

The White–Jung Friendship: The Untold Story

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For decades Jung searched in vain for a theologian with whom he could deeply and openly converse about his new vision of Christianity. Only very late in his life did he find and form a deep friendship with Victor White, a Dominican theology professor, whose own psychic life was saved by Jung's teachings. Jung saw White as the first theologian he had met who truly understood his psychology. Jung wanted to use White's expertise in Catholic theology in his pioneering efforts to transform Christianity, through his psychology, into a living, breathing, vital faith in the divine. For his part, White wanted to resuscitate Thomistic theology by infusing its dry, cerebral character with the emotional vitality of the original Thomas Aquinas by using his newly discovered Jungian teachings combined with some of the original teachings of Aquinas. In the process of their work together, Jung and White became close, trusting friends. However, White was pushed beyond the limits of his psychological resources by political events within his order, whose superiors destroyed his career as a theologian and sent him into exile. In his scathing review of *Answer to Job*, White displaced his anger/rage onto Jung instead of the appropriate objects. This attack wounded their friendship deeply, and it was only toward the end of their lives that a partial reconciliation was possible. And yet, Jung's friendship with White was perhaps the closest and most trusting relationship he had with a man during his lifetime. Finally, I suggest that White's mission in this life was to resuscitate Thomism rather than help Jung achieve his purposes, and that White achieved his mission.



Nancy Romero, *Duality*, 2007.
Oil on panel, 16" x 19". Photo: Edward Carreon.

I have a huge correspondence, see innumerable people but have only two real friends with whom I can speak about my own difficulties; the one is Erich Neumann and he lives in Israel and the other is Father Victor White in England.

—*The Jung–White Letters*, p. 334

JUNG'S PATH

Reading the Jung–White letters gives one the deep impression that these two men loved and trusted each other and that each found in the other a beloved colleague with whom he could be honest and open in his agreements and disagreements. In respectfully disagreeing with one another, each helped the other to move further in the development of his own thought. Thus, one of the characteristics that connected Jung to White was their mutual ability to disagree with the collective. Early in his life, Jung exhibited this quality. In his *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, he writes:

... my father did not dare to think, because he was consumed by inward doubts. He was taking refuge from himself and therefore insisted on blind faith. (p. 73)

At the time, too, there arose in me profound doubts about everything my father said. When I heard him preaching about grace, I always thought of my own experience. What he said sounded stale and hollow, like a tale told by someone who knows it only by hearsay and cannot quite believe it himself. *I wanted to help him but did not know how.* (pp. 42–43)

Whenever Jung attempted to discuss “the miracle of grace” (p. 43), his father would call on him to simply believe and would then turn away from his son. Jung knew that there was much more to the experience of God than what he perceived as the empty, arid faith of his beloved father. He’d had the experience of the dark side of the divine when he was very young (between three and four years old), and he’d had the famous phallus dream, in which he saw, in a large, stone-lined, underground chamber, standing on a royal throne, something that he thought at first was tree trunk, 12 to 15 feet high and one and a half to two feet thick. It was huge and made of skin and flesh, and on top there was a rounded head with no face and no hair. On the very top was a single eye, gazing motionless upward, surrounded by an aura of brightness. “I was paralyzed with terror. At that moment I heard from outside and above me my mother’s voice. She called out, ‘Yes, just look at him. That is the man-eater!’ That intensified my terror still more, and I awoke sweating and scared to death” (pp. 11–12). This dream revealed to him “a subterranean God not to be named.” And the Lord Jesus was never again the same for Jung: “Lord Jesus never became quite real for me, never

quite acceptable, never quite lovable, for again and again I would think of his underground counterpart, a frightful revelation which had been accorded me without my seeking it" (p. 13).

Another significant incident occurred close to the same time. After having heard his father, with some irritation and fear, discuss "the Jesuits" with a friend, Jung saw a man wearing a strangely broad hat and what looked like a black dress walking down the road toward his house. He thought it was a Jesuit. Filled with fear, he retreated to the attic and stayed there, terrified, for several hours, coming out only when he was sure that the coast was clear. But the fear remained.

Several years later, when Jung was six years old, on a trip to town, his mother pointed out a Catholic church to him. A nervous and curious Jung peered through the open door to catch a glimpse of the interior. He saw a richly decorated altar and then stumbled on a step and cut his chin badly on a piece of iron. In Jung's words:

My state of mind was curious: on the one hand I was ashamed because my screams were attracting the attention of the churchgoers, and on the other hand I felt that I had done something forbidden. "Jesuits—secret of the man-eater. . . . So that is the Catholic Church which has to do with Jesuits. It is their fault that I stumbled and screamed."

For years afterward I was unable to set foot inside a Catholic church without a secret fear of blood and falling and Jesuits. (p. 17)

When he was ten years old, Jung fashioned a little manikin that he hid in the attic. He kept its existence hidden from everyone, for his very life depended on keeping this secret. The manikin seemed to symbolize a secret realm that contained things that he did not understand, like the phallus dream and the Jesuit. He wrote: "I was constantly on the lookout for something mysterious. Consciously, I was religious in the Christian sense, though always with the reservation: 'But it is not so certain as all that!' or, 'What about that thing under the ground?'" (p. 22). Thus, from early in his life, Jung was searching and always questioning so much of the religious information he was given, for he knew that he was privy to some secrets of which others were unaware. He was already on his own path.

When he was about twelve years old, Jung had a unique experience of grace. On a beautiful day, he thought of the beautiful world and the beautiful Basel cathedral, "and God made all this and sits above it far away in the blue sky on a golden throne and . . . here comes a great hole in my thoughts, and a choking sensation, . . . 'Don't go on thinking now! Something terrible is coming, something I do not want to think. . . . All I need to do is not go on

thinking.’” And he held off the thought for three days, until he realized that Adam and Eve were induced by God to sin, in that God arranged everything so that the first parents would have to sin. Eventually, Jung became convinced that he needed to be courageous, and he let the thought continue: “God sits on his golden throne, high above the world—and from under the throne an enormous turd falls upon the sparkling new roof, shatters it, and breaks the wall of the cathedral asunder.” Jung felt great relief and bliss and realized that he had experienced surrendering to the will of God. And he thought that his father “did not know that in His trial of human courage, God refuses to abide by traditions, no matter how sacred. . . . If one fulfills the will of God one can be sure of going the right way. . . . Why did God befoul His own cathedral? That, for me, was a terrible thought. But then came the dim understanding that God could do something terrible. I had experienced a dark and terrible secret. It overshadowed my whole life, and I became deeply pensive” (pp. 36–40).

The last straw for Jung was his First Communion. Afterward, he realized that “nothing had happened. . . . Among the others I had noticed nothing

of the vast despair, the overpowering elation and outpouring of grace which for me constituted the essence of God. . . . Slowly I came to understand that this communion had been a fatal experience for me. . . . Why that is not religion at all. It is an absence of God; the church is a place I should not go to. It is not life which is there but death” (p. 55). These realizations removed Jung from his sense of union not only with the church but with the entire human world. He saw it

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as “the greatest defeat of my life. The religious outlook which I had imagined constituted my sole meaningful relationship with the universe had disintegrated. I could no longer participate in the general faith. . . . For God’s sake I now found myself cut off from the church and from my father’s and everybody else’s faith. Insofar as they all represented the Christian religion, I was an outsider” (p. 56).

In this way Jung started on his lifelong search for some understanding of the mysteries of God, philosophy, evil, etc. What is noteworthy here is

his desire to help his father attain an experiential understanding of God's grace, and the son's feelings of helplessness that he cannot help his father find grace and peace. Perhaps Jung spent his whole life trying to convert his beloved father to a new understanding of God and God's grace. *Answer to Job* was his last direct attempt, and Victor White may have been the last "father" whom he tried to convert.

WHITE'S PATH

From an early age Victor White felt that a clerical future was to be his path, and he made some significant decisions early in his adulthood. White reflected in a letter to John Layard, his first analyst, that his relationship with his father, a high church Anglican vicar, prevented him from becoming an Anglican priest (Lammers & Cunningham, 2007, pp. 308–309). The details of the relationship are not available, but one can speculate that a major psychological change would have to occur within the psyche of a young man (who was the oldest of three sons) for him to move beyond his father and become first a Catholic, then a Dominican, and then a Catholic priest. As he recalled later, looking back on his conversion and his subsequent life:

The trouble for so many of us converts-in-adolescence is something awfully difficult for you cradle Catholics to understand! The trouble is that one fine day, we find that we *did* (unconsciously) pose when we became RCs [Roman Catholics]. It is more a matter of *culture*, of our picture-of-the-world, than of religion! We revolted from the whole "protestant–materialist" world and values in which we were brought up: . . . For that we substituted a beautiful, romantic "Ages of Faith," medieval world. . . . The Church was central in that pretty picture; and after playing with high Anglicanism of course we became Catholics. (p. 330)

White converted to Catholicism at age nineteen and was then accepted for training to become a priest for the diocese of Plymouth, studying at the English College in Spain. He left this college in 1923 when he decided to join the Dominicans. After completing his studies in philosophy and theology, White was ordained a priest on June 2, 1928. He was then sent to Louvain, Belgium, where he completed his licentiate in sacred theology in 1930. He was appointed professor of dogmatic theology and also taught moral theology and church history at the Dominican House of Studies, Blackfriars, at Oxford University.

In reaction to the conservative Dominican neoscholastics, who feared that Thomism—the philosophical and theological system of St. Thomas

Aquinas (1225–1275)—would be diluted by any contact with the secular world, White wrote in 1932 that “it is the aim of the modern Thomist to integrate all modern discoveries and scientific achievements, all that is truly valuable and permanent in post medieval thought, into the Thomistic synthesis for the good of man and the glory of God: in short to do for our own age what St. Thomas did for his, building on the foundations he laid” (Weldon, p. 13). White seems to have found meaning and satisfaction in teaching theology and in Dominican monastic life for some years after his ordination and the completion of his theological studies. But toward the end of the 1930s, when so much else was going on in the world, some things began to gnaw at him. The conservative politics of the Catholic church and the inevitable strains of community living were exacerbated in wartime and led, in 1940, to a general crisis about his identity as a Catholic theologian. Later, he wrote:

I am by profession a theologian. Suddenly, or perhaps not so suddenly, theology ceased to have any meaning for me at all: I could not get my mind into it, or anything to do with it, except with horror, boredom and loathing. . . . Other theologians and pastors did not seem to be able to help me out of my difficulties. And so I was forced to turn to the psychologists I had read a certain amount of Freud and Jung, and I did have a hunch that the method and approach of Jung might have something that spoke to my condition. (p. 16)

White was experiencing a severe clinical depression associated with a midlife crisis. He seriously considered leaving the Dominicans as well as the Catholic church to return to the Anglican church and become a priest like his father and younger brother. He eventually sought help and began working with Jungian analyst John Layard, to whom he initially wrote in a letter of September 19, 1940: “I am a Catholic priest who has become badly ‘stuck.’ It is the writings of Dr. Jung that have given me some inkling of what I’m up against” (p. 15). Jung’s approach was both intriguing and disturbing to White. His understanding of religious symbolism was deepened by his reading of Jung and his continued analysis with Layard, and he came to see how Jung’s archetypal approach, with its experiential, existential, and phenomenological aspects, could play a part in reinterpreting Thomistic theology. But Jung’s approach disturbed him: “Why does Jung disturb me so? Because it is impossible to read him without drawing the conclusion that if Jesus had not existed, it would have been necessary to invent him. And if it was necessary to invent Him, it seems unnecessary that He should have existed” (Lammers & Cunningham, p. 315, from White’s diary). By early November, 1940, White felt desperate—“at the edge of an abyss”: “I feel I am now on the brink of the

Urgrund whence gods and demons proceed . . . the imminence of a descent into hell. I seem to have gone back in time to a devil-infested universe” (p. 316).

A turning point came a few days later with three waking visions of a dazzling white sun, a windmill, and a revolving disc like the governor of a machine. Layard saw this mandala symbolism as indicating a fundamental change and suggested that White was ready to go back to teaching—a suggestion with

which White agreed. “Indeed, I feel like a changed person—at the dawn of a new life. Now I must thank God” (p. 316).

White’s new life centered on his attempts to put his reflections on Jung and Thomistic theology into some kind of systematic form. White’s personal healing experience with Jungian psychology motivated him to interweave Jung’s psychology with Catholic theology. When White returned to teaching, he felt like the cured leper who was told not to tell anyone what had happened to him. He needed to hide Jung under a bushel. As it turned out, he was unable to do so.

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THE HISTORY OF THEIR FRIENDSHIP: SELECTED LETTERS

3rd of August, 1945

Dear Professor Jung,

Although I have never had the honor to meet you (outside of my dreams), I am taking the very great liberty of sending you some of my writings concerning your psychology, written from the Catholic point of view. I doubt, of course, that you will have time or inclination to read them, let alone comment on them; but should you ever do so, it would be a great help to me and any future work I am able to do if I could be shown any points on which I have positively misunderstood you.

I might mention . . . that I am personally one of the very many who owe to you and your disciples in England an immense debt of gratitude. . . .

Yours very obediently, gratefully, Fr. Victor White, O.P.
(Lammers & Cunningham, p. 3)

At the time of this letter, White was forty-two years old, twenty-eight years younger than the world-famous seventy-year-old Jung. White is in awe of the wise old man and approaches him respectfully, very open to instruction. But although he is idealizing Jung, he has also sized up some of Jung's writing with the critical attitude appropriate to a recognized expert in philosophy and theology.

After an initial letter of September 26th, 1945, in which he acknowledged receiving White's materials, Jung wrote a second time:

Oct. 5th, 1945

My Dear Father White,

In the meantime I have finished reading the pamphlets you kindly have sent to me. My first reaction was: what a pity, that you live in England and that I have you not at my elbow, when I am blundering in the wide field of theological knowledge. . . . Excuse the irreverential pun: You are to me a white raven inasmuch as you are the only theologian I know of who has really understood something of what the problem of psychology in our present world means. You have seen its enormous implications. I cannot tell you how glad I am that I know a man, a theologian, who is conscientious enough to weigh my opinions on the basis of a careful study of my writings! This is a really rare occasion. . . .

After this enthusiastic reception of White's writings, Jung proceeds directly to a deeper explanation of his thoughts and a discussion of their different views:

Thus, when I said that God is a complex, I meant to say: whatever He is, he is *at least* a very tangible complex. You can say, He is an illusion, but He is at least a psychological fact. I surely never intended to say: He is *nothing else* but a complex. . . .

You have rendered justice to my empirical and practical standpoint throughout. I consider this as a very meritorious act, since most of my philosophically or theologically minded readers overlook my empiricism completely. I never allow myself to make statements about the divine entity, since such would be a transgression beyond the limit of science. . . . My personal view in this matter is that man's vital energy or libido is the divine pneuma alright. . . .

Jung's statement that "man's vital energy or libido is the divine pneuma" relates directly to the divine immanence that White wanted to revivify in Thomistic theology. Jung continues:

You accuse me of repudiating the divine Transcendence altogether. That is not quite correct. I merely

omit it, since I am unable to prove it. I don't preach, I try to establish psychological facts. I can confirm and prove the interrelation of the God image with other parts of the psyche, but I cannot go further without committing the error of a metaphysical assertion which is far beyond my scope. I am not a theologian and I have nothing to say about the nature of God. . . .

"It is of the highest importance that the educated and 'enlightened' public should know religious truth as a thing living in the human soul and not as an abstruse and unreasonable relic of the past . . ."

Here Jung points out the distinction between the infinite mystery that we humans designate as "God" or the "Godhead" and the *images* of God and states that he can confirm "the interrelation of the God image with other parts of the psyche," but cannot go beyond that. Jung also makes clear what his ultimate goal is and how difficult it will be to achieve: "It is of the *highest importance* that the educated and 'enlightened' public should know religious truth as a thing living in the human soul and not as an abstruse and unreasonable relic of the past. . . . Understanding begins with the individual mind and this means psychology. It is a gigantic task indeed to create a new approach to an old truth" (pp. 5–10).

Jung seems to have been carried away by his enthusiasm in his lengthy response to the material sent by his new interlocutor. And already, in this initial exchange of views between the patriarchal psychologist and the brilliant young theologian, major topics of their future dialogue are raised, such as metaphysics versus empiricism and the immanence versus the transcendence of the divine. The willingness and humility that each shows in wanting to learn from the other are striking. Jung had longed to engage a theologian such as White in discussion and debate ever since he had, decades before, attempted to debate theology with his father. And White, having been healed by the application of Jung's psychology in analysis, was hungry to learn more, both for his application of Jung's teachings in his own

pastoral work and also in his task of revivifying Thomistic theology with the help of some of Jung's teachings. White expresses this desire in his next letter, of October 23rd, 1945:

For some time I have found myself ploughing a rather lonely furrow, painfully aware of the inadequacy of my experience on the psychological side, and of my need for expert and understanding guidance—at least to the extent of some reassurance that I was not positively on the *wrong* lines from a psychological standpoint. . . . Since reading your books, and still more since my own analysis, I have found myself more and more compelled to expound the “Summa” of St. Thomas Aquinas in psychological terms and with constant reference to its vast psychological relevance and implications. . . . In addition to this I have accumulated an increasing amount of more personal work: I do not know whether to describe it as care of souls or psychotherapy! . . . Of course I well understand that approval of the general drift of my writings does not imply approval of my practical methods; but your assurance that I have in the main “understood” your work aright is a greater relief and comfort to me than I can possibly say. (pp. 15–16)

Here we sense White's intense need for Jung's confirmation, practicing, as he was, Jungian psychotherapy without any clinical training aside from his own experience of analysis.

In the February 1946 letter, Jung was also very open with Fr. White, telling White of the illnesses with which he had been struggling and describing the heavy work load that he was carrying. On April 1, 1946, White wrote to Jung:

I have been very much wondering whether you would be able to spare me any time if I were able to come to Zurich (or elsewhere) for a few days during the summer vacation. . . .

I do very much hope that this suggestion will not appear overpresumptuous; but it is impossible to say how much I should appreciate the opportunity to talk to you. But of course I shall quite understand if you feel that you would not be able to spare the time. . . .

Thanking you once again, dear Professor Jung, for all your kindness and most encouraging interest,

I remain, Yours sincerely, Victor White, O.P. (p. 31)

Jung answered promptly. On April 13th, he wrote:

Dear Father White,

I was very pleased with your letter and hasten to answer it at once. It is a nice idea of yours, that you want to come out to Switzerland between July and September. . . . I should like you to consider yourself as my guest during your stay here. I shall be in the country, on the upper part of the Lake of Zurich, where I have a little country place. If you are a friend of the simple life you will have all the comfort you need . . . and we shall have plenty of time to discuss anything under the sun.

Yours sincerely, C. G. Jung

White responded right away: “Thank you so *very* much. It all sounds like my idea of heaven” (pp. 32–33). An invitation to Bollingen was a very personal gift from Jung to White, and they were to meet there annually for a number of years. Later in 1946, White shared with Jung an important dream:

A few nights ago I dreamed that I was in a largish sailing-boat sailing from (for some reason I have not yet discovered) Norway to England. I was roaming carefree all over the boat. You were the Captain at the wheel. After a while I noticed we were scudding along in a southerly direction at considerable speed and amid perilous rocks and shoals; but we always missed them. I “knew” there was no danger, not so much because you were at the wheel, but because the *Wind* was taking care of us and would never wreck the pair of us. Presently I found that we were speeding along very close to the shore (on our left), but still we always missed it and its many promontories. After a while we reached a small (?Danish) coastal town; the boat, with you calmly at the wheel and smoking your pipe, imperceptibly mounted the shore and sailed down the streets dexterously missing all the buildings and the traffic. She was amphibious! (pp. 44–45)

Several weeks later, Jung answered: “Your dream is very much to the point! I had all sorts of feelings or ‘hunches’ about you and the risks you are running. We are indeed on an adventurous and dangerous journey. But the guiding principle is the ‘wind’, i.e. *pneuma*” (p. 53).

They are together on a dangerous journey, but Jung seems to sense the danger more acutely than does White, who is still very much in the first glow of closeness to the wise old man. Soon he is offered the opportunity to be of priestly service to Jung. Several days after he had written the above

letter, Jung suffered a heart infarct and was very ill. When it seemed Jung was recovering, White wrote to him:

Dec. 11th, 1946

Dear Dr. Jung,

I am extremely thankful to hear from Miss Schmid that you are now able to read. I venture therefore to send you a few lines but refrain from saying all that I should like to do. I need hardly tell you that you are very much in my thoughts and prayers at present, and, as I know, in those of very many other people in England too. . . .

Ever yours sincerely, Victor White, O.P. (p. 57)

Jung responded on Dec. 18th, 1946:

Dear Father White,

Thank you for your dear letter. It is a great consolation to know that one is included in the prayers of fellow beings. The *aspectus mortis* (aspect of death) is a mighty lonely thing, when you are stripped of everything in the presence of God. . . . I am very weak. The situation dubious. Death does not seem imminent, although an embolism can occur any time again. I confess to be afraid of a long drawn-out suffering. It seems to me as if I were ready to die, although—as it looks to me—some powerful thoughts are still flickering like lightnings in a summer night. Yet they are not mine, they belong to God, as everything else which bears mentioning.

Please write again to me. You have a purity of purpose which is beneficial. . . . I don't know whether I can answer your next letter again. But let us hope—

Gratefully yours, C. G. Jung (pp. 59–60)

White answers quickly, on December 31, 1946: “These can only be a very few brief lines to thank you enormously for the letter you wrote to me from your bed. It moved me very much, and I am exceedingly grateful” (p. 60). Then, early in 1947, at the end of a longer letter, White writes: “If you should ever care to write again, I should like very much if you were to drop WHITE and WIGHT and just call me Victor” (p. 73). In his next letter, Jung responds:

My Dear Victor,

As you see I avail myself of your kind permission to call you by your first name. I hope you will reciprocate by calling me C.

G. which is the current designation of my unworthy “paucity.”
(p. 80)

Much later, after a sabbatical year in the United States, as White prepares to return to the Dominican life in England, he writes of his concerns to his close friend:

Stone Ridge, NY
June 1st, 1948

My dear C. G.,

I confess that I am not relishing the idea either of leaving the USA or returning to England and getting back again into harness, and the old routine and responsibilities. . . . Added to this has been a curious recurrence of dreams in which I find myself back in England (usually before I am due there) in a state of acute, claustrophobic anxiety—though the dreams never seem to show anything to be anxious about. I have been able to make very little sense at all of these dreams. (p. 124)

It is clear that White is struggling here, and these struggles will continue. And Jung is concerned. In December, 1948, Jung penned the following:

Dear Victor,

The spirit prompts me to write to you. It is quite a while since I have heard of you and very much longer since I have heard you really. I may be all wrong, but I confess to have a feeling, as if when you were in America a door had been shut, softly but tightly. . . . Don't feel pressed for an answer, please! I am looking for my own peace and that is the reason why I tell you about my qualms. . . .

Light that wants to shine needs darkness.

Cordially yours, C. G. (p. 132)

It is difficult to know exactly what Jung was picking up from his dear friend. There is a hint of what was bothering Jung in his next letter to White. On January 8th, 1949, Jung writes:

Dear Victor,

Thank you cordially for your nice human letter! Now I know at least, where you are. I was afraid America had spirited you away altogether. . . .

The combination of Priest and Medicine Man is not so impossible as you seem to think. They are based on a common archetype, which will assert its right, provided your inner development will continue as hitherto. . . . One's anxiety always points to our task. If you escape it, you have lost a piece of yourself and at that a most problematic piece, with which the Creator of things was going to experiment in His unforeseeable ways. (pp. 135–136)

There is here a palpable sense on Jung's part of unease and uncertainty regarding his friend's psychic state. Jung senses that important issues remain unconscious in White—areas that may include profound changes. Much later, in 1953, those issues come to the surface.

My dear C. G.,

November 8, 1953

The dilemma, reduced to its simplest terms, seems complete and insoluble. If Christ is no longer an adequate and valid symbol of the Self, and in fact very inadequate, one-sided, unintegrated and harmful, then must not one choose—at whatever cost? Faith in him, it seems to me, must be unconditional; once one “criticizes Christ” one has lost faith in him, and one cannot in honesty preach him any more. And one has lost any sense of oneness that one ever had with one's community, with the Church, with the “cause” that animates them. . . .

So I tell myself from time to time that, whatever the cost, I must get out. . . .

I am just indescribably lonely, and it's some relief to me to tell you. . . .

I must confess there are times when I wish to heaven I had never heard of your psychology (and some of your disciples); and yet I tremble to think what would have happened if I hadn't!

Ever Cordially, Victor (pp. 216–217)

Later in the month, Jung responds to the cry from the anguished soul of the dear friend whom he knows and loves:

Nov 24, 1953

Dear Victor,

Forget for once dogmatics and listen to what psychology has to say concerning your problem: *Christ as a symbol is far from being invalid*, although he is one side of the Self and the

devil the other. . . . Thus the very first thing Christ must do is to sever himself from his shadow and call him devil.

When a patient in our days is about to emerge from an unconscious condition, he is instantly confronted with his *shadow* and he has to decide for the good otherwise he goes down the drain. . . . He imitates Christ and follows his example. The first step on the way to individuation consists in the discrimination between himself and his shadow. . . .

Since the Christian Church is the community of all those having surrendered to the principle of the *imitatio Christi*, this institution (i.e., such a mental attitude) is to be maintained until it is clearly understood, what the assimilation of the shadow means. Those that foresee must—as it were—stay behind their vision in order to help; and to teach, particularly so, if they belong to the church as her appointed servants. . . .

Whatever your ultimate decision will be, you ought to realize before that staying in the church makes sense as it is important to make people understand what the symbol of Christ means, as such understanding is indispensable to any further development. . . .

My best wishes!

Yours cordially, C.G. Jung (pp. 218–223)

Victor's response to Jung's answer is humble and grateful:

Nov. 19, 1953

My dear C. G.,

I am very penitent for having prompted so long and tiring a letter from you. . . . But I am *immensely* grateful to you. . . .

Thank you a million, my dear C. G., for this token of your interest and friendship.

Ever cordially, Victor (pp. 223–224)

With Jung's understanding and support, White decided to remain a Dominican and a priest and received his STM degree (Master of Sacred Theology) in May, 1954. He expected to be appointed regent of Blackfriars College, a position for which he had been groomed for some years. However, subsequent to the death of the Dominican Father General, changes in the leadership positions in the Dominican Order were made, and the superiors of his order appointed someone else as regent. White was then asked to consider going to the Dominican Study House in Oakland, California. In a letter to Jung dated September 25th, 1954, White writes:

The “problem” has been changed considerably, at least from the outside. . . . All was set for me, not only to continue teaching here this year; but also to become the “Regent of Studies.” Then, in early August, I suddenly got a letter from my boss (Provincial) in which I learned that someone else (a complete incompetent) was to be appointed Regent, and asking if I would like to go to California! After many delays, this has at last been fixed up; . . . I am no longer “indispensable” at Oxford: Indeed, it seems definitely “not wanted.” I am still left guessing the reasons: there could be several. But in many ways it is of course a huge relief. (pp. 247–248)

Thus, in secret, Victor White’s life as a renowned theologian was destroyed. He had been trained to—and was expected to—accept the change without protest, to obey, like a good Dominican. His writing to Jung of “a huge relief” was part of this attempt. But White had other feelings as well—perhaps partially or even totally unconscious feelings. These feelings seem to have festered unnoticed, over the months that followed his exile to California, until they broke through in his review of Jung’s *Answer to Job*, which was published in the March 1955 issue of *Blackfriars*. In this review, White included personal attacks on Jung, accusing him of bad faith, childish ignorance and dependence, and paranoia. This review hurt Jung deeply, and these two

close friends drifted apart.

A strong element of displacement seems to have contributed to White’s outburst: his anger/rage related to his frustrations with religious life, in particular, the most recent humiliation of removal and exile. White seems to have had limited consciousness of what he was writing and of its possible effect on his friend C. G. After White’s review had been published,

“There is no comfort and no consolation anywhere except in the submission to and the acceptance of the Self or you may call it the God that suffers in his own creation . . . ”

lished, he had become somewhat aware of what he had done:

I am very afraid indeed that you will think mine [the review] unforgivable. . . . There are some passages I would now wish to have kept to myself. I wonder what induced you to publish it. . . . I am sorry: but I just see no sense in guying publicly the Christian

beliefs, symbols, myths, virtues which you tell us elsewhere were never so essential as now. (p. 259)

This letter reveals a mix of some regret with a stronger element of anger—which was probably White’s reaction to his exposed position and accompanying feelings of anxiety and helplessness as a Catholic priest and Jungian analyst preaching to Catholic believers who would not “get” *Answer to Job*. In Jung’s long letter of April 2, 1955, he defends his book at length and tells White directly that his criticism was out of line, while at the same time expressing his understanding of White’s untenable position:

Your criticism of my motive concerning “Job” is certainly unjust and you know it. It is an expression of the mental torment you had to undergo. . . . Having chosen the life of the monk you have separated yourself from the world and exposed yourself to the eternal fires of the other. Somewhere you have to pay the toll either to man or to God and in the end you will discover that both overcharge you. . . . You yourself are profoundly emotional about it and you could not make anyone believe that you are not in a hell of suffering. There is no comfort and no consolation anywhere except in the submission to and the acceptance of the Self or you may call it the God that suffers in his own creation: “I have tried you . . . and chosen you in the furnace of affliction. For my own sake, for my own sake, will I do it.” (Isaiah 48.10f) (pp. 263–264)

Jung is describing the potentially transformative suffering that White is experiencing, and will continue to experience, to the end of his life. And yet White projects his unconscious, defensive anger onto Jung, despite Jung’s understanding of White’s anguish. These very close friends seem to be separating from one another. Nevertheless, they continue to communicate. Jung wrote White the following letter, dated May 6th, 1955, prior to their next meeting:

Dear Victor,

The serious illness of my wife has consumed all my spare time. She has undergone an operation so far successfully, but it has left her in a feeble state needing careful nursing for several weeks to come. (p. 265)

After some hesitation, Jung and White do meet briefly at the convalescent home in Mammern where Emma Jung was recovering after her surgery for cancer. The meeting was a disaster. Afterward, White wrote:

My dear C. G.,

I am afraid it was disgracefully inconsiderate of me to trouble you with my very mundane “problems” (re *Answer to Job*) when you yourself have so many other cares within and without. I earnestly hope that Mrs. Jung is now well on the mend. Her illness alone must have given you great anxiety, and of course I realize that you have many other cares on your mind. It was so heartless of me to bother you with such very different problems—and so ruthlessly. Evidently I must work them out on my own, as best I can. And perhaps, in our mutual solitude, the reconciling symbol has a better chance to grow than from any amount of talk. . . .

For myself, it seems that our ways must, at least to some extent, part. I shall never forget, and please God I shall never lose, what I owe to your work and your friendship. It seems my role, at least for a year or two, is to be that of a very independent Catholic priest in California. (pp. 272–273)

In August of 1956, fifteen months after his last letter, White wrote to Jung: “My year in California has been a rather wearing but profitable experience. I feel much more settled within myself now; not that any problems are solved, but they don’t seem to matter so much any more; and I feel more ready to plow a lonely furrow” (p. 274). On June 1st, 1958, almost two years after his last letter, White again wrote to Jung, mentioning that he would be in Switzerland and would be happy to come to Kusnacht for a meeting if Jung so desired. Then White wrote:

I have lately been rereading the generous and most stimulating letters you have written me in the past. They have been most helpful in finding myself. I am, in fact, pretty well and happy these days, and better able to contain the “empirical church”—though less than ever able to be contained by it. . . .

I often think of you, dear C. G., and with great affection and gratitude; and I very much hope that all goes as well as possible with you in this vale of tears.

Please do not trouble to reply to this unless my suggestion is possible and agreeable to you.

Ever cordially, Victor (White) (p. 276)

There was no answer. Both Jung and White had suffered profound losses in the last several years—Jung of Emma and all she meant to him, as well as continuing deterioration of his own health, and White of his profession

as a professor of theology and of his close friendship with Jung, the only remains of which are the old letters from his friend, from which he now finds sustenance.

White had a serious motor scooter accident in April of 1959 which left him with permanently impaired sight and hearing. His mental recovery seemed complete, but in September of that year he was hospitalized for abdominal pain that later, after exploratory surgery, was diagnosed as incurable stomach cancer. The accident was the occasion of renewed communication between Jung and White, and some continued discussion of their perceived differences. White seemed surprised at Jung's statement in a letter to the Mother Prioress: "I am glad that you give me some news about Father White's activity. Thus I know that he does not fully disapprove of my work" (p. 298). White replied: "I smiled, somewhat cynically, at your remark that I did not wholly disapprove of your work. (How could I?) It seems that I am in quite serious trouble (and with Rome itself!) for (apparently) my approval of it; so much so that my future is quite uncertain!" (p. 281) To which Jung responded: "Concerning my doubts about your general attitude I must mention, in self-defense, that you expressed yourself publicly in such a negative way about my work that I really did not know what your real attitude would be" (p. 282). White did not understand: "In your last letter you wrote to me—'You expressed yourself in such a negative way about my work that I really did not know what your real attitude would be.' I have been, and still am, not a little distressed that you should think this" (p. 283).

At this point Jung seems to have realized that some of the differences between himself and his dear friend were not going to be resolved. He had already expressed his understanding for the kind of pressure White was under from church authorities and the risks he had taken, right from the beginning, in working with Jung. He may also have considered the possible organic effect of the serious head injury that White had suffered in the accident. At any rate, Jung was loving and reassuring in his response:

March 25th, 1960

My Dear Victor,

[After a long section discussing their different views on Job, the shadow, etc., Jung closes with the following:]

Don't worry. I think of you in everlasting friendship. *Ultra posse nemo obligatur*. (No one is required to do more than he can.) Thus, I ask for your forgiveness, as is incumbent on one, who has given cause for scandal and vexation. . . .

My best wishes in every respect!

Yours ever, C. G. (p. 286)

Jung wrote White a further letter on April 30th, 1960, and closed it with the following paragraph:

In the meantime, I hope you don't worry about my letter. I want to assure you of my loyal friendship. I shall not forget all the useful things I have learned through our many talks and through your forbearance with me. I was often sorry to be a *petra scandali*. It was my fate, however, not my choice, and I had to fulfill this unbecoming role. Things had to be moved in the great crisis of our time.

Many greetings and cordial wishes!
Yours ever, C. G. (p. 287)

White, who knew that his stomach cancer was terminal, wrote two subsequent letters, one continuing the discussion with Jung, the last simply closing their earthly discussion.

May 8th, 1960

My very dear C. G.,

I composed and dictated the enclosed incoherent letter before your wonderful and comforting letter dated April 30th arrived. I am sending it to you all the same. Of course I well understand that it is impractical for us to meet at present. Perhaps we

will meet in another world or dimension where "we know even as we are known."

...But I am now finding that it is one thing to write a book—especially that part on life and death—and that it is quite another to live it and to have to keep these opposites constantly in mind and together....

I do not know if it is true that you have been a "*petrus*

scandali" to me (as you say you have), but to the extent that you may have been, I think I can honestly say that I am grateful for it.

"I have now seen quite a number of people die reaching as it were the end of their pilgrimage in sight of the Gates, where the way bifurcates to the land of Hereafter and to the future of mankind and its spiritual adventure."

May I add that I pray with all my heart for your well-being, whatever that may be in the eyes of God.

Ever cordially and affectionately, Victor White (pp. 291–292)

Below his signature White drew a straight line. He died in the late morning of May 22nd, 1960. His last words were: “Take me.”

REFLECTIONS

C. G. Jung and Victor White learned from each other and also vigorously disagreed with each other on several important subjects, in the process developing a very close personal friendship. In the end, it was their loving friendship that remained the one constant. After White’s death, Jung wrote the following: “I have now seen quite a number of people die in the time of a great transition, reaching as it were the end of their pilgrimage in sight of the Gates, where the way bifurcates to the land of Hereafter and to the future of mankind and its spiritual adventure. You had a glimpse of the *Mysterium Magnum*” (p. 306). John Dourley has interpreted this statement as follows: “It is difficult to read this passage without concluding that White’s death meant for Jung that when faced with the choice White was unable to participate in what Jung describes as ‘the future of mankind and its spiritual adventure’” (p. 291).

I would argue that Victor White’s mission was focused primarily on the resuscitation of Thomistic Catholic theology and that he used Jung’s psychology to help achieve this purpose. White’s and Jung’s aims were clearly different, and perhaps it was left to Jung’s later followers to move into the “future of mankind and its spiritual adventure.” Edward Edinger certainly seemed to see it that way when he described *Answer to Job* as having

the same psychic depth and import as characterize the major scriptures of the world religions. . . . It lays the groundwork for a new world-view, a new myth for modern man, a *new dispensation* that connects man to the transpersonal psyche in a new way. In Jung’s words, his insights “may well involve a tremendous change in the God-image.” (p. 5)

This “new myth for mankind” is something that Victor White feared when he wondered “whether there is not considerable likelihood that Jungians, by going beyond their empirical data and making metaphysical affirmations which are not necessarily demanded by those data, may lay the foundations for a religion or ersatz-religion which, so far from complementing Christianity, may contradict it radically” (letter to John Layard, 12/5/40, Lammers & Cunningham, p. 316).

This struggle continues in Jungian psychology, and it is related to the very human tendency to select a leader and to become his or her disciple rather than to undertake the arduous daily task of self-development—in Jungian terms, of “individuation.” One could argue that Edinger individuated to some degree in his expression of his intense passion about Jung and his teachings, even though some of his critics have seen him as having made a religion of Jungian psychology (Ashley, 1999). Likewise, some could fault White for not following the way “to the future of mankind and its spiritual adventure.” But that is perhaps an incomplete view, held by those who do not understand that White’s process of individuation involved his struggles and confrontations with Jung *and* the Catholic church. He disagreed with church leadership and moved beyond it, going his own way and finding that way, in the end, to be “a lonely furrow.” But was that not White’s mission in this life? Was that not his unique way to individuation? And do not both of these individuals, Edinger and White, as well as Jung, offer to us examples of unique paths taken, and of individuation passionately sought? As Jung once wrote: “The goal is important only as an idea; the essential thing is the *opus* which leads to the goal: *that* is the goal of a lifetime” (1985, par. 400).

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