

# What did Jung see in the Shroud?

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Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung were among the most influential figures of the last century. One came from a Jewish background, the other from a Zwinglian Protestant clerical family. Despite the incompatibility of the two minds, due mainly to differences of viewpoint, both shared the same scepticism in relation to the Judaeo-Christian tradition. The two also had the same intellectual ancestors, thinkers like Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Ernst Haeckel, Eduard von Hartmann and Ernst von Brücke, as well as several reductionist scientific materialists whose world-views would have a bearing on psychology.

A diehard atheist and pessimist, Freud turned out to be what science historian Frank Suloway called the “biologist of the mind”. At the end of his career he even went so far as to write *Moses and Monotheism* (1938), according to which the lawgiver was actually an Egyptian who derived monotheism from the pharaoh Akhenaton ( Amenhotep IV ). It was as though he was trying to justify why he had to break away from the religious part of his background. Since his influence had already begun to be felt, there was no hope for the immediate publication of his book in Vienna, capital of the predominantly Catholic Austria under the conservative Catholic government of Kurt von Schuschnigg. Psychoanalysis was under criticism as an atheistic and materialistic cult. That it could come to be considered as some sort of religion was precisely what Freud’s friend, the Protestant minister Rev.Oscar Pfister, feared. The two psychoanalysts had developed a long friendship, thrashing out their differences in a friendly way. No agreement was ever reached.

Jung was no less emphatic in his scepticism and expressed it in a number of works, one of which was *Answer to Job*, where he employed symbolic interpretation and metaphysical speculation. The big difference between him and Freud was that he was not an atheist, although feeling that “along the great highways of the world everything seems desolate and outworn.” There had to be some path, something more to us than the mere material, prompting him to delve into occultism and spiritualism, encouraged by relatives, a line he eventually abandoned for psychiatry. This was after all a period during which twentieth-century German fads were in vogue. Being Swiss of German origin, Jung found in them an interesting area of research. This led him to make an in-depth study of the mythological contents in the dreams and fantasies of everyday people, including a wide-ranging examination of the most diverse cultures, folkmagic and astrology. Freud, who viewed the Swiss psychiatrist as his successor, warned him about “the black tide of occultism.”

Although his study of mythology was vast, the concepts of the collective unconscious, the archetypes, synchronization and individuation were what constituted Jung’s most valuable contribution. His theories had philosophical implications, involved metaphysical speculation and raised important questions in his approach to the study of the human mind, an approach that made his ideas change markedly as the years went by. Initially sceptical about the Christian Church, to the extent of chiding his associate Jolande Jacobi when she converted to Catholicism, later in life he counted the great English Dominican theologian Father Victor White as one of his closest friends and associates, perhaps also as one of his successors. It was in the interest of both scholars to see

what kind of rapport there could be between psychology and religion. The fruitful relationship was cut short by the priest's untimely death. It became evident that Jung had an open mind, and according to Liliane Frey-Rohn, another of those close to him, he was strongly attracted to the Catholic Church, but objected to what he saw as its authoritarian system.

Curiously, it was one of the victims of this "authoritarian system", the Swiss Catholic theologian Father Hans Küng, author of an exhaustive study of the existence of God, who years later pointed to the fact that in the year before his death Jung had said that he considered himself Christian, but wanted psychology to be taken into account. Such a contention was not asking too much of scholars and was important to Jung, who as a psychiatrist and empiricist could see "the darkness of the human mind" but also thought of himself as a Christian and was entirely based on Christian concepts. For Father Küng, however, psychological reality had nothing to do with historical reality. The two were quite separate issues.

Jung had not ignored this intricate question. He may have made his extensive studies of mythology, comparative religion and a lot more, but no blow had been dealt to Christianity, particularly to its founder, Jesus, however odd his view of the role of the Holy Spirit would have sounded. Contradicting what Joseph Campbell was to say later on, he apparently considered Jesus unique. None of his views was to demonstrate this as clearly as when he wrote that "it goes without saying that a quite special interest attaches to the character of the incarnate son of God.... Certain theologians have discovered that Christ's biography cannot be separated from eschatology. Eschatology means in effect that Christ is God and man at the same time and therefore suffers a divine as well as a human fate. The two natures interpenetrate so thoroughly that any attempt to separate them mutilates both. The divine overshadows the human and the human being is scarcely graspable as an empirical personality. Even the critical procedures of modern psychology do not suffice to throw light on all the obscurities. Every attempt to single out one particular feature for clarity's sake does violence to another which is just as essential with respect to his divinity or with respect to his humanity."

It was evident that while Jung was being as ruthlessly objective as possible and left no room for the use of trickery to dodge crucial points in the study of religion, he also did not hesitate to admit defeat when an insurmountable obstacle was met. And he was a scholar with an enormous capacity for critical reflection.

It is difficult to say with certainty why he kept a copy of the face on the Turin Shroud. Perhaps he intuitively guessed something about the mystery of this extraordinary image that had already been called *acheiropoetos*, that is "not made by human hands" in Greek, by the Byzantine Christians in the first thousand years of its existence. These Eastern Christians never kept the Shroud permanently exposed, under public gaze, a tradition that was naturally followed by the Catholics. One thing seems certain. Jung believed the image was genuine, in fact told the American writer Upton Sinclair that it had created the strongest impression on him, for the "stern and august countenance" had confirmed his "formerly vague expectations." He hung the copy of the Shroud face in his study --- behind a curtain.