



## Faith and the practising analyst

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*Abstract:* In this brief essay, I reflect on three questions: What is ‘faith’ in a modern and post-modern cultural context? Do I, a Jungian analyst, have ‘faith’ or do I not? Does having ‘faith’ or not make a difference in the practice of analysis? I make reference to Jung’s understanding of ‘faith’ and his frequent disclaimers about making metaphysical claims. I conclude that a post-credal ‘faith’ is possible for contemporary Jungian analysts, that I do have such a faith personally, and that in my experience this makes a significant difference in analytic practice at least with some patients. Traditional faith statements must be translated into depth psychological terms, however, in order for them to be applicable in post-modern, multicultural contexts.

*Key words:* faith, modernity, numinous experience, religion, transcendence

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‘Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards’  
(Søren Kierkegaard).

I will address three questions in this paper: 1) What is ‘faith’? 2) Have I faith or a faith or not? 3) Does the presence or absence of faith on the part of the analyst make a difference for the course and outcome of analytic work?

1) What is ‘faith’? What do we intend when we use this term?

In Western cultures, which are based on and largely shaped by the monotheistic religious traditions stemming from the Bible (I include Islam and the Koran in this ‘set’), ‘faith’ has strong metaphysical and supernatural connotations. The word ‘faith’ implies ‘faith in God’, and the God is named and revealed.

The English word’s etymology, however, is actually devoid of explicit reference to anything religious or supernatural. In the SOED, we find that the English word ‘faith’ derives from the Latin *fides*, *fide*, *fidere* and that the Latin *fides* translates the Greek *pistis*. The basic meanings of these Latin and Greek root words are confidence, reliance, trust. This can be trust in anyone or anything—in one’s own creative abilities and powers; for instance, as Louise Bourgeois, the famous sculptress, used the word when she was asked, ‘How were you able to continue working for so long without public recognition’ (she was not ‘discovered’ until she was in her 70s and had been busy as a sculptress

for decades) and said, 'I just had faith in my work!'<sup>1</sup> One can have faith in one's business or intimate partner (to be reliable and 'faithful'), or in one's political party or leadership ('Yes, we can!' with Barak Obama).

Here faith is purely of this world and without spiritual or religious connotation. It means confidence and trust in someone or something visible, knowable, tangible. It is more or less equivalent to 'I trust you'. 'Your handshake is as good as a legal contract'. Faith is trust pure and simple, in anyone or anything.

However, in the Biblical sense of the word, 'faith' is a term that speaks of reliance and trust *in God*, hence it implies contact with and knowledge about Divinity, a supernatural reality. In the Hebrew Bible, the great exemplars of faith, such as Abraham who trusted God and left his home country to embark on a journey into the unknown, and Moses who trusted God to provide nourishment during the years of wandering in the wilderness, place their faith in the Deity, not in their own powers or in anything mundane. Faith exceeds the reach of reason and the requirement for evidence first. It leaps to another type of cognition (as in Kierkegaard's famous 'leap of faith') where risk is involved.

In the New Testament, we find a classic definition of faith in this religious sense:

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old received divine approval. By faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear.

(Hebrews 11:1-3)

Faith here means a kind of knowledge of the unseen, of supernatural and ultimate Power(s) operating behind the scenes and responsible for there being something rather than nothing. Additionally, in the New Testament faith in Christ is made the condition of the soul's salvation, an idea that was powerfully carried forward by Luther in the Protestant Reformation. Faith becomes the requirement for salvation and insures one's blessed condition, if not always to one's physical satisfaction in this life then surely to one's spiritual satisfaction in the next. Faith is not trust in just anything, it is trust specifically in Christ.

This religious understanding of 'faith' is what has been passed down through generations of people embedded in the Biblical traditions, and so it is not surprising to find that it is this understanding of the term, rather than the more neutral one as indicated above, that has been adopted also by our more or less secular culture in the West. It is commonly understood that the content of 'faith' is made up of an intuition of invisible and supernatural forces, putative

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<sup>1</sup> 'Louise Bourgeois: The Spider, the Mistress and the Tangerine', a film by Marion Cajori and Amei Wallach, Zeitgeist Video, 2008.

knowledge about how they affect and impact visible reality in time and space, and trust in them. 'Faith' is a religious word in our vocabulary.

No wonder, then, that modern people generally shun the term. Faith belongs to the Middle Ages, to the 'Age of Faith'. To have faith is generally considered to be pre-modern, indicating that the 'believer' belongs to the mythological stage of human consciousness and has not yet passed into the next stage of consciousness, into the 'Age of Enlightenment' with its rejection of the supernatural ('mere superstition') and its commitment to science and rationality. To claim 'faith' is not rational in the modern view of reality. It is a throwback to another era. Faith is not a word used in scientific discourse. In fact, it is anathema to use a religious term! Banished!

Jung struggled with the term. In a letter to Father Victor White dated May 21, 1948, he questions himself about the issue of faith and writes:

Your paper ['Notes on Gnosticism'] has made me think: *Have I faith or a faith or not?* I have always been unable to produce faith and I have tried so hard, that I finally do not know any more, what faith is or means. I owe it to your paper that I have now apparently an answer: faith or the equivalent of faith with me is what I would call *Respect*. I have respect of the Christian Truth . . . There is however nothing specific in it, since I feel the same kind of respect for the basic teachings of Buddhism and the fundamental Taoistic ideas.

(Lammers 2007, p. 119)

Typical of moderns and scientists, Jung has great difficulty with the term 'faith'. To his mind, it generally meant 'belief'—assent to a particular set of doctrines and creeds, be it Protestant Reformed, Roman Catholic, Moslem, Jewish, Hindu, or whatever. It does not necessarily imply a first-hand, primary religious experience or a hard-won and rigorous philosophical position that includes a personal cosmological vision or, as Jung would say, a personal *Weltanschauung*. Jung could not identify with any of the traditional Confessions, even though he was culturally a Swiss Reformed Protestant. This kind of faith—sheer belief—Jung could not claim for himself, and indeed he often expressed hostility and defiance if pressed to accept authoritative teachings about transcendent or metaphysical teachings about God. But he did *respect* the religious traditions, all of them, and he learned a good deal from many. For him they were loaded with archetypal symbolism and taught him about the contents of the collective unconscious. He did not subscribe to their ontological and metaphysical claims, however, and so he did not have 'faith' in any of them. One could say that he looked at all of them from the outside with an unprejudiced gaze, and from this perspective all were of equal value—for psychology. If he could replace 'faith' with 'respect', he was content. He did have genuine appreciation for religious thought and experience of all kinds.

But how 'modern' was Jung, really, if we define 'modern' as the absolute rejection of any thing religious or transcendent? He is very hard to pin down and capture in the familiar terms we use nowadays to categorize historical

types of attitude and thinking—‘pre-modern’, ‘modern’, and ‘post-modern’. In contrast to what he says in this letter to Victor White just quoted, Jung *was* quite capable of expressing intuitions of transcendence—faith statements, I would argue—as they came to him spontaneously or through the channels of personal, and especially of numinous, experience. For instance, in a letter to Fr. White (January 30, 1948) just prior to the one quoted above, he writes:

Whoever has clearly understood, what it means: ‘*Qui fidelis est in minimo*’ [‘He that is faithful in that which is least’ (Luke 16:10)], is overwhelmed with the *dura necessitas* [hard necessity] of submission and discipline of a subtler kind than the regula S. Benedicti [Rule of St. Benedict]. I don’t want to prescribe a way to other people, because I know that my way has been prescribed to me by a hand far above my reach. (ibid., p. 117)

Jung’s caution here about giving advice to others is based on the sense that his own life has received direction and shape, indeed commands of a sort, from ‘a hand far above my reach’. From this statement it seems quite evident that he had given himself over in full submission to a ‘higher power’ which, in other letters to White, he would freely refer to as God. Recall, too, the Delphic oracle inscribed over the doorway of Jung’s own home: *Vocatus atque non vocatus Deus aderit*. Here stood a constant reminder, as he entered his home day in and day out, of ‘Deus’. Although it is hard to define and pin down precisely what this means, *Deus* is certainly a reference to a transcendent factor of which Jung was constantly reminded.

It is this kind of awareness of a ‘way’ which ‘has been prescribed . . . by a hand far above my reach’, that I wish to speak to in considering here the issue of faith and the practising analyst. It is not faith in the conventional meaning of ‘belief’ in traditional doctrines about God, but it is more than the neutral meaning of faith as simply trust in anyone or anything. It is faith rather in the sense of owning up to having an implicit or explicit recognition of Being that is more complete and comprehensive than our focused knowing can in principle ever comprehend or exhaustively understand; trusting in the occasional glimpses we do have of this ‘hand far above my reach’; and submitting to its greater vision, wisdom, will, and power. No more than Jung are most of us ready to accept without question authoritative teaching delivered from pulpit, mosque, synagogue or cathedral. We value our freedom to think and to experience life for ourselves too highly for that. But do we go as far as he did in owning up to trusting and submitting to a ‘hand far above [our] reach’? I mean this as a challenge.

Leaving a *specific, revealed* God out of the picture, let’s say that ‘faith’ is defined as a kind of intuitive cognition, with strong emotional over- and undertones, of a realm of being beyond our conscious grasp (awareness of ‘a hand far above my reach’), and that it is forward-looking with trust (‘the assurance of things hoped for’). Karl Jaspers used the neutral phrase ‘the Comprehensive’ to speak of this realm toward which we would direct our

attention in an act of faith (Jaspers 1954, pp. 28–38). The person of or with faith would put trust in such intuitive cognitions and, I would add, would do so because of personal experiences that suggest this totality is a Truth, a totality that exceeds the self of the individual person and is a kind of self of selves, an all-encompassing Self.

## 2) Have *I* faith or a faith or not?

To this second question, each of us must give an individual and personal answer, quietly, inwardly, drawing on a personal anamnesis (to follow Eric Voegelin's example in establishing his noetic certainty and varieties of transcendences of consciousness [Voegelin 1978]). We have to consult our memories, look back at the unfolding patterns in our lives, reflect on the question of meaning in the seemingly accidental twists and turns of our personal history (the 'synchronicities'), and recall the 'miracles'.

Speaking personally, therefore, I have to say that I have asked myself this question often and have answered it in different ways at different times. As a child I was exposed to religious faith in our home. I grew up with the Bible and became familiar with many of its stories and figures. Later I studied Christian theology formally and intensively. And so throughout my life I have had many 'phases' of being with and without, in and out of 'faith' in the religious sense, depending on the stage of individuation I was in.

As I enter the later decades of life and ask myself this question, I find myself now drawing on a wealth of specific, and what I call primary experiences, including important dreams, scenes and events from active imagination, and several astonishing synchronicities (I think of them as 'miracles') that have shaped what I would now call my 'faith platform'. Of course, reading in a wide variety of sources has been important as well, but the primary experiences are the crucial elements. Considering these experiences, I can find also what Jung called 'respect' for the religious traditions and for what people in them experience when they speak of 'faith', but my own platform of faith is somewhat apart from the planks laid down by my own background religious tradition, Protestant Christianity.

Put into a few words and rather abstractly, my faith platform is that *time and eternity intersect and assure the transcendent value of certain numinous experiences, which in turn offer a deep sense of meaning for life*. I do recognize this as a variation on the notion of incarnation as affirmed in Christian faith, where an infinite God and a limited human consciousness unite in a specific historical moment. It is a type of *mysterium coniunctionis*. The element of numinosity in this moment is key. In my experiences, however, the Deity who is present in this moment is not always specified as the Biblical one although the symbol of Christ is quite central.

Sometimes these numinous experiences of transcendent value have taken place in the *vas bene clausam* of analysis with my analysands. These are indelible

transformational moments for consciousness, and they have been recognized as such by both of us in the process (see Carter 2010). The intuition of an intersection or interpenetration of time and eternity, the finite and the infinite, the concrete and the symbolic is the essence of this experience. It has a feeling of timelessness and it communicates a sense of meaning that can be trusted for the present and the future. The hand behind the timing and exact location of these intersections is hidden in the Great Mystery. It is the ‘hand far above my head’, as Jung says.

A satellite or derivative of this platform is the article (also of faith) that the individual human soul/psyche/self is of infinite value. Why? Because each finite person is a suitable subject for reception of the infinite. To my mind, this is what Jung meant by ‘the Christification of many’ in his late work, *Answer to Job* (1958/1969). Everyone is called to incarnate the infinite in this life; everyone is capable of receiving intuitions of the Divine and of finding ultimate meaning in life as lived concretely in each and every human context on the planet. Such Gnosis is freely available to every single person on earth. The human self is an *imago dei* and therefore related to the Deity itself and graced with ultimate value. Whether the person realizes this or not, lives a short or a long life, individuates consciously or not, the value remains. So we ‘meet the Buddha’ or ‘the Christ’ in ourselves and in all the others we may encounter in our brief lives on earth.

This also means that the human encounter with others, as we experience it in analysis for instance, is of infinite potential. The horizontal interpersonal relationship, with all of its transference and projections, illusions and disillusionments, love and hate and other dramas, is intersected by a vertical line of infinite value and potential for meaning that extends beyond the two empirical humans in this joint venture. In this we can trust.

### 3) Does the presence or absence of faith on the part of the analyst make a difference for the course and outcome of analytic work?

I turn now to the third question. Obviously this makes a difference! Everything makes a difference if the analytic process becomes at all deep and transformative. The analyst’s attitudes, temperament, cultural biases, complexes, personal development—all of these factors make a difference for the course and outcome of analysis because in the end they all enter into the process, affect the ‘field’ and make an impact. But maybe it’s useful to look a little more closely at how precisely this factor—faith, as I have defined it above—might make a crucial difference.

An analysand asked me recently at the beginning of a session and more or less out of the blue: ‘Do you believe we can change our fate, our destiny?’ It was not clear to me where this question was coming from or why it was an issue. It is of course an impossible question on a scientific or rational level. What is destiny, fate? Do they really exist? To hold that each life has a destiny

or a fate is itself a statement of faith and must be answered on the same level. And why would one want to change it? In reflecting on this question I have to confess that I don't think we can interfere with an individual's fate if that is what Jung meant by 'a hand far above my reach'. But we can come to accept it, even to love it (*amor fati*). For the analyst to take this position, however, requires an act of faith, namely that each individual's destiny or fate is of value, even of ultimate value and meaning. Without this attitude engendered by faith, the analyst might be tempted to play God and try to help a person change their destiny.

'Only when God is there may one cease to be obliged to be God', wrote the German psychoanalyst and theologian Eugen Drevermann. For analysis to work properly, it seems to me, the analyst must not be cast in the role of God, but for this to be the case it is necessary to have a sense that the Transcendent is present in the room apart from either of the human participants, yet with them, among them, for here 'two are gathered'. Analysis takes place in the presence of the Divine and so participates in the sacred aura. In such a setting even a very difficult fate can be accepted, appreciated and found to be of ultimate value.

In this perspective, I often think of Jung's statement: 'the fact is that the approach to the numinous is the real therapy and inasmuch as you attain to the numinous experiences you are released from the curse of pathology. Even the very disease takes on a numinous character' (1973, p. 377). When even a disease—depression, anxiety, addiction, borderline disorders, perversion—takes on a numinous character, it means that the disease has been placed within the infinitely containing perspective of faith.

What I would caution against is settling for something that sometimes, perhaps even often, happens when in classical Jungian terms faith in the spiritual and religious sense of its meaning is *translated* simply as knowledge of the (invisible) archetypal world and the contents of the collective unconscious and trust in the self's processes. Jungian analysts routinely do employ this type of thinking when they treat patients, especially the challenging and difficult ones. They have faith in the psyche's wisdom, in the self's operations, even when these are opaque and hidden from view. From their training, they have some positive knowledge about the invisible world of the unconscious—they know of complexes and archetypal images and patterns of thought and behaviour. They know about the self and about the ego's relativity with respect to the objective psyche. Without this knowledge it would be difficult to proceed in many cases. But this falls short of faith as it is understood in the stronger sense, which implies knowledge of and trust in transcendent factors that lie entirely beyond the psychological realm and extend into what Jung called the psychoid dimension, and even beyond that to altogether trans- or non-human material and spiritual dimensions of reality. Faith in this sense speaks of territory beyond the discernible ends of the spectrum that Jung uses as a metaphor to describe the human psyche, with the infrared shading off into the soma and the material world and the ultraviolet passing into the spiritual. Faith of this far reach passes

beyond the personal, the causal, and the rational, and looks to realms that Jung calls 'the beyond' (*Jenseits*) in *The Red Book* and later discusses as the basis of synchronicity. The horizon of rationality of whatever kind is breached and opens out into the transpersonal and the cosmic ('a hand *far* above my reach'; my italics). An image of such a glimpse into the cosmic world can be seen in the famous picture of the alchemist poking his head out of the globe and gazing at the supercelestial firmament of the stars, a firmament beyond even the physical stars. It is from here that our fate, our destiny is drawn. Our psyche is an *imago Dei*.

For modern people (like most of us) this is the sticking point: is such knowledge possible, is it credible? For traditional religionists, it is possible only because of divine revelation, hence Anselm's famous sentence: '*Neque enim quaero intelligere ut credam, sed credo ut intelligam. Nam et hoc credo, quia, nisi credidero, non intelligam*' ('Nor do I seek to understand that I may believe, but I believe that I may understand. For this, too, I believe, that, unless I first believe, I shall not understand'). But after Kant's critiques, we have become appropriately cautious about such certainties.

Yet Jung, quite sensitive to the Kantian caution, could also say, quite boldly, at the conclusion of his Terry Lectures at Yale in 1937: '[I]f the spiritual adventure of our time is the exposure of human consciousness to the undefined and indefinable, there would seem to be good reasons for thinking that even the Boundless is pervaded by psychic laws, which no man invented, but of which he has "gnosis" ...' (Jung 1936/1970, para. 168). Clearly he was intent on exploring beyond the bounds of the purely psychological realm, and of course this attitude entered into his practice as an analyst.

Faith provides a quite specific perspective on the therapeutic process, in that it trusts that if the psyche/soul opens to the 'unconscious' (which is without limit and cannot be defined exhaustively by the conscious mind) the necessary developments and movements for individuation will emerge. There is implicit trust that what is happening, however peculiar or bizarre at times, has potential for meaning. The effect of this attitude on the part of the analyst is that analysands gain a sense of faith in themselves (in the self within themselves). The faith of the analyst, I would suggest, is subtly communicated and taken up in time by the analysand. The analyst's 'I have faith that your psyche has infinite potential' becomes translated into 'I have faith that my psyche has contact with the infinite and with its potential for meaning in my life'.

Of course, in this era of evidence- (and not faith-) based medicine and psychotherapy it is necessary to offer studies and research that demonstrate results, that show that our methods work, that people benefit and get better, become more trusting of themselves, of their feelings and intuitions. We need to be able to show that faith is communicable, that it passes from 'I trust in your self' to 'I trust in my self'. This does happen, I believe, in analysis, *Deo concidente*.

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 TRANSLATIONS OF ABSTRACT
 

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Dans ce bref essai, je pose trois questions; qu'est-ce que la 'foi', dans un contexte culturel moderne et post-moderne ? Est-ce que moi, analyste jungien, j'ai la foi ? Avoir la foi ou non, cela détermine-t-il une pratique particulière de l'analyse ? Je me réfère à la compréhension jungienne de la foi, ainsi qu'aux fréquents démentis apportés par Jung au sujet de ses supposées revendications métaphysiques. J'en conclus qu'une foi 'post-credo' est envisageable chez les analystes jungiens contemporains et en ce qui me concerne, je me réclame d'une telle foi. Pour autant que je me rapporte à mon expérience, ceci induit des différences significatives dans la pratique analytique, du moins avec certains patients. Les professions de foi traditionnelles doivent cependant être reformulées à l'aune de la psychologie des profondeurs, de manière à s'ajuster à la pluralité culturelle des contextes post-modernes.

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In diesem kurzen Essay beschäftige ich mich mit drei Fragen: was bedeutet 'Glaube' in einem modernen und postmodernen Kulturkontext? Habe ich, ein jungianischer Analytiker, 'Glauben' oder nicht? Macht es einen Unterschied in der Analyse, 'Glauben' zu haben oder nicht? Ich beziehe mich auf Jungs Verständnis von 'Glauben' und seine häufigen Dementi, metaphysische Ansprüche zu erheben. Ich schließe, daß ein post-bekennender 'Glaube' für heutige jungianische Analytiker möglich ist, daß ich persönlich einen solchen Glauben habe und daß dies nach meiner Erfahrung einen signifikanten Unterschied in der analytischen Behandlung zumindest einiger Patienten bedingt. Traditionelle Glaubensbekenntnisse müssen jedoch in tiefenpsychologische Terminologie übersetzt werden, um in post-modernen multikulturellen Kontexten applizierbar sein zu können.

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In questo breve saggio la mia riflessione verte su tre questioni: cos'è "fede" in un contesto culturale moderno e postmoderno? Io, come analista junghiano, ho "fede" oppure no? Avere "fede" o non averne crea una differenza nella pratica analitica? Mi riferisco al modo con cui Jung intende la fede e al suo aver spesso negato di fare affermazioni metafisiche. Concludo che una "fede" al di là del "credo" è possibile per gli analisti junghiani contemporanei, che io personalmente ho una tale fede e che nella mia esperienza ciò comporta una differenza significativa nella pratica analitica almeno con alcuni pazienti. Comunque le affermazioni della fede tradizionale devono essere tradotte in termini di psicologia del profondo in modo da poter essere applicabili in contesti postmoderni multiculturali.

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В этом коротком эссе я размышляю над тремя вопросами: «Что такое «вера» в современном постмодернистском культурном контексте? «Верую» ли я, как юнгианский аналитик, или нет? Разнится ли аналитическая практика при наличии или ощущении «веры»? Я ссылаюсь на понимание «веры» Юнгом и на его частые отращения от метафизических притязаний. Я прихожу к заключению, что пост-исповедальная «вера» для современных юнгианских

аналитиков возможна, что я лично обладаю такой верой и что мой опыт подтверждает: обладание верой привносит сильные отличия в аналитическую практику (по крайней мере, с некоторыми пациентами). Однако для того, чтобы быть применимыми в пост-модернистском мультикультурном контексте, традиционные заявления веры должны быть переведены в термины глубинной психологии.

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En este breve ensayo, se reflexiona sobre tres cuestiones: ¿Qué es la 'fe' en un contexto cultural moderno y post-moderno? ¿Yo, como analista junguiano, tengo 'fe' o no tengo 'fe'? ¿Hace una diferencia en la práctica del análisis el tener 'fe' o no? Hago referencia a la comprensión de Jung de 'fe' y sus frecuentes renuncias acerca a hacer afirmaciones metafísicas. Mi conclusión es que 'la fe' como un post-credo es posible para los analistas contemporáneos de Jung, que tengo una fe personal y, en mi experiencia, esto produce una diferencia significativa en la práctica analítica al menos con algunos pacientes. Las declaraciones de la fe tradicional deben traducirse en los términos psicológicos profundos, sin embargo, para que puedan ser aplicables a los contextos post-modernos y multiculturales.

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