

Transcript

Edward Edinger Interview on Relevance of Religion to Jungian Psychology

<https://youtu.be/4SfmCHMMiI4>

Lawrence Jaffe: *This interview is being conducted in the West Los Angeles home of the internationally known Jungian Analyst Edward F. Edinger and his partner Dianne Cordic, who's also a Jungian Analyst. I am Lawrence Jaffe, a Jungian Analyst from Berkeley, California and the Author of a book on Jung's and Edinger's work called Liberating the Heart: Spirituality and Jungian Psychology.*

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Interview:

LJ: One reason apparently that some of Jung's books are difficult to follow is that his thinking was so far ahead of our own. Would you say that much of your work has the goal of rendering more understandable Jung's religious message, understood broadly?

Edward Edinger: I think of myself as a mediator between Jung and a wider audience. Jung is this gigantic presence that is profoundly intimidating to all of us little ones and we're all little ones in comparison to him. I've been studying Jung, as my major life endeavour, for 40 years and the more I study him, the more impressed I am by his magnitude and the more I can understand why so many people don't want to get anywhere near him. Because it's just too painful to experience one's comparative smallness in comparison to such a massive entity and often I think it's a sound instinct of self-preservation that keeps people away from Jung.

You know we have many different schools of psychotherapy and I think that's for good reason. We have as many different schools of psychotherapy as there are basic attitudes and typological categories in relation to the psyche. In other words, the psyche creates for itself the schools of psychotherapy that serve it. Human beings may think they create the schools but I don't think so, I think the unconscious does it you see and everyone should find the school that fits him best and when that's done, there're not very many Jungians because Jung's particular approach doesn't seem to be relevant to the majority of people – yet. I think that's only a short-term phenomenon but I'm trying to make it a little easier to relate to Jung by mediating.

LJ: 4:15... What does Jungian Psychology have to do with religion?

EE: Everything, everything! You see Jung has demonstrated that the religious function resides in the psyche and is an integral part of human psychology. That just means that the ego, in order to be healthy, needs to have a living connection to a transpersonal centre. There are two etymologies for the word 'religion.' One etymology emphasizes that it means 'linking back.' The idea then would be that the religious function links the ego back to its origin, to its background, to the larger entity that it came from. The other etymology of religion, that Jung really preferred actually, was that the word 'religio' means the opposite of the root of the word 'neglect.' So that 'religio' means the careful consideration of the background of one's life – the opposite of neglecting the background of one's life. Jung

actually preferred that association, although he acknowledged the importance of the other one, which I think goes back to Augustine.

But the point is that the human psyche has a religious function in both senses, a need to link back and a need to give careful consideration to the source of his being and the religious process then is one in which the ego has a living, organic connection to a larger whole. And that, of course, is the function that the traditional religions have always served. They've done it by the collective structure and the dogmatic formulations and the whole concept of God and man's relation to God, that they provide the believer. They've given the individual a religious container in which he has the sense of being connected to the larger whole. Now modern man – especially the creative minority in modern man – has lost that connection provided by the traditional religions, because they're too concrete. They haven't kept pace with modern man's mental development, so they're not in tune with modern categories of understanding.

The great service that Jung has performed by his discovery of the collective unconscious and the archetypes and the Self, he's penetrated to the psychological source and basis that underlies all the world religions and thereby he's verified and redeemed for modern consciousness the validity and reality of the religious operations as they express themselves in all religions. That's been achieved and I don't think we can appreciate the magnitude of that achievement because what it means is that the psychological basis has been laid for the realisation of a unified world. We've got the basis now for a unification of all of the factional divisions among the world religions and once that is achieved, I think political unification is bound to follow. It's been accomplished! One man has done it!

10:00... I wish I could communicate the fact that I see so clearly concerning Jung's discovery of the basis of all the world's religions. He's achieved by this discovery the psychological basis for the unification of the world. It's really a pitiful sight to see the world split up into these separate warring fragments of religious identifications, of nationalistic identifications, of ethnic identifications, all at war with one another. They're all operating out of the energies of connection with the same transpersonal image of wholeness. They are all operating out of their connection to deity – to the Self – as it is constellated and perceived within their local context – religious or nationalistic context. It's the same psychic Self and what Jung has done, has penetrated to that source – that's the paradoxical God that he talks about. He's seen it and once he's seen it, it can then no longer split up into these various ethnic and religious factions and fight against itself. One human being has seen the back of God, so to speak, so that means then that He's going to be eventually unified and the world will be unified politically, sooner or later, as an inevitable consequence of that event of human consciousness.

LJ: Jung has taught us that the leading idea of a new religion will come from the symbolism of the religion that preceded it. Applied to modern times, this means that the leading idea of the era that we are now entering will be based on the Judeo-Christian myth. Do you have a comment on this?

EE: 13:07... Yes, I do. It leads us right in to a major pronouncement that Jung makes in his late work, especially in Answer to Job, where he speaks about the new mode of existence is to be what he calls 'continuing incarnation.' Now that requires some explanation because I think very few people will get right away just what he means by 'continuing incarnation.'

You see, the central image of the Judeo-Christian myth, is that Yahweh, the God of the Old Testament, according to Jung because he had an encounter with Job, was obliged to incarnate. So, he's born in the form of his son as a human being in Jesus Christ. That's the basic image of the total Judeo-Christian myth and that's the issue that Christianity has picked up and elaborated and that Judaism has declined to pick up.

Christianity is really just a Jewish heresy that has mushroomed so much that it's sort of obscured its mother. But the Jewish scriptures and the Christian scriptures share the same idea of a divine son but the difference between them is that the Jews think his coming's going to be in the future and the Christians think he's already come. But the basic idea is the same and Jung's point is that that image of the incarnation of deity in a human being, which was symbolically manifested in Christ, is now to be empirically realized in a few individuals who are able to go through the process of individuation because he considers that the individuation process to be equivalent to the symbolic imagery of the incarnation of God in the human being. What that means psychologically is that the ego, in the process of establishing a conscious, living, relationship with the Self, becomes the ground, so to speak, for the incarnation of deity. As Jung puts it someplace, the ego is the stable in which the Christ child is born.

17:30... This symbolism has now become available for empirical psychological understanding. It no longer has to be worshipped as a metaphysical hypostasis, which is the way it appears in projection, so to speak, in metaphysical or theological projection, when it's worshipped as a religious image. In such a form it's not yet realized as a psychic reality; as an aspect of psychological experience. That's what Jung has achieved – he's achieved in his own life the incarnation of deity and the way he modestly puts it, there's now the opportunity for many to do likewise. He describes that at the conclusion of Answer to Job. He puts it so well that I'd like to read it. It's the final paragraph of Jung's Answer to Job. He's talking about the relation between the ego and the Self and he says that a reciprocal action is established when the ego and the Self are consciously related:

A reciprocal action between two relatively autonomous factors which compels us, when describing and explaining the processes, to present sometimes the one and sometimes the other factor as the acting subject, even when God becomes man. The Christian solution has hitherto avoided this difficulty by recognizing Christ as the one and only God-man. But the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, the third Divine Person, in man, brings about a Christification of many.

That's the phrase I wanted to get to: 'the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, the third Divine Person, in man, brings about a Christification of many...' Now if I translate that symbolic imagery into banal psychological terms, then I would say, 'The achievement of consciousness of the ego-Self Axis – the connecting factor between the ego and the Self (the Holy Ghost) – brings about a realization that the ego is manifesting in its life a transpersonal purpose and meaning.' That's what's meant by the symbolic imagery of the incarnation of God in man through the agency of the Holy Ghost. Now that's hard to grasp but with so much of Jung's writings, I think the way to go at it is to read the relevant passages – that's why I point to the last paragraph of Answer to Job – to read the relevant passages over and over and over again because they really have the quality of scripture. Jung is speaking from a consciousness that transcends that of all of us and therefore we must read what he has to communicate over and over again and then it begins to dawn on us just what he means.

LJ: 22:30... Jung said about certain aspects of his work that it sounded like religion but was not. Would you say the same about your work?

EE: Jung's work is so much that it's very difficult to characterize it. And of course, Jung says different things at different times under different circumstances. You have to keep that in mind. I consider Jung's work primarily – and I think he did too – primarily to be a scientific accomplishment. What he did was to discover, through his own personal experience both individually and with patients, he discovered the objective psyche – the psyche as an objective entity, as contrasted with just a subjective entity. That led him into a region of such immense dimensions, that he then spent the rest of his life trying to describe and present some of the major aspects of the nature of the objective psyche, as he'd discovered it. So he is primarily, fundamentally, a scientific genius, who has made a totally new discovery – a totally new dimension of being has been laid bare and following that discovery he was obliged to create a whole new methodology of approaching it because since it's a new object, it cannot be approached by the old methodology that physical science used.

Physical science requires a methodology different from the science of depth psychology because the nature of the subject matter is different. The psyche requires a methodology that engages the whole person. Physical science, by its nature, excludes a significant portion of the whole person, you see, as irrelevant but dealing with the psyche requires an engagement of the whole person. That's a totally new approach and people have yet to learn it. Jung teaches us how to do it but we still have to learn it. Anyway, he was obliged to create that whole new methodology in order to deal with the new subject that he'd discovered – the subject of the objective psyche – and this is what he's done in all his mature work.

26:32... So that's how I think of him fundamentally. However, what he discovered when he discovered the objective psyche and started exploring it, was that it is the source of religion, of philosophy, of art, of mythology, of worldviews of all kinds. It's the source of those. Therefore, although we say quite accurately, 'No, Jungian psychology is not a religion, it's not a philosophy, it's not a *Weltanschauung*,' nonetheless it deals with the source of all of those and it has also discovered in the course of realizing the practical aspect of encounter with the psyche, which is psychotherapy, it's discovered that psychotherapy, if it's going to be complete in the individual case, involves the individual's discovery of a religious standpoint and of a *Weltanschauung*.

So that Jungian psychology, when it's applied, does lead to religious consciousness and to the emerging awareness of a new worldview, even though Jungian psychology itself is not itself a religion or a worldview. It's as though it's more fundamental than that. Just because Jung talks about religious imagery and religious phenomenology, many people superficially think he's a religionist, or as you said earlier, he's a mystic. That's not true – he's an empirical scientist of the psyche. That's what he is.

LJ: 29:00... As you have spoken of Jung as an epochal man and you have explained that you mean by that a man whose life inaugurates a new age in cultural history, can you tell us more of this idea and have there been other epochal men?

EE: See I have a perception of Jung that I'm afraid practically nobody shares. I'm almost alone in that. Speaking of being alone, I mentioned earlier, he's a whole new species. We know from history that when an individual carrying major new consciousness arrives on the scene, that often inaugurates a new epoch. The two examples that I'm thinking of particularly

are the examples of Christ and Buddha. I believe that Jung belongs to that order of individual, you see. When a major new level of consciousness emerges, then it has to have some huge collective effect that it may take several hundred years to bring into visibility but that will eventually be seen for what it is and that's how I see Jung. There's a remark that Jung makes on this subject that I want to refer to. It comes from page 311 of Volume II of his letters. I want to refer to it because I believe it summarizes in a nutshell, the basic idea behind continuing incarnation. Here's what he says,

Buddha's insight and the incarnation in Christ break the chain of suffering through the intervention of the enlightened human consciousness which thereby acquires a metaphysical and cosmic significance.

Now of course you're not going to get that in one reading but what he's referring to there is the Buddhist notion of the chain of suffering that involves desirousness leading to frustration and finally to death, that repeats itself endlessly. The chain of life that goes round and round because it can never be broken. That's what he's referring to and he says that two things break it; he says Buddha's insight breaks it and the incarnation in Christ breaks it. He doesn't say 'broke it.' He doesn't use the past tense. He uses the present tense, which means then that Buddha's insight and incarnation in Christ are current happenings which have the effect of breaking the chain of suffering, through the intervention of the enlightened human consciousness, which thereby acquires a metaphysical and cosmic significance.

33:40... Now, you see, that's what happened in the Book of Job, as Jung spells it out in Answer to Job. Job got a glimpse into the nature of the primordial psyche. As Jung puts it, 'He got a glimpse of the back side of God, the abysmal world of shards.' He saw it. That seeing it was Buddha's insight and it had the effect then of bringing about the incarnation in Christ and in fact, Job was a kind of prefiguration of the incarnation in Christ because he was the victim... his suffering was the sacrifice that had to be paid in order to achieve the insight that he got. So that Buddha's insight and incarnation in Christ are illustrated in the Book of Job and what they achieve then is the intervention of the enlightened human consciousness which thereby acquires a metaphysical and cosmic significance. It thereby takes on divine attributes and that corresponds to the incarnation of God. The fact that enlightened human consciousness acquires metaphysical and cosmic significance, means that it is a carrier of the God-image. It's all there in that one sentence and I was delighted when I came across it.

LJ: 35:53... So, as human beings attempt to carry consciousness they participate in the transformation of God?

EE: Ah, yeah! There's another major term, or image, concerning the same issue. Jung says somewhere that it may very well be that his insights will have the effect of bringing about a major change, major evolution, in the God-image. So, he's telling us quite explicitly that the consciousness of an individual human being does have the capacity of transforming the God-image. Now the whole question for us is: How does that happen? How are we to understand that? How are we apply it to psychological experience that we can grasp? I'm not sure I can communicate how that's done, but I'm going to try anyway. You remember I spoke earlier about the objective psyche as being a pervading medium like the atmosphere that we live in. We participate in it, it's within us and is expressed through us and it's also without. It's the medium that we exist in that is usually invisible. The ego, the human ego, is a part of that objective psyche but it's a part that owes its existence to the fact that it's been able to separate itself and exist like a separate island but it's still a part. So it's got an organic living connection between the medium that it was born out of and its own separateness.

That means then, in the science of depth psychology, in the course of studying the objective psyche, the only means we have to study it is an individual human ego. That's the only 'I' there is to look at it but since the individual human ego does have an organic attachment to the medium that it's studying, that means that whenever the ego looks at the medium, it influences the medium in the process of looking at it – because they're connected; they're not totally separate entities. Well, that complicates things. It means that to some extent or another then, the observing ego, as he studies the objective psyche, is subjectifying what he's studying to some extent. We can't help that – it's built into the situation but nonetheless if we're aware of that fact, then we make allowances for it and that will at least mitigate its effects. Now that's the situation.

40:16... The God-image is the central archetype, as Jung describes it, in that pervading medium of the objective psyche of the collective unconscious, so that when the ego perceives the God-image – when it consciously sees it for what it is – that very perception has the effect of altering it, you see, because of the nature of the connection between the ego and the Self. They're part of the same total organism – the total state of being – and therefore what happens to one has an effect on the other and that's the mechanism, so to speak, whereby God undergoes transformation by being seen by a human ego. Now that's just an abstraction but when you've had some living experiences that illustrate it, they're very impressive because what happens is, in the course of a really deep analysis, the unconscious changes. It isn't just the ego that changes – the unconscious changes – and the rule of thumb that Jung has taught us, is that the unconscious takes the same attitude towards the ego as the ego takes towards it.

So that's one aspect of how the unconscious changes when the ego pays attention to it but the unconscious also changes when the ego has seen, with its own eyes, the raw view of the primordial psyche. Believe me, it's a terrible thing to see. I'll show you later a picture whereby that takes place. That's one of the Job pictures in Blake's series that I want to show you, where Yahweh is showing Job his back side and what He's showing him is behemoth and leviathan, the terrible monsters. That's an image of getting a glimpse of what the primordial psyche looks like, what God's back side is, you see and when one has that view – not just hearsay knowledge, when one sees it in shuddering, knee knocking reality – that changes the nature of the primordial psyche, first of all in oneself and we have reason to believe that the effect goes beyond just one's own personal psyche.

LJ: 43:45... Do you believe that, as I do, that Jung will be remembered by future generations, not primarily as a theoretician of depth psychotherapy but for the religious aspect of his work?

EE: I'm not a prophet but I have a perception as to, in broad outlines, what I expect to happen. It's obvious to any thoughtful person that Western society is hurtling toward some terrible catastrophe. That's obvious. That means that we are going to be exposed to massive suffering – something along the order of what went on 2,000 years ago with the disintegration of the Roman Empire, where the established social structures break down and chaos intervenes, you see. Something like that's going to happen and in such a case, there will be reversions to more primitive modes of behaviour. There will be a regressive movement backwards. There'll be a regression to tribalisms of all kinds I'm sure, to more primitive structures, more localized structures. There'll be a regression to concrete and fundamentalist religions of various kinds and what I hope is that, for what Toynbee calls the

creative minority, the collective suffering on such a vast scale will force reflective individuals to look around desperately for some kind of understanding of what's happening to them.

If they're able to resist the regressive tendency to revert to more primitive modes of functioning, if they can hold onto their consciousness enough, then they might discover Jung. Then they might pick up Answer to Job and read him really attentively and realize that what's being experienced collectively on such a vast scale... (25sec glitch in recording) ...of the emergence of a new God-image and the possibility, as I mentioned earlier, of a genuine unification of both the individual and the world. I think that in the long run, that's what's in store for the Age of Aquarius, after a terrible time of troubles.

LJ: 47:46... In your book, *The Christian Archetype: A Jungian Commentary on the Life of Christ*, you write, 'The goal of the incarnation cycle, like the goal of individuation, is the coniunctio. The time has come for the psychic opposites – heaven and earth, male and female, spirit and nature, good and evil, which have long been torn asunder in the western psyche to be reconciled.' Can you elaborate on this idea?

EE: The basic question is, 'What is this thing called the coniunctio?' You know Jung's last work, his last book length work was on that subject and the title was *The Mystery of the Coniunctio* – a very sizeable tome. It was a theme that really preoccupied him in his last years. He had some profound experiences of the coniunctio during his illness in 1944, which he reports in his *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. Then the question is, 'How are we to understand this symbolic image?' You see, it comes from alchemy, as I mentioned earlier. The goal of the alchemical process was the Philosopher's Stone and it was created, so the alchemists thought, by the coniunctio of purified opposites.

The basic image was the coniunctio of Sol and Luna – sun and moon – create the Philosopher's Stone, so that the coniunctio is the process which achieves the Philosopher's Stone, which achieves selfhood, which achieves the living connection to the God-image. It was pictured as a marriage, or as a sexual intercourse. Now we know that just on the biological level, the goal of biological existence is the creation of offspring, which is achieved through sexual intercourse and that's the reason that nature has built into us the experience of supreme bliss at the peak of sexual intercourse. Nature, of course, knows what she's doing and that is the goal of biological existence – sexual intercourse. The physical coniunctio is the goal of our existence as biological organisms.

51:40... What Jung has demonstrated is that the psychological *coniunctio* is the goal of existence as the psychological organism. Now the only difficulty is being able to grasp what that means. It's easy enough to grasp what sexual intercourse means, we can encompass that in the definition but psychological *coniunctio* is a image of the achievement of totality which transcends the ego. It transcends therefore the rational ability to define it, therefore we can't define it. We can talk about it and we can sort of circumambulate it and bring up images that express it but we can't grasp it or contain it rationally because it's bigger than we are. There's reason to believe that probably the coniunctio is only experienced in its complete form in death, in physical death and I think that's good to know about because there's a real need to reappraise, in the modern world, the nature and significance of death.

Death is a goal of life and in a different sense than Freud meant it, there really is a death instinct. We've got the instinctual equipment built into us to take care of all the basic occurrences in human existence. These are the archetypal patterns that are built into us and

our physical life ends in death and we've got the instinctual wisdom to relate to that phenomenon properly, if we're in touch with that wisdom.

54:14... Part of that wisdom, I think, is the realization that one level of psychological existence is achieved and fulfilled in the process of physical death and that the coniunctio is realized, probably, to the fullest extent at that time and Jung's visions of the coniunctio occurred during a near-death experience. He almost died during that 1944 illness. It's an image of great joy and fulfillment. It's the biological experience of sexuality on the psychological plane and that's why sexual images have to be used to refer to it and perhaps our finest document concerning it is The Song of Songs, in the Bible. There of course is more to be said about it. It's an image of totality. It's a image of the reconciliation of opposites. On the simplest level, it's the reconciliation of the opposites of the male and female but those images actually can be used to express all the pairs of opposites, so that it's an image of harmony beyond the conflict of all the opposites that go to make up the struggle and agony of existence.

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