



STATEMENT DP215

**The Jung Cult: Origins of a Charismatic Movement**  
**Richard Noll**  
**(Princeton University Press, 1994)**

In the early years of this century, Swiss psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) became the second-in-command in Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic movement. In 1913 Jung broke with Freud and established his own movement, called analytic psychology.

Although Freud's importance in the history of psychology has been much greater than Jung's, in recent decades the former's influence has declined while the latter's has grown. Jung's increasing influence is most noticeable in the broader culture. Best-selling authors who promote Jungian ideas include the late Joseph Campbell (*The Power of Myth*), Thomas Moore (*The Care of the Soul*), and Clarissa Pinkola Estés (*Women Who Run with the Wolves*).

In my judgment, no single individual has done more to shape the contemporary New Age movement than Jung. And Jung has also won acceptance from many professing orthodox Christians, some of whom are popularizers of his ideas (e.g., J. Gordon Melton, Morton Kelsey, and John Sanford). His profound influence on the inner healing movement is documented in Don Matzat's *Inner Healing: Deliverance or Deception?* (Harvest House, 1987).

Because of Jung's extreme importance today, the publication of Richard Noll's *The Jung Cult* was a major literary event. It won a prize as the best book of 1994 on psychology from the Association of American Publishers. Noll, 36, is a clinical psychologist who recently completed a postdoctoral fellowship in the history of science at Harvard University. The book's central thesis is that the movement that Jung initiated is much closer in nature to a neopagan (Aryan) cult than the scientific psychiatric discipline that it has always claimed to be. It is not just *religious* but a *religion*.

Noll affirms that Jung increasingly guided his movement away from the trappings of a scientific discipline, shaping it instead into a "charismatic movement" or cult of personality built around himself. Jung's true esoteric message was made available mystery-cult style only to initiates who had undergone one hundred hours of analysis and had obtained Jung's personal permission. Since Jung's death it has been passed down to the present generation of initiates by a "body of priest-analysts."

*The "Fin de Siecle": In Search of the Historical Jung.* Convinced that the Jung portrayed in Jungian literature is not historically reliable but rather the well-crafted image of a cultic leader preserved by his cult, Noll set out to uncover the historical Jung. To do so, it was necessary for him to comprehensively analyze the vast intellectual milieu that gave rise to Jungian psychology. He has done an amazing job.

Noll asserts that none of the extant biographies of Jung place him within the historical context of the *fin de siecle* ("end of the [nineteenth] century"), a period in European history that Jung himself claimed "contains the origin of all my ideas" (p. 26). It was a time of "cultural ferment and generational collision in which opposing forces of rationality and irrationality, of social progress and hereditary degeneration, of positivism and occultism, scraped together like great tectonic plates and set off earthquakes and aftershocks that culminated in the Great War and its subsequent revolutions and putsches . . ." (27). No one better represented the fin de siecle period than philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, the prophet of modernity and irrationalism. And, Noll affirms, no one exerted a greater influence over Jung than Nietzsche.

Nietzsche himself was strongly influenced by the German higher criticism of the nineteenth century that sought for the "historical Jesus" and, in the process, reduced Christian theology to the level of mythology. Noll observes that "by the end of the century widespread skepticism about the divinity of Jesus and the truth of the stories in the Gospels of the New Testament opened the way for social experimentation with alternative religions, neopagan, occultist, or atheistic life-styles" (34). To this he adds,

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“Jung’s later repudiation of orthodox Christianity has its roots in this Protestant critical theology that also redirected Nietzsche to explore pagan paths of regeneration” (37).

This revision of the image of Christ allowed people in the current of the fin-de-siecle to reevaluate pagan religions, especially the ancient Hellenistic (Greek or Greek influenced) mystery cults, which seemed to have many surface similarities with certain aspects of the early Christ cult of the Roman Empire. The ancient mysteries and their pagan gods would no longer seem as satanic and taboo to the average Christian — or at least to the learned scholar... If Jesus of Nazareth was no longer outside of time and was in fact a historical person, as these German Protestant theologians argued, how could any thinking Christian turn to Christ or his contemporary representatives in the various Christian churches for redemption or salvation? Many late nineteenth-century individuals came up with creative solutions to these problems and paved new paths to individual fulfillment — in some cases with more than a little help from some very ancient pagan sources. (37)

**Haeckel and the “Biogenetic Law.”** Of course, evolutionary theory also strongly influenced the thinking of young fin-de-siecle intellectuals such as Jung. Evolution seemed to hammer another nail into the coffin of orthodox Christianity. But in Germany the dominant evolutionary theorist was not Charles Darwin but biologist Ernst Haeckel. Haeckel’s published views on human evolution predated those of Darwin, and it was he who developed the famous “biogenetic law” that “ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny” (i.e., that the evolutionary stages of a species are repeated in the prenatal development of individual members of the species).

Haeckel was not an atheist but a pantheistic monist who held to the unity of matter and spirit. Believing, therefore, that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny in the realm of the soul as well as the body, he called on psychological researchers to demonstrate this principle. Apparently Jung took this summons seriously, for his theory of a collective unconscious (race memory) was originally based on the biogenetic law.

Jung wrote in *The Psychology of the Unconscious* (as quoted in Noll, 53) that the “phantastical” thinking found in the “lower races” in children, and even in modern educated adults when they allow their minds to wander, corresponds to the “phantastical, mythological thinking of antiquity.” Thus, “from all these signs it may be concluded that the soul possesses in some degree historical strata, the oldest stratum of which would correspond to the unconscious.”

Noll reveals the significance of all this to analytical psychology:

Haeckel thus becomes the key to understanding the biological ideas underlying Jung’s hypothesis of a phylogenetic layer of the unconscious mind circa 1909. In his first published theory to this effect, in 1911, Jung introduces the idea that his phylogenetic layer contains the mythological images and thinking of pagan antiquity: therefore, when Jung’s use of language is analyzed to reveal his intent, it is a decidedly pre-Christian layer that has been covered up by centuries of Judeo-Christian sediment. Although initially viewed as, perhaps, “psychosis” or “incipient psychosis” in 1909, by 1916 — after repudiating the relevance of the Christian myth in his own life in 1912 — Jung instead advocates *deliberately* cutting through centuries of strangling Judeo-Christian underbrush to reach the promised land of the “impersonal psyche,” a pre-Christian, pagan “land of the Dead,” and to thereby be *revitalized*. (54; emphases in original.)

Around 1916 Jung stopped referring to a *phylogenetic* unconscious and began instead to speak of an *impersonal* or *collective* unconscious. By so doing he was shifting his emphasis from a biologically defined unconscious composed of layers of evolutionary experience to a more Platonic unconscious composed of certain symbolic ideas and images (*dominants* or *archetypes*).

To prove his theory of a collective unconscious Jung cited the recurring independent appearances of the same archetypes in mythological traditions and in the delusions of his psychiatric patients — particularly one patient known as the “Solar Phallus Man,” whose hallucination of a phallic sun paralleled a vision described in the ancient Mithraic Liturgy. However, Noll delivers a severe blow to these claims. First, he points out that the patients in the hospital where Jung conducted his research had ample opportunities to learn about ancient mythology. Next, he documents that the Solar Phallus Man could indeed have had access to information about the Mithraic Liturgy, and that in order to conceal this fact Jung deliberately misrepresented several important details surrounding the case.

Influences on Jung, besides Nietzsche and Haeckel (among *many* others detailed in the book), included Theosophy, spiritualism, and the neopagan *volkisch* revival that also gave rise to National Socialism.

**Theosophy.** Through advances in publishing technology around the 1880s, “the great philosophies of the East were distilled and marketed en masse to Western civilization to a greater extent than had ever been possible at any previous time in history. The

enormous Theosophical publishing machine thus set the stage for the familiar countercultural fascination with these topics, beginning in Ascona, Switzerland and Munich circa 1900, and continuing through the beatniks, hippies, Greens, and New Agers of more recent times” (67-68). Noll cites considerable evidence to suggest that Jung had read these works and gained much of his initial knowledge of Eastern philosophy, Gnosticism, ancient mythology, and astrology from them.

**Spiritualism.** Noll also indicates that Jung’s long-time interest in spiritualism gave him “ample experience of how one may deliberately enter a dissociative state, or trance, that allowed such automatisms as automatic writing or even alternate personalities to emerge. Jung had observed this at séances, and indeed, his entire mother’s side of the family . . . seemed to have regularly engaged in discourse with spirits” (202).

After having repeated visions in 1913 of all Europe being destroyed in a sea of blood, Jung heard a disembodied voice speak to him about the visions. Desiring to hear more from the voice and engage it in conversation, Jung offered the entity the use of his body so that it would have the necessary “speech centers” to communicate with him. “This,” Jung wrote, “is the origin of the technique I developed for dealing directly with the unconscious contents.” Noll makes the obvious but critical point: “Jung is therefore admitting here that his psychotherapeutic technique of active imagination is based on the techniques of spiritualism” (203).

Active imagination became the foundation for Jung’s entire approach to psychotherapy, as Noll describes:

It was in December 1913 that he begins the deliberately induced visionary experiences that he later named “active imagination.” From this time forward, Jung engages in these visions with the attitude that they are real in every sense of the word. In these visions he descends and meets autonomous mythological figures with whom he interacts. Over the years (certainly by 1916) a wise old man figure named Philemon emerges who becomes Jung’s spiritual guru, much like the ascended “masters” or “brothers” engaged by [Theosophy’s H. P.] Blavatsky or the Teutonic Brotherhood of the Armanen met by [Guido von] List. Philemon and other visionary figures insist upon their reality and reveal to Jung the foundation of his life and work. He refers on many occasions to the place where these beings live as “the land of the Dead.” These visionary experiences — Jung’s mythic confrontation with the unconscious — form the basis of the psychological theory and method he would develop in 1916. (209-10)

It would seem then that Jung’s approach is essentially a fusion of spiritualism with psychology, the “collective unconscious” being nothing other than a psychoanalytic term for the same realm of experience that occultists call the spirit world.

From here Noll proceeds to describe how “active imagination” led Jung to an experience of deification in which he identified himself with Christ. And Noll leaves no room for doubt that such self-deification is one and the same as “individuation” — the therapeutic goal of analytical psychology.

Jungian analysis, explains Noll, is essentially an initiation into a pagan mystery — a means to experience what Jung experienced. It is an occult process in which the opposites of creation supposedly reconcile in the oneness of the god within, and thus the individual becomes psychologically and spiritually whole. As Noll aptly observes: “Jung’s familiar psychological theory and method, which are so widely promoted in our culture today, rests [sic] on this very early neopagan or volkisch formulation — a fact entirely unknown to the countless thousands of devout Christian or Jewish Jungians today who would, in all likelihood, find this fact repugnant if they fully understood the meaning behind the argument I make here” (219).

Significantly, Jung’s path to individuation “demanded breaking bonds with one’s family, one’s society, even one’s God, for ‘by cutting himself off from God’ the individual becomes ‘wholly himself.’” Thus, “the first step in individuation is a tragic *guilt*. The accumulation of guilt demands *expiation* . . . Every further step in individuation creates new guilt and necessitates new expiation. Hence: individuation is continual rebirth through sinning (breaking bourgeois-Christian norms) and redemption (translating transcendental insights into social action).”

**Volkisch Groups, Sun Worship, and Anti-Semitism.** Noll is convinced that Jung cannot be properly understood apart from this “volkisch formulation”: “Nineteenth-century Europe witnessed a revival of what has been termed volkisch (‘folkish’) movements, nationalistic groups bonded together by a common ethnic and cultural identity (the idea of Volk) and seeking a political and cultural return to an idealized past or golden age. A new utopian golden age of the Volk could then be established” (75). Many Germanic people who started out in Theosophy or other occult teachings began to seek their own pre-Christian, pagan (Teutonic) roots. Drawing on scholarly and occultic (e.g., Theosophical) speculations about evolution and the history of the Aryan race (Indo-European Caucasians, as distinct from Semitic Caucasians), they cultivated sentiments of nationalism, racial superiority, and (in some cases) overt anti-Semitism. National Socialism was one of many movements that emerged from this revival.

While not openly and blatantly espousing anti-Semitism, Jung had collegial relations with open anti-Semites, read and cited anti-Semitic works, shared their volkisch interest in the Aryan roots of the Germanic peoples, made unflattering comments about the Semitic peoples' spiritual and psychological development as compared to the Aryan peoples, and long supported a secret quota that kept Jewish membership limited to 10 percent in his Psychology Club in Zurich. After the atrocities of Hitler's regime came to light, Jung shifted his metaphysical focus from volkisch themes to the "rich symbolism of alchemy" (284).

Sun worship occupied a central place in this turn-of-the-century neopagan spirituality. Believed to be the practice of the ancient Teutons, it was viewed as the best alternative to Semitic Christ worship and in keeping with modern scientific knowledge of the earth's dependence on the sun. Noll extensively documents that "Jung's earliest psychological theories and method can be interpreted as perhaps nothing more than an anti-Christian return to solar mythology and sun worship based on Romantic beliefs about the natural religion of the ancient Aryan peoples. What Jung eventually offered to volkisch believers in sun worship circa 1916 was a practical method — active imagination — through which one could contact [Teutonic] ancestors and also have a direct experience of God as a star or sun within" (136). Indeed, Noll affirms that "sun worship is perhaps the key to fully understanding Jung and the story I tell in this book" (137).

*An Unintending Apologist.* *The Jung Cult* is must reading for the Christian who wants a serious, objective, scholarly treatment of Jung and his movement. Although Noll makes comments that indicate he is not an orthodox Christian, throughout this book he puts his finger on those aspects of Jung's life and thought that would most concern Christians.

Noll's book is serviceable to Christian apologetics all the more because he is *not* a Christian apologist (and thus cannot be accused of having an orthodox Christian bias). He documents that Nazism — the epitome of intolerance — did *not* arise out of a Christian fundamentalism (as many today presume) but rather out of a virulently anti-Christian sentiment, occultism, and evolutionary scientism. A profusion of mysticism, nature worship, and neopaganism comparable to what we find in the West today did *not* prevent militant nationalism, racism, and anti-Semitism but actually fueled their development. Indeed, it was the rejection of orthodox Christianity in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Germany that opened the floodgates that ultimately culminated in the rise of the Third Reich.

— Elliot Miller