

# Reflections on “The Way of What Is to Come” of *The Red Book*

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“Ha, this book . . . banal and pathological and frantic and divine, my written unconscious.”<sup>1</sup>

This article provides the historical background and psychological context necessary to orient the reader of *The Red Book*, the recently published facsimile of the calligraphic rendition of C. G. Jung’s encounter with the unconscious. The essay amplifies and interprets the basic themes and images of the prologue to *The Red Book*. The prologue, “The Way of What Is to Come,” is an attempt on Jung’s part to establish his *bona fides*, first to himself, and then, to the sympathetic reader with respect to two issues: (1) that he is not insane; and (2) that his unconscious has a capacity for prophetic insight. The outbreak of World War I in August 1914 confirmed the validity of Jung’s prophetic visions. The external events convinced him that his premonition concerning the constellation of a new God image also had historical validity and was not merely a compensatory activation of the archetype of the Self addressing the disorientation of his psyche during his midlife crisis.

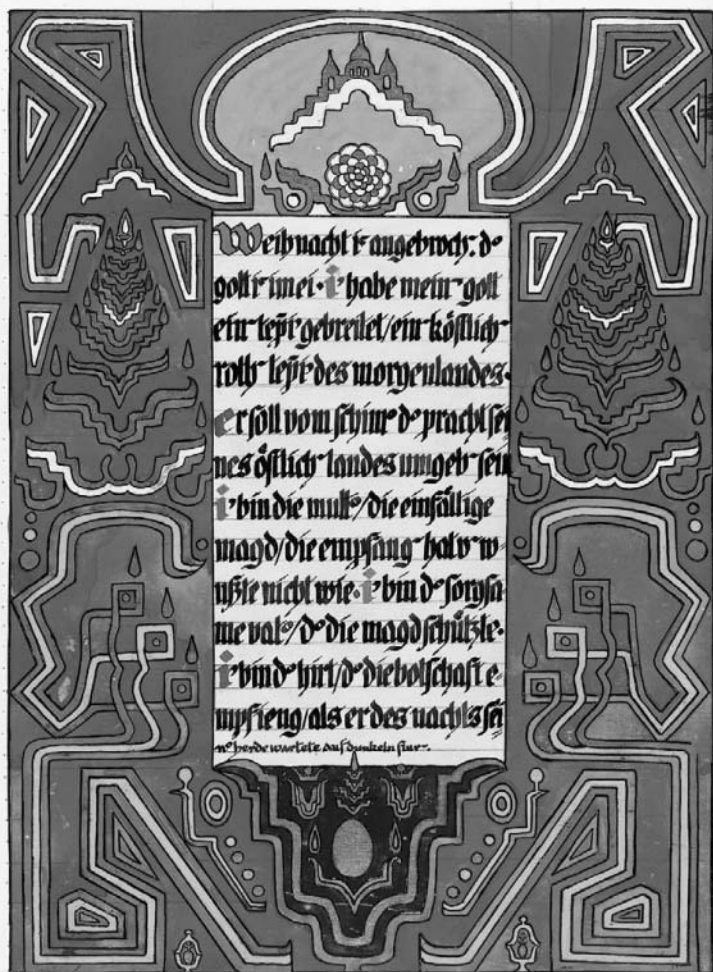
## INTRODUCTION

My aim in this article is to provide the background and context necessary to orient the reader of *The Red Book* by interpreting and

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<sup>1</sup>C. G. Jung, *The Red Book: Liber Novus*, ed. Sonu Shamdasani, New York: Norton, 2009, p. 336, note 21. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations are from the prologue to *The Red Book*, pp. 229–231. I am grateful to my wife, Katherine Odesmith, for editing the initial drafts of this article.

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*The Red Book (Liber Novus)*, page 50. Mixed media on paper.

Folio size: 11.57" × 15.35" (29 cm × 39 cm). 1914–1930.

amplifying the basic themes and images found in the prologue, "The Way of What Is to Come." The German reads, *Der Weg des Komenden*, which can also be translated as "The Way of the Coming One." Jung wrote this preface sometime during 1915, after he had experienced all the significant dreams, visions, and encounters with the figures of the unconscious. This intensively engaged period was relatively brief, from November 1913 to April 1914.

Jung began the calligraphic rendition of his encounter with the unconscious in 1915 and appended the prologue to provide a frame for the rest of the volume. He worked on the manuscript faithfully for a period of sixteen years, editing the initial accounts and adding mandalas and paintings as further amplifications of the original accounts. Still, he never completed transcribing the Liber Secundus from his handwritten and typed drafts of the Black Books (leather-bound notebooks with black covers) in which he recorded the initial experiences. Thus, the illuminated manuscript ends with page 189 (p. 325 of the published facsimile). In the published *Red Book*, the pages that complete the Liber Secundus and the section called Scrutinies (*Prüfungen* in the German, meaning "examinations") are derived from a combination of handwritten and typed drafts (1914–1915) of the Black Books and Cary Baynes's 1924–1925 transcriptions of these drafts and of the calligraphic volume (Editorial Note, pp. 225–226 of *The Red Book*).

One cannot overestimate the significance of the event, in 1928, when Richard Wilhelm sent Jung *The Secret of the Golden Flower* just as he completed a mandala that looked Chinese to him. The book was an ancient Chinese Taoist text, from the eighth century B.C.E., that confirmed Jung's discovery of the mandala-like center of the psyche. The coincidence, he writes, in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, "was the first event which broke through my isolation. I became aware of an affinity; I could establish ties with something and someone" (p. 197). At first, he ignored the alchemical background of the book, but eventually he realized that the alchemical tradition also contained parallel motifs to his own *prima materia*: the dreams, visions, and encounters with the unconscious recorded in *The Red Book*. With that discovery, as he writes in the 1959 postscript to the illuminated manuscript, "the contents of this book found their way into actuality and I could no longer continue working on it" (p. 360).

The prologue is an attempt on Jung's part to establish his *bone fides*, first to himself, and then, hopefully, to a sympathetic reader with respect to two issues: (1) that he is not insane; and (2) that his unconscious has a capacity for prophetic insight. The prologue describes the internal debate waged between his conscious and unconscious concerning these matters. In the course of the dialogue, he is forced to acknowledge the radical difference between these two ways of perceiving reality and concludes that if he is going

accept the reality of the unconscious, he will have to suspend his human values and scientific outlook.

For the sake of allowing the unconscious to emerge in an uncensored manner, he does so; but once it has its say, Jung begins to examine everything it brings to the surface in light of his conscious knowledge and attitudes. Actually, even when he is engaged with the unconscious, Jung never fully gives in, but questions the pronouncements of the various figures he encounters and responds to the internal dramas he witnesses in a personal and human way. This confrontative stance on his part is the deciding factor that keeps him sane: He does not abdicate to the unconscious or let it overwhelm him.

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As for the prophetic aspect of his psyche, Jung wanted to verify its validity. . . . He could not accept the revelation of a newly emerging God-image pressing in on him without some indication that he was indeed experiencing a reality that was valid not just for himself, but also for his contemporaries.

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In a sense, Jung is well versed in maneuvering between these two realities. Already as a child, he had a sense that his being consisted of two personalities: Personality No. 1 was the ordinary schoolboy of 1890; and personality No. 2, who appeared whenever he was alone, experienced reality as transcendent and eternal. In *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, Jung observes that “the play and counter-play between personalities No. 1 and No. 2, which has run through my whole life, has nothing to do with a ‘split’ or dissociation in the ordinary medical sense. On the contrary, it is played out in every individual” (p. 45).

Most people, however, project the contents of the No. 2 personality onto religious figures and do not know that this is a typical internal psychic figure: “Most people’s conscious understanding is not sufficient to realize the he is also *what* they are” (p. 45, emphasis added).

As for the prophetic aspect of his psyche, Jung wanted to verify its validity. He felt he could not accept the revelation of a newly emerging God-image pressing in on him without some indication that he was indeed experiencing a reality that was valid not just for himself, but also for his contemporaries. The verification that his unconscious was gifted with prophetic insight came in August 1914 with the outbreak of the First World War. He

was then able to conclude that the disturbing visions and dreams of a coming catastrophe he'd had in November 1913 and in June and July 1914 were indeed indications of future events. Initially, he thought the dreams presaged a psychosis, and he was understandably anxious about his mental stability. The fact that his unconscious was attuned to phenomena taking place below the surface of the collective psyche allowed him to entertain the possibility that his intuitive insight concerning the birth of a new God-image might also be true, and not just for himself but for others as well.

That knowledge gave him the courage to transcribe his experiences in the medieval-style illuminated manuscript that has come to be known as *The Red Book*. Jung himself entitled the manuscript *Liber Novus*, or *The New Book*, clearly indicating that this text announced a new revelation. Evidently, in the 1920s he considered publishing the book. He had already published a part of it, the *Septem Sermones ad Mortuos* (Seven Sermons to the Dead), in 1916, albeit for private circulation. But as time went on, he realized that most of what he wrote in *The Red Book*, in an archaic and grandiloquent manner, could be translated into conventional language and concepts in his books and essays. Consequently, the publication of *The Red Book* became problematic. Nevertheless, it remained a precious record of his formative experiences. In his autobiography he states, "Today I can say that I have never lost touch with my initial experiences. All my works, all my creative activity, has come from those initial fantasies and dreams. . . . Everything that I accomplished was already contained in them, although at first only in the form of emotions and images" (p. 192).

The publication of *The Red Book* in 2009, when Jungian psychology has become a recognized field of endeavor, places the book in a proper context. Its significance can now be evaluated in light of Jung's entire scholarly opus. The popular interest in the book also indicates that the time is ripe for its dissemination. Is it possible that the message of the book, which a hundred years ago would have been deemed utter nonsense, is finding a receptive audience?

## THE FOUR EPIGRAPHS

*The Red Book* begins with four Biblical epigraphs, three from Isaiah and one from the Gospel of St. John. The emphasis on Isaiah is deliberate, for he is the prophet associated with the future coming of the Messiah. Together, the four citations describe a sequence: the first concerns Jung as the carrier of a new revelation; the second announces the birth of a new god; the third affirms its incarnation in humanity; and the fourth proclaims the saving grace accompanying that realization and the opening of a new "way of holiness."

Christians usually interpret the first citation from Isaiah (53:1–4) as a reference to Christ: "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted." But

here Jung is applying the description to himself. The comparison with Christ stems from his genuine reaction to what he had experienced in the course of his encounters with the unconscious and to what he knew would be the reaction of his contemporaries to the message he felt forced to convey: namely, that he was suffering from schizophrenic religious delusions. Indeed, after his October 1913 visions of “the death of countless thousands” and of a terrible flood that reached from England to Russia, Jung himself concluded that the imagery appeared to presage a psychosis. As previously mentioned, he was released from this fear only in August 1914, with the onset of World War I. As for the griefs and sorrows, in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* he describes the ordeal he suffered during this period: “I was living in a constant state of tension; often I felt as if gigantic blocks of stone were tumbling down upon me. One thunderstorm followed another. My enduring these storms was a question of brute strength. Others have been shattered by them—Nietzsche, and Hölderlin, and many others” (p. 177). Jung rightly concluded that his personal suffering reached transpersonal proportions. The horrible visions of the war made him feel that he was indeed afflicted, so to speak, with “the sins of the world.” But throughout his initial and subsequent encounters with the alien world of the collective unconscious, he invariably fought to uphold human limitations and values. He therefore felt it was not entirely presumptuous of him to find the narrative in Isaiah a fitting portrayal of his situation.

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The second epigraph is another quotation from Isaiah: “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given” (9:6). Again, Jung uses this verse, usually taken as a reference to the coming of the Messiah, to declare the birth of a new God for our era. The third quotation is from the Gospel of St. John: “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (1:14). The implication is that the new God will not reign from on high as a ruling spiritual

principle, but like Christ, will participate in the ordinary life of humanity, but with an important caveat. This time the incarnation of the God-image is not confined to one individual but potentially will occur in all human beings. In his book *Answer to Job*, Jung therefore speaks about “a Christification of many” (CW 11, para. 758). (An exploration of Jung’s mature conception of

the new God-image can be found in Edward Edinger's *The New God-Image: A Study of Jung's Key Letters Concerning the Evolution of the Western God-Image.*)

The final quotation, again from Isaiah, is a triumphant declaration of the miraculous transformations the new development will bring: "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. . . . And the parched ground shall become a pool and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes" (35:1–8). Certainly many people know that thanks to the new conception of the psyche that Jung wrested from his encounters with the unconscious, they were healed and their consciousness expanded. Where their dragons lay—namely, the complexes and unconscious drives that blocked development—there grass with reeds and rushes began to grow. In Shinto mythology the reed is the first manifestation that sprouts from the primeval waters and is similar in meaning to the lotus in the Hindu and the Egyptian creation myths.

## THE NEW WAY

The last verse quoted by Jung announces a new way, "the way of holiness" or the "Sacred Way" in *The New Jerusalem Bible* translation. There is an allusion here to the title of the section, and Jung takes up the theme of the way again in the conclusion to the prologue, where he warns the reader: "There is only one way and that is your way. You seek the path? I warn you away from my own. It can also be the wrong way for you. May each go his own way." Anyone who knows the rest of the first quotation from Isaiah (53:1–4) and reads Jung's warning will also hear the echo of verse 53:6: "We have turned every one to his own way." Yet, here is Jung announcing that each, in fact, must go his or her own way.

Jung's emphasis on each going his or her own way must be considered in a historical context. He spent the entire year of 1913 parting with Freud and withdrawing from the public positions he held. In April 1913, Jung resigned as president of the International Psychoanalytic Association and as lecturer at the University of Zürich. In October, he resigned as editor of the psychoanalytic journal founded by Freud. And November 1913 marks the beginning of his encounter with the unconscious, as recorded in *The Red Book*. It is hardly a coincidence, therefore, that the experience begins with the theme of each person's having to find his or her own way.

By pointing out the historical context, I do not mean to reduce the archetypal import of this section of *The Red Book* to Jung's personal psychology. On the contrary, it seems that the personal context provides the receptivity to analogous archetypal contents. For example, speaking purely from a human perspective, Christ had no personal father and therefore felt

a need to establish an intimate connection with the Father in Heaven. Jung's personal need to find his own way after breaking with Freud apparently coincided with an archetypal change in the collective Western psyche that now required a new individual relationship to religious worship and spiritual practice. Jung's personal situation made him receptive to the message.

But to complete the image of the way in the Biblical context, I must note that it is impossible to overlook Christ's response to the apostle Thomas, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), when Thomas asked how we can know the way. By contrast, Jung writes, "My path is not your path, therefore I cannot teach you. The way is within us, but not in Gods, nor in teachings, nor in laws. Within us is the way, the truth and the life." If anyone has any doubt that the way of what is to come is radically different from the way that preceded it, Jung's restatement of Christ's declaration should put an end to that. He openly proclaims that for contemporary Christians, imitating and following Christ is no longer the way: "Woe betide those who live by the way of examples! Life is not with them. If you live according to an example, you then live the life of that example, but who should live your own life if not yourself? So live yourselves." He continues: "One should not turn people into sheep, but sheep into people" (note 28). By insisting that each follow his or her own way, Jung maintains that he is not proposing a new law: "This is not a law, but notice of the fact that the time of example and law, and of the straight line drawn in advance has become overripe" (note 25)—meaning, no longer valid. As for laws, Jung writes: "Giving laws, wanting improvements, making things easier, has all become wrong and evil. . . . Only one law exists, and that is your law. Only one truth exists and that is your truth" (notes 26 and 27). Obviously, one must take these statements in the spirit meant by Jung, as referring to mature individuals who accept their social obligations, as he always did, but who also wrestle with the existential and ethical issues of the day and find the old attitudes and values no longer adequate. We can agree that for many people the collective ideals of the past, such as reason, science, democracy, capitalism, socialism, and religion (with its sectarian strife), have been found wanting. The revelations imposed on Jung by the voice of the collective unconscious propose a radical cut with the collective nostrums of the past. Instead, each individual is asked to take responsibility for the course of his or her life. As they do so, Jung is hopeful that people "will come to see and feel the similarity and commonality of their ways," which will lead to "mutual love in community."

Paradoxically, even though Jung asserts, "It is no teaching, no instruction that I give you," in outlining the new way, he does criticize the previous collective approach. He thinks it fosters an attitude in which "power stands against power, contempt against contempt, love against love." What he refers to is that in the attempt to improve the lot of humanity with



collective recipes, power struggles invariably arise, and with them, contempt for those with opposing views and acceptance only for those with the same mindset. This is why "giving laws, wanting improvements, making things easier has all become wrong and evil." In contrast, Jung writes, "Give humanity dignity, and trust that life will find the better way." By *humanity*, he means each and every individual.

The concluding sentence of the prologue is somewhat enigmatic: "The one eye of the Godhead is blind, the one ear of the Godhead is deaf, the order of its being is crossed by chaos." I think the metaphor implies that the monotheistic conception of the deity is one-sided and hence it cannot but engender disequilibrium. The consequence of looking at the world through the prism of patriarchal monotheism has wounded our humanity and distorted our relation to the world. Thus, under patriarchy women have been denigrated and the

natural world exploited. "So be patient with the crippledness of the world," Jung counsels; it will take some time to right the balance. "And do not overvalue its consummate beauty," he continues; meaning, do not go to the other extreme and see only the beauty that is present in God's creation, but consider the horror and suffering it contains as well. Two eyes are needed to look at the world aright and to accept it for what it is. Such is the new truth, the new revelation. "This is all, my dear friends, that I can tell you about the grounds and aims of my message, which I am burdened with like the patient donkey with a heavy load. He is glad to put it down."

The writing of *The Red Book* was Jung's way of discharging the obligations he felt the collective unconscious imposed upon him. That was his way. He constantly warns that everyone needs to find her or his own way to build a bridge between the spirit of the times and the spirit of the depths. It is hardly a coincidence, therefore, that *Liber Secundus* ends with the same theme with which the prologue began:

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The touchtone is being alone with oneself.  
This is the way. (p. 330)

## THE TWO SPIRITS

After the four epigraphs, Jung begins his prologue to *The Red Book*. In doing so, he returns to the psychic depths from which the early material emanated and gives the unconscious a voice in its composition. He refers to this voice as “the spirit of the depths.” That spirit has a mantic property and tends to speak, as he later observed in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, in “high-flown language” (p. 178). The style, he concluded, must correspond to the style of the archetypes, which “speak the language of high-rhetoric, even bombast. It is a style I find embarrassing; it grates on my nerves. . . . But since I did not know what was going on, I had no choice but to write everything down in the style selected by the unconscious itself” (p. 178). As for the manner in which the revelations came to him, Jung writes, “Sometimes it was as if I were hearing it with my ears, sometimes feeling it with my mouth, as if my tongue were formulating words; now and then I heard myself whispering aloud” (p. 178). In time, “the spirit of the depths” became personified in the figure of Philemon; it was Philemon, Jung later realized, who essentially dictated the prophetic contents of *The Red Book*. (In Jung’s illustration of Philemon, his features, to my eyes, at least, seem to resemble Freud’s in his old age.) The personification of “the spirit of the depths” as Philemon allowed Jung to disidentify from this aspect of his unconscious and subject it to conscious scrutiny. One can observe that process in the last part of the book, entitled *Scrutinies*. In the prologue, the overtly prophetic statements are written in a large script, rendered in italics in the published facsimile of *The Red Book*.

The prologue begins with a distinction between “the spirit of this time” and “the spirit of the depths.” The first spirit refers to our conscious contemporary outlook on reality, our *Weltanschauung*. The prologue states that although we may think we are the authors of our contemporary perspectives on reality, the fact is that the spirit of the depths rules “everything contemporary.” An example might be the general belief that the Enlightenment and its ideals of liberty, fraternity, and equality are products of a conscious commitment on the part of many individuals during and after the French Revolution. From the depth psychological perspective, however, this new development in the contemporary outlook was presaged by the gradual withdrawal of the projection of the archetype of the Self onto the monarch. In this regard, I think it is important to note Jung’s giving notice that a further internalization of that archetype is taking place in our day, with its withdrawal from the figure of Christ.

Jung describes the spirit of the twentieth century as devoted to the principles of use and value, the basic premises of capitalism. The other contemporary standard is science. Science, use, and value are the measures by which we evaluate and justify all things. Jung acknowledges that he also thought this way. But the spirit of the depths forced him "to speak, beyond justification, use, and meaning. . . . He took away my belief in science, he robbed me of the joy of explaining and ordering things, and he let the devotion to the ideals of this time die out in me."

It is in this context that Jung writes, "No one and nothing can justify what I must proclaim to you." He knows that what he has to say is outside the realm of science and of no use or value in contemporary terms. For the spirit of the depths, he continues, robbed him of "speech and writing for everything that was not in his service." And what was that service? It was "the melting together of sense and nonsense, which produces the supreme meaning." Jung coined a new German word for this fusion of sense and nonsense, *der Übersinn*. He was certainly aware of the term's similarity to Nietzsche's *Übermensch*. But while Nietzsche was passionate about overcoming the dichotomy between instinct and spirit, Jung was interested in the existential problem of our day, that of meaning and meaninglessness. Actually, Jung picked up where Nietzsche left off. Nietzsche announced the death of God; Jung proclaimed the birth of a new God. Both were articulating the same dramatic change taking place at the very core of the Western European psyche.

The idea of *der Übersinn* appears to have a Hegelian connotation—thesis, antithesis, synthesis—but Jung speaks of it as the way and the bridge to the God that is yet to come: "It is not the coming God himself, but his image that appears in the supreme meaning." Here, Jung makes a distinction he will always insist upon in his later writings: between the archetype per se and the archetypal image. The archetype per se is unknowable. We surmise its existence only through its manifest images. In religious terms, this means that the metaphysical God is unknowable, only the manifestations of that God are accessible to the human psyche. We can only know the image of the deity, never the deity itself.

Next, Jung emphasizes that the *Übersinn* is an "image and force in one"; by *force*, he means psychic energy or libido. As the section unfolds, Jung proposes a further distinction: between the psychic energy present in an image and the temporal manifestation of the image. The image changes and withers in time; the psychic energy remains and passes on to a new image. With time, every manifestation of the God image loses its supreme meaning and falls back into the dichotomy between the meaningful and the absurd. Eventually it becomes merely absurd; think of how we view the God images of past cultures. The images of gods, Jung writes, eventually die "of

their temporality, yet the supreme meaning never dies, it turns into meaning and then into absurdity, and out of the fire and blood of their collision the supreme meaning rises up rejuvenated anew." (Since the supreme meaning is the melting together of sense and nonsense, the concept of *Übersinn* implies that the God image is beyond these two opposites and therefore incomprehensible.)

At this point in the prologue, Jung introduces the idea that "the image of God has a shadow"; in fact, "it throws a shadow that is just as great as itself." Anything that is real and actual must have a shadow, he argues. Here, Jung is speaking in generalities, but in his book, *Answer to Job*, he will define the shadow of the Jehovah God image in terms shocking to its worshippers. With respect to the shadow of the God image, Jung states that like his contemporaries, he could only think of God as characterized by greatness and extraordinariness; he could not imagine that God is also small and inconsequential. He was still caught up in the duality between sense and nonsense, and the ordinary was just nonsense. Jung writes: "I resisted recognizing that the everyday belongs to the image of the Godhead. I fled this thought, I hid myself beyond the highest and coldest stars." But the spirit of the depths forced him to recognize that "the small, narrow, and banal is not nonsense, but one of both of the essences of the Godhead." In this respect, even in the last year of his life when asked about his idea of God, he refused to speak of God in the abstract but insisted on making the concept concrete: "To this day God is the name by which I designate all things which cross my willful path violently and recklessly, all things which upset my subjective views, plans and intentions and change the course of my life for better or worse" (Edinger, 1986, p. 101).

Resisting the transpersonal message of the unconscious, Jung tries to reason that the image of God as the melting together of opposites is just his own subjective process and refers only to a union of opposites taking place within his own psyche. But the spirit of the depths will have none of that: "You are an image of the unending world, all the last mysteries of becoming and passing away live in you. If you do not possess all this, how could you know?" I think the spirit of the depths has in mind Genesis, "God created man in his own image," and affirms that potentially we human beings have intimate knowledge of all that is taking place beyond our subjective selves. In his day, Jung was especially aware of the passing away of the former God image and the coming of a new one. He knew this at his core and felt forced to speak that truth: "I do not speak it freely, but because I must. I speak because the spirit robs me of joy and life if I do not speak." He is like the person meant to become a shaman who is depressed and ill until he realizes that shamanizing is his profession, and he has no choice but to respond to the call.

Even so, Jung's conscious mind wanted an explanation and sought reasons for his having to say things that went so much against its grain in tone and content. Instead of just giving voice to the spirit of the depths, he "was thinking about reasons and explanations." In keeping with the diagnostic model of psychiatry, he wanted to uncover the internal or external causes responsible for his condition. He says that he was even tempted to make one up. But at this point in his internal dialogue, the spirit of the depths interjected: understanding, it said, is a bridge to the path, "but to explain a matter is arbitrary and sometimes even murder. Have you counted the murderers among the scholars?" Unfortunately, one could add, the same can be said of psychotherapists and psychoanalysts whose rational reductive explanations kill the living spirit and undermine any creative resolution of the problems they are asked to address.

But Jung's conscious mind was still not satisfied. It pointed to all the knowledge he had garnered from his psychiatric and other studies and insisted that on the basis of all he knew, he must be deemed insane: "What you speak, that is madness." He had no choice but to agree: "It is true, it is true, what I speak is the greatness and intoxication and ugliness of madness." From the years of his work with the mentally ill at the Burghölzli clinic, Jung had first-hand experience with the inflated and distorted outbursts of the unconscious. From a strictly psychiatric standpoint, it was difficult to see the difference between the material coming from his patients and that from his own unconscious. In this connection, I think Jung's painstaking calligraphic rendition of his dreams and visions and the painting of the mandalas and other pictures in *The Red Book* helped to channel the archetypal energy that threatened his psychic integrity. It took a good deal of faith and courage to accept the contents pressing in on him, take them seriously, and express them in a style he deemed embarrassing and distasteful. Reflecting on his experiences during this period in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, Jung writes:

One of the greatest difficulties for me lay in dealing with my negative feelings. I was voluntarily submitting myself to emotions of which I could not really approve, and I was writing down fantasies which often struck me as nonsense, and toward which I had strong resistances. For as long as we do not understand their meaning, such fantasies are a diabolical mixture of the sublime and the ridiculous. It cost me a great deal to undergo them, but I had been challenged by fate. Only by extreme effort was I finally able to escape from the labyrinth. (p. 178)

In response to Jung's feeling that what he was being forced to speak was madness, the spirit of the depths said: "What you speak is. The greatness

is, the intoxication is, the undignified, sick, paltry dailiness is." The spirit of the depths added that what it has to say is also "ridiculous." Actually, *ridiculous* is a mild word for what comes next: "You coming men! You will recognize the supreme meaning [i.e., the coming Godhead] by the fact that he is laughter and worship, a bloody laughter and a bloody worship. A sacrificial blood binds the poles. Those who know this laugh and worship in the same breath." The spirit is referring to Jung's visions, first of the sea of blood and then of all life annihilated by a cold fallen from space that turned every living thing into ice. We now know these visions referred to World War I; but, at this point, we must also add World War II, the Holocaust, Hiroshima and Nagasaki. How can one speak of laughter and worship in the face of such previously unimaginable horrors?

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"I needed a visible sign that would show me that the spirit of the depths in me was at the same time the ruler of the depths of world affairs." He sought assurance that there was a relationship between the images welling up in him and the real world.

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As for the coming of God's arrival with "a bloody laughter and a bloody worship," Jung's sense of humanity rises in protest: "What solitude, what coldness of desolation you lay upon me when you speak such. Reflect on the destruction of being and the streams of blood from the terrible sacrifice that the depths demand." But the spirit of the depths is merciless: "No one can or should halt sacrifice. Sacrifice is not destruction, sacrifice is the foundation

stone of what is to come." The spirit of the depths then draws a comparison with the hundreds of thousands of people who, in the past, had withdrawn into the desert and into the monasteries, and who sacrificed their lives in that manner for the sake of the Christian God. For us that comparison pales when confronted with the sacrifices of millions of innocent men, women, and children killed during the two world wars. The fact is, we do not share the perspective of the collective unconscious, which is alien and not human. To our dismay, apparently it can pursue its ends through the sacrifice of countless human beings, and regard all this in terms of "bloody laughter and bloody worship." The image must give pause to our sanctified notion of God and prompt us instead to think of the combination of the wrathful and benevolent images of the gods in India and Tibet. But we should not be completely

surprised, for there are stark reminders of the alien nature of the deity in our tradition as well. There is the Great Flood, which essentially wiped out all of humanity before the establishment of a new covenant between Jehovah and Noah, the second Adam, and his descendents. There is the cold-blooded annihilation of the Canaanites—men, women, and children—for the sake of establishing the worship of Jehovah in the Promised Land. Christians honor the sacrifice of Christ, the “only begotten Son of God,” amidst bloody laughter by the onlookers and sorrowful worship by his followers. Finally, the Revelation of St. John is probably a prophetic description of the horrors humanity is witnessing with the conclusion of the Christian era in our day.

When Jung first encountered the horrible image of sacrifice as part of “The Way of What Is to Come,” he realized he was going to hold that image for a long time completely by himself. Hence, the spirit of the depths added: “Truly, I prepare you for solitude.” He too would have to withdraw into the desert, into a monastery. In time, Jung’s need for a withdrawal from the world so as to nurture the terrible secret he carried was realized with the construction of his hermitage at Bollingen.

## A VISIBLE SIGN

At this point in his dialogue with the spirit of the depths, Jung was willing to give in and accept his task. But he felt he still needed evidence that he was not just proclaiming a combination of sublime and ridiculous fantasies that had no meaning for anyone but himself: “I needed a visible sign that would show me that the spirit of the depths in me was at the same time the ruler of the depths of world affairs.” He sought assurance that there was a relationship between the images welling up in him and the real world. As we have seen, he received that sign when his intimations were verified by the onset of the First World War.

In the prologue he now reports those visions and dreams in detail, noting exactly when and where they occurred and his emotional reactions to them. In October 1913 he was overcome by an image of a terrible flood covering all the northern low-lying countries between the North Sea and the Alps from England to Russia: “I saw yellow waves, swimming rubble, and the death of countless thousands.” The experience lasted for two hours and made him ill. He could not interpret it. After two weeks the visualization returned, “this time still more violent than before, and an inner voice spoke: ‘Look at it, it is completely real, and it will come to pass. You cannot doubt this.’” He wrestled with the vision for two hours, but it held him fast. The allusion, of course, is to Jacob’s wrestling with God. The encounter left him exhausted and confused: “And I thought my mind had gone crazy.”

Then in June and July of 1914, on three separate occasions, he dreamt that “a terrible cold had fallen from space, which had turned every living thing into ice.” In the third dream, however, “there stood a leaf-bearing but fruitless tree, whose leaves had turned into sweet grapes full of healing juice through the working of the frost. I picked some grapes and gave them to a waiting throng.” (The working of the frost on the grapes refers to the making of “ice wine.” The grapes are left to ripen on the vine until the first frost, pressed, and turned into a delectable sweet wine.)

In his book, *Ego and Archetype*, Edward F. Edinger devotes an entire chapter to the relationship between grapes and blood, particularly the blood of Christ; for Christ is sometimes represented as a cluster of grapes or as a grape crushed in a wine press (pp. 237–240). But in terms of Jung’s dream, perhaps a more apt image is from The Book of Revelation in which “the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. . . . and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs” (14:19–20). Also, in ancient Egypt grape wines were thought to have sprung from the blood of human beings who had rebelled against the sun god Ra and whom his terrible eye, the goddess Sekhmet, destroyed in a blood-thirsty rage. Hence the harmful effects of wine: It fills people with the blood of their rebellious ancestors. Edinger interprets the myth as a description of the influx of the collective unconscious, the libido of our ancestors. He also ties the idea to Jung’s compelling need, described in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, to respond to questions and issues raised by his ancestors (pp. 238–239).

We must, therefore, see the grapes picked by Jung from the paradoxically fruitless yet fruitful tree as the product of the sea of blood that fertilized the earth. When war commenced in August 1914, Jung realized that the visions and dreams were true and that he was not losing his mind:

I encountered the colossal cold that froze everything. I met up with the flood, the sea of blood, and found my barren tree whose leaves the frost had transformed into a remedy. And I plucked the ripe fruit and gave it to you and I do not know what I poured out for you, what bitter-sweet intoxicating drink, which left on your tongues an aftertaste of blood.

The image does place Jung in a unique position, for he is the one who picks the grapes and gives them to a waiting throng. But unlike Christ, he is not the tree or the grapes. As for the barren but fruitful tree, it probably represents the Christian myth that for him and many others was no longer alive. Evidently, through his descent into the collective unconscious, that



myth came to life again. As the result of his heroic journey into the underworld, Jung returned with a healing elixir for his patients and, eventually, for the world at large. The current broad-based acceptance of *The Red Book* demonstrates that his dream was not merely a compensating inflation to his crushed ego, but an indication of his collective role in the future.

## CONCLUSION

As time went on, Jung became aware of the transpersonal nature of his experiences. In his autobiography, he observes:

When I look back upon it all today and consider what happened to me during the period of my work on the fantasies, it seems as though a message had come to me with overwhelming force. There were things in the images which concerned not only myself but many others also. It was then that I ceased to belong to myself alone, ceased to have the right to do so. From then on, my life belonged to the generality. The knowledge I was concerned with, or was seeking, still could not be found in the science of those days. I myself had to undergo the original experience, and, moreover, try to plant the results of my experience in the soil of reality; otherwise they would have remained subjective assumptions without validity. It was then that I dedicated myself to the service of the psyche. I loved it and hated it, but it was my greatest wealth. My delivering myself over to it, as it were, was the only way by which I could endure my existence and live it as fully as possible. (p. 192)

But this is Jung writing near the close of his life. At the time when he was engaged with the experiences recorded in *The Red Book*, he had no idea how things would turn out. He knew he was risking everything by taking the unconscious seriously, yet at the same time he felt he had no choice. He therefore accepted his fate and devoted himself to the task with heart and soul. The result is the beautiful illuminated manuscript with a numinosity that evokes a popular response. I hope that my exposition of the prologue to *The Red Book* provides an apposite entry for the readers of this timeless document of the human soul.

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