central river. When religion is dominant in the culture, the two are one, what Christianity called the care of souls, what John Mbiti (1970), scholar of African religions, called the drama of rocks, trees, drums, for we human beings live in a religious universe. In the twentieth century, the one became two with depth psychology verging into a separate river from its original containment in theology. Now, in the twenty-first century, the two are converging to meet again, to send boats and bridges back and forth (p. 61).

There are many examples of this converging, this sending back and forth of boats and bridges. A number of psychoanalytic theorists have ventured into the realm of mystery and mysticism, using terms and concepts to evoke that sense of "something" that transcends the ego/self. Recall Winnicott's notion of the sacred core of a person that is private, silent, "incommunicado"—worthy of preservation and not to be violated; or Bion's "O"—the Godhead, ultimate reality, that which we strive to be at-one with; or Michael Eigen's notion of the "area of faith" in Winnicott, Lacan, and Bion, by which he means "a way of experiencing which is undertaken with one's whole being, all out, 'with one's heart, with one's soul, and with all one's might'" (1981, p. 413).

We might well take a closer look at Eigen's use of religious language in that last example. Here we see an echo of the Shema, the central Jewish affirmation of faith (Deut. 6). Eigen's work is typically rather full of these kinds of echoes of religious terminology. At other points in the essay, for example, he uses the phrase "ground of being," which is generally associated with the existential theologians, particularly Tillich. Eigen links this numinous "ground" with Bion's O, which he describes as having no psychological location. "Its status is not confined to any category one can possibly postulate concerning psychic life," Eigen writes, "yet it is assumed to be the ground of them all. No starting or ending point can be envisioned for O" (p. 427).

No Psychological Locus… At All

Gradually—increasingly—psychoanalytic theory is attempting to account for a force for healing and growth that seems to come from a location external to us—from some place beyond that which we call the ego or self or psyche (e.g., Ghent 1990; Milner 1969). In his book, *The Mystery of Things,* Christopher Bollas writes of this force in a manner that veers into the domain of theology. "What is the intelligence that moves through the mind to create its objects, to shape its inscapes, to word itself, to gather moods, to effect the other's arriving ideas, to… to… to?" Bollas offers his own tentative (confessional?) response. "If there is a God this is where it lives," he writes, "a mystery working itself though the materials of life, giving us shape and passing us on to others" (1999, p. 195). How remarkable that a psychoanalyst hazards something about the place of divine residence, the holy habitation, what religious folks often refer to as "sacred ground"!

Meanwhile, religion has been busy sending forth its own boats and bridges. And where psychoanalysis has been setting sail for destinations that lie somewhere off the psychological grid, theology has been pressing along a downward vector. It has been journeying into the depths of the human condition, into the recesses of psychic life and experience, into the region commonly referred to as the unconscious. And, in the process, the notion of transcendence has been recast, reframed, redefined, relocated. Consider this example from the initial pages of Caputo's (2006) recent book, *The Weakness of God,* in which he deconstructs traditional (strong) theologies of God and offers, in its place, the notion of God as a "weak force":

> In a strong theology, God is the overarching governor of the universe, but in what follows I will endeavor to show that the weak force of God settles down below in the hidden interstices of being, insinuated into the obscure crevices of being, like an *ordo non ordinans*, the dis-ordering order of what disturbs being from within, like an ararchic interruption that refuses to allow being to settle firmly in place. The name of God is the name of an event transpiring in being's restless heart, creating confusion in the house of being, forcing being into motion, mutation, transformation, reversal. The name of God is the name of the event that being both dreads and longs for, sighing and groaning until *something new is brought forth from down below* (p. 9, emphasis added).

Now, in these first years of this new millennium, we are wandering more and more into such places of convergence between psychoanalysis and religion. We who work in either/both of these two disciplines are searching high and low for the source of mystery, *the mystery of things*… the mystery *beyond* and *within* things; a mystery that creates its objects, that words itself, that shapes its inscapes, that gathers us, that urges us into motion, mutation, transformation, reversal—*metanoia.*

What is this force, this "intelligence"? What is its source, its name? Where does it live? These are the questions pertaining to thirdness, to the third thing that the fourth does. Together, they offer us a glimpse of a differentiated unity, of a separation that is not a separation but a form of union; of a dancing-around of sameness and difference, identity and otherness; of a perichoretic interplay of differing entities—meeting without fusing, communing without totalizing, discoursing without dissolving. The fourth makes possible this differentiated dancing-around, as well as our coming around, again, to the other things that the fourth does.

The fourth deconstructs our categories and definitions. It shows us our limits—the limits of our perceptions. This function of the fourth, I would suggest, is a critical one for the

recent and ongoing rapprochement between psychoanalysis and religion. The fourth challenges us to see each discipline with fresh eyes, to open ourselves to new approaches and definitions, to acknowledge that the boats and bridges being sent back and forth are busy bringing us messages from other, once distant shores.

Here we might benefit from a little associative exercise to take us to the heart of this thing that the fourth does. What comes to mind when you encounter the word religion? How do you define it or account for the experience of it? My hunch is that if we, writer and readers alike, could share our thoughts and associations, we would discover a notable variety of viewpoints. We might also discover unexpected points of commonality. But the work of the fourth is to show us that no matter what we think we know—no matter how lofty or reasonable or careful our attempts to explain and describe and define—there remains something ultimately inadequate and limited about our multiple points-of-view.

The fourth presses us—psychoanalysts and religionists alike—to embrace new ways of envisioning the disciplinary "other;" to ever expand the ways we categorize our experiences and the experiences of others. *Religion*, then, cannot be explained away with psychoanalytic categories and processes—as that which is infantile and regressive; or as that which is an illusion, a mere consequence of human projective phenomena. And *psychoanalysis* can be envisioned as something other than a method for deconstructing faith; as a discipline that would cure us of our need for God, or explain away our images of God. Instead, each discipline can be regarded as having something crucial to offer the other. Now we can identify, say, the origins of our faith in our earliest object relations, and the image of God as "father" or "mother" offers us precious insight into our connection with whatever we call sacred. Now, perhaps, we can speak with greater awareness of that mystery of things that unsettles us, moves us, summons us, and transforms us.

The fourth requires our subjective, ego response—an active taking-part in shaping its purpose, moving the insights it offers to each of us into the realities everyday existence. That is a very sophisticated way of saying that we have work to do, each us and all of us together, in our response to the many boats and bridges going back and forth between these two disciplines. The fourth will not allow us to be content simply to sit passively on one shore or another, as if watching a spectator sport, while all this activity of convergence just "happens." We are meant to respond—to look, to examine, to sift through the messages coming at us, to make decisions about how we will proceed. In order to serve the necessary differentiation between psychoanalysis, for example, we need repeatedly to strive for clarity about the methods, the objects of inquiry, and the goals unique to each discipline (all the while acknowledging the fact that each discipline reckons with its own pluralism in such matters).

There is much work for us to do, and our tasks do not just belong to the theoretical and speculative realms. So much is at stake clinically, for example—in how we respond to religious issues that come up with our patients from time to time, in how we regard patients who identify as religious, in what we would identify as our own "ground of being," in what we hold as sacred. Here, issues pertaining to categories and definitions—about religion, for example—appear in bold relief. We cannot hide behind our (perhaps) cherished notions of neutrality. Instead, the "field" between our patients and us is permeated by the assumptions and attitudes we hold—both consciously and unconsciously. The work of the fourth prompts us to consider and re-consider our hard-won achievements of analytic "third-ness"—pressing for whatever is left out of our work, glimpsing a greater view of the whole.

An Audacious Ending

One, Two, Three—But Where Is the Fourth of Those Who Were Yesterday Our Guests and Are to Be Our Hosts Today?

In the beginning of this essay, I commended a sustained attention to an ancient metaphor for the Trinity: the image of three different persons dancing around as one, *meeting without fusing, communing without totalizing, discoursing without dissolving*—to use philosopher Richard Kearney's words. *Perichoresis* is the Greek word for this divine "circle dance," where the Father, the Son, and the Spirit give place to each other "in a gesture of reciprocal dispossession" (2001, p. 109)

Kearney similarly plays around with the Latin term for this gesture, this "God-play"—*circumincessio.* "The Latin spells this [gesture] out intriguingly," Kearney wrties, "by punning on the dual phonetic connotations of cicum-in-sessio (from sedo, to sit or assume a position) and circum-in-cession (from cedo, to cede, give way or dis-position). What emerges is an image of three distinct persons moving toward each other in a gesture of immanence and away from each other in a gesture of transcendence. At once belonging and distance. Moving in and out of position. An interplay of loving and letting go" (ibid.).

I suggest that we glimpse the fourth in this divine threesome and their playful and sacred dance. It is that force that moves them about—from taking a seat to offering up the chair; from staking out a position to relinquishing a claim; from being the guest to serving as host; from the heights of transcendence to the lows of immanence. The fourth generates movement, "moreness," aliveness. For me, the fourth is not God. But the *God who may be* might well be revealed in this fourth—a mystery working itself though the materials of life, giving us shape and passing us on to others—and linking us up to that that has no psychological locus at all. The *deus absconditus*—the god hidden within and yet beyond the depths of the psyche.

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